

**Intentionality and the Sense Dis/Location in
Translation: A Case Study *Rubaiyat* of Omar
Khayyam**

*Bouregbi Salah,
Annaba Badji Mokhtar*

Does translation really need a theory? If yes which one among so many, which complicate more than simplify the matter? Which strategy do we adopt to at least communicate something of the original to a target reader, who does not know anything of the source language? In any case, the crux of the matter is meaning: how can we get it? Is it really grasped? If yes, is it of the text, or of the author, or of the reader? Are understanding and meaning interchangeable? Is understanding a diagnostic process of the meaning?

*Meaning, then, is not restricted to linguistic parameters; it is more cognitive and essentially based on the interpreter's own world knowledge. In other words, meaning is more intentional and more hermeneutic than linguistic. In **Critical Discourse Analysis**, Terry Lockemaintains that: "Not only do different types of text require different ways of reading, but the same text can also be read in different ways to generate different meanings. Textual meaning becomes multiple and therefore indeterminate." (14) The text is not only a product but essentially an on-going process of meaning. Though it has precise time and space when produced, it is nonetheless, timeless and spaceless. That is, its space and time are dialogically related to its act of reading: its*

now. When we read and animate it, it becomes a text within the scope of a new space and a new time. It is the now that makes the process of reading construct its being—its becoming. In other words, it is an interactive event between the text and the reader. The critic Norman Fairclough points that: “ [the text] whose primary semiotic form is language increasingly combine language with other semiotic forms. The implicit content of a text is a sort of halfway house between presence and absence.” (4) Fairclough believes that any meaning in a literary text is preconstructed. This preconception of meaning paves the way for the reader to get within the text and finds out what he has already constructed. Fairclough maintains that: “The concept of 'preconstructed' has been used to give an intertextual understanding of implicit content (presupposition); the unsaid of a text, what it takes as given, is taken as the already-said-elsewhere, the form in which a text is shaped and penetrated by (ideological) elements from domains of prior textual practice.” (6)

In the same vein the critic H.G. Widdowson points out the instability of meaning in creative writing, mainly fiction and poetry. He writes:

The text is there at first hand, stable, continuous, wellordered, fixed on a page, or on a screen. But these very features of the textual record can mislead us into thinking that its relationship with the discourse that gave rise to it is relatively unproblematic, and we are

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drawn into the delusion that meaning is inscribed in the text itself, and that what the writer intended to mean can be discovered, inferred, directly from textual evidence. [...] The orderliness and apparent completeness of written text disguises the fact that it too is only a partial record of intended meaning. (10)

The text poses a great problem of interpretation: it holds many stances of interpretations. Its process of meaning is multiple and based on the interpreter's intention(s). Widdowson states that: "The writer enacts a discourse with a projected reader who may be very different from the actual readers who derive their own discourse from the text. [...] And unlike spoken conversation, there can be no on-line negotiation to enable the two parties to converge on a common understanding. In this respect, the stability of the text conceals an intrinsic instability of meaning." (11).

So, what we get as meaning from the text is only a meaning of one's own assumption. Even, the same reader could find a series of meanings through his different diverse readings of the same text. In other words, your own intentions will, subsequently, chase the author out of the context of his own reality.

The text is not only a linguistic matter: a system of codes, sentences and expressions dissociated from contexts and insights. It is a whole, and its interdependent relationship between form and content

weave its own texture. Bettina Fischer-Starcke points out that: the meaning is not a linguistic phenomenon, which could be found out through linguistic analyses. Rather, it is text-internal analysis that “gives a new perspective on the data, so that the researcher can detect new meanings even in a widely discussed text. The detailed linguistic analysis permits detecting meanings, which are virtually invisible in an intuitive approach to the data as in literary studies.(6) James Paul Gee pushed it over claiming that the ‘whos’ and the ‘whats’ are the major difficulties which make meaning multifarious and diverse. He writes:

