

TRANSLATING ‘UMAR KHAYYĀM’S RUBĀ’ĪYYĀT INTO ESTONIAN

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ÖZET

Ömer Hayyam’ın seçilmiş teraneleri, Estoncaya Uku Masing (1909-1985) ve Haljand Udam (1936-2005) tarafından çevirilmiştir. İki çevirmenin, Farsça ve tasavvuf hakkında edindikleri bilgiler çok farklıdır. Poliglot, şair, şarkiyatçı ve folklor uzmanı Uku Masing, çeviri yaparken eski Orta Doğu Edebiyatının üslûbunu temel alır; Fars ve Arap şiirleri ve düzyazı çevirmeni Haljand Udam, Ömer Hayyam’ı Estoncada uygun bir şekilde ifade etmek için farklı bir yol seçiyor: Sûfi sembolik dilde tezini hazırlayıp bu dil üzerinden terâneleri de çeviriyor.

Bu bildiride çevirilerin ikisi, şiirlerinin yapısı ve içerikleri bakımından eleştirilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ömer Hayyam, çeviri, eleştiri yapmak.

ABSTRACT

A selection of Umar Khayyam’s Rubayat have been translated into Estonian by two Estonian translators – Uku Masing (1909-1985) and Haljand Udam (1936-2005). The translators differ in their knowledge of persian and sufi teachings. Uku Masing, a polyglot, poet, orientalist and folclorist, tends to lean heavily on the style and attitude of E. FitzGerald’s translations, whereas Haljand Udam, a translator of persian and arabic poetry and prose, followed a different path to expressing Umar Hayyam in Estonian – he studied and wrote his dissertation on sufi symbolic language through which he also interpreted the Rubayat. Both translations can be criticized from the point of view of structure and content.

Key Words: Omar Khayyam, translation, criticize.

‘Umar Khayyām of Nishapur (412/1021-22 - 515-6/1122), a scientist, mathematician, philosopher, astrologist, and also the acclaimed author of the famous rubā’īyyāt translated into many languages, could be considered the most famous representative of Persian literature in Estonia as a selection of his rubā’īyyāt have found their way into Estonian in two translations by Uku Masing and Haljand Udam.

Uku Masing’s translation of 40 quatrains with commentaries was first published in 1993, after his death. But the article was ready before Haljand Udam’s first compendium was published in 1967 (Hajjam, 2000: 153). Uku Masing chose 40 quatrains of the 121 verified by Christensen. (Masing, 1993: 468)

The first compendium of Khayyām’s quatrains translated and supported by explanations and afterword by Haljand Udam was published in 1967. 33 years later, in 2000, a new compendium (“Nelikvärsid”) came into light consisting of 120 ‘Umar Khayyām’s quatrains and even more thorough commentaries.

There are 7 quatrains that overlap in the translations. Three of them are discussed as the main area of interest in the given work. The aim of this work is to explain and bring examples of why and how do the metatexts differ from each other and also from the prototext. The original in Persian, the two translations into Estonian, and an English version of both translations is given. The English variants’ language is clumsy and aims to make my commentaries understandable.

The given topic concentrates on Uku Masing’s and Haljand Udam’s translations. The differences in the two translations seem to stem strongly from the educational background of the translators. As ‘Umar Khayyām’s life is more famous than his Estonian translators’ a short introduction to their lives and achievements is unavoidable in view of the influence they have played on the way of translating.

In Estonian cultural history Uku Masing (1909-1985) is a well-known polyglot, poet, orientalist, folklorist, ethnologist, and theologian. Beside theology and classical languages he also studied Semitic languages, psychology, and Assyriology in Tartu (Estonia), Ethiopistics, Arabistics and Judaistics in Tübingen and Berlin (Germany). He has translated Middle and Far Eastern also European Antique literature into Estonian. His contribution into Estonian translation literature can not be underestimated.

Haljand Udam (1936-2005) was an encyclopaedist. He studied geology

in Tartu (Estonia), Persian language and culture in Tashkent and Moscow, and wrote his dissertation on Sufi symbolic language. He has translated a selection of Arabic and Persian literature into Estonian with thorough commentaries. One of his biggest achievements is the translation of the Holy Qur'an.

