In the Name of Allah
The Compassionate
The Merciful

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University of Isfahan
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M.A. Thesis

FitzGerald or Fitz-Omar: Ideological Reconsideration of the English Translation of Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*

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To

God The Eternal Absolute

Abstract

The present study attempted to, first, investigate the extent of ideological manipulation applied by Edward Fitzgerald in the English translation of Khayyam's Rubaiyat, then, examine whether Fitzgerald's translation is effective in doing justice to the true philosophical/ideological image of Khayyam and his poems, and through referring to some insights from Colonial and Post-colonial Studies deal with the existence of probable traces of colonialism in his translation.

For the first purpose, the content of 75 quatrains, i.e. all the quatrains in the first edition of the English translation of Khayyam's Rubaiyat by Fitzgerald with their corresponding Persian equivalents, were analyzed. The ideological manipulation theory of Zauberga (2004) was made use of as the theoretical framework of the analysis. The frequency and the frequency percentage of each of the forms of ideological manipulation of the theory (deletion, addition, substitution and attenuation) detectable in the above-mentioned English and Persian quatrains were calculated. The results indicated that the form of deletion was of the highest frequency.

For the second purpose, through benefitting from the opinions of literary scholars, the key concepts of Khayyam's philosophy and his poetry were discussed; the Khayyam and the Rubaiyat which were introduced by Fitzgerald to the Western world were unveiled; some examples of the allusions to the Holy Quran and Hadith existing in Rubaiyat were presented to reveal the image of Khayyam and finally considering the pertinent fundamentals of Post-colonialism, the traces of Fitzgerald's colonialistic attitude toward Khayyam in his translation were investigated. The results revealed that the English translation of Fitzgerald has been subjected to ideological manipulations, and the translator, due to his colonialistic attitude in the translation, has distorted Khayyam's image.

Considering the indisputable role of the translator, as the manipulator of the text, in presenting a probably untrue image of the author/poet of the source language to the world through ideological manipulation, one can apply the findings of the present study to the translators and make them pay attention to the fact that their personal opinions and experiences clearly affect the result(s) of their works to such an extent that they may utilize certain translatorial strategies and/or writing styles which are not exactly appropriate for the source text.

Keywords: Manipulation, ideological manipulation, Rubaiyat, Colonial and Post-colonial Studies

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Overview

Whenever there is a need for communication between two nations with different languages, translation, as a medium of communication, occurs. According to Heylen (1993, p. 5), a translated text is the "rewritten form of an original text." Every text reflects a certain ideology and poetics whereby manipulating literature to function in a given society in a certain way. The concept of manipulation in translation has inspired numerous studies in the past decades (Hermans 1985, Bassnett 1987, Bassenett & Lefevere 1990, Venuti 1992, & others). Most of these studies have focused on the role of manipulation in translation, how it affects the target text as a product, and what roles the manipulated target texts play in the target language community. The present study is intended to investigate the problem of manipulation in translation of Persian literature. This chapter presents an introductory part to this study in the realm of manipulation with an eye on ideological manipulation and its effect generally on our rich literature and specifically on Khayyam's Rubaiyat.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Persian literature has been made known for years to all people around the world in various ways by its lovers inside and outside Iran. The literature of every nation reflects the interests, beliefs, and culture of that nation. Strictly speaking, every nation's literature and culture are interrelated. In conveying this culture, translation of its masterpieces plays a significant role. Unfortunately, in the process of translation, which is considered one of the most effective means in making every nation's literature known to the world, many formal and semantic aspects of the work evaporate through the ideological manipulation applied by the translator, even to such an extent that it can culminate in the distortion of the writer's philosophy and ideology; consequently, the image of the writer presented to other nations is obliterated. Hence, a manipulated image of the writer, based on the translator's own ideology or the dominant ideology of his time, is introduced into the readership.

According to Frost (as cited in Baker, 1998, p.170), "poetry is what is lost in translation." Based on this notion, no translation of a poem can be equal to or substituted for the original, especially in translating from an SL to a TL with a significantly different culture. Stylistic intricacies and semantic profundity are important issues in poetry translation. Close attention to the stylistic complexities is necessary in poetic translation, because style is a particular poet's idiosyncratic way of using language and also a distinctive aspect which differentiates poetry translation from other kinds of translation.

Boase-Beier (1995, as cited in Mona Baker, 1998, p.73) "considers poetic translation successful only if style has been conveyed together with content." It is obvious that content is one of the essential parts in translating poetry which encompasses a poet's ideology and philosophy. It is, therefore, not surprising that a translator of Persian works should be aware of the tradition of Persian poetry which is not only a literary genre, but a major means for Persian poets to express their ideology, life experiences, world views, philosophy, religion and mystic doctrines.

Fitzgerald's judgment about Persian poetry is rooted in his ignorance of such a tradition. He even prides himself in meddling with the original text and admits he has manipulated the texts "to shape them": "It's an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians, who are not poets enough to frighten one from such excursions and who really do want a little art to shape them" (Yohannan, 1977, p. 102).

