

## Chapter 11

# LE GALLIENNE'S PARAPHRASE AND THE LIMITS OF TRANSLATION

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What is the book I saw you with but now?

“The book of verses underneath the bough”!

So that old poison-pot still catches flies!

“The jug of wine, the loaf of bread, and Thou”!

Richard Le Gallienne, *Omar Repentant* (1908)

Richard Le Gallienne (1866–1947) was not a fashionable writer in his day,<sup>1</sup> and though his version of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* is often prominently quoted today, he rarely gets much credit for it; it is Omar Khayyám who is being quoted.<sup>2</sup> When Le Gallienne the ‘translator’ does attract attention, it is rarely favourable.<sup>3</sup> It scarcely needs to be said that Le Gallienne, like all other interpreters of the *Rubáiyát*, has been overshadowed by Edward FitzGerald’s fame and esteem, but it might be said that Le Gallienne has been unfairly, if understandably, overshadowed by Omar Khayyám. It is not clear whether Le Gallienne himself understood the danger these two luminaries – FitzGerald and Khayyám – posed to his own prospects for fame, but the subtitle of his *Rubáiyát* is ‘a paraphrase of several literal translations by Richard Le Gallienne’, which suggests that the poet was keen to claim his share of the credit.

Yet the relationship between Le Gallienne and the very idea of a *Rubáiyát* translation is vexed. The paraphraser can hardly be accused of any deceit as he himself admitted that his *Rubáiyát* was not a translation at all, but rather a ‘paraphrase’.<sup>4</sup> By calling his *Rubáiyát* a paraphrase and admitting that he did not have the linguistic ability to produce a translation, even going so far as to name the qualified translators whose work he relied on, Le Gallienne seems to say everything one would have expected him to avoid saying:

As for that very minor matter, my Persian, I would put it to my friends of the Omar Khayyám Club – whether Persian be any ‘necessary adjunct or true ornament’ of

your true Omarian. Indeed, I have a notion – which may be quite erroneous – that a knowledge of Persian disqualifies one for membership in that genial society.<sup>5</sup>

This self-conscious and bold admission makes it clear that Le Gallienne was wholly unconcerned with the issue of translation. What he offers under the name of Omar Khayyám is only a paraphrase of other translations, whose value he is, *ipso facto*, unable to estimate. Ultimately it seems that for Le Gallienne in 1897 the activity of translating the *Rubáiyát* from Persian was a scholarly preoccupation divorced from mainstream English literary culture and the marketplace. According to Le Gallienne, the members of the Omar Khayyám Club shared this opinion. A poem Le Gallienne delivered at a club meeting on 18 December 1894 hints at how the poet perceived his relationship with the eleventh-century Persian.<sup>6</sup> Addressing Khayyám, he says:

So many years your Tomb the Roses strew,  
 Yet not one penny wiser we than you,  
 The doubts that wearied you are with us still,  
 And, Heaven be thanked! your wine is with us too.<sup>7</sup>

For Le Gallienne, Khayyám's *Rubáiyát* talks of universal concerns and the poet's bacchic vice is similarly widespread. Le Gallienne, his *Rubáiyát* and the Omarians, as the club members called themselves, were united together in a turn of the century literary and cultural movement that John Yohannan has called 'the cult of the *Rubaiyat*'.<sup>8</sup>

John Yohannan has written on this subject in great depth, describing the history of Anglo-American engagement with Persian literature, and Omar Khayyám and his *Rubáiyát* are at the focus of this interaction.<sup>9</sup> According to Yohannan, 'the most important development in the formation of this cult was the death, in 1883, of Edward FitzGerald'. 'FitzGerald', he writes, 'came to be thought of as the author of a poem called *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* rather than as the man who rendered into English Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*.'<sup>10</sup> This is the impression one gets from Le Gallienne's introduction to his own paraphrase, though it is not stated so baldly. Le Gallienne is interested in FitzGerald's role in inventing the *Rubáiyát* insofar as it validates his own re-creation, through amateur paraphrase, of a by now quintessentially English literary work. It was also a best-selling literary work and thus we must always remind ourselves that Le Gallienne's paraphrase cannot be divorced from the world of commercial publishing, especially that segment of the turn of the century Anglo-American publishing industry closely affiliated with the Decadent movement.<sup>11</sup>

In the introduction to his *Rubáiyát*, Le Gallienne better explains how he conceived of the nature of his putative paraphrase:

I am told that an apology will be expected of me for this humble attempt to add to the poetry of nations. For my part, I believe that poetry should be its own apology, and that in so far as the following paraphrase is poetry, it will need no further justification.

However, as there is another name upon the title-page besides my own, perhaps, I owe it to my reverence for Omar Khayyám and Edward FitzGerald to make a few minor explanations.<sup>12</sup>

At this stage, the reader might be inclined to agree with Charles G. D. Roberts, who in a rare, positive review of Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát*, said 'Nor was I altogether conciliated by the preface, whose cleverness seemed a trifle too airy to comport with its subject.'<sup>13</sup> Yet setting stylistic judgments aside, it is remarkable how Le Gallienne declares his paraphrase 'poetry' on the first page of his introduction, the first page of the entire work, and although it comes in the course of a humorously self-effacing *mea culpa*, it is no less bold. It is interesting, as well, that Le Gallienne felt he owed an equal debt to FitzGerald as he did to Khayyám.

