THE VOGUE OF FITZGERALD’S KHAYYĀM IN RIHANI’S ABUL ‘ALĀ’

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Comparative Literature

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The Vogue of Fitzgerald’s Khayyām in Rihani’s Abul ‘Alā’

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to show that in translating Abul ‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī’s poetry, Ameen Rihani has imitated Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of ‘Umar Khayyām. By comparing Rihani’s translation with R. A. Nicholson’s literal translation of Ma‘arrī, a translation that differs in purpose and method, and evaluating both in light of translation theory and translational practices, it can be said that Rihani’s work qualifies as an adaptation and as a work whose authority is to be claimed by Rihani and not Ma’arri. Additionally, Rihani’s version seems to be inspired by Fitzgerald’s Rubā‘iyyāt of Omar Khayyam on the semantic and aesthetic levels: the significant borrowing of word associations and, at times, whole lines, and the choice of the quatrain as the poetic form. Rihani has also incorporated his extensive readings of English as well as Arabic literature into his translation, namely his readings of English poets like Shakespeare and Milton and Arab poets like Ibn ‘Arabī. Rihani emerges as a writer of versions, and is to be called a ‘translator’ only in the default of a better word.

Keywords: Ma‘arrī; Rihani; Fitzgerald; Adaptation; Imitation
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Chapter One

Introduction

Is it true what he relates so that we accept?
Or ’tis but nightly words, false and inept?¹
—Abu al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī.

There is substance for a critically understated claim in the following argument: Did ‘Umar Khayyām² plagiarize Abu al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, or did Ameen Rihani plagiarize Edward Fitzgerald? Did Fitzgerald’s *The Rubā’iyyāt of Omar Khayyām* inspire Rihani’s *The Quatrains of Abu ’l-Ala*? While Fitzgerald’s translation has been extensively studied, little attention was given to Rihani’s translation of Ma‘arrī, and the similarity between the translations themselves was blurred in the discussions that addressed the Arab and Persian poets. As a result, the similarity in the practice of Fitzgerald and Rihani as translators went unnoticed. Fitzgerald’s practice is not the concern for this research, Rihani’s practice, however, is.

Translating Eastern poetry, particularly Persian and Arabic, continues to be a practice of exoticism. It has been influenced by a multitude of ideologies and theories, most notably by Orientalism. As a communicative act, in which cultures exchange

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² ‘Umar Khayyām (1048-1123) is a Persian philosopher and poet born in Nishapur. He is mostly known as an astrologer and famous for his ruba’iyyāt in Edward Fitzgerald’s translation. His works cover philosophy, astrology, and mathematics. For a more detailed biography of Khayyām, see “‘Umar Khayyam.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill 2012.
values and negotiate similarities and differences, translation functions as the interpreter of meaning. It is of crucial importance, then, that the message be interpreted properly for the communicative act to take place and for the cultural exchange to continue unfettered by misrepresentations and misunderstandings. The choice of translation strategy is almost arbitrary and varies according to the aims and aspirations of translators. While some aspire to be literal and confined by the original text, others tend to be freer and unconfined by the words and lines of the original.

Since translation is, in a way or another, a reading or an interpretation, it gives way to a multitude of translational choices and elements which, most of the time, lie outside the original text. Such choices in translation tend to one of two extremes: they either deliver the original in its entirety in the host language, unhindered by any remaining foreign ‘traces’, or deliver it partially leaving it a space of its own to be able to trace its roots in the source language. Translators are often caught in compromise, negotiating the same choices at every juncture of the original text.

The criteria for judging the translated text are also determined by ‘reading’ the text, whether we refer by ‘reading’ to its literal meaning, the unhindered act of reading with comprehension, or to ‘interpretive’ reading in the Barthesian\(^3\) designation. If we consider modern theories of interpretation that have absorbed the deconstructionist model for example, the former type of reading merely qualifies when it comes to poetry because poetry, by its very nature, is not meant to be ‘read,’ rather, it is meant to be

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\(^3\) Referring to Roland Barthes’ famous claim that the author is dead and the meaning of a text is determined by the reader’s response and interpretation. In poststructuralist thought, the “death of author” anticipated the “birth of reader” and the advent of Stanley Fish’s equally famous “interpretive communities”. For more on this, see: Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” in Image-Music-Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142-148; and Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980).
hanging in *différance*[^4] and aporia, always delayed and undecided. It follows that any translation of a text is justified as one possible reading. It follows also that a text could be translated endlessly, or in as much readings it can afford, and there is no such thing as ‘misinterpretation’ or ‘misrepresentation.’ In this light, all representations are valid, and all translational practices score the same; there are no criteria for judging a translation as good, dull, ‘faithful,’ or ‘unfaithful’. Whether it is literal, adaptation, imitation, or creation, a translation is always justified by the merits of interpretation.

Robert Frost’s rather sentimental notion of ‘loss’ in translating poetry is a ‘gain’ from a Derridian standpoint. What are we to make, then, of the author and the original text? For Barthes and Derrida, the answer is obvious: what author? But does not translation, in some mysterious way that is yet to be considered and addressed in translation studies, bring the author back from the dead? If a text alludes to or sustains a belief in cremation of the dead, for example, does that ascribe it to, say, Indian asceticism, or make a Brahmin of its author? While a translation still has a definite point of reference, which is the author, from a post-structuralist perspective, the point of reference is the text and not the author; interpretation can only sort out the multiple meanings of the text.

Interpretation does not create the *différance* because the text itself is ‘always already’ unsettled—the *différance* is inherent in the text. How are we, then, to arrive at evaluating a translation, let alone poetry translation? If a translator-poet, like Rihani, allows his “individual talent,”[^5] as T. S. Eliot’s poet does in *The Wasteland*, to act like a

[^4]: The term *différance* is a coinage by Jacques Derrida referring to a “gap” in reading which allows the continuous free play of signs, always deferring the meaning to keep it undecided and open to a surplus of possibilities. For more on this, see: Jacques Derrida, “Différence” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

“catalyst” in producing poetry from an array of available reactants already present in his mind as traces of readings outside the original text, then his product is justified as his own individual ‘creation’. As long as Rihani’s poetic practice is concerned, his labor seizes to be a translation of a specific text, a specific author, or a specific tradition.

It is the purpose of this research to show that *The Quatrains of Abu ’l-Ala* owe their lines, or at least a considerable number of their lines, along with their outlook, to the *Rubā’iyyāt of Omar Khayyām* not because of any suspect act of plagiarism, on the part of the author-poets, but rather because of an act of imitation, inspiration or adaptation on the part of the translator of *The Quatrains*.

The choice of the English translations for the comparative study undertaken in this research has been guided by two main considerations. First, the translations have to be different in their purpose and translational approach which would allow their analysis in light of the different translation theories and studies, and second, they have to be substantial so that enough material is available for the comparison. Of the many English translations of Ma‘arrī’s poetry which meet these considerations, Rihani’s and R. A. Nicholson’s, in his *Studies in Islamic Poetry*, seem to be the best candidates for comparison.

To borrow metaphors from science, like Eliot, it is helpful to view different translations or versions of the same text as chemical experiments. A ‘control’ experiment is that which shows how a chemical compound should behave naturally or ‘ideally’. Comparing other experiments to the control experiment shows the different compositions and possible reactions behind the variation from the expected outcome of

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rightful heir of tradition on whom rests the responsibility of preserving and expanding tradition, primarily through allusion. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* is a remarkable application of what he explicates in theory.  

6 Mentioned later in Chapter 3.
the control. The ‘control’ translation, so to speak, of Ma‘arrī to which Rihani’s translation will be compared is Nicholson’s literal translation. The choice of this translation among several English translations is based on the fact that it is literal in its approach to the originals. Therefore, literal translations function as controls, that is, blueprints or maps of the originals, in the host language so that a poem is compared not only across borders and cultures but also with other translations in its new environment; variations are easily discerned. Because a translation should also stand on its own in the host language, as it does in its original language, it is critical then to examine two translations that differ in purpose and method.

Translating poetry is considered by many to be the most challenging in literary translation⁷. To this effect, some have argued that poetry cannot be translated because poetry is, in the famous definition of Robert Frost, “that which is lost in translation”. Regardless, there have been tremendous efforts made to arrive at a theory of what a good translation should look or be like. Theories have been put to practice, experiments carried, and while some practices attend to the source text, others see to suit the target reader, but either choice remains open to individual and arbitrary judgments.

Eastern literature, as with any non-Western literature, is normally accessible to the West only through translation. “To comprehend,” says A. J. Arberry, “we must know not only what the other man says, but why he says it in that particular way”⁸. What follows from this is the question of the extent to which each of Ma‘arrī’s translators comprehend his words and his reasons. This is not to hint at a possible

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misunderstanding, which might be the case, or a ‘deliberate’ misunderstanding on the part of the translators. It is, however, to set a criterion for what a ‘faithful’ and legitimate translation should look like, and to study the causes of ‘misrepresentation’ when it results in translation. While Arberry contends that there is “no universal criterion for literary excellence” and that “the best translation cannot convey more than one part of the meaning of its original,” nevertheless, he asserts that “that part will be still smaller if the reader is unaware of the differing traditions and ideals of the various literatures”\(^9\). It is critical, then, for the translator, who is initially a reader, to be aware of the characteristics of the work at hand and, ultimately, the “ideals” of the literature it belongs to.

The conclusion to be made from the above is that, in translation, we will always need a point of reference in order to make value judgments. Since translation is a ‘bringing over’ of material from one language to another, a communicative act between cultures, allowing interpretive readings creates for a surplus of mis-representation as much as it does of representation.

However, if we are to take on a poststructuralist view, translating a text already producing multiple meanings in its original language and culture should aim at preserving, as much as possible, those meanings from being reduced, expanded, or narrowed down to one reading, when the original text affords more in its original context. Perhaps this is why literal translations seem to be ‘safe’ and more adequate in communicating a text to a new audience and perhaps this is why they serve best as ‘controls’ in comparing different translations.

\(^9\) Ibid, xi.
Following is a brief overview of the contents and chapters. Chapter 1 provides biographies of Ma‘arrī and the translators, Rihani and Nicholson, culled from well known biographies, published letters, and encyclopedia entries. Chapter 2 introduces the original works translated with a brief overview of some perspectives on Ma‘arrī, western and eastern, along with a discussion of Ma‘arrī’s poetics as reflected in his poetry. Chapter 3 presents and compares the translations of Rihani and Nicholson, mostly based on selections in common, and occasionally discussing different selections to emphasis elements of style and points of strengths and weaknesses in each translation. Chapter 4 discusses the influence of Fitzgerald’s Rubā’iyyāt on Rihani’s Quatians and highlights the parallels between both translations, as well as trace other sources that Rihani has incorporated into his translation. In Chapter 5, the translations, and translators, are analyzed and evaluated in light of translation theory.
Chapter Two

Ma‘arrī and His Translators: A Short Biography

2.1- Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī1 (973-1058)

The blind Arab poet, critic, philosopher, and man of letters notoriously known for his pessimism, comparable in his melancholy to Thomas Hardy in English, was born Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Sulaymān al-Tanūkhī al- Ma‘arri in Ma‘arrah al-Nu‘mān in north Syria. He lost his eyesight at an early age due to an affliction by smallpox, however, he was compensated by an exceptional memory. Ma‘arri started composing poetry at the age of 11 or 12 and was influenced by the youthful poetry of al-Mutanabbi. He finished his religious studies and literary education in Aleppo under the supervision of several shaykhs most notably Ibn Khālawayh and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Sa‘d. After the death of his father, he left Ma‘arrah to Baghdād because he was interested in its libraries, but did not stay for long due to financial and familial problems. His mother got sick and died before his return from Baghdād. Back in Ma‘arrah, he secluded himself and acquired the sobriquet rahīn al-maḥbisayn, “the two-fold prisoner” (his blindness and his house). Meanwhile, he maintained correspondence with several notable people, princes, and judges, and his house became a destination for students who

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flocked at his door to attain their studies, most notably of those was al-Tabrīzī. He died naturally in 1058.

As to his beliefs, many of his works show that he considered breeding a sin so he never married. He adhered to a vegetarian diet and, therefore, never ate meat, eggs, or milk. He believed in annihilation as the best hope for humanity, and he is said to have wished the lines: “this wrong was by my father done to me, but never by me to anyone” be inscribed on his grave. Al-Jundī lists more than 85 works by Ma‘arrī, including poetry, commentary, criticism, and prose, in addition to his letters and correspondences. However, most of his works are lost, and from the most notable existing works, the following could be mentioned: Saqṭ al-Zand, of which a collection of 31 poems have been put together under the title Dir‘iyāt; Luzūm mā lā Yalzam; Zajr al-Nābiḥ; al-Fuṣūl wa al-Ghāyāt; Risālat al-Ghufrān; Risālat al-Malāʾika; al-Ṣāhil wa al-Jāḥij; Mu’jiz Ahmad; and al-Lāmiʿ al-‘Azīzī.

2.2 - Ameen F. Rihani² (1876-1940)

The Lebanese-American poet, critic, and essayist was born Ameen Faris al-Rihani in Freikey in Mount Lebanon. He finished his elementary schooling in St. George Behordoq under the supervision of Naoum Mokarzil, and in 1888, emigrated together with his uncle and Mokarzil to New York. A year later his family followed and his father established a basement store. He continued his schooling in Newburgh, and a year later he quit to join the family business as a bookkeeper, but he kept reading continuously. He

² Biographical information is collected from: Albert Rihani, Where to Find Ameen Rihani (Beirut: The Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, 1979); The Letters of Ameen Rihani (Beirut: Dar al-Rihani, 1959); Nadeen Naimy, The Lebanese Prophets of New York (Beirut, American University of Beirut, 1985); The Rihani Organization Website: www.ameenrihani.org.
joined a stage group headed by Henry Jewet, and, in 1896, expressed his wish to pursue a career in acting. Later that year, he joined the law school but a lung infection interrupted his studies and he was advised to come back to Lebanon for its moderate climate. In 1899, he went back to New York and started writing for Al-Hoda newspaper using pen names such as ‘Ibn Yaqzan al-Souri’ and ‘Lisahibihi’. In 1916, he became the correspondent of two New York magazines during World War I. Shortly after, he called for and chaired The Syrian-Mount Lebanon League of Liberation, North America Section, and in 1920, he was asked to join The Pen League, established by Kahlil Gibran, Mikhael Naimy, and others but he apologized. In 1922, he embarked on his journey in Arabia, through Hijaz, Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and finally Beirut. In the period between 1923 and 1930 he became more politically active and the focus of his works shifted from literature to politics and Middle Eastern affairs. He continued to publish his politically oriented books and critical articles and taught courses at some universities in Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. He died in 1940 following a bicycle accident.

Rihani is mostly known for his political activity in the latter stage of his life, and his criticism of classical Arabic rhetoric which epitomized in his introduction of free verse into Arabic poetry. Nevertheless, he wrote in both Arabic and English. Some of his notable works in Arabic are: Nabdhah fi al-Thawrah al-Faransiyyah; Tārīkh Najd; al-Nakabāt; Mulūk al-‘Arab; Zanbaqat al-Ghawr; Hutāf al-Awdiyah; Qalb Lubnān; and al-Rīḥaniyyāt; and in English: The Path of Vision; The Book of Khalid; Myrtle and Myrrh; A Chant of Mystics; The Descent of Bolshevism; The Fate of Palestine; Around The Coasts of Arabia; and Ibn Saoud of Arabia, His People and His Land, in addition is his
translation of selections from Ma‘arrî’s poetry, *The Quatrains of Abu ’l-Ala*, which was later titled *The Luzumiyat of Abu ’l-Ala*.

### 2.3 - Reynold Alleyne Nicholson (1868-1945)

One of the major English Orientalists whose works have an enduring influence on Islamic studies; born Reynold Alleyne Nicholson in Keighley, Yorkshire, England and Educated at Aberdeen University and the University of Cambridge, he was lecturer in Persian (1902–26) and Sir Thomas Adams professor of Arabic (1926–33) at Cambridge. Nicholson was an important academic in the fields of Islamic literature and mysticism and his *A Literary History of the Arabs* is a classic in Islamic studies in English. His translations of Şūfī literature advanced studies on Islamic mysticism. His translations of Arabic and Persian poetry make him a poet in his own right. Though he had never been to the Near East, his understanding of Islam and the Muslim cultures was remarkable. He died in Chester, Cheshire in 1945.

Most of his works are translations of Eastern poetry and prose of which are the following: *Studies in Islamic Poetry; A Literary History of the Arabs; Translations of Eastern Poetry and Prose; Studies in Islamic Mysticism; The Mystics of Islam; Mathnawi of Jalalu’ddin Rumi; and The Epistle of Forgiveness.*

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Chapter Three

Ma‘arrī’s Poetics and Practice

Perhaps the first comment on Ma‘arrī in Western scholarship comes from J. D. Carlyle who, as early as 1796, translated few lines of Ma‘arrī ’s poetry to English and Latin, in his *Specimen of Arabian Poetry*. Carlyle provides a very brief biography of Ma‘arrī, which may be the first biography in western scholarship, and is worthy of quoting almost entirely:

Abou Alôla … attempted every species of poetry … his compositions seem evidently intended to turn religion into ridicule. This disposition, … gave rise to a report among his contemporaries that he had abjured Mohammedanism, and became a follower of the Bramins … he was as little attached to one sect of religion as to another, or rather that he was equally an enemy to all. Abulfeda has preserved one of his epigrams, which I have endeavoured to render as follows:

Errant Islamici, servi felluntur Jësu,
Sunt cocci Isacidte, sunt sine corde Magi;
Dividitur mundus pius hinc et mentis egenus
Cernitur, atque illinc impius et sapiens.¹

Von Kremer contends that Ma‘arrī was “more of a Brahmin than an Arab,” and while he maintains that Ma‘arrī had “the mind of an Indian ascetic” living a “life of long uninterrupted fasting and deprivation,”² D. S. Margoliouth argues that Ma‘arrī ’s letters “exhibit [him] as anything but a hermit; he appears rather as a man of many

friends, who takes a kindly interest both in men and things”\(^3\). On Ma‘arrī ’s asceticism, Nicholson claims that “he had nothing of the mystical spirit, and his allusions to Sufism—a name which in his time covered much vagabondage and licence—are contemptuous”\(^4\). Given Carlyle’s and Von Kremer’s descriptions of Ma‘arrī as having the asceticism of the Bahmins, it is no wonder that we find Ma‘arrī ’s poetry quoted as an epigram at the very beginning of a book on Indian mystics and yogis\(^5\), and cross referenced with Kabir and Shankaracharya. Nevertheless, Von Kremer hails Ma‘arrī ’s “moral earnestness, noble sentiment, and the unequalled championship of language” which resembles that of the “great German poets”\(^6\). While Clément Huart regards Ma‘arrī “a philosopher who was the last of the great poets of the Arabic tongue, and whose pessimism, finely expressed in verse, stirred the admiration of many generations,”\(^7\) Nicholson believes that Ma‘arrī ’s poetry has a contemporary appeal so that “the words of the old blind poet, who died in Syria eight hundred and sixty years ago ring out to-day as a challenge to deep and irreconcilable antagonisms in the nature of mankind”\(^8\). Nicholson also claims that Ma‘arrī’s art is similar in its execution to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*\(^9\). However, for the western observing eye, what appears to be interesting in Ma‘arrī is not only his sophisticated poetry that combines philosophy with art, but more importantly his tendencies to “turn religion into ridicule” and the outlook of his poetry as a critique of society. “Taking

\(^3\) D. S. Margoliouth, *The Letters of Abu l-‘Alá* (Oxford, 1898), 34.
\(^6\) Von Kremer, *philosophischen Gedichte*, 1.
\(^8\) Nicholson, *Studies*, 43.
\(^9\) Ibid, 44.
Reason for his guide,” Nicholson says, “he judges men and things with a freedom which must have seemed scandalous to the rulers and privileged classes of the day”.  