Although some of the Iranian scholars have constantly shown their gratitude and appreciation to Fitzgerald's attempt in translating Khayyam's Rubaiyat and thus introduce him to the world as a figure to whom Persian literature is indebted, we can see how contemptuously he judges Persian poets and their art if we make a little inquiry in Fitzgerald's personal letters and notes. According to Yohannan (1977), Fitzgerald even claims that he has accredited Khayyam by refining his poems. However, by perusing his translations, one can detect the way he has distorted Khayyam's poetic language and techniques which are considered the main virtue of his style, which are means to endow his thought and philosophy with profundity and opulence: he has modified the images, word plays, puns, even musical devices and effects according to his own and to the taste of his own era and audience. His somehow flowery language has affected and distorted the sense and the original effect of Khayyam's poetry. Michael J. Cummings

(2008) states that FitzGerald translated many of Khayyam's quatrains and combined them into a single work with a central theme of "seize the day." Therefore, FitzGerald has reduced all the philosophical issues and overtones of the poems to this theme which appealed to the Victorian readers who resented the Puritan imposition of doctrines and restrictions.

According to Yohannan (1977, p.102), "the attitude Fitzgerald adopts is somehow colonialistic and anti-Orientalist." He adds that whatever the artistry of the Persian poets, there was much obvious artistry in the method of the translator; of "cutting and curtailing" Fitzgerald entirely approved (p.102).

Some critics ironically refer to Fitzgerald's English versions as "The Rubaiyat of Fitz-Omar," a practice that not only reveals the liberties Fitzgerald took with his source but also questions the credit Fitzgerald acquired for the considerable portion of the translation that is his own creation (Anand, 1993, para. 6). Some people find this quite unfortunate, while others see Fitzgerald's translation of the work as close enough to the true spirit of the poems to warrant the liberties taken (New World Encyclopedia contributors, 2008, para.12).

No doubt Fitzgerald was a talented poet; however, his "Rubaiyat" is not a serious and scholarly translation of Khayyam's work; instead it represents many of his own ideas and interests. Fitzgerald's "Rubaiyat" describes what he believed to be the thoughts and feelings of Omar Khayyam, with seemingly Eastern tones and colors, but it is rendered in a way that would be appealing to a Western audience (Kiannush, 1998, para.5).

The present study is meant to examine the extent of ideological manipulation applied by Edward Fitzgerald in the translation of Khayyam's Rubaiyat to make the poems befitting the taste and demand of his readers and it will focus on the content and the semantic profundity of the original poems which have been distorted in their translations. Benefiting from different scholars' interpretations and analyses of Khayyam's poetry, this study investigates whether or not the Epicurean image of Khayyam created by Fitzgerald is an authentic image.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The translation of literary texts interrelates with the characteristics and the representation of a nation or a special group. According to Farahzad (2006, p. 44), "Post-colonialists believe that the image created by a translation would gradually take the position of reality in the mind of its recipients although it might contradict reality." It means that the nation or the special group comprehends itself as it has been imaged by the translations. Consequently, it would own the same characteristics that the translator, as the manipulator of the text, has created. Regarding what Fitzgerald claims in one of his letters to Cowell asserting that “those Orientals look silly” (Yohannan, 1977, p. 102), one may conclude that he has translated Rubaiyat with a negative and contemptuous attitude toward Khayyam and, therefore, it is likely that he has ideologically manipulated the poems to conform them to his own ideology and philosophy or those of the Victorian period. This kind of ideology-induced manipulation can be detrimental to the image of our rich literature in the eyes of the world. It is, therefore, incumbent on us to preserve enthusiastically our literary resources from being plundered in the process of manipulation in translation and defend them in the face of such unfair exploitations.

Álvarez & Vidal (1996) claim that the complexity of translation process and avoidance of the simplistic view of regarding translation as a mere process of transferring words from one text to another will result in realizing the importance of the ideology underlying a translation. They argue that behind every one of the translator's selections, as.what to add, what to leave out, which words to choose and how to place them, "there is a voluntary act that reveals his history and the socio-political milieu that surrounds him; in other words, his own culture [and ideology]" (Álvarez & Vidal, 1996, p. 5). Regarding the indisputably notable role of the translator, as the manipulator of the text, in depicting a probably false image of the original writer/poet to the world through his/her (mostly ideology-induced) manipulation, the present study seeks to draw the attention of the translators to this fact that their opinions and experiences do influence their achievement and they may compel them to choose certain translatorial strategies or styles of writing that are not perhaps exactly appropriate.

1.4. Purpose and Research Questions

The present study attempts to investigate the extent of ideological manipulation in Fitzgerald's translation of Khayyam by analyzing the Persian poems and their translations semantically, based on the ideological manipulation theory of Zauberga (2004) to find the probable distortions imposed on content and their consequences in depicting a distorted image of Khayyam to the world. Regarding what Fitzgerald as the translator of Rubaiyat says, "better a live sparrow than a stuffed Eagle" (Yohannan, 1977, p.103), one finds it vital to investigate what Fitzgerald actually did as a translator and whether we can call him a translator who intended to make Khayyam known to the world or a poet who exploited our poet's artistic skills as a launch pad to his own success and popularity.

This study seeks to answer the following questions: