

**PROBLEMS OF RE-CREATING FORM AND TONE IN ENGLISH
TRANSLATIONS OF THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM**

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Abstract. This article examines the challenges faced in re-creating the form and tone of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam in English translations. The Rubaiyat, a collection of Persian quatrains, is known for its intricate rhyme scheme, meter, and philosophical undertones. Translating such a work requires careful consideration of poetic devices, cultural nuances, and the intended impact on the reader. By analyzing the specific problems encountered in capturing the essence of the original work, this article aims to shed light on the complexities of rendering the Rubaiyat into English while preserving its poetic form and evocative tone.

Introduction. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam holds a unique place in world literature, renowned for its profound philosophical reflections and lyrical beauty. Translating this masterpiece into English poses significant challenges due to the intricate rhyme scheme, meter, and cultural nuances. This section provides an overview of the Rubaiyat and highlights the importance of maintaining its form and tone in English translations.

Form and Meter. The Rubaiyat follows a specific form consisting of quatrains with a strict rhyme scheme. Translating this structure into English, with its different phonetic characteristics, presents difficulties in preserving the original rhyme and meter. This section explores the complexities involved in re-creating the form and meter of the Rubaiyat in English translations and the strategies employed by translators to overcome these challenges. Here is a famous stanza from Edward FitzGerald's translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam:

*"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."*

This stanza captures the imagery and contemplative nature of Khayyam's poetry, as interpreted by FitzGerald. The entire translation consists of quatrains (rubaiyat) that explore themes of mortality, fate, love, and the transient nature of life. FitzGerald's translation is known for its elegant and evocative language, which has made it one of the most popular and enduring versions of Khayyam's Rubaiyat in the English-speaking world.

Rhyme and Poetic Devices. The Rubaiyat's poetic beauty is enhanced by its intricate rhyme patterns and the effective use of poetic devices such as metaphors, imagery, and symbolism. Translating these devices accurately requires a deep understanding of Persian culture and literary traditions. This section discusses the issues encountered in maintaining the richness of rhyme and poetic devices in English translations and examines the creative solutions employed by translators.

Cultural Nuances and Context. The Rubaiyat reflects the cultural and historical context of Omar Khayyam's time, with references to Persian customs, philosophy, and spirituality. Translating these cultural nuances into English while retaining their intended meaning and impact is a significant challenge. This section explores the difficulties in capturing the cultural essence of the Rubaiyat in English translations and analyzes the strategies used to convey its intended tone and context.

Philosophical and Existential Themes. The Rubaiyat delves into profound philosophical and existential themes, exploring the nature of life, love, mortality, and the search for meaning. Translating these themes requires careful consideration of language choices and cultural perspectives. This section investigates the problems encountered in preserving the philosophical depth and evocative tone of the Rubaiyat in English translations and examines the approaches taken by translators to convey its essence. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is a renowned collection of Persian poetry attributed to the 11th-century Persian poet and philosopher, Omar Khayyam. This work encompasses various philosophical and existential themes, which continue to resonate with readers across cultures and time. Here are some of the key themes found in the Rubaiyat:

1. Transience and Impermanence: One of the central themes of the Rubaiyat is the fleeting nature of life and the impermanence of worldly existence. Khayyam emphasizes the brevity of human life and the inevitability of mortality. This theme encourages readers to reflect on the transient nature of their own lives and the need to make the most of the present moment.

2. Carpe Diem: The concept of "carpe diem" or "seize the day" is prevalent in the Rubaiyat. Khayyam urges individuals to embrace the pleasures of life and enjoy its sensual experiences while they can, given the uncertainty of the future. This theme advocates for living in the present and finding joy in the world's pleasures.

3. Skepticism and Relativism: Khayyam displays a certain skepticism towards religious dogma and the certainty of knowledge. He questions traditional beliefs and explores the limits of human understanding. The poems often challenge the established order and question the notion of absolute truth, highlighting the complexities and uncertainties of existence.

