

## An In-Depth Exploration of *Rubaiyat Al-Khayyam* Translations: A Comparative Study of Translation and Re-Translation

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### Abstract

Intriguing scholars and linguists for generations, the *Rubaiyat* Al-Khayyam, authored by the illustrious Persian polymath Omar Al-Khayyam, has historically transcended borders and cultures. This study delved deeper into the art of translation, focusing on two noteworthy Arabic translations of the Rubaiyat by Ahmad Rami (1924) and Badr Tawfik (1989). Rami's rendition, a direct translation from the original Persian, encapsulates the spirit of a twentieth-century Arab world in flux, capturing both the echoes of a cultural renaissance and the familiar rhythmic structure beloved by Arab audiences. By contrast, Tawfik's 1989 re-translation, influenced by FitzGerald's English version, serves as a melting pot of East meets West, merging original Persian sentiments with global interpretations. This research elucidates the delicate balance that translators must maintain between authenticity, contextual relevance, and personal interpretation. The intricate dance of words across these translations reaffirms the universal appeal of Al-Khayyam's poetic genius, while highlighting the transformative magic inherent in the act of translation.

**Keywords:** *Rubaiyat* Al-Khayyam; translation; Ahmad Rami; Badr Tawfik; Persian literature; cultural renaissance; rhythmic structure; Fitzgerald's adaptation; authenticity; contextual relevance; poetic genius

### Introduction

The Rubaiyat Al-Khayyam, penned by the renowned Persian polymath Omar Al-Khayyam, has captivated the minds of scholars, poets, and translators for generations. An eleventh-century luminary, Al-Khayyam, was not simply a gifted poet; his expertise also spanned mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy (Yarshater, 1983). His quatrains, rich with themes such as

existentialism, hedonism and fatalism found universal appeal, touching hearts beyond the confines of time and place (Aminrazavi, 2007).

The art of translation catapulted Al-Khayyam's poetic wonders to global prominence. Amidst this international embrace, Edward FitzGerald's 1859 English adaptation is arguably the most distinctive. Despite certain purists raising eyebrows at its liberal style, FitzGerald's work undeniably carved Al-Khayyam's niche into the Western literary landscape (Karin, 2009). The relationship between original works and their translated counterparts is profound, unveiling the intricacies of linguistic evolution, cultural dialogues, and interpretative choices (Bassnett, 2014).

Surprisingly, the Arab world's twentieth-century resurgence in Al-Khayyam's philosophy was influenced by the English adaptation. This catalyzed numerous Arabic translations, each reflecting its translator's signature and the cultural milieu of the time (Al-Musawi, 2006). The translation by Ahmad Rami in 1924, sourced directly from Persian and Badr Tawfik's 1989 re-adaptation influenced by FitzGerald's English version offer contrasting insights.

This research comprised a comprehensive exploration of these Arabic translations. Through their juxtaposition, we aimed to unearth the variations in translation techniques, interpretation bias, and prevailing sociocultural influences. This endeavor aligns with the broader discourse in translation studies, accentuating the nuanced equilibrium between authenticity, lucidity, and the perspective of the translator (Venuti, 2008).

## **Literature Review**

The challenge of translation, especially when it involves masterpieces such as the Rubaiyat Al-Khayyam, offers profound insights into the complexities involved in staying true to the original, while linguistically and culturally adapting. Esteemed works illuminate the multifarious intricacies of translating cherished poetic pieces.

Bassnett (2002) asserted that translation extends beyond a mere exchange of words: it is an intricate dance of communication, intricately weaving cultural, societal, and textual elements. Venuti's (1995) insights emphasize the tightrope that is walked between making a text accessible to its readers while retaining its cultural distinctiveness.

Aminrazavi (2007) navigated the philosophical depths of Al-Khayyam's writings, revealing the heartbeats of existentialism, the transient nature of life, and nuanced hedonism. These revelations arm translators with a thematic road map for their journeys. FitzGerald's rendition of the Rubaiyat, as emphasized by Karlin (2009), sparked discourses regarding the leeway a translator should possess. Malmkjær (2016) delved further into this issue, exploring the spectrum of translational liberties.

The Arab renaissance with Al-Khayyam in the twentieth century, documented by Al-Musawi (2006), introduced its own challenges, as a large number of translations drew inspiration from their English counterparts. Pym (2010) explored the labyrinth of multilayered translations, illustrating the nuanced shifts that each iteration can introduce.

Baker (1992) concentrated on the strong influence that translators have on their final output, which is especially relevant in poetic translations where every word choice weaves the final tapestry. Cultural nuances in translation as explored by Hatim and Mason (1997) position translators as crucial links between originating and target cultures. The Rubaiyat, with its cultural weight, exemplifies this.

Tymoczko (2007) argued that translations are temporal snapshots, reflecting their sociopolitical and cultural backdrops. Analyzing works from diverse periods such as those of Rami and Tawfik provides insights into the evolving nature of translation.

