

Khayyam who Thinks and Speaks Albanian



Literature

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Abstract

According to the Albanologist R. Jokli, Noli's Rubaiyat stands as the best of the many translations of Fitzgerald's version, but this translation, almost a recreation, can be considered his dearest, closest and most spiritual. Probably in none of his works did Noli express himself the way he did while translating (or better say culturally adapting into Albanian) Rubaiyat. This is the work in which he expressed his thoughts and his troubles, his volcanic character, his creative courage, his tolerance, his humanity and his longing for freedom.

In this study we will try to discuss what was said above, thus we will mainly linger over some words, terms, concepts and forms borrowed from the Bible and Christianity in general, but also from the Albanian folklore of the cycle of epic songs which Khayyam was most probably not aware of or used for that matter.

When considering "Rubaiyat" and the languages they have been translated into, Noli's adaption into Albanian is acknowledged as the most poetic and melodious version. Paraphrasing what Fitzgerald scholars say about Rubaiyat, that they are FitzOmar's work, we could say that for the Albanians they are an authentic work of Fan Omar.

“For me is a fun to take from those Persian poets all the freedom I want, in my judgment [...] need a bit 'of art that will grow and models them. (Lefevere A. 1998) ” This expression taken from a letter of the Victorian writer Edward Fitzgerald, the famous rewriter of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam, is probably the most wonderful example of the combination of the ideological and poetic motivations. Maybe it's this very confession of his "teacher" that drove Noli to feel free in rewriting Rubaiyat. Where is Noli in "Rubaiyat"? He is everywhere in the poem, so skillfully "translated" into Albanian. He is there with his typical choice of words and his satirical tone, somewhere through some typical words and phrases taken from the Albanian popular phraseology, because “he is not a poet of ether heights, but a writer of the salt of the earth (Çabej, 1965)”. Noli's visible traces are noted even at a new spirit that Rubaiyat take in his translation in Albanian.

A holy, wise long- bearded old man

Një plak të shenjtë, t'urt e mjekërgjatë

Who I saw running in the midst of the night

Kam parë që vraponte që menatë;

I asked him: Where is your holiness going?

I thashë: "Ku po shkon kështu, Uratë?"

In altar for masses and communions, he told me.

Më tha: "N'Alltar për Mesh' e për Kungatë"

Khayyam's Rubaiyat has been translated into several different European languages since 1858, when Edward Fitzgerald took the Persian manuscript from the dusty Bodleian Library in Oxford. Each of the translators has tried hard to bring a very good translation of it. Let's say, that two are considered to be the main sources that Rubaiyat came from. One of them is the English translation of Edward Fitzgerald, and the other is the original Persian version. In Noli's case, he states that the “Albanian version – a poor version of other versions – contains parts of the Rubaiyat translated by E. Fitzgerald, parts from the Rosen's German version and parts from the Grolleau's French version

(Rushit Bilbil Gramshi, 1926)¹. This gives him the freedom that through his authentic and free translation to agree with the first version, even though he made use of the most valuable elements of the second too. He turned it into his own principle of creativity and practice. By loyally following the thought and the spirit of the original version, the ideas and the variety of feelings in the text; he made differences in form. As a consequence, he doesn't completely respect the verse metrics, rhyme schemes, number of words and phraseology. Being himself a poet with an outstanding force of creativity, knowing and making good use of the expressive abilities of the Albanian language, its peculiarities and nuances, Noli aims to rebuild the original's artistic and ideological values into his mother tongue by finding equivalent interchangeable or similar variants. He doesn't hang back to sacrifice the word and the rhyme, even the metrics and verse to conserve the artistic values of his written works. By doing this, Noli has the chance to restructure the sequence of Rubaiyat. As Noli has admitted, he had translated most of Rubaiyat according to Fitzgerald's version. But different from the English writer, who structured the Rubaiyat as a short poem so that each Rubaiyat is positioned in such way that logically preserves the time order from dawn till the sun sets;

AWAKE! for the Morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight...²
[...]
Ah, Moon of my Delight who know'st no wane,
The Moon of heav'n is rising once again³

Rubaiyat 1.

meanwhile Noli doesn't respect such a sequence.

