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**RESISTANCE IN AN AGE OF CONFUSION:
CREATIVE VERSIONS OF THE
RUBA'IYYAT IN BRITAIN, IRAQ AND
EGYPT**

By

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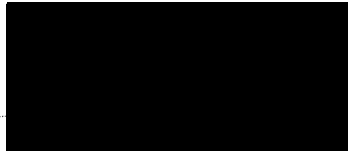
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ABSTRACT

This study traces the distinctiveness of three nineteenth- and twentieth-century English and Arabic versions of Omar Khayyam's eleventh-century Persian *Ruba'iyat*. In this thesis, I argue that Edward Fitzgerald's, Ahmad Najafi's and Ahmad Rami's versions of the *Ruba'iyat* are products of their socio-political contexts and individual creative works despite the fact that they were categorized at the time of their publication as mere translations.

This thesis argues that Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat* as well as, the British and Arab poems resist numerous aesthetic, political and social aspects of their ages. Fitzgerald's quatrains spoke against the excesses of nineteenth-century industrialization and called for a slowdown and a reconsideration of prevalent values. Najafi and Rami, in Iraq and Egypt respectively, voiced through their work strong opposition to colonial hegemony in the twentieth century. Each, however, employed a different means of "recapturing" a lost Arab identity. Najafi's *ruba'is* promoted a return to the ancient literary glories of the Abbasid period while Rami's *ruba'is* proposed a refuge in religious fervor. The dual political and poetic elements of these poems suggest that the importance of this study lies at least partly in its breaking down of the distinction between the categories of "resistance" and "aesthetic" poetry.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This thesis is a comparative study of the eleventh-century *Ruba 'iyyat* of Omar Khayyam, its nineteenth-century English version by Edward Fitzgerald, and twentieth-century Arabic versions by both Ahmad Rami and Ahmad Najafi. The focus of this study is on the transmission of Khayyam's Persian quatrains into European and Arab poetic traditions and their political resonances in the target cultures. Not a fluent reader of Persian, my grasp of Khayyam's text is primarily based on the Persian copy translated into English by Arthur Christensen in 1927. The English component of this study concentrates on the 75 quatrains selected by Fitzgerald in his first edition of 1859. For the Arabic component of the study, I have read the 351 Arabic *ruba 'is* published by Najafi in 1926 and finally, the 134 quartets by Rami published in 1924.

Omar Khayyam lived in eleventh-century Persia under Seljuq Turkish occupation. The period is best described as an age of turmoil that affected political events and intellectual productivity. It was also a period of religious stagnation under the dominance of the ruling faith which was Sunni Islam. Religious influence over society became so powerful that it stifled philosophical debates. The oppression included the persecution of philosophers and the issuance of decrees or *fatwas* against dissident ideas.

It is under such circumstances that Khayyam, a poet, a philosopher and a scientist, wrote the *Ruba 'iyyat*. A *ruba 'i* is a four verse stanza in which the first, the second and the fourth verses rhyme but not the third. Through a symbolic and Sufi-like terminology,

Khayyam launched a resistance against the political instability, the social injustice and the cultural changes that he witnessed in his country. Although virtually unknown for centuries after its composition, his work eventually managed to reach a wider audience. Khayyam's poetry explains issues of life and death and the role human beings play in the universe. The quatrains represent Khayyam's philosophical vision through terminologies and expressions that common people hardly grasped. Since its rediscovery in the 19th century, his poetry, shaped by the history and language of Persia in the eleventh century, has been a contested field drawing the attention of a number of poets and thinkers. The *Ruba'iyat* exerted a considerable influence on the Victorian poet Edward Fitzgerald and on two modern Arab poets: the Egyptian Ahmad Rami and the Iraqi Ahmad Najafi.

Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat* remained unknown until Edward Fitzgerald transferred it into English and became famous in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, Victorian England was expanding politically via its colonies and forming its great empire. The industrial and scientific revolutions were rapidly transforming social values. Fitzgerald's quatrains reflected a dissatisfaction with this environment as well as a longing for Eastern inspiration. In highly figurative language, he expressed ideas that were out of tune with what he perceived as a materialistic life. Fitzgerald dealt with the issues of interest to the nineteenth-century British audience, which apparently derived pleasure from the translated quatrains; the general popularity of Fitzgerald's poem resulted in numerous venues and clubs named after Khayyam in Europe and America.

A century later Arabs discovered the marvels of the Persian masterpiece through the eyes of the West. Ahmad Najafi and Ahmad Rami, unlike other poets who worked from the English version, decided to base their quatrains on the original Persian work.

Like Khayyam's and Fitzgerald's, their social milieu was also characterized by instability and repression. Arabic poetry, burdened and weakened by Ottoman then European occupations, was ripe for foreign revitalizers. The Arab society in both Egypt and Iraq experienced an intellectual transformation effected by European literary schools. The Western influence found a fertile soil in modern literary Arab society and many Arab poets and writers imitated their principles and forms. However, Najafi and Rami did not opt for imitation; they are noteworthy for their effort to tailor Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat* to their own religious and cultural needs. Each reacted through his poem to the political, social and cultural crises that were occurring in the Arab world at the time. Rami and Najafi's versions found a warm response among Arab readers. In fact, Rami's quatrains were later sung by the Egyptian singer 'Umm Kulthum.

This research focuses on the similarities and differences between Rami and Najafi's works on the one hand and Fitzgerald's on the other. Despite the fact that all were categorized as translations by the poets themselves and the critics, the thesis here argues for the distinctiveness of each of the three texts. It attempts to illustrate how the British and Arab poets mentioned above used the *Ruba'iyat* and integrated it into their own intellectual milieus. Each employed his own distinctive rhetorical devices in order to develop independent poetical entities carrying his personal signature. At the same time, these poets restructured and reshaped the Persian quatrains in a way adapted to the context of their age. Accordingly, these works of art reflect the individuality of the poets and their ways of thinking and are not simply derivations of the social, political and cultural contexts. The three poets are distanced geographically and temporally with respect to Khayyam, the eleventh-century Persian poet. It is worth noticing that all of

these poets lived during tumultuous times. The events that took place in the poets' countries constituted turning points in history and effected radical changes in all aspects of life. Hence, the turmoil that Persia, Britain, Iraq and Egypt experienced left an impact on the poets' works. For these writers, a poet is committed and sometimes he participates in the events and circumstances of the age. Thus, Fitzgerald, Najafi and Rami arguably sought to intervene in their political situations by expressing political attitudes and views through their poetry.

These observations evoke numerous questions about Fitzgerald's, Najafi's and Rami's uniquely rebellious attitudes. To what extent do the quatrains succeed in asserting each poet's individuality and distinction? To what extent does the age contribute to their way of thinking and writing? Finally, to what extent do Fitzgerald's, Najafi's and Rami's texts exceed the category of "translations" to become adaptations that convey personal acts of resistance against their respective social and cultural milieus?

Khayyam's eleventh-century way of thinking constituted an inspiration to the British poet in the nineteenth century as well as to both Arabs in the twentieth century. Since Fitzgerald wrote his quatrains, there have been many translations of the *Ruba'iyyat* from Fitzgerald's English version. In my study, I have selected Najafi's and Rami's versions because they are inspired from Khayyam's *Ruba'iyyat*. The unfamiliar literary elements apparent in the *Ruba'iyyat* arguably triggered a longing on the part of both British and Arab readers for novelty in their national literatures. The controversy that Khayyam elicited concerning his work and hence his philosophy attracted many poets and critics. The purpose of this research does not lie in evaluating their statements about Khayyam's life and thought. Susan Bassnett argues that, "poetry as a cultural capital

cannot be consistently measured across all cultures equally” (58). She quotes Shelley’s analogy between a poem transferred from one language to another and plant reproduction: The seeds have to be transplanted in a new place (58). The three poets took the Persian seeds that are the original quatrains and managed to grow these *ruba’is* in British, Iraqi and Egyptian soils. As a result, the different texts not only preserved the *Ruba’iyyat*, they also came up with vital new elements in form or content in their respective literatures. Bassnett points to, “the impact upon a literary system that translation can have and the power of translated texts to change and innovate” (60).

Although the three poets have characteristics in common with Khayyam, starting with the *ruba’i* form that is undertaken in their texts, they adopt different ways of expressing their revolt against their backgrounds. These methods are revealed in rhythm, images, tone and the diction employed in their quatrains. Accordingly, the approach adopted in the thesis is close to formalism, and in particular to Mukarovsky’s claim that language is not an isolated unit but an “aesthetic function.” Language and the aesthetic are not fixed and static units but entities that respond to social changes. According to Mukarovsky, literature is, “a social act” (43) exposed to evolutions through the ages. The approach here focuses on form as it relates to each poet’s social background. The political and cultural conflicts and agitations that emerged in these societies are shown indirectly in their quatrains and indicate their ways of thinking and attitudes in dealing with them. Besides formalism, the thesis makes use of postcolonial theory keeping in mind that Persia, Khayyam’s homeland, had been under the dominance of the Arabs who invaded Persia in the seventh century. After the Arabs, there were the Seljuq Turks and various other sects such as the Egyptian Fatimids. The colonial state affected Khayyam’s

way of thinking in relation to the Other, and his search for his own national identity among the foreigners who imposed their norms on all aspects of the society. Postcolonial theory also applies to Fitzgerald's quatrains but from a different perspective, which is that of the dominant ideology with respect to the Orient, particularly Persia. Postcolonial insights work, as well, in the *rubai's* of Najafi and Rami whose countries were under British occupation for a long time. The Arab world in the twentieth century suffered Turkish colonization and then an unjust and abusive British rule. Consequently, the poets' resistance and philosophies are derived from these circumstances which are reflected either directly or indirectly in their poetry.

By means of the critical methods used, the research throws light on the controversial traits of Khayyam's *Ruba'iyyat* and the different versions it has been translated into. The eleventh century Persian text has remained an attractive topic to many critics and poets since the nineteenth century. The more articles and poems are written about it, the more theories and arguments appear in relation to the mysterious figure of Khayyam. Hitherto, no scholarly work has compared Khayyam and these poet-translators. This thesis highlights the cross-cultural traits between these literatures. It argues that the interrelations observed between Persian, English and Arabic cultures and literatures served to enrich and renew the national literature of each of the countries. The thesis also attempts to shed light on the human experience of revolt against oppression. It is the human journey traced by Khayyam and the other three poets which is the center of attention.

Most critical sources are not really useful in tackling the comparative intercultural study of these texts. The Arabic references present a complete biography of each of the

Arabic poets and a detailed historical background of their countries; however, when it comes to a critical analysis of their poetry and in particular the *ruba'is*, the information given is sparse and based more on general descriptive criticism rather than modern literary theories. The Arabic references are limited to Western classifications such as Romanticism, Symbolism and others. The English sources are closer to an analysis of the Persian or British *ruba'is* yet they are not really thorough. Most offer uniform views and analyses about the epicurean trait of Fitzgerald's poem. This unilateral perspective may be traced back to their implicit ideas about the Orient as a place of sensual and earthly pleasures. They tend to classify the Orient to which Khayyam's text belongs, disregarding the philosophy conveyed in the Persian text. Finally, some sources are concerned with labeling the poet as a philosopher, a Sufi, an atheist, Existentialist or fatalist more than shedding light on the rebellious journey undertaken by Khayyam. This study seeks to distinguish itself as an exploration of the interface between individual poetic technique and social political discourse.

Chapter 2

Political, Social and Cultural Frameworks

This chapter focuses on the “transfusion” of a collection of Persian quatrains into European and Arabic poetry (Alexander 81). The originality of the Persian, English or Arabic poems relates to the milieus in which Fitzgerald, Rami and Najafi lived. Each poet integrated the *Ruba 'iyyat* into his social and political contexts, adapting it in accordance with his cultural norms. This chapter examines primarily the cultural, political and social backgrounds that conditioned each version of the poem. How did these contribute to the production of the *Ruba 'iyyat*? Was there a certain linkage between eleventh-century Iran, nineteenth-century England and twentieth-century Arab world, which prepared a fertile literary soil for the reception of the *Rubaiyyat* and made them part of world literature?

2.1. Persia: The Eleventh-Century Seljuq Reign

The political situation in Persia at the time was in a state of turmoil. Persia had fallen under the control of two authorities: the ineffective Abbasid Caliphate in Iraq and the powerful Seljuq Turkish empire. Both rulers maintained a bond by means of marriage and the Sunni Islam faith. But, in reality each was ruling separately and independently of the other. The Seljuqids' concerns were mainly military aimed at expanding the Islamic Empire and shunning any external threat. The Seljuq empire extended from China to Syria (Browne 168). Their anxiety to conquer other countries distracted them from

perceiving the schisms in their own country. Some princes went as far as attempting to overthrow the Turkish sovereign in order to capture the power themselves. Even the Seljuq princes fought against one another. Edward Browne notes that, "Persia was split up into the numerous governments of the Buwayhid princes (whose Shi'ite opinions left little respect for the puppet Caliphs of their time), or was held by sundry insignificant dynasts, each ready to attack the other, and thus contribute to the general weakness" (165). The main threat to stability in Persia emanated from the Assassins, a Shi'ite sect originally related to the Fatimid Caliph in Egypt. In the name of the Isma'ili sect, it grew and assembled many partisans who caused terror in Persia by committing massacres. After getting their autonomy from Egypt, the Assassins constituted an independent organization whose members killed upon orders (Browne 206). One of the victims of these so called Fidai's that followed Hasan Sabbah (Browne 187) was Nidhami-I-Mulk, Alp Arslan's then Malikshah's prime minister, who accused the shi'ites of heresy (Browne 187). The Assassins, who first settled in Alamut, dominated entire countries without the interference of either the Turks or the Abbaside Caliphate neither of whom was able to take control of its inner affairs. Browne claims that, "the civil wars which prevailed earlier this period enabled the Assassins to establish and consolidate their power in Persia" (312). Thus, local chaos facilitated the surge of such terrorist military organizations; in the name of religion, they executed people in order to obtain power. In fact, they vanquished the prince Malikshah thanks to his indecision and distraction with the external affairs of other countries. The political instability left a strong impact on a society that as a result could not live peacefully.

2.1.1. Social Frustration

Socially, the Persian community suffered from division and alienation. The Persians who embraced a rigid Sunni Islam came under the control of the Shi'ite sects who claim that Imam Ali was the only just successor to the Prophet because of his kinship, being the prophet's son-in-law. The Shi'ites eventually split into two: the sect of the seven who regarded Ismail as the last Imam and the sect of the twelve who affirmed that Mahdi was the last Imam and that he disappeared and will be returning. Between the Arabic conquest that took place in the seventh century and the Turkish occupation, the Persians gradually distanced themselves from their heritage and favored Arabic and Turkish values. The elitist values of generosity, honor and courage were admired by the Persians. The Arabic language became the official language adopted in the state. Not only did the Persians witness the eradication of their native culture and religion, they were also treated unequally by both the Arabs and the Turks. They were second-class citizens inferior to the Arab and Turk conquerors. Hence, feelings of social injustice built up over the centuries. Meanwhile, the majority of Persians could not resist against it, which resulted in deep frustration and anger. Only a few nationalist movements appeared such as *Shu'ubiyya*. This movement claimed equality through the Quran which affirms "the equality of the non-Arab shu'ub and the Arab qaba'il (tribes): "Those nearest to God are the most pious, regardless of ethnic origin" (Kennedy 36). This movement attempted to obtain an equal treatment for Persians; it was a form of resistance in disguise launched by the Persians who wanted to reassert themselves in their own land.

2.1.2. The Cultural Decline

With respect to the culture of eleventh-century Persia, all sciences and philosophies faded away in favor of religion. In the tenth century, Greek philosophy effected intercultural exchanges which were led by many Persian thinkers such as Ibn Sina. One century later, a tremendous decline occurred when philosophical debates and intellectual opinions were forbidden with threats of persecution. The Caliph al-Mutiwakkil then al-Qadir, “opposed the intellectual debates(...) and Fatwas were decreed against philosophers” (Browne 71). An orthodox theology, the Ash’arites, took supremacy over the Mu’tazilites who were influenced by Greek philosophy. The religious sciences ruled unrivaled: “All sciences were rejected as associated with the devil” (Razavi 72) and little importance was given to poetry. This is why Persian rebels and thinkers used poems and parables as means of expression (Browne 86). Poetry was an appropriate outlet for their protest and anger against the political rule and its oppressive decrees.

2.1.3. Poetry: A Weapon of Resistance

Persian poetry gradually renounced the simplicity and spontaneity of its Persian background. The Arabic poetic forms influenced Persian poetry; *qasida*, an Arabic invention, was integrated into Persian genres starting with, “tashbib, passing into the *madih* or panegyric” (Browne 30). Generally, Persian poets imitated the Arabs in, “wandering from court to court, dedicating a work or a poem to each of their various patrons” (Browne 101). Biruni, a Persian writer, wrote in Arabic which became the

literary language of Persia. The Persian poems sounded artificial whether in form or meaning; they generally adopted an artificial setting which was the desert and supplied their personages with alienating Arabic traits. An ornate style developed making use of the various stylistic embellishments that were employed by Arabic poets and good poetry in Persia came to be based on craft and style.

2.1.4. Khayyam's Background and Resistance

Omar Khayyam rejected mainstream political and religious norms of his age and embraced philosophy and logic. He was born in the city of Khurasan, "one of the richest cultural milieus" (Razavi 67). However, Khurasan's cultural influence decreased after the conflicts between the Seljuqs and Ghaznavids, the assassination of the Ismailis and the eradication of Zoroastrian culture (Razavi 68). Khayyam grew up with a rebellious spirit; he was influenced by Ibn Sina and it is said that he died with one of the philosopher's books in his hands. He was interested in science, especially astronomy and mathematics on which he had formulated his own theories. He also succeeded in his *Ruba'iyyat* in avoiding Arabic embellishments. For his philosophy in life he chose the quatrain form which was "the oldest indigenous verse-form produced in Iran" (Browne 18). Being rarely used at that time, it was the safest form in which to convey opposition to the religious and political persecutions that were common in Persia at the time. Ghazali was one of the people who classified him among the heretics. Khayyam did not use the Arabic form of *qasida* as many of his contemporaries did. He adopted the *ruba'i*, a Persian invention consisting of two *bayts* or four hemistiches in which the first, second and fourth

misra ' or hemistiche rhyme, written in the *hazaj* and said to be independent in itself (Browne 34). The *ruba 'is* written with a Sufi terminology in simple and unsophisticated style integrated his philosophy that he was unable to communicate openly due to religious prohibitions. Probably, this is the reason why Khayyam's quatrains remained unread and "obscured" during his age and the following centuries. The *Ruba 'iyyat* remained largely unread until the nineteenth century when Fitzgerald found a copy in one of the British libraries and chose to translate it. John Hay maintained that, "Khayyam had sung a song of incomparable beauty and power in an environment no longer worthy of him, in a language of narrow range, for many generations the song was virtually lost" (qtd. in Razavi 261). Perhaps Hay underestimated the Persian audience and the language used in the *Ruba 'iyyat*. Perhaps also the critic mistook the quatrains for a "song"; Khayyam formed his philosophy after covering a large number of readings and participating in many intellectual debates. I suggest that the quatrains were not lost because the message was too advanced for the Persians to grasp; such messages had surreptitiously existed due to the social, political and religious restraints of the age; they could not be communicated openly under the threat of death. My argument is that Hay's degrading comment exaggerates the importance of the fact that the British discovered the *Ruba 'iyyat*. Khayyam did not get involved in politics; he managed to remain away from politics even though he was close to the Prime Minister Nidhamu-l- Mulk and benefited from his patronage. This lack of interest was illustrated by an unverified story that recounts a relationship between Hasan Sabbah, Nidhamu-l-Mulk and Khayyam as school boys. The three made a pact that if one became eminent, he would be willing to help the other two. In fact, Nidhamu-l-Mulk reached a high position through the Seljuq prince

Malikshah. He fulfilled his promise by offering Khayyam a high political position in one of the cities, but the latter refused and was satisfied with an annual pension. Khayyam was disinterested in political power and the prevalent religious sciences, despite his deep knowledge of the *Hadith* and *Quran*.

2.2. The Nineteenth-Century British Colonial Empire

Nineteenth-century Victorian England bore parallels to eleventh-century Persian Empire. Both maintained powerful positions in the world at the expense of their internal affairs. Britain was concerned with acquiring a great number of colonies, especially in the Orient. From the outside, it was a great British Empire made powerful by the colonies it conquered; from the inside, it suffered great conflicts.

On the political level, it preserved its strength by militarily presiding over the greatest empire in the world and benefiting economically from its colonies. The purpose of the colonizers was not educational or cultural as they assumed. The aim of colonization was, “neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease and tyranny” (Cesaire 32). These are false pretenses covering up an illegal occupation. There was often enough little goodwill involved in conquering other countries; it was generally motivated by economic greed. Memmi compares colonization to, “a voyage towards an easier life” (3) in which one could gain more in the occupied land than in one’s own country. The colonizer left his native land due dissatisfaction and expectation of better living standards. The British Empire fed on these countries using their rare agricultural products to enrich its own. It

did not spare the colonies or even its own citizens from this materialistic urge, exposing them to severe conditions, victimizing children in the name of industrialization. Many literary figures during the nineteenth century wrote about the children's hardships and labor. This resulted in major changes in the nineteenth century.

2.2.1. Social Problems

On the social level, the British suffered from poor living conditions. The economic depression in the mid-nineteenth century led to severe social problems such as unemployment and poverty. The British under these harsh circumstances protested and rioted. Child labor could hardly pass without being noticed in a society that amassed mainly in slums (Abrams 920). It took a while before reform bills were decreed to spread democracy and reduce poverty. Meanwhile, science and technology were blooming at the expense of traditions and values. The scientific discoveries in this period resulted in two contradictory trends: one of them consisted in spreading a skeptical attitude toward faith while the other instilled an extreme puritan code. On the one hand, skepticism toward religion ensued and moral values crumbled. On the other hand, religious fanaticism or Puritanism was a reaction against the materialistic age. Despite all the divisions and internal changes, the Victorian society ironically sought to preserve the glowing picture of united family gatherings, while in fact, disintegrated households appeared with more interest in materialistic aspects than in education. Arguably, British society, the nucleus of the Empire, was similar to the Empire in terms of its preoccupation with external glitter at the expense of the essence. Consequently, society became fragile.

2.2.2. Fitzgerald's Background and Resistance

A typical product of this civilization would be Fitzgerald's family. The father, a pillar of patriarchal society, went into bankruptcy due to the severe economic depression at the time. He ceded the authoritative role to the mother who represented the flourishing materialistic world of sumptuous parties, elegant clothes and numerous estates. Fitzgerald himself fell under the influence of his mother, but at the same time he developed a clear resistance against the apparently rich and sophisticated life. Consequently, he decided to isolate himself from the changing social structures such as the matriarchal authority embodied in his mother and his wife later on. He also showed a skeptical attitude with respect to faith, which was the reason Fitzgerald ignored the religious aspect of Khayyam's quatrains (Razavi 216). Nature was his comfort and his refuge away from religious and social values. Besides nature, he searched into Eastern manuscripts hoping to find in this ultimate "other" a spirituality he did not see in the West. In the West, he sought traits that did not pertain to the materialistic age he lived in. Alexander claims that Fitzgerald's, "salvation through the whole of that trauma was Omar Khayyam" (65). To the Victorian poet, the *Ruba 'iyyat* arguably constituted a catharsis in which he purged all the negative feelings that he could not reveal as a result of his mother's domination and the materialism of his age. After reading Khayyam and like many literary figures of his age, Fitzgerald projected his own feelings and rebellious attitudes through Khayyam. Even though he admitted in his introduction that his poem is a "free translation", it is rather a distinct creation preserving the four verse form of the original but with a different

content. Alexander reinforces Fitzgerald's originality by stating that he, "invariably creates his own ambience and his own ideas out of Omar's" (71). The Persian quatrains were only a trigger to stir "personal associations of his own" (Alexander 71-72).

Fitzgerald did not deeply understand Oriental languages and their respective cultures. He was not familiar with Persian history or civilization in addition to the fact that he never set foot there. Yet he found in the *Ruba 'iyyat* a means to express his ideas in a familiar British setting. "The poem is not of arid Persia, largely desert, but of England's green and tree-shaded countryside, (...) his Persian garden with its roses and nightingales is really an English garden" (Alexander 70-71).

The 19th century witnessed the ascendancy of reason and science over spontaneous emotions emphasized during the Romantic period. Numerous scientific theories clearly indicated the governing trend at that time. Darwinism was one of the main theories that contributed to materialism by objectifying humankind (Abrams et al. 924). This theory opposed religion by tracing the origin of human beings back to the animal species. The industrial revolution, along with its machines and technological inventions, was a major factor in radically changing the Victorians' life. Mechanization effected many negative traits such as boredom, lack of motivation and an objectification of the human being. Plausibly, the British individual often felt reduced to an object, a thing devoid of any human traits. He deviated from artistic and creative activities to perform robotic and monotonous actions, and was caught into the vicious circle of industrial and technological productivity. With respect to literature, many writers, as a result of this lost Romanticism became nostalgic for self-expression and emotional spontaneity. They alternatively found escape in this other part of the world that they labeled as spiritual;

Razavi maintains that, "European Romanticism (...) had turned eastward seeking spiritual wealth and the marvels of the Orient" (205). The poets did not manage to reconcile themselves with the harsh and materialistic conditions ruling in Britain, and sought a return to romanticism in the Eastern world away from their homeland. The Western colonizers never grasped the orient as it is. They were inclined to stamp the orient in their own way. Said comments on the unbalanced relationship between the colonizer and the colonized by asserting that, "the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else" (67). Westerners molded the Orient into the form they desired; they disregarded its traits and characteristics to view it strictly as spiritual fantasy land.

Fitzgerald was raised in this atmosphere, but he was a rebel who hated the glowing appearances and social propriety and favored learning and love of nature. Unlike his composition of poetry which abounded with imagery, his way of living was devoid of ornaments. His fame originated in translating Khayyam's quatrains; his audience acclaimed the discovery of an Eastern literary trace. However, some might forget that Fitzgerald's fame did not lie in retracing a long lost literary production; it lies instead in the poet's own invention which was triggered by these quatrains. My argument is that Fitzgerald's quatrains are an outcry against the values of his age and a refuge in nature advocating a return to simplicity and love.

2.3. Twentieth Century Occupied Iraq and Egypt

Before the European occupation of Arab lands, the Arab world had been conquered by the Ottoman Empire. Political and social crises plagued the Arab world during much of this time. Politicians and rulers were corrupt and used bribe in order to run the affairs of the elites while the common people fell into deprivation, poverty and illness (Ezzedine 123). Such harsh conditions subsisted until the Europeans occupied the Arab world. The Europeans, who were expected to rescue the Arabs, brought problems of their own. In other words, they, too were colonizers. Egypt fell under the French rule while Iraq became a British colony. Rulers kept their positions in return for the colonizer's silence about corruption. The Arab authorities were puppets in the hands of the superior power that dictated its wishes through military superiority which led to social and cultural hegemony.

2.3.1. The Arab Search for a Lost Identity

The Arabs attempted to resist colonial power in order to gain their autonomy. After many futile attempts, they fell victim to despair and submitted to a bitter reality. Memmi states in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* that the colonizer's, "justification requires the usurper to extol himself to the skies and to drive the usurped below the ground at the same time" (53). The colonizers' aim was to degrade the colonized in order to protect themselves against any future revolutions. They deluded the colonized by pretending to come to his rescue and introduce him to civilization, to, "prod the Orient into active life,

to turn the Orient from unchanging 'Oriental' passivity into militant modern life" (Said 240). Hence, the Arabs interiorized a sense of inferiority and imitated the west. They looked up to the colonizer trying to adopt his culture and his language. However, many rebels refused to participate in the colonial erasure of the past. Memmi states, "sooner or later, the potential rebel falls back on the traditional values" and he adds that, "religion constitutes another refuge value, both for the individual and the group" (99-101). The Arabs protested against the infiltration of the colonizers' values and culture, and did not choose to remain helpless as their rulers did in the midst of this invasion that mainly aimed at economic greed and exploitation. It was hard for the rebels among the younger generations to fight against the eradication of their traditions and civilization. They had to look for ways to unite the people under one identity and ignite their fervor. One of these ways was religion, Islam. The religious feelings constituted the core of the Arabs' identity and strengthened their sense of belonging to their countries. The other means consisted of Arab traditional values. Against the foreign power, some Arabs gave up military force and chose instead a reembrace of religious values and ancient literary glories.

2.3.2. The Decadence of Arabic Culture and Literature

Due to the colonial situation, Arabic culture faced a crisis that led to major changes. The Arabic language that had already suffered during the long Turkish rule arguably did not recover during the period of British colonization despite the vaunted achievements of the renaissance. The colonized found themselves bound to use the colonizer's language

which became the official language in certain countries, a fact that weakened the Arabic language and culture immensely. The Arabs' golden age in history came to be generally forgotten. History became gradually connected to the current colonial reality. Plausibly, Arab writers sought imitation of Western literary schools and theories. Many writers attempted to mend the weaknesses of Arabic language and literature by means of Western trends such as Romanticism, Symbolism, Realism and free verse; however, the rescue procedures lacked their personal signatures. They took to imitation in a context remote from individuality and history. This type of so called Arabic modernism or Renaissance differed from one Arab country to another. Modernity was specifically embraced in Lebanon and Egypt, while it was delayed in other countries such as Iraq that got the echoes of modernism through literary magazines. The tendency for modernism was launched earlier in Egypt and Syria than in the rest of the Arab world due to political and cultural circumstances (Haddara 20). The Arabs, according to Ezzedine, became strongly aware of their identity and flourishing past (124). Some retrieved from Arab history the golden era represented by the Abbasid period and tried to revive it through poetry and various writings, others attempted to reaffirm themselves by clinging to religion. There was a call to religion and a revival of the glories of the *Quran* against the infidels and the enemies represented by the occupants (Ezzedine 61). Ezzedine also identifies poetry that was characterized by original Islamic and Abbasid traces (25). The writers looked back to the lost literary heritage in order to borrow its forms and purposes. Literature that used to be in the previous periods a craft, with language and imagery as its main focus, became their model. They followed it meticulously in their composition. Hence poetry that had previously occupied an advanced status regained its glory in the

twentieth century as the most appreciated genre in literature. Under the effect of the West, poetry abandoned sincerity and spontaneity and embraced artificiality. It became a major trait in this modern poetry.

2.3.3. Najafi's and Rami's Resistance

The Arabs at this time were in search of their lost identity through the rigid Arabic language and rules and Islamic religious feelings. Najafi and Rami were perfect illustrations of these movements; Haddara classifies the former among the classicists. He notes that Najafi's poetry lacks true emotions and creative imagery (20). The writer claims that modernism was delayed in most Arab countries; however, I argue that Najafi's resistance was due to an attempt to revive the Arabic heritage and regain the long lost identity. A consciousness of the past constituted a reaction against the colonial power that tried to eradicate this past and adopt "thingification" (Cesaire 9) in order to restructure the colonized identity. That is why Najafi, who left Iraq after the failure of the national revolution in 1930, found a shelter in Iran when he learned the Persian language. Persian civilization and especially the *Ruba'iyat* were not imposed upon him like the colonial British culture. He chose to go in depth into these quatrains for a particular purpose that went beyond the fact of embracing another culture distinct from his own. Najafi aimed to adapt Arabic classical forms expressing new concepts that were still Oriental in nature. The *Ruba'iyat* met his expectations. Through this neighboring poetical medium, the Iraqi poet managed to let out his frustration and anger caused by his

country's occupants. Accordingly, he traced back the vestiges of Arabic literature and adopted the classical form in his quatrains.

Even though Egypt, Syria and Lebanon took the lead in modernism, Rami made use of the Islamic religious fervor in an attempt to restore Arab identity. Islam, along with the concept of *Jihad*, had always imposed a threat on the Europeans (Said 92). In another context, he states that, "the European encounter with the Orient and specifically with Islam, strengthened this system of representing the Orient and turned Islam into the very epitome of an outsider against which European civilization was founded" (70). By means of missionaries and schools in the Arab world, the European occupants sought to break the unity of the Arabs since it might jeopardize their existence. The only reason why the Arabs tolerated Ottoman sovereignty was Islam. Therefore, Ezzedine explains that nationalism and religion were among the main influences in Arab literature (30-33). By means of invoking ancient literary glory and Islamic fervor, Najafi and Rami succeeded in raising an awareness of the shattered Arab identity.

2.4. Similarities and Contrasts Among the Poets

Besides having the *Ruba 'iyyat* in common, Khayyam, Fitzgerald, Rami and Najafi shared similar circumstances in their respective periods. There is a link between the different poets' backgrounds despite time and geography that distanced them. The different countries lived in turbulence socially, politically and culturally. Even though eleventh-century Persia, nineteenth-century England and the twentieth-century Arab world experienced the effects of the Ottoman and British empires, they suffered internal

weakness. Conditions were unstable due to the countries' preoccupation with military and political issues; Persians expanded their empire, the Victorians increased the number of their colonies. Oppression was a constant in all three situations. Like Persia that was exposed to different occupations, the modern Arab world suffered both Ottoman and European colonization. Persian and Arab societies in two distinct and remote periods faced a similar injustice. Not only did the latter lead them to violence, it also urged them to reaffirm themselves; they lived in occupied countries whose history and civilization were at risk. While nineteenth-century Britain faced no occupation, it did experience harsh social conditions. British subjects were defamiliarized with the situation in their country whose leaders' main concern lay in military achievements. The population grew with a certain dissatisfaction with successive crises and depressions. The internal crises changed the social and moral values in Persia, England and Iran leaving a great impact on cultural productivity.

These conflicts were not often the object of explicit interest in literature and poetry of eleventh-century Persia, nineteenth-century Britain and twentieth-century Arab world; they were rather implied in the poets' works. The reason for such indirection might be that political oppression obstructed freedom of speech and penalized free thinkers. In Persia, the religious attitude strengthened by the ruling dynasty widely prevailed. Hence, sciences and philosophy were limited. The creative artistic flow was under continuous control by the state officials. Omar Khayyam rebelled against restraints on expression through poetry using Sufi terminologies. In Britain too, overgrowing materialistic power and sumptuous appearances infiltrated nineteenth-century way of living. It was an age of mechanization and scientific inventions. Fitzgerald, discontent with the current situation

in his country, turned toward the East and found in the *Ruba 'iyyat* what he missed in the West. He used romantic imagery away from skeptical sciences. Likewise, the occupied Arab world oppressed liberties and exerted pressure on the artists. The latter were obliged to use the foreign language of the occupant and gradually lost touch with their own Arabic language. Under such strict regulations, they did not manage to express their ideas naturally in their work; instead they either imitated the Western schools or went back to ancient literature. Najafi and Rami took refuge in the Persian *Ruba 'iyyat* which was oriental. They adopted the Abbaside style and a religious fervor in an attempt to search for a lost identity and revive their heritage.

Both Victorian and modern Arab poets found the Persian *Ruba 'iyyat* amenable to resistance. The poetic genre was not arguably in a sound status, whether in England or in the Arab world, and it needed a fresh breeze and a radical change in content. This content was composed in similar repressed circumstances. Khayyam, Fitzgerald, Rami and Najafi reacted to the circumstances in an indirect and symbolic way. Through the *Ruba 'iyyat*, they all expressed their discontent and suggested their personal remedies to the turbulence witnessed in their countries.

Chapter 3

Fitzgerald's Resistance against the Age

Numerous critics have argued that Edward Fitzgerald's 1859 translation of the *Ruba'iyat* of Omar Khayyam is a romantic escape from reality. Erik Gray claims it is a "form of evasion" (93). Others portray Fitzgerald as a typical Western poet looking for an outlet from Western civilization in an Oriental textual world that is full of sensual and Bacchic pleasures. In this chapter, close attention to poetic genre and the theme will reveal that Fitzgerald, like Khayyam, was far more critical of the social structures of nineteenth century Britain than escapist. His quatrains convey a resistance against the nineteenth century in its political, social and scientific dimensions.

3.1. The Choice of the *Ruba'i*

In the eleventh century, the Persian poet Omar Khayyam adopted the poetic form of the *ruba'i* defined as a quatrain in which the first, second and fourth verses rhyme. The choice of the *ruba'i* was arguably a form of resistance against the foreign colonial regime existing in Persia at the time. In this chapter, I suggest that Khayyam decided on this particular form because it represents, "the natural accent of Persian and its intonation, which in all the other meters are hustled uncomfortably into a quantitative metrical system alien to its genius and poetic phonology" (Shahid 11). The *ruba'i* was one of the original Persian poetic genres that remained unaffected by the introduction of new Arabic forms and meters into Persian poetry including the *qasida* or ode. Aside from

Khayyam, only a few poets such as Baba Tahir of Hamadan, Abu Khayr, and Al-Ansari used the *ruba'i* or quatrain (Browne 246).

The *ruba'i* displays a particular character of its own in both form and content. Like the Arabic *bayt*, every quatrain is an entity in itself; it forms a meaning independently of the others. There have been many attempts to define the *ruba'i*. Browne defines it as, “an absolutely complete and isolated unit” (259). Christensen, along with Browne, notes that the quatrains are usually arranged in alphabetical order (24); however, in Omar Khayyam’s *Ruba’iyyat* there exists besides the alphabetical quatrains a small number that are non- alphabetical (26). Razavi explains that the quatrain called “taraneh,” or “dobaiti” in Persian “consists of two hemistiches for a total of four parts” (90). Furthermore, he points to the simplicity that characterizes the *ruba'i* throughout the Persian literary tradition, and especially in the eleventh century for, “only the first, second and fourth lines rhymed” (90). Dashti turns the reader’s attention to the importance of the final line, “summing up the moral of the whole” (16). This gives the four-line Persian stanza an intellectual aspect since, “being so brief, the *ruba'i* lends itself particularly to the expression of pithy, epigrammatical thoughts” (16). It is the contention of this chapter that by employing an unsophisticated and simple Persian poetical frame for his philosophical view of life, Khayyam rebelled against a foreign culture that he was otherwise forced to embrace. In implicit contrast to the complexity of the *qasida*, the *ruba'i* form permitted the expression of a philosophical message that could reach everyone.

The potential for syllogistic reasoning deployed in Khayyam’s *Ruba’iyyat* is a poetic trait generally unavailable in Arab poetry. His linkage of lines in a *ruba'i* thereby

forms, “a self-contained unit, intelligible by itself and through itself, dealing with one aspect or facet of reality” (Shahid 9). Shahid’s analysis of the *ruba’i* compares it to a syllogism in which “the first two lines are premises and the last two lines clinch the argument of the syllogism and form the conclusion” (10). The logical chaining of the *ruba’i* allows the *Ruba’iyyat* to have an intellectual aspect through which Khayyam’s philosophy is developed. I think that Khayyam’s mathematical background and contribution contributed to shaping this logical frame.

Persian literature of the eleventh century was deeply influenced by Arabic poetry in terms of form and literary embellishments. Against the general trend of the age, Khayyam opted for the unsophisticated, simple and straightforward style which has always been a characteristic of Persian literature. According to Browne, it is not “florid and ornate, abounding in rhetorical embellishments, and overlaid with metaphor” (17). It favors improvisation, especially in poetry and was “highly esteemed in early times” (38). Khayyam’s simple *Ruba’iyyat* constitutes part of this literary tradition at that time. Shahid argues that “Khayyam’s poetry is predominantly poetry of content rather than of form” (15). The poet’s main concern is to convey the thought about the life journey. Khayyam selected the simple Hazaj for the *Ruba’iyyat*. This meter permits it to merge well with the content. It actually helps in better conveying the Persian poet’s thoughts and philosophy. Shahid perhaps attributes too much importance to this choice of prosody for he says, “the transformation of Omar’s philosophy into poetry would probably have failed if he had chosen the wrong prosodical form for his poetry” (9). At any rate, the critic praises Khayyam’s unsophisticated prosody for lightening the heavy meditative material it expresses. Not only did the simplicity adopted by Khayyam manage to convey

his philosophy, it also made a political breakthrough by excluding the Arabic literary forms and going back to Persian literature and language. I suggest that Khayyam intended to revive Persian roots that had been long forgotten due to Arabic colonial presence.

In diction, too, Khayyam uses a simple, unsophisticated language to deliver his philosophical message. He admits that his aim is, “to speak the truth and not as a metaphor” (110). Nevertheless, Khayyam does employ many images and metaphors to elucidate philosophical ideas. Among them, Shahid lists, “the manuscript of youth,” “the cup- bearer of life,” “the dawn of nothingness,” “the waste of annihilation,” “the wall of existence,” “the board of being,” and “the party of life” (8). His metaphors combine as the critic notices, the concrete and the abstract forming a duality which serves the “philosopher’s insight and scope of reach” (8). Hence, we could claim that Khayyam achieved resistance in both form and content with respect to his poetry.

Fitzgerald, like Khayyam, showed originality in the midst of the common trend of his age by choosing a unique form for his poetry. In the nineteenth century adaptation of Khayyam’s masterpiece, Fitzgerald employed a poetic form that was not generally popular in the Victorian age. The mid-to-late nineteenth century abounded in scientific essays and novels more than in poetry. Thus Fitzgerald’s resistance against his age included the form he chose for his ideas. He adopted poetry, specifically the Persian form of the quatrain used in Khayyam’s original *Ruba’iyyat* as evidenced in the Ouseley or the Calcutta manuscripts. It is worth noting that the latter constitutes the oldest copy of the *Ruba’iyyat*, “written nearly 350 years after the death of the poet” (Christensen 7).

Fitzgerald’s revolt against his own age also diverged from Khayyam’s poetic form. He attempts to impose a certain unity among the quatrains by starting the first with the

morning and ending the last with the night. The unity of time, which is not present in Kayyam's *Ruba'iyat*, enhances the importance of the present moment and passes over mysteries of birth and death. In addition to the unity of time, the stanzas are organized according to themes such as destiny's control over life, the rejection of reason, and urgings to enjoy life. Shahid perceives that Fitzgerald, "grouped them around a number of themes. In doing so, he gave an orderly sequence" (21) which does not usually exist in the self-independent *ruba'i* form. The *ruba'i* form, lacking organic unity, was common in Persia and met the taste of the audience due to the characteristic that it shares with classical Arabic poetry. Western poetry, on the other hand, tends to focus on a logical link among the lines. In order to connect his ideas more tightly, Fitzgerald uses referent pronouns between the quatrains. He also repeats words and images as, "a formal means of ensuring that each individual occurrence will be forgotten" (Gray 104).

Another significant difference between Khayyam and Fitzgerald is in the latter's disregard of perceiving as oppressive the sense of unity and order that characterized the scientific age, Fitzgerald often ignores internal cohesion by letting the last line or two stray from the rest. Gray comments on the absence of an internal order in the quatrains: "the third line proposes a new element, a hope, a change; but it is immediately, even willfully, forgotten by the fourth line" (103). In quatrain 12 of Fitzgerald's earlier 1854 edition, the poet invokes a *carpe diem* theme:

"How sweet is mortal Sovranty!"--think some:

Others--"How blest the Paradise to come!"

Ah, take the Cash in hand and waive the Rest;

Oh, the brave Music of a distant Drum! (54)

The image of “the brave music of the distant drum” in line 4 does not relate to the previous line. It is not clear if Fitzgerald means Judgment Day by referring to “distant drums” and in that case, why does he use the adjective with a positive connotation “brave”? In line 3, he valorizes the “cash in hand” of actual life rather than the far future and the afterlife. The poet disrupts the unity of the quatrain by adding a final verse that does not match with the meaning.

Fitzgerald’s main concern is to keep a logical bond among the quatrains at the expense of internal consistency, but in doing so he risks the clarity of the meaning.

Quatrain 32 is another instance of the lack of internal cohesion.

There was a Door to which I found no Key:

There was a Veil past which I could not see:

Some little Talk awhile of ME and THEE

There seemed--and then no more of THEE and ME (88)

It involves two ideas; lines 1 and 2 emphasize the incapacity of elucidating the questions concerning the metaphysical world through the usage of concrete imagery such as the “door” and the “veil”, line 4 shifts the meaning to the ultimate absence of people due to death, “and then no more of thee and me.” While the first part connotes some regret due to the inability of comprehending the metaphysical world, the other half expresses melancholy at not being part of this earthly life. Another case is quatrain 41:

The outwardness of existence and non-existence,

Inwardness of all that is high and low (104)

He sacrifices the beauty of the paradox in order to keep the same concept of the previous quatrain about the rejection of reason.

Among the literary genres and metrical variations common at the time, the British poet adopted the classical form. Weir quotes Fitzgerald: "My translation will interest you from its form" (16). Poetry according to Fitzgerald is a craft. We observed that the core of Fitzgerald's poetry is the framework which consists of rhythm, diction and imagery. He adopts the classical iambic pentameter, which is usually used for major, serious and intellectual topics. This meter in Fitzgerald's rendering of Khayyam has a "musical ethos" that resonates with meditation and intellectualism (Shahid 22). What helps achieve this musicality is the alliteration figuring in his lines such as,

Into this Universe, and why not knowing,
Nor whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing:
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing. (83)

The repetition of "w" and "l" reinforces life's unpredictability and incomprehensiveness. The assonance, which consists here in the repetition of the vowels "i" and "o," reflects perhaps in the play of contrasts both lightness and seriousness.

3.2. Wine as a Symbol of Resistance

At the time of Khayyam, a controversy broke out over the use of Bacchic terminology in Khayyam's poetry; some critics tended to interpret it literally while others classified this direct terminology figuratively as part of Sufi philosophy. Sufi imagery is actually

symbolic, referring to God as “the Friend,” “the Beloved,” and “the Darling” and the pleasure resulting from meditating on him is similar to the wine drinking effect or intoxication (Browne 268). Based on this language, some critics gave wine a Sufi interpretation and attributed a spiritual meaning to it. On the other hand more recently, Razavi points out that the wine mentioned by Khayyam is that of wisdom; he relates it to his own philosophy in appreciating the present moment before life comes to an end (112). We remark that the wine the Persian poet uses is not literal and consequently he cannot be described as hedonist, neither should it be given Sufi or intellectual dimensions. The wine Khayyam describes in his *Ruba'iyat* cannot be interpreted in isolation from the circumstances in his age. Wine is a rebellious linguistic element in an age when freedom of expression is forbidden by the authorities.

The Persian poet attacks the hypocrisy that prevailed among the Arab religious authorities since they were in charge of censorship in the eleventh century. He accuses them of fakeness and immorality and objects to the way they oblige people to abide by rules they do not follow themselves:

be not arrogant, saying: “I do not drink wine. Thou dost a hundred things in comparison to which wine drinking is but child’s play.” (123)

Khayyam was often criticized for his challenging imagery such as

o wheel of heaven: I am not satisfied with thy rotation. Why dost thou give me advice? I am immune to advice (113).

However, it was only a resistant reaction against the extremists who exercised a wide control and issued decrees at the time. This is made clear in his verse

every love- lament that a drunkard raises at dawn is better than the cry of
the hypocritical zealots (126),

The defiant attitude Khayyam undertakes against the pretenses of the religious hypocrites is revealed in his frequent repetition of the term “wine” in his quatrains. He usually does not use any other imagery along with that of wine:

If thou sprinklest wine on the mountain, it dances. A defective man is he
who is deficient in wine.

Why dost thou command me to repent of wine? Wine is that spirit which
brings out personality (128).

In these and other lines, Khayyam uses vivifying wine as a symbolic revolt against the strict religious teachings imposed by the Arab authorities in Persia during this period. Similarly, Fitzgerald elaborates on wine drinking along with the motifs related to it such as tavern and cup. In addition to bread and poetry, wine is significant in the poet’s life turning the “wilderness” of his age into “paradise”:

Beside me singing in the Wilderness--

And Wilderness is Paradise enow (52)

It provides pleasure and enjoyment unrivaled by the age’s scientific achievements. Wine, the natural juice of the grapes, represents the poet’s contact with nature. He longs for a simple and natural way of living that opposes the complications and disturbances of a boisterous period. Hence, personified wine is not only a lifetime companion or a wife, it is also considered to be a permanent mate even in the afterlife. Khayyam and, following him, Fitzgerald wish to be washed and revived by wine after death.

Ah, with the grape my fading life provide,

And wash my body whence the life has died (143).

With respect to wine, Fitzgerald does not need to react strongly against anyone so he mostly alludes to wine indirectly in terms of imagery; he gives wine human attributes which consist of youth and beauty in the personification “the daughter of the vine” (102). Actually, the “vine” and “grape” often recur as synecdoches of wine:

Ah, with the grape my fading life provide,
And wash my body whence the life has died,
And in a windingsheet of vine-leaf wrapt (143).

Since wine constitutes no challenge in Fitzgerald’s Victorian environment, he seeks to defamiliarize this common element and express it in images.

Wine serves as therapeutic to the poet and humanity in general; hence, it can purge negative feelings and worldly worries that a mortal may have:

Drink wine: thou knowest not whence thou art come.

Be merry! Thou knowest not whither thou shalt go (Christensen 112)

Besides, it plays a positive role in uniting people regardless of their religions. Khayyam says, “It will relieve thee of all the care for the seventy-two sects” (Christensen 116), reflecting the turbulence that prevailed in his age. With respect to both Khayyam and Fitzgerald, wine is a means to spread peace even among the warring countries. The peace that Fitzgerald seeks does not find room in a British Empire that fed on the nations it conquered. It is only through wine that all people can reach a reconciliation including the colonizer and the colonized.

Due to its peaceful valor, both poets use the imagery of wine preciously conserved in artistically-shaped earthenware pots. The latter, art object, constitutes a worthy

receptacle for such an important content. The pot recurs as a motif in certain *Ruba'iyyat*, which are called *kuza-nama*, for their relevance to the drinking theme. The pot maker, like the poet, works skillfully on his object to present a masterpiece that is distinct from the world of commodified objects. Drinking wine is not only an activity performed early in the morning and ending at night; it is a tradition that should be preserved even after the poet's death. Fitzgerald, like Khayyam, attempted to pass on his resistance to posterity; the poets' message is not limited to their respective ages; it goes beyond the present to reach the future. He asks the later generation to commemorate the tradition:

And in thy joyous errand reach the spot

Where I made one- turn down an empty glass! (156).

The impermanence of life necessitates that people lead a harmonious and unsophisticated life. Like Khayyam, Fitzgerald embraces wine drinking as a reaction to the impermanence of life that forms a dominant theme in both the *Ruba'iyyat* and the quatrains. Razavi affirms that "what lies at the heart of the Khayyamian message is the notion of impermanence. Life is in a stage of flux" (99). The shortness of life haunts the human being from birth to death. It is represented in both Khayyam's and Fitzgerald's quatrains through the image of:

The flower that once has blown for ever dies (79).

No sooner does the flower blossom than it withers and dies. Fleeting life is a general truth that escapes any doubt or argument. It is the poet's starting point in his skeptical philosophy.

Death spares no one:

How sultan after sultan with his pomp

Abode his hour or two, and went his way (60).

No matter how powerful a human being is, one must meet one's destiny and face mortality. The British poet here may well be implicitly criticizing the vanity of the British leaders who thirst for more power while their stay on earth is only brief. Since all people will join the departed ones, one would do better to benefit from life's worldly pleasures such as wine.

Only nature and art challenge death and provide continuity. This idea is best rendered in Fitzgerald's imagery of the green grass springing from an unseen lip or those who are buried forming a support for the living who tread on earth.

Ourselves must we beneath the couch of earth

Descend, ourselves to make a couch-for whom? (72).

Clay is used to form other pots, artistic receptacles for the wine of life. It is through art, particularly poetry, that both poets achieve continuity and fame even after their death. Art outlives death. Fitzgerald's pot is analogous to Keats's urn in his famous ode pointing to aesthetic truth being the only certainty in our existence.

3.3. Human's Weakness versus Hubris

Both Khayyam and Fitzgerald stress human helplessness in an age dominated by hubris. Eleventh-century Persia was rife with people who claimed boundless power and fought for precedence in the Empire. The authorities at that time decided on the type of discussions and sciences to be forbidden or allowed. Similarly, nineteenth-century Britain swaggered with pride at being a great empire and source of scientific breakthroughs.

According to Khayyam and Fitzgerald, despite such power, mankind cannot answer the questions related to human provenance and destination. The terms “mystery” and “secret” are often repeated in Khayyam’s verses with respect to this issue:

Nobody can utter a single word rightly to explain the mystery, whence our
coming, and whither our going,

Where is the one who has come back to tell us the secret? (110),

Thou shalt go behind the veil of the mystery of annihilation (111).

Death and birth are not under human control:

Unborn tomorrow and dead yesterday (96)

These are in the hands of a greater power admitted by both poets.

Despite all their attempts to solve the mystery of existence, human beings are weak and powerless in the face of destiny. An image in the *Ruba 'iyyat* compares a human being to a “pawn” on a chess board moved whenever and wherever the superior force wants. One’s fate is already designated and nothing can change it. Fitzgerald adopts the Islamic imagery of “al-maktoob” in relation to destiny. This kind of determinism that haunts both the Persian and the Victorian poets cannot fairly be defined as pessimism, nor does it lead to nihilism and despair as some critics claim. Razavi, for example, asserts that the *Ruba 'iyyat* connotes a certain negativity and consists of, “existential bemoanings of a thinker similar to Schopenhauer and Goethe” (69); he also classifies Khayyam among the absurdists by stating, “Khayyam’s response can be called “satirical deconstructionism,” or a version of *reductio ad absurdum*” (77).

In contrast to Razavi’s analysis, Khayyam’s and Fitzgerald’s determinism may be channeled in a positive and practical manner seeking to benefit the most from life’s

offerings. They refused to give in to the status quo of their countries; they managed to come up with their own optimistic philosophy. Since the different branches of knowledge cannot offer solutions to the mysteries of human beginnings and ends, Khayyam and Fitzgerald find it futile to continue searching in the books of the wise and the learned. Philosophers have theorized about life and afterlife, but all is in vain. Scientists have resorted to different ideas, but they have reached nothing more than skepticism. With respect to Khayyam, philosophy as Shahid states, “failed to provide him with answers to the metaphysical questions” (4). Accordingly, he issues his judgment:

All the wise have become helpless captives” (Christensen 117).

He even reduces to naught

Those who are become the slaves of intellect and argument, in anxious ponderings over existence and non- existence” (118)

Similarly, Fitzgerald denies that the history of thought has elucidated man’s questions. Weir affirms that to the Victorian poet, “the thought is one which has weighed on the human heart since the world began” (24). Fitzgerald’s opinion came as a rebellious reaction against the predominance of science in his age. He was unable to express it openly so he managed through his quatrains to reveal the frustrated protest. In this manner, Gray declares that “the translations thus become fronts for what Fitzgerald oft had thought but never dared to express on his own behalf” (96).

Consequently, both poets decide to abandon reason for good in the figure of divorce:

Divorced old barren reason from my bed,
And took the daughter of the vine to spouse (102),

By thrice repeating the formula of divorce, I will repudiate reason
(Christensen 123).

Science and philosophy cannot quench the curiosity of the poets, so Khayyam recommends to keep away from them

It is better that thou fliest from all the lore of the sciences (117).

3.4. Refuge in the Past

As an alternative to reason, Khayyam and Fitzgerald refer to the earliest form of human thought which consists of explaining the natural by means of supernatural elements. According to them, mythology provides a satisfactory explanation of the beginning of the world, which is best illustrated by the imagery of a stallion attached to the sun for its journey round the earth. They reiterate names and actions of legendary heroes and kings such as Bahram and Jamshyd in order to prove their point that the brevity of life spares no one. They do not use scientific proofs or philosophical theories but historical and mythological figures to articulate truths more fundamental than science. Citing Bahram as an example, Khayyam confirms the universality of death that encompasses all people even those with glory and riches such as Bahram and Jamshyd:

Bahram spent his whole life in catching wild asses (gur); and lo! To day
the tomb (gur) has caught Bahram (117),

The brick that is placed upon the jar is sweeter than the kingdom of Jam
(128).

The allusions to Persian men as glorious and heroic underlie Khayyam's silent protest against the rulers of his time whether they be Turks or Arabs. In his opinion, only the great Persian men of the past are actual heroes while the sovereigns reigning in his country are just outsiders whose influence expanded over the countries. Khayyam never used poetry to win the favors of the rulers, he in fact, strongly opposed panegyricism as a genre (Browne 374). In one of the verses, he mentions new year which is a Persian festival celebrated every year on the occasion of the coming of spring:

when at new year the cloud has washed the face of the tulip (118).

Its importance lies in this personification symbolizing a new beginning that purifies the earth and beautifies the flowers. The nostalgic return to the past in his images indicates a growing sense of nationalism among people whose identity gradually faded due to the imposition of foreign religion and culture. The foreign impact shows as well in his *Ruba'is*:

go and look at the tablets of fate, for the master of the pen has written
from eternity all that must be (113).

In this verse, there is a direct reference to the Quranic text that reflects predestination.

Islamic imagery occupies an important place in the *Ruba'iyat* which shows the effect of the Arabic culture in Persia. He compares the one that gives him wine to a houri:

if in the time of spring, an idol, houri-shaped, gives me a cup of wine on
the bank of the field (116).

Yet even here, religious imagery is appropriated for nationalism.

Khayyam's imagery is nevertheless affected in the first place by Persian culture and tradition; he mentions the four elements in his quatrains

Every draught that the Saqi sheds upon the earth stifles the fire of anguish
in a burning eye. God be praised! Is then the water that frees thy heart
from a hundred pains nothing but air to thee? (120).

The poet groups all the contrasting elements of the Zoroastrian religion in the stanza in metaphors and personifications rendering an exquisite image in which the poet shows the soothing effect of wine compared to water. Besides the usage of the four elements, he refers to Persian kings in his imagery;

the Kai Khusraw has filled the cup-like sky with ruddy light (127),
today the tomb (gur) has caught Bahram (117).

Similarly, Fitzgerald finds refuge in mythology since he is looking for a lost heroism. In his image “enchanted sword” (108), Fitzgerald expands the person of Sultan Mahmud to create a mythical figure, which contributes to the orientaling picture many Westerners have of the Arab and Persian worlds. It is created by their yearning for heroism in a materialistic age. The poet even unroots the Seljuq prince out of a realistic context to draw a fairy setting that can be found in legends and myths. He as well, includes Iram and the “seven ringed cup” (44), not to mention his introduction of Jamshyd who is a mythical Persian king (62).

Fitzgerald also uses both figures to indicate that mortality is everyone’s destiny regardless of his social status:

They say that the lion and the lizard keep
the courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep

In the same quatrain he concludes:

And Bahram, that great hunter-the wild ass

stamps o'er his head, and he lies fast asleep (62).

Rational powers and sciences do not prove helpful in Khayyam's and Fitzgerald's views.

Imagination and art are compensatory practices.

The futility of the philosophers' and scientists' approaches does not leave both poets with an entirely negative and deterministic outlook on life. Khayyam and Fitzgerald reach a practical hopeful solution. Since the past and the future remain mysterious and incomprehensible, attention is directed toward the present in which humans are supposed to enjoy free will. Khayyam and Fitzgerald highlight the importance of the moment to be seized and taken advantage of. Razavi explains that the wine Khayyam keeps on mentioning in his poetry is a kind of wisdom calling for, "a profound appreciation of the here and now before life comes to an end" (112). This theme is presented in the common imagery of "cash in hand" (54) that is preferable to all past interpretations and future promises. The present moment is what human beings can control while the past and future are beyond their understanding. Khayyam says, "Find out this one moment of thy lifetime" (Christensen 111) in order to live it fully before it is too late. Unlike Christensen's analysis of the "fundamental pessimism in the lyricism of 'Umar'" (45), Khayyam shows optimism when he urges his audience to change the actual world into a paradise, "Prepare a paradise here" (115) and, "Sit down in this paradise with a being with a paradaisic face" (112).

Khayyam refutes all future expectations of heavenly bliss and puts an end to waiting which involves some passivity by calling for action and human will to make the best out of this world. The Persian poet's insistence on the present is an outcry against the political leaders of his time who satisfy their thirst for power by convincing youths that

violent acts will lead to eternal bliss. A famous illustration would be the Assassins under the leadership of Sabbah who exploited his followers' religious fervor for his own personal greed and political influence. Since the present is not something to be sacrificed for the future or lost in bloody wars, Khayyam delivers the underlying message of world peace for every moment of one's life should be cherished:

O friend, come, let us not grieve for tomorrow, but

Count this one moment of our life a gain (Christensen 114)

Similarly, Fitzgerald stresses the importance of the present that he describes as "sweet," and asks his audience to, "Make the most of what we yet may spend" (73). Weir highlights the "stanzas which counsel living for today and letting yesterday and tomorrow take care of themselves" (38). Gray too, stresses Fitzgerald's theme that, "steadfastly refuses to consider anything but the present" (94). In emphasizing the present, Gray believes Fitzgerald reacts against the thinking mode in the Victorian period that was caught in a race toward a more developed and technological future. Hence, the poet "shows indifference to ambition" (94) and lacks the materialistic aspiration that was common in his age because he senses that it will lead to many disadvantages. Consequently, he calls for full awareness and enjoyment of the present away from all the trouble that the materialistic way of living causes. The treasure in Fitzgerald's and Khayyam's terms exists neither in the past nor in the future, but is to be found in the actual life they experience on earth. This results in many labeling their poetry as Epicurean.

In contrast with Khayyam's limited usage of images, Fitzgerald's poetry abounds with imagery which adds elegance to his writing and adapts it to the historical and

cultural contexts. The conflict between spiritual ideals and materialistic values in the nineteenth century is embodied in Fitzgerald's usage of sensual imagery. He elaborates on Khayyam's imagery of divorcing reason by shaping the latter as an old "barren" woman that has to be distanced from the poet's marital "bed" and replaced by the young "daughter of the vine":

You know, my Friends, how long since in my House
For a new Marriage I did make Carouse:
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse (102)

Sensuality also figures in the images of "the river's lip" and "the lovely's lip" (66) which occur in the same quatrain, as well as in "make game" (109) which evokes a hedonistic meaning of enjoying sensual pleasures in life.

Besides sensual imagery, the British poet makes use of Biblical imagery; he refers to the Bible "dust to dust and ashes to ashes" (73), the "angel shape" (105), "true light" (127) standing for the divine power. He adds as well the images of the "snake" (130) to indicate sin, and there is also a reference to David (45). It is true that the Victorian poet attempts to avoid the religious issues brought up in the *Ruba'iyat*, as Razavi says, yet he cannot avoid the need for spiritual power in an age which arguably fetishized science to the exclusion of spirituality.

However, Fitzgerald does not keep the Islamic imagery or the terminology Khayyam employs; he instead tries to reduce this oriental religious impact and change it into whatever suits the requirements of his age. Though Fitzgerald was not much of an imperialist, his translation reflects an implicit colonial flair which was put into action in

the nineteenth century by Britain in the different colonies it dominated. The British modified the spiritual structures of the Orient as they became “naturalized, modernized, and laicized substitutes for Christian supernaturalism” (Said 122). The reduction of Islam clearly shows in Fitzgerald’s:

Indeed the idols I have loved so long
Have done my credit in men’s eye much wrong (145).

He substitutes the religious terms Khayyam lists in his *Ruba’i* “prayer, fasting and ritual washing” by the personification given to credit.

In a world dominated by colonial conflicts and interests, surges the need for new values. Such values do not relate to dry sciences or to spiritual powers, but they cling onto imagination and fantasy in a place where neither faith nor reason ostensibly rule. The Victorians attributed these values to the East not because they truly exist there and constitute its characteristics but because they really wanted to believe so.

In addition to spirituality, Fitzgerald calls for a return to nature. Nature imagery adds a romantic aspect to his poetry and a return to simplicity away from the sophistications of the Victorian life. According to Weir, Fitzgerald’s “chief delight was in natural scenery” (42). Besides the natural frame extending from dawn to night with which he confines his quatrains, there is the metaphor of the “well of life” that he uses in both quatrains 34 and 38 in contrast to the “setting stars” (98) that indicate the end of the life journey. Death is as well represented by “the last harvest” (124). The images related to nature constitute with respect to Fitzgerald and his contemporaries a refuge from life’s materialistic constraints and appearances. In, “I came like water, and like wind I go” (82),

as a visage “with the smoke of hell” (139). He also uses wordplay in “hither” and “whither”, “hence” and “whence” (85) and mentions “lip” thrice in two different contexts (91). Khayyam, on the contrary, simplifies his diction with the intention of unraveling the complications that surround the cycle of life and death. Khayyam’s *Ruba’iyyat* familiarizes the audience with what has been known as problems of existence by the philosophers and the religious. Fitzgerald’s quatrains defamiliarize the philosophical issues of existence by means of form.

3.5. Fitzgerald’s Critique of Human Vanity

Fitzgerald’s quatrains underscore a certain passivity regarding the role of human beings in this existence. Thematically, Gray analyzes this by highlighting the diminishment Fitzgerald effected in man’s potentials; he says that the purpose is not “to exalt mankind but rather to reduce it and so evade accountability” (93). Like Khayyam, he compares man to a pot, but unlike him, he shows man in an extremely helpless manner. For instance, in quatrain 63, the pot figures as “of a more ungainly make” and “leaning all awry” (138), which reflects human fragility. In another context, the personified pots do not imply any kind of individuality, they are presented collectively waiting to be filled in order to celebrate (141) life. Fitzgerald’s theme of passivity mostly appears in the verses in which he says:

Some little talk awhile of me and thee

There seem’d- and then no more of thee and me (88).

In other words, human life ends with death symbolized by night or the end of the day.

Besides, the “loss of personality with death” connotes a deep pessimism. In contrast with Khayyam who insists on man leaving a noticeable effect after death, Fitzgerald draws a clear-cut limit to human life on earth. In quatrain 67, Fitzgerald concludes with:

so bury me by some sweet garden-side (143).

The usage of the word “bury” reflects a sad ending wherein human life ends with burial, in addition to the fact that “some” conveys generalization in the verse which eliminates any uniqueness accorded to man. However, Khayyam states that his body should be “sought” even after death but not in any garden. It is located in a very specific place which is “the earth of the tavern threshold” (143). One’s life and personality do not vanish with death, but preserve their particularity even after burial. The diction used by the Victorian poet to refer to the helplessness of human beings is manifest in many verses such as “wrought me” and “should stamp me” (136) in quatrain 61; here, man compared to the vessel is illustrated as totally passive and under the control of the pot maker.

Fitzgerald surprises the reader by expressing a need to change in quatrain 73, which is interpreted in the activity of destroying the “scheme of things” and reshaping it according to man’s wish. However, this activity cannot be performed on one’s own; it necessitates the cooperation of “love” and “fate” in order to be accomplished. Khayyam, on the contrary, grants more power to man by pointing to the poet himself and his wish to change; it is all up to the poet and not to any external force. Unlike Khayyam who emphasizes the continuity of existence, Fitzgerald stresses on the revivifying aspect of wine:

But fill me with the old familiar juice,

Methinks I might recover by-and-bye (140).

In contrast with the Persian poet who adds certain optimism to life on earth in which continuity and procreation conquer death, he does not mention that the clay is taken from the departed person to create a new pot.

Fitzgerald, like Khayyam, was not alienated from the occurrences in his society. He engaged himself through the *Ruba'iyat* in an implied criticism of certain prevailing aspects of the nineteenth century. He considered such aspects as defects pulling the Victorians backward rather than leading them to a pinnacle of achievements and progress. Fitzgerald's quatrains form a resistance against the nineteenth-century "progress" not only by pinpointing its negative aspects but also by suggesting alternatives in a well- built philosophy.

Chapter 4

Najafi's *Ruba'iyyat* of Arabic Resistance against British Colonialism

Most critics consider the Iraqi poet Ahmed Safi Najafi's Arabic version of the *Ruba'iyyat* to be the most faithful to Omar Khayyam's original (Jouda 41; Kilani 240). However, Najafi's quatrains cannot be severed from the circumstances of his age. As faithful as they are to Omar Khayyam's original, Najafi's quatrains reflect a social, political and literary critique of his country, Iraq, and of the Arab world in general. Part of the argument of this chapter is that translation inevitably goes beyond a purely linguistic act to speak to a broader context, whether personal in relation to the poet, or social in terms of the circumstances of the age. Najafi's *ruba'is* are particularly relevant as a means of resistance against the conditions in the twentieth-century Arab world. Like Khayyam, Najafi is a rebel in an age of confusion.

4.1. Najafi's Ambivalence toward His Environment

Najafi's quatrains are an implicit critique of the political situation in his country. Barhoumi corroborates this view, admitting that Najafi was an influential figure in triggering awareness and resistance against corporate monopoly and social injustice in early twentieth-century Iraq (33). Like Khayyam, the Iraqi poet's rendition bitterly

attacks the leaders of high rank who are in charge of the country: (“They make sure they do not treat him in a humane manner”) حرصهم لا يرونه إنسانا (139). But in his case, he indirectly refers to the governors and rulers of the occupied Arab world. Notorious for their unfairness and for collaborating with the British colonial power, they sacrificed their nation for the purpose of satisfying their aspiration toward higher rank and power. Najafi indirectly protests against the misery they spread among the Iraqi people. His quatrains target politicians but also religious hypocrites who use religion as a cover to issue strict judgments on people while in fact, they do not abide by any religious law. Similar to Khayyam, Najafi rebels against hypocrisy:

سأطوين صاح أعلام التفاق غداً (138) (“My friend, I will soon end hypocrisy”)

The city of Najaf occupies, according to al-Meouch, the fourth rank among the Islamic holy cities (32). It is a very conservative and traditional city where the youth are mainly trained to become religious scholars. Kilani notes that the young Najafi had to choose one of three future careers in his life, that of a religious scholar, a politician or a poet (12). Najafi obtained a religious formation in agreement with his parents’ will and the extremely conservative milieu he was brought up in (77). The strict religious atmosphere may well have affected the later *ruba’is* he wrote since they abound with terms related to an Islamic semantic field and context. This is evident in his rendering of the rituals of fasting, ablution (69), and *tawba* (“repentance”) that he repeats five times in quatrain 33:

لا تتب قطّ عن الراح فكم

توبةٍ منها يتوب التائب

قد شدا البلبل والورد زها

أبذا الوقت يتوب الشارب؟ (57)

[“Don’t abstain from wine, for how useless

Abstinence is.

The bird has sung and the flowers blossomed;

Is this the moment for the drinker to repent?”]

He, moreover, considers knowledge as divinely ordained and that the human mind is unable to comprehend or encompass it.

At a certain period in his life, the Iraqi poet rebelled against religious determinism and the character traits that religion conveys by virtue of being passed on from one generation to another without regard to personal choice. This is reflected in the challenging tone he undertakes in some of his lines. Toward the end of his life, however, he felt guilt and regretted the fact that he rendered the *Ruba'iyat* into Arabic (232). The fluctuation between faith and resistance mirrored the struggle he endured in coming from a strict religious background such as Najaf and yet longing for the moderation and enjoyment of foreign civilization. His allegiance to Najaf as home could not blind him to its oppression, and his love for modern life could not blind him to the fact that it came from colonialism. Consequently, it is natural that in some quatrains, he disregards the strict religious commands:

نعم ولكن نشوتي لحظة

أحلى من الدنيا مع الآخرة (92)

[“The moment I feel pleasure after drinking

Is better than life and afterlife”]

These lines show an appreciation of wine to the exclusion of Judgment Day in the afterlife. However, the very next quatrain also displays a soliloquy praying for God’s understanding:

أوجدتني يا ربّ من عدم ولي
أسديت فضلاً ما له مقدار (92)

[“God You created me from naught
And you were endlessly generous with me”]

Thus, Najafi casts criticism on different aspects of his environment. Yet, he also suggests ways of defiance that are totally different from the weapons the British use. He brings forth a notion that proves more efficient in the case of bloody revolutions; it is the mere acceptance of death.

4.2. Mortality as a Symbol of Resistance

Najafi retains the notion of the impermanence of life that Khayyam uses in his *Ruba'iyat*. Najafi’s poetry rebels against the British occupation whose power had caused the death of revolutionary Iraqis. His weapon is to deflate the threat of death they brought upon Iraqi patriots. Life is so short and as a consequence, people ought to enjoy and benefit from its offerings. In both Persian and Arabic quatrains, the *carpe diem* motif takes on political and philosophical hues:

فَعشْ جَذْلانَ وارْتَشِفْ الحُمَيّا
وَنَلْ أَقْصَى الهِنا قَبْلَ الحِمامِ (131)

[“Live happily, drink wine

And enjoy the greatest pleasure before death”]

Najafi emphasizes mortality and the nihilistic meaning of human existence. According to Kilani, Khayyam and Najafi consider that since life, be it short or long, ends in death, it is pointless to talk about the after life. Najafi, like his Persian analogue, downplays death by comparing it to a sort of slumber before an eternal and long sleep (55). Both Omar Khayyam and Najafi familiarize their audience with death to the point that it becomes a culture whether in Persian or Arabic society. The reader does not feel distanced from this concept; on the contrary, the texts make him develop a certain ease and familiarity with death. Najafi repeatedly states the meaning of departure from this life: (“Soon I returned to where I was came from”) (104) عدت من حيث قد أتيت سريعا

Like Khayyam, the Iraqi poet does not feel the need to embellish death with imagery the way Fitzgerald does in his quatrains. Khayyam and Najafi reject the philosophers’ preoccupation with man’s end on earth and admit its futility. They undermine reason and conclude that the mind’s eternal search for truth is futile. Knowledge, according to both poets, cannot be attained by reason (Kilani 230). In Iraq, the colonial forces rule with the power of weapons and not of reason. Najafi, as well as all the Iraqis, cannot resort to any reasonable explanation in order to justify the presence of foreign armies on their soil. Najafi rejects reason as a means of attaining knowledge.

Unlike Khayyam, Najafi rarely uses euphemisms while referring to death and employs direct and metonymic references to it: coffin, dead body, tomb, and many others. Moreover, he actually tends to employ hyperbole, describing death in violent terms: “assassination” (76) “murdered” or “killed,” (115) “bloodshed,” (144) “butcher,”

(67) “ripping off” (70). The fact that he points to death directly and even gives it horrible and bloody connotations is congruent with the revolutions that took place in Iraq and the number of victims that fell for the sake of the national cause. Not only has death become familiar to him, it also assumes more cruel and harsh dimensions. Consequently, he builds up on the fear human beings already have of death, the very fear that Khayyam attempts to soothe and turn into a positive willingness to enjoy life. In order to emphasize pessimism, Najafi uses negative structures in his quatrains starting with negative particles before verbs (“they did not come, he was not born, it has not become”) “ ما أتوا، لم يولد، لم “ (69) or nouns, (“I am not a wise man”) “فلمست بعالم” (71) or nouns, (“I am not a wise man”) “فلمست بعالم” (69). The negative structure dominates an entire quatrain in order to sustain his wish not to exist and suffer the painful human condition:

لو كنت ربّ اختيار ما أتيت الى الـ
 دنيا ولم أرتحل عنها ولم أبين
 ما كان أسعدني لو لم أجيء أبداً
 للذهر يوماً ولم أرحل ولم أكن (136)

[“If I were free I would not have come
 To the world, neither departed nor got away from it.
 How happy would I have been if I had not come at all
 To the world, neither left nor ever existed.”]

