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Quatrains of Many Receptions: A Survey of Perceptions of ‘Omar Khayyām in Ottoman and Turkish Translations

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Abstract

This article explores the wide range of responses to Persian polymath and poet ‘Omar Khayyām (d. ca. 526/1132) in Ottoman and Turkish literary sources. A great number of intellectuals, past and present, translated Khayyām’s famed quatrains into Turkish, albeit with differing motivations regarding subject, style, message, and literary reception. Social critics like Abdullah Cevdet employed Khayyām’s quatrains as a vehicle for proving that liberal and progressive mindsets were accommodated in classical Islam. On the other hand, literary scholars like Rıza Tevfik [Bölükbaşı], Hüseyin Dâniş, and Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı chose to focus on the intellectual origins of Khayyām’s thought, as well as on his connections to Islamic philosophical traditions. In the first decades of the Turkish Republic, there was another wave of interest in Khayyām’s quatrains related to prosody, message, and what his legacy and poetic disposition represented with regard to the Islamic past. Whereas poets like Yahya Kemal and Âsaf Hâlet Çelebi regarded him as a paragon of libertine lyrics and Sufi mysticism, Turkish leftist intellectuals such as Nâzım Hikmet, Sabahattin Eyuboğlu, and A. Kadir set him as a socialist or materialist humanist who was a staunch critic of religious bigotry and fanaticism.

Keywords: literary reception; ‘Omar Khayyām; Ottoman and Turkish literature; *Rubaiyat*; translation studies

Persian polymath, mathematician, philosopher, and poet ‘Omar Khayyām (d. ca. 526/1132) has attracted the attention of a great number of Ottoman and Turkish littérateurs, past and present, from poets and scholars to politicians and religious figures, who translated and wrote on Khayyām, prompted by a variety of literary, cultural, and political reasons. The image of Khayyām and the reception of his thought have provided a fertile ground for investigating questions of linguistic nationalism, variability of hermeneutical transfer, ideological bias, and prosodic correspondence. The present survey has the aim of exploring the wide range of perspectives and interpretations that prevailed in Khayyām’s literary reception in Ottoman and Turkish sources, as well as the complex networks of littérateurs who utilized Khayyām’s quatrains for diverse political and cultural motivations.

For some critics, the form “quatrain” (*rubā‘i*) was often perceived as a form of “light verse” given its brevity and repetitive rhyming structure—a type of pithy verse that ascribed to everyday feelings and sensibilities (“the emotional mode”).¹ On the other hand, certain intellectuals, including Rıza Tevfik (Bölükbaşı) (1869–1949), Yahya Kemal (1884–1958), and Âsaf Hâlet Çelebi (1907–58), argued that the quatrain was the most condensed poetic form

¹ See the term “emotional mode” in Uyguner, “Cemal Yeşil’in *Rübailer*’i,” 319.

for making philosophical and mystical assertions, especially due to its terseness and intensity (“the contemplative mode”).² Apart from debates about genre and form, there were numerous discussions in the early days of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s concerning the origins and prevalence of the quatrain form in Turkish and Persian literature vis-à-vis the premodern Turkish *dörtlük* (a four-line stanza often with various rhyme schemes).³

The early diffusion of Khayyām’s verse and stylistic influence was through literary imitations penned by classical Ottoman poets. The term *nazîre* (Pers. *nazîra*; Lat. *imitatio*) described a common literary topos employed in the early modern world, a practice which was preferred over literal translation, since, by *nazîre*, the poets of “Rûm” not only found a venue to showcase their talents in adapting past themes to new wording, but also acknowledged (and legitimized) their own voices in response to the classical poets. Khayyām was indeed regarded as a master of the quatrain in the Perso-Ottoman poetic tradition, and his style was emulated and praised by a wide range of classical Ottoman poets from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who often equated themselves with the poet in relation to the style and refinement in their inspired verse or *imitatio*s.⁴

Turkish libraries hold only nineteen manuscripts of Khayyām’s collection of quatrains in Persian, including two from the fifteenth century, two from the sixteenth, and three from the seventeenth. The rest are undated. This relatively low number of manuscripts containing Khayyām’s original quatrains might indicate that the poet’s literary influence owed more to the prevalence of literary imitations in the Ottoman canon. One of the earliest renditions of Khayyām’s poetry was included in the book of Persian *nazîre*, the *Rebî’ül-manzûm*, of historian Gelibolulu Muştafâ ‘Âlî (d. 1600), which redeployed Khayyām’s style and content in response to fifty-two selected verses.⁵

Besides Khayyām’s deep literary influence on Ottoman poetry through literary imitations, there were a certain number of Ottoman poets whose quatrains were considered comparable to the craftsmanship of the Rubaiyat master. A contemporary of ‘Âlî, an Ottoman jurist and master poet with over six hundred quatrains, ‘Azîmîzâde Muştafâ Hâletî (d. 1631) proclaimed that his own quatrains were “on a par with Khayyām’s” in terms of craftsmanship and composition—although the later interpreter Rıza Tevfik found Hâletî’s work highly pedestrian and its meter flawed.⁶ Thematically, Hâletî wrote quatrains vastly different from Khayyām in content, specifically covering Akbarî Sufi themes including the unity of existence (*waḥdat al-wujûd*), whereas Khayyām’s quatrains rather referenced the Sufi attitude more as an everyday disposition, arguably without the specificities and subtleties of a complex mystical theology.⁷ Khayyām indeed lived a century before the mystic Ibn al-‘Arabî (d. 638/1240), yet due to his formation as a scholar of rational sciences, one could rather trace certain references to Avicennism and its discontents.⁸ One of the early criticisms of

² Ibid. See “[Rubai] daha çok ince bir düşüncüyü, felsefî ve mistik bir hakikati, bedbinliğin dilimizin ucıyla doku-nacak kadar kuvvetli açılığını hissetiren bir şiir parçasıdır” in Çelebi, *Seçme Rubâiler*, 15. On the other hand, Rıza Tevfik would discuss the crossovers between the Persian *rubâî* and the Greek *epigrama*, and refer to *kit’a* (*dörtlük* in Arabic) as the Turkish quatrain (Rıza Tevfik, “Rubâiler ve Tarihçesi,” in Yengin, *Eski Rubâilerim*, 5–8).

³ Köprülü, “Klasik Türk Nazmında ‘Rubâî’ Şeklinin Eskiliği,” 437.

⁴ Among them one could mention the seventeenth-century poets Aḥmed bin Hemdem Süheylî, ‘Ömer Efendi Ne’î, Muştafâ Fehîm-i Kâdim, Mezâkî Süleymân Efendi, and Meḥmed Vahyî; along with certain other eighteenth-century poets such as Aḥmed Nedîm, Sa’îd Giray, Süleymân Nahîfî, Aḥmed Neylî, Meḥmed Hâzîk, and Sünbülzâde Vehbî, as well as the nineteenth-century poets Muştafâ Eşref Paşa, Meḥmed ‘Aṭâullah Efendi Şânîzâde, Yeñişehirli ‘Avnî Bey, and Maḥmûd Celâleddîn Paşa (with the pseudonym Âşaf). See Çalka, “Divan Şairlerinin Gözüyle,” 30–40; Çalka, *Divan Şiirinde Rubai*, 27–52; Behzad, “Nedîm’in Farsça Rubailerinde,” 97–107.

⁵ [İnal], İbnülemin, “Rebî’ül-manzûm ve terbî’ül-manzûm,” 53; Başaran and Atalay, “Gelibolulu Âlî’nin *Rebî’ül-manzûm* Adlı Eseri,” part 1, 66.

⁶ Kandemir, “Rubâiyi Pek Severim,” 116; (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubâileri*, 128.

⁷ Kaya, “Azîmî-zâde Hâletî: Hayatı, Edebi Kişiliği,” 65–69; Kaya, *Azîmîzâde Hâletî Divânı*, 30–34.

⁸ With regard to Khayyām’s contributions to philosophy, see Wisnovsky, “Essence and Existence,” 27–50; Benevich, “Essence-Existence Distinction,” 203–58; Kaukua, *Suhrawardî’s Illuminationism*, 59–63; Griffel, *Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy*, 413, 498; and Aminrazavi, “Khayyam’s Philosophical Thought,” 157–87. Nasr published one of the early studies about Khayyām’s philosophical referencing. Although he concluded in his study that the

Khayyām's worldview in regard to his doctrinal preferences was by Ottoman physician Şābān-ı Şifā'ī (d. 1795). The physician included a Persian refutation of one of Khayyām's quatrains that vied for the Avicennan doctrine of the pre-eternity of the world at the end of his *Kitāb al-Mu'jiz al-Qānūn*, a work currently housed at the Istanbul University Library.⁹

Imagining the Ottoman Classics: Politics of Muslim Libertine Lyrics

The earliest modern biographical account of Khayyām appeared in an encyclopedia in Turkish, *Ḳāmūsü'l-a'lām*, prepared by the celebrated Ottoman Albanian philologist and lexicographer Şemseddin Sāmī (1850–1904). He described Khayyām as a scholar of the rational sciences, a philosopher, and a Sufi.¹⁰ Apart from this entry, Khayyām was not included in any other significant late nineteenth-century Ottoman histories of Persian/Islamic literature.¹¹ This fact led Islamist-nationalist authors Necip Fazıl Kısakürek and Cemil Meriç to regard Khayyām as a figure who won plaudits from the so-called late Ottoman “imitator-intellectuals” under the influence of Western Orientalists, including the case of Abdullah Cevdet (1869–1932).¹² The designation implies a reductionist assertion that overlooks the efforts of early translators who committed their work to rigorous source criticism, such as Hüseyin Dāniş (1870–1943), Rıza Tevfik, and Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı (1900–82).

One of the earliest books of Turkish translations (*tercüme*) of Khayyām was by Mu'allim Feyzī Efendi (1842–1910), an instructor at the prestigious imperial high school Mekteb-i Sultānī (today the Galatasaray Lisesi).¹³ Encouraged by poet-critic Mu'allim Nācī (1849–93), Feyzī decided to translate Khayyām due to the international attention that the poet gathered after FitzGerald's renderings.¹⁴ Feyzī's prose translations were initially serialized in littérateur Aḥmed Midḥat's newspaper *Tercümān-ı Ḥaḳīkat* in 1303/1885–86 along with Khayyām's original quatrains in Persian. According to the note of appreciation (*takrīz*) penned by Nācī, the selection focused in particular on Khayyām's acute observations on the human condition.¹⁵

Another early selection was prepared by Müstecābīzāde 'İsmet Bey (1868–1917), a scribe of the Sultan 'Abdülhamīd II (r. 1876–1909), who was sent into exile on the island of Midilli (Lesbos), having been accused of maintaining close ties with the Young Turks.¹⁶ With the intention of serializing his prose translations in his short-lived literary journal *Ḥiyābān*, 'İsmet Bey mailed his translations and glosses to his close friends, including the calligrapher Su'ūdū'l-Mevlevī (1882–1923), who transcribed the work for preservation.¹⁷ This unpublished manuscript contains 170 quatrains. There are two extant copies in Turkish manuscript libraries, MS Balıkesir and MS Millet Library Ali Emīrī 221. 'İsmet Bey also incorporated his own poems in his long explanatory notes after each verse.¹⁸ Besides this copy, there

poet was “a follower of Avicenna with certain independent interpretations of his own,” he does not provide any details about particular doctrines that he followed or modified by way of close readings. Instead, most of Nasr's conclusions were reduced to Sufi discursiveness and imagery, as well as Akbarī and illuminationist references (Nasr, “Poet-Scientist ‘Umar Khayyām,” 165–83; esp. 179, 183). For Khayyām's possible Avicennan referencing: Balıçoğlu, “Şair, Feylesūf ve Şüphe,” 99–121. Turkish scholar Hilmi Ziya Ülken applied certain aspects of Neoplatonist and Akbarī cosmology in his readings of the quatrains of poet-scholar Rıfık Melül Meriç (1901–64) with a reference to Khayyām's understanding of existence; see Meriç, *Rubāiyyât-ı Melül*, 36–38.

⁹ See MS 238, mentioned in Ünver, “Hekim Şaban Şifai,” 13–15.

¹⁰ Sāmī, “Ömer Ḥayyām,” 2071.

¹¹ Çoşkun, “Oryantalizmin 19. Asırda,” 9.

¹² Kısakürek, *Edebiyat Mahkemeleri*, 158; Meriç, *Bu Ülke*, 145.

¹³ [İnal], İbnülemin, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, 425–27.

¹⁴ (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, “Rubāiler ve Tarihçesi,” 11.

¹⁵ Mu'allim Feyzī Efendi, *Ḥayyām*, 102.

¹⁶ Andı, “Müstecābīzāde 'İsmet Bey,” 131.

¹⁷ Su'ūdū'l-Mevlevī, “Müstecābīzāde 'İsmet Bey,” 1339/1920–21, 107; 1339/1921, 125.

¹⁸ Andı, “Türkçe'de Rubāiyyât-ı Hayyam Tercümelere,” 9–11.

also exists a previously unstudied manuscript in the personal archive of Professor Mustafa Çiçekler, which includes 142 translations by Niğdeli Hakkı Eroğlu.¹⁹

A leading Turkish freethinker, publicist, and physicist, Abdullah Cevdet, who is also noted as the first translator of Shakespeare's tragedies into Turkish as well for his political opposition during the reign of 'Abdülhamid II, published two editions of prose translations of Khayyām in Turkish. The first, published in 1914, went out of print after a few years, and the second edition was published in 1926 (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

A complex figure in Turkish political and cultural history, Abdullah Cevdet was disillusioned with religious reasoning and saw orthodox Islam as a hindrance to social progress. Rather than rejecting the category of religion altogether, he utilized arguments from Islamic history and literature to advocate modernization and Westernization in Ottoman politics.²⁰ He had taken an anticlerical stance and promoted works challenging the official Islamic historiography, most prominently the nineteenth-century Dutch Orientalist Reinhart Dozy (1820–83) and his highly controversial book in its French translation by Victor Chauvin, *Essai sur l'histoire de l'Islamisme* (1879). The work attempted to give an alternative (but reductionist) narrative of Islam through the social conventions of early Arabia. Cevdet's annotated translation *Tārīḥ-i İslāmiyyet* created a huge uproar in the Ottoman world, a case, as Murat Belge suggests, arguably comparable to Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.²¹ Many scholars penned refutations against the positivist method of the work, especially its theses concerning the unsoundness of the ḥadīth and the Prophet Muhammad's alleged epilepsy.²² In the section "Islam in the West," which references Abū'l-'Alā' Ma'arrī (d. 1057), a poet-philosopher who was deemed irreligious by certain other scholars, Cevdet included a footnote comparing him to Khayyām based on the scholar Georges Salmon's *Un précurseur d'Omar Khayyam* (Paris, 1904).²³

The "classics debate" of 1897 initiated by Ahmed Midhat's urgent call for the translation of European classics was the main impetus for the Ottoman interest in translation studies.²⁴ This debate led the late nineteenth-century Ottoman intellectuals to believe that the West could be best approached by perceiving the significance of works that had assumed classical status.²⁵ In a paper presented at the Paris International Congress for Social Education, Cevdet argued that translating the great works of the Western canon, such as the tragedies of Shakespeare, was a way to elevate the cultural level of the Turks, putting them into contact with other civilizations for further intellectual advancement.²⁶ Later in life, Cevdet produced some significant literary translations from a wide range of poets and writers from East to West, including, as mentioned above, the first translations of Shakespeare into Turkish, but mostly from French. His only direct translation from English, *Antony and Cleopatra*, included a subtle political commentary.²⁷ Cevdet's Khayyām translations can be seen as in the service of creating a "nativist" canon, which demonstrated that certain sensibilities in European classics also existed in the Perso-Ottoman world.

Cevdet's first edition of his Khayyām translations in 1914 included a brief introduction with notes on Khayyām's life and early translations in the West, highlighting the role of Austrian historian Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856) in making the poet known in the West with the epithet "Voltaire of the East."²⁸ For Cevdet, Khayyām was neither a denier of God nor a dissolute libertine. On the contrary, he upheld certain moral

¹⁹ See Eroğlu, *Rubâiyyât*.

²⁰ Hanioglu, "Preface by the Author [Abdullah Cevdet]," 172–74.

²¹ Bardakçı, "Abdullah Cevdet'in kitaplarını mahkeme kararıyla Köprü'den denize atmıştık."

²² Hatiboğlu, "Osmanlı Aydınları'nca"; Çam, "Tartışmalı Bir Eser."

²³ Cevdet, *Tārīḥ-i İslāmiyyet*, vol. 2, 448.

²⁴ Kaplan, *Klâsikler Tartışması Başlangıç Dönemi*; Paker, "1897 'Classics Debate,'" 325–26.

²⁵ Paker, "Hamlet" in Turkey," 92.

²⁶ Mardin, *Jön Türkler'in siyasi fikirleri*, 167; Ayluçtarhan, "Dr. Abdullah Cevdet's Translations (1908–1910)," 5–6.

²⁷ de Bruijn, "Shakespeare in Turkish."

²⁸ Cevdet, *Rubâiyyât-ı Ḥayyâm ve Türkçe'ye Tercümelere*, 1st ed. (1914), 9.

