

**TRANSLATOR'S " FUSION OF HORIZONS " IN THE PERSIAN  
TRANSLATION OF MORIER'S *THE ADVENTURES OF  
HAJJI BABA OF ISPAHAN***

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**Abstract**

James Justinian Morier, the British diplomat, spent nearly six years of his life in Iran in the court of Fath Ali Shah Qajar. His experiences are reflected in the form of an autobiographical travelogue entitled *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*. The book displays Morier's thoughts and opinions about Iran, the government of the time, the Qajar dynasty and the Iranian society and culture through the vicissitudinous life of the character Hajji Baba. The novel, later translated into Persian by Mirza Habib Isfahani, startled Iranian readers and also brought acknowledgement to this Persian man of wit. The present translation study explores techniques, procedures and strategies of Mirza Habib Isfahani's Persian text and those of Morier based on the concept of "fusion of horizons" proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer. As it is explained in the structuralist narratology, the meaning of a text is not a concrete one-sided concept. Rather it is a multitude of possible interpretations in which it is shaped. Moreover, instead of focusing all his attention on the denotative meaning of words, Isfahani tried to put emphasis on a network of meanings which is referred to as "horizon" in Gadamer's philosophy; the viewpoint which the translator possesses and shares with the writer. Isfahani's strategies in the translation of this novel includes: addition, reduction and domestication of some parts of the original text and presenting a familiar language to proffer his society a completely Persian piece of story. Under the light of colonial discourse, the essay concludes that the "fusion of horizons" is conceptualized and brightly visible in Isfahani's Persian translation.

Morier's oriental novel portrays the Iranian society as low-cultured, backward and volatile as opposed to the progressed, cultured West. Moreover, it attempts to pave the way for an in-depth understanding of Isfahani's efforts in reflecting a totally domesticated image of Morier's novel.

**Keywords:** James Morier, Mirza Habib Isfahani, translation, Persian, Gadamer, Hermeneutics, Colonialism, fusion of horizons

**Introduction**

The British man of politics James Morier has been at the center of attention in the eye of colonial scholars for his noted work *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*. Morier who had resided in Iran for nearly six years narrates his experiences of the Iranian society and government, the Qajar dynasty of the time. Through the eyes of a foreign observer, this travelogue was first published in 1824 and won a great recognition among its readers. The story is a fictitious account of letters that appear as an introductory Epistle to the novel (Morier, 1824. I, pp xxi-lxxv) which were written by Europeans to whom an Iranian named Hajji Baba had given his diary and which they decided to publish later on. The book is an account of James Morier's actual experiences but not discordantly as they happened. Rather they are aligned in a straight story which is actually a fictitious account of Hajji Baba's life. For example the character Mirza Firouz featured in the book is the actual Persian envoy to Britain Mirza Abdul Hasan Khan (Garza 1). At the beginning of the story, Hajji Baba is a child. He grows up gradually, shifts from one profession to another and lives at different social levels from an apprentice working in a barbershop developing to a secretary to an Iranian diplomat.

The book was translated into Persian by Mirza Habib Isfahani who himself opposed the Qajar dynasty (Ahmadi 132). As an Iranian poet, grammarian and translator, Mirza Habib spent much of his life in exile in Ottoman, Turkey. He has included his own notions in the translated text by adding Persian particular manners, traditions and also poetry, which do not exist in Morier's original text, to let the book flourish, suit the taste and win the recognition of Persian readers. The book might be viewed from different and varying perspectives such as Anti-authoritarian, Anti-colonialist, Ethnic autonomist, Feminist and so on but the first two readings might be of more significance for Isfahani in his Persian translation (Ahmadi 132, 133).

### **Gadamer's notion of "fusion of horizons"**

Speaking of textual translation, Hans-Georg Gadamer, the German hermeneutist opened up a new ground in translation studies in his famous book, *Truth and Method* (1975). One of the concepts he proposed in this book is the notion of the "fusion of horizons" that refers to the reader's grasp of meaning of the text.

In the process of translation, it is important to note that the translator has been considered as the reader of a text. Thus in the act of translation, the horizons of a translator (as the reader) that of Morier's fuse into each other.