This negative parallel structure does not meet with Khayyam’s philosophy of enjoying the present and benefiting from life’s offerings. It clouds the optimism and hope the Persian poet tries to convey through his *Ruba’iyyat*.

The Iraqi poet’s favorite trope is the simile:

وأشرب فإنك سوف تصبح كالثرى (64)

كمومس دميمة أو كفقير ملحد (76)

[“Drink for you will end up buried

Like an ugly prostitute or a poor atheist”]

In such similes, it is as if the points of comparison distance two worlds such as good and evil and never allow them to meet positively. In this way, literary tools of expressing wishes indicate the distance between his actual situation and his hopes.

4.3. Nature as a Sanctuary from Injustice

Death, according to Najafi, is the alarming call that incites people to enjoy life’s gifts. One of these gifts is nature. Najafi and Khayyam turn away from the daily worries of their age and seek refuge in nature. Nature is a kind of sanctuary, Kilani states (131); it constitutes an alternative to the society and its values that are unsatisfactory to both poets. In nature, Najafi finds the peace and liberty that he is forbidden to enjoy in the city. Kilani connects the Iraqi’s preference for the countryside over urban life to the presence of nature, freedom, and absence of obligations and constraints (107). The description of

natural elements abounds in his verses:

قد داعبت ریح للصبا الورد وقد

هاج الهزار حسنه فاستبشرا (92)

[“The spring breeze has caressed the flowers

And its beauty has moved the bird so it became hopeful”]

Najafi's imagery is close to Khayyam's with respect to nature. A principle image displays the potter who symbolizes God and the pots in reference to human beings: ("O potter, if you are sensitive beware") أيا خزّاف إن تشعّر فحاذر (79). The image of the pot being made by the potter only to be broken later on and replaced by another encompasses human life from its beginnings to its end.

4.4. Najafi's Pessimism

Even though both poets are rebels, each reveals different reactions and attitudes toward life in his poetry. While Khayyam's *rubas* reflect a positive reconciliation between life and death, Najafi adopts an acute pessimism. This negativity arguably results from the harsh colonial circumstances in Iraq at that time. Kilani elaborates on Najafi's pessimism by stating that it is not of the romantic type that drives the poet to escape reality and seek metaphysical reflections on man's destiny; it is more a negative stand and an existentialist view that remains within the confines of the poet's self without encompassing the vast humanity (90). He adopts a splenetic attitude wherein everything in life is depicted in misery:

فسبحان ربّي كلّ شيءٍ نظرته

رأيت به يأسٍ لعيني ممثلاً (119)

["O God merciful, everything I viewed

It used to represent despair to me"]

Darkness is the general mood of the quatrains and in fact, the word "الذّجى" (62)

("darkness") is frequently repeated. The words with negative connotations mainly govern

the quatrains; a couple of them “worries” and “misery” reappear constantly throughout his verses.

The world is an embodiment of his inner melancholy such that Najafi cannot see anything joyful in life. Pessimism is plausibly a result of a deep confusion experienced by the poet who, unlike Khayyam, is unable to manage a reconciliation or a meeting point between dualities in his life the way Khayyam does. How could he be, along with most Arabs at that time, on good terms with life while the latter did not offer him the natural rights of staying in his own land and enjoying a free way of living? The vast majority of Arabs in the twentieth century were exposed to poverty and oppression due to colonialism.

The European colonizers came under the pretense of saving the Arab countries from the Turkish occupation whereas in reality, it was more likely that they came to benefit economically from the Orient. Al-Meouch states that as a result of the blooming industrial revolution, there was a surplus of production. Therefore, it was necessary for Europe to find other markets such as in the Arab countries that constituted the appropriate victims for this purpose (20). Poverty and hunger that already spread during the Turkish occupation worsened under colonialism. Political and national awareness surged in Iraq. Wars and revolutions resulted in major changes in political, social and economic conditions (Kilani 110). Iraq was one of the Arab countries that was torn between Turkish and British occupations, which forced many of its citizens including Najafi to leave their native country after trying hopelessly in the Iraqi revolution in 1930 to clear out the foreign intruders.

If we take for granted the fact that the poet is not bound to belong to one country, what could be said about the hardships Najafi faced in Persia despite the common traits that relate it to Najaf? The historical, geographical, cultural and religious bonds between Najafi's hometown, Najaf, and Iran removed a lot of obstacles that might have impeded the Iraqi poet from adaptation. Not only is Iran a neighboring country, it also embraces the *Shi'ite* Muslim twelver faith which is similar to the one in Najaf. Al-Meouch mentions a cultural exchange between Najaf and Iranian cities (63). However, all these common traits between Najafi's city and Iran do not negate the fact that Najafi spent eight years in Iran trying to learn Persian culture. In addition, he later faced obstacles in Syria and felt distanced with regard to its literary circles. Finally, he found himself in Lebanon amid the glowing appearances of urbanism and foreign influences that he had always discarded and been estranged from. Yet his stay in Lebanon did not spare him from life's misfortunes. It gave him the final blow as he endured its civil war in 1977. Najafi actually reveals that from the moment he was born he witnessed revolutions and consecutive wars whether in Iraq, Syria or Lebanon (Al-Meouch 23).

Along with his pessimism, his quatrains convey the helplessness of human condition, which reminds us of Fitzgerald's highlighting of the weakness and impotence of human beings. Indeed the word ("impotence") "عجز" (141) appears repeatedly in the same quatrain denoting absolute passivity. This human frailty is revealed moreover in the simile that Najafi employs comparing man to an animal thus, stripping him of any reason or freewill: ("you have not found me living like an animal") "لم تجدني أدور كالحيوان" (13). The line clearly mentions the inability of the individual to choose his or her path in life and modify the course of destiny. According to Najafi, human beings and animals are equal in

impotence and ignorance. They are determined and predestined by a higher force, a divine board on which the future of every living being is stated from the moment of birth ("In you the board has put numbers") "وفيك اللوح قد رقما" (130). Man is a passive sponge that imbibes the instructions of the above.

4.5. A Return to the Arabic classicism against Western Imitation

Najafi's quatrains reflect a resistance in poetic form and structure. This is clearly shown in his way of arranging the quatrains. The Iraqi poet does not adopt the organic unity as shown in the Western literary traces. He does not sort out his quatrains according to a thematic concept, he rather follows an alphabetical order. As a result, the reader loses track of the ideas displayed in his quatrains. For instance, in one quatrain, he glorifies life and its offerings, then in the following one, he shocks the reader by expressing his despair of life and his wish to depart from it.

In addition to the organic unity, his quatrains lack internal unity or the syllogistic structure that is present in Khayyam's *ruba'is*; the linking words are mostly absent and the last two verses of each quatrain do not show a practical conclusion to the premises he is supposed to start with at the beginning of the quatrain; most of his lines are linked by an enjambment that omits the role of the logical outcome at the end of the quatrain:

كم جبت من وادٍ وسهلٍ دون أن

أحظى بتحسين لبعض أموري

قد سرّني أنّ الحياة قد انقضت

عني وإن تك ما انقضت بسرور (92)

The poet recommends the company of fewer people in order to keep away from problems. For the *Hikma* genre, Najafi initiates his verses with either verbs of command as in the ones mentioned above or the conditional form.

Najafi preserves some classical stylistic traits in his quatrains. One of them is the dialogue between two speakers and the rhetorical questions which often recur in the *Ruba'iyat*: (“Is it the time for a drunkard to repent?”) (55) . أبدا الوقت يتوب الشارب؟. This corresponds to the practice of classical Arab poets who used to address another imaginary speaker in their poetry as a means of comfort and consolation in their times of distress.

His resistance against the cultural practices of his age shows in the fact that he does not choose the English quatrains as a source or reference as other Arab poets do. Najafi actually refutes the imitation of the Western production by Fitzgerald and goes back to the original Persian version. He, along with Ahmad Rami, acquires the Persian language in order to be able to convey the famous *Ruba'iyat* into Arabic. This was considered at that time a resistance against the literary current that adopted Western poetry and trends as their main sources of inspiration.

On the other hand, we cannot disregard a certain Western literary influence in his quatrains. Not only does he disregard the original rhythm Khayyam uses, he also adopts a varied rhythm throughout the quatrains, which is definitely one of the effects of Western modern poetry on Arabic. He claims that a variety of rhythms keep away the possibility of monotony.

His ambivalence between classical poetry and Western modernity causes this conflict of opinions between the critics. Al-Meouch classifies Najafi among the pioneers of Renaissance in contemporary Najafi poetry (25). Kilani cites Abou Chabkeh's

comment that Najafi is a representative of traditional Arabic poetry amid the many imitators of Western poetry (42). In fact, the Iraqi poet is clear about his admiration for Arabic spontaneity far from the modern obsession with craft and Western imitation. He even considers himself the offspring of 'oukaz generations (Kilani 256). Kilani somehow contradicts Abou Chabkeh's opinion and Najafi's statement by criticizing the latter's poetry in relation to its form and content. The critic points out Najafi's defects in the usage of misplaced terms, weak structure and form and partial content that is disfigured by repetition. Finally, he mentions Najafi's violation of syntax and morphology (44). An example of such mistakes would be in the following line: ("Are you the same one that appears to people?") أنت حقاً كما لدى الناس تبدو؟ (78). Kilani thinks the Iraqi poet does not really belong to the old traditional school of Arabic poetry. Indeed, Najafi, unlike Khayyam, is not spontaneous in his composition the way Khayyam is; the Iraqi poet eschews simplicity and is closer to artificiality in writing poetry. Barhoumi states that Najafi is way ahead of Omar Khayyam in terms of style and rhetoric (86). As evidence, he also adds that the Arabic poet conveys more than twenty versions for one quatrain in order to choose one (85). Consequently, Abou Chabkeh's statement about the natural poetic flow of Najafi's quatrains (Kilani 41) is not totally accurate.

Like Khayyam, the Iraqi poet is a rebel against the colonial politics, culture and literature that prevailed in the twentieth century Iraq. The circumstances in Najafi's age are not really different from those during the eleventh century Persia; both are characterized by turmoil and turbulences. In the course of his analysis of the *Ruba'iyat*, Najafi claims that Khayyam's call for wine drinking is a means to purge his anger and criticism of the society (Barhoumi 89). The same applies to him and his version of the

quatrains; Najafi, through his quatrains, expresses his contempt and disagreement with the traits of a colonial age in the twentieth century.

Chapter 5

Rami's Inclusive Approach to the *Ruba'iyyat*

Both Najafi and Ahmad Rami translated the original Persian version of the *Ruba'iyyat*, ignoring the different translations in the East and the West. They chose the main source written by Khayyam, which drove them to learn a new language, a foreign culture and civilization. The literary cross-pollination between Persian and Arabic literatures was not forged by Najafi and Rami; it was launched at the time the Arabs ruled Persia and annexed it to the Abbasid Caliphate. Arab political and religious dominance paved the way for many cross-cultural experiments which resulted in the borrowing of Persian words into the Arabic language on the one hand, and adopting Arabic forms and contents into Persian literature and poetry on the other hand. It is plausible, however, that Arabic had a greater impact on Persian culture and literature than vice versa due to the Persians' admiration of the Arabic heritage and the golden age of Arabic literature at that time. As a result, Persia enriched its productivity and reached a worldwide audience due to masterpieces such as the *Ruba'iyyat* of Omar Khayyam.

Later on, in the late 19th century, the Arabs sought enriching and revitalizing Persian sources for their literature that was arguably in a state of decadence and extreme fragility. Kamel Awayda states that the Arab poets before the modern Renaissance, focused mainly on form and were preoccupied primarily with rhythm and rhetorical embellishments. According to Awayda, they aligned words like children attempting to collect colorful stones in order to classify them (155). Such concern with form was one of

the main reasons that Najafi and Rami looked to Persian culture for new meanings, imagery, and harmony. Taha Hussain, writing from a subjective standpoint, did not hide his contempt for the role reversal between Arabic and Persian poets (139). Fawzi Atweh reports Hussain's statement that the Arabs are not among the nations that owe to others in their native literature, claiming that it is Persia that is greatly indebted to Arabic literature (139). I think such statements reflect some nationalistic fanaticism and ignore any literature's need for external sources and influences. After facing a growing crisis up till the twentieth century, Arabic literature was arguably in need of rejuvenation. Cross-cultural influences proved enriching for Arabic. While Najafi's was the most faithful rendering of the *Ruba'iyat* into Arabic, Rami's version was a free adaptation. The argument in this chapter does not discuss the closeness of the versions to Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat*, but analyzes the individuality and special traits of each poem whether written by Najafi or Rami. Hence, I disagree with Atweh's claim that every poet who renders these quatrains falls under the spell of Khayyam's spirit and follows his footsteps in the path of Sufi or non Sufi contents (114). As Taha Wadi points out, literature, and poetry in particular, embodies a human experience conveyed in a figurative language that has its subtle uniqueness and semantic and phonetic peculiarity (155). When a poet transfers a poem into his own language, irrespective of his knowledge of the source language, he reveals his own rhetorical experience in the first place (155). Both Najafi and Rami reveal in their poems a uniqueness that cannot be isolated from their surroundings whether social, political or cultural. According to Wadi, the poet is inseparable from his environment (146). In the case of Najafi and Rami, both Arab poets perform a resistance

against circumstances in their societies. I will argue in this chapter that Rami's defiance of his background shaped his translation of the *Ruba'iyyat*.

5.1. Adopting Simplicity against Formal Classicism

Rami, like Khayyam, opts for language accessibility. Due to the nature of Persian poetry that uses a simple and unsophisticated language, Khayyam's quatrains attempt to remain within reach of Persian readers. Similarly, Rami distances himself from the formal classical terminology of the Abbasid period in order to seek simplicity and delicacy. As a result, Rami's poem was suitable for a song performed later on by Umm Koulthoum. In fact, Rami suggests the existence of a bond between songs and poems through rhythm, unity and rhyme (Awayda 114). Rami is also famous for employing all sorts of vibrant, visual, tactile and auditory imagery. Awayda also points to the condensed vocabulary by means of which Rami conveys meanings and music simultaneously (113). I think that Rami's poem's kinship with music makes it suitable for singing and offers a certain parallelism to Fitzgerald's poem.

5.2. Maintaining a Form Distinct From the Classics

With respect to meter, Rami drifts away from the classical Arabic forms used in earlier periods. He preserves the Persian form of the quatrain in which the first, second and fourth lines rhyme but not the third. Thematically, he attempts to make the quatrain an autonomous entity separate from the others. The first two lines in Rami's quatrains

usually prepare for the conclusion or action to be taken in the third line. Rami, unlike Najafi, succeeds in incorporating the internal syllogism. In one of the quatrains, he describes the brevity of life and the importance of the afterlife in order to surprise us by posing a rhetorical question in the third line that reprimands the sinner for his sins on earth:

دنياك ساعات سراع الزوال

وإنما العقبى خلود المال

فهل تبيع الخلد يا غافلا

وتشتري دنيا المنى والضلال (١٨٩)

[“Your life will end so fast

And what matters is in the afterlife,

So will you sell the afterlife, O ignoramus

And buy a world full of false hopes?”]

The Egyptian poet adopts the element of surprise in the clinching verse of the quatrain, a characteristic that has not been followed by Fitzgerald nor Najafi. By means of this element, Rami succeeds in maintaining an internal unity in the quatrain in addition to the organic unity of the entire poem as a whole. Rami’s verses are not restricted to the Persian rhythm, which has led to some criticism (Atweh 121).

Stoic and pessimistic philosophy provide thematic unity to Rami’s quatrains, unlike Khayyam’s *Ruba’iyyat* in which the *ruba’i* stands as an entity on its own. The pessimistic mood that runs throughout the quatrains and provides the poem with an organic unity was a recent Western innovation in Arabic literature. Like Fitzgerald, Rami believed in the thematic unity that ties his quatrains altogether. Horr declares on Rami’s

behalf that the poem is analogous to a short story for it starts with an idea that smoothly develops to reach an end (50). Awayda claims that Rami's poetry is characterized by an organic unity that was part of the modernists' rules (54), in addition to the varied rhymes in his quatrains. Being committed to one rhyme in Arabic poetry was what the classic writers called for, but Rami did not abide by it. He ends each quatrain with a different rhyme although he does adhere to the classic trait of maintaining one meter. Along with his Western readings and scholarship in the West, Rami made sure to have a thorough knowledge of the classics by al-Kali, al-Asfahani, al-'Amili and others (Horr 46). Thus, Rami cannot fairly be described as a modernist or as a classicist. He was an Arab poet affected by Western colonialism in the twentieth century. Awayda comments astutely that in Rami's poetry, we sense the verve of Arabic poetry merged with a Western impact and a European influence (41). Unlike his contemporaries, the Egyptian poet does not work against the classical forms of the Arabic literature, nor does he deny Western influence in his poetry, but rather unites them to be able to produce the masterpiece of the *Ruba'iyyat*. Horr notes that Rami's success is due to the fact that he managed to get beyond imitation to create a content that is suitable for his social surroundings (52). Rami was able through the *Ruba'iyyat* to renovate rather than imitate in Arabic poetry.

5.3. A Critique of Human Knowledge

Through his easy style, Rami delivers themes such as the inability of the mind to comprehend metaphysical issues:

أفئيت عمري في اكتناه القضاء

وكشف ما يحجبه في الخفاء

فلم أجد أسرارہ وانقضی

عمري وأحسست ديبب الفناء (١٧٩)

["I spent my life trying to understand the universe

And revealing the hidden

But I have not found out its mystery though

Life has come to an end"]

According to Rami, it is futile to try to solve the mystery of the world; Rami denies that this type of knowledge is attained by anyone. He does not even classify people into learned and unlearned the way Khayyam does. He universalizes ignorance among all human beings irrespective of the nature of their learning. He even says that confusion rules the mind that attempts to think of the world beyond. Knowledge, to Rami, is exclusively related to God since he is the omniscient one. Human beings are incapable of encompassing the mysteries of life:

وفات عمري وأنا جاهل

كتاب هذا الدهر جم الفصول (١٨٠)

["My life has come to an end, still I have not

Known this book full of chapters"]

He does not mind being unaware of the problems of existence; he is satisfied with the way he is, convinced that the human condition is incapable of solving the puzzles of life. He accepts human frailty without contempt and openly admits:

أفنييت عمري في ارتقاب المنى

ولم أذق في العيش طعم الهنا (١٨٠)

["I spent my life expecting the fulfillment of wishes

But never have I savored the taste of pleasure"]

In contrast to Khayyam, Rami does not ask critical questions about human existence in an attempt to elucidate the unknown; he, however, proves to be content with a certain passivity that is not altogether different from Fitzgerald's and Najafi's. The three poets, unlike Khayyam, resort to an inactive and nihilistic life. "My existence is nil," as Rami writes (191).

5.4. The Inevitability of Death

Despite the metaphysical questions Rami ignores, and does not bother to question, there is one reality he along with Khayyam is certain of, and it is everyone's destiny: death. Life is so brief,^(١٨٩) ("your life is reduced to hours that do not last")^(١٨٩)

"دنياك ساعات سراع الزوال", and compared in another verse to the leaves that fall off the trees (189). Even though the brevity of life is a common theme to both Khayyam and Rami, it is more highlighted in the former's *rubai's*. Not only is the brevity of life highlighted, it is also recurrent in the *Ruba'iyat*. The reader cannot help but sense the regretful sad tone that accompanies this theme, whether in Khayyam's *rubai's*, Fitzgerald's or Najafi's while in Rami's verses it is just stated as a fact and even as an outlet. Death, to Rami, is a transient stage to the afterlife which is far better than life on earth.

As a result of his gloomy philosophy about life, Rami develops a certain familiarization with death which is already achieved in the Persian *Ruba'iyat* but for a different purpose. Khayyam has in mind a reconciliation of death and life while Rami

believes that death opens the path for a better afterlife in God's shelter. The familiarization with the concept of death corresponds to Rami's personal and social background. From a personal perspective, it is perhaps not unnoteworthy that he also lived for a while near a graveyard and witnessed many deaths in his family starting with his father and ending with his brother whom he mentioned in the course of the introduction to the *Ruba'iyyat*. Socially, the Egyptian poet was aware of resistance and persecution that took place at the hands of the British occupation against his countrymen leading to numerous deaths. Religion also plays an important role in Rami's embracing death. Actually, Rami says ("we are entitled to death") "الموت حق" (187) which is based on the Islamic religious teachings. Death is a passage enabling human beings to reach God's grace:

يا قابل الأعدار فننا إلى

ظلك فاقبل توبة التائبين (٢١٠)

["O God who accepts repentants, put us

Under your shadow and accept the sinners' repentance"]

He is not afraid of it ("I will not as long as I live be scared of nil")

"العدم ولست مهما عشت أخشى" (205) but, in fact welcomes it and wishes for it:

يا رب مهد لي سبيل الرشاد

واكتب لي الراحة بعد الجهاد (٢٠٤)

["O God show me the right way

And give me comfort after a struggling life"]

According to Rami, real life is not in this world, but in a religious afterlife that Khayyam does not bother to mention at all in his *ruba'is*. Rami's holding onto religion is not only a

result of worldly hopelessness, it also reveals an attempt to prove his Arab identity in a country invaded by foreigners. He needs to state his belonging to Islam because it is the strongest cultural weapon that he shares with the majority of other Egyptians against the Christian colonizer. Wadi refers to the existence of some quatrains that call for faith and forgiveness, which was welcomed in modern Arabic literature (152). The warm reception of the religious type of quatrains is possible in a country where the colonizer's values, religion and literature were imposed and spread widely. The colonized were searching for their lost Arabic identity of which religion is an essential part. Rami's longing to integrate the religious theme was obvious from the beginning. Shawareb quotes Rami's certainty that the Muslim poet Khayyam had a spiritual entity distinct from that of the non-Muslims, and therefore must have written in his *ruba'is* what the Christian British Fitzgerald cannot figure out or comprehend (241). Atweh claims that some of his verses became prayers on the lips of the Sufis and worshippers (103).

In addition to the transience of life, Rami shares to a certain extent with Khayyam his belief in predestination or determinism; Fouad who mentions the common deterministic trait between Khayyam and Rami (Atweh 124). This is closely related to the Islamic concept of one's destiny being "written" and there is no way the helpless individual can change anything in the course of his life:

فما احتيالي والذي قد جرى

كتبتّه يا رب فوق الجبين

وسلم الأمر فمحو الذي

خطت يد المقدار أمر محال (١٨٤)

["What could I do when everything that happened

You, God, have already written on our foreheads?

It is done and wiping out what

Destiny wrote is impossible”]

The inability to control one’s life weighs more heavily and adds to the misery man suffers from. It turns him into a victim of passivity and laziness (“I lived a life of laziness”) “وعشت فيه عيشة الخاملين” (190). Rami even goes so far in claiming that even if he enjoys free will, he will not be active or productive in his way of living. He will actually choose to die, which conveys a silent resistance against colonial life. Khayyam, however, limits determinism to man’s life and death and invites man optimistically to make use of his free will in the course of his living. The optimistic Persian poet grants human beings more freedom and incites them to take action and profit from their short stay on earth.

5.5. Resistance against the Social and Political Aspects of his age

The severe colonial circumstances shaped Rami’s revolt against both social and political conditions in early 20th century Egypt. He describes life in terms of “depriving” (193) people from any kind of blessing or happiness. He clearly refers to the political state when he expresses his wish of living happily as a free man (“a world in which the free person lives happily”) “دنيا يعيش الحر فيها سعيد” (209). In addition to the absence of freedom and democracy in his country, he complains about the poor economic status caused by the colonial exploitation (“striking poverty increased my worries”) “وزاد همي الفقر” (191), and points to the social aspect that is blighted by hypocrisy even among close friends (“don’t hope for a loyal friend”) “لا تأمل الخلّ المقيم الوفاء” (188) and those who

appear to be faithful while in reality they are not. The poet criticizes them severely (you, who appear pious, I am better”) “يا مدعي الزهد أنا أكرم” (187) because they abuse common people for the sake of their own interests:

تستنزف الخلق وما أستقي

إلا دم الكرم فمن آثم (١٨٧)

[“You exploit people while I drink
Wine, so who is the sinner here?”]

All this pain man has to bear alone (“you are alone in suffering pain”) “إنفرد بالشتاء” (188), and as a result he declares his antagonism to life and the poet and life become enemies (“we take back at life”) “نتأر من الأيام” (192), (“as if we were enemies of life”) “كأننا أعداء هذا القضاء” (197). He decides to let go of the world and disregard its events (“so let us ignore it”) “فلندع أمره” (192). Contrarily, Khayyam reconciles himself to life and finds that the only practical solution is to benefit from life’s offerings, hence, he urges an active usage of time despite its brevity. Rami’s verses, on the other hand, imply passivity:

تنحّ واجلس قانعاً وادعاً

وانظر إلى لعب القضا بالبشر (١٩٩)

[“Stay aside and be content
While looking at destiny’s manipulation of people”]

The reason for this passivity lies in the fact that he sees no point in fighting a world afflicted with persecution. The people who were discontent with the state of humiliation in their own country, eventually lost hope for any happiness and freedom they fought for in the 1919 revolution. Consequently, they ended up witnessing the crumbling of ideals

in the face of common interests (Shawareb 18). In such circumstances, the individual does not have the possibility to resist, and can only accept harsh reality (“be content with what has been stated”) “فارض بما قد حكم” (200); Rami even expresses patience and gratitude (“be thankful for your poverty”, “tolerate pain”) “واشكر على الفقر”, “تحملّ الداء” (200). Shawareb claims that the world in Rami’s poetry is one of continuous deprivation and pain. Since human beings do not have the ability to avoid these, they should give themselves up to them (98). This attitude evokes a philosophy related to stoicism. Shawareb explains Rami’s stoicism by the fact that he tames himself to befriend pain; the poet deduces a submission to the unfair life:

وأنت يا حظي تنكرت لي

وكنت من قبل الأخ المستعان (١٩٩)

[“Chance has abandoned me

While you were before a helpful brother”]

He also gets used to failure in achieving his dreams (“I never get what I wish for”)

“ولا يوافيني بما أبتغي” (190). Rami, Shawareb pursues, finds out that life has besieged him

with its misfortunes. His sensitive nature is unable to put up with this situation so he

announces his despair and escape from life (64). Unlike Khayyam who reconciles life

with death, Rami declares his antipathy toward life and decides to neglect it and consider

it as nil. Life according to him is unreal (“life is a temporary shadow”)

“وإنما الدنيا خيال يزول” (198). It is an abode that no mortal would like to inhabit; even

troubles would not want to be part of it:

وإنما الدهر مذيق الكروب

نعيمه رهن بكفّ الخطوب

ولو درى الهم الذي لم يجيء

دنيا الأسى لاختار دار الغيوب (١٩٧)

[“Life is full of misfortunes

Its bliss is at the hands of disasters

If worries knew this

World of misery, they would choose other worlds”]

Throughout the quatrains, stoic thoughts are revealed forming a consistent philosophy of pain and forbearance. Many critics deny the existence of a philosophy in Rami’s *ruba’is*.

Among them, Atweh negates the philosophical trait and claims that it is not necessary for a poet to be a philosopher as well (129). He also supports his statement by quoting

Naccache who refutes the relationship between Rami’s poem and philosophy, justifying the poet’s fleeting thoughts as devoid of depth and consistency (127). Probably,

Naccache bases his opinion on the few verses that deliver moral messages :

لا تتخذ كل الورى صاحبا

ولا تنل من كل ما يؤكل (٢٠٦)

[“Don’t befriend all people

And don’t eat from everything edible”]

However, he does not manage to perceive the stoicism that underlies his quatrains.

Similarly, Najafi conveys some verses of wisdom because morality is a trait inherited from the classic writers in which the poet gets beyond personal experience to reach a larger human scope, but that does not make him a philosopher the way Khayyam and

Rami are. The only resort is nature, the place in which humans can forget their miserable condition.

5.6. Refuge in Nature

Unlike Khayyam who invites mankind to confront life and enjoy it despite the difficulties, Rami announces that life is to be escaped, and nature is one of the outlets. The emphasis on nature is a residue of Western influence on Rami's poetry that contributed to personalizing his quatrains and thus differentiating them from Khayyam's. The British occupation in Egypt led the way to social and cultural exchanges thereby marking Arabic literature and the poets of the twentieth century. Shawareb declares that poets took after the English Romantics in their emotional outbursts and the prevailing sad tone in their poetry. They were moreover inspired by Arab emigrants' literature that was known for its romantic aspect (19). Rami was not different from the poets of his age who were affected by Western literature. Wadi categorizes Rami as a romantic poet even though the Egyptian poet was not part of any literary circle (149). The poet in fact, denies being part or contributing to any existing school (Horr 50). However, the effect of literary schools at that time cannot be underestimated. Under the turbulent political circumstances in the twentieth-century Egypt, cultural life acquires vigor. Shawareb notes the importance for the intellectual life to be in contact with the West via missionaries and translations. New methodologies in sciences and literature were established in Egypt, but most important was the change that occurred in the concept of poetry as a result of the Romantic movement in Europe (8). Several literary schools, affected by British romantic

poetry, were launched in Egypt and aimed at helping Arabic literature out of its general decadence and immobility. Appollo and Diwan were among the circles that stood against the traditional writers who in turn accused them of “destroying poetry with Western axes” (Shawareb 14). This chapter is not in the process of displaying the confrontations between the conservatives as they were called and the modernists. It is of great significance to indicate that these literary attacks on both sides aided in the rebirth of Arabic literature, whether due to a Western Romantic influence or to a classicist reverence for the literary glory of the past. Wadi asserts that it was natural for Rami to be a romantic poet since he was part of an entire symphony playing a romantic beat (148); the critic points to the wide effect Western literature and criticism had in the twentieth century Arab world and in Egypt in particular.

