IN THE NAME OF GOD

Tarbiat Moallem University
Department of Foreign languages

Theory of translating Persian Poetry during 1850-1950

By

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Translation Studies

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February 2008

MASTER'S THESIS APPROVAL

We her by certify that this thesis entitled "Theory of translating Persian Poetry during 1850-1950" be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Translation Studies.

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To My Dear Parents Anush and Suren

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ABSTRACT

By Ani Honarchian

The critical description of prefaces can be instrumental in bringing to light the divergent concepts and definition of translation in historical contexts. Therefore, this thesis tries to reveal the theory of translation in late Victorian period during the great age of industrial capitalism and colonial expansion up to the end of the Second World War, by means of studying prefaces written by British translators of Persian Poetry. What is done in the present thesis is to collect and study three prefaces written during each decade from 1850 up to 1950.

The research reveals five main translation patterns adopted by translators, namely, 'scholarly translation', 'crib-like translation', 'foreignness in form and language', 'pragmatic choice of source text', and 'upgrading the source text by translation'. These patterns with their specific background theory are identified and are followed by an investigation of the manner of the translation. Furthermore, the changes of translation theory, which occurred through this specified period, have been observed as well.

The findings of the investigation show that scholarly translation and crib-like translations which were accessible to an educated minority or civil servants of East India Company would tend to produce very literal, overly concerned with minute details translation. Moreover, in pragmatic choice of source text or upgrading the source

translator's eclectic process leads to completely new version of the text that is the result of much freer translation. By comparing the prefaces written in the first fifty years of study with ones which have been written in the second half of the century, it can be concluded that as time goes by translation has developed into a scholar's activity. No crib-like translation and less pragmatic translation are therefore observable in the 20th century. The thesis sheds some light on the partial theory of translation during colonial era and suggests that by change of colonial view toward India the manner of translation changes too.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Chapter I

Introduction

Chapter I: Introduction

Much of what has been said about translation until recently has been said in prefaces.

Sherry Simon

1.1 Background

In his *Persian Poetry in England and America* (1977: 3) John Yohannan states that study of the Persian language had begun in England before the middle of the 17th century; the motivation was the foundation of East India Company under Queen Elizabeth in the year 1600 which was in great need of understanding Persian.

According to Yohannan (ibid) Britain came to the East some time after France and by great effort managed to expel the French from their "commercial hegemony". The British discovered that their success depended "upon their ability to use the Persian language and to understand the Islamic culture on which the Mogul rule had been based" (ibid).

Yohannan quotes Major Davy, Persian Secretary to the Governor-General, who argues that it was important to train Englishman in the Asian languages because the natives

were not trustworthy as interpreters. Ultimately the British sought to fall back on their own resources by establishing schools at home and in India for the study of Asian languages. Furthermore, Sir William Jones truly emphasizes that" interest [i.e., a vested interest] was the charm which gave the languages of the East a real and solid importance" (ibid).

Studying Persian means learning the language of collapsed Mogul emperors who used to rule India but exactly how and when Persian enters Indian soil is not clear. However, commercial relationships between India and Iran had existed from very ancient times. Nizamuddin in *Indo-Iran Relations: Cultural Aspects* (1970: 99) writes, the language of Persia although not the native language of either Turks or the Moguls who held sway over India had become so popular with the Mogul princes during their stay in central Asia that it acted as the government's official language.

1.2 The statement of the problem and the purpose of the study

In "The Meek or the Mighty: Reappraising of the Role of the Translator" (Alvarez & Vidal, 1996: 22) Bassnett confirms that 'history' in Translation Studies is a key word and a rich field for research; therefore this study is intended to partly fill the historical and cultural gap of Translation Studies in regards English translator, theory translating Persian poetry. This study may pave the path toward theoretical discussion on the cultural aspects of translation.

Williams and Chesterman in *The Map* (2002: 24) state that prefaces, afterwords, footnotes, personal essays and memoirs, even interviews with translators are raw material for studying theories of translation. By carefully analyzing these materials we can understand what translators think about their work, about themselves and what kind of role model they seem to have in their mind.

Apart from the historical value of the study, according to Susan Bassnett (1982/2004: 83) within the field of literary translation more time has been devoted to

investigating problems of translating poetry than any other literary mode. She divides the nature of this investigation into two parts: whether researchers evaluate different translations of a single work or classify the personal statements of individual translators on what they said about solving problems and difficulties of the task. Unfortunately, most studies of poetry translation focus on either the decoding of the ST or the product of the re-encoding. But how one could read out the black box of the translator's brain? Discussions about actual process and attempts to define the particular problems involved and the strategies for dealing with these problems are relatively few.

1.3 Significance of the study

According to Susan Bassnett (1980/88: 45) the translation theory is better viewed in historical periods; she believes that it would be of great help to "look at the way in which certain basic lines of approach to translation have emerged at different periods of European and American culture" (1980/88: 45) and to consider the role and function of translation throughout history.

