

Intersemiotic Retranslation: A Study on the Illustrations of Khayyam's Quatrains

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Abstract

The quatrains of Omar Khayyam were first introduced to the West through the translation of FitzGerald (1859). More than 150 illustrators have re-illustrated these quatrains as long as the translation is printed. This paper aims to test the retranslation hypothesis by examining the illustrations of two different illustrators, Edmund Sullivan (1913) and Niroot Puttapipat (2013) who lived a century apart in Britain. To confirm or reject the retranslation hypothesis more significantly, this article will assess (1) whether the earlier illustrator followed the norms of the target culture or the later (2) how and to what extent we can trace the manipulative power of illustrators during the process of intersemiotic transformation; (3) to what extent the socio-cultural context has an impact on the retranslation strategies of illustrators. This paper concludes that intersemiotic retranslation of a literary work can indicate historical, ideological, social, and cultural changes. The study ultimately serves as another piece of the puzzle for the retranslation hypothesis to approach a theory.

Keywords: retranslation, manipulation, illustration, intersemiotic transformation

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1. Introduction

The retranslation hypothesis is a theory concerning the nature of multiple translations of the same source text. Bensimon (1990, p. ix) posits that first translations tend to be closer to the target culture than subsequent translations, as it is the intention of the translator to have the ST accepted into the target culture. Retranslations, then, have less need to be accepted into the target culture, as the translated text has already performed this function. The translator is hence free to shift away from the target culture, back towards the source text and render its original exoticism

(Bensimon, 1990, p. iv). As Gambier (1994, p. 414) stated that “It can be argued that a first translation always tends to be more assimilating. Retranslation, in this case, would be a return to the source text”. Retranslation normally occurs by a different translator at a different time. The period between the initial translation and the re-translations may vary from a few years to decades or hundreds of years. Paloposki and Koskinen stated that “later translators can benefit from increased familiarity with the source culture” (2004, 28).

Although the growing number of works on retranslation coming from increasingly diverse cultural and linguistic contexts but the study of multimodal retranslation makes a broad interdisciplinary approach imperative in recent years. Retranslation operates on a range of different levels and confining its study to interlingual translation and to the printed page denies its potential to offer greater understanding of processes of meaning-making in our contemporary world, where we are surrounded by images and sounds travelling in multiple directions. The images and illustrations have the capacity to convey very important messages. One of the ways of transferring culture and identity of a nation is through book illustrations which has not received much attention by the researchers in the field of multimodal retranslation.

This paper questions the validity of the retranslation hypothesis by examining books illustrations as a kind of intersemiotic translations. To do so, we carries out a comparative analysis of the Edmund Sullivan’s illustrations dating from 1913 and Niroot Puttapipat’s from 2013 who depicted Khayyam’s quatrains based on FitzGerald’s translation.

2. Retranslation

From the perspective of culture and sociology, one can define translation as a kind of rewriting that reflect a kind of ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society (Lefevere 1992). According to him, the act of translation can be regarded as the “rewriting of an original text” (xi). In fact, the process of rewriting reflects the ideology of the translator who manipulates the original text so that it will “function in a given society in a given way” (xi). In other terms, for Lefevere, “rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power [...]” (xi). Considering translations/rewritings as “images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes a whole literature,” he says:

“These images existed side by side with the realities they competed with, but the images always tended to reach more people than the corresponding realities did. Yet (. . .) the impact (of these images) has not often been studied. (. . .) This is all the more strange since the power wielded by these images, and therefore by their makers, is enormous”. (*Ibid.* 5)