Therefore, in order to accomplish his task, the translator should keep his horizon as close as possible to the horizon of the source text. As stated by Li You:

Gadamer suggests that different readers have unique fore-understanding or prejudices, which refer to reader's past knowledge which influences his inclination in thinking ... Only in the dialogue between readers and the texts, can readers grasp the meaning of the text. The result of the dialogical reader-text interaction is what Gadamer called a "fusion of horizons", where the limited horizon of a text and the limited horizon of the reader

have generated a new, intermediary creation that can be called the meaning of the text in the readers' minds. (You, 110)

As the philosophy of language expanded, the emphasis on the independency of interpretation was replaced by the emergence of a strong interrelationship between understanding and interpretation. Gadamer maintains that an understanding is an adapted interpretation of a text so as the meaning is bound in the process of interpretations which lead to understandings, and understandings which lead to new interpretations. As he mentions:

Being bound by a situation does not mean that the claim to correctness that every interpretation must make is dissolved into the subjective or the occasional... Interpretation is not something pedagogical for us either; it is the act of understanding itself, which is realized—not just for the one for whom one is interpreting but also for the interpreter himself—in the explicitness of verbal interpretation. (Gadamer 398, 399)

The outcome then, when all this process ends in a unified understanding, would be "the fusion of horizons": the amalgamation of all interpretations and viewpoints which have been expanded gradually by the additions of different ideas.

Based on Gadamer's analytic scope of Hermeneutics, the present article tries to find proof of fusing Mirza Habib Isfahani's critical views with Morier's notions; the distortion of Iranian national character. Accordingly, the investigation of Hajji Baba's translation reveals Morier's colonial discourse which criticizes Iranian cultural, social and traditional values, a discourse that Hajji Baba shares based on the particular grasp of the source book for Persian readers.

### **Methodology**

Hermeneutics as a theory was first used by scholars to interpret biblical and religious texts and after that there was an interest for it to be expanded into the realm of literature. Hermeneutics' major concern is a practice of interpretation of a text for a better understanding. This theory strives to surpass all the barriers of tradition, history and relativism to arrive at the question of "truth" and where the answer might be. The German hermeneutist Hans-Georg Gadamer who left a great influence on theories of translation around the world, has spared a great body of his philosophical literature to introduce a more-than-before reliable method on the way to "truth".

In the eye of Gadamer although language is necessary for society, it is not a tool in itself because it is not separable and independent from the human thought process. He argues that meaning is shaped in the mould of a "dialogue" and this "dialogue" is bifurcated into two categories: The first is the communication between two speaking partners and the second the conversation which forms between the text and its interpreter so the ideas of the original text pass through different filters on its way to shape an understanding in the mind of readers

(Piecychna 163, 164, 165). According to Gadamer there is a barrier between the original text and its interpreter and also another barrier which exists between the translated text and its reader. The act of translation then with its unavoidable changes results eventually in the doubling of the "hermeneutical situation"; the situation in which the obstacles on the way of the process of understanding are doubled (Piecychna 167). The result of interpretation is an understanding, which can lead to another interpretation. This process can ultimately lead to the reaching to a "hermeneutical horizon" which is necessary for interpretation: "a circle closed by the dialectic of question and answer" (Gadamer 391).

The language which Gadamer speaks of changes while used in different times and different situations but as he puts: "Language is such that, whatever particular meaning a word may possess, words do not have a single unchanging [fixed] meaning; rather, they possess a fluctuating range of meanings" (Gadamer 106). This confluence of different meanings becomes very important when it comes to culture, the feeding ground of every society which will shape and shift its character affected initially by history and tradition and ultimately ending in the everyday life of people. This "range of meaning", referred to as "horizon", makes possible a great many point of views, all arising from the same text; by the text itself and by its interpreter. The translator then is merging his own "horizon" with that of the text and leaves his effects in the process under the name of "fusion of horizons", so stated by Sampaio:

From Gadamer's perspective, if all meaning is context-dependent, then understanding is not primarily a relation between a subject and an object, but a relation between horizons. Since it is not possible to ignore and to jump out of one's own horizon, understanding operates through an integration of a strange horizon. Such an integration means, on the one hand, that our own horizon is transformed and, on the other hand, that the other horizon, being illuminated by a new perspective, transfigures itself. Understanding consists therefore in a process of fusions of horizons. (Sampaio 86)

As the borrowed method in this study, Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" sheds light on Mirza Habib Isfahani's social, cultural and political overtones in his Persian translation of *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*.