While some praise Ma‘arrī’s works, G. M. Wickens considers his poetry unappealing to most scholars because of his “verbal gymnastics and hyperbole”. Wickens sanctimoniously asserts that “if justice were to be done, for example, al-Ma‘arrī’s poetry would need the joint services of Swift and Pope, with the carefully controlled intervention of Ezra Pound”. Evidently, Wicken’s assertion only demonstrates the involvedness of Ma‘arrī’s poetry to the extent that its appraisal requires the collective poetic genius of Swift, Pope, and Pound. In his poetry, Stefan Sperl argues, Ma‘arrī “re-defines every element of tradition in the light of what he considers morality and reason,” and in his Luzūmiyyāt, Ma‘arrī assigns classical Arabic poetry “a new function in a new poetic form”.

According to ‘A’ishah ‘Abd al-Rahman, “literary historians have been concerned with al-Ma‘arrī’s beliefs virtually to the exclusion of his writings”. ‘Abd al-Rahman argues that Ma‘arrī had an emotional relationship with his works and had no secrets to hide or encode into his writings. She claims that Ma‘arrī’s writings reflect his persona as a passionate and sincere philosopher poet who “knew his mission and declared his position in relation to the world and mankind boldly and unashamedly”.

In the Arabic literary circles of the early 20th century, interest in Ma‘arrī followed D. S. Margoliouth’s publication of The Letters of Abū‘l-‘Alā’. Arab scholars like Taha

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10 Ibid, 44.  
14 Ibid, 335.
Husayn, playwrights like Twafiq al-Hakim, and poets like Adunis and Salah ‘Abd al-Sabur tried to identify with, and romanticize, Ma‘arrī’s thought and poetic legacy. According to Taha Husayn, Arab intellectuals were attracted to Ma‘arrī because they found in him the prints of thought, feeling, and imagery which they found in Western literatures. “They found in literatures of the West,” Husayn explicates, “poetry engaged in philosophy, and when they sought its equivalent in Arabic literature, they found pieces in Abu Tammām and fragments in al-Mutanabbi, but in Ma‘arrī they found a surplus”\textsuperscript{15}. For Tawfiq al-Hakim, the blind Ma‘arrī was “able to see, like Homer, the sublime of things,”\textsuperscript{16} and for Salah ‘Abd al-Sabur, he was “three quarters of Arabic poetry;” the remaining quarter was “shared by Abu Nawwās, al-Mutanabbi, and Ibn al-Rūmī”\textsuperscript{17}.

\textbf{3.1 - The Poetics of Ma‘arrī}

In the introduction to his translation, Nicholson proclaims that Ma‘arrī’s mastery of Arabic language often displays itself in his diction, imagery, and style\textsuperscript{18}. The main feature of Ma‘arrī’s works, says ‘Abd al-Rahman, is a “passionate sincerity … deeply imbued with a feeling for the Arabic language”\textsuperscript{19}. Ma‘arrī’s poetry embraces the sophistication of his time, displaying a tendency for complex linguistic constructions (\textit{badī‘}) and often resulting in figurative language that is deeply rooted in the imaginative and ‘verbal gymnastics’ of Arabic and exceedingly challenging for translation. His prose

\textsuperscript{18} Nicholson, \textit{Studies}, 44.
works, particularly *al-Fusūl wa al-Ghāyāt*, display a considerable use of *saj‘*, an aspect of linguistic sophistication celebrated by many authors at the time. Ma‘arrī’s poetry, according to ‘Abd al-Rahman, displays “love of rhyming, punning, symbolism, allusion and conundrums”20 and is rich in proverbs, atypical vocabulary, and critical views on literature, history, and language.

Likewise, his poems cover a wide range of themes and aspects of life. They represent a microcosm of traditions, and understanding them requires an appreciation of the intercultural spaces they inhabit and the cultural worlds they address. They embody elements of Islamic and Arabic tradition, and do not fail to epitomize, by allusion, elements of Greek, Indian, and Magian traditions. His poetry addresses a multitude of maxims and philosophies, the physical and the metaphysical, the outward and the esoteric; few details escape his poetic insight.

### 3.2 - The Practice of Ma‘arrī: *Luzūm mā lā Yalzam* and *Saqṭ al-Zand*

Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūm mā lā Yalzam*, is a collection of poems composed following a predetermined rhyming scheme that does not fall under the conventions of pre-‘Abbasid Arabic poetry. Ma‘arrī necessitates that composition follows that predetermined unnecessary scheme, hence, the title of the work. The poems in *Luzūm* are untitled and arranged alphabetically, starting with the *hamzah*. In the introduction, Ma‘arrī states that the poems are “meant to glorify God, remind the unconscious, and alert the ignorant,” and that “he sought truth, raising them above lies”21.

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20 Ibid. 338.
21 *Luzūm* I, 5.
In the *Luzūmiyyāt*, says ‘Abd al-Rahman, Ma‘arrī was unprecedented in composing poetry according to the double-consonant rhyme scheme. She claims that his “artifice” is directly related to “his code of conduct in the latter part of his life, when he fettered himself with an abnormal code of conduct of retirement and self-abnegation.”

However, al-Jundi observes that the rhyming scheme Ma‘arrī adopted in *Luzūm* was not unprecedented and had occurred in pre-Islamic poets like al-Shanfara and al-Nābighah, Umayyad poets like Dhū al-Rummah and Ibn Sa‘īd al-Kātib, and even ‘Abbasid poets like al-Buḥturī, and Ibn al-Rūmī.

“In the East, however,” Nicholson notes, “the Saqtu ‘l-Zand has always been more popular than the Luzum, which Mohammedans usually dislike on account of the opinions put forth in it.” If Ma‘arrī defied society and the “time-honoured model” of Arabic poetry, which is the ode, in his *Luzūm*, it is in *Saqt al-Zand* where he “engaged in a defiant struggle…directed by the spark of ambition and accompanied by revelatory flashes of his sensitivity to his personal tragedy.” Equally vigorous is the tone of the *Luzūm* which “thrills, fatigues, fascinates, and repels; (...) it remains unique and immortal because it expresses the personality of an extraordinary man.”

In the *Luzūm*, Ma‘arrī utilizes the Arabic poetic tradition primarily for linguistic, as well as philosophical, purposes to pronounce the theory and practice of his contemporaries. “Were Ma‘arrī a minor poet,” says Nicholson, “the *Luzūm* would be a senseless tour de force.” Being as such, a careful contextualization of Ma‘arrī and his

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27 Ibid, 53.
poetry, that is, realizing the challenging aspects of Maʿarrī’s poetics, is required for any translation if it is to deliver the astuteness and perception of the Arabic originals.
Chapter Four

The Translators at Work

The translation of a poem having any depth ends by being one of two things: Either it is the expression of the translator, virtually a new poem, or it is as it were a photograph, as exact as possible, of one side of the statue.—Ezra Pound (qtd. in Anderson, 5)

Although Ma‘arri’s poetry has been translated to English as early as 1796 by J. D. Carlyle, it was not until Von Kremer published his renderings to German that interest in Ma‘arri’s poetry and prose took a systemic form resulting in translations of most of his notable works, primarily, Risālat al-Ghufrān and the two collections of poetry: Luzūm mā lā Yalzam and Saqṭ al-Zand. What concerns this research is the translation of his poetry. The most notable translations of Ma‘arri’s poetry, or works that feature some selections, in chronological order, are as follows:

1. Specimens of Arabian Poetry¹ (1796) by J. D. Carlyle.
2. Uber die philosophischen Gedichte des Abul’Ala Ma‘arry² (1888) by Von Kremer.
3. The Quatrains of Abu’l-Ala³ (1903) by Ameen Rihani.
6. The Diwan of Abul-Ala⁶ (1908) by Henry Baerlein.

¹ J. D. Carlyle, Specimens of Arabian Poetry (Cambridge: John Burges, 1796).
² Freiherrn Von Kremer, Uber die philosophischen Gedichte des Abul’Ala Ma‘arry (Wein, 1888).

8. *The Luzumiyat of Abu ’l-Ala*\(^8\) (1918) by Ameen Rihani.


Before going into the discussion of the translations, few aspects of translating Arabic literature require mentioning. Translated in the early 18\(^{th}\) Century, *The Arabian Nights* presented the East as a space of fairy tales and alien cultures, a world of fantasies and magic that cultivated the imagination of Coleridge and Byron. The attractive “unfamiliar” in the *Nights* influenced the imagination of the West that “by 1800,” as Ros Ballaster claims, “more than eighty collections in English had appeared in imitation of the Arabian Nights”\(^12\). The reason for this, as Marina Warner contends, is “the huge enthusiasm for literary fairy tales” which “just preceded and overlapped with the reading public’s appetite for Oriental tales, inspired or adapted from the *Arabian Nights*”\(^13\).

Western access to the literatures of the East increased by 1800, as Arberry notes, and provided Western thought with new conceptualizations of meaning, enabling it to further expand its claimed knowledge of the world.

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As far as Arabic poetry is concerned, G. M. Wickens believes that much of the Arabic poetry composed between 800 and 1300 A.D., which is Ma‘arrī’s period, “deals in themes so abstruse” to the extent that “only prose could bear their burden in translation”\(^1\). Wickens contends that “the best-esteemed Arabic style is not flowery and involved, but abrupt, terse, often bafflingly elliptical”\(^2\). According to Michael Sells, a major characteristic of Arabic poetry, which a translation should consider, is that one poem may refer to many aspects of Arabic poetic tradition and literature\(^3\). Poetry, he says, has a “fundamental role” in Islam and is “deeply and broadly cultivated” in the Islamic heritage. The difficulty in translating that poetry comes from figuring out “a way that would render it accessible to the Western reader. Poetry in this world is a living tradition”\(^4\). A ‘good’ translation, then, should stand on its own with minimum notes and commentary so as to ‘breathe’ in the translation as it does in the original. Nevertheless, as Sells notes, a translation is a “bringing over of material from one culture and language to another and, as such, a conscious exercise in interpretation”\(^5\).

That the translation should stand on its own as ‘poetry’ in the target culture means that it has to retain its aesthetic qualities (form) while delivering its content. The emphasis on form is evident in the early theories and essays on translation which maintain that form is a necessity in translating poetry, and that the form into which poetry must be translated is verse. Translating poetry to prose “is the most absurd of all

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\(^2\) Ibid, 25.
\(^4\) Ibid, xi.
\(^5\) Ibid, xi.
undertakings; for those very characters of the original … become unpardonable blemishes”

Since the poems of the *Luzūm* may be considered as philosophical, experimentally sophisticated poetry (on the aesthetic level) and because their rhyme scheme is challenging even for the skilled translator, they ought to have a valid equivalent in English, so a translation of Ma‘arri’s poetry should attend to the content as much as to the poetic form, and rhyme in particular. The translation should also account for the word play and the constructions of *badī‘*, notably, the recurrence of words and sounds.

Although the translation should seek to present Ma‘arri’s thought and poetry to present-day audience and the poems should stand on their own with minimal notes, some Arabic terms, critical to the reader’s understanding of allusions, paradoxes, multiple meanings, word-play, and so on, force the translator to resort to notes and commentaries to deliver the thought or wit of the original. The translator is forced to note or footnote to ensure the delivery of meaning. Therefore, analyzing poetry translation assumes that the critic is no less engaged than the translator himself.

Translating a poem is, in one way or another, a reading, an interpretation, and eventually a creation. Evaluating translation, then, is a similar engagement as it involves a close reading and analysis of the original and the translated texts.

It is held that the success or failure of the translated text, and particularly in poetry translation, is determined by its fulfillment of a set of requirements. Complete ‘faithfulness,’ that is, accuracy on all levels, is generally held to be impossible, and the

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choice of method in dealing with this difficulty is determined by individual justifications.

Assuming that a translation of poetry should correspond to the original content and poetic form, since content and form are inseparable in poetry and constitute its defining features, and that it should qualify as poetry in the target language, the comparison of Rihani’s and Nicholson’s sample translations will be carried out on two levels: the semantic level, corresponding to content, and the aesthetic level, corresponding to form.

4.1 - Ameen Rihani’s The Quatrains of Abu’il-Ala

First published in 1903, Ameen Rihani’s *The Quatrains of Abu’il-Ala* claimed that ‘Umar Khayyām was an imitator of Ma‘arrī. The claim has raised some controversies around the figures of Khayyām and Ma‘arrī and as a result Rihani’s practice in the translation went unexamined. This claim will be addressed later on, as the objective of this chapter is to introduce Rihani’s translation and its many versions, and to present the method by which he translated Ma‘arrī’s poetry.

Rihani’s *The Quatrains* is the first substantial English translation of Ma‘arrī’s poetry. The first two editions of 1903 and 1904\(^\text{20}\) are titled: *The Quatrains of Abu’il-Ala* while the 1918, 1920, 1944, and 1978 editions are titled: *The Luzumiyat of Abu’il-Ala*.

\(^{20}\) The biographers of Rihani, as well as his family and his organization, are apparently unaware of this edition of *The Quatrains* by Grant Richards, London, 1904. In my correspondence with Ameen A. Rihani, Rihani’s nephew and curator of his legacy, he affirmed to me that he “has no idea about it.” Trivial as it is, this makes the number of editions six and not five. For about 108 years, this edition has not been recognized in scholarship on Rihani. This edition appears in Brockelman’s *History of Arabic Literature* in the section on Ma‘arrī. It is featured on Google books, URL: [http://books.google.com.lb/books/about/The_quatrains_of_Ab%CA%BCul_Ala.html?id=TN1dewAACA AJ&redir_esc=y](http://books.google.com.lb/books/about/The_quatrains_of_Ab%CA%BCul_Ala.html?id=TN1dewAACA AJ&redir_esc=y) and on WorldCat, OCLC Number 123002441.
The first three “acknowledged” editions were published in New York, while the last two editions were published in Beirut. The 1904 edition was published in London.

Most of the differences and variations between the editions are between the 1904 and 1918 editions, which are the editions used in this research. The differences are in the titles and the number of quatrains. The 1904 edition features 126 quatrains, reduced to 121 in the 1918 edition; some quatrains were removed, some revised, and some merged together. However, there are two important implications that result from the revised edition of 1918. The first concerns content: in *The Luzumiyat* of 1918 Rihani translates selections from *Luzūm*, which could justify the title, but he also translates form *Saqt al-Zand*, so we have lines from the two distinct works appearing as *Luzūmiyyāt*, while the poems of *Saqt al-Zand* are not “luzūmiyyāt” given the difference in purpose, style and form between both works of Ma‘arrī. The second point concerns form: even though Rihani changed the name from *The Quatrains* to *The Luzumiyat*, the lines remained in the quatrain form, so there is no difference between the quatrain and the “luzūmiyyah” so to speak.

Ameen Rihani’s translations of Ma‘arrī’s poetry, *The Quatrains of Abu‘l-Ala*, is a selection, as the title page shows, from *Luzūm mā lā Yalzam* and *Saqt al-Zand*. The discussion of the following example will allow us to arrive at Rihani’s practice in translating and compiling his selections into quatrains. The lines translated come from an elegy in *Saqt al-Zand*, where Ma‘arrī mourns a ḥanafī cleric. The poem runs for

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نَوَحُ بَاكَ، لَا تَرْتِمْ شَاد
من بسَوت البَشِيرِ فِي كُلْ نَاد
نَتَ عَلَى فَرع غَصَنَها المِيَاد
بَ، فَأَنَّلَتْ الْفَوْرُ مِنْ عُمَّ عَادٌ
حَرَّمَ الْأَمَامَ إِلَّا مِنْ هَذِهِ الأَجْسَاد
حَدِ، هُوَانُ الأَبْوَابِ، والْأَجْسَاد
غَيْرُ مُجَدِّدٍ، فِي مَلْتِي وَاعْقَادِ
وَشَيْبِه صَوْعَتُ النَّمْعِ، أَتَا قَد
أَبْكَتْ تَكْلِمَ الحَماَةَ، أَمْ عَد
صَاحِ، هَذَا قُوُورُنَا تَمَّا الْرَّحِ
خَفْفِي الْحَوْلَةِ مَا أَطْنَ أَبْدِمَ عَل
وَقَبَبَ بَنِيَّا، وَأَنْ قَدَّمَ الْحَمِيّ
sixty four lines, of which Rihani appears to have translated, or rendered in the form of the quatrain, the first ten. Because Rihani’s translation, contrary to Nicholson’s literal translation, does not follow the original word for word or line by line but moves freely omitting at points and expanding at others, a more detailed analysis is required. Rihani’s translation reads:

VII
What boots it, in my creed, that Man should moan
In Sorrow’s Night, or sing in Pleasure’s Dawn?
In vain the doves all coo on yonder branch—
In vain one sings or sobs: behold! he’s gone.

IX
So solemnly the Funeral passes by!
The march of Triumph, under this same sky,
Comes in its trail both vanish into Night:
To me are one, the Sob, the Joyous Cry.

X
Behold, O, friend, our tombs engulf the land,
Our fathers’ corses moulder in the sand;
From Aad’s time where and how many are the graves?
Has not this sea of Death a cliff, a strand?

XI
Thus they have passed, and we shall follow soon
Into an endless Midnight or a Noon;
The Stars, that likewise oft shoot from their spheres,
Fall in the arms of wooting Sun or Moon.

XII
Tread lightly, for a thousand hearts unseen
Might now be beating in this misty green;
Here are the herbs that once were pretty cheeks,
Here the remains of those that once have been.

The first point to highlight about Rihani’s translation, before going into its specificities, is his adoption of the quatrain as the choice of poetic form. The quatrain is

22 Rihani, The Quatrains, 10-14.
a poetic form of Persian poetry not Arabic, and Ma‘arrī is an Arab poet who composed poetry according to the available poetic forms of classical Arabic poetry. The second point follows from the first is his dividing of the poem, which functions as one whole construct of meaning, into many pieces, or quatrains, each standing alone as a separate unit.

As for the content of the poem, Rihani’s translation omits, displaces, expands, and merges lines and ideas from different sections of the poem. For example, Rihani displaces the third line in the original to fit in the first where now the “dove” from the third line coo-coos in the first quatrain. In the third quatrain, we can find Ma‘arrī’s verse, if we drop the second and fourth lines—the quatrain then reads

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Behold, O, friend, our tombs engulf the land,
From Aad's time where and how many
are the graves?
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as a translation of the fourth line in Ma‘arrī’s poem. The “fathers” in the second line of Rihani’s quatrain X is taken from the sixth line of Ma‘arrī’s poem; the rest of the line altogether with the fourth line of the quatrain are an invention added by Rihani and have no reference anywhere in the original poem. However, Rihani’s strategy is not consistent as to say that he made the same choices in all his translation because after this point, the presence of Ma‘arrī is reduced to a merely visible trace of usually two or three words which Rihani amplifies and expands, making the poetry his own, as much as it is Ma‘arrī’s. Quatrain XI, for example, is entirely invented, and in quatrain XII Ma‘arrī is present in the two words: “Tread lightly,” while the rest of quatrain XII, like the previous examples, have no reference or existence in the original, the seven lines of Ma‘arrī become twenty (five quatrains) in Rihani’s translation.
Rihani does not provide any indexes to the original lines in Ma‘arrī’s poetry, and he does not refer to the original copy he used for his translation. Mostly, he refers the reader to another poet or another verse as though making the image or meaning understood through comparison or analogy.

4.2 - R. A. Nicholson’s “The Meditations of Ma‘arrī”

Whether Nicholson’s interest in Ma‘arrī precedes that of Rihani’s is open to postulation, but considering Nicholson’s 1900 published translation of Ma‘arrī’s Risālat al-Ghufrān, it could be said that it did. However, Nicholson’s translations of Ma‘arrī’s poetry first appear in 1907 in his A Literary History of the Arabs embedded in his discussion of Ma‘arrī in a manner similar to how they appear in Von Kremer’s 1888 German study of Ma‘arrī. However, it was not until 1921 that Nicholson produced a substantial translation of Ma‘arrī’s poetry in his Studies in Islamic Poetry along with a brief overview of early Persian poetry. Nicholson’s Translation of Eastern Poetry and Prose also has a section on Ma‘arrī in which he includes some of the extracts translated earlier in Studies.

While his Literary History features 16 extracts merely for emphasizing the point discussed, his Studies features 332 selections which he arranged under four general headings: “Life and Death,” “Human Society,” “Asceticism,” and “Philosophy and Religion.” This arrangement of Ma‘arrī’s poetry, he claims, will allow the reader “to judge it as a whole more fairly than from the extracts published by Von Kremer, which are not so numerous or representative as [his]”

23 Nicholson, Studies, 58.
originals of the translated Arabic lines. His *Translations* features 38 extracts selected from his *Studies*.

The title Nicholson gives for his section on Ma‘arrī in *Studies* is “The Meditations of Ma‘arrī.” The selections are titled numerically according to their arrangement under the headings described above. Most of the extracts in *Literary History* and all those in *Translations* are found in *Studies*, with subtle changes, mostly in word order. All of Nicholson’s translations in *Studies* come from Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūm* and he only refers to lines from *Saqt* in the footnotes, when a similar idea occurs in the latter. What is worthy to note, before examining a sample translation, is that Nicholson’s translations, unlike Rihani’s, are scholarly works with commentary, notes, and footnotes, and they differ in their literary purpose and value. While Rihani’s translation can be considered as a “work” of literature, Nicholson’s cannot; a point discussed later in the chapter.

Because Nicholson’s translation is literal, contrary to Rihani’s paraphrastic rendering, the sample translation analyzed should be of considerable length to allow an understanding of his method. The selected poem[^24], numbered [16] in *Luzūm* and (24) in *Studies*, will not be quoted here in its entirety and analyzed line by line, as in Rihani’s analysis, rather, a general overview of the original will be provided, followed by the commentary on the translation.

Ma‘arrī’s poem opens with the claim that wisdom is absent: “فقدت في أياكم العلماء” and that people are swarmed by darkness and illusions of truth. No one understands the wisdom of the creator (الملك) to whom everything belongs, and all tales and theories made by the fools (الغواة) and the ancients (القدماء) are either ignorant or falsified (افترتها). The poem establishes the superiority of the creator by presenting examples from the

world and showing how they belong to Him. It starts with elements from nature: water (الماء), earth (الارض), soil (النبط), then from universe: sky (السماء), full moon (القمر الكلبي), crescent moon (القمر الصغير), sun (الشمس), stars (النجوم). It proceeds then to humans (الخلق) and human souls and instincts (انفسنا), then to animals (الحيوان) and plants (النبات), then to lifeless matter (الشيء غير النبات). Once enough examples have been provided, the poem addresses the falsification and ill manners that have befallen people who have no sympathy but rudeness and ill hearts: "وغضبنا من قول زايم حق، \\ أتنا، في أصولنا، لزماء" and as a result the world has become confused by our actions (عالم حائر). The poem concludes that all things in the world, except mankind, even spring (الاربع) and desert (البيضاء), recognize the importance of giving and admit their belonging to the creator who is all-giving (شهدت بالملك). In the last line, Ma’arrî wonders how those who are blessed, refrain from giving, and He to whom everything belongs, never refrains. The theme, then, is giving and charity. The poet’s argument is addressed to those who, despite their ignorance, fragility and insignificance compared to the world and to the creator, refrain from giving and have no sympathy towards those who are in need. The original poem runs for forty two lines. However, Nicholson translated the first eighteen which serve only to introduce the theme and constitute the grounds for the poet’s argument, thereby disrupting the unity of the poem as a whole where every part contributes to the meaning.

Even though the translated version opens in a similar manner: “In these thy days the learned are extinct,” and follows line by line, selecting and focusing on the philosophical introduction, dropping the remainder of the poem fails in following the argument to closure. Most of Ma’arrî’s argument and examples are provided in the omitted section and its message is explicit in the last line. What the poem says about the
world and human relationships is only partially delivered in the translation because the sequence of thought leading to its ‘rightful’ conclusion is missing and only the philosophical aspect is presented.

Most of Ma‘arî’s ideas are present in Nicholson’s translation, except for the omitted part, following the original line for line, and at times word for word. However, preserving the word content and word associations is not enough to preserve the meaning. The poem, in its unity or wholeness, is not a poem about life and death, the heading under which Nicholson placed it, but rather a poem about human greed and cruelty in which Ma‘arî defines himself against a strongly ignorant, dim-witted, and ill-hearted society; it fits better under the heading “Human Society”.

4.3 - Comparative Analysis of the Translations

The different methods and approaches used by Rihani and Nicholson foretell that this difference will be reflected in the resulting translations, but often, both translations display similarity, and both strategies seem to intersect at some junctures in the original text. To explain the similarities and differences, the comparison will account for all of Rihani’s and Nicholson’s works that feature translations of Ma‘arî’s poetry, and these are: *The Quatrains* of 1904 and *The Luzumiyyat* of 1918 for Rihani (the two prominent editions of Rihani’s translation), and for Nicholson, *his Studies* and *Literary History*. Nicholson’s later *Translations of Eastern Poetry and Prose* also features translations of Ma‘arî’s poetry, but those are culled from his earlier *Studies* and they read the same.

Given Rihani’s intuitive and paraphrastic translational practice and the literal text-oriented practice of Nicholson, both translations display considerable differences. Little
can be said regarding Nicholson’s delivery of the original lines vis-à-vis Rihani’s interpretive approach, which differs in its word choice, word-associations, and its working out of, rather than into, the text to offer paraphrases or renderings of the original lines. The method or strategy followed by each of the translators has been outlined earlier. However, a parallel display of some key lines, or quatrains, from both translations would help illustrate the point. Because it is literal, Nicholson’s translation displays minimal interpretation on his part, and results in fewer points which are discussed wherever they occur. (Words and lines in italics are for emphasis)

RIHANI
I wish to stand, like Adam, at one end
Of this long line, which I shall not extend;
Tho’ Omar yawns as Khalid does, I can
Not be infected by the Yawn, my friend.25

NICHOLSON
The cord of generation stretched unbroken between
Adam and me, but no b was attached to my l
When Khalid yawned, 'Amr yawned because of infection, but I was not infected by their yawning.26

It is clear that Rihani’s interpretation of “no b was attached to my l” in the context of Adam’s line of generations is the break in the line which Ma‘arrī “shall not extend”. The “my friend” in Rihani’s quatrain is an addition, merely to follow the rhyme, that does not occur in the original.

RIHANI
Awake, awake, thou pious dupes, awake!
And see how all the creeds and cults do shake:
These are the jades the wily ancients rode

NICHOLSON
O fools, awake! The rites ye sacred hold
Are but a cheat contrived by men of old, Who lusted after wealth and gained their lust

25 Rihani, The Quatrains, 101, XCIX; The Luzumiyat, 85, CV: the quatrain reads:
Now, at this end of Adam’s line I stand
Holding my father’s life-curse in my hand
Doing no one the wrong he did me:—
Would that his mother were barren as the sand!
Rihani incorporates in this revision of the quatrain a line that Ma‘rrī wished to be written on his grave; the 3rd line.

26 Nicholson, Studies, 140, (204); Luzūm I, 27, [1]:
مويلاً، ولم يوصل بلمغي بأي كابع
كَثَّارمُب، دَخَالَاءٌ، غَيْبٌ أَيْدَىٰ، فَمَا أَنْثَيَ التَّفْوَاءٰ
Upon the track of Life, to *win their stake*.\(^{27}\) And died in baseness and their law is dust.\(^{28}\)

The different choice of words is clear in both translations. What is noteworthy here is that the imperative “Awake” appears twice in the original, while it appears once in Nicholson, and three times in Rihani. The emphatic repetition in Rihani is stronger and closer to the effect of the original lines, but his other word choices and associations are weaker than those of Nicholson, which are more accurate and seem to be the correct English equivalents of the Arabic words.

Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 50, XLVIII, this quatrain does not appear in later editions.

Nicholson, *Studies*, 173, (249); *Luzûm I*, 40, [22]:

\[\text{أفِ١مــٛا أفِ١مــٛا ٠ا غُــٛاج}!\]

\[\text{فبّٔا دِ٠أَرُىُُ َِىشٌ ِٓ اٌـــمذِــاء} \]

\[\text{أسادٚ تٙا جَّْغَ اٌذُطاَِ فؤدسَوٛا، ٚتادٚا ِٚاذد عًَّٕح اٌٍُّئِاء} \]

Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 52, L, this quatrain is reduced to two lines in *The Luzumiyyat*, 68, LXXII:

**Come up with me, O Brother, to the heights**

**Where Reason is the prophet and the guide.**

Nicholson, *Studies*, 144, (209); *Luzûm I*, 209, [433]:

\[\text{جاءت أحاديثٞ، إن صحبت، فإن لها} \]

\[\text{شأنًا، ولكن فيها صعف استد} \]

**فشاور العقل، واترك عيزه هدراً، فاعطل خير مشير**

**منفعة النادي.**

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\(^{27}\) Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 50, XLVIII, this quatrain does not appear in later editions.

\(^{28}\) Nicholson, *Studies*, 173, (249); *Luzûm I*, 40, [22]:

\[\text{أفِ١مــٛا أفِ١مــٛا ٠ا غُــٛاج}!\]

\[\text{فبّٔا} \]

\[\text{دِ٠أَرُىُُ َِىشٌ ِٓ اٌـــمذِــاء} \]

\[\text{أسادٚ تٙا جَّْغَ اٌذُطاَِ فؤدسَوٛا، ٚتادٚا ِٚاذد عًَّٕح اٌٍُّئِاء} \]

\(^{29}\) Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 52, L, this quatrain is reduced to two lines in *The Luzumiyyat*, 68, LXXII:

**Come up with me, O Brother, to the heights**

**Where Reason is the prophet and the guide.**

\(^{30}\) Nicholson, *Studies*, 144, (209); *Luzûm I*, 209, [433]:

\[\text{جاءت أحاديثٞ، إن صحبت، فإن لها} \]

\[\text{شأنًا، ولكن فيها صعف استد} \]

**فشاور العقل، واترك عيزه هدراً، فاعطل خير مشير**

**منفعة النادي.**
RIHANI
Another prophet will, they say, soon rise;
*But will he profit by his tricks, likewise?*
  *My prophet is my reason, aye, myself-
From me to me there is no room for lies.*

NICHOLSON
But some hope an *Imam* with voice prophetic
Will rise amidst the silent ranks agaze.
An idle thought! *There’s no Imam but Reason*
To point the morning and the evening ways.

The original lines read “Imam,” as in Nicholson, but Rihani decides on “Prophet”. At
some places, Ma‘arrī does refer to reason as “Prophet,” so it seems that Rihani adopts
the coinage and employs it in this quatrain. Furthermore, Rihani’s second line is a
complete insertion which raises the question: does Ma‘arrī believe that prophets are
tricksters? Even with his radical way of thinking, Ma‘arrī does not go so far to make
such a statement. At other occasions, Rihani makes a line, which would otherwise be
dull and straightforward as in Nicholson’s translation, qualify as a line of certain poetic
resonance, such as:

RIHANI
*Thou art the creature of thy Present Age,*
*Thy Past is an obliterated Page;*
The rest that follows may not see thee more,
*Make best of what is worst and do not rage.*

NICHOLSON
*I live in the present: the past I have forgotten,*
and I
*feel no savour of what shall come.*

Even though Rihani expands and adds his interpretation into the quatrain, nevertheless,
it reads as poetry and displays the qualities of poetic composition more than Nicholson’s
translation.

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31 Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 57, LV, this quatrain does not appear in later editions.
32 Nicholson, *Studies*, 102, (109); *Luzūm I*, 40, [24]:

يرجى الناس أن يقوم إمام متالياً بالمبناة، في الكتابة الخسراء
كتاب القرآن، لا إمام سوى الله عقل، مشيرًا في صحة والمساء

33 Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 123, CXXI, in *The Luzumiyat*, 91, CXVIII, this quatrain reads:
   For this I say, Be watchful of the Cage
   Of chance; it opens alike to fool and sage’
   Spy on the moment, for to-morrow’ll be,
   Like yesterday, an obliterated page.
   This quatrain is discussed later in detail.
34 Nicholson, *Studies*, 145, (212); *Luzūm II*, 235, [1304]:

غدوت ابن وقتي، ما تقصني نسيته، وما هو أتى لا أجنِّه طمعاً
At times, Rihani conveys the same idea of the original by presenting a more obvious paraphrase which is familiar to the reader’s understanding than the rather less obvious and complex idea of the original. Doing so, he is working out of, rather than into, the original idea and digressing from its original expression. For example, the following comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rihani</th>
<th>Nicholson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And he who drinks to-day in a golden bowl</td>
<td>If any be not waylaid by calamities in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May drink to-morrow in a wooden pot.</td>
<td>night,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some ill hap of Time is sure to meet him at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>morningtide.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rihani presents the idea of the ebb and flow of fate in a simpler and more efficient manner, even though paraphrased, than the three-line and slow moving translation of Nicholson.

Despite their obviously distinct methods, Rihani’s and Nicholson’s translations seem to meet at some instances, displaying a degree of similarity in their word choice and adherence to the lines of the original. The most notable quatrains are the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rihani</th>
<th>Nicholson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O, when will Fate come forth with his decree,</td>
<td>Oh, when shall Time cease the power of Allah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That I may clasp the cool clay and be free?</td>
<td>is over all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Soul and Body, wedded for awhile,</td>
<td>And we be at rest in earth, hushed everlastingly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are sick and would that separation be.</td>
<td>This body and soul have housed together a period,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
<pre><code>                                          | And ever my soul thereby was anguished, her     |
                                          | brightness dimmed.                             |
</code></pre>

35 Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 48, XLVI; *The Luzumiyat*, 66, LXVIII.
36 Nicholson, *Studies*, 60, (3); Luzūm I, 157, [292]; ومن ثم نَلْبِيَهُ الخُلْوَاتُ، فِئَتُهُ صَيْحَةً
37 Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 81, LXXIX, in *The Luzumiyat*, 79, XCIV, the quatrain reads: But I was not. Oh! That the Fates decree
That I now cast aside this clay of me;
My soul and body wedded for a while
Are sick and would that separation be.
38 Nicholson, *Studies*, 71, (35); Luzūm I, 30, [5];
In this case, the translations are relatively similar that each seems to be a paraphrase of
the other. Rihani’s quatrain does not bring in much interpretation on his part, and the
resulting expression of the idea is similar, on the semantic level, to that of Nicholson’s
literal translation and, subsequently, to Ma‘arrī’s original lines.