By mentioning his theory, we wanted that the reader keep it in mind while we are talking about retranslation, an act which in itself reduplicates to a new degree the act of translation. If translation is indeed an act of rewriting, retranslation should be regarded as rewriting to an even higher degree. In our case, the illustrator is the intersemiotic retranslator who plays an important role in orienting a translated text toward the target culture or disorienting it. In Berman’s view, most first translations are defective, as they are not as rich in language in comparison to the original language and they are not as meaningful, either (1990, p. 5). In this same vein, Bensimon (1990) points out that the problem with first translations is that they yield a naturalization of the foreign work (p. 1), i.e. they are target-oriented or domesticating. Bensimon follows Berman, when the latter argues that this type of translation peters out the alterity of the original to better integrate it into another culture. Briefly, both Berman and Bensimon consider that retranslations are called for because it is necessary to display the original’s foreignness and exoticisms that have been watered down in the first translations. This entails that first translations would tend to be target-oriented or domesticating, whereas retranslations would be marked as source-oriented or foreignizing. In Gambier’s terms, the first translations would be target-oriented, focused on the norms of the target linguo-culture, whereas retranslations would be source-oriented or literal (1994, p. 414).

In our case, Fitzgerald’s translation is considered as the interlingual translation. So, Sullivan’s and Puttapipat’s illustrations are considered as the intersemiotic retranslations of Khayyam Quatrains based on FitzGerald’s translation. to confirm or reject the retranslation hypothesis more significantly, this article will assess (1) whether the earlier illustrator followed the norms of target culture or the later (2) how and to what extent we can trace the manipulative role of illustrators during the process of intersemiotic transformation; (3) to what extent the socio-cultural context has an impact on the retranslation strategies of illustrators in depicting the cultural elements.

3. Literature review

Most work on retranslation has focused on literary or drama translations with studies such as those conducted by Hanna (2007) and Siponkoski (2009), both on Shakespeare, Du-Nour (1995) on the retranslation of children's books, and O'Driscoll (2011) on Jules Verne in English. Few work has been carried out about the validity of retranslation hypothesis in book illustration. Ziemann (2020) applied the concept of retranslation to a graphic novel adaptation of Kafka's life and work. She proved that cultural context, publishers' policies and re/translators' personal backgrounds, interests and motivations in the case of retranslation. Tan (2020) has carried out a study on paratexts of the Chinese translations of *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays* by Thomas H. Huxley and investigated the shifting motives and intended functions of retranslation in China in over a century by tracing the discourses crystalizing in the paratexts, including translator's notes, commentary, preface, and visual material. He reveals how the different social and political backgrounds to the translations and China's changing cultural landscape have affected the main goals of the translators and publishers vis-a-vis the dissemination of science and knowledge in the society.

In the audiovisual domain, Bywood (2019) examined the retranslation strategies of subtitlers to reject or confirm the validity of retranslation hypothesis. Moving through time from oldest to newest translations, he noticed a demonstrable tendency is oriented toward target culture oriented solutions and thus the retranslation hypothesis does not apply in this case. Other work on subtitles by Gottlieb (2009) has suggested that where translation takes place from English, the retranslation hypothesis is more likely to be confirmed, a phenomenon which may owe its existence to the global dominance of the English language and Anglophone culture in the media space.

By analyzing Griffin's translation of *Brevi'sima relacio'n de la destruccio'n de las Indias* book, Valdeon (2014) concluded that whereas some features of the earlier translation have been toned down, the inclusion of the engravings, Griffin's footnotes and some of his translation choices continue to echo earlier versions, even though the motivations for publication (ideological or otherwise) may differ.

This paper investigates the intersemiotic retranslation strategies used by illustrators for depicting cultural elements in the Quatrains of Khayyam translated by FitzGerald. The aim of this analysis is to see these strategies are source culture oriented or target culture oriented with the aim of testing the retranslation hypothesis, which states that whilst first translations tend to be target culture oriented, retranslations move then towards the source culture (Koskinen & Paloposki, 2004). The retranslations in questions are Sullivan's and Puttapipat's illustrations of FitzGerald translation who lived in the same context but at a different time.