Let us consider Le Gallienne's apology. Firstly, as we have seen, he admits that he does not consider a 'knowledge of Persian' to be a prerequisite.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, Le Gallienne lays the blame on his publisher: 'To plead that the idea of a new verse rendering of Omar Khayyám was not my own unassisted impertinence, is but to hint at the originality of the English publisher, without easing the burden of my responsibility.'<sup>15</sup> Next, he takes up the topic of the historical Omar. 'It would seem', he says, 'a sort of unkindness towards FitzGerald, – as suggesting, what it is the growing fashion to forget, that there ever was any such person as Omar at all.'<sup>16</sup> Le Gallienne, though, does no such unkindness to FitzGerald; his suggestion that FitzGerald did more than just translate the *Rubáiyát* is quite precocious:

Probably the original rose of Omar was, so to speak, never a rose at all, but only petals towards the making of a rose; and perhaps FitzGerald did not so much bring Omar's rose to bloom again, as make it bloom for the first time. The petals came from Persia, but it was an English magician who charmed them into a living rose.<sup>17</sup>

While Le Gallienne's interpretation is valuable for demonstrating the fluidity of the concept of translation at the end of the nineteenth century, it is also an important indication of his own tolerance for paraphrase, for – as it were – imaginative interpretation. He reminds the reader that Omar

Khayyám was a historical figure, but he does not hesitate to confuse the relationship between poet and translator, pointedly contrasting the latter's agency with the former's mere potential. By causing Khayyám's rose to bloom for the first time, he implies, FitzGerald deserves more credit than the poet, who actually seems to owe his translator for having rescued him from obscurity. That is, at least, how Le Gallienne the paraphraser saw it. FitzGerald's success, combined with the scholarly doubt surrounding the authenticity of Khayyám's oeuvre, actually encourages Le Gallienne's lax attitude toward the commonly held belief that it is a translator's responsibility to be faithful to the original.<sup>18</sup> He is, by his account, only following FitzGerald's example:

Out of that hoard of wine-stained rose-leaves, FitzGerald made his wonderful Rose of the Hundred and One Petals – purple rose incomparable for glory and perfume. He had chosen many of the richest petals, but he had left many behind, – and it is chiefly of these that I have made my little yellow rose.

I have persisted in this image because it is really an accurate description of what I conceive to have been FitzGerald's method of dealing with his original, as it describes my own method of manipulating the translations on which the following poem is based.<sup>19</sup>

Le Gallienne's conspicuous use of the word 'poem' – to say nothing of the confession implicit in the phrase 'manipulating the translations' – again draws our attention to his particular interpretation of the practice of translation and paraphrase. Most – if not all – translators purport to be translating, to be rewriting a work into a different language. Even if they are quite conscious of having taken arguably unjustified liberties, they seldom admit it. Obviously, Le Gallienne insists that his *Rubáiyát* is an original poem, but this claim must be understood in the circumstances of his literary context. Were it not for the success and popularity of FitzGerald's translation and its adoption in the English literary canon, Le Gallienne would never have been able to write poetry under Omar's name or to reinterpret the *Rubáiyát* as Shakespeare remade the Lear legend. Society is more forgiving of fanciful, daring translations – even of inventive pseudo-translations masquerading as paraphrases – if the texts are well known. The translation of a text and its permeation of a recipient culture being akin to adoption, societies are more forgiving when translators (or filmmakers, novelists, poets, artists, satirists) take liberties with one of their own.<sup>20</sup> This may perhaps explain why Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát* slipped silently into the category of translation despite its author's prefatory protestations.

Richard Le Gallienne worked in a world in which the *Rubáiyát* was a treasure of English literature and its supposed originator Omar Khayyám a beloved character. Regrettably for Le Gallienne, his paraphrase was judged alongside FitzGerald's work and in comparison with that earlier, pioneering work, his attempt was found lacking. The *New York Times* review of Le Gallienne's paraphrase is a clear example of how these three figures – a dubious mediaeval poet, a translator and a paraphraser – interacted in the minds of the literary community. The review begins, 'Richard Le Gallienne's version of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is out in England. The critics have fallen foul of it', but the bulk of the review is taken up with quotations from the *Rubáiyáts* of Le Gallienne and FitzGerald. In the last paragraph, the reviewer returns to Omar, who is presented as a figure out-of-time, an indelible, eternal voice whose wisdom has only to be translated, however poorly, to have an effect:

One thing at least has been demonstrated by Mr Le Gallienne. With all the faults of his work – its often times feebleness, its commonplace taste in the choice of words, its unfailing inferiority in every line to Fitz Gerald's [sic] version – nowhere does it make wholly illusive the weird charm, the puissant and awful truth that Omar put into verse... Whether we read Fitz Gerald, Le Gallienne, or McCarthy, Omar's voice is heard. That voice spoke to the human soul, whether Persian, English, French, or Tartar. The mere language in which it is heard can never silence it.<sup>21</sup>

## Strategies

One way of understanding the nature of Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát* and how it relates to the translations on which it was based is to look at how *Rubáiyát* translators themselves characterised their works. We will consider here the prefaces to the three *Rubáiyát* translations Le Gallienne used to write his paraphrase: Jean-Baptiste Nicolas' *Les Quatrains de Khèyam traduits du Persan* (1867); Justin Huntly McCarthy's *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: Translated into English Prose* (1889); and E. H. Whinfield's *The Quatrains of Omar Khayyám* (1882; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1901). A common motif, which crops up in the translators' prefaces, is the claim that the translators were asked to produce their translations. This may reflect three factual situations: either the translators were indeed asked to produce new translations, in which case there was, as other evidence demonstrates, a great demand for the *Rubáiyát*, or the translators are instead suggesting they were asked to produce translations in order to plead false modesty, or – and this must be true

for all English-language translators of the *Rubáiyát* – they are attempting to justify their attempts to do what FitzGerald had already done so well. Nicolas (1814–75), who translated into French, was less susceptible to the FitzGeraldian anxiety:

A mon dernier passage à Paris, j'y ai rencontré des amis avides de nouveauté en fait de littérature orientale... Après avoir entendu les citations orales que j'ai pu leur faire succinctement de quelques quatrains du poète qui nous occupe, ils m'ont si fortement conseillé d'en publier une traduction complète, ils ont mis tant d'insistance dans leur conseils, tant de bienveillance dans leurs offres de service, que je me suis décidé à me conformer à leurs désirs en éditant aujourd'hui cet ouvrage.<sup>22</sup>

The translators felt compelled to explain their decisions regarding translation into verse or prose, as well. McCarthy (1860–1936) is rather dogmatic:

I have set it down in prose, because, firstly, prose can give the meaning more nearly than any verse could give it, secondly, because it has never been done in English prose, thirdly, because it has been done in English verse once and for ever, and to attempt verse again is but to put oneself in comparison with FitzGerald which, in the pithy phrase of the great Hellenic humourist, 'is absurd.'<sup>23</sup>

In comparison with Nicolas and McCarthy, Whinfield's (1836–1922) introduction is a slightly philosophical, extended rumination on the rhyme and reason, as it were, of translation. 'A man who professes to translate into English must write English. Consequently, even when he is translating plain prose, he must allow himself such latitude as is involved in substituting English equivalents for foreign idioms and constructions'. 'Again', Whinfield goes on to say, 'in the case of epigrammatic and lyric poetry like Omar's, where nearly the whole attractiveness lies in the style and the manner, the point and the "curious felicity" of the expression, the translator must claim still further latitude if he wishes to convey to the reader any adequate idea of the charm of the original'. Coming to exactly the opposite conclusion from McCarthy, Whinfield says that the aforementioned issues 'obviously point to the adoption of verse as the best vehicle for representing Omar to English readers.' 'And,' he adds, 'of course, the trammels of metre and rhyme...force the translator to take still further liberties.' Yet having made a case for liberty and latitude in translation, Whinfield's scholarly conscience leads him to protect himself from accusations of too much leeway: 'Shall we say then that a translator may take unlimited license to paraphrase? By no means.' It is 'legitimate',

he says, to paraphrase 'in order to bring out the meaning and the charm of the original'; in fact 'the translator is only trying to acquit himself of his proper duty'. But if the translator paraphrases in order to '[alter] the meaning [of the original] to give it a modern flavour, to elevate what seems a too grovelling sentiment, or to trick out an ancient commonplace with present-day trappings, the paraphrase is unwarranted and illegitimate'. In what is perhaps the finest distillation of the attitude of later translators to the intimidating success and fame of FitzGerald's version, Whinfield rather cravenly stipulates that 'these remarks are not intended to apply to Fitz-Gerald, but only to ordinary translators.'<sup>24</sup>

We have had occasion, above, to consider the interesting preface to Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát*, in which he discusses his approach to the paraphrase, but we can find other indications of his method and principles of translation in two other sources. In a piece entitled 'The Eternal Omar', Le Gallienne alludes to a preoccupation that may help explain how he saw his *Rubáiyát* in relation to other translations of the text.<sup>25</sup> Like Whinfield, Le Gallienne seems to have taken some comfort in Edward Heron-Allen's 1898 study in which FitzGerald's version is compared to a literal translation, accompanied by scholarly annotations and the original Persian: 'Mr. Nathan Haskell Dole's elaborate variorum edition, together with Mr. E. Heron-Allen's annotations, give us pretty well as much data as we need to illustrate FitzGerald's way of making his classic'.<sup>26</sup> The esteemed image of FitzGerald, burnished by assertions of his genius as a poet rather than his accuracy as a translator, was rendered human again and, as a result, slightly more credit was given to Khayyám. 'It used to be somewhat freely said that Omar was nearly all FitzGerald. How entirely fanciful the statement was Mr. Haskell Dole and Mr. Heron-Allen have enabled even those who have no Persian to see for themselves'.<sup>27</sup> This reappraisal of FitzGerald could only serve the interests of competing translators. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that Le Gallienne follows this passage with an extended critique of some of FitzGerald's earlier infelicities, which were corrected for the fourth edition of his translation.<sup>28</sup>

### Le Gallienne's Paraphrase

The paraphrase itself is quite fluid and demonstrates a clear structure.<sup>29</sup> The first 15 quatrains proceed somewhat chronologically: from 'Wake' (1: 1), 'the wine of morning' (2: 1), 'morning star' (3: 1) and 'No false mirage of morning' (3: 3) to 'this sun that rises all too soon shall sink' (4: 2) and 'Since darkling dawn we have been waiting here, / waiting and waiting for the day to come' (5: 3–4) to 'the nodding afternoon' (12: 1) and finally to 'Who brought thee

last night lovely to my side?' (15: 1). The rest of the poem, though, departs from this pattern and, therefore, to borrow a line from quatrain 16 the reader becomes 'entranced beyond the bounds of night and day' (16: 2). Of course, FitzGerald's *Rubāiyāt* begins with 'Awake' or 'Wake',<sup>30</sup> but this brief, prefatory progression of time seems to have been Le Gallienne's own imputation.<sup>31</sup>