Uku Masing sees 'Umar Khayyām in the context of old Near Eastern history, culture and literature, and to be even more exact—the history, culture and literature of Semitic peoples. One of his favourite fields of studies has also been Finno-Ugric culture. Some of his preferences in translation lean heavily on this knowledge.

Haljand Udam claims that he has “always read and explained the quatrains in the context of the Islamic culture in Iran” (Hajjam, 2000: 154). According to Haljand Udam we could find material of Iranian provenience among Ural peoples' lore if we overcome the Finno-Ugric and Semitic racism of which the main and earnest follower was Uku Masing (Udam, 1995: 70).

The two main differences mentioned before will be discussed while analysing the translations and under three categories: semantic field of the words, aspiration to stay within the rules of poetics, personal preferences.

Uku Masing and especially Haljand Udam can be considered as the founders of the special dimension of style in Estonian to express intentionally artful and philosophical fantasies of 'Umar Hayyām. H.Udam is complaining in his commentaries about this missing dimension and retells how he created his own dictionary of rhyming words that would suit the quatrains (Hajjam, 2000: 152-153).

U.Masing, being a poet and a translator of old Near Eastern texts, does not find anything missing in Estonian and has good command of the Biblical Estonian language or uses words that are not widely known, which would sometimes render the quatrains incomprehensible. Thus the translation results in peculiar coherence. H.Udam also comments U.Masing's quatrains:

While reading I must say that they are coherent but in the view of the style they are not in the right place; their language's odd coherence suits better for expressing the fashion of quatrain writers of a period many centuries after Umar Khayyām. (Hajjam, 2000: 152)

The writers Udam bears in mind are Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī and even more

obscure and cryptic being Abd al-Kadir Bedil and his “Indian style.” (Hajjam, 2000: 153)

Even so U.Masing’s quatrains’ force of persuasion is worthy of mentioning. Even if the meaning may remain obscure to an ordinary reader the effect of reading it aloud and hearing it sound may compensate the oddness. It might have also been intentional. Philologically a masterpiece, preserving the rhyme, radif and 13 syllables in a line, but at the same time his strangest sounding rubā’ī, under it H.Udam’s translation in comparison, beside them the English text, and under them ‘Umar Khayyām’s original:

<i>Näe, elu killavoor kui tume ime möödub, õnnest, lõbust kime möödub. Oh, saaki, ära kurda teiste homset päeva, Too karikas, sest juba sume pime möödub.</i>	Look, life’s caravan like dark miracle passes, <i>Et leia hetk, mis To find a moment that ringing from happiness and joy passes. Oh, Saki, don’t complain about others’ tomorrow, Bring a cup for already the tender darkness passes.</i>
(Masing, 1993: 474)	

<i>Kui kummaliselt ruttu elukaravan ka kaoks, sa aega leia, et ta kadu pidulärmi vaoks. Nüüd, kallaja, sa ära mõtle homsest kohtupäevast sa veini too, sest pea see üürikene öö saab aoks!</i>	How oddly fast the caravan of life vanishes, Find time for making its loss into party’s noise to vanish Now, pourer, don’t think of tomorrow’s Judgement Day Bring wine for this short night will turn into dawn.
(Hajjam, 2000:28)	

<i>In kāfile-i ‘umr ‘ajib mīguzarad Sāqī, gham-i fardā-i harīfān che khorī?</i>	<i>daryāb damī ke bā tarab mīguzarad Pīsh ār piyāle rā ke shab mīguzarad</i>
(Khayyām, 1970: 64)	

In H. Udam’s quatrain the thought is expressed more simply and clearly by selection of words understandable to a common Estonian. He usually prefers neutral and simple solutions.

Masing preferred the original word ‘saaki’ (*sāqī*) against Udam’s ‘kallaja’ (‘pourer’), which is most probably a selection for the sake of not spoiling the rules of poetics.

Persian *shab* is in Udam’s quatrain ‘öö’, a neutral word for night. Therefore Masing prefers ‘sume pime’ (‘tender darkness’) instead of ‘night’, thus giving the impression of a warm and caressing dark place.