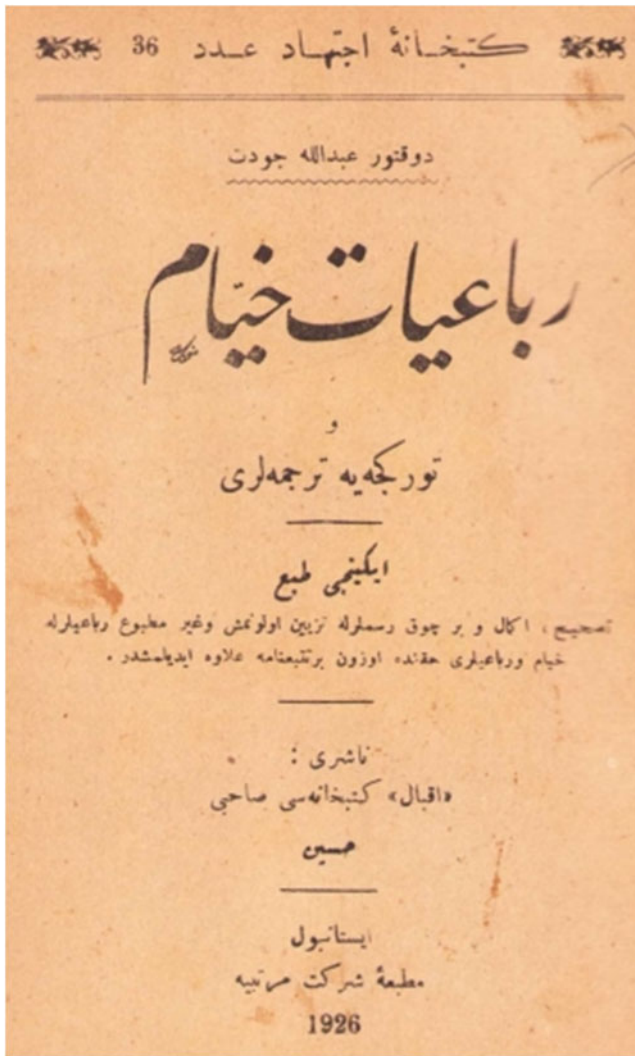


Figure 1. ‘Abdullāh Cevdet, *Rubā’iyāt-ı Ḥayyām ve Türkçe’ye Tercümeleri*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Maṭba’-ı Şirket-i Mürettibiye, 1926).

virtues, including a belief in God’s unicity. Khayyām also should not be perceived as a libertine rogue, since otherwise later American utilitarian pragmatists would not have praised the poet for manifesting a virtuous and contemplative nature.²⁹ For Cevdet, Khayyām was not a dipsomaniac either, but a *dilmest* (or *dil-i āteşnāk*), a particular Sufi designation that employed the intoxication of wine as an analogy for attaining “divine, rejuvenating growth and awakening” (*‘ulvī ve müteceddid bir neş’et ve tenebbüh*).³⁰ Khayyām’s drunkenness was therefore an outcome of his contemplative attainments.

Cevdet’s extended second edition included prose translations of 575 quatrains based on the 1867 French edition of Jean Baptiste Nicolas (1814–75), the chief interpreter at the French legation in Tehran, along with a long preface that evaluated Khayyām’s life and works, with cross-references to a wide range of poets.³¹ Persian and Turkish poets such as figures ‘Urfi of Shiraz, Nedīm, and Qā’ānī, as well as the Roman epicurean poet Lucretius, various European Romantic poets, along with the French botanist writer Jean-Henri Fabre

²⁹ Ibid., 15–16.

³⁰ Ibid., 3–5.

³¹ Lenepveu-Hotz, “Khayyām, ‘Omar vi. French Translations.”



Figure 2. “Ah! Toprağa münkalib olmadan evvel, hayattan ne kadar çok istifâde etmek mümkünse o kadar çok istifâde idelim” (Before transforming into soil, we shall enjoy life as much as we can). ‘Abdullâh Cevdet, *Rubâ’iyyât-ı Hâyyâm ve Türkçe’ye Tercümelere*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Maṭba’â-ı Şirket-i Mürettibiye, 1926), 207. The drawing is taken from Herbert Cole’s illustrations of Edward FitzGerald’s English rendition.

and the Chilean lyrical poet Gabriela Mistral. The second edition opens with a congratulatory note in Persian sent by the editor of the *Khāvar* newspaper along with an additional telegraph from the Persian embassy in French signed by Ehtishām-al-Salṭana Mīrzā Maḥmūd Khān Qājār Davalū (d. 1354/1935), the ambassador to Turkey during World War I.³² The latter’s note praises Cevdet’s efforts in presenting Khayyām to the Turkish audience in a fresh and rejuvenating voice, loyal to the poet’s philosophical and literary premises.³³

Cevdet’s second edition classifies Khayyām’s poetry according to its content and meaning, including a long introductory note that critiques previous translations in European languages. For Cevdet, Nicolas’ translations were not sufficiently precise in meaning and, similarly, Edward FitzGerald (1809–83) was not faithful to the original. One of the highlights of Cevdet’s foreword discussed the problem of “quatrains with contradictory meanings” (*naḳīz rubā’iler*) in Khayyām, which had been an obstacle to deducing a coherent worldview from his poetry. Cevdet found this a faulty criterion for evaluating his work, since every poet could convey mixed emotions, contradicting at times ideas expressed in certain other poems.³⁴ Cevdet construed Khayyām as a freethinker who went against religious fanaticism and bigotry, an essentializing form of religion, which, for him, was foisted on the Persians by the Arab sword. Khayyām’s voice, in this sense, should be taken as a reaction against the procrustean bed of Arab-centered Islam and Sunnī orthodoxy.³⁵

³² Bāmdād, *Sharḥ-e ḥāl-e rejāl-e Irān*, vol. 4, 33–34.