To mark the transition from this day-span movement, the quatrain that follows begins boldly with the anticipated announcement: 'Yea, it is truly Khayyām that you see, / These are his dancing-girls, and drunk is he' (17: 1–2). The body of Le Gallienne's poem exhibits a texture that is marked by epicurean quatrains; an emphasis that reflects the imprint of the paraphraser's conscious and significant authorial choice. Of course, many of the Persian *rubāiyāt* that have come down to us are imbued with this bacchic irreverence, but it is clear that, for Le Gallienne – *pace* Whinfield and Nicolas – Khayyām's wine is not a religious symbol, but rather the hallmark of libertinism; it was the same for FitzGerald, as Marzieh Gail has so entertainingly explained.<sup>32</sup> Elsewhere Le Gallienne fronts the irreligious dimension in the *Rubaiyat*:

Only a breath divides belief from doubt  
'Tis muttered breath that makes a man devout (18: 1–2)<sup>33</sup>

and:

Men talk of heaven, – there is no heaven but here;  
Men talk of hell, – there is no hell but here;  
Men of hereafters talk, and future lives, –  
O love, there is no other life – but here. (56)

Le Gallienne celebrates the libertine's confident heresy, though this emphasis may at the same time reflect the paraphraser's own preoccupation with the pious ethos of the mediaeval world. Le Gallienne also groups a series of quatrains together in Omar's aside against religious hypocrites, *de rigueur* in any argument against religious belief.

The Koran! well, come put me to the test –  
Lovely old book in hideous error drest –  
Believe me, I can quote the Koran too,  
The unbeliever knows his Koran best. (70)

Having issued this challenge, which seems to suggest that something like a religious *gnosis* ought to be exalted over religious practice and knowledge of



which precludes any accusations of petty sin, Omar denounces the idea of a religious elect:

And do you think that unto such as you,  
A maggot-minded, starved, fanatic crew,  
God gave the Secret, and denied it me? –  
Well, well, what matters it! believe that too. (71)

This may be derived from Nicolas' quatrain 130:

Vois-tu ces deux ou trois imbéciles qui tiennent le monde entre leurs mains, et qui, dans leur candide ignorance, se croient les plus savants de l'univers? Ne t'en inquiète pas, car, dans leur extrême contentement, ils considèrent comme hérétiques tous ceux qui ne sont pas des ânes (comme eux).<sup>34</sup>

which is, in turn, a translation of the Persian:

*bā'īn dū'sih nā-dān kih jahāndārān-and / az jahl-i kih dānāy-i jahān īshānand  
khūsh bāsh kih az khurramī īshān bih mithl-i / har kū nah khar ast kāfirash mūdānand*

which Whinfield translated into English as:

These fools, by dint of ignorance most crass,  
Think they in wisdom all mankind surpass;  
And glibly do they damn as infidel,  
Each one who is not, like themselves, an ass.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly Le Gallienne's version is the least concerned with properly relating the Persian meaning, but notice how Le Gallienne – if this quatrain is indeed derived from the sources I have suggested – dismisses the existing asinine simile in favour of the more polemical 'maggot-minded'. He changes the phrasing, as well, putting the third person into the second person. Obviously this entire argument is contingent upon whether Le Gallienne was indeed paraphrasing the quatrain I have identified in the original Persian, Nicolas' French and Whinfield's English. It may just be a coincidence and perhaps a good example of why the parapet of paraphrase is a stronger defensive position than that of translation.

For Le Gallienne's Omar, those who claim to understand God's 'Secret' are the true sinners for whereas 'He sins no sins but gentle drunkenness, / Warm-hearted mirth, and kind adultery,' (72: 3–4), '[theirs] is the cold heart, and the murderous tongue, / The wintry soul that hates to hear a song, / The close-shut fist, the mean and measuring eye, / And all the little poisoned ways

of wrong? (73). Omar prefers his own logic when it comes to answering the question of God's mystery:

So since with all my passion and my skill,  
The world's mysterious meaning mocks me still,  
Shall I not piously believe that I  
Am kept in darkness by the heavenly will? (68)

Yet this bald declaration, and the challenge to the hypocrites which follows it, is preceded by several quatrains in which Omar describes the extent to which he searched for this secret. In this passage, Le Gallienne attempts to establish Omar's *bona fides* as a religious thinker, but a tone of longing mixed in with light-hearted reminiscence can be distinguished here as well. He is not 'idle' or 'profane' in what he is preaching for his 'playful wisdom [has grown] out of pain' (58: 1–2). He too wanted to know the secret and searched for it 'low in the dust... and on high' (59: 1–2). But when he came to the end of his journey for the truth and failed to find the truth he had sought, he came to a realisation:

Up, up, where Parwin's<sup>36</sup> hoofs stamp heaven's floor,  
My soul went knocking at each starry door,  
Till on the still stop of heaven's stair  
Clear-eyed I looked – and laughed – and climbed no more.

Of all my seeking this is all my gain:  
No agony of any mortal brain  
Shall wrest the secret of the life of man;  
The Search has taught me that the Search is vain. (60–1)

The story of this futile search, which is the impetus for the entire *Rubáiyát*, is also the basis for Omar's relationship with the audience. By placing this story and the challenge to the hypocrites side by side and giving them a prominent place toward the beginning of his paraphrase, Le Gallienne makes of his Omar a sympathetic character with past experience, and it is this past experience which authorises him to transmit his message. The message he has come to give, the ethos of the entire *Rubáiyát*, is summarised in two quatrains near the end of this passage:

Look not above, there is no answer there;  
Pray not, for no one listens to your prayer;  
NEAR is as near to God as any FAR,  
And HERE is just the same deceit as THERE.

