

Omar Khayyam

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Biography and Works

Hakim Ghiyath al-Din Abu'l-fath Omar Ibn Ibrahim Khayyam Neyshapuri was born in Neyshapur on May 18, in 1048 A.D. He is also called Khayyam Neyshapuri, Khayyami or Omar Khayyam. He is thought to have been born into a family of tent-makers, later in life he would make this into a play on words (literally, Khayyam in Arabic means "tent-maker"). He was a Persian polymath, mathematician, philosopher, astronomer, physician, and poet. Also, he wrote treatises on mechanics, geography, and music. He spent part of his childhood in the town of Balkh, studying under the well-known scholar Sheikh Mohammad Mansuri and Imam Mowaffagh Neyshapuri, who was considered one of the greatest teachers of Khorasan region. He was one of the followers of Ibn Sina in philosophy which was based on wisdom, logic, and reason. Imam Mohammad Ghazali and Ein al-Ghozat Hamedani were his students. Khayyam passed away at the age of 83 in 1131 A.D. in Neyshapur and his tomb is there, too.

After the conquest of Samarghand by Malekshah Saljughhi, Khayyam became the minister of court with the help of Khaje Nezam al-Molk. Also, as an astronomer he worked in the observatory of Isfahan and along with other distinguished scholars like Beyhaghi, introduced several reforms to the Persian calendar. This calendar was known as Jalali calendar which is now the basis of Iranian calendar. Additionally, he built a star map which was famous in the Persian and Islamic world.

Also, Khayyam was famous during his time as a mathematician. He wrote the influential *Treatise on Demonstration of Problems of Algebra* (1070), which determined the principles of algebra, part of the body of Persian Mathematics that was eventually transmitted to Europe. In particular, he derived general

methods for solving cubic equations and even some higher orders. In addition, he worked on non-Euclidian geometry which became the basis of Lobachevski and Einstein works on geometry.

Khayyam's poetic work has eclipsed his fame as a mathematician and scientist. He is believed to have written about a thousand four-line verses or quatrains (Rubaiies).

Some experts have classified Khayyam rubai's themes as followings:

1. Mystery of Creation

>> از آمدنم نبود گردون را سود/ وز رفتن من جاه و جلالش نفزود/ وز هیچ کسی نیز دو گوشم نشنود/ کاین آمدن و رفتنم از بهر چه بود <<

2. Destiny

>> بر لوح نشان بودنیها بوده است/ پیوسته قلم ز نیک و بد فرسوده است/ در روز ازل هر آنچه << بایست بداد/ غم خوردن و کوشیدن ما بیهوده است <<

3. Passage of Life

>> یکچند به کودکی به استاد شدیم/ یکچند ز استادی خود شاد شدیم/ پایان سخن شنو که مارا چه رسید/ از خاک بر آمدیم و بر باد شدیم <<

4. Vanity

>> بنگر ز جهان چه رخت بر بستم هیچ/ وز حاصل عمر چیست در دستم هیچ/ شمع طربم ولی چو بنشستم هیچ/ من جام جمم ولی چو بشکستم هیچ <<

5. Carpe Diem / Seize the Day

>> این قافله ی عمر عجب می گذرد/ دریاب دمی که با طرب می گذرد/ ساقی غم فردای حریفان چه خوری/ پیش از پیاله را که شب می گذرد <<

Among all quatrains that are believed to be composed by Khayyam, there are many quatrains that do not belong to him. As Sadegh Hedayat mentioned that even if a person lived for one hundred years and every single day he changed his ideas and believes twice, he would not write such a varied thoughts and ideas. So, it is obvious that the whole collection is full of paradox. It might be caused by some factors: The first one is that probably what his followers had

written based on his style combined with Khayyam's quatrains. The second reason, according to Sadegh Hedayat, is that whoever became drunk and composed a quatrain, because of fear, related it to Khayyam. And the last one is that maybe writers who wrote his quatrains made some mistakes in rewriting his poems.