Occasionally, both translations are similar to a great extent where the differences
are minor, or trivial, as to the overall presentation of the original, as in the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RIHANI</th>
<th>NICHOLSON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I laugh, but in my laughter-cup I pour</td>
<td>We laugh, but inept is our laughter,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tears of scorn and melancholy sore,</td>
<td>We should weep, and weep sore,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I who am shattered by the hand of Doubt</td>
<td>Who are shattered like glass and thereafter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like glass to be remoulded nevermore.</td>
<td>Remoulded no more.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, Rihani does not miss on including the doer of the action of shattering (rayb al-
 zamān) which Nicholson ignores, thus, presenting the idea of the last line in the passive
voice.

By 1918, when Rihani published his Luzumiyat, Nicholson had not yet published
his wide ranging and substantial translation of Ma‘arrī in his Studies, but had translated
some lines from Ma‘arrī’s poetry in 1907, in his A Literary History of the Arabs. The
noteworthy observation is that in his 1918 Luzumiyat, Rihani refers to Nicholson’s
Literary History and quotes some of his introduction on Ma‘arrī. Furthermore, Rihani’s
Luzumiyat features new quatrains that do not appear in the 1903 or 1904 editions of The

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39 Rihani, The Luzumiyat, 60, LVI, in The Quatrains, 35, XXXIII, it reads:
I laugh and lo! my shafts of scorn doth leap
On Adam’s sons, who all by right should weep;
Doubt crushes us like glass, and even the hope
Of restoration lost is in the heap.

40 Nicholson, Studies, 186, (288); Luzūm II, 126, [1033]:
وَقَدْ كَانَ الْكُلُّ مَنْ سَفَاهَةٌ
مُّحَلْتُهَا، وَكَانَ الْحَلَكُ مَنْ سَفَاهَةٌ
سُفَاهُةٌ، وَكَانَ الْحَلَكُ مَنْ سَفَاهَةٌ
مُّحَلْتُهَا، وَكَانَ الْحَلَكُ مَنْ سَفَاهَةٌ

Quatrains, and which are common with Literary History. The following two comparisons highlight and offer further clues to Rihani’s method which, at times, tends to expand emphatically, and at times to summarize or play down the original, marking it for key terms and ideas and centering the quatrain on those key marks.

RIHANI
And though around the Temple they should run
Full seventy times and seven, and in the sun
Of mad devotion drool, their prayers are still
Like their desires of feasting-fancies spun.

NICHOLSON
Praise God and pray,
Walk seventy times, not seven, the Temple round—
And impious remain!
Devout is he alone who, when he may
Feast his desires, is found
With courage to abstain.

It is clear that the focal point in Rihani’s quatrain is ‘impiety,’ so the “Devout” does not appear in his quatrain, as it does in Nicholson’s. Devoutness is implied by free association in the interpretation of the reader.

RIHANI
Ay! Thus thy children, though they sovereigns be,
When truth upon them dawns, will turn on thee,
Who cast them into life’s dark labyrinth
Where even old Izrail can not see.

NICHOLSON
Amends are richly due from sire to son:
That eminence estranges them the more
From thee, and causes them to wax in hate,
Beholding one who cast them into Life’s
Dark labyrinth whence no wit can extricate.

In this example, Rihani’s translation is selective and focused on the idea of fathers bringing children into life. What is interesting in this example is the striking similarity between Rihani’s 3rd line and Nicholson’s 3rd and fourth lines: both read the same exact

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41 The similarity between Rihani’s The Luzumiyat and Nicholson’s Literary History is discussed in detail in the following chapter.
42 Rihani, The Luzumiyat, 68, LXXI.
43 Nicholson, Literary History, 319; Nicholson, Studies, 190, (298); Luzūm II, 139, [1070]:
44 Rihani, The Luzumiyat, 85, CVI.
45 Nicholson, Literary History, 317; Nicholson, Studies, 140, (203); Luzūm I, 28, [1]:

words: “cast them into this life’s dark labyrinth”. Since this quatrain does not appear in the 1904 edition of *The Quatrains* and appears only later, in the 1918 edition of *The Luzumiyat* in which Rihani quotes quite enthusiastically from Nicholson’s *Literary History*, it is very likely that Rihani made use of Nicholson’s *Literary History*, and had it as a source, in producing his own renderings of Ma‘arrī.\(^{46}\)

### 4.4 - Strengths and Weaknesses of the Translations

Most of the weaknesses of Rihani’s translation result from his method in *The Luzumiyat* of 1918. At more than one place, his translation has produced images and quatrains that can hardly be identified in the original. An example would be the following:

> —From the height
> Of reason I can see nor fire nor light
> That feeds not on the darknesses;\(^{47}\)

How would fire and light feed on the “darknesses” simultaneously? Rihani’s double negation in “nor” and “not” does not bring the image closer; it further complicates the meaning so that the whole quatrain suffers from the negation that cripples the apprehension of the metaphor.

There are also evident discrepancies among the editions regarding the same quatrain. On most occasions, the discrepancies result from Rihani’s insertion of words which are alien to the original lines, and his over interpretation while revising the quatrains of *The Luzumiyat* of 1918. The revision of some quatrains results in a

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\(^{46}\) This and other important propositions on Rihani’s possible sources are discussed in detail in the following chapter.

\(^{47}\) Rihani, *The Luzumiyat*, 44, XXIII. This quatrain does not appear in *The Quatrains* of 1903 and 1904. These lines have no equivalents in the originals, and the particulars of their obscurity, together with the preceding lines, are discussed in detail in the following chapter.
complete reversal of the idea, and a quatrain appears to produce its direct anti-
quatrains—an example would be:

**The Quatrains of 1904**

To all humanity, O consecrate
Thy heart, and shun the *thousand* Sects that prate
About the things they little know about
*Let all receive thy pity, love, or hate.*

**The Luzumiyat of 1918**

To humankind, O Brother, consecrate
Thy heart, and shun the *hundred* sects that prate
About the things they little know about—
*Let all receive thy pity, not thy hate.*

Which Nicholson translates as:

Falsehood hath so corrupted all the world,
Ne’er deal as true friends they whom sects divide;
But were not hate Man’s natural element,
Churches and mosques had risen side by side.

In the 1918 edition, the “hundred” is changed to a “thousand,” and we have a reversal, so to say, in the wisdom of the quatrain; in the 1904 edition, “hate” is an option, while in the 1918 version of the quatrain it is not: “Let all receive thy pity not thy hate”.

Most importantly, however, there are those quatrains that seem to be foreign to Ma‘arri’s poetry, thus, questioning the integrity of the translation rather than praising its originality. Two quatrains in particular display such foreignness, and these are:

If prayers produce among us this rich crop
Of vice, abandon prayers and wed the cup;
Drink, whilst thou art of this Mortality,
When dead thou mayst not ever taste a drop

and

Now, mosques and churches—even a Kaaba Stone,
Corans and Bibles—even a martyr’s bone,—

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48 Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 43, XLI.
49 Rihani, *The Luzumiyat*, 64, LXIV.
50 Nicholson, *Studies*, 195, (305); *Luzūm II*, 76, [910]:

العين أهلُك فوق الأرض ساكنها،
فما تصانف في أبناءها الشتى
لولا عداوة أصل في طيباتهم.

51 Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 1904, 49, XLVII. This Quatrain does not appear in later editions, and is discussed in detail in the following chapter.
All these and more my heart can tolerate,  
For my religion’s love, and love alone.\(^{52}\)

The uncertainty surrounding these quatrains is focused on the last lines in each quatrain. Does Ma‘arrī really say “wed the cup” and “Drink”? Does he go as far as to declare: “my religion’s love, and love alone”? Nowhere in Ma‘arrī do we hear or read such declarations and statements; the foreignness of these quatrains to Ma‘arrī’s poetry and thought constitutes for a major weakness.

Rihani’s strategy and approach to the translation have also produced some successful renderings like the opening\(^{53}\) quatrains in the 1904 edition which he translates from a poem in \textit{Saqt al-Zand}. The quatrains run as follows:

\begin{quotation}
Behold the Night, lest vauntingly we say,  
“He fell a-bleeding, ‘neath the sword of Day,”

Again recharges with his starry host,  
While all the fiery Suns in ambush lay.

O, Night, to me thou art as bright, as fair  
As Dawn or Twilight, with their golden hair;  
How oft, when young, we lurked beneath thy wing,  
And Jupiter, with bated breath, would stare!

Our eyes, all heedless of sweet Sleep’s behest:  
Scanned in God’s book of Stars the sonnet best,  
The Pleiads ah, the Moon from them departs;  
She throws a kiss and hastens toward the west.

But soon my Night, this winsome Ethiop Queen,  
Who passes by be-jewelled, calm, serene,  
Will wax old and with Saffron deeply dye  
Her tresses, lest the ash of age be seen.\(^{54}\)
\end{quotation}

\(^{52}\) Rihani, \textit{The Luzumiyat}, 63, LXII.  
\(^{53}\) The opening quatrains in the 1918 and later editions are different.  
\(^{54}\) Rihani, \textit{The Quatrains}, 3-6, I, II, III, IV; \textit{Saqt}, 94.
Rihani’s method involves large extent of freedom in rearranging the lines of the original, and freely associating lines, words, and images. In this example, the 1st quatrain is a rendering of lines 12 and 15 in the original, which present the image of the Canopus star (suhayl) which is supposedly being slaughtered by the day, that is, its light is dimming as dawn progresses into morning. The 2nd quatrain comes from lines 3 and 4, in which the poet addresses the night and remembers the good times he had in his youth. The 3rd quatrain is rendered from lines 8 and 9, in which the poet is sleepless and watching the stars farewell the moon; the 4th quatrain comes from lines 7 and 17, in which the poet compares his night to a bejeweled Ethiopian bride who is getting old, as morning approaches, and who dyes her hair with saffron, that is, the yellow and crimson colors of the horizon at dawn, as a metaphor for the parting of night and the coming of morning.

This example is one of Rihani’s successful translations because it follows the original words and word associations, even though changing the progress of lines in the original. However, one would find some difficulty in understanding the lines:

The Pleiads ah, the Moon from them departs;  
She throws a kiss and hastens toward the west

because they refer to the once-a-year alignment of the Pleiads (al-Thurayyā) and the moon in Aries after which the moon seems to be moving to the west. The alignment and the subsequent departing are presented by Ma‘arrī as an intimate hugging before the ordained long absence. Nevertheless, Rihani presents the original lines as eloquently and successfully as could be, compared to his other quatrains. In The Luzumiyat of 1918 and later editions, however, these are revised and reduced to two quatrains only:

Come, let us with the naked Night now rest  
And read in Allah’s Book the sonnet best:  
The Pleiads—ah, the Moon from them departs,—
She draws her veil and hastens toward the west.

The Pleiads follow; and our Ethiop Queen
Will soon unveil, that her night-soil be seen,
   And steep her tresses in the saffron dye
Of dawn, and vanish in the morning sheen.⁵⁵

Rihani could have noted, or footnoted, a reference to such astronomical phenomenon, but a translation, as noted earlier, must stand on its own as ‘poetry’ with minimal digressions and commentaries; which Rihani’s translation achieves quite efficiently—adding to the strength of Rihani’s successful renderings.

The revision, removal, and addition of quatrains in *The Luzumiyat* of 1918 have resulted in more interpretations, more digressions, and obscure lines and quatrains. More than often, *The Quatrains* of 1904 seem to be far more successful in rendering Ma‘arri’s poetry than the later editions; the quatrains discussed here are only one example.

When it comes to highlighting the weak and strong points in Nicholson’s translations, few points can be raised due to the minimal interpretive effort on the part of Nicholson and the literal, text-oriented nature of his translation. However, being literal is a point of weakness and a point of strength at the same time. On the weak side, literal translations allow minimum interference on the part of the translator which often results in lines that are monotonous, “insipid, dull, and at times even ridiculous,” as Rihani observes.⁵⁶ To avoid dullness and ridicule, a literal translation would then require extensive commentaries, notes, and footnotes, which is typical of Nicholson’s *Studies* considering its scholarly purpose compared to Rihani’s poem whose purpose is to stand as a literary work and claims to have a literary “value”.

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⁵⁵ Rihani, *The Luzumiyat*, 35-36, VI and V.
⁵⁶ Rihani, *The Luzumiyat*, 16.
Additionally, and for the purpose of creating rhyme, Nicholson has taken some liberties regarding word choice, content, and form, and has given us translations like:

- In the casket of the Hours
- Events deep-hid
- Wait on their guardian Powers
- To raise the lid.

- And the Maker infinite,
- Whose poem is Time,
- He need not weave in it
- A forced stale rhyme.

- The Nights pass so,
- Voices dumb,
- Without sense quick or slow
- Of what shall come.\(^\text{57}\)

Perhaps because these are the opening lines to his translation, Nicholson aims at presenting an eloquent opening by dropping the definitive literal translation and employing his own interpretation. Instead of translating: “as if time is a poem, whose poet needs not to force a rhyme into,” as he did in most of his translations, he interprets the poet of time as the “Maker infinite” or God, and bestows nights with silence, “Voices dumb.”

However, literal translation is often praised for its adherence to the original, presenting its words and ideas as much as possible in their original associations. When such literal approach meets with rhyme “naturally,” that is, in the target language as in the source language, the resulting translation is one that has achieved its ideal purpose: conveying the same poetic excellence, and to the same effect, of the original, and doing

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\(^{57}\) Nicholson, *Studies*, 59, (1); Luzûm I, 42, [27]: الساعَة آتِيَةُ الحوادِثَ ما خَوَتَ،
لم يَبْدَ إلا بَعْدَ كَشْفُ غَطَائِها
وَكَانَهَا هَذَا الزَّمَانُ قَصِيَّةً،
ما اضْطَرَّ شَاعِرُهَا إِلَى إِبْطَنَّهَا
so without resorting to commentaries and notes. At more than one place, Nicholson achieves this success as when he translates:

Age after age entirely dark hath run
Nor any dawn led up a rising sun.
Things change and pass, the world unshaken stands
With all its western, all its eastern lands.\(^{58}\)

From this evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each translation, and the earlier comparison between the selected lines and quatrains, it can be argued that where Rihani’s translation fails in conveying the form, and to some extent the meaning, of Ma‘arrî’s original poetry, Nicholson succeeds, and where Rihani’s poem succeeds in standing on its own as a work of literary value, Nicholson’s “Meditations” fail.

4.5 - Remarks

Rihani does offer a kind of contextualization of Ma‘arrî’s poetry. In his notes, he offers some interesting comparisons of Ma‘arrî’s poetry with those of Khayyâm, Tennyson, Milton, Shakespeare, and Lowell. These comparisons often come at the level of the word or quote and they seem as though they are forced into the comparison by Rihani; the contrasts between Ma‘arrî’s world and that of Shakespeare, for example, are apparent. The comparisons however, bring Ma‘arrî’s poetry into the universal sphere, and a western reader would identify better with a poet who shares the thought and values, and perhaps the philosophy, of English poets like Milton, Tennyson, and Shakespeare. Perhaps also, this would bring Ma‘arrî into the universal scene to be on par with Milton and Shakespeare. Readers of Rihani’s translation do not need a contextual

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كذّبت الأشياء، والملك ثابتٌ، وتغيّرت الأشياء، والمملك ثابتٌ.
analysis that explains Ma‘arri’s poetry in his culture, they do not need to understand a
specific reference to the Qur’an or a specific allusion to some pre-Islamic myth or verse
of poetry, and most importantly, they want to be spared the complications, and the
significance, of, say, the rhyme scheme of the poems in Luzūm. What they want, Rihani
figures, is a poet who speaks in the Fitzgeraldian quatrain, which Rihani offers
generously.

Because of its scholarly outlook, Nicholson’s translation is meant to be explanatory.
In his introduction, comments, and notes to the translated lines, Nicholson provides a
contextualization of Ma‘arri and his poetry. His discussions of classical Arabic poetry,
the metres and their equivalents in English, the relationship between religion and
philosophy in Ma‘arri’s poetry, he provides the background necessary for reading,
interpreting, and understanding Ma‘arri’s philosophy as delivered in his poetry.
Ma‘arri’s persona and philosophy are presented to the reader in “meditations” on
multiple dimensions and of varied breadth. In other words, the reader is brought into
Ma‘arri’s world, and with the literal translation, the reader is better equipped to
understand such descriptions of Ma‘arri as “Lucretius of Islam” or “Voltaire of the
East”59, to evaluate Ma‘arri’s status among other known Arab poets, and to sort out the
Rihanian “philosopher-poet of Syria” from the Fitzgeraldian “astrologer-poet of Persia”.

With Nicholson’s contextualization, however, the reader is better equipped to figure out
why a poet like Ma‘arri would be selected by a Western translator for a ‘study in Islamic
poetry’. In a word, Rihani’s translation is his expression, ‘a new poem,’ whereas
Nicholson’s translation is a ‘photograph’ of Ma‘arri’s poetry.

59 Rihani, The Luzumiyyat, 7.
Chapter Five

The Vogue of Khayyām in *The Quatrains of Abu’l-Ala*

*Mimēsis* is innate in human beings from childhood, and pleasure in instances of *mimēsis* is equally general.—Aristotle, *Poetics*.

The present chapter does not propose to analyze Ma‘arrī’s poetry, as much as to carefully examine, in light of vigilant research, the poem of Ameen Rihani, which was founded upon, and inspired its title from, the quatrains of Edward Fitzgerald. Since Rihani’s poem was published, a controversy had circulated pertaining to Rihani’s claim, in the last paragraph of the preface to the translation, that ‘Umar Khayyām had plagiarized Ma‘arrī. It seems also that this claim was hastily embraced for that it inspired some to further expand the theory into a book¹ within a year of Rihani’s publication. Most of the reviews in support of such claim were based on Rihani’s own notes and comparisons, in which he refers to the similar verses that occur in Khayyām’s quatrains. However, no one was interested in the extent to which Rihani’s translation can be considered as an accurate representation of Ma‘arrī or an acceptable rendering of his poetry. Because it is a translation, one has to make certain first whether it is accurate and representative first, then formulate theories of possible plagiarism. Informed readers could make the required associations and pin down the similarities, but an uninformed English readership can be easily misinformed.