If I have no idea who you are and what you are doing, then I cannot make sense of what you have said, written, or done.[....] What I mean by a “who” is a socially-situated identity. What I mean by a “what” is a socially-situated activity that the utterance helps to constitute. Finally, we can point out that whos and whats are not really discrete and separable. You are who you are partly through what you are doing and what you are doing is partly recognized for what it is by who is doing it.(13/14)

In the same context, Ernest Lepore and Kirk Ludwig acknowledge the ‘ingraspability’ of the literary text. Words on their own—separately—are significant, and they cause no difficulty in their comprehension. But being within a sentence, the sentence within a paragraph,

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and the paragraph within a text, the meaning is no longer the sum of the meanings of each word, but it steps beyond such significances, and the whole gets a new sense dictated, here, by the intentionality of the reader—subsequent readers. Leopore and Ludwig point out:

The meaningful complexes in a language obviously are understood on the basis of their parts and mode of combination. The illusion of understanding is increased when we realize that this makes available to us the apparatus of quantification theory in giving a systematic account of the meanings of complex expressions on the basis of the meanings of their parts and mode of combination. (327)

If the text resists to its reader, or if the reader builds up its significance on his own intention, then how can we translate the text? Or put forward, what do we exactly portrait? Anthony Pym claims that: “Meaning transfer is thus an assumption—certainly a social illusion—operative in the use of translations as translations. Yet it is not ubiquitous. Inasmuch as there are users for whom the source text is unavailable, this assumption of meaning transfer is specifically external to actual translation processes. No translator or translation critic need believe that translation is the transfer of stable meaning. Indeed, inasmuch as there is a plurality of translators for whom source-text meanings differ.” (18)

In his article "Theories of Translation," Eugene A. Nida points out that: "The basic problem of formulating an adequate theory of translation is the fact that translation actually takes place in our brains, and we do not know precisely what actually happens. There are no complete synonyms within a language or between different languages, but such a statement seems evidently incorrect because almost all dictionaries have extensive lists of synonyms, for example, sets such as rich/wealthy and run/race. But such sets of synonyms are normally limited to a restricted set of contexts. (12)

And so, the problem is within the text at the first degree, and the text and the reader at a second degree. The within and the without, the outer and the inner, the external and the internal are interrelated; thus, they, subsequently, exclude its author. The critics Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiromaintain that :

Dans la problématique herméneutique, qui est au principe de plusieurs approches littéraires et philosophiques de la traduction, la production de traductions procède, au même titre que l'interprétation, d'un « mouvement herméneutique » qui a pour fin un accès au « sens » du texte et à son unicité. [elle se caractérise] par une mise entre parenthèses des conditions sociales de possibilité de cet « art de comprendre » et par l'universalisation implicite d'une posture savante qui revient à faire

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l'impasse sur la pluralité des agents impliqués, ainsi que sur les fonctions effectives que peuvent remplir les traductions à la fois pour le traducteur, les médiateurs divers ainsi que pour les publics dans leurs espaces historiques et sociaux de réception.(3)

Commenting on Nida's definition of translation, Shiyang Ran writes: "If there is an absolute correct translation, then we have to face the question that 'who can identify the absolute correct translation?' An expert or an ordinary reader? Are their opinions the same? [...] As every estimator is characteristic of his/her personal class, any valuation is characteristic of relative class feature. Readers decide to accept or reject translations, and different types of reader will require different types of translation. A closest natural translation for highly qualified intellectuals may not be the closest natural one for common people or ordinary citizens. (45)

What Ran wants to transmit for us is that all meanings are contextual, and all contexts are dialogically related to the reader through his intention and the 'what' to discover. In the process of translation, the operation becomes doubly complicated since, by definition, two languages and thus two cultures and two societies are involved. (45) Peter Newmark underlines that: "In reading, you search for the intention of the text, you cannot isolate this from understanding it. [...] The intention of the text represents the SL writer's

attitude to the subject matter. What is meant by "That was clever of him? Is it ironical, openly or implicitly? It may be 'iceberg work to find out, since the tone may come through in a literal translation, but the translator has to be aware of it.'"(12)