For Persian *kāfile* H.Udam uses ‘karavan’ in Estonian which is a neutral word for ‘caravan’. U.Masing uses ‘killavoor’ which falls into another semantic field for it carries the dimension of belittling and insignificance (there are a lot of rags and trash included).

But surprisingly it is now Udam’s turn to remind us of the Holy Scriptures for he translated *fardā* (‘the morrow’) as ‘the Judgement Day’ (‘kohtupäev’). The choice can be explained with Khayyām’s attitude towards ‘tomorrow’

and ‘today’ — living ‘today’ as if it were the last day of life or indeed before the tomorrow’s Judgement Day.

Talking behind or through the veil? Can the veil be penetrated or could we be only on one or the other side of it? What tradition to follow?

U.Masing’s, H.Udam’s translations (again including the English version), and ‘Umar Khayyām’s original rubā’ī say:

*Maailma saladusi ei tea sa, ei mina,
end mõistatuse kostjaks ei sea sa, ei mina
On läbi loori vestlust minul küll ja sinul,
kui vajub loor; siis hinge ei pea sa, ei mina.*
(Masing, 1993: 474)

World’s secrets know neither you nor me,
Hasn’t set oneself as a mystery revealer solver neither you nor me.
Through the veil there is enough to talk about for me and you,
When the veil falls the soul will not be kept by you and me.

*Ei mõista igaviku saladusi sina ega mina,
ei iial mõõda tema sügavusi sina ega mina.
Me õpetatud jutu vestame vaid sealpool loori,
kaob loor; ei enam pea siis arutlusi sina ega mina!*

Understand the secrets of eternity neither you nor me,
Never measure its secrets neither you nor me.
We spin the educated talk on the other side of the veil,
Vanishes the veil, hold the discussions neither you nor me.
(Hajjam, 2000:11)

*Asrār-i azal ra ne tū dānī ve ne man
Ast az pas parde-i guftagū-i man u tū*
(Khayyām, 1970: 37)

*va tū harf-i mu’ammā ne tū khwānī ve ne man
chūn parde bar āfiad ne tū mānī ve ne man*

In Uku Masing’s translation *az pas parde* is given as ‘through the veil’ (‘läbi loori’) although the meaning word by word is very clearly ‘behind the veil’ as also Haljand Udam has it translated (‘sealpool loori’ — ‘on the other side of the veil’). The veil which divides the realm of the God and the one of humans is not penetrable in Sufi symbolic language but it can fall off in the end or when the understanding of all the God’s secrets is reached. It is assumed by specialists, including H.Udam, that Khayyām’s rubā’īyyāt carry Sufi symbolic meaning. But according to Jan Rypka’s *History of Iranian Literature* U.Hayyām followed the path of Ibn Sīnā, which bore a strong resemblance to the Ismā’īlī doctrine and Sufism (Rypka, 1968:190). In either case the Sufi symbolic is represented to some extent.

The answer to the question why Masing does not give the usual ‘behind the veil’ should be located in his primary field of studies. Thus the veil reminds the supernal curtain (*pargod*) that is between the world of humans and gods. In Jewish mystics and rabbinic writings if a man has obtained knowledge of God’s decisions on the fate of the world it would be expressed by “listening behind the *pargod*” to hear the secrets **through** the curtain.

Going further back in history a reed wall in the Epic of Gilgamesh is found. The great god Ea formed the connection with Utnapishtim, the prototype of Noah in the Sumerian mythology, **through** the reed wall and delivered the gods’ decision of destroying the world by flooding to him, to his favourite, to Utnapishtim (XI 19-25) (Annus, 2007: 23):

*Ea, the Prince, was under oath with them
so he repeated their talk to the reed house:
'Reed house, reed house! Wall, wall!
O man of Šuruppak, son of Ubar-Tutu*

*Tear down the house and build a boat
Abandon wealth and seek living beings!
Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings!*

(translation from <http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood3-t-gilgamesh.html#21>)

In the place of *mānī* Masing uses ‘hinge pidama’ holds a mountain of other allusions in Estonian and also a connection to the Biblical and not the Islamic tradition. So it can be ‘to hold [one’s] peace’. A similar expression is also used as ‘hinge kinni pidama’ (‘hold [one’s] breath’). But taken word by word it says ‘to keep [one’s] soul’. In the given context it should stand for ‘vanish’ (‘ei pea hinge’ — ‘soul will not be kept’). Udam wrote ‘arutlusi pidama’ (‘hold discussions’) which apparently aims to bring the third line even more into opposition and offer a witty result as the rules of quatrain decrees.