Thus, some well-known writers and scholars as Sadegh Hedayat in *Songs of Khayyam*, Ahmad Shamloo in *Songs*, Mohammad Ali Forooghi, Saeed Nafisi, Jalal al-Din Homaee, Ali Dashti, Karim Emami, Mojtaba Minavi, and many others have corrected the collection. Also, Professor Arthur Christensen has said that among 1213 quatrains which exist in British, French, and German libraries, only 121 of them belong to Khayyam.

The Translation of Rubaiyat

Edward Fitzgerald, born in 1809, was from a wealthy family. Fitzgerald was not a successful writer and translator. Fitzgerald's knowledge of the Persian language was extremely deficient. According to Farahzad (2006), his resources for the Persian language contained Sir William Jones's Grammar of the Persian Language and a Dictionary of Persian, Arabic, and English, the Persian texts Cowell sent him to practice Persian, and Cowell's letters to him which provided answers to his questions about Persian.

Fitzgerald started to translate the Rubaiyat with such narrow knowledge and resources. Thus, it is not unexpected that he was not aware of the Persian poetry tradition which used to be not only a literary genre, but also the major means of manifestation for Persians to express their life experiences, their world views, their sufferings, their physical and spiritual love, their mythology, their history, their wars, their philosophy, their religion, and their Sufi doctrines.

Furthermore, he did not pay attention to the point that Persian poetry traditionally was used as a main means of teachings through Sufi symbolism. Fitzgerald's interpretation of Rubaiyat was Epicurean which was mentioned in his introduction, and did not leave any chance for any Sufi interpretation of

them; so that, his translation adjusted to the Western thought scope, and as a result he became extremely well known.

Fitzgerald used some strategies in translation of Rubaiyat, as Wright (1901) has summarized:

"It must be admitted that Fitzgerald took great liberties with the original in his version of Omar Khayyam."

As Farahzad (2006) has mentioned, Fitzgerald is said to have dealt with the Rubaiyat "as though he had the license of absolute authorship, changing, transposing, and manipulating the substance of the Persian quatrains."

According to Farahzad (2006), his strategies are as followings:

1. Selection

Based on some factors as translatability and fitness to the Epicurean interpretation, Fitzgerald selected some quatrains.

2. Omission

Again based on the same factors he omitted some quatrains.

3. Reduction

He did not translate the whole quatrain in some cases. For example, he translated only one or two lines and the rest was his own composition.

4. Addition

Fitzgerald added some parts to Rubaiyat as it can be said that they are not translation, but original composition.

5. Acculturation

In some cases he chose words as a result of ideological shift. For instance, Jamshid changed to Cesar or Sultan and some religious references have been omitted.

6. Alternation of Images

Sometimes he changed the images and as a result produced completely different connotations or meanings.

7. Subjectivity

At the end of some quatrains Khayyam had mentioned his own name, but Fitzgerald omitted the name and addressed readers instead.

8. Reordering

Khayyam's Rubaiyat had been arranged based on alphabetical order, but Fitzgerald changed that order in this way: First, the poet enters a garden at dawn, conscious and alert, sunk into contemplation, then he starts to drink wine during the day and becomes drunk and starts to write his poetry in praise of life and finally mourns at man's short life at night. Of course, it is not true.

According to one of British Orientalist, Satan, Fitzgerald's purpose, from the beginning, was not translation, but only a composition based on Eastern style which was very common among British poets of 19th century. As a matter of fact, what Fitzgerald did, was grasping the essence of Khayyam's poems and composed new ones which were in the taste of people of that time who were not, because of the dominance of church, dare enough to talk about their own ideas and believes freely. This matter made Fitzgerald's translation of Khayyam's Rubaiyat very famous which; as a result, led to the translation of the Rubaiyat to other languages, such as Arabic, Russian, French, German, Spanish, Armenian, and many other languages which mostly used Fitzgerald's translation as their source text. Thus, his Epicurean image of Khayyam soon spread globally.

References

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