Simon (quoted in Bassnett & Lefevere 1990: 111) believes that these "basic lines of approach" can be quested in "prefaces" where translators mention the process of their work. She proposes the significance of prefaces and mentions the fact that content and function of prefaces have yet to be analyzed systemically. She believes that "what has been said about translation until recently has been said in prefaces that is the context where the focus on immediate readership is foremost" (ibid: 111). This is the reason the researcher attempts to investigate the prefaces written by English translators.

Connelly (quoted in Baker, 1996: 172) writes that skilled translators' reflection on translation is a way to understand the process of translation of poetry that is missing from most theoretical models and approaches.

Until now there has been no comprehensive study carried out about the English translators approach toward Persian poetry; the present research is about to shed some light on this rather undiscovered area.

1.4 Research questions

It is interesting to know what relationship exists between two cultures at a certain period of time and, how this relationship has changed. How did the receiving and/or source culture manipulate the translation? This study unfortunately can not answer all these questions but to narrow down the study researcher appointed two questions:

1. What translation theories did English translators adopt to deal with Persian poetry between 1850 and 1950?

2. How does the underlying theory of translation change during these one hundred years?

1.5 Definition of key terms

Prefaces: Genette defines (quoted by Tahir-Gurcaglar, Herman 2002: 44) the prefaces, post faces, titles, dedications, illustration, as a number of in-between phenomena that mediate between the texts and the reader and serve to 'present' the work.

Translation theory: Bassnett (1980/1988: 43) believes that what is meant by translation theory is a way to reach an understanding of 'the processes undertaken in the act of

translation' not as generally misunderstood by common, to 'provide a set of norms' in order to produce an ideal or 'perfect translation.'

Late Victorians Period: By the late Victorians period researcher means the period 1850-1950. According to Tarling, the editor of the *Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, the year 1857 is a turning point in British and Indian relationships. In this year a year-long revolution has occurred. The revolt, mutiny, or rebellion, which some have seen as the first Indian war of independence, has several chief results; dissolution of the British East India Company and ending of the Moguls Empire. From then on until 1947 when the Second World War had almost ceased, or as Edward Said confirms the "rise of American implicit Orientalism" (Cain & Harrison 2001: 44)**,** Indians are directly ruled by Queen Victoria.

1.6 Limitation and delimitation of the study

This is perhaps the proper place to disclaim any intention of dealing with the whole Persian literature translated into English. The researcher has omitted drama and fictional and non-fictional prose, important as they are. But the research is done on paratextual elements in general and prefaces in particular written on Persian poems translated directly in the last century by English translators. The point is that except just for one book there has been no book translated during 1850s-60s; the researcher believes that the conflicts or, as Richard Allen notes (2001:56), the 'First War of Indian independence' or 'Uprising of 1857' can be the cause. Readers will face same translators' prefaces in different decades because the researcher believes some of their ideas may vary during the period of two decades. Finally,

the fact is that from all the books reviewed some do not have any prefaces. This is the reason this study is limited to less than thirty books.

Chapter II

Review of Related literature

Chapter II: Review of Related Literature

2.1 Translation and Tower of Babel

"Translation exists because men speak different languages." This simple truism is George Steiner's words in *After Babel* (1975/1998: 51). He poses the question why human beings should speak thousand of different languages. Why do these unified though individually unique beings not use one common language? He wants us to imagine a deaf, non-literate observer viewing us from outside the planet; he probably will report that humans speak a small number of different, though probably related, languages.

Steiner argues the actual situation is, in fact, totally different that we do not speak one language, not half a dozen, nor thirty or forty; there are rather four to five thousand languages currently in use today. Until now, there is no atlas of languages that can claim to be anywhere close to exhaustive, not to mention dead languages like some ancient American Indian speeches that "lapse into irretrievable silence" (ibid: 56).

Steiner provides us with a religious imaginary clue, Tower of Babel, as mentioned in Genesis 10:10 built in the home city of Nimrod. According to Genesis 11: 1-9, mankind, after the deluge, traveled from the mountains where they attempted to

build a city and a tower whose top might reach unto **Heaven**, the Babel. The attempt to build the Tower of Babel had angered **God** who, in His anger, made each person involved unable to remember his or her 'universal, native' parlance and speak a different language which ultimately halted the project and scattered and disconnected the people across the planet. Steiner further adds that tongue of Eden is like 'light of total understanding' and the Babel was a second fall, in some regards as 'desolate' as the first. Adam has been driven from the garden of man; now men were hurried out of the single family of men. The symbolic reverse of its effects occurs at Pentecost –when Christ's apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost and "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2, verse 4).

There are positive as well as negative views about human speeches. Barnstone (cited in Shuttleworth 1997: 14) believes that the world is enriched by "diverse linguistic cultures, iconic and verbal." He regards the destruction of the original tower as a challenge to build a second Babel by means of the act of translation.