Rihani’s poem, known to English readers as *The Quatrains of Abu’l-Ala* or *Luzumiyyat of Abu’l-Ala*, is, in the fewest words possible, the disclosed outcome of

Rihani’s ample discourse in English studies and, to some extent, Arabic and Persian studies, mostly from English translations. One can isolate many lines and images, even entire quatrains, for which careful research finds no parallel equivalents in the original poems of Maʿarrī—for example, the quatrain:

If prayers produce among us this rich crop  
Of vice, abandon prayers and wed the cup;  
Drink, whilst thou art of this Mortality,  
When dead thou mayst not ever taste a drop.

and the lines:

All these and more my heart can tolerate  
For my religion’s love, and love alone.

and

Lightly, the violets beneath thy feet  
Spring from the mole of some Arabian queen.

Rihani took these and others, as it will be shown, not from Maʿarrī, but from Fitzgerald and other sources. Rihani’s method in translating should be taken into consideration as his quatrains do not follow the original sources, the arrangement of the original poems, or the order of lines in individual poems, rather, they “are culled from the three volumes of [Maʿarrī’s] poems, and they are arranged, as far as possible, in the

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2 Ameen Rihani, *The Quatrains of Abu’l-Ala* (London: Grant Richards, 1904) 140; he refers to E. H. Palmer’s translation of a verse by Zoheir. It could be argued also that Rihani’s Arabic and Persian studies culminated in his later *The Book of Khalid* where he incorporates Arab and Persian mystics like Ibn al-ʿArabī, Ibn al-Fārīḍ, and Jalāluddīn Rūmī, and in the play *Wafā’ al-Zamān* which is centered around Firdawsī. Hereafter, *The Quatrains.*

3 The editions of Maʿarrī’s poetry used are: *Luzūm Mā Lā Yalzam* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2006, 2 Vols.) and *Saqṭ al-Zand* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2008).

4 Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 49, XLVII.

5 Rihani, *The Luzumiyat*, 63, LXII.

6 Ibid, 41, XVIII.

7 The quatrains in his translation are mixed together as one poem so that a line from *Luzūm* appears together with a line from *Saqṭ al-Zand* in the same quatrain, which creates another problem because each work has its definitive form and context and each belongs to a different stage in Maʿarrī’s life.
logical order of their sequence of thought”\textsuperscript{8}. In a word, he was more concerned with the “ruling idea” and the “completion of the general thought,” omitting anything that was “too clannish or grotesque” to avoid “being insipid, dull and at times even ridiculous”\textsuperscript{9}. Thus his translations would sometimes be closer to the original and at times moving away from it. Translating his quatrains in this way, with Fitzgerald’s poem as his model and inspiration, his Arabic studies, and his readings of English poetry, European and American\textsuperscript{10}, are unmistakably recognizable in the lines and quatrains discussed hereafter. That no one attended to this similarity before is surprising, even thought Nicholson had touched upon the subject when he said in the preface to his Studies that “English readers have not yet had this work put before them in a recognisable form: they will see that it is not in the least like the ‘quatrain’ which it has inspired,”\textsuperscript{11} No one went as far as to carefully analyze Rihani’s quatrains to arrive at the source of their inspiration. To establish the grounds for the argument of this research, some biographical and historical accounts of Rihani’s thought and practice are critical.

According to Albert Rihani, Ameen’s brother and chief biographer, Rihani’s first readings in Arabic where: Bahthul-Mataleb, Ibn Khaldoun, Al-Hariri, Ad-Dourar Wal-Ghourar, Tarikh Masr, and At-Tawrat. And in English he read Origin of Species and Descent of Man; (Darwin). Man’s Place in Nature; (Huxley). Data of Ethics; (Spencer). Life of Darwin; (Allen). And Progress and Poverty; (Henry George). And in French: Rayons de l’Aube, (Tolstoy). Louis XIV; (Voltaire). Morceaux Choisis and Extrait; (Hugo). Later he widened his readings to Shakespear [sic]. Thoreou, Emerson, Byron and many others\textsuperscript{12}. (emphasis in the original)

\textsuperscript{8} Rihani, The Quatrains, xviii, The Luzumiyyat, 16.
\textsuperscript{9} Rihani, The Quatrains, xvii, The Luzumiyyat, 16.
\textsuperscript{10} Mostly his readings of Lowell, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Milton to which he refers in his notes.
\textsuperscript{11} Nicholson, Studies, vi.
It is clear from the list that Rihani’s readings covered a wide range of cultures, authors, and themes, and that his readings in English far surpass those in Arabic. The question that lends itself is: did Rihani know Arabic to the same extent he knew English? Or did Rihani have a grasp of Arabic that would allow him to interpret and translate Ma’arrī’s poetry? Rihani, it seems, did not base his translation on manuscripts of Ma’arrī’s original poetry. His translations of Saqt al-Zand, and so his interpretation of the original poetry, are based on a commentary in manuscript form whose image is shown only in his 1903 and 1904 editions and removed from all the other subsequent editions. As for the Luzūm, Rihani cites an edition which was published in Cairo by Azeez Bey Zind in 1891, but he does not refer to it again whether in the notes, the preface, or the notes to preface. Rihani’s understanding of the original Arabic poems, as far as the first two editions of his translation are concerned, depended to a large extent on the biographies of Ma’arrī and the commentaries on his poetry. For his 1918 and later editions, he resorted to works on Ma’arrī, mainly by Nicholson and Margoliouth. Rihani’s relationship with classical Arabic was not one of affection, and he often had to resort to English translations whenever possible.

Rihani was repulsed rather than engrossed by classical Arabic poetry. In one of his letters, he notes that “contemporary Arabic literature is still swathed with classic formulas,” and that “grammarians are just as bad as the priests and the autocracy in

13 The commentary is by Abu al-Faḍl Qāsim b. Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Khawārizmī, which, as the image indicates, is at the Khedivial Library in Cairo, Egypt, MS no. 7268, entitled Dirām al-Saqt Sharḥ Saqt al-Zand.
point of authority.” Rihani also contends that his objective is to introduce “a sort of free verse” into his Arabic writings.\(^{15}\)

For Rihani, growing up in America and reading English literatures of Europe, Arabic language was a problem which he had to overcome by coming back to the “wild mountains of Syria” where he “taught English to the monks and priests, and learned Arabic from them”\(^{16}\). However, his learning of Arabic only repelled Rihani even more, and it seems that introducing free verse into Arabic poetry, which some regard as the greatest achievement of The Pen League,\(^{17}\) was one way for Rihani to dodge the rigorous fetters of classical Arabic poetry. Rihani’s “difficulty in handling [Arabic] is quite conspicuous,” as Nadeem Naimy\(^{18}\) puts it, and his “break from the classical seems not to represent a genuine new development, being in reality more of a necessity for him rather than a deliberate artistic choice”\(^{19}\).

In the preface to his 1904 edition, Rihani notes that he is not aware of any translations of Ma‘arrī to English, French, or German, and maintains that the “philosopher-poet was completely ignored by Oriental scholars”\(^{20}\). Rihani obviously was not aware of Von Kremer’s *Die Philosophische* in 1889, Margoliouth’s *Letters* in 1898, and Nicholson’s *Risālat al-Ghufrān* in 1900. In 1907, Nicholson published his study\(^{21}\) on the literary history of the Arabs, which has a section on Ma‘arrī, his beliefs, and few translations of his poetry. Apparently, this increased Rihani’s interest in

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\(^{15}\) In the preface to *Hutāf al-Awdiya* (Beirut, 1955), 9, Rihani explicitly states that in introducing free verse, he is following the example of Walt Whitman; and in *The Path of Vision* (New York, 1921), 102-103, he proclaims: “Whitman and Emerson and Thoreau are come to pay you a visit, my beloved Syria.”

\(^{16}\) The Minneapolis Journal. (Minneapolis, October 19, 1903), 4.

\(^{17}\) Also known as “Al-Rābīṭah al-Qalamiyyah” or the “School of Mahjar”. Its predominant figures were Ameen Rihani, Kahlil Gibran, and Mikhail Naimy.

\(^{18}\) Nephew of Mikhail Naimy, mentioned in preceding footnote.

\(^{19}\) Naimy, *Lebanese Prophets*, 20.


Maʿarī\textsuperscript{22}, so that in the 1918 edition, now \textit{The Luzumiyat}, he notes that one of his learned friends, a certain Count E. de Mulinen\textsuperscript{23}, has “called his attention” to the above mentioned works. Rihani then revised his 1904 edition, cut down the number of quatrains to 121, and presented the final version of his \textit{Luzumiyat} in the edition of 1918 introducing a considerable number of new quatrains which do not appear in the previous editions, most of which are common with Nicholson’s translations in \textit{Literary History}\textsuperscript{24}.

\textbf{5.1 - Rihani’s Acknowledged Sources}

The historical and contextual account of Rihani and his translation, knowing that he had read and used Fitzgerald’s translations of ʿUmar Khayyām as his notes show, has been essential for the argument of this research. We can, therefore, present a list of his acknowledged material and sources as follows:

I. Milton’s \textit{Il Penseroso}.

II. Shakespeare’s \textit{Romeo and Juliet}.

III. Tennyson’s \textit{In Memoriam A. H. H}.

IV. Lowell’s \textit{The Present Crisis}.

V. Selected quatrains from Fitzgerald’s and Heron-Allen’s translations of ʿUmar Khayyām.

We do also have his “selected” references to ʿUmar Khayyām, but these are to Fitzgerald’s and Heron Allen’s “translations,” not to Khayyām’s original verses. However, when this similarity is examined in light of Maʿarī’s original poems, it

\textsuperscript{22} Rihani affectionately cites and quotes from Nicholson’s \textit{Literary History} in his preface to the 1918 edition.
\textsuperscript{23} Rihani, \textit{The Luzumiyat}, 25.
\textsuperscript{24} Twelve new quatrains, six of which are common with Nicholson: \textit{The Luzumiyat} (1918) 35, 48, 64, 68, 85, 92; \textit{Literary History} (1907) 315, 317, 319, 321, 322.
becomes clear that it is limited to the translations only, which affirms the claim that Rihani had incorporated Fitzgerald’s translation into his own. The similarity in Rihani’s selected notes is trivial compared to that in his unacknowledged, or “borrowed,” paraphrases and whole lines.

In his Quatrains, Rihani notes that he hesitated to use the word “Ethiop” in one of his quatrains25, even though it occurs in the original poem. He notes also that he still used the word based on the fact that Milton and Shakespeare had already used it. What is noteworthy here is that the word “Ethiop” in both Milton and Shakespeare26 is used to create the contrast between bright and dark qualities of their characters, which would allow the heroine, for example, to emerge as bright and beautiful as possible, in contrast to her dark and wicked antagonist.

I. When Milton says:

\begin{verbatim}
Or that starred Ethiop queen that strove
To set her beauty's praise above
The sea nymphs, and their powers offended\textsuperscript{27}.
\end{verbatim}

he alludes to the legend of Cassiopea, wife of the Ethiopian king Cepheus, who boasted about the beauty of her daughter, Andromeda, and thus “offended” the “sea nymphs”. As a result, Andromeda was fed to a sea monster and Cassiopea was changed to a star\textsuperscript{28}. Milton warns, so to say, from false praise, or perhaps, wicked comparisons like those

\begin{footnotes}
\item 25 Rihani, \textit{The Quatrains}, 5, III, and \textit{The Luzumiyat}, 36, VII.
\item 26 In Shakespeare's time, the word “Ethiop” was used to denote wickedness and evil versus good, and more than often, depreciated characters in plays, Shakespeare’s plays in particular, were dark in color. See \textit{Midsummer Night’s Dream}, III, 2: "Away, you Ethiop!" and \textit{Much Ado for Nothing}, V, 4: “I'll hold my mind were she an Ethiope".
\item 28 Ibid, 97.
\end{footnotes}
made by Cassiopea: praising the beauty of her black Ethiopian daughter above that of the goddesses—it denotes the wickedness often associated with the word “Ethiop”.

II. When Shakespeare’s Romeo says:

Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope’s ear;
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows
As yonder lady o’er her fellows shows.  

he uses “Ethiope” to create the contrast with the bright beauty of his heroine. Night in itself is not the ruling idea, rather, the “Beauty” of Juliet who is “Like a rich jewel” and “a snowy dove” among the black “crows”; here again, we have the association of “Ethiop” with depreciation and wickedness, which characterizes most of Shakespeare’s uses of the word. In Ma‘arrī’s original poem, however, he refers to night as an “Ethiop bride” to express a joyful night he once had when young. According to one of his chief commentators, Ma‘arrī refers to night as such because Ethiopians were known for their dance, song and joyful spirits; the night itself is the “bride”. Ma‘arrī’s use of the term is very much different from that of Milton and Shakespeare and thus the references which Rihani makes to both English poets are unwarranted and have no basis.

III. Rihani refers to Tennyson having said:

There is more truth in honest doubt
Believe me, than in all the creeds.  

Tennyson’s original is:

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30 *Saqṭ*, 94.
31 Al-Khawārizmī, *Shurūḥ Saqṭ al-Zand*, Ed. Muṣṭafa al-Saqqā et al. (Cairo: Al-Hay’ah al-Mašriyyah al-‘Āmmah Lil-Kitāb, 1986), 429: Al-Khawārizmī says: “he [Ma‘arrī] refers to that night as an Ethiope bride because she is a black girl, happy and enchanted. Ethiopians, among other peoples, are known for being keen on song, dance, and euphoria.”
Perplext in faith, but pure in deeds,
At last he beat his music out.
There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds. 33

Rihani’s quatrain is

A-fearing whom I trust I gain my end,
But trusting, without fear, I lose, my friend;
Much better is the Doubt that gives me peace,
Than all the Faiths which in hell-fire may end 34.

Two comments on this quatrain are noteworthy. First, Ma‘arrī does not use “Faith” nor implies it; he uses “fear” in contrast 35 with “peace” and not “doubt” in contrast with “faith”. Ma‘arrī refers to doubt as rayb, or one of its derivatives, in some of his poems. 36

Second, Tennyson does not say doubt but rather “honest doubt” and he does not say “all the creeds,” he says “half the creeds”. The reason for being meticulous on these words is that the generalizations made by Rihani in this reference free Ma‘arrī, and also Tennyson, from any moral commitment. Moreover, using his reading of Tennyson to translate Ma‘arrī, Rihani presents a relatively obscure idea of a collective of Faiths ending in “hell-fire”. If “all the Faiths” and “all the creeds,” as Rihani translates and notes, may end in hell, what creeds and what Faiths are left for Ma‘arrī and Tennyson?

Even for a radical pessimist like Ma‘arrī, faith and creed still command reverence.

34 Rihani, The Quatrains, 21, XIX, and The Luzumiyat, 47, XXIX.
35 Ma‘arrī uses fear in contrast with peace at more than one place, for example, Luzūm I, 70, [87]:

36 Luzūm I, 63, [72]:

37 Luzūm I, 70, [89]:

38 Luzūm I, 74, [101]:

and Luzūm I, 69, [85]:

and Luzūm I, 70, [89]:

and Luzūm I, 74, [101]:
IV. Rihani also quotes James Russell Lowell\textsuperscript{37} who said: “Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne,” as a reference to the quatrain:

\begin{quote}
Among us falsehood is proclaimed aloud.
But truth is whispered to the phantom bowed
Of conscience; ay! and Wrong is ever crowned,
While Right and Reason are even denied a shroud\textsuperscript{38}.
\end{quote}

The lines by Lowell are:

\begin{quote}
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own\textsuperscript{39}.
\end{quote}

The line which Rihani cites cannot be taken alone as other lines are required to complete the meaning. The idea of truth being sacrificed and wrong being glorified is further expanded in the following line which shows that this is not as bad as it seems because in its sacrifice, truth is forever remembered and recorded. A literal translation of Ma‘arri’s verse\textsuperscript{40} would be: “Falsehood is naked like a star, without a shroud, and Rights have veiled faces”. It is clear that what Rihani offers is a paraphrastic translation of Lowell’s line. It is not “Right and Reason” which are naked or “denied a shroud,” as in Rihani’s quatrain, rather, it is “Falsehood” that is “naked like a star”. Ma‘arri’s idea is reversed in Rihani’s quatrain, which approximates nearer to Lowell than to Ma‘arri.

V. The acknowledged ‘Khayyāmian’ quatrains to which Rihani refers in his notes do have a “similarity of thought,” but this similarity, as far as the idea is concerned, is not

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 137 and *The Luzumiyat*, 98. It is noteworthy here to mention some discrepancies regarding this note. Even though the verse to which the note refers is present in all the editions, the reference to Lowell by name shows only in the 1944 and 1978 editions, published posthumously, while in the previous editions, it shows as “the American poet, the author of ‘The Crisis’”.
\footnote{Rihani, *The Luzumiyat*, 71, LXXVII.
\footnote{Luzūm I, 271, [581]: “والغَي كَالنَّجم عَريِّا، بَلا سَنِير، وَلِلَّحَقِّ وَحُقُّوُهُ أَيْسَت خَطْرَا.}}}}}
particular to Khayyām and Maʿarrī alone because the ideas in the noted quatrains are not uncommon in philosophies of life. However, the similarity Rihani refers to appears striking to the reader, not because Khayyām and Maʿarrī do share the same idea but because Rihani forces his lines, his words even, to justify such similarity, that is, he creates the similarity. One of the best examples in support of this is the following Rihanian quatrain from the 1904 edition:

Tread lightly, for a thousand hearts unseen
Might now be beating in this misty green;
Here are the herbs that once were pretty cheeks,
Here the remains of those that once have been.

which appears in the 1918 edition as:

Tread lightly, for the mighty that have been
Might now be beating in the dust unseen;
Lightly, the violets beneath thy feet
Spring from the mole of some Arabian queen.

To justify the similarity between Khayyām and Maʿarrī, and to do “justice to both the Persian and the Arab poet,” Rihani refers to two quatrains of Khayyām by Fitzgerald and Heron-Allen to assert that Khayyām expresses the same idea. The quatrains, as they appear in both of the translations of Khayyām, are:

And this delightful Herb whose tender Green
Fledges the River's Lip on which we lean—
Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen.

for Fitzgerald, and for Heron-Allen:

41 Rihani, The Quatrains, 14, XII.
42 Rihani, The Luzumiyyat, 41, XVIII.
43 Rihani, The Luzumiyyat, 94-95. The quatrains by Fitzgerald and Heron-Allen in this research are cited as they appear in their originals; variations in the quatrains quoted by Rihani are indicated where they occur.
Everywhere that there has been a rose or tulip-bed, there has been spilled the crimson blood of a king; every violet shoot that grows from the earth is a mole that was once upon the cheek of a beauty\textsuperscript{45}.