But here are wine and beautiful young girls,<sup>37</sup>  
 Be wise and hide your sorrows in their curls;  
 Dive as you will in life's mysterious sea,  
 You shall not bring us any better pearls. (65–6)

There is further evidence of Le Gallienne's organisational arrangement in the passage in which he juxtaposes spring with death in a *carpe diem* vignette à la FitzGerald. The passage begins with the auspicious line 'O come, my love, the spring is in the land!' (32: 1) and this new season is heralded with particularly innocent, almost childlike, similes: 'White as the hand of Moses blooms the thorn, / Sweet as the breath of Jesus comes the spring' (34: 3–4). But this is soon given over to the ineluctable tragedy that underpins human existence. When 'Spring, with the cuckoo-sob deep in his throat' arrives, and 'o'er all the land his thrilling whispers float', the 'Old earth believes his ancient lies once more, / And runs to meet him in a golden coat' (35: 1–4). This optimism is misplaced, though, as Le Gallienne makes clear with a sinister enjambment:

And many a lovely girl that hath long lain  
 Beneath the grass...  
 Lifts up a daisied head to hear him sing... (36: 1–3)

He goes on to explain to his beloved that 'this very ground you lightly tread, / ...is pillow to some maiden's head; / Ah! tread upon it lightly, lest you wake / The sacred slumber of the happy dead' (37).<sup>38</sup> He expresses this motif of *memento mori* more clearly, saying, 'The grave of beauty is its cradle too, / And new is old, and old is ever new' (39: 1–2). Of course lovers are often reminded of the transitory nature of life, but the transition from spring to the contemplation of lovers' deaths is an example of how Le Gallienne the poet-paraphraser composed his text.<sup>39</sup> On the structural level he brings quatrains together to create movements in the course of the poem, and on the level of diction he roots Omar's sentiments in the literary heritage of Western lyric.

The concluding movement of the *Rubáiyát* is a lamentation; a return to the constant subtext of death that runs through the body of the poem. 'If only this green world might last for ever,' (200: 1) Omar says wistfully, repudiating any interest in the world to come, and going so far as to apostrophise the earth as if it were his beloved: 'O gentle earth, methinks my heart will break / At the mere thought of leaving you behind' (201: 3–4). In an inverted refrain of the initial day-span movement, personified night arrives at the end of the poem:

Night with a sudden splendour opens wide  
 Her purple robe, and bares her silver side,

The moon, her bosom, fills the world with light, –  
 Only thy breast is lovelier, my bride. (203)<sup>40</sup>

And it is bedtime, sleep – an inversion of FitzGerald's 'Wake' – that comes to symbolise eternal rest:

With twilight dew each rose's face is wet,  
 Morning was grey upon them when we met,  
 Still must I drink, and still must drink with thee –  
 'Tis many laughing hours to bedtime yet. (204)

Le Gallienne sets the stage for the end, be it night or death, in the final stanzas with phrases like: 'O Love, before Death comes to make our bed...' (205: 1), 'Ah, when at last the shrouded Saki, Death...' (206: 1), 'And for my coffin...' (207: 3), '...when all is over' (208: 1), '...when at last is run my race' (209: 1), 'This is the thought the dead man thinks upon' (210: 1), but Le Gallienne's Omar is not a doomsayer. His role is to alert his audience to the value of this transitory life: 'O friends forget not, as you laugh and play, / Some that were laughing with you yesterday' (211: 1–2), Omar says, reminding his audience that '...even this dust... Once whispered to its love' (212: 1–2). Life and its delights are impermanent, that has been the clarion theme throughout the poem, but here, at the poem's conclusion, Le Gallienne links the good life and the poem in one diurnal symbol, which stands for both life and the poem's duration:

How wonderfully has the day gone by!  
 If only when the stars come we could die,  
 And morning find us gathered to our dreams, –  
 Two happy solemn faces and the sky! (214)

### **Liberating Masquerade**

Now that we have examined some of the structural and compositional features of Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát*, the reader will understand that this text does not sit easily in any of the rubrics we would conceive for it. Much of the scholarship concerned with earlier Orientalist translations is interested in which texts were chosen for translation and how faithfully those translations were carried out; I include in this category those very interesting studies of how translators' cultural and political attitudes, as well as the attitudes of their readers, shaped their translations.<sup>41</sup> Some work has been done on the phenomenon of pseudo-translation – passing off an original work as a translation – but is it fair to

call Le Gallienne a pseudo-translator when he himself confesses not to know Persian in the introduction to what he calls his 'paraphrase'? Scholars working on the theoretical ramifications of pseudo-translation have used these texts to problematise concepts like originality, authorship and exoticisation. Susan Bassnett lists pseudo-translations such as MacPherson's *Ossian* (1765, rev. 1773), Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605–1615) and Richard Burton's *The Kasidah of Hají Abdú El-Yezdí* (1880), originally published under a pseudonym.<sup>42</sup> Nearer to our purposes, Parvin Loloi has written about translations of the Persian poet Hafiz 'in which the author exercises the liberty not only of changing the words and senses of the original but also abandoning them as he or she pleases'.<sup>43</sup> Gideon Toury has suggested that:

From the point of view of literary evolution, the use of fictitious translations is often a convenient way, sometimes one of the only ways open to writers, to introduce innovations into a literary system, especially when this system is resistant to deviations from canonical models and norms.<sup>44</sup>