4. Methodology

Five illustrations were selected from Puttapipat's and Sullivan's illustrations randomly. It is also worth mentioning that these five quatrains contain arguable cultural elements. The samples of Puttapipat have been extracted from the website that belongs to Heather Palmer (www.heatherpalmer.org). Then, five illustrations of the same quatrains illustrated by Sullivan have been juxtaposed with Puttapipat's. Then, we examined the intersemiotic retranslation strategies of Sullivan and Puttapipat in order to test the validity of retranslation hypothesis. In the data analysis section, the illustrations on the left side are those illustrated by Sullivan and the right ones belong to Puttapipat.

5. Data Analysis

The data analysis focuses on these paired illustrations, with Sullivan's on the left and Puttapipat's on the right. Through this juxtaposition, we examine how each artist has reinterpreted the same quatrains, identifying distinct visual strategies and cultural nuances. This comparative approach allows us to discern patterns and divergences in their artistic translations, ultimately contributing to our understanding of how visual art can serve as a medium for cultural and semiotic reinterpretation.

By analyzing these illustrations, we aim to uncover the underlying principles and techniques that guide each artist's retranslation process. This will not only shed light on their individual artistic visions but also enhance our broader comprehension of intersemiotic translation within the context of literary and visual arts.

Quatrain 1

Sullivan (1913)



Puttapipat (2013)



Think, in this batter'd **caravanserai**
 Whose doorways are alternate night and day,
 How **sultan** after sultan with his pomp
 Abode his hour or two, and went his way.

Here the world is likened to a caravanserai whose guests are sultans (kings). In Iranian culture, **caravanserai** is a roadside inn where travelers can rest and recover from the day's journey. Puttapipat has depicted a "Sultan" just like an Old Iranian king who is a skilled archer and wear spectacular Iranian clothes scabbard with a sword. Farrokh (2009) stated that "the sword is an ancient and powerful symbol in Iranian theology".

Caravanserai is depicted like a building from 18 or 19 centry by Sullivan. In his illustration, Sultan is just like the Caesar, and a priest who stands behind the Ceasar. Many of the Greek writings in this image depict the concept of life and death with a non-Oriental color and scent.

The word "Charon" in Greek mythology refers to a sailman that carries the souls of people who have just died across the Styx River. "Acheron" also means the boundary river between the world of the dead and the living (Sacks, 2005, 12). These vocabularies are not culturally compatible with the concept of immortality found in the corresponding quatrain. In addition to what is mentioned in the poem, this image also contains elements such as priest, rabbi, child and skeleton.

Quatrain 2



Come, fill the cup, and in the fire of spring
The winter garment of repentance fling
The **bird** of **time** has but a little way
To fly-and lo! The bird is on the wing

Puttapipat has depicted a bird which is dropping a king's turban (as a symbol of kingdom in Old Persian). To illustrate the word "bird", the illustrator has used foreignization method and depicted "the bird of time" through illustrating Huma bird which is one of the symbols of Iranian culture. As a matter of fact, he has shown this metaphor through depicting an Iranian legendary bird. Huma is a mystical bird of Iranian legends and fables and also is considered as a common motif in Sufi poetry. In Persian literature, it is stated that if this bird cast its shadow on everyone, h/she will be prosperous. Huma is the symbol of prosperity in Persian literature. Foreignization is manifested in this picture by creating a Persian motif unknown to the Western audience.

As shown in Figure 4, a hat of a king, a necklace and a golden bowl which can be considered as signs of power, wealth and dignity have been depicted based on Fitzgerald's translation. In his personal website, Puttapipat has given an explanation about this picture (n. d):

“This is my depiction of the Huma bird, a creature of fortune that bestows kingship and flies without ever coming to rest. In some variations of its legends, it is said, like the phoenix, to consume itself in flames and rise again. I felt that it might serve for the metaphorical “Bird of time” of the quatrain”.

The left image illustrated by Sullivan shows an hourglass in the clutches of an eagle denotes the inexorable passage of time which is “the symbol of transitory nature of life in Western art” (Steffler, 2002, p.112).