Ma‘arrî’s original line is taken form a poem in \textit{Saqt al-Zand}, a literal translation of which reads: “tread lightly, for I think the soil of this ground is made from none but these bodies”\textsuperscript{46}. Ma‘arrî does not go further to present another metaphor of roses springing from the ashes of the dead. Nowhere in Ma‘arrî’s poetry does this association of violets with dust occur, so where does this image of “violets” springing from “a mole of some Arabian queen,” come from? Following Rihani’s note, the reader will find a striking similarity between Rihani’s quatrain and the Khayyâmian quatrains to which he refers. The reader will find “misty green” and “violets…spring,” in Rihani, “tender green” and “delightful Herb … springs” in Fitzgerald, and “rose or tulip … violet … grows” in Heron-Allen. Since this image does not occur in Ma‘arrî, but occurs in Rihani’s, Fitzgerald’s, and Heron-Allen’s translations, it could be safely said that image in Rihani’s quatrain is inspired by Fitzgerald and Heron-Allen rather than being shared by Ma‘arrî and Khayyâm. A parallel reading of the three translations shows that this image comes primarily from Heron-Allen.

The return to earth and the subsequent decay of bodies in the “dust to dust, ashes to ashes” aphorism is almost universally shared as to the final destination of bodies after death. However, and as far as poets, philosophers, cultures, or even civilizations are concerned, originality of thought rests in the expression of the idea. It is true, based on

\textsuperscript{45} Edward Heron-Allen, \textit{The Ruba’yat of Omar Khayyam}, (London: H. S. Nichols LTD.,1898), 8, no. 43, Rihani’s note has no ‘a’ before beauty, it reads: “cheek of beauty”.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Saqt}, 7:

خفف الوطاء، ما أطل أدم ال
وامض إلا من هذه الأجسام

56
the present translations of Ma‘arrī and Khayyām, that both share the same idea of earth, or soil, being the final destination of the body, or harboring the ashes of those who had passed, but expressing the idea metaphorically as roses springing from the cheeks or “mole of some Arabian queen” or from the “crimson blood of a king” is a point where Ma‘arrī and Khayyām depart and Rihani, Fitzgerald, and Heron-Allen meet. Rihani’s effort to bring Ma‘arrī and Khayyām together is further elaborated when he compares, at more than one place, three quatrains of Ma‘arrī with one quatrain of Khayyām.\(^{47}\)

The similarity in the noted quatrains is less obvious than that in the quatrain discussed above, and the reader has to deliberate his interpretation of the quatrains to arrive at a minor similarity. Without going into a detailed discussion to demonstrate the incomparability of the quatrains, it is enough to say that the similarity is trivial and legitimate only when the quatrains are taken as Rihani intends them to be, and when considering his “translation,” regardless of the possible originals. To take a line of poetry on binaries like sin/forgiveness, wrath/mercy, life/death, or soul/body from a poet and compare it with twelve lines of poetry, on the same subjects, of another poet of the same period and culture, one is most likely to invoke some degree of similarity.

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\(^{47}\) Rihani, *The Luzumiyat*, 96, Rihani compares quatrains XXXVIII, XCIII, and XCIV of his translation to quatrain XLIV in Fitzgerald, which reads:

> Why, if the Soul can fling the Dust aside,
> And naked on the Air of Heaven ride,
> Wer’t not a Shame—wer’t not a Shame for him
> In this clay carcase crippled to abide?

and, *The Luzumiyat*, 97, he compares LVII, LVIII, LIX to quatrain no. 23 in Heron-Allen which reads:

> Khayyam, why mourn thus for thy sins?
> from grieving thus what advantage, more or less, dost thou gain?
> Mercy was never for him who sins not,
> mercy is granted for sins—why then grieve?

and, *The Luzumiyat*, 98, he compares XCIII and XCIV to quatrain no. 157 in Heron-Allen; *The Luzumiyat*, 99, he compares quatrains CXV, CXVI, and CXVII to a stanza in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* which has nothing in common except for his use of the phrase “turned to clay”.

57
5.2 - The Unacknowledged Sources

Knowing that Rihani had Fitzgerald’s *Rubā‘iyyāt* as one of his sources, we can now go into discussing his unacknowledged quatrains whose similarity with Fitzgerald’s quatrains is not one of thought but rather of specific and definite words, and whole lines. Most of the quatrains discussed in this section have no corresponding lines in Ma‘arrī’s original poems, as far as Rihani’s presentation of the lines is concerned. Some lines could be traceable in Ma‘arrī and those are discussed where they occur, but the quatrains in their entirety, the context, and the word/image associations in Rihani’s translation are completely foreign to Ma‘arrī’s original poetry. To achieve the purpose of the current analysis, quatrains from both translators are presented in parallel, emphasizing the similar words and lines in italics; commentary follows.

1. **RIHANI**

   Then *Jannat* or *Juhammad*? From the height
   Of reason I can see nor *fire* nor *light*
   That *feeds* not on the *darknesses*; we *pass*
   From world to world like shadows through the night.  
   
   48 Rihani, *The Luzumiyat*, 44, XXIII. This quatrain does not appear in *The Quatrains* of 1903 and 1904.

   **FITZGERALD**

   *Heav’n* but the Vision of fulfill’d *Desire*,
   And *Hell* the Shadow from a Soul on *fire* Cast on the *Darkness* into which
   Ourselves, So late emerg’d from, shall so soon *expire*.  

   49 Fitzgerald, *Rubā‘iyyāt*, 53, LXVII.

The similarity between these quatrains can be found in Rihani’s use of the transliterated words for Heaven and Hell, creating the same contrast, in Fitzgerald’s quatrain, between desire and fire, light and darkness, imitating the image of Hell feeding on, and casting souls into, darkness, and the image of passing or expiring of ourselves. What is worthy to note here is that at times, Rihani’s inspiration, or imitation, and his faithfulness to the imagery in Fitzgerald’s quatrain has resulted in obscure imagery that one cannot understand within the same quatrain or the preceding or following quatrains. This
quatrain, for instance, presents the image of “fire nor light that feeds not on the
darknesses”. One can understand how fire could feed on darkness, given the context of
Hell, or “Juhannam” in the preceding line, but how can “light” feed on darkness? Even
in Fitzgerald’s quatrain, it is only Hell that is associated with darkness.

2. RIHANI
Hark, in the minarets the muazzens call
The evening hour that in the interval
Of darkness Ahmad might remembered be,—
Remembered of the Darkness be they all.50

FITZGERALD
Alike for those who for To-day prepare
And those that after some To-morrow stare,
A Muezzín from the Tower of Darkness cries,
“Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There”.51

The parallel of the “muazzen” calling from the “Tower of Darkness” or in the “interval
of darkness” is clear. Obviously, Rihani’s “muazzen” would be calling for prayer from
the “minarets” of mosques, so he cannot associate the minaret with “Tower of
darkness,” as in Fitzgerald’s quatrain, instead, he interprets darkness as referring to
night.

3. RIHANI
I give and go, grim Destiny,—I play
Upon this checker-board of Night and Day
The dark game with thee, but the day will come
When one will turn the Board the other way.52

FITZGERALD
But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days;
Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.53

The parallel here is obvious, a whole line, with the exception of the singular form of the
words “Night” and “Day”. Rihani also adopts the same rhyme. The line, it seems, is so
appealing to allow a paraphrase, and using it obliged the whole quatrain to adhere to the
rhyme of “day”. This use of Fitzgerald’s quatrain and obliging the rhyme, together with

50 Rihani, The Luzumiyat, 34, III. This quatrain does not appear in The Quatrains of 1903 and 1904.
51 Fitzgerald, Rubáiyát, 34, XXIV.
52 Rihani, The Luzumiyat, 76, LXXXVIII. This quatrain does not appear in The Quatrains of 1903 and 1904.
53 Fitzgerald, Rubáiyát, 55, LXIX.
the content of the copied line, on the whole quatrain resulted, again, in obscurity. In Fitzgerald’s quatrain, the one playing the game is something to which everything is but a “helpless piece,” be it God, Destiny, or Death, checked and laid and tosses upon a checker board; it cannot be surpassed. In Rihani’s quatrain however, there is the “I” playing with “Destiny” and this “I” will one day “turn the Board the other way”! How could one reverse the roles and defeat destiny in its own game?

4. RIHANI

If prayers produce among us this rich crop
Of vice, abandon prayers and wed the cup;
Drink, whilst thou art of this Mortality,
When dead thou mayst not ever taste a drop.  

FITZGERALD

Then to this earthen Bowl did I adjourn
My lip the secret Well of Life to learn:
And Lip to Lip it murmur’d—"While you live
"Drink!—for once dead you never shall return."

According to Rihani’s quatrain, Ma‘arrī recommends drinking if prayers should produce vice. This quatrain is exceedingly important and striking, particularly the last two lines, and it demands a lengthier discussion, starting with the closest idea that occurs in Ma‘arrī regarding prayer abandon. Ma‘arrī’s lines, in Nicholson’s literal translation, read:

Who knows? Some that fill the mosque with terror whene’er they preach
No better may be than some that drink to a tavern-tune.
If God's public worship serve them only to engine fraud,
Then nearer to Him are those forsaking it purposely.

Ma‘arrī says that those who are misled in their religion, or who abuse religion, are as fraudulent in their faith as those who “drink to the tavern tune”. He does not say that those who drink to the tavern tune are better, so as to recommend, or allow, a conclusion

54 Rihani, The Quatrains, 1904, 49, XLVII. This Quatrain does not appear in The Luzumiyyat of 1918, 1920, 1944, and 1978.
55 Fitzgerald, Rubâ‘iyât, 38, XXXIV.
56 Nicholson, Studies, 109, no. 127; Luzûm I, 52, [41]:
like: “abandon prayer and wed the cup.” Saying that it is better to forsake prayer than to be a hypocrite, does not mean or imply an advice to drink wine in the tavern, rather, an advice to avoid deception and fake beliefs; the hypothetical comparison made by Ma‘arrī emphasizes hypocrisy, not drinking wine.

Furthermore, Ma‘arrī is very accusatory when it comes to wine and wine drinking as he says, for instance, in the following lines:

If wine had been allowable, I would never allow myself to drink it, neither in public nor in secret. May God forgive our wants of other things, when He has allowed us all the delights.⁵⁷

and:

Will a prophet come and allow wine, so that it carries some load of my sorrows and worries? And if so, still I would not drink because it will lessen my awareness.⁵⁸

Ma‘arrī warns explicitly from drinking wine:

Beware of wine, for it is illusory, victorious—an ill-fated victory.⁵⁹

and also addresses others, probably the Sufis, who praise the charms of wine and bestow it with divinity, thus deceiving others:

They pleased you craftily by the charms of wine; Hold it! It is not a pleasure to want.⁶⁰

and:

⁵⁷ Luzūm II, 285, [1444]:

أَيُّنَفِسي الْخَمْرَ جَنَّةً مَا سُمِّجَتْ بِهَا وَقَدْ أُحْلِلَ الْطَّيِّبَاتُ لَنَا فَغُفِّرَ اللَّهُ عَلَى مَلَأِهِ

⁵⁸ Luzūm II, 299, [1466]:

أَيُّنَفِسي الْخَمْرَ جَنَّةً مَا سُمِّجَتْ بِهَا وَقَدْ أُحْلِلَ الْطَّيِّبَاتُ لَنَا فَغُفِّرَ اللَّهُ عَلَى مَلَأِهِ

⁵⁹ Luzūm I, 63, [73]:

أَيُّنَفِسي الْخَمْرَ جَنَّةً مَا سُمِّجَتْ بِهَا وَقَدْ أُحْلِلَ الْطَّيِّبَاتُ لَنَا فَغُفِّرَ اللَّهُ عَلَى مَلَأِهِ

⁶⁰ Luzūm I, 163, [308]:

أَيُّنَفِسي الْخَمْرَ جَنَّةً مَا سُمِّجَتْ بِهَا وَقَدْ أُحْلِلَ الْطَّيِّبَاتُ لَنَا فَغُفِّرَ اللَّهُ عَلَى مَلَأِهِ
From memory, he, who is hemmed in the cup, recited God’s Book, as if he, to cast off his iniquities, throws Wine on the Qur’an. Do not visit the drunken, nor host him nor shelter him.  

Form these lines, it is clear that Ma‘arrī does not approve, under any circumstance, the drinking of wine, and the lines translated by Rihani as “wed the cup” or “Drink, whilst thou art of this Mortality” are nowhere to be found, said or implied, in Ma‘arrī’s poetry. However, it is worthy to note that at one place, Ma‘arrī does say that he drank wine, but he does not refer to the wine of grapes, rather, he uses wine metaphorically. The line reads:

I drank the wine of worry, whose cup is my head, and whose simmers are my joints.

The metaphorical use of wine is to express the idea of getting old, comparing the white simmers or bubbles of wine in the cup to the marks of old age which cover Ma‘arrī’s joints. He associates wine with “worry”, thus, it is the metaphorical “wine of worry” that he drank. This metaphorical association of wine with worry also occurs in Saqṭ al-Zand, where he says:

The wine of worries is achieving what the wine of grapes could not.

Given this discussion of Ma‘arrī’s definite stand on wine and drinking wine, it becomes clear that Rihani’s

Drink, whilst thou art of this Mortality,
When dead thou mayst not ever taste a drop

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61 Luzūm II, 100, [969]:

62 Luzūm I, 178, [349]:

63 Saqṭ al-Zand, 203:
is a literal paraphrase\textsuperscript{64}, so to say, of Fitzgerald’s

—“While you live
   Drink!—for once dead you never shall return”.

Rihani’s method of incorporating Fitzgerald’s quatrains into his own is not always as
free and apparent as in the preceding quatrains. At times, this similarity is less striking;
even though, some quatrains succeed in displaying parallels:

5. **RIHANI**

   I heard it whispered in the cryptic streets
   Where every sage the same dumb shadow
   meets:

   “We are but words fallen from the lips of Time
   Which God, that we may understand,
repeats.”\textsuperscript{65}

   **FITZGERALD**

   And fear not lest Existence closing your
   Account, and mine, should know the like no more;

   The Eternal Sákí from that Bowl has pour’d
   Millions of Bubbles like Us, and will pour.\textsuperscript{66}

The idea being the cycle of births and deaths, Rihani’s quatrain clearly takes on
Fitzgerald’s metaphor of the “Eternal Sákí” as “Time,” and the metaphor of “pour’d …
Bubbles” and the subsequent “and will pour” as “words fallen” and the subsequent
“repeats.”

6. **RIHANI**

   How many preachers from the pulpits preach,
   How many prophets rose from sleep to teach?
   They prayed, and slayed, and passed away,
   and yet
   Our ills are like the pebbles on the beach!\textsuperscript{67}

   **FITZGERALD**

   The Revelations of Devout and Learn’d
   Who rose before us, and as Prophets burn’d,
   Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep
   They told their comrades, and to Sleep

\textsuperscript{64} I refer by “literal paraphrase” to a paraphrase carried out in the same manner of a literal translation;
adhering closely and as much as possible to the words, and word-structure, in the sentence being paraphrased. However, this kind of paraphrase, as the discussion of this and the other quatrains have showed, could raise some noteworthy problems about where to draw the line between a legitimate and an illegitimate paraphrase, particularly in the case of unacknowledged sources.

\textsuperscript{65} Rihani, *The Luzumiyat*, 56, XLVII. This quatrain does not appear in *The Quatrains* of 1903 and 1904.

\textsuperscript{66} Fitzgerald, *Rubáiyát*, 43, XLVI.

\textsuperscript{67} Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 58/ LVI.
Unlike the precedingquatrain, there is a close equivalent of this line by Ma‘arrī that bears some similarity, but the expression of the idea certainly comes from Fitzgerald.

Ma‘arrī’s lines read:

Prophets arose and vanished: Moses, Jesus, Mohammed last, who brought the prayers five
And 'tis foretold there comes another Faith
Than this and men still perishing away
Between a morrow and a yesterday.69

Rihani, it seems, abridges the function of Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed in Ma‘arrī’s lines to the simple word “prophets” and appropriates it so that the resulting quatrain could read as a paraphrase of the idea presented by Fitzgerald. The added “preachers” in Rihani’s quatrain are the “Devout and Learn’d” in Fitzgerald’s.

5.3 - Other Sources

At the beginning of this chapter, it has been mentioned that Rihani has incorporated a variety of sources into his translation. So far, the discussion has showed how he integrated his readings of Milton, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Lowell, Fitzgerald’s and Heron-Allen’s translations of ‘Umar Khayyām, and how he paraphrased and imitated Fitzgerald’s Rubáiyát. There remain few sources to identify.

Lines in two quatrains seem to be particularly inspired by the Bible70, and these are the following:

And only this: Man’s of the soil and sun
And to the soil and sun he shall return.71

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68 Fitzgerald, Rubáiyát, 51, XLV.
69 Nicholson, Studies, 178, no. 263; Luzūm II, 39, [805].
70 The Holly Bible. King James Version.
71 Rihani, The Luzumiyyat, 45, XXV.
which is to be found in Genesis 3:19:

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

and:

Oh hear the inner Voice:—“If thou’lt be right,
Do what they deem is wrong, and go thy way.”

which occurs in Mathew 19:21 as:

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.

and in Mark 10:21 as:

Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

Two of the most striking instances which, since the beginning of this research, have challenged Ma’arri’s poetry for equivalents and forced their interpretation over a number of possible quatrains with no avail. These are the lines

But now my Soul has travelled high and low
Now all save Love, to me, is but a name.

and the quatrain

Now, mosques and churches—even a Kaaba Stone,
Korans and Bibles—even a martyr’s bone,—
All these and more my heart can tolerate,
For my religion’s love, and love alone.