³³ Cevdet, *Rubā’iyyât-ı Hâyyâm ve Türkçe’ye Tercümelere*, 2nd ed. (1926), 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Another lengthy section in Cevdet's foreword concerns the perceptions of Khayyām's oeuvre by previous translators. For Cevdet, Hüseyin Dāniş regarded the poet as a naturalist philosopher, whereas Charles Grolleau (1867–1940), who translated 158 quatrains of the poet into French, deemed him to be a thorough pessimist in the tradition of Hamlet.³⁶ Cevdet, on the other hand, noted that Khayyām was a materialist freethinker who did not fall into the trap of European *Vulgarmaterialismus*, which crudely explained every physical phenomenon through positivist-materialistic means. Instead, he was a materialist with spiritual leanings, who was ready to embrace the unknown with a sense of nihilistic fatalism, a sensibility that had also influenced a line of French Romanticist, Decadent, and Symbolist poets. For Cevdet, Khayyām should not be reduced to a mere pantheist in belief either. Instead, he should be regarded as a deist with a firm faith in the one true God. With the aim of modernizing Islam (*mu'āşırlaşmak*), he tried to promote a liberal and progressive form of religion to address the conditions contributing to the decline in the Islamic world—a project that also fostered his interest in doctrines in certain offshoot Islamic contexts, including Bahai pacifism.³⁷ In 1922, Cevdet's advocacy of more recent communities such as the Bahai's led him to become the last person to be imprisoned for blasphemy in the Ottoman Empire.³⁸

As ideologues of the Young Turk Revolution, Cevdet and his milieu had an early interest in the German *Vulgarmaterialismus*, especially in the works of philosopher-physician Ludwig Büchner (1824–99), who had resorted to materialist, scientific, and Darwinian principles to explain physical phenomena, denying the binary opposition between mind and matter.³⁹ His books provided him with the gateway to reconcile *the spiritual* through the expression and study of *the material*—justifying materialist biology with Islamic religious principles deduced from the Qur'an or the ḥadīth.⁴⁰ As a response to the critics who had labeled him a “radical vulgar materialist,” Cevdet might have included the above-mentioned section about Khayyām's religiosity to assert that his own perception of materialism did not ignore spiritual sensibilities either. Khayyām's life was a proof that Islam could also accommodate various aspects of a progressive and secular lifestyle, a scientific and liberal outlook that would not necessarily go against religion. In fact, Cevdet was neither a denier of Islam nor of religion per se, but an intellectual who argued that there was no single prescribed sense of Islam limited to strict orthodoxy and orthopraxy.⁴¹ His sense of materialism did not make him fall into sheer positivism but opened some leeway to the unknowable. That is, Cevdet endorsed materialism in Islamic terms by using figures like Khayyām as a vehicle for proving that there existed other forms of Muslim lifestyle and aesthetics—arguably on par with those expressed in the French libertine lyrical tradition.⁴²

Khayyām's influence went far beyond pedantic concerns or religious history. For Cevdet, he could even be considered a forerunner of certain European poets who, in a parallel universe, penned poems inspired by him (*Ḥayyām'dan mülhem*); such poets included figures ranging from Pierre de Ronsard to the Symbolists Théophile Gautier and Jean Lahor (Henri Cazalis), and the Parnassian Leconte de Lisle.⁴³ In the words of Cevdet, these poets covered similar themes, oscillating between carpe diem and nihilist fatalism, as evidenced in his Khayyām-inspired verses “Homme! Ou Yavroum Dinle!” in *Fièvre d'Ame*, a poem that was devoted to the “pessimist-naturalist” Jean Lahor. This poem has some thematic parallels with Khayyām's thought, as in the line “Oui, pense, transforme, et sans être ruineux” (Yes,

³⁶ Ibid., 19.

³⁷ Hanioglu, *Young Turks in Opposition*, 202.

³⁸ For Cevdet's interest in Bahaism, see Alkan, “Eternal Enemy of İslām,” 5.

³⁹ Süsseim, “Abd Allāh Djevdet,” 59; Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Abdullah Cevdet*, 136–37.

⁴⁰ Hanioglu, “Garbçılar,” 134; Bürüngüz, “Abdullah Cevdet and the Garpcılık Movement,” 50–51; Demir, “Doktor Abdullah Cevdet'te Din Algısı,” 14.

⁴¹ Berkes, *Development of Secularism in Modern Turkey*, 339–40.

⁴² Ibid., 174.