Quatrain 3



One Moment in Annihilation's Waste,
 One Moment, of the Well of Life to taste -
 The Stars are setting and the **Caravan**
 Starts for the Dawn of Nothing - oh, make haste

An oriental scene is evident in these illustrations but there are also differences between them. Passing a Caravan through the desert is the manifestation of worldly life, and also appearing the stars in the sky means the journey is coming to an end. Van Voorst (2014, p.298) stated that

“camel caravans were important for lucrative Mecca trade, and camels are referred to often in Islamic scriptures and tradition”. Stetkevych (2010) mentioned that “the camel is the symbol of culture in pre-Islamic Arab nations” (p.27). He (2010) stated that camel is a symbol of man’s soul who is eager to meet God in Persian art. Sullivan has added a western symbol, skeleton, to this image. Ferguson (1961) stated that human skeleton is the symbol of death in Christian art. As depicted by Sullivan, the Skeleton is bearing a scythe, a symbol of the cutting short of life, as a Western symbol. As stated by Bhabha (1994), hybridity has frequently been used in post-colonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural ‘exchange’. This use of the term has been widely criticized, since it usually implies negating and neglecting the imbalance and inequality of the power relations it references. By stressing the transformative cultural, linguistic and political impacts on both the colonized and the colonizer, it has been regarded as replicating assimilationist policies by masking or whitewashing cultural differences. Mixing western and eastern symbols as a kind of cultural hybridity in Sullivan’s illustration is one of the impacts of postcolonial environment on his intersemiotic translation strategies.

Quatrain 4



But come with old Khayyám, and leave the Lot
Of Kaikobád and Kaikhosrú forgot!
Let **Rustam** lay about him as he will,

Or Hátim Tai cry Supper -- heed them not.

Regarding this quatrain, Forest stated that (n. d):

“Rustum (or Rostam) is as FitzGerald notes from his first edition onwards, the Hercules of Persia. He was the all-action hero, who, according to the *Shahnama*, required the milk of ten nurses at birth and felled a rampaging elephant whilst still a child. He grew up to slay a dragon, outwit a cunningly disguised witch, single-handedly rout an army, and destroy a demon known as the White Deev, these being four of the so-called Seven Labours of Rostam (which of course naturally invite comparison with the Twelve Labors of Hercules).

Puttapipat has illustrated this verse by using foreignization method and depicted Rustam, the famous hero in Persian literature. Portraying this evident i.e. killing the dragon happened in the third labor (Khan) shows that he is well aware of its existence in *Shahnama*. In Iranian culture, a dragon symbolizes evil; moreover, fighting a dragon is meant to ward off Evil. According to Kafshchian Moghadam and Yahaghi (2012), the Dragon, an animal consisted of a bird and a snake, is considered as a consolidated symbol in Persian art; moreover it is a symbol of evil in Iranian culture.

Puttapipat stated in his personal website that (n.d):

“The illustration for this quatrain really properly illustrates just the third line, 'Let Rustam lay about him as he will', rather than interprets the sense of the quatrain as a whole; but it gave me the opportunity to depict the Persian hero, Rustam, from an episode of the *Shahnameh* in which he fights the dragon”.

According to this statement, it is evident that he has quite enough knowledge about Persian culture. Harrison (2012) stated that the translator's knowledge of ST and TT culture will affect the quality of translation. Puttapipat's domestication strategy about Iranian values and Persian culture saved the ones which have been removed or foreignized in Sullivan's intersemiotic translation of Rubaiyat. In contrast with Sullivan, he transformed the Victorian and western cultural elements into Persian ones through depicting the elements belonging to Eastern

and Iranian context, and also force the audiences to search about a new character and ask themselves who the Persian hero is!. Sullivan has not shown any specific cultural element in this picture to show the main Iranian characters in this quatrain.

Quatrain 5



AWAKE! For Morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to flight;
And Lo! The Hunter of the East has caught
The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of Light.