Involvement within the choice of words and expressions makes the translator/interpreter reconstruct a context proper to his own strategy and thus makes another text out of the relics of the original. The critic Maria Tymoczko maintains that: "Translations themselves form subsystems of textual systems—notably literary systems—and collectively can be grouped by parameters such as function, audience, text type, formal effects, and patronage." (5)

One should not forget that the duty of the translator is to transfer for us a source text and enables us to read the text as if it was written in the target language. But is he able to do it?The embodiment of the source text is not made in a vacuum: its texture both formal and contextual is trailed to a degree that we cannot take even a fibre of its oneness—its constitution. I mean, we can dislocate or relocate its style and content and makes it foreign to its source—original: there is a great risk of transformation, since, it seems to me, any act of translation is an act of omission and addition.Laurence Venuti speaks of illusory translation. The text you read seems to be a foreign text that you accept as such because of the ingenuity of the translator, who recreates it in a way that makes you appreciate both

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the form (his from) and the style (his style) and you claim its originality. Venuti points out:

The illusion of transparency is an effect of fluent discourse, of the translator's effort to insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning. What is so remarkable here is that this illusory effect conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator's crucial intervention in the foreign text.(8)

But this invisibility Venuti is speaking about can in no way be possible: The more the translator is invisible, the more the text becomes his own—the more he possesses it. He becomes his author—his creator-. In other words, invisibility excludes the author and corrupts the text. The invisibility annihilates the author.

There is no correct, adequate, right equivalence in languages, even of the same roots, in style and expression. And no meaning is ever possible without these expressions and stylistic patterns. Thus, even equivalences pose a problem. Meaning we derive, or deduce from equivalence, is not the meaning of the text, but the meaning of a text suggested by the reading of the translator. Equivalence is, then, what is intended be a meaning. In this context, the critic Mona Baker states that:

The notion of equivalent effect is also linked to the idea of reproducing the 'intention' of the source author, i.e., emphasizing the equivalence of intended meaning. This is also highly problematic because it assumes that the translator 'understands' rather than 'interprets' the source text – that somehow he or she has direct access to the communicative intentions of the original author. But translators cannot know with any certainty what the source author intended to convey, especially where there is a large temporal gap between the source and target texts. All they can do is try to interpret it, so that any theory or model based on some notion of equivalence of intention would be impossible to verify. (3)

The text seems for us, as readers of the target, as if it was an original one because of the effect the translator uses in his formulaic and imitating narrative. This illusory artefact makes us believe him and accept the text as a good translation and what we read must be the original, but, hopelessly, it is not.

In his article "Translation Theory and the Problem of Equivalence," Mariano Garcia-Landarises such problem of equivalence and its inadequacy with meaning transfer. He thinks that equivalence exists but the matter is what do we transfer and how do we transfer? He writes: "The problem with equivalence is

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this. We know that equivalence is the real thing in translation, that there is no translation if there is no equivalence between the original text and the translated text. And we know of course that equivalence exists, that is not the real problem. (1) He maintains that translating is another way of speaking of conveying messages through signs, and through these signs we produce perceptions. But the problem is that these perceptions which are produced through these sign chains are different from these sign chains. This means that translation is the reproduction of the same perceptions which are produced with another sign system of another language. (2) This is somehow a mirage!

And so; what about poetry whose problem is double-edged: problem of form (meter, rhyme, rhythm, euphony) and content (context, in-text, etc...). Poetry is, then, a real challenge for translators!

Form and content cannot be separate in poetry. It is like a coin whose value is based on its both faces. James Paul Gee states that: "Content is highly language-bound and this is what translation of poetry more difficult than the other types of translations. Poetry, makes possessing components such as rhythm, rhyme, tone, deviation from the institutionalized linguistic code, musicality expressed through meters and cadence, etc., arouses pessimistic statements on the scope of its translatability that exceeds those affirmative ones." (159)

Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat (1957-59) is to be a good example of such difficulty. Our reading of both