⁴³ Kanar, *Ömer Hayyam Rubailer*, 26–28.

think, transform, and without being ruinous), as well as the American translator Nathan Haskell Dole's views on Khayyām's poetry.⁴⁴

In Search of Khayyām's Historicity: Early Efforts in Designating the Poet's Authentic Vision

Another significant publication was a joint effort by a Turco-Persian poet, scholar and diplomat, Hüseyin Dāniş, and Ottoman philosopher and statesman, Rıza Tevfik, in 1340/1922, both of whom were known for their close contact with the Cambridge Orientalist Edward G. Browne (1862–1926).⁴⁵ In particular, Dāniş was one of the main sources of motivation and impetus behind the completion of certain works by both scholars, especially Browne's voluminous *A Literary History of Persia*.⁴⁶ In his informative and detailed foreword, Dāniş, who also worked as a Persian instructor at Galatasaray, having replaced Khayyām's earlier translator Mu'allim Feyzī, aimed to contextualize Khayyām's life through personal anecdotes, authentic quatrains, and extant passages from various Muslim historians and poets, along with long passages describing his reception and influence in the West. He based his prose translation on MS Ouseley 140 at Oxford's Bodleian Library, and divided the poet's poems into common themes and designations, labeling their content as agnostic, skeptic, pessimist, fatalist, etc. Dāniş's previous publication on the history of Persian poetry had drawn criticism from the Turkish historian and statesman Fuad Köprülü (1890–1966), who penned essays problematizing Dāniş's lack of breadth in selection and "Iran-centered," proto-nationalist canonization, which, for him, contained neither substantial source criticism nor textual basis.⁴⁷ Dāniş's scholarly rigor in source criticism and classification in his later Khayyām volume could be perceived as a response to Köprülü's earlier criticism that his assessments were like those present in the *tezkire* (dictionaries of poets) tradition, being subjective, arbitrary, and lacking historicity and rigorous methodology.⁴⁸

Before this joint effort, Dāniş also published one of the earliest studies of Khayyām's life and works in his *Serāmedān-ı sühan*, an Ottoman Turkish course textbook prepared for the departments of literature and theology at *Dārülfünūn* (today's Istanbul University), and the literature branch of *Dārülmü'allimīn*, the vocational school for high school teachers.⁴⁹ The book includes contextual information and analyses about the lives and works of sixteen Persian poets, employing recent scholarly works by European Orientalists, as well as close readings by the author himself (it is highly probable that this study could have shaped and inspired Rıza Tevfik's later interpretations regarding Khayyām's thought). Dāniş described Khayyām as a Graeco-Arabic philosopher (*hakīm*) from the East in line with the thoughts of Ibn Sīnā/Avicenna (d. 1037), as well as a freethinker who developed a unique perspective on life.⁵⁰ Dāniş did not follow Cevdet's later anachronisms of equating the poet with various other non-Muslim thinkers of the past, such as Lucretius. Instead, he asserted that the poet was neither a materialist nor someone who believed in the transmutation of souls (*metempsychosis*), but an Arabic philosopher with a strict code of morality and a belief in the Necessarily Existent (*al-wājib*) that did not clash with the basic Sunnī tenets taught at the Seljūq madrasas during Khayyām's lifetime.⁵¹ For Dāniş, Khayyām probably never drank wine, therefore the wine imagery could be interpreted as a metaphor for the freedom of expression and conscience (*hürriyet-i fikr ve vicdān*), the firsthand knowledge of

⁴⁴ Cevdet, *Fièvre d'Ame*, 105–6.

⁴⁵ Chelkowski, "Edward G. Browne's Turkish Connexion," 26.

⁴⁶ Gurney, "E. G. Browne and the Iranian Community in Istanbul," 160–63.

⁴⁷ Dāniş, *Münazarātım*; Koçakoğlu, *Hüseyin Daniş'in Fuad Köprülü'ye Cevabı*.

⁴⁸ Ozdemir, "Translation after the Persianate?" 10–13.

⁴⁹ Dāniş, *Serāmedān-ı sühan*, 13–14.

⁵⁰ Dāniş and Tevfik, *Rubā'iyāt-ı Ömer Hayyām*, 173, 188, 191, 198.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 201, 208–9.

divine love (*zevk-i 'aşk-ı rabbāni*), and an inclination toward carnal desires and animal instincts (*meyl-i şehvāni ve şafā-ı hiss-i hayvāni*).⁵²

Dāniş's revised second edition was a solo effort published in 1346/1927 without Tevfik's participation. Dedicated to the memory of E. G. Browne, the book opens with an epigraphic poem in Turkish by the translator with the title "Ömer Ḥayyām," which seeks an answer to the question of what message can be deduced from Khayyām today. The translations from Khayyām's original Persian were a pressing need for Dāniş because Cevdet had not only based his translations on Nicolas's random selection in French, but he had also distorted certain nuances of meaning.⁵³ Dāniş took a different approach, making certain changes in the foreword and translations, as well as amending the main thrust of Tevfik's section on Khayyām's philosophy—albeit arguably incorporating some of Tevfik's references and points as his own.⁵⁴ Yet there were some radical differences between the approaches of the two authors. Tevfik was often unmethodical and inattentive in his scholarly pursuits due to his political ambitions, which prompted both Browne and Dāniş to frequently amend his research.⁵⁵ Rıza Tevfik argued that the intellectual sources of Khayyām could be traced to Neoplatonism and Sufi thought and compared to the philosophical ideas of Persian Illuminationism as well as to European thinkers such as Baruch Spinoza and poets like John Milton.⁵⁶ Dāniş, on the other hand, did not assign the poet to any particular school of thought, and argued, instead, for his uniqueness and originality by showing that, strictly speaking, his ideas could not be reconciled with the premises of Islamic mystical or rational philosophy.