At night while sleeping, the sprit told me: "Drink!"

In sleep and tomb there is no prosperity.

Wake up! While being alive, pour drinks and kiss girls

There are centuries for you to sleep in quiet⁴!

Natën kur flinja, më tha Shpirti: "Pi!"

Në Gjumë dhe në Varr s'ka Lumëri:

Ngrehu! sa rron, zbraz Kupa dhe puth Çupa

Ke shekuj që të flesh në qetësi!

¹ Rushit Bilbil Gramshi is one of Noli's pseudonyms. It is used in the first edition of translated Rubaiyat.

² This is the 8 th Rubaiyat in Noli's version, meanwhile the following Rubaiyats, the second and third ones are the same as those in Fitzgerald's version. This sequence is not to be respected for the following Rubaiyats. In fact, Noli had very rarely respected the Fitzgerald's version sequence of Rubaiyats. What Noli did was not noted in any of the translated versions in French and Italian. Charles Grolleau, who Noli translated some of them from, had conserved the same sequence as E. Fitzgerald.

³ This stanza usually stands as the penultimate stanza in the translations based on Fitzgerald's version. However, just like other Rubaiyats, this one doesn't respect the Fitzgerald's sequence in neither of Noli's editions, the first edition came out in 1926 followed then by a later one.

⁴ In the English, French and German editions taken into consideration there are no equivalents of this Rubaiyat. The European Rubaiyats taken into consideration end with the one that Noli had collocated to be the penultimate in his version. It is justifiable to think that Noli, penetrating deeply into Khayyam's world, has created both his first and last Rubaiyat according to the Persian author's style and mentality. By so doing, he makes it possible for these Rubaiyats to stay together in a closed structure: At night while sleeping, the sprit told me: "Drink!" In sleep and tomb there is no

(Fitzgerald E. 1858)."

Rubaiyat 1.

And when you go, you silver hand and foot
 To treat friends in those places
 Where we used to drink together, and arrive where I stand
 Do not whisper! – But pour your own calyx⁵.

Dhe kur të shkosh, moj Dor' e Këmb' Argjende
 Për të gostitur miqtë n'ato vënde,
 Ku pinim bashkë, e t'arrish ku rri,
 Mos psherëti! - po zbrasmë Kupën tënde.

Rubaiyat 330 (Noli 1988)

There are theories that in his translations, Noli serves as an artistic interpreter, because by acting in such a way, he succeeds not only in transmitting the meaning of the text, but also the feelings and tone of the language, which are closely linked to the emotional sentiment and stylistic features of the original. "By following this method, in his work, despite loyal literal translations, we can also find paraphrases, adaptations, simplified passages, folkloristic patterns. (Karjagdiu A. 1971)". He is aware of the fact that "The Albanian immigrants were villagers, and very few of them were properly educated – he afterwards explains – Thus I tried to communicate with them and the only kind of language I could use with them was a simplified and pure one. These were Noli's readers, so to be understood by them, he has to make Khayyam speak Albanian. (Jorgaqi N. 2005)".

For this reason, aiming to transplant the spirit of the original version, he doesn't forget the reader who these Albanian version is destined to. The Albanian reader needs to be directed in his own language, a language that he is used to from the traditional creativity. As a consequence the usage of expressions taken from the Albanian everyday life and mentality is not a coincidence.

... Life is short, well, we become old
 And we are left as the basket after the harvest

... E shkurtër është Jeta, ja, u mplakmë
Dhe mbetmë si kofini pas të vjeli

Rubaiyat 3

...He smiles at me with lips and eyes, as his spirit tells him
 "Make a good deed and throw it away"

... Më qesh me buz' e sy, se shpirti i thotë:
"Bëje të mirën dhe e hidh në det"

Rubaiyat 37

Other elements which are taken from the Albanian mentality are figures such as: The fairy, The beauty of the earth, the girl with rose lips, cypress stature, the night's tower, lahuta, krajli, the wise man, besa, the bud, the vulture, lilies (sometimes, tulips in the European version), figures which

prosperity./Wake up! While being alive, pour drinks and kiss girls/There are centuries for you to sleep in quiet/... And when dead in black dust/ When becoming mud and ash./ Bring me a bottle, pour me a drink/And you'll see, I'll revive again.