Clay and the potter—a topic not discussed by other Iranian authors (Udam, 1995: 67) but found in Khayyām’s quatrains. The last of the three chosen quatrains:

*Mul jatkus potisepa juures seista malda
ja mõelda raiast vaadates ta meelevalda.
Ta mätsis kokku sangaks potile ja kaelaks
päälage kuninga ja sandi talda.
(Masing, 1993: 474)*

I was patient enough to stand near the potter’s stove
And looking at the wheel think of his power.
He hand built the handle for the jug and neck
Of king’s top of the head and cripple’s foot.

*Kord nägin savilöövi pilgu selgemaga—
seal kannumeister seisis oma ratta taga
Ta voolis julgelt kannudele kõrvu, kaelu
sest põrmust, milles kerjus kõrvu kuningaga.
(Hajjam, 2000: 36)*

Once I saw the potter’s stove with a brighter look—
There stood the pottery master at the wheel.
He boldly hand built for the jugs ears and necks
of this dust in which the beggar is next to the king.

*Dar kārgah-i kūzegarī kardam rāī
Mīkard dilīr kūze rā deste u sar
(Khayyām, 1970: 31)*

*bar pelle-i charh dīdam ustād be pāī
az kelle-i pādishāh u az dast-i gadāt.*

Both translators have distanced from the exact original text. But here we see a certain reason. The topic of clay and potter, the equalizing of the pottery making with God’s creating process, is represented in the Bible (Jr 18:1-6; Js 45: 9; Ps 2: 9; etc.) (Udam, 1995: 66-69). Thus the discourse is

found, certain expressions have been formularised and ready in our minds to be used, also possible that partly unintentionally.

In Masing's text the potter is not standing but the first person. The first *bait* centres entirely on the first person and his musings: 'mul jatkus... seista malda'— 'I was patient enough to stand...'; 'mõelda...vaadates ta meeleva' ('looking ... think of his power')—the same word 'meeleva' ('power') in the same context is used in the Bible (Ro 9:20-21). In the last line 'the king's top of the head and beggar's foot' are made into pottery against original 'head and hand'. But the temptation to over hyperbolise this topic is understandable.

The last line in Udam's text 'sest põrmust, milles kerjus kõrvu kuningaga'—'from this dust in which the beggar is next to the king' is the only lapse from the prototext.

The aim of this work was not to prove one translation's superiority over the other. Firstly because the number of *rubā'īyyāt* under the discussion reaches to only three. Secondly there are very few translations of the Persian (or Arabic) texts in Estonian and from this angle the researched metatexts of the given work, reaching to the amount of two, are a rarity.

The goal was to bring forth the connections between the peculiarities occurring in metatexts, and how the texts change obtaining myriad of new meanings and connotations while shifting from one geographical and mental location to another. The change is not always unwelcome. At first acquaintance the *rubā'īyyāt* may seem trivial and simple sometimes even silly. The same can be said about Mulla Nasreddin stories. And only to the trained eye and cognition they hold meaning. The researched authors' eyes and cognition were trained in different places and aspects which resulted in pleasantly interesting metatexts. So the change brings insights from entirely different context partly to make the prototext understandable for the translator, partly because the metatext should deliver a comprehensible message to the reader.

In the given work also a curious translation play occurred. The Estonian texts were translated into English, thus creating a metatext's metatext. But the outcome remains unknown to the author because the mind is recording only what the text should say and how it can be closer to the Estonian version. And the author is aware of her blindness in the matter.

The occurrence of this kind proves that the given work's discussions are endless and always creating new currents of research.

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