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72 Ibid, 71, LXXVIII.
73 Rihani, *The Quatrains*, 41, XXXIX. This quatrain does not appear in *The Luzumiyyat* of 1918 and subsequent editions.
74 Rihani, *The Luzumiyyat*, 63, LXII. This quatrain appears in *The Quatrains* (1903, 1904), 42, XL, as:
A church, a temple, or a Kaba Stone,
Koran or Bible or a martyr’s bone
All these and more my heart can tolerate
Since my religion now is Love alone.
The closest lines that occur in Ma‘arrī to the same effect of this quatrain read:

Religion and impiety, and stories told;
A Qur‘an, and a Testament: New and Old.
Each generation has its convictions,
Did any generation acquire true faith?\(^75\)

and possibly:

Ye cast the creeds behind,
Tho' nowhere do ye find
In Wisdom they should be rejected and dismissed.
Obedience ye refuse
The Moslem judge, the Jews'
Rabbi, the Christian bishop, and the Magian priest.
Let your law be in turn
Offered to them ye spurn,
All will cry, "Nay; we don't desire it in the least.\(^76\)

These lines seem to be the lines on which Rihani based his translation of the first two lines in the quatrain. The religious terms: “Korans,” and “Bibles,” and their resonances could be recognized and justified in:

Now, mosques and churches—even a Kaaba Stone,
Korans and Bibles—even a martyr’s bone,—

However, what is striking in the last two lines is the term “love” in its abstract form.

Ma‘arrī does not address “love” as a separate entity, and it is always associated with another term\(^77\): love of wealth, power, women, children, or wine even—never in the abstract form. Furthermore, if Ma‘arrī is to issue a declaration of faith, it would read as

\(^{75}\) Luzūm II, 153, [1103]:

\(^{76}\) Nicholson, Studies, 197, no. 310: Luzūm I, 223, [473]:

\(^{77}\) See Luzūm I, 136, [233]; See also, Luzūm II, 67, [884], and Luzūm II, 191, [1197].
“my religion is reason,” as evident in many of his lines which exalt reason and elevate it above any human faculty;⁷８ we are left with the question: Where does this line on “religion of love” come from? It is likely that the last two lines, if not the entire quatrain are derived from a poem by Muḥyiddīn Ibn ‘Arabī which bears a striking similarity. In fact, it seems almost a translation of Ibn ‘Arabī, rather than of Ma‘arrī. The lines read:

My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,
And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba and the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran.
I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith.⁷⁹

The elements of Rihani’s quatrain are obvious, and, most importantly, the parallel lines on love as religion and faith. The religious resonances appear in common between Rihani’s and Ibn ‘Arabī’s lines: their content, ruling idea, words and their connotations, and their expression. As noted earlier, Rihani had integrated his readings of Arab and Persian Sufi mystics like Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn al-Fārīd, and Jalāluddīn Rūmī into his The Book of Khalid⁸⁰ in a manner similar to how Shakib, one of the characters in the book,

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⁷⁸ See Luzūm I, 40, [24]; See also, Luzūm I, 209, [433], and Luzūm II, 355, [1575].

ٌمذ صاسَ لٍثٟ لاتِلاً وًَّ صٛسجٍ     فََّشْػًٝ ٌغِضلاٍْ ٚد٠شٌ ٌشُ٘ثاِْ
ٚتـ١دٌ لأٚشـاٍْ ٚوـؼثـحُ طـائفٍ،     ٚأٌٛاحُ ذَٛساجٍ ُِٚصْذَفُ لُشآِْ
 أد٠ُٓ تذ٠ـِٓ اٌذُـةِّ أّٔٝ ذَٛجّٙـد     سَوـائِثُـٗ فاٌـذُةُّ د٠ٕٟ ٚا٠ّأٟ

⁸⁰ Ameen Rihani, The Book of Khalid, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1911), 183-184: Rihani, it seems, was attracted to Sufi poetry and its ruling theme of “Love” in particular, and has incorporated his readings of Sufi poets into his work. A brief passage would illustrate the point and is worthy of noting: “Know you not the anecdote about the enchanting Goddess Rabia, as related by Attar in his Biographies of Sufi Mystics and Saints? Here it is. Rabia was asked if she hated the devil, and she replied, ‘No.’ Asked again why, she said, ‘Being absorbed in love, I have no time to hate.’...Yes, this one single, simple act of love brings forth an infinite variety of flowers to celebrate the death of the finite outward shape and the eternal essence of life perennial. In complete surrender lies the divineness of things eternal. This is the key-note of the Oriental mystic poets. And I incline to the belief that they of all bards have sung best the song of love. In rambling through the fields with these beautiful children of the terraces, I know not what
puts it: “he loafs … after the manner of the great thinkers and mystics: like Al-Fared and Jelal'ud-Din Rumy”\textsuperscript{81}. Loafing for the genius of al-Ma‘arrī, Rihani utilizes and incorporates into Ma‘arrī’s poetry the manners of Ibn ‘Arabī.

5.4 - Concluding Remarks

Rihani has given us paraphrastic translations of Ma‘arrī, frequently adding to the translation his interpretation of the lines. Even though the majority of Rihani’s quatrains obtained their thought from Ma‘arrī’s poetry, they found their expression elsewhere. Evidently, Rihani took great liberties with Ma‘arrī’s original poetry, whether in The Quatrains or The Luzumiyat, which appears to be similar to the liberties Fitzgerald took in his translation of Khayyām. Rihani has incorporated his readings and interpretations of Milton, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Lowell, resulting, at some places, in misconception of the originals. To highlight some of these liberties, we can recall the following: the first quatrain is entirely taken from Fitzgerald; in quatrain XLVII (1904 edition), the imperative “Drink” is from Fitzgerald’s XXXIV; in quatrain XVIII, the “misty green” is taken from Fitzgerald’s quatrain XIX and the “Violets that grow” are taken from Heron-Allen’s no. 43; in quatrain XXIII, the image of Heaven and Hell casting their shadows on darkness is taken from Fitzgerald’s quatrain LXVII; in quatrain LXXXVIII, he took a complete line from Fitzgerald’s quatrain LXIX; quatrains XXV and LXXVIII were inspired by the Bible; and most importantly, the striking similarity between quatrain LXII and the lines of Ibn ‘Arabī.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 11.
Rihani’s *Quatrains* or *Luzumiyyat* could be called ‘translation’ only if we fail to coin another word, a word that describes his practice as one which qualifies, not as a translation, but as a “transport,” so to speak, of a poetic inspiration, or sublimity, between two languages, re-presenting the expressions, feelings, and ideas of the original in a form that is modified or adapted to a new readership. Rihani was not unaware of such practice. In fact, he describes the best method of translating poetry as “transmigration,” which is best achieved by a “true poet,” and only then, Rihani claims, the translation “can be made to sing as in the original”\(^8^2\). But do the lines in Rihani’s quatrains sing the same song as in Ma‘arrī’s *Luzūm Mā Lā Yalzam* and *Saqṭ al-Zand*? The *Quatrains* are the work of Rihani; they are not a copy of Ma‘arrī’s poetry, but a personalized re-production of Ma‘arrī’s originals inspired by the vogue of ‘Umar Khayyām; an inspiration which Rihani found not in Ma‘arrī’s lines, but in the *Rubā‘iyyāt* of Fitzgerald. Rihani had fitted Ma‘arrī’s poetry into the custom-made Fitzgeraldian mould.

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Chapter Six

Evaluation of the Translations

What an English-only reader wants is a good poem in English.—T. Gallagher

The object of this chapter is to analyze how far Rihani’s and Nicholson’s translations can be considered as “translation” or “adaptation,” of Ma‘arri’s poetry, and how far as original works by Rihani and Nicholson. There is something amusing in how Rihani, Nicholson, and Fitzgerald come together around the figures of Khayyām and Ma‘arri, and how Rihani and Nicholson try to set themselves, their poet, and their translations, apart from Fitzgerald, Khayyām, and the Rubā‘iyāt. Before going into the evaluation of Rihani’s and Nicholson’s translations, there is one more problem, pertaining to the previous chapter, that has raised a great deal of debate and has yet to be solved: Was Omar Khayyām a disciple of Ma‘arri?

6.1 - Nicholson, Rihani, and Fitzgerald

Praising Ma‘arri, in both of their works, and each for his own reasons, Rihani and Nicholson criticize Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of Khayyām’s poetry. Fitzgerald’s Rubā‘iyāt, as has been shown in the previous chapter, is of critical importance for the understanding, and evaluation of Rihani’s Quatrains because the latter mimics the former “faithfully,” so to speak, in many aspects of style, form, and expression. Remarkably, all three translators come to call their poet as “Lucretius”. In the preface to his Rubāiyāt, Fitzgerald points out that Ma‘arri and Lucretius are similar in their
“natural Temper and Genius”\(^1\). Rihani, also, in the preface to *The Quatrains*, makes the same comparison and goes on to add few titles of his own to the list: “the Lucretius of Al-Islam, the Diogenes of Arabia and the Voltaire of the East”\(^2\). Similarly, Nicholson compares Maʿarrī to Lucretius, and like Rihani, puts forward his own: “He sits below Dante and Milton, but he belongs to their school; and if he contemplates life with the profound feeling of Lucretius, he handles his subject with a literary skill as fine as that of Horace”\(^3\).

Rihani and Fitzgerald defend and canonize their poets as the avant-garde predecessors who had great influence on later poets. According to Fitzgerald, Sufi poets “borrowed largely, indeed, of Omar’s material, but turning it to a mystical Use more convenient to Themselves and the People they addressed”\(^4\). While Fitzgerald traced influence among Persian poets, Rihani directed his criticism at Omar Khayyām who, Rihani has “reason to believe, was an imitator or a disciple” of Maʿarrī because “the birth of the first and the death of the second poets are not very far apart from each other; they both occurred about the middle of the eleventh century”\(^5\). Rihani advances the claim that

the skepticism and pessimism of Omar are, to a great extent, imported from Marrah… Just as Voltaire, for instance, acquired most of his liberal and skeptical views from Hobbes, Locke and Bayle, so did Omar acquire his from Abu'l-Ala.\(^6\)

Nicholson avoids going into prolonged debates of originality and influence, but he criticizes Fitzgerald’s practice and Salmon’s claim in *Un Précurseur d’Omar Khayyam*:

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\(^1\) Fitzgerald, *Rubáiyát*, 12.
\(^2\) Rihani, *The Quatrains*, vi.
\(^3\) Nicholson, *Studies*, 44.
\(^5\) Rihani, *The Quatrains*, xviii.
\(^6\) Ibid, xix.
He maintains that “Persian literature furnishes no example of a poem like FitzGerald’s.” Rihani’s claim that ‘Umar “was an imitator or disciple” of Ma‘arrī is unsubstantiated by solid proof. The reader of Ma‘arrī’s original poetry will, with no doubt, find that Khayyām’s poetry and thought are far from Ma‘arrī’s, and there is no “reason to believe” that one has imitated the other. If one is to read Fitzgerald’s translation of Khayyām, and Rihani’s translation of Ma‘arrī without knowing which is which, the reader will arrive at a conclusion that both are works by the same poet. The similarity which Rihani tries to justify is the result of his imitation of Fitzgerald. The facts Rihani provides for his claim are slippery and hasty, and it seems that his “question which, though unimportant in itself” but “worthy of consideration” and his “I quote again from Omar,” “Omar too,” and “the same idea is expressed by Omar” are all intentional by Rihani to substantiate his claim and make the readers identify with his translation, especially because English readers are already familiar with the form of the quatrain and to a large extent with the kind of imagery, expression, and thought presented by Fitzgerald in the *Rubáiyát*.

In contrast to Rihani’s and Fitzgerald’s, Nicholson’s translations are not meant to hold a literary value or qualify as literary works by men of letters. His translations were published as “studies” for educational and scholarly purposes. Rihani’s translation, however, claims to be a work of literature by Ma‘arrī, while it is not. *The Quatrains* are the work of Rihani, and it was Rihani, not Ma‘arrī, who said:

> Drink, whilst thou art of this Mortality,  
> When dead thou mayst not ever taste a drop.

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6.2 - Methodology of Evaluation

Classifying the translations of Nicholson and Rihani as belonging to one or another translation strategy requires some considerations pertaining to the translational approach, the translator’s aims, and the final product. “Translation,” says Juliane House, is “simultaneously bound to the source text and to the presuppositions and conditions governing its reception in the target linguistic and cultural system. Any attempt at evaluating translation must take this basic fact as a starting point”\(^9\). According to House’s argument, both translations fare well in evaluation because one is literal and typical of scholarly translations, and the other is freer and typical of translations that take English readership into account. However, to evaluate translation as a literary work that aspires to bridge a gap between an author and a foreign audience, as David Connolly points out, it is essential “that the original be recognizable in the translation, if we are to talk about translation and not imitation or adaptation”\(^10\). Furthermore, commenting on a translator’s aim, André Lefevere suggests that translators often fail to see the text as a whole and give attention to certain features over others\(^11\). Nicholson’s translation is different aesthetically, since it ignores the rhyme and metre more often, but semantically the same, since it preserves the content, although selective, while Rihani’s translation differs on both levels. Both Rihani and Nicholson seem to make compromises but each according to his aims and proposals. Compromise is inevitable in translating poetry because of the impossibility of accounting for all the levels in which


poetry functions and to correspond to all the characteristic features of the source poem in a language, and especially in a form, recognizable in the target culture.

The task of choosing the foreign text and developing a method to translate it, according to Lawrence Venuti for example, is determined by many factors. Venuti differentiates between two major strategies of translation: those that are “domesticating in their handling of the foreign text,” that is, “appropriating it to support domestic canons,” and those that “can be described as foreignizing, motivated by an impulse to preserve linguistic and cultural differences”. Venuti also points out that domesticating strategies have been employed “in the service of specific domestic agendas, imperialist, evangelical, professional”. As a result, foreignization emerges as a resistant strategy working against dominant cultural values and homogeneity.\textsuperscript{12}

Even though faithfulness contributes to the success of a translation, the concept of faithfulness to the foreign text, and particularly in poetry translation, had changed with the onset of interpretation theories and the rise of reader and interpretive communities as a major determining force in the production and consumption of meaning. Not only did poets make use of symbols, paradoxes, ironies, and signs, translators too were compelled to do so, if they were to produce a ‘faithful’ version of the original poem. A foreign text which does not belong to any one interpretive community and doesn’t employ paradox or ambiguity, for example, can be acquired and represented as doing so. The theoretical challenge of what ‘faithfulness’ is in practice is also a challenge of what ‘foreignization’ and ‘domestication’ are.

Hence, the method for evaluating Rihani’s and Nicholson’s translations should consider all the preceding suppositions about translation. Such framework is suggested by Connolly who believes that “poetry translation is about value judgments”\(^{13}\) and that evaluating a translation must take into consideration the aims of the translator and the method used to accomplish those aims.

### 6.3 - “The Meditations of Ma‘arrī”

In the introduction to his translation of Rihani’s *Hymns of the Valleys*, Naji Oueijan claims that translations of Arabic poetry by Orientalists like William Jones, R. A. Nicholson and H. A. R. Gibb “had been at best scholarly paraphrasing of the original”\(^{14}\). Nicholson, in Queijan’s terms, is one of the “major Orientalists” who produced scholarly translations not works of literature, but Nicholson has an eye on a wider readership. He notes, in *Studies in Islamic Poetry*, that “English readers have not yet had this work put before them in a recognisable form”\(^{15}\). Nicholson seems to address the translation of Rihani in the quatrain form which, apparently, he rejects as a “recognizable” form.

It is clear that Nicholson’s main concern in Ma‘arrī’s poetry was the content which he selected, as his categorization of the poems shows. The strategy he applies for translating the verse form can be described by what James Holmes later identified, in

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\(^{13}\) Connolly, “Poetry Translation,” 175.
\(^{15}\) Nicholson, *Studies*, vi.
Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies, as “organic,” where the content determines and develops the form of the translated poem.\(^{16}\)

Additionally, in most of the poems, Nicholson does not apply what he explicates about rhyme. Although he says that he had imitated the Arabic metres adopting the method of Sir Charles Lyall, who “has imitated the Arabic metres with peculiar skill,”\(^{17}\) he fails to imitate the metre to preserve the original form and drops the rhyme which is inconsistent with what he noted on the necessity of rhyme. However, the major aim or principle of his strategy is to present Maʿarrī’s poetry to English readers in a “recognisable form.” The question that comes to mind is this: was not the form of the quatrain, presented by Rihani and already celebrated, and canonized, in Fitzgerald’s translations of ‘Umar Khayyām which were, by 1898, in their sixth edition, recognizable by English readers? The answer might be that Nicholson rejects translating Arabic poetry in the Persian quatrain form, and, therefore, rejects the quatrain as “recognisable”.

As for choosing “what to translate,” Nicholson chose to translate those sections of Maʿarrī’s poetry which fall into his description of the poet as one who “applies a rationalistic standard to all revealed religions, not excepting Islam.”\(^{18}\) It followed that all the selections focused on that aspect of Maʿarrī’s poetry and philosophy which criticizes belief systems “not excepting Islam.” The outlook of Maʿarrī’s poetry is thus established as a critique of Islam.

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\(^{16}\) James Holmes, Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 25.

\(^{17}\) Nicholson, Translations, ix.

\(^{18}\) Ibid, 102.
To take Venuti’s standpoint, Nicholson’s translation of Maʿarrī seems to display features of domestication because it neglects the conditions under which the poems were written and only considers the conditions under which translation is functioning. The function of the poems is replaced by the function of translation. “Foreignizing a text,” says Venuti, “entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language”\(^\text{19}\). Nicholson’s method corresponds to lines included, rather than excluded, by the cultural values in English language. Nicholson states his method explicitly when he maintains that “we must decide what to translate, and especially what not to translate, before considering how it shall be done”\(^\text{20}\). To take one example of how domestication/foreignization works, we have from Nicholson’s translation:

I see humankind are lost in ignorance: even those
Of ripe age at random guess, like boys playing *mora*\(^\text{21}\)

Nicholson footnotes to this line: “Arab boys played a game called *kharāj*, like the Italian *mora*, in which one player has to guess the number of fingers suddenly put forth by another”\(^\text{22}\). Nicholson domesticates *kharāj* to the more familiar *mora*. A foreignized version of the line would keep *kharāj* and Nicholson could have kept it since the footnote explains what the term refers to.