⁵ Kjo rubai në versionin e Fitzgeraldit është rubaira e fundit.

considering the time and place he lived should have not been created by Khajam, furthermore they are not even translated in the European versions.

What kind of method did Noli implement in his process of translation? He himself gives the answer to this question. "My method, - he explains - is the following: When I started the translation of Hamlet, I translated the famous monologue (soliloquy) "To be or not to be" or he started translating "Macbeth" with the part "Tomorrow and tomorrow". Following the same procedure, when translating "Othello", I began with the most beautiful part and afterwards, I completed it with the missing parts (Jorgaqi N. 2005)". " He strives not only to gradually understand and digest the text, but also to experience it deeply (Jorgaqi N. 2008)", identifying himself with the original author. Let me remind you of Çabej`s evaluation of Noli, who notifies that, behind the world greatest author`s unis, there stand Noli`s uni. This is such a true fact that even the explanations about the Rubaiyat and their footnotes are used by Noli as a means of revealing something from his own life. This idea is given by the explanation of Rubaiyat 146-147, according to the 1926 edition (Gramshi. Rr. B, 1926)⁶⁻⁷.

Noli`s interpretation of the Rubaiyat, reminds us of his life, his relationships with friends, the disillusionments during and after the June Revolution. These feelings are transmitted in Rubiyat number 299-303.

They call you wicked, if to fame you're known	Të lik të bëjnë kur fiton lavdi
And an intriguer, if you live alone	Dhe intrigan, kur rron në vetmi:
Trust me, though you were Khizr or Elias,	Qofsh pra Profet prej Qiellit, Shën-Elli
It`s best to know none, and of none to be known	Më mirë mos u njih, mos njih njeri.

These examples are a stable reason to understand Noli`s Rubaiyat as a way of expressing his ego. By considering them as creations and recreations, Noli, most of all, aims to give the Persian author a respected status in Albanian literature. He decided to do this by transmitting Khayyam`s most essential ideas, democratic and sometimes materialistic ones, to the Albanian reader.

Noli would criticize the masterful translation of Fitzgerald`s Rubaiyat, calling them "original English variants inspired by Omar Khayyam (Noli. F. S, 1988)". However, the analysis of his Albanian version of Rubaiyat showed that the same procedure was also followed by him, what he did was just rebringing them freely and beautifully into Albanian. Noli would sometimes make good use of the similarities between English and Albanian languages. Among other examples, this

⁶ In the 1988, published version entitled "Vepra I", these Rubaiyats are in this sequence 325-326.

⁷ Noli tries to explain these Rubaiyats in this way: " These two Rubaiyats reveal that, if not during the whole life, when being very old, Khayyam should have suffered a lot. Most of his friends hated him and so abandoned him. The cause of Freedom of Thinking was left without its sovereign soldiers and Royal Fanaticisms. His bravest friends and followers moved to the triumphant camp of Fanatism and asked for protection from the flag of the mystical Sofists. The firsts` infidelity and the seconds` oppurtunism desperated him to death. The war is lost, the defeat is great...this is the end. Khayyam should write the Testament. Loyal to his principles until the death, he wrote the Testament drinking wine and just before his last breath, he flung to the Fantics` faces his last challenge. ... Rubajatet e Omar Khajamit"

happens even at Rubaiyat 88, about which considering the fourth verse: Where did he go? Where, where where did he go down?, he wrote that this Rubaiyat cannot be translated in any other language better than in our language because the word that imitates the cuckoo's howl has such a significant meaning in Albanian and Persian (Noli F. S. 1988)". But he really wants to surpass the time limits and the reasons that made Khayyam write about summer and the freedom that it brings. In each of the Rubaiyat there may be found traces of Noli as a multi faceted figure. He sometimes speaks with the language of a great democratic politician:

Mosques, churches and temples; slavery	Xhami e Kish' e Tempull: robëri!
Bells and minaret; a havoc	Këmban e Minare: një patërdi!
Dervish, priest and khoja; and cross and moon	Dervish e Prift e Hoxh' e kryq e Hënë:
All obstacles of freedom.	Pengime që të gjitha për liri!