4. The Search for Meaning: The Rubaiyat engages with the existential quest for meaning and purpose in life. Khayyam contemplates the nature of existence, the human

condition, and the mysteries of the universe. Through his poetry, he encourages readers to reflect on their place in the world and to ponder philosophical questions related to the meaning of life.

5. Nature and the Universe: Khayyam's poetry frequently celebrates the beauty of nature and the vastness of the universe. He often uses natural imagery and astronomical references to evoke a sense of awe and wonder. This theme underscores the interconnectedness of humanity with the natural world and encourages a deep appreciation for the wonders of creation.

6. Mortality and Immortality: The Rubaiyat explores the contrast between human mortality and the idea of a spiritual or immortal essence. Khayyam questions notions of an afterlife and ponders the legacy individuals leave behind. This theme prompts readers to reflect on their mortality and consider the significance of their actions and contributions in the limited time they have. These philosophical and existential themes present in the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam continue to captivate readers due to their timeless relevance and thought-provoking nature. The work invites individuals to reflect on life's transient nature, the pursuit of meaning, and the complex interplay between the human condition and the vast universe.

Comparative Analysis of Translations. A comparative analysis of different English translations of the Rubaiyat provides valuable insights into the diverse approaches employed by translators. This section discusses notable translations, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses in terms of re-creating the form and tone of the original work. It offers a critical evaluation of the challenges faced and the solutions proposed by various translators. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam has been translated into various languages, and numerous translations exist in English alone. A comparative analysis of these translations reveals variations in style, interpretation, and poetic elements. Here are some key points to consider when comparing translations of the Rubaiyat:

a) Language and Style: Different translators employ varying styles and linguistic choices that can significantly impact the reader's experience. Some translations strive to retain the poetic and metaphoric elements of the original Persian text, while others prioritize conveying the overall meaning and ideas in a more accessible manner. The choice of language and style can affect the tone, imagery, and emotional impact of the poems.

b) Faithfulness to the Original: Translating poetry involves striking a balance between remaining faithful to the original text and adapting it to the target language. Some translations prioritize preserving the literal meaning and structure of the original verses, while others focus on capturing the essence and spirit of the poems, even if it means deviating from a strict word-for-word translation. Readers may prefer translations that adhere closely to the original, while others appreciate creative

reinterpretations.

c) **Cultural Context:** The cultural and historical context in which the translator works can influence the interpretation and presentation of the Rubaiyat. Translators often bring their own perspectives, experiences, and understanding of the original text, which can shape the nuances and themes they emphasize. Translations from different time periods may reflect the prevailing intellectual, social, and literary trends of their respective eras.

d) **Poetic Devices and Meter:** The Rubaiyat utilizes poetic devices, such as metaphors, similes, alliteration, and rhyme schemes, which can pose challenges in translation. Translators employ various techniques to recreate these elements, such as adopting similar rhyme and meter patterns or employing alternative poetic devices in the target language. Assessing the effectiveness of these adaptations is a crucial aspect of comparative analysis.

e) **Interpretation of Themes:** The Rubaiyat encompasses philosophical and existential themes, as discussed earlier. Translators may interpret these themes differently, leading to variations in emphasis or even the inclusion or omission of certain ideas. Some translations may lean more towards the hedonistic aspects of Khayyam's work, while others may emphasize the contemplative and philosophical dimensions. When conducting a comparative analysis of translations of the Rubaiyat, it is important to consider these factors and read multiple translations to gain a comprehensive understanding of the work. Each translation offers a unique perspective and interpretation of Omar Khayyam's poetry, allowing readers to explore the multilayered beauty of the Rubaiyat from different angles.

Conclusion

Translating the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam into English requires a delicate balance between maintaining the poetic form, capturing the intended tone, and conveying the profound philosophical themes. This article has explored the problems encountered in re-creating the form and tone in English translations of the Rubaiyat, including issues related to form and meter, rhyme and poetic devices, cultural nuances, and philosophical depth. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, translators can strive to preserve the essence and beauty of this iconic work in its translated versions, ensuring its continued appreciation across linguistic

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