Yogananda (2008) explains the meaning of some words in the quatrains of FitzGerald and states that facing eastward during prayer and meditation is a long habit and tradition in the East and especially among Muslims. He stated that the reason of this habit is because of the radiation of wisdom spreads Westward over the earth; moreover, in Muslim countries when the time of prayer comes, Muezzin call to prayer at the top of a Minaret. Based on his explanations in his website, The Sultan's Turret is described as "The Kingly Minaret of Pride". In Puttapipat's illustration, the path direction of the horse and the cavalier is from the East to the West.

Forrest (n. d) gives a comprehensive description of this quatrain which substantiate that FitzGerald has used domestication and aimed to transfer a more domesticated sense rather than an alienated one. He states that FitzGerald's most detailed thoughts on the image are contained in

one of his letters written to Cowell and he talks about throwing a pebble into a cup as “a sign of breaking up the Party...though in this case it does not mean breaking up any Party but that of Night, whose departure is a sign for the Drinkers to assemble”. Forest (n. d) stated that flinging a stone into a cup or pot is the signal for ‘striking camp’ among tribes of nomad Arabs. So we can deduce that FitzGerald means the drinkers must assemble before the tavern door not the prayers before the mosque door. He aims to transfer a meaning in favor of the target readers. In Sullivan’s illustration, there is no evidence of the eastern symbols, and he only depicted a man who is trying to wake up a woman to do something before it gets too late.

In this verse, the time for praying is evident. Puttapipat has depicted the building of a mosque as a symbol of Islamic cultural landscape which is one of the main characteristics of Islamic civilization. Through depicting a valuable monument, he tried to demonstrate his awareness of Islamic values. As a British translator, it was possible for him to illustrate a church or a building of a tavern based on target culture but he has foreignized the cultural elements consciously. As shown in this illustration, the mosque has turned the Western ambience of the poem into Eastern (Iranian) one. The building of a mosque is a sign of the presence of Muslims and a place for self-purification. Alibhai (2008) stated that “the minaret became a manifestation of this symbolic importance and many Islamic regimes sought to portray their power through the height and grandeur of their minarets” (p.27). Kirabaev & Pochta (2002) mentions that one of the general features determining a classical “Islamic town” is cult building like a mosque.

In this verse, one of the main cultural characters is “Sultan” which has been considered by Puttapipat but not by Sullivan. Puttapipat has illustrated the Sultan as a Persian king in old fashion (the casual clothes in Iranian court) and makes the readers feel that they are in a different context.

6. Conclusion

The present study, in order to examine the validity of “Retranslation Hypothesis” about assimilating first translations and the ST orientation of the retranslations and its accomplishment over time, chose the intersemiotic retranslations of Khayyam’s quatrains from two different era.

By examining the illustrations of Sullivan and Puttapipat to test the validity of retranslation hypothesis, we can conclude that that first translation are likely to be closer to the target culture than any subsequent retranslations so as to enable the acceptance of the text in said culture. The results show that the retranslation hypothesis does apply for this particular corpus, leading to the conclusion that retranslation of Khayyam's Quatrains tend to be more source culture oriented as retranslations are performed during a century. The cultural elements have become more foreignized during this elapse of time. The older illustrations are likely to appear domesticated to the receiver of the quatrains, whilst the more recent illustrations bring the cultural elements closer to the source culture with the translation strategy of foreignization. The new illustrated version of quatrains is closer to the original because the illustrator has managed to avoid the ideological biases of the earlier illustrator.

Generally, according to what Bensimon and Berman (1990) believed; namely, retranslations are made to emphasize the "otherness" of the source text which was lost in the first translation, it can be concluded that the source text "otherness" is one of the reasons which causes the retranslation to happen.

Regarding "Retranslation Hypothesis" the results obtained from the present study were almost in line with the hypothesis claims. According to "Retranslation Hypothesis" retranslations were expected to be more source-text oriented than the first translation of the same work. What was depicted through this study implied that retranslation of FitzGerald 'quatrains got nearer to the cultural context of the source text, while the first illustrated version kept more distance from the source text's cultural context to ensure the positive reception of the translated text in the colonial context.

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