The academic landscape emphasizes translation's intricate dance between linguistic accuracy, cultural resonance, and the influence of time. The journey of the Rubaiyat, traversing from Persian heartlands to Victorian English interpretations and subsequent Arabic nuances, highlights literature's timeless charm and translation's metamorphic essence.

## **Methodology**

Central to this research was a qualitative lens which aimed to uncover the layered subtleties of Omar Al-Khayyam's Rubaiyat translations. Such a qualitative approach, celebrated for its depth and contextuality, seemed appropriate, given our intent to unearth the layered meanings, cultural contexts, and unique vantage points of translators, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

During the process of data collection, we meticulously curated editions of the Rubaiyat, emphasizing their historical relevance, impact, and representation of specific cultural epochs. To enhance our understanding, we incorporated auxiliary materials ranging from critiques to historical records in order to provide our primary translations with a well-rounded contextual fabric.

Our analytical blueprint derives its strength from established paradigms in translation studies, marrying rigor with depth. Guided by key scholars, we dissected specific segments of each translation, sifting through linguistic intricacies, thematic priorities, and stylistic touches. This in-depth exploration that was structured yet interpretative aimed to spotlight not only the ‘what’, but also the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the translation choices.

Our focus on Rami and Tawfik’s translations was deliberate as these echo distinct eras in the Arab reception of Al-Khayyam’s magnum opus. Rami’s direct Persian-to-Arabic rendition in the vibrant twentieth century and Tawfik’s 1989 version, colored by FitzGerald’s English interpretation, present a canvas rich with contrasts and comparisons. Such juxtaposition allowed for a richer tapestry of analysis, emphasizing the layered nuances of translation over time and varied interpretative lenses.

It is important to emphasize that our choice of translations was strategic rather than whimsical, offering a holistic understanding of the intricate dance between language, culture, era, and personal interpretation in the realm of literary translation.

## Findings and Discussion

<b>Tawfik (Arabic)</b>	<b>Rami (Arabic)</b>	<b>Omar Al-Khayyam (Persian)</b>
الأمر سيان لمن يعدون انفسهم لهذا اليوم ومن يتطلعون إلى ما بعد غد ها هو المؤذن من برج الظلام يصيح أيها الأغبياء ليس لكم هنا جزاء ولا هناك	قد مزق البدر سنار الظلام فاغنم صفا الوقت وهات المدام واطرب فإن البدر من بعدنا يسري علينا في طباق الرغام	اکنون که ز خوشدلی بجز نام نماند یک همدم پخته جز می خام نماند دست طرب از ساغر می باز مگیر امروز که در دست بجز جام نماند

When we delved into the translations of Omar Al-Khayyam’s Rubaiyat by Ahmad Rami and Badr Tawfik, an intricate web of distinctions and patterns unraveled, elucidating the

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 23:11 November 2023

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multifaceted dynamics at play. Each rendition, while a reflection of the original's essence, also bears the unmistakable marks of the translator's personal and cultural perspectives colored by the distinct zeitgeist of their respective eras.

Ahmad Rami's 1924 rendition, meticulously crafted directly from the Persian source, is emblematic of the early twentieth-century Arab world. This was a time punctuated by cultural awakenings and seismic societal shifts. Rami's work is resonant with the tones of a renaissance, weaving Al-Khayyam's profound verses seamlessly into the dominant ideals and challenges of his time. The choices he makes, both linguistic and thematic, offer a window into an Arab region poised precariously at a crossroads, balanced between the pull of tradition and the push of modernity.

Rami's meticulous adherence to the rhythmic structure mirrors the musicality of the original, resonating deeply with Arab readers who have a cultural predilection for rhythm in poetry. This faithfulness to rhythmic patterns while simultaneously embedding the translation in familiar linguistic territory contributed significantly to the work's warm reception. By not only preserving, but also emphasizing the AABA rhyme scheme inherent in Al-Khayyam's verses, Rami showcases a harmonious fusion of form and content.

For instance, the seamless alignment of sounds in Rami's version such as "aam, aam, na, and amm" pays homage to the Persian original's "nad, nad, yir, and nad." This synchronization encapsulates Rami's strategy, as he seeks to create an Arabic rendition that dances to the same rhythmic beats as the Persian original. Such choices not only elevate the text's poetic quality, but also cater to the inherent Arab love for structured poetic sounds, thereby enhancing its appeal.

Furthermore, by maintaining this rhythmic consistency, Rami makes a compelling argument for the universality of Al-Khayyam's themes. He demonstrates that while the words might travel across languages, their essence—their heartbeat—remains unaltered. This rhythmic resonance is more than just a stylistic choice; it is a bridge that connects the historical and cultural context of the source text to the contemporary sensibilities of Rami's readers.

In essence, Rami's decision to retain the rhythmic structure was more than just a nod to the original's form; it was a strategic choice aimed at amplifying its reception in the target culture. By

marrying the familiar rhythmic cadences of Arabic poetic traditions with Al-Khayyam's profound verses, he crafts a translation that is both authentic to the original and deeply resonant for its new audience.