This seems to describe rather exactly the literary revolution brought on by FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*, which is not a pseudo-translation. But can this paradigm explain Le Gallienne's paraphrase, which was, after all, just one more *Rubáiyát*? This text is perhaps better understood by way of another quotation from Toury:

If in such cases, translational norms differ from the norms of original literary writing in the target culture...and if the difference is in the direction of greater tolerance for deviations from sanctioned models, as is often the case, then the translational norms can also be adopted, at least in part, for the composition of original texts, which are introduced into the system in the guise of genuine translations and, as a result, have a lower resistance threshold to pass.<sup>45</sup>

Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát* was not as transgressive as Toury's paradigm might suggest, but there is a clear similarity between this type of pseudo-translation and our text. Yet rather than adopt the guise of a translation in order to make his libertine work acceptable to the reading public, it is likely that Le Gallienne imposed his poetry on the raw material of Khayyám, as provided by McCarthy, Whinfield and Nicolas, in order to promote his own literary brand and to respond to market demands. Rather than using the conceit of translation to disguise his original work, Le Gallienne was actually using Khayyám for a leg up the literary ladder.<sup>46</sup> Translation, especially the translation of pre-modern poetry, also enabled the passé Le Gallienne to be justifiably out-of-fashion for the first time in his literary career.

Benjamin Brawley, a fan of Le Gallienne's, wrote that 'The verses [of Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát*] are so distinctive that they are quite able to stand on their own merits as poems.'<sup>47</sup> However it does not seem that Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát* was ever thought of as his own composition. The text was described as such only a few times, but this was usually done to deride it and contrast it with the work of FitzGerald.<sup>48</sup> Writing after FitzGerald – and after scholarly investigations that challenged the authenticity of Omar's authorship – Le Gallienne found himself with all the poetic liberty he needed.<sup>49</sup> He could not avoid, it seems, the form FitzGerald laid down, but otherwise Le Gallienne felt free to substitute a superior poetic image or phrase when he found the original translations lacking, and – most importantly – to invent; after all, FitzGerald had done the same.

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### Notes

- 1 Maria F. Gonzalez, 'Decadence and the Major Poetical Works of Richard Le Gallienne' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Miami, 1978) is the only study of Le Gallienne's work that I know of, though it does not treat Le Gallienne's translations. Wendell Harris and Rebecca Larsen, 'Richard Le Gallienne: A Bibliography of Writings About Him', *English Literature in Transition (1880–1920)* 19, no. 2 (1976): 111–32 is an invaluable resource for researchers interested in Le Gallienne's career.
- 2 Le Gallienne's paraphrase crops up from time to time; lamentably, it is almost always disguised as a quotation from Omar Khayyám. John Yohannan has remarked that '[judging] from the number of editions of Le Gallienne's work in England and America, his translation was second only to FitzGerald's in popular appeal' (*Persian Poetry in England and America: a 200-Year history* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1977), 196). Clarence Darrow, the famous defence attorney, quoted Le Gallienne as Khayyám three times at the trial of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb in Chicago in 1924 (Clarence Darrow, *Attorney for the Damned*, ed. Arthur Weinberg (London: MacDonald, 1957), 28, 65, 87). Christopher Hitchens frequently quotes one particular quatrain (LXXI), as for example in *God is not Great: the case against religion* (New York: Twelve Books, 2007), x, and *The Portable Atheist: essential readings for the non-believer* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2007), 7–11.
- 3 In Yohannan's formulation, Le Gallienne is 'the best example...of the more frankly decadent interpreters of Persian poetry' (*Persian Poetry*, 196).