Rubaiyat 226

Noli brought to Albanians some freedom - loving opportunities even through Omar Khayyami's Rubaiyat, in which the personality of free people was so strongly and beautifully realized. Noli could find himself in those magical verses. Likewise he could find certain echoes and traces of the Albanian mentality. Although coming from Oriental regions, Khayyam's lyric hero preached the freedom of thought and feelings, the joy of life, beauty, pleasure, all existing far away from every kind of doctrine or fanaticism. Through this hero, Noli makes blasphemies against the spiritual and social enslavement, so present in Albanian society of that time. He was so courageous and dissatisfied, that by ignoring the ethics and limits of the religious position, he proclaimed freedom as the people's most sacred attribute. Throughout the Rubaiyat, the individual would move freely, which is also depicted by such contrasts, where the religious man stands opposed to the atheist, the Aztec to the epicurean. Such kind of creative work was Noli transmitting to the Albanians, in which his disturbed and stormy spirit found itself home (Jorgaqi. N. 2005)". Being a priest he could write any blasphemies (and we may say that neither Khayyam nor any the European translators had ever made such kind of blasphemies, thus this Rubaiyat is not found translated by any of them, but instead Khayyam gives Noli the opportunity of expressing himself freely:

Tell me that I will get burned in hell	Më thoni që do t'digjem në Skëterrë
Cause I adored Love and Wine	Se adhurova Dashurin' e Verën
Not at all! You have only a mediator	Aspak! Ju kini vetëm një <i>Ndërmjetës</i> ,
I have two: communion and wine.	<i>Unë kam dy: Kungatën edhe Verën</i>

Rubaiyat 282

Or

Around the glass approach: take it and then drink	<i>Rreth Qelqit u afroni: merrni, pini!</i>
Remember the grapes with nostalgia	Rrushkat me mall kujtoni: merrni, pini!

Because the vineyard said: "This is my blood"

Se Vreshta tha: "*Ky është Gjaku im,*

That is being poured for you! Have communions, take it and drink.

Q'u derdh për Ju! Kungoni: merrni, pini!

Rubaiyat 285

But despite this blasphemy there stands the priests, because Noli would also make use of Christian terms, which are unknown to the Persian readers. Khayyam`s use of words such as: dervish, mosque, Ramadan, Rustem, Elysium, minaret, etc is quite acceptable considering the fact that these are linked to the oriental world. While other terms such as: communion, church, priest, St Elijah, Adam, Eva, Pharisees, altar, mass etc. that were not present in Khayyam`s world. But what really signs his existence as a priest are not separated word but whole verses that seems to have been written from the mentality of a priest. For example:

But we have God among us many times,

Po kemi Zotin midis nesh sa herë

With the blessed wine we`re making communions

Me verën e bekuar po kungojmë.

Rubaiyat 281

Or

Direct me the way, you salvation confess

Ti hiqma Udhën, ti shpëtim rrëfemë

Open me the door, God and console me

Ti çilma Derën, Zot, dhe përdëllemë.

Rubaiyat 236

In fact, Noli used to handle with several creative works at the same time. The religious spirit that appears in these verses is not present in the version published in 1926, and this may have been realized as a result of the fact that Noli was meanwhile translating the Bible as well, and could not avoid the interference of certain discursive registers, even though he struggled hard to embody the spirit and the mentality of the Persian poet. Despite these examples where Noli`s religious beliefs are evident, there are also other Rubaiyat in which he depicts and praises the female beauty and love. In his 45-th birthday, he wrote the poem "The old man suitor and lamp".