What assisted Romanticism in finding a fertile soil in Egypt is the political situation at that time. The British occupied Egypt for a period that lasted 74 years, during which revolutions shook the Arab society, which continuously claimed their right to independence. Awayda clarifies that the Egyptians’ social, psychological and economic contacts with the foreigners prepared the writers to modernize their literature (40). It is really ironic that the colonial factor that brought misery and injustice to the country was at the same time beneficial and revitalizing to local literature. The colonial occupation economically exploited the Arab country and banned any freedom of expression among the Egyptian citizens. Shawareb says that the individual under such severe political circumstances could not freely express his opinion about the political changes taking place in his country, consequently, the poet sought escape in nature (16). This refuge in nature constitutes, of course, an essential element in Romanticism.

Nature in Rami's poetry is constantly present. An idealistic rejuvenating natural landscape is drawn in his imagery. If perfection cannot be found in his own society, it is in nature that one enjoys its effect. Rami often begins his quatrains with natural imagery ("the gardens beneath the clouds") "بساط الروض كفّ السحاب" (177). He furthermore elaborates in the following lines on the description of a green setting in which fresh grass stands by the river, flowers are scattered on the hills and birds sing beautifully. It is always the sunny season of spring in which nature looks its best. Rami carries his audience to a perfect natural scenery away from the worries and the sorrows he experienced in his everyday life. The setting sharply contrasts with his life ruled by misery. Worries or *hamm* is a keyword in Rami's poem as in Najafi's:

يا قلب كم تشقى بهذا الوجود

وكلّ يوم لك همّ جديد (١٨٩)

["O heart, you undergo a lot of pain in this existence
And every day brings to you new worries"]

5.7. Individuality against Romantic Imitation

Unlike the romantics, Rami does not seek to embrace nature for its own beauty. As mentioned before, it is not the real natural landscape envisaged in his poetry; it is an ideal one. He also differs from the romantics who used to be fond of the splenetic state in all situations. Rami's pain and sadness are related to his deprived social status, not to mention the personal reasons that he himself admitted about his brother's death. Atweh

alludes to Rami's idea about the futility of life and the grief he poured in his *Ruba'iyat* on his young brother's death (98).

Wine is another way of escaping his surroundings; he admits that wine does not provide him with pleasure:

لم أشرب الخمر ابتغاء الطرب
ولا دعنتي قلة في الأدب
لكن إحساسي نزاعا إلى
إطلاق نفسي كان كل السبب (١٧٨)

["I did not drink wine for fun
Nor out of indecency
But the reason was that I wanted
To set myself free"]

It is a way to emancipate himself from the prison of life forced upon him:

وأشرب عتيق الخمر فهي التي
تفكّ عن نفسك قيد الإِسار (١٩٢)

["Drink vintage wine for it
Unfeters you from your misery"]

The world is described as painful and wine and nature are but two temporary means of escape. They are not pain killers for nature as mentioned before does not represent a real landscape on earth and wine drinking is an enormous sin against God. He makes sure before carrying on with the bacchic quatrain to precede it with the word sin "*ithm*" ("sin"). He sees the final refuge from life's injustice and misery in death. Rami, like any

Arab citizen during this period, was a prisoner deprived of his natural rights in his own land.

Besides nature and wine, the theme of passion figures as a shelter from the injustice of the society. The beloved that practically does not exist in Khayyam's *Ruba'iyyat* and rarely appears in Fitzgerald's and Najafi's occupies an important place in Rami's quatrains. This constitutes another romantic aspect in his poetry. Shawareb admits that the Egyptian poet invested part of his poetic inspiration in the domain of passion and love, while his contemporaries treated political and philosophical topics in their poetry (107). The beloved in Rami's verses is always linked with nature for both constitute a certain catharsis that purges all negative feelings and emotions from the poet's soul:

وتعذب الشكوى إلى فاتن

على شفى الوادي الخصيب الينيع (١٧٧)

[“Complaining to a beautiful girl is smoother
On the side of a fresh and green valley”]

Moreover, both are imaginative since they are always depicted as sources of beauty and rejuvenation. His imaginative beloved represents all attractive women, not one in particular; she enlightens his dark and desperate existence. However, he admits that she remains a desire that could never be fulfilled, perhaps because it is a creation of his own fantasy:

مصباح قلبي يستمد الضياء

من طلعة الغيد ذوات البهاء

لكنني مثل الفراش الذي

يسعى إلى النور وفيه القناء (١٨٢)

["My heart gets its light
From the sight of beautiful women
But I am like a butterfly that
Seeks the light in which there is its end"]

Passion is so appealing as long as it is a product of one's imagination. Once it turns into reality, it becomes a fire that troubles the person and exhausts him. This evokes on a personal level his passion for the great singer of the Orient 'Umm Kulthum that was solely nurtured by his mind without any reciprocity or real relationship between them. Rami writes about love and passion in a society that spreads cruelty and inhumanity. It is to be deduced that Rami's poetry might be affected by romanticism, since Rami's readings of English and French poetry left a great impact on the development of his imagery and thought (Horr 51). Furthermore, Shawareb affirms that his readings of Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth clearly oriented his poetry toward the romantic direction (36); however, Rami was not a romantic poet. In order to support this claim, Shawareb refers to al-Shabbi who says that the poet has got a free spirit that is unlimited by one trend or a specific school (21). This applies to Rami who did not belong to a particular school, but revealed certain romantic traits through his quatrains. How can he be classified as a Western romantic while he clearly says that he is not looking for his poetic identity in the others' West but in his Arabic Orient (Horr 52)?

5.8. Combinations of English and Iraqi Versions

There has been a controversy among the critics about the best translation of the *Ruba'iyat*. This chapter posits that Rami's success is due not only to his readings of English, Arabic and even Persian versions, but also the fact that these special stylistic elements feature in his own poetic characteristics and philosophy. All versions left an impact on his poetry, which put the critics at a loss as to whether he got his inspiration from English, Persian, or even Arabic sources. It is a sign of great poetic genius that he combined all of the poets' achievements and shaped them according to his own way of thinking and writing.

Conclusion

The French poet Alfred de Vigny says in one of his famous poems “La Mort du Loup”: “rien ne nous rend si grands qu’une si grande douleur.” It is under harsh and painful circumstances that Khayyam’s *Ruba’iyyat*, Fitzgerald’s quatrains, Najafi’s and Rami’s *ruba’is* came to light. Political oppression cast its shadows on Persian, British and Arabic societies forbidding much artistic expression. In the eleventh century, Persia was under the dominance of Arabs on the one hand and Seljuqs on the other hand. It was during this period that decrees were issued against philosophical and free discussions. The situation was arguably little better in nineteenth-century Britain as the Empire expanded, disregarding its subjects who were often doomed to mechanization and hard labor in the name of progress and industrial revolution. During the twentieth century, Arab countries such as Iraq and Egypt, suffered from two major foreign occupations, Turk and British. The latter strictly controlled the colonized and prevented all types of liberties in order to maintain their powerful status. From the heart of this oppression, Khayyam appeared as a free thinker. He chose poetry, the least common genre at the time, to express his resistance against the situation in his country. Fitzgerald, Najafi and Rami, inspired by the Persian *ruba’is*, disclosed their opinions and criticism of their respective ages in translations of the *Ruba’iyyat* of Omar Khayyam. They did not want to be called to account in front of their countries’ political authorities, whereas they could not be held responsible for transmitting a Persian content into another language. However, it was not solely the Persian content that was rendered in their poetry. Their quatrains display original concepts that belonged to the British, Iraqi and Egyptian poets in relation with their various milieus.

The three poets mentioned above rebelled each in his own way creating his individual free space away from censorship. Since nature occupies an important place in their poetry, it could be said that they went to cultivate their own gardens. The British garden is characterized by simplicity and quiet away from mechanization and social injustice. Fitzgerald was looking for a lost sense of heroism in order to recover a human dignity that had been arguably reduced into nothingness. His verses describe the achievements of heroes from mythology or Persian history in an exaggerated and nostalgic manner. Unlike the British, the cultivators of the Arabic garden were preoccupied with searching for a lost national identity. Najafi planted his own seeds having in mind the classical models of Abbasid poetry. His poem followed the ancient form to a certain extent in addition to its different types such as Ghazal and epigrammatic thoughts. Rami adopted a different method from Najafi's. He cultivated his natural space with religious ideas. He resorted to religion and Islam, which was an essential part of Arab identity.

These *ruba'is* wander freely from a specific situation to a wider scope that encompasses humanity. Not only were the poets able to criticize their age, they also came up with philosophies about the role of human beings in the world. Similarly to Khayyam, they base their philosophy on the concept of life's brevity. This is common because of the severe conditions of wars and death. The fact that they were familiar with the concept of death made them aware of the transience of life. The poets departed from this point and reached different directions. Khayyam launches his philosophy on life's brevity and familiarizes his audience with death in order to reconcile the two extremes. He is optimistic since he urges people to confront their present and live happily without worries. In contrast to Khayyam, Fitzgerald's, Najafi's and Rami's thoughts were

pessimistic. Pessimism runs less strongly in the British poem for it also includes a degree of *carpe diem*. Passivity is dominant as a present attitude. My argument had been that Fitzgerald calls for a pause from the industrial wheel that crushes all citizens; he is not at ease with materialistic aspirations that drive away all kinds of ideals and values. He accepts the human inability to change the course of life, so his only option is to sit aside and observe passively. Pessimism takes a larger share in Najafi's poem. It rises up to yield a certain melancholy and depression. His helplessness throws him in confusion and the concept of death assumes terrible dimensions. According to him, man is not able to find his way out of this dilemma, whether in wine, God's forgiveness, the beloved, or others. However, Rami encompasses both attitudes to reach the starting point. His philosophy is similar to a vicious circle that begins and ends with death. He gets beyond passivity and despair to adopt total stoicism concluding with a wish to embrace death. During their existence on earth, human beings learn to accept their situation and tolerate pain and misery. According to Rami, there are two pain relievers: wine and passion. However, both provide a temporary escape because later one has to face the harsh reality. Wine and women are mere delusions that might soothe the pain and help one carry on with life until death. What counts is not life in Rami's view; it is death that we all await in order to move to the afterlife. Life is full of pain and miseries, all we can do is bear the pain and befriend it and prepare ourselves for the afterlife that is much better than the actual one. Hence, life is a dark and painful passage toward the bright afterlife. I conclude that Khayyam, Fitzgerald, Najafi and Rami trace different human journeys in their quatrains. The Persian poet draws a positive journey by confronting the present challenges of life and protesting against the social and political events of his time. The

British poet, unlike Khayyam, rebelled against the progress that reduced humanity.

Najafi's journey is one of despair and confusion. Finally, Rami meets with Fitzgerald and Najafi and he takes the pessimistic thought further to stoicism. Through death, human beings achieve salvation. Rami's journey can be described as spiritual and religious since real life is not the worldly one; it is subsequent to death and rewards people with justice and eternal bliss.

My argument has affirmed that the similarities between Persian and Arab cultures enriched Persian literature and Arabic literatures. Accordingly, I tend to disagree with Taha Hussain who considers Persian literature as being indebted to Arabic and not the other way around. Actually, both Persian and Arabic literatures had exchanged traits that subsequently became inherent to each culture; the borrowing of Persian and Arabic words, the integration of new poetic genres such as Bacchism into Arabic literature. The *qasida*, for instance, with its different divisions became part of Persian literature.

Literature is something of a free spirit that wanders throughout the world and pollinates its products in order to produce the finest creations. The pollination that occurs between literary masterpieces enriches all parties in addition to literature in general. In this case, both English and Arabic poetry were introduced to a new literary form which is the *ruba'i*, the oldest indigenous Persian form. The British had been used to poems as unified entities; the Arabs were familiar with the *qasida* form in which the line consisting of two hemistiches is complete by itself. Wine was celebrated throughout time, but its connotation in British and Arabic literatures seldom signified resistance such as in Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat*. It stands as a challenge against the authorities that forbade Khayyam and his contemporaries from expressing their political views and thoughts.

Similarly, in Fitzgerald's quatrains, wine imagery is a means of resistance to the age of science and evolution. According to Najafi, the "daughter of the grape" defies troubles and injustice. Although it is temporary, Rami's wine is a challenge against a life that is not worth living. Wine has taken many dimensions based on Khayyam's *Ruba'iyat*, it has been interpreted within religious, intellectual and Epicurean contexts. Mainly, wine in all versions whether Persian, British, or Arabic is adopted as means of defiance and resistance against particular oppressive circumstances. Intercultural work between English and Arabic literatures was also enriching. Arabic literature and especially poetry in the early twentieth century was in a decadent state; it revolved around rhetorical embellishments to the exclusion of the content. Rami and Najafi succeeded in enhancing the status of content. Both mirrored the various aspects of their life in its cultural, political and social aspects. Besides, they were able to integrate their own philosophies consistently throughout the *ruba'is*. Hitherto, Arabic poetry tended to reveal epigrammatic and fleeting thoughts, but seldom concentrated deeply on one thought or philosophy. Rami and Najafi made up for this intellectual absence and presented a pattern of thought pursued from the beginning till the end of their quatrains. Fitzgerald too, satisfied the thirst of the European audience for a way of thinking unrelated to materialistic and earthly aspirations. Through his philosophy, the British poet indirectly calls for a reconsideration of the human being's role on earth. Hence, we deduce that British and Arabic literatures have acquired new characteristics as a result of the three poets' quatrains.

More importantly, the cross cultural works under study have reestablished the significance of art and poetry in particular. The Persian, British and Arab poets planted

their poetic seeds in an almost arid land at a time when the people in the eleventh, nineteenth and twentieth centuries were turning away from poetry and preoccupying themselves with other issues. Little importance was given to poetry in Persia since the religious sciences and astronomy were unrivaled. Britain, as well, witnessed a rise in the scientific and evolutionary theories which relegated poetry to a popular genre. Similarly, in the twentieth century, the Arab world dethroned poetry that had been a main genre throughout the previous literary periods. Poetry was neglected for the sake of other genres such as the novel. Western hegemony meant that the Arabs started embracing and working on other genres. Those who wrote lines often did not go beyond word play and precious imagery, totally disregarding content. However, these masterpieces managed to achieve a wide fame attracting poets and critics around the world to this day. The Persian manuscript that took centuries to achieve popularity has been turned into a controversial topic along with the mysterious figure of Khayyam.

Fitzgerald's version did not immediately draw the Victorian audience but after a while was considered one of the best poems and became famous even in the American continent. Najafi's and Rami's poems were at the beginning the target of criticism on behalf of the literary circles at that time. The Arab poets brought back the poetic genre to its distinguished place among the Arab audience. Najafi's quatrains had widely circulated in the Arab countries and Rami's *ruba'is* were sung and made eternal by the legendary Umm Kulthum. They were even considered as prayers by the Sufis.

Khayyam, Fitzgerald, Najafi and Rami shared the image of pottery. They wrote about the pot that is worked with perfection in order to remain forever worthy of carrying the precious wine representing the rebellious spirit of the poet. The pot is the poem

written in the *ruba'i* form that brings out the defiance of each one of the poets against the social and political injustices of their respective ages. This underscores the importance of art that is preserved throughout time and does not succumb to the impermanence of life or to the oppression of the authorities. It is a tradition that remains even after the death of the poets to be passed on to other generations.

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