### **Discussion**

Structuralists consider a text not as a body filled with words and sentences from which one single meaning can easily be grasped. Rather, they consider the text, as a network of relations. Accordingly, as a structuralist critic, Roland Barthes believes that in the process of producing a text, there is no creation afresh but a new combination of the already used words is presented. Reviewing Saussure's idea of the production of meanings based on paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of

words, Barthes talks about a network of meaning in which possible meaning of a word is in fact under the influence of other words and their meanings. So the interpretation of a text is the continuous process of eradication and adoption of possibilities (Barthes 160).

With regard to what was maintained above, there are many controversies about the book, *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*, among literary scholars. While some say that a lot of change was done to the actual account of the novel in its Persian translation, others maintain that the translator through his choice of actual and faithful words, has saved the book's authenticity to the most acceptable degree. There are five Persian translations of TAHBI, of which Mirza Habib Isfahani's is the most praised and the most accepted among Persian speakers (Ahmadi 134). Isfahani's understanding of the novel might owe its greatness to some of the qualities which are skillfully transmitted from Morier's original to the target text, the Persian. As neatly as possible, like Morier, Isfahani's translation portrays Hajji Baba in a picaresque novel with the atmosphere of roguery, rascality and demagoguery of its characters which shape the narrative through the course of the story. Isfahani then must have completely been aware of Morier's intentions of writing the novel, that is to say, as a westerner, casting a condescending glance upon the Iranian people, an outlook which puts these two in opposition. Morier's portrayal of the Persian people emphasizes their amorality and the nation's backwardness. However, Isfahani tried to excuse the people and instead, he holds the Qajar dynasty responsible for the political shortcomings and amoral atmosphere inside the borders of Iran so as Ahmadi puts:

For Mirza Habib Isfahani, the Persian translator of the book, who himself was a political activist against the Gajar dynasty, the symbol of Hajji Baba signifies a hero, a political critic and an activist against the traditional society and patrimonialism. (Ahmadi 132)

In his translation Isfahani included a great amount of poetry, omitted the parts which were unfamiliar for the Persian readers, and changed a lot of phrases to recreate a foreign language in the style of Persian everyday speech. According to Gadamer: "

A translator must understand that highlighting is part of his task. Obviously he must not leave open whatever is not clear to him. He must show his colors. Yet there are borderline cases in the original where something is in fact unclear. But precisely there hermeneutical borderline cases show the straits in which the translator constantly finds himself. Here he must resign himself. He must state clearly how he understands. But since he is always in the position of not really being able to express all the dimensions of his text, he must make a constant renunciation. (Gadamer 388)

The word "horizon" refers to one's outlook and preferred view about a text. Thus the "fusion of horizons" refer to the moment when two or more understandings merge into one and the outcome would be an spectrum of understandings as a broader grasp, a more sophisticated intake from a text. The horizon of a text, however, is not a fixed and static view but a dynamic and developing process in which understandings interact and the new understanding sheds light on the former ones continuously. As Gadamer claims: "Understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event" (Gadamer 300). This might be the clue to Isfahani's effort to render Iranian society associated with deception, gullibility and corruption in his translated text.

Isfahani's translation strategies are arranged in two categories in this article; the addition of Persian poetry and using domesticated language. As Avery maintains:

In 1905 the Persian text of Hajji Baba was published in Calcutta, after the English version of James Morier. The Persian edition set a standard for modern writing in the language of the people. The vernacular is reproduced with all the grace and liveliness of ordinary Persian speech. This book is one of the most important memorials in the new style of Persian prose. (Avery 132)

### 1. The Addition of Persian Poetry

Due to Avery's idea, Isfahani's highlights are made by means of different literary techniques one of which is the excessive use of poetry in his translation. As an Example, in the second chapter of the book "Hajji Baba commences his travels -His encounter with the Turcomans, and his captivity" there are no poems in the original text but Isfahani has included seven pieces of poetry one of which is the part where the character Osman Agha is reciting a piece to praise the great warrior and guardian of their caravan:

چه باک از موج بحر آن را که باشد نوح کشتیبان

چه بیم از ترکمن با چاوشی چون رستم دستان

(*H<sup>-</sup>aj<sup>-</sup>i B<sup>-</sup>ab<sup>-</sup>a-yi Isfah<sup>-</sup>an<sup>-</sup>I 9*)

It is stated by Li You that "sometimes the translator would meet the readers' needs; it is likely that he, consciously or unconsciously, will make his translation in accordance with the dominant expectation of a certain time in the receiving culture" (You 111).