English translations seems to be very problematic. What do we read? Who is nearest to Khayyam: Edward Fitzgerald or John Pasha? Why do we have such diversities in form and content? The problem seems to be a question of meaning and how does the translator render the quatrains, expressions and words into English. In his comments on Fitzgerald's translation, the critic C. Eliot Norton assumes that:

He [Fitzgerald] is to be called 'translator' only in default of a better word, one which should express the poetic transfusion of a poetic spirit from one language to another, and the representation of the ideas and images of the original in a form not altogether diverse from their own, but perfectly adopted to the new conditions of time, place, custom, and the habit of the mind in which they appear. (575-76)

The writer John Ruskin noted in a letter to E. Fitzgerald dated 2nd September 1865 the following:

*'My dear and very dear sir,
I never did—till this day—read anything so glorious, to my mind as this poem. [...] and that, and this, is all I can say about it—more—more—please more—and that I am ever gratefully and respectfully yours.*

J. Ruskin(212)

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The critic reviewer of Lippincott's Magazine, Edward Hall, praised the poem and wrote: "He [Fitzgerald] has gone far to prove that the acceptableness among us of Oriental poetry may depend very largely on the skill with which it is transplanted into our language." (261)

So many critics glorify Fitzgerald. But can we really acknowledge its originality? Are all these grandiloquent words adequate and ever-inciting? Does the poem hold the spirit of Omar Khayyam or Edward Fitzgerald's or both, or just none of them? Is it a mediator of both souls and philosophies? Or just has a total autonomy: It is from both, yet negates both? It just becomes another text for another reader of another understanding?

But before embarking on such heated contentious questions, it is of paramount importance to have a closer look on the nature of the meter in Persian poetry then draw a kind of similarity between the English and the Persian meters, and how did Fitzgerald manage with all these in his translation?

What is a Rubai in Persian literature? The critic, Alfred Mckinley Terhume, explains for us the rubai and its equivalence in English meters as follows: "It is simply for convenience that the Persian term rubai is translated into English 'quatrain.' Actually, the rubai is a two-lined stanza which breaks naturally into four lines of the English quatrain. In every variety of Persian poetry, the unit is the bayt , a line which consists of six or eight feet.

Each baytin a rubaiis divided into two symmetrical halves called misra. Usually, the first, second and fourth 'misra', rhyme, resulting in the a a b a pattern used in English translations. In other words, a rubai consists of two lines divided into hemisticks with the first, second, and fourth hemisticks rhyming.” (220)

In this translation, Fitzgerald adopted the rhyme pattern (a a b a) which predominates in the original, but he simplified the rhyme itself. Many critics contend that Fitzgerald has translated his personal outlook of the spirit/philosophy of Omar Khayyam rather than the quatrains of The Rubaiyat. Edward Hemon-Allen claims that Fitzgerald has not faithfully restricted himself to the quatrains of Khayyam ; the first stanza, for example, is entirely his own. (5)Hemon-Allen spent around twelve years surveying the entire range of Fitzgerald's Persian studies and tracing his quatrains to their sources. His object was: “to set at rest, once or for ever, the vexed quatrain of how Edward Fitzgerald's incomparable poem may be regarded far as an adaptation, and how far an original work.” (5-6) His observations are astonishingly remarkable:

- **Forty Nine (49) quatrains are faithful and beautiful paraphrases of single quatrains to be found in the Onsley or Calcutta or both.**
- **Forty Four (44) quatrains are more than one quatrain and may be termed 'composite' quatrains.**
- **Two (2) quatrains are inspired by Fitzgerald only in Nicolas' text.**

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- **Two (2)** quatrains reflecting the whole spirit of the original poem.
- **Two (2)** quatrains are exclusively due to the influence of the *Mantik Uttair* of *Ferid Id di Attar*.
- **Two (2)** quatrains primarily inspired by *Omar* were influenced by the *Odes* of *Hafiz*.

The total accounts for 101 stanzas make up the poem in its final form. (Hemon-Allen xi-xii). Furthermore, Hemon-Allen claims that Fitzgerald's poem is not wholly adapted from the original but various translated and non-translated references, besides some quatrains of *Khayyam* that are not of his *Rubaiyat*:

*Quatrains **forty six (46)** and **ninety eight (98)** are inspired by *J. B. Nicolas*.