Tawfik's approach starkly contrasts with that of Rami, primarily in its structural choices. While Rami meticulously preserved the rhythmic AABA scheme in order to appeal to the Arab affinity for structured poetry, Tawfik deviated, opting for a prose-like rendition that does not strictly adhere to any set rhyme pattern. For example, Tawfik's lines end with varying sounds: "oum, ghad, eeh, and nak." This divergence from rhythmic structure is emblematic of his broader translation strategy.

Tawfik's choice of prose which is a more flexible and expansive form might stem from his intention to prioritize the fluidity and essence of Al-Khayyam's ideas over their original poetic form. This decision could be influenced by the intermediary English translation of FitzGerald which in its own right adopted certain liberal approaches to capture the spirit of the Rubaiyat. By assuming this strategy, Tawfik's translation becomes a hybrid—a text rooted in the Persian original, but also tinted by the lens of Western literary interpretation.

Moreover, this prose-like approach allows Tawfik to delve more deeply into the intricate nuances, allegories, and philosophical underpinnings of Al-Khayyam's work. By freeing himself from the constraints of a strict rhythmic structure, Tawfik offers readers an exploration of the content that is both expansive and, in many ways, more accessible to a contemporary audience that might prioritize meaning over form.

Furthermore, by weaving in the Western reception of the Rubaiyat, Tawfik's rendition serves as a testament to the transformative power of intercultural dialogue in literature. His translation does not simply introduce Al-Khayyam to the Arab audience; it also introduces (subtly) the Western interpretations and shared global literary appreciation for the Persian polymath's work.

In essence, while Rami's translation seeks to harmoniously align the form and content of Al-Khayyam's Rubaiyat within the familiar rhythmic structures of Arabic poetry, Tawfik's work is a bold experiment, one that ventures beyond form to capture the multifaceted essence of the original, drawing from both Eastern and Western literary landscapes. When contrasted, the two

translations, offer readers a comprehensive spectrum—from the traditional and structured to the modern and fluid—that showcases the vast expanse and versatility of Al-Khayyam’s timeless masterpiece.

Additionally, the divergent approaches that each translator adopts with respect to cultural idioms, metaphors and poetic structures are striking. While Rami’s unwavering fidelity to the original’s essence is evident throughout, Tawfik, who is potentially influenced by his English intermediary occasionally exhibits more liberal interpretative choices. Such choices—some overt, others subtly nuanced—underscore the translator’s pivotal role as being more than just a linguistic conduit; they are craftsmen, curators, and occasionally, innovators, deftly shaping the original’s essence to resonate with newer, diverse audiences.

In their depth and breadth, these translations exemplify the nuanced ballet of authenticity, innovation and contextual resonance that forms the cornerstone of literary translation. They not only unveil the challenges and choices inherent in transposing Al-Khayyam’s masterpiece, but also elevate our appreciation of the transformative journey of words as they navigate across linguistic frontiers and cultural landscapes. Through their lenses, we not only celebrate Al-Khayyam’s timeless brilliance, but also gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the dynamic and multifaceted domain of translation studies.

## **Conclusion**

Omar Al-Khayyam’s Rubaiyat, a shining beacon from the vast expanse of Persian literary heritage, unfolds a complex tapestry laden with insights into the realms of translation, interpretation, and cross-cultural dialogue. Anchoring our discourse in the nuanced translations by Rami and Tawfik, this research brings to the fore the intricate dimensions and dynamics that constitute the art and science of translation.

Navigating the vast and turbulent seas of literary translation, the Rubaiyat emerges as a lighthouse, illuminating the delicate equilibrium between staying true to the essence of the original while integrating the rich nuances of varied linguistic and cultural landscapes. The enduring allure and universal appeal of Al-Khayyam’s quatrains when seen through different linguistic and

cultural lenses underscore the existence of universal literary strands that effortlessly weave together diverse facets of humanity across different times and territories.

### **Future Research Directions**

In addition to providing in-depth insights into the translations by Rami and Tawfik, this research also lays the groundwork for broader explorations. Future studies could further enrich the existing discourse by incorporating a wider range of translations spanning different periods and linguistic backgrounds into the comparative analysis. Such an expanded canvas would offer a more comprehensive panorama of the Rubaiyat's global reception and the multitude of interpretations it has inspired.

Moreover, a more detailed microanalysis delving into the specific linguistic, syntactic and semantic choices of various translators would unveil the granular intricacies of their craft. Conversely, a macro-level analysis studying the broader sociopolitical and cultural contexts enveloping each translation would provide valuable insights into the external influences shaping translation choices.

Additionally, given the increasing interest in digital humanities and computational analysis, it would be intriguing to employ these tools to quantitatively analyze and compare translations. This could reveal patterns and nuances otherwise imperceptible through conventional qualitative methods.

In conclusion, the journey of the Rubaiyat from its Persian roots to its global forays accentuates the enduring power and allure of literature and the transformative magic wielded by translation. This exploration is a tale of linguistic transposition that also stands as an eloquent testament to the vibrant, multifaceted dialogues between texts, each echoing and resonating within the vast amphitheater of culture, time, and individual interpretation.

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 23:11 November 2023

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