Another example of added Persian poetry appears in chapter thirteen when Hajji Baba chooses to tell some people a story and he uses a traditional Persian technique of reciting poems in storytelling to make it more rhythmic and captivating. In his poem, Hajji Baba talks about a barber who was very skilful in shaving people's heads mentioning the word "to skin" which in Persian metaphorically means to "harm someone" and also to "speak frankly". The use of both of these metaphors to create suspense

in Hajji Baba's storytelling makes his audience thrilled and more eager to hear the rest of the story as to conclude which of these is going to be fulfilled at the end.

گفتم راویان اخبار و ناقلان آثار چنین روایت کرده اند که در ایام خلافت هارون الرشید در بغداد دلاکی بود علی صقال نام. استادی بود چنان ماهر و چیره دست که با چشم بسته سر تراشیدی و بدون آنکه نگاه کند مورچه پی زدی. هر چند شاعری که با او سابقه ی عداوت داشت در حقش گفته بود.

در حق سر تراش این بازار

سخن راست بنده میگویم

میکنند پوست از سر مردم

سخن پوست کنده میگویم

(*Hajji Baba-yi Isfahani* 75)

## 2. The Domestication of Language

The translated book is full of intentional domestications an example of which is evident at the beginning of chapter thirteen when Hajji Baba is angry about the city of Meshed (Mashhad):

When I had cleared the gate which leads out of Meshed to Tehran, I shook the collar of my coat, and exclaimed to myself: 'May Heaven send thee misfortunes!' ... Dervish Sefer, whom I knew to be of my mind, entered into my feelings, and we both vented our spleen against the inhabitants of that place; I for the drubbings which had been inflicted upon me, he for the persecutions he had undergone from the Mollahs. (TAHBI 99)

همینکه پا از دروازه بیرون گذاشتم خطاب بمشهد رضا گفتم برو ای مشهد ای کوفه ثانی الهی مثل شهر قوم لوط زیر و زبر شوی... درویش صفر هم با من همزبان و هم لعنت بود. من از درد چوب و فلک و او از درد کوک و کلک همزبان شده به مشهدیان دعای خیر تحویل میدادیم.

(*Hajji Baba-yi Isfahani* 72)

As the examples testify there are no references to "کوفه" and also to the alliteration of "چوب و فلک/کوک و کلک" in the original text. The former change is an allusion to the historic account of the Shiah third Imam and his mistreatment by the people of "Koofeh" and the latter serves as an example of alliteration in Persian language.

As the following excerpt from the fifty-third chapter and the included translation testifies, another case of Isfahani's domestications of language is where words with deep cultural and social impact are used by the Iranians of the time while they do not exist in Morier's original version:

### **Chapter LIII - The mollah Nadân gives an account of his new scheme for raising money, and for making men happy.**

When left to ourselves (for the priest soon after quitted the room), mullah Nadân, taking the mûshthead's note from his breast, said, that he should be happy to receive me in his service upon so good a recommendation; and having

questioned me upon my qualifications, I gave such answers, that he expressed himself satisfied.

'I have long been seeking a person of your character,' said he, 'but hitherto without success. He, who has just left us, has assisted me in my several duties; but he is too much of a napak (an intriguer) for my purpose. I want one who will look upon my interests as his own, who will eat his bit of bread with me and be satisfied, without taking a larger share than his due. (TAHBI 340)

### در تدبیر ملانادان در راه جمع مال و فراغت بال خلق الله

همینکه آخوند از اتاق بیرون رفت و ملانادان مرا با خود تنها دید کاغذ مجتهد قم را از جیب درآورد و گفت «به موجب این ترا در نزد خود نگه میدارم». آنگاه از اوضاع و احوال سوالی چند نمود و از جواب هایم خیلی حظ کرد. پس بدین منوال سر مطلب راگشوده با من در میان نهاد که «مدتی بود مانند تو آدمی را می جستیم اما نمی یافتیم. این آخوند که الان بیرون رفت معاون و دستیار من است اما بسیار ناپاک است. دلم آدمی را میخواهد که مال مرا مثل مال خودش بداند و با لقمه نانی که میخورد قناعت کند و در پی حرص و طمع نباشد».

(*H<sup>-</sup>aj<sup>-</sup>i B<sup>-</sup>ab<sup>-</sup>a-yi Isfah<sup>-</sup>an<sup>-</sup>I 263*)

In this excerpt the word "priest" has been changed to the local word "Akhoond" which means a clergyman in Persian, and also the title of the chapter has been changed to a large degree by Isfahani as there is no word for "happiness" included in the Persian translation.

In spite of these contradictions, the downward look on the Persian clergymen is apparent since Morier, as a result of his colonial outlook, calls him "mollah Nadân" and surprisingly Isfahani also uses equivalent low words to address him as "ملانادان".

The influence of Saa'di's language in *Golistan* on Isfahani's translation appears as having totally Persian characteristics of language. In the novel, this influence has been acknowledged by some scholars. Following the narrative and also the writing style of *Golistan* Isfahani has endeavoured to connect the classical to the contemporary Persian language of the time to make the novel a bridge between tradition and modernity. The borrowings of Isfahani's work from Saa'di's body of writings, particularly *Golistan* could serve as a proof to the presence of strong intertextual links in Isfahani's translation. His purposeful emphasis on Saa'di's name in the novel and several brilliant allusions to his works, illuminate the structural and stylistic borrowings from this classical writer (Dehghanian & Jamali 33). The "innovative use of language" both "linguistic and stylistic" in the translation of novel was done so neatly based on the Persian local literature that a Persian reader might not notice it as a text made by a non-Persian author (Rahimieh 15).

Gadamer's ideas, as a result become clear when the horizon of Morier's oriental outlook is fused with the horizon of Isfahani's opinions about the craftiness and cowardice of Persians and also the corrupted Qajar governmental system. Despite all the differences, the common denominator of the writer and the translator is the manifestation of their oriental attitudes



of the roguery and untrustworthiness of the Persian people. In Isfahani's translation there are several demonstrations of such suppositions, which are exemplified by Edward Said; "the modern orient in short participates in its own orientalizing". (Said 325 )

The "fusion of horizons" in the translation of *TAHBI* culminates into a relevance of a common view point between Morier and Isfahani that in spite of being looked upon as a mock autobiography by a lot of readers, most of them however describe the novel as an actual reality of Iranian society during the Qajar dynasty. One might not be allowed to claim a dark spot in the artistry of both Morier and Isfahani, but objections might be maintained as to show a falsity in the novel if it is to be analyzed as an actual novel showing the everyday reality of a society. Although a lot of critics believe it to be a real picaresque form of novel writing in Persian language, it seems that Isfahani has gone further than Morier himself to dispossess of his society its virtues and elevated cultural values in favour of his own pen, making a literary joke to attack the Qajar Shah. The nascent mystification done by Isfahani in his translation develops into a depiction of deep cultural, governmental and also religious corruption in Iran.

### **Conclusion**

The oriental novel *The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan* has been at the center of attention to many colonial scholars in Iran and also beyond the Iranian borders. The writer of the novel, James Morier, presents a negative view of the Iranian society and following his possibly colonial notions, the Persian translator of the book, Mirza Habib Isfahani, also makes Morier's intentions reappear again in the translated version which is semantically and structurally domesticated.

Ultimately, the Gadamerian concern of the "hermeneutical conversation" between text and translator has been taken into consideration as the focal point in this article. Having discussed and analyzed "fusion of horizons", the present study tried to show how the colonialist horizon of Mirza Habib Isfahani is merged with the colonial discourse of James Morier, the writer of the original text. Aside from what has been claimed, Isfahani's deliberate depiction of the Persian society might be an approval of the "fusion of horizons" which has served the colonial purpose of the writer of *TAHBI*. In spite of portraying the inferiority of Iranian society due to its ill manners and downgrading customs, the use of Persian common sayings reflects Persian traditions.

Isfahani's approach to translation is proved to have done a great favor to the understanding of the novel. Moreover, his pen has been so much purified of Morier's language that it presents a completely new rendition of the novel, a Persian novel which is not believed to have been written by a non-Persian author (Boubani 24, 25). Comparing the original and the translated text,

this translation study here calls the attention of the readers, as the hermeneutist philosopher Gadamer maintains, through "fusion of horizons". The writer believes this leads to a wider and a more thorough understanding of the anti-colonial approach, as one possible reading of TAHBI which has been manifested all through.

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