Steiner sees a messianic role for translation and talks of it as "a teleological, imperative, a stubborn searching out of all the apertures, translucencies, sluice-gates through which the divided steams of human speech pursue their destined return to a single sea" (1975/1998: 256-67). Steiner's view is very similar to Walter Benjamin's discussion of the recovery of pure language, the language of Paradise which Man used in order to name everything in Creation; the translation of nameless into name, the translation of an imperfect language into more perfect one (1977:151 cited in Shuttleworth 1997: 135).

Each civilization has its own version of Babel, and its mythology about the scattering languages.

2.2 Europeans and the Persian language

Before human beings reach this single language, it is interesting to view how they manage to deal with "the Other's" language. As Levi-Strauss states:

> ...that crucial moment in modern thought when, thanks to the great voyages of discovery, a human community which had believed itself to be complete and in its final form suddenly learned…that it was not alone, that it was part of a greater whole, and that, in order to achieve self-knowledge, it must first of all contemplate its recognizable image in this mirror.
>
> (Cited by Melman, 2001:335)

Yohannan (1977: xviii) states that first the Persian went to England. He explains that the first Persian who visited the British Isles was a certain bishop of the Nestorian Church named Ivon (ibid). He says, that was in the sixth century, when Nestorians were sending missionaries eastward as far as India, and even China. Ivon is believed to have gone in the opposite direction to England and to have resided there till his death. In the thirteenth century, again a Persian emissary reached England, this one a Moslem. Yohannan (ibid: xvii) quotes Matthew Paris that in 1238 the Grand Master of the Order of the Assassins, from his Persian mountain hideout at Alamut, sent an ambassador to the English king to solicit his aid in fighting off the Mongols. He is said to have had a chilling reception, for the Christian world apparently kept alive the hope of converting the pagan Mogols.

After that, Yohannan sees that the missionaries were to go mainly from the West to the East. The conversion of the Mogols to Islam made it necessary for Europeans to seek a water route to the East, and so began the great navigations which were eventually to open up Asia to the West. It was the published accounts of these travels that produced the oriental

coloring in the literature of the Renaissance and that gave Europeans their first notions about the language and literature of the Asian continent (ibid: xviii).

During the earlier Middle Ages, when Islam came westward along the edges of the European world, Islamic culture was so international that it is difficult to measure the peculiarly Persian element that came into the popular fiction of medieval Europe from Asia. Yohannan (ibid) notes that of medieval travelers, the two best known --Marco Polo and John Mandeville-- had much to report about Persia but little about its language and literature.

Sir Anthony Jenkinson is said to be the first Englishman who visited Persia. His voyage, undertaken in 1561 for the Muscovy Company, took him beyond the Caspian Sea to the medieval trade routes that ran through the land of the Sophy, as the Persian Safavi monarchs were called. Jenkinson, according to Yohannan (ibid) brought home graphic descriptions of Persian court life, and he had much to say about the possibilities of the silk trade; of the Persian language he appears to have learned only forms of welcome and farewell.

In the seventeenth century, Yohannan declares that the quixotic missions of the three Shirley brothers provided the best first-hand account of Persia. Robert Shirley's appearance at court in Persian attire was a notable enough event for Van Dyke to paint him in costume, but the most notable thing about these brothers' last trip was the presence of a young clerk of twenty named Thomas Herbert. It was Herbert who buried his unlucky companion in his adopted land, hardly survived the ordeal of bad times befalling them and came back to write his adventures in popular book of *Travels* (1970: xii).

As a matter of fact Herbert was neither a merchant nor a diplomat, but an observer. He had wide interests and a flair for the literary and the bookish. Although he was intolerant

in his religious views but he was appreciative of cultural differences. He could not handle Persian language well but by the help of a "bourgeoning Oriental scholarship" he managed to provide his readers with at least a chart of the Persian alphabet and a brief working vocabulary (Yohannan: xxi). The first European grammar of the Persian language was published at Leyden in 1639, but unfortunately the religious wars of the seventeenth century did not provide a favorable climate for the growth of Oriental studies in England. As mentioned before East India Company came into the scene and the British specially discovered that their enterprise depended for its success upon the ability to use the Persian language and to understand the Islamic culture (ibid: 3).

2.3 West meets East

According to Edward Said (Cain & Harrison, 2001: 31) one way of coming to the term "Orientalism" is based on the Orient's special place in the European Western experience. Said believes that the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also a place of Europe's greatest and richest colonies, the source of Europe's civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the "Other" (ibid). Orientalism in an academic sense is the label for a number of institutions, or anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, and philologist. It is true that compared with Oriental Studies the term is less preferred by specialists, both because it is too vague and general and because it connotes the high-handed executive attitude of nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century European colonialism.

Said argues that Orientalism most of all is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and "the Occident". Taking the late