He sometimes ironically admitted that senility was approaching, a lot of troubles were exhausting him, but he still remained a suitor, attracted by the joy of life, love and beauty, thus he directed these verses to an unknown woman:

Wait a while, I have a word with

Dale moj se kam një fjalë

Because waves of tears are flowing to me

se më rrjedhin lotët valë

Wait a while, I`m lame

dale moj se jam i çalë

And I cannot walk

dhe më s'ecënj dot

Because the poet`s eyes cannot be indifferent to such a beauty and he praises it in several of his Rubaiyat. While in Khayyam`s Rubaiyat, the girl is just a girl; in Noli`s Rubaiyat, She is not just a

girl, but she has specific well-defined traits which gives us the opportunity to establish a full portrait of her. In Noli's Albanian version, She is not only depicted as Pure, but she is also depicted as having rose-bud lips, with a body as an Italian cypress, a Muse, the beauty of the Earth, with silver hands and feet. Despite being forced to wear the priest's cassock, Noli was a human, and as such he would sing to the female beauty, leaving us through the translation in Albanian, why not, even through recreation, a clear evidence of his ability, as a poet who did not only write about politics, but love as well. This fact is clearly demonstrated in Rubaiyat 32-39.

When it does not hurt It is not love Kur s'dhëmp e s'shemp nuk është Dashuri

.....

.....

When fire is in your breasts every day and night Kur zjarr' e ke në gji, me nat' e ditë

Today you shine in laughter and tomorrow you die in mourning Sot ndrit me gas e nesër ndes më zi.

Rubaiyat 32

The girlfriend shone, blinding me E Dashura shkëlqeu, më verboi,

My heart was speaking, my tongue stopped Zemra më fliste, gjuha më pushoi:

Whose eyes had seen such a torture? Kush pa me sy tortyrë kësisoj?

Burning from thirst, I went to the spring Nga etja u dogja, u shova mun te kroj.

Rubaiyat 39

Noli knows the Albanian readers, who he translated these verses to, very well. For this reason he tried hard that the famous world writers, through whom he talked to the Albanians, speak his language. It is clear to him that the success of the translation in Albanian depends not only in the selection of the literary works, but even on the language used by him to permeate in the Albanians' spirit and mind and to gain their respect and adoration. This kind of mentality is manifested in Noli's presentation entitled "How did I become a writer" in the second workshop of Albanian Studies, held in USA on 07-11.08.61. Among so many tips he gave to the young writers, he would say "This means that the artist should find the inspiration in the environment where he works, he should learn techniques for the creation of artistic works, he should earn his living from selling his works and he should be appreciated and supported by his readers (Jorgaqi. N. 2005)".

Whatever the means he uses - translations, abstracts of literary works, anthologies - Noli as a re-writer of Rubaiyat aims to transform almost radically the original version by manipulating it in order to adapt it to the ideology or the needs of the time. In this case Noli is convinced that Albanian literature, in terms of poetry, needs new, more expressive forms. He knew very well what the Albanian literature needed and was certain that it needed such a development, just like world literature which had partially undergone the process of rewriting. Quoting Schmidt (2007): "literature can be analysed as a complex system of social behaviour - characterised by a special structure and the differentialism between the inner and the outer - accepted by the society in which it performs, and that is done in a way that no other system could explain."

This is how we can fully understand Noli's choice to view literature as an indefinite system built on fiction which gives every translator and rewriter the freedom to deeply consider on the one hand the original text and on the other his specific status inside an ideologically well-defined system.

“If the expression that the work of an author is the truest mirror of his spirit and his mental form was right, then, both the poems written by him and those translated in Albanian, left at us represent symbolically from the beginning to the end, a lone confession, a person's or a whole life's credo. [...] Revolutionaries and prophets, poets and active well – wishers of humanity are equally embodiments of his inner self, through them he expresses himself. In this sense even the translations in Albanian, in a deeper understanding are his creations (Çabej. E. 1965)”.

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