\(^{19}\) Venuti, “Strategies of Translation,” 242.
\(^{21}\) Nicholson, *Studies*, 144, (208); *Luzūm I*, 149, [272]: أرى الناس في مجهولة، *كَيْرَاوُ هُمْ* كُوِدارَانُ حِيَّينِ بَيْعُونُ خُرَابًا

\(^{22}\) Nicholson, *Studies*, 144.
6.4 - *The Quatrains of Abu’l-Ala*

Given Rihani’s argument against classical Arabic poetry, and those who called for it, his encouragement and advocacy of free verse, and his fluency in English language compared to Arabic, to which he was introduced at a later stage of his life, it is methodical for him to find some of Ma’arri’s poetry “too clannish and grotesque” to be portrayed in English language and eventually to “necessarily be doffed.” 23 He adopts the already established and celebrated quatrain as a model for his translation. The quatrain, in Fitzgerald terms, is the “oriental verse”24 of the mystic East. Because of the hardships Orientalists and translators encounter while translating classical Arabic poetry, the popularity of the quatrain form, and his weak hold of Arabic language, the quatrain emerges as the form of choice for Rihani to translate Ma’arri’s poetry.

As discussed in an earlier section, Rihani has freely manipulated Ma’arri’s poetry to produce a poem of his own. Because of the many additions and paraphrases of other sources, which he incorporated into his version of Ma‘arrī, Rihani’s method is inconsistent with what he explicates in his preface as having “added nothing that was foreign to the ruling idea”25. Furthermore, the choice of the quatrain has, in a way, Persianized Ma’arrī’s poetry, de-contextualizing and directing it at an audience of different expectations. The quatrain, in its Persian context, is the poetic form often used by Persian Sufi poets like Hāfiz, Rūmī, and ‘Aṭṭār in their yearning for an immortal beloved. Ma’arrī was far from expressing or hinting at any mystical or Sufi notion of

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divine love, however, in Rihani’s translation, he not only does so, but joins the mystics in their rituals of intoxication.

Regarding the arrangement of the quatrains, Rihani, like Nicholson, arranges his selections under Roman numerals, but while Nicholson labels his selections under the four categories listed earlier, Rihani is satisfied to have them under Roman numerals arranged “as far as possible, in the logical order of their sequence of thought”26. This ambiguous “sequence of thought” in addition to providing no reference about each “quatrain,” gives Rihani the freedom to render and incorporate into his translation a multitude of meanings and sources whose whereabouts have been discussed in an earlier chapter.

According to Connolly, the difference between translator, adapter, and imitator “seems to lie in the degree of interpretation”. Connolly quotes from Lefevere that

the translator proper is content to render the original author’s interpretation of a theme accessible to a different audience. The writer of versions [adapter] basically keeps the substance of the source text, but changes its form. The writer of imitations, produces, to all intents and purposes, a poem of his own, which has only title and points of departure, if those, in common with the source text27.

In his translation, Rihani introduces foreign elements to Ma‘arri’s “sequence of thought,” selects, omits, expands, and often merges many ideas and verses into one “quatrain,” he fails to keep Ma’arri in his view, and most importantly he imitates Fitzgerald’s translation of Omar Khayyām, which is more acceptable, as a translation of Eastern poetry, by the English readers who, as Rihani states in the preface, are familiar with Fitzgerald’s translation.

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26 Rihani, The Quatrains, xviii.
27 Connolly, “Poetry Translation,” 175.
Furthermore, Rihani’s *Quatrains* claims to have a literary value as being a literary work by Ma’arrī, this coming from the fact that he titled his translation as *The Quatrains of Abu’l-Ala*, imitating, even in this respect, Fitzgerald’s *Rubāiyāt of Omar Khayyām*, to conform with a genre of poetry which the English reader recognizes as “The Quatrains of So-and-So.”

In contrast, Nicholson produces a translation of Ma’arrī that introduces neither foreign elements nor foreign poetic forms. He titles his translation as “The Meditations of Ma’arrī,” being the second part of his “studies,” in Islamic poetry. Rihani’s work, thus, is similar to the recreations of, say, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* according to the genre of children literature. Similarly, Rihani recreates Ma’arrī’s poetry according to the genre of the Persian quatrain and embeds his readings of Fitzgerald, which, as a result, questions whether his *Quatrains* is really a ‘translation’ of Ma’arrī.

Rihani does not provide insights on the mechanics of his method of translation as Nicholson and Fitzgerald do. Also, he does not justify his choice of the ‘quatrain’ as the poetic form of translation. Georges Bastin explains that such kind of method is “justified in terms of the need for foreign texts to be adapted to the tastes and habits of the target culture regardless of the damage done to the original”\(^2\). Bastin goes on to explicate that this practice is often involved in “rewriting” a text to a “new readership”.

To get back to Connolly’s criteria in evaluating translation, the outlook of Rihani’s *Quatrains* is inconsistent with that of *Luzūm mā lā Yalzam*, which invites an ‘ethical’ standpoint on translational practice. On this ethical standpoint, Bastin maintains that adaptation is a “betrayal” of the original author and text, and that “there is a point at

which adaptation ceases to be translation at all”\(^{29}\). In his discussion, Bastin identifies several modes of adaptation of which the most familiar are what he calls “situational equivalence” and “creation”. Situational equivalence, Bastin defines, is the “insertion of a more familiar context than the one used in the original”\(^{30}\). The quatrains of ‘Umar Khayyām which were already canonized and were circulating in their sixth edition, by 1898, stand as Rihani’s model of translation to compensate for an English readership. Creation, on the other hand, is “a more global replacement of the original text with a text that preserves only the essential message/ideas/functions of the original”\(^{31}\). In its ambiguous selections, ambivalent renderings of Persian mystical motifs into Arabic poetry, and its English fluent language, Rihani’s *Quatrains* represents a “global replacement” of Ma‘arrī’s original poetry. Both modes described by Bastin apply remarkably to Rihani’s translation in comparison to the scholarly selectiveness of Nicholson which neither inserts a “familiar context” nor replaces Ma‘arrī’s poetry.

To adopt Connolly’s and Bastin’s classifications and definitions, Nicholson emerges as a “translator proper” who is content to ‘translate’ Ma‘arrī’s poems literally to English, while Rihani emerges as a “writer of versions” with a tendency to imitate the poetry of Ma‘arrī in a Fitzgeraldian style, producing “a poem of his own”. The controversy which Rihani’s *Quatrains* and Nicholson’s “Meditations” produce surrounding the ‘ethical’ or ‘proper’ method of translation, as Bastin points out, is often “fueled by ideological issues”\(^{32}\).


\(^{30}\) Ibid. 7.

\(^{31}\) Ibid. 7.

\(^{32}\) Ibid. 8.
6.5 - The Orientalist Rihani

Commenting on Rihani’s attempts to gain acceptance as an Arab-American writer in the United States, Evelyn Shakir points out that “the first generation of Arab-American writers… dressed carefully for their encounter with the American public, putting on the guise of prophet, preacher, or man of letters”\(^{33}\). Thus, for Rihani and Ma’arrî to gain the acceptance of the American public they had to put on the guise of Fitzgerald and Khayyâm respectively.

Rihani himself, as pointed earlier, calls for the reader’s attention to Fitzgerald’s translation, however, not in an attempt to deflate or criticize Fitzgerald or Khayyâm as he claims, but to make his audience realize the similarity between the two works and, thus, his work would be accepted as belonging to the same genre. In this vein, Rihani evokes his reader’s expectations and calls into their attention the previous model of Fitzgerald which they already knew. Rihani’s translation, thus, fulfills an ideological function that encourages both the assimilation of Ma’arrî’s poetry into the canonical scholarship on the Orient and Rihani’s acceptance by the ‘English-reading public’.

Rihani is known for his views on the relationship between the East and the West\(^{34}\). He believes in the supremacy of the West in terms of science and advancement, and the mysticism of the East which has yet to follow on the footsteps of Voltaire, Thoreau, and


\(^{34}\) Most of Rihani’s views on the relationship between East and West are put forward in his *The Path of Vision* which is dedicated to the examination of this relationship.
Emerson. He is, according to Oueijan, a “poet and thinker torn out between East and West, between stock tradition and modernity, and between what is and what must be”\(^\text{35}\).

As Arab-American writers, Rihani and others like Kahlil Gibran had to do whatever needed to gain acceptance. Wael Hassan examines the ideological aspects of Rihani’s works and considers Rihani and Gibran as Arab American writers who “when writing in English, they had to couch their message in ways that guaranteed, or at least increased, the likelihood of its acceptance—of their acceptance as writers—by American readers”\(^\text{36}\).

Rihani’s motives for his translation of Ma’arrī thus originate from this need to be accepted by American readers, and, simultaneously, to present himself as better equipped as an Eastern translator of Eastern poetry than Western Orientalist translators like Fitzgerald and Nicolson. Hassan considers that the attempts by Rihani, and other Arab-American writers, to replace Western Orientalists as “interpreters or translators of the Orient were a way of claiming cultural space and voice, countering the negativity associated with the Orient, and mediating between it and the West for the sake of greater cross-cultural understanding”\(^\text{37}\).

Rihani’s works and thought on the momentous advantages of an East-West cultural exchange that enriches and improves human life, whether praised or condemned, are reflected in his translation of Ma’arrī. He takes out Ma’arrī’s poems from the “too clannish” context of classical Arabic poetry, which is painstakingly accessible to the

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37 Ibid, 250.
West, and incorporates them into the more popular and ‘familiar’ context of the quatrain.

Rihani’s translation has brought Maʿarrī to the English reader, as Fitzgerald’s translation brought and celebrated Khayyām, but the way by which Rihani’s translation introduces Maʿarrī is different from the way Nicholson’s translation does. Being one of the “major Orientalists,” Nicholson is satisfied with translating on the semantic level without any aesthetic engagement with Maʿarrī’s poetry, despite his reverence for the “philosopher poet.” Nicholson’s stance in his translation conforms to what Edward Said describes as

standing before a distant, barely intelligible civilization or cultural monument, the Orientalist scholar reduced the obscurity by translating, sympathetically portraying, inwardly grasping the hard-to-reach object. Yet the Orientalist remained outside the Orient, which, however much was made to appear intelligible, remained beyond the occident.38

Hassan, however, does not consider Rihani’s imitation of Fitzgerald’s translation as “incompetence” on the part of Rihani, but a practice of resistance. Hassan claims that “through al-Maʿarri Rihani questioned Europe's fascination with Omar Khayyam, Persian author of rubaiyyat (Arabic and Persian for Quatrains), famous in Europe in Edward Fitzgerald's translation, a fascination that represents at once partial and partisan knowledge.”39 However, Rihani is careful not to criticize this fascination. In the preface to his Quatrains he maintains that his translation is by no means an act of resistance, as Hassan claims, but an act of conformity. He states that his “desire is to confirm and not

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to convulse, to expand and not to contract the Oriental influence on Occidental minds.*

Even though he makes bold arguments about the originality of ‘Umar Khayyām, Rihani does not criticize Fitzgerald’s translation, as Nicholson does, but contributes to and affirms the acceptance of the quatrain poetic form as a characteristic genre of Eastern poetry. According to Hassan, Rihani has invested in the East/West opposition and his “translational strategies” are his vehicle of pursuing “the ideal of a Hegelian synthesis of East and West.”

The fact that most of Rihani’s works were originally written in English speaks for itself on Rihani’s stand on the East, and places him together with the Orientalists he seems to criticize or challenge. Geoffrey Nash comments on Rihani’s writings as being influenced by “western Romantics … diluting or acculturating oriental idioms to suit occidental pre-dispositions and expectations.” While Nash remarks that “Rihani's biculturality is not of the kind that can be considered ethnic American,” and that his “writings do not fully register the ‘cultural doubleness’ in those writers who chose to address themselves to the ethnic situation in America,” Hassan considers that “Said's unmasking of Orientalism's historical affiliations with power” has influenced later Arab-American writers and allowed them to “reconfigure the terms of cultural translation and cross-cultural discourse beyond the limitations of Rihani and his contemporaries.”

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40 Rihani, *The Quatrains*, xix.
41 Ibid, 260.
However successful or accurate Rihani may be in spelling out the intentions of Ma’arrī, nevertheless, his translation qualifies as a “global” adaptation investing in, while resisting, Orientalist ideology and English readership expectations. His translation, in contrast to Nicholson’s literal and sympathetic translation, is one that seeks conformity along with recreation. But the line between different translational strategies is often determined by cultural ideologies, readership expectations, and individual judgments. The translator of Eastern literature is often called on to conform to one translational practice or another in producing the translation. Translational strategies vary between those that reproduce while preserving, as much as possible, the message of the original work, those that recreate and adapt the original message according to cultural, literary, and ideological determinants, and those that produce ambivalent translations that fluctuate between ideologies and theories. Such methods of translation that build on ideology can be viewed and evaluated in terms of what Venuti calls “translation as an ideological critique”\textsuperscript{45}.

Rihani’s dropping of the classical verse of Arabic poetry and his choice of the quatrain along with its cultural connotations, is fed by his ambivalence in resisting and investing in Orientalist ideology, and his translation affirms the Orientalist view of Eastern languages, Arabic in particular, as “inaccessible,” and pronounces the reduction of the East to mysticism and exoticism.

\textsuperscript{45} Venuti, \textit{The Translator’s Invisibility}, 143.
Chapter Seven

Conclusion

In his translation, Rihani has reproduced the Orientalist reduction of the East to mysticism which he aspires, in his other works, to resist. He has domesticated Ma‘arrī’s poetry by appropriating it to English readership, as it is currently the case of many translations from Arabic to English, which is almost always the cause of any quarrel between an author, who wants admittance to English readership, and a translator who refuses to domesticate at the risk of sacrificing the original meaning¹. In this sense, Rihani’s translation is a more successful translation outside literary circles, while Nicholson’s translation is not widely circulated because it is a “study” in Islamic poetry, a scholarly work intended for the scholar, and not a “Quatrains” intended for the common reader, through which Rihani aims at the same universal fame which brings together the names of Fitzgerald and Khayyām. Rihani also invests in English readership for the purpose of being accepted as a substitute for the Orientalist translator, but his translation retains the tenets of Orientalist ideology and confirms the workability and effectiveness of the Orientalist model in translating Eastern poetry; it shows that it is not a practice of the Orientalist Western translator only, but a practice of the Eastern translator as well.

As with any discussion of poetic influence, Harold Bloom’s theorizations of “misreading” are indispensable. As they define an “anxiety of influence” among poets,

¹ For a noteworthy source on this author-translator quarrel, see Marilyn Booth, “Translator v. author”, Translation Studies 1:2 (2008):197-211.
they can also relate to an anxiety among translators of poetry. Bloom claims that poetic history is identical to poetic influence, and that poets make that history by “misreading” each other to create their own imaginative space\(^2\). He argues that the influence of the antecedent poets develops a sense of anxiety in the living successors. “If the dead poets,” Bloom says, “constituted their successors’ particular advance in knowledge, that knowledge is still their successors’ creation, made by the living for the needs of the living”\(^3\). In *The Quatrains*, Rihani’s anxiety develops from the universal popularity of the *Rubáiyát*. The influence of the latter on the former is remarkable, in the sense that Fitzgerald, the “antecedent,” had “constituted” the model for Rihani, the “successor”. Nevertheless, *The Quatrains* is Rihani’s creation even if it owes its anxiety to Fitzgerald’s *Rubáiyát*.

However, there is another aspect of Rihani’s influence. The “anxiety” in *The Quatrains* is backwarded, by Rihani, to ‘Umar Khayyām. In the last note to his preface, Rihani notes that “Omar wrote poetry in Arabic too. My learned friend, Isa Iskandar Maluf of Zehleh, Mt. Lebanon, showed me some quatrains of ‘Omar the Tentmaker and Astronomer,’ in an old Arabic Ms. which bear a striking resemblance to some of Abu’l-Ala’s both in thought and style”\(^4\). Rihani’s “implicit” hint that Khayyām might have plagiarized Ma‘arrī has been addressed in detail, but if what he claims is true, why did he not present those “Arabic quatrains” that show this “striking resemblance” in “style” instead of referring to trifle comparisons with Shakespeare and Milton? Even if we were to question the validity of Rihani’s claim, we ought to study the original respective Persian and Arabic texts, and not the translations, especially when they are

\(^3\) Ibid, 19.
misrepresentative and overly worked out to be convincing. There are few excerpts of Arabic poetry by Khayyām⁵, but they deal with common themes which are of a universal outlook and do not allow for a claim as that made by Rihani.

Rihani’s “reason to believe” that Khayyām was influenced by Ma‘arrī is lacking and unsubstantiated, and the fact that “the birth of the first poet and the death of the second are not very far apart” does not warrant a theory of influence. Additionally, if we are to compare authors on the basis of their shared ideas on issues like God, Life, Death, or even Night and Day, then no poet, author, or philosopher, can claim, or be acclaimed, to be original. We might, as well, say that Dante did imitate Ma‘arrī’s Risālat al-Ghurān, or even, Hardy’s pessimism, Kant’s skepticism, and Darwin’s theory⁶ are as well “imported from Ma‘arrah”. If we are to craft theories of influence or originality reports based on “similarity of thought,” we are ‘treading lightly’ in a minefield of embarrassment which no author will survive unblemished.

To reiterate Frost’s remark on the untranslatability of poetry, and to assert the instrumental use of translation for personal, dogmatic, or ideological purposes, as far as concepts of ‘influence,’ ‘authority,’ and ‘representation’ are concerned, it could be said that a translation should, in the first place, attend to the status of the author and the text in their original culture, and that the translator should possess, or acquire, a firm knowledge of that author, text, or culture, towards an ethics, and aesthetics, of translation. Otherwise, we will find ourselves referring back to the known label “traddutore traditore,” Italian for “traitor translator”

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⁵ Khayyām’s Arabic writings were mostly in Mathematics, not poetry.
⁶ Darwin’s theory on the origin of species which gave birth to the theory of evolution; an extremely important, if not constitutional, theory in Biological sciences; The Luzumiyat, 97, Rihani claims that Ma‘arrī anticipated Darwin’s theory.
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