- 4 See Richard Le Gallienne, 'The Eternal Omar', in *The Book of Omar and Rubáiyát ; being a book of miscellanies – biographical, historical, bibliographical and pictorial notes on Omar Khayyám of Nishapur and his inspired quatrains* (New York and London: The Bankside Press, M. F. Mansfield, Publisher, 1900), 18, where he refers to FitzGerald's version as a 'paraphrase'.
- 5 Richard Le Gallienne, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: A Paraphrase from Several Literal Translations* (London: Grant Richards, 1897), viii. The phrase quoted is John Milton's famous comment about rhyme from his introduction to the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Paradise Lost* (1674).
- 6 *The Book of the Omar Khayyám Club, 1892–1910* (London, 1910), 37.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 8 This is the title of ch. 18 of Yohannan's *Persian Poetry*; he calls the 'Omar Khayyam Clubs of England and America...the true agents of the fin de siècle cult of the Rubaiyat'. A contemporary account of the formation of the original Omar Khayyám Club already uses the term 'cult' in 1893 (Moncure D. Conway, 'The Omar Khayyam Cult in England', *The Nation* 57, no. 1478 (October 1893): 304–5); this may indicate that the fad had always been slightly self-aware, rather unlike a true cult.
- 9 See Mehdi Aminrazavi, *The Wine of Wisdom: the Life, Poetry and Philosophy of Omar Khayyam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), ch. 18, for an overview of this historical interaction, including a discussion of the *Rubáiyát* in continental Europe.
- 10 Yohannan, *Persian Poetry*, 202.
- 11 See *inter alia* Margaret D. Stetz, 'Publishing industries and practices', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 113–30. Writing about John Lane, who would come to publish Le Gallienne's paraphrase, Stetz comments: 'When John Lane broke with his business associate, Elkin Mathews, in 1894 and spirited away the Yellow Book for a firm of his own that specialised in publishing Aesthetes, Decadents, and "New Women", he made sure that his daring new illustrated quarterly would be available at railway stations. Lane's periodical appeared to target a consumer who was affluent, sophisticated and at home in Paris or Dieppe, but the Yellow Book also sold nicely to those whose experience of travel was confined to a daily commute through Waterloo or Victoria.' (120) See also J. Lewis May, *John Lane and the Nineties* (London: John Lane, 1936); W. G. Murdoch's *The Renaissance of the Nineties: A View from the Bodley Head* (London: De La More, 1911); and Ellen Moers 'Literary Economics in the 1890's: Golden Boys for Sale'. *Victorian Studies* 7, no. 2 (December 1963): 185–91.
- 12 Le Gallienne, *Rubáiyát* (1897 ed.), vii.
- 13 Charles G. D. Roberts, 'Mr Le Gallienne's Paraphrases of Omar Khayyam', *The Bookman: a Review of Books and Life* 7, no. 1 (March 1898): 77.
- 14 Le Gallienne, *Rubáiyát* (1897 ed.), viii.
- 15 *Ibid.*, viii. The serialisation of extracts from Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát* in magazines such as the *Cosmopolitan* and the *Bookman* testifies to the important commercial dimension of his translation.
- 16 Le Gallienne, *Rubáiyát* (1897 ed.), viii.
- 17 Le Gallienne, *Rubáiyát* (1897 ed.), x; cf. the story of William Simpson, who brought seeds from a rose-tree growing in Nishapur back to England, grafted the resulting plant to an English tree, and planted it at FitzGerald's grave in Boulge (*The Book of the Omar Khayyám Club*, 185–7). In the whine of today's little England this sentiment has lost any charity it once possessed: 'It is we who have provided the Persian/Iranian nation with a literary celebrity of worldwide renown (whose "tomb" in Nishapur is now visited

- by thousands) rather than the other way round.' (Tony Briggs writing in the *Telegraph*, 18 April 2009)
- 18 Le Gallienne emphasises this indeterminacy: 'Omar's editors count, roughly, some five hundred [quatrains], many of which are of doubtful authenticity' (Le Gallienne, *Rubāyāt* (1897 ed.), ix).
- 19 Le Gallienne, *Rubāyāt* (1897 ed.), x–xi.
- 20 Perhaps this is why new film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays recast in imaginatively different settings and eras appear so frequently in cinemas and why the Bible has been written in so many different Englishes. Re-translations of literary works tend to come across as correctives, e.g. the new English translation, under Christopher Prendergast's editorship, of the whole of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* published as *In Search of Lost Time* (London: Penguin Classics, 2002); and Michael Henry Heim's new translation of Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* published as *Death in Venice* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005).
- 21 'Le Gallienne's Version of Omar', *New York Times*, 4 December 1897.
- 22 'On my last trip to Paris, I met with friends eager for new works of oriental literature... After hearing some brief renditions I had been able to make for them of some quatrains by the poet who concerns us here, they strongly encouraged me to publish a complete translation. Their encouragement [was accompanied by] such insistence and their offers of assistance by such goodwill that I decided to respond to their desires by producing this work here.' *Les Quatrains de Khèyam traduits du Persan par J. B. Nicolas*, trans. J. B. Nicolas (Paris: L'Imprimerie Impériale, 1867), i–ii.
- 23 *The Rubāyāt of Omar Khayyām: Translated into English Prose by Justin Huntly McCarthy, M. P.*, trans. Justin Huntly McCarthy (London: David Nutt, 1889), xiii.
- 24 *The Quatrains of Omar Khayyām: the Persian text with an English verse translation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., corrected and enlarged, trans. E. H. Whinfield (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901; repr. London: Routledge, 2000), xxvi, xxvii.
- 25 In *The Book of Omar and Rubāyāt*, 13–21.
- 26 Le Gallienne, 'The Eternal Omar', 16. The variorum edition referred to is the *Rubāyāt of Omar Khayyām. English, French, German, Italian, and Danish translations comparatively arranged in accordance with the text of E. FitzGerald's version*, ed. N. H. Dole (Boston: L.C. Page, 1898)
- 27 *Ibid.*, 17.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 17–21.
- 29 In the citations from Le Gallienne's paraphrase, which follow, I cite by quatrain and line from the 1897 edition. We know that Le Gallienne composed his poem with a structure in mind – in stark contrast to mediaeval Persian *Rubāyāt* collections – because he admits that he struggled with the arrangement of some quatrains, which are marked off by italics in the text: 'As it proved impracticable to give even such random continuity to these love-verses, as I have attempted in the body of the poem, I have made use of them as an intermezzo, a device of arrangement which is appropriate as suggesting the intercalary importance of women in the life of the great thinker-drinker – as though, in some pause of his grave or humourous argument, he should turn to caress the little moon at his side.' (Le Gallienne, *Rubāyāt*, 1897, xv–xvi)
- 30 As we can see from Christopher Decker's helpful appendix, 'Comparative texts, with a table of the sequence of quatrains in the *Rubāyāt*', FitzGerald changed 'Awake!' (1859 ed.) to 'Wake!' in the subsequent editions (*Rubāyāt of Omar Khayyām: a Critical Edition*, ed. Christopher Decker (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 119).