*Quatrains **thirty three (33)** and **thirty four (34)** are *Atter's*.

*Quatrains **two (2)** and **three (3)** are *Hafiz's*.

*Quatrains **five (5)** and **eightysix (86)** hold no reference to any quotation in the original, but refer to *Omar's* philosophy. (*ibid*)

Fitzgerald studied three different collections of *Omar's* quatrains before his poem reached its final form: *The Onsley Manuscript* at the *Boldean Library*, *Nicolas's* translation, and the *Calcutta Manuscript* of *Bengal Society*. The *Boldean* contains **158** stanzas; *Calcutta Manuscript* counts **516** stanzas, *J. B. Nicolas's* translation of 1867 contains **464** Stanzas. *Fitzgerald's* contains **101** stanzas which are seen as

distillations of Omar Khayyam's thoughts and philosophy.

Reynolds A. Nicholson recognizes the intrusion of a modern note and the liberties which Fitzgerald took with his material but observes that the translator's very deficiencies as a Persian scholar were an advantage to him as an artist. He states:

Persian is not a difficult language, but to read Persian religious and philosophical poetry, with full understanding of the sense intended by the writer, is an achievement of which few professed scholars are capable, since it requires not only mastery of the language, but also intimate acquaintance with the general history of Moslem thought, and in particular with theology and mysticism. Fitzgerald luckily, did not trouble himself about such matters; the poetry was what he cared for, and he read it by the light of his own speculations and those of the age in which he lived. (28-30)

Fitzgerad is skilled in the reproduction of the sense of the original. Quatrain eighty one (81) has been much discussed. In his 1903 edition, Aldus Wright quotes the following from a letter written to him by Cowell: " There is no original for the line about the snake: I have looked for it in vain in Nicolas; but I have

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always supposed that the last line is Fitzgerald's mistake version of quatrain 236 in Nicolas's edition."(229)

Stanza 81:

*Oh Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst
make,
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake:
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of
Man
Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—
and take!*

In a letter to Mrs Cowell, December 17, 1867, Fitzgerald acknowledged that: "You know I have translated none literally, and have generally mashed up two-or-more-into one." (qtdTerhume 229)

The second version of The Rubaiyat in English is that of Johnson Pasha. This version does not in any way lack dexterity to that of Fitzgerald. His translation was published in 1913, years after that of Fitzgerald. In his preface to such translation, he wrote underlining the difficulties he faced in the course of translation:

I have, however, subject it [The Rubaiyat] to some revision, and hope that the more important errors have been corrected, and that it now presents a fairly accurate idea of the original meaning. I think that the great majority of the quatrains are, if not a literal, at least a fairly close rendering of the original text, but I have not

hesitated to add expressions not to be found in the original where it seemed to me clear that anything like a simple translation of the original words not convey the same ideas as the Persian.(5)

*He even claimed that the word 'khish' in the quatrain **sixty seven** (67) was wrongly translated as 'spear' not 'brick' as usually rendered. "There is, of course, much (sic) repetition, but though this greatly increases the difficulty of any attempt to render into verse without contact repetition of the same phrases.... There is generally something new to be found" (vi). About the feet, he has chosen for the meter, he wrote: "I have feet justified in serving the needs of rhyme by speaking of the flower's thanks for new born-life." He adds "I have departed from the ten-syllable line in many instances, and have even exceeded the limits of the rubai, but I can only urge in extenuation that I have found the endeavour to turn **seven hundred sixty two** (762) quatrains of Persian into **seven hundred sixty two** (762) quatrains of English a task of great difficulty, and I hope for the indulgence of those who may care to read" (vi).*

Rendering seems to be the only solution to literary translation mainly in poetry. But do we dare say that we are reading a foreign text?

The conclusion that I have come up with is that the moment is the key for meaning transfer; and this transfer is in no way of the text, or the author or the

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reader; yet, it is from the text and the author and the reader.

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