- 31 McCarthy does not begin this way. Nicolas's first quatrain has 'morning' ('matin'), as in FitzGerald, but 'nuit' is mentioned already in the third quatrain. Whinfield's first quatrain is set at dawn, but – as the second quatrain makes clear – this dawn comes after a long night's drinking.
- 32 See *Les Quatrains*, trans. Nicolas, iii–iv; *The Quatrains*, trans. Whinfield, xxii; Le Gallienne, 'The Eternal Omar', 14–15; and Marzieh Gail, *Persia and the Victorians* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951): ch. 19, esp. 155–8; 167–8.
- 33 Compare these lines to McCarthy's translation: 'Only a breath divides faith and unfaith, only a breath divides belief from doubt' (16). We see that Le Gallienne, having lifted the wording of McCarthy's second line, making that his first, humanises his second line. He introduces an agent ('a man') and he enhances the platitude by transforming it into a specific and evocative action ('muttered'). Whinfield translates these lines as 'From doubt to clear assurance is a breath, / A breath from infidelity to faith' (quatrain 24, page 18) and Nicolas translates them as 'La distance qui sépare l'incrédulité de la foi n'est que d'un souffle, celle qui sépare le doute de la certitude n'est également que d'un souffle' (quatrain 20, page 12). The Persian original, given in Whinfield and Nicolas, is: 'az manzil-i kufr tā bi-dīn yak-nafas-ast / va-z 'ālam-i shakk tā bi-yaqīn yak-nafas-ast'.
- 34 'Can you see these two or three idiots who've got the world in their hands and who – in their sincere ignorance – think themselves the wisest men in the world? Don't worry for – in their utter bliss – they think everyone a heretic who's not a jackass (like them).' *Les Quatrains*, trans. Nicolas, 68. For the Persian original, reproduced above, see *Les Quatrains*, trans. Nicolas, 69. Le Gallienne's version may also have been influenced by McCarthy (see 50).
- 35 *The Quatrains*, trans. Whinfield, quatrain 156, page 106. FitzGerald appears not to have translated this quatrain (see the English translation of Nicolas: *The Rubāyāt of 'Umar Khayyām: translated from the French of J. B. Nicolas*, trans. Frederic Baron Corvo, ed. Edward Heron-Allen, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Ltd., 1924), xxii).
- 36 The Pleiades, which are part of the constellation Taurus; this is a *pars pro toto* synecdoche. See *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s. v. 'Constellations' [D. N. MacKenzie].
- 37 Comparing Le Gallienne's *Rubāyāt* to FitzGerald's, Yohannan remarks, 'There is more optimism here and more interest in love – love of women –, something which, Le Gallienne shrewdly noticed, had been underplayed by his model.' (Yohannan, *Persian Poetry*, 196); cf. the introduction to Le Gallienne's *Rubāyāt*, xv–xvi.
- 38 Students of mediaeval Arabic poetry will see a parallel in the line by the poet Abū 'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (973–1057): 'Tread softly over this earth for it is of those bodies' (al-Ma'arrī, Abū 'Alā'. *Shurūh siqt* [read *saqt*] *al-Ẓand*, ed. Mustafā al-Saqqā et al., 5 vols (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyyah, 1945–9), III: 974).
- 39 Le Gallienne was a fan of Robert Herrick, author of 'To the virgins, to make much of time', and quotes a Herrick couplet on the title page of his collection *Three Poems (The housemaid, adultery-ad absurdum, Julia's clothes)*. Printed for private circulation only (London, 1892). Murray Pittock has noted that Le Gallienne 'consciously wrote poems on the model of Herrick' (Murray Pittock, *Spectrum of Decadence: the literature of the 1890s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 93).
- 40 In his expanded edition of the *Rubāyāt* (1901), Le Gallienne added several more nocturnal quatrains here.
- 41 See *inter alia* Efraim Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002).
- 42 'When is a Translation not a Translation', 28. Gideon Toury cites various examples of pseudo-translation in his article 'Enhancing Cultural Changes by means of Fictitious

- Translations' in *Translation and Cultural Change: Studies in history, norms and image-projection*, ed. Eva Hung (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2005), 3–18: pseudo-translated English Gothic novels in nineteenth-century Russia, *Papa Hamlet*, a late nineteenth-century German pseudo-translation from the Norwegian, etc.
- 43 *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s. v. 'Hafez: X. Translations of Hafez in English' [Parvin Loloi]. See the same author's *Hafiz, Master of Persian Poetry: A Critical Bibliography* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).
- 44 Gideon Toury, 'Translation, literary translation and pseudotranslation', *Comparative Criticism: an annual journal* 6, ed. E. S. Shaffer (1984): 73–85.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 In 1905, Le Gallienne published another translation of pre-modern Persian poetry: *Odes from the Divan of Hafiz: freely rendered from literal translations* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1905).
- 47 Benjamin Brawley, 'Richard Le Gallienne and the Tradition of Beauty', *The Sewanee Review* 26 (1918; repr. New York: Kraus Reprint Company, 1963.): 53.
- 48 E.g. the review entitled 'Mr. Le Gallienne's *Rubáiyát*': 'Unluckily, he has come too soon into FitzGerald's neighborhood, and now bears with regard to him, the relation that the muddy creek among the reeds bears to the ocean, a few paces away.' (*The Critic: a Weekly Review of Literature and the Arts* 29, no. 837 (5 March 1898): 160.)
- 49 A review of Le Gallienne's *Odes from the Divan of Hafiz* states that '[Le Gallienne's] work is frankly not a translation by a scholar, but a poet's version of another poet.' ('Le Gallienne's Rendering of Hafiz', *The Literary Digest* 31, no. 19 (4 November 1905): 665.)