In the initial joint edition, Rıza Tevfik appears to regard Khayyām primarily as a thinker, and never as a Sufi per se.⁵⁷ For Tevfik, he was a metaphysician who in his poems covered problematic philosophical subjects, such as absolute existence, the reality of things, the nature of souls, as well as generation and corruption.⁵⁸ Contrary to Dāniş' claim that wine was part of Sufi discourse, Tevfik saw it as nothing other than everyday wine, not as a metaphor.⁵⁹ In his analysis, Tevfik aimed to assert the universality of Khayyām's thought as a precursor to the great intellectuals of modern European thought, and long passages in Dāniş's second edition, discrediting these labels, seem to be an implied criticism of Tevfik's (and Cevdet's) abundant anachronistic references.⁶⁰

In his introduction to the second edition, Dāniş noted that the discovery of Khayyām as a poet coincided with the rise of philological rigor and analysis in nineteenth-century scholarship, thanks to European Orientalists.⁶¹ According to Dāniş, due to the various aspects of Khayyām's thoughts, such as freethinking, materialism, nihilism, and the audacity of his libertine moral righteousness, many Western critics (along with Cevdet) made certain analogies between Khayyām and past philosophers like Epicurus, Abu'l-'Alā' Ma'arri, and Voltaire, as well as poets including Lucretius, Goethe, and Heine, along with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, concluding that these comparisons were simply reductive labels.⁶² Dāniş linked Khayyām's thought to the Avicennan school, emphasizing that scholars like Ibn Sīnā and Fakhr-al-Dīn Rāzī also crafted agnostic poems around the same time, but he later ruled

⁵² Ibid., 193–95.

⁵³ Dāniş, *Rubā'iyāt-ı 'Ömer Ḥayyām*, 20.

⁵⁴ See "O vakit Hüseyin Daniş merhum, tercüme halile felsefi kısmını birleştirip benim mülâhazalarımı ve fikirlerimi de derç ve yazmış olduğum mukaddimeyi de yine İkbāl kütüphanesi marifetile (1927) senesinde tabettirmiş [...] in (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Ömer Ḥayyām ve Rubāileri*, 4.

⁵⁵ Gurney, "E. G. Browne and the Iranian Community in Istanbul," 158–60.

⁵⁶ Dāniş and Tevfik, *Rubā'iyāt-ı 'Ömer Ḥayyām*, 68–69, 149.

⁵⁷ Dāniş, *Münāzarātım*, 13.

⁵⁸ Dāniş and Tevfik, *Rubā'iyāt-ı 'Ömer Ḥayyām*, 71.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 144.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 154; Dāniş, *Rubā'iyāt-ı 'Ömer Ḥayyām*, 18–20.

⁶¹ Ibid., 11–12.

⁶² Ibid., 66, 75–77; Cevdet, *Rubā'iyāt-ı Ḥayyām ve Türkçe'ye Tercümelere*, 1st ed. (1914), 10.

out the possibility of this philosophical lineage after acknowledging Khayyām's fierce rejection of immaterial souls, as well as the transmigration of life.⁶³

For Dāniş, Khayyām's message was concerned with the obscurity of death, as well as the preciousness of life, as a way of reaching truth and dispelling unhappiness. If one needed to designate a name, Dāniş suggested that it would more likely be oscillating between fatalist materialism and the Sufi allegory.⁶⁴ Also, for him, Khayyām probably never consumed wine but merely used this imagery through the prism of Sufi metaphors (arguably similar to Nicolas's thesis), a perennial inspiration for lyrical poetry from Dionysus and Zoroaster to Ḥāfiz.⁶⁵ Dāniş's collected verse *Ḳārvān-ı 'Ömr* included two poems that summarized Khayyām's disposition in life along with translated lines from his original poems, as well as a quatrain titled "'Ömer Ḥayyām ve Şeykspir," comparing Khayyām's thought to Shakespeare's conception of the "inevitability of death."⁶⁶ Dāniş set Khayyām as a pessimist freethinker who emphasized the overwhelming quality of the universe, human mortality, and the futility of life, also boasting his exactitude in collecting words of wisdom like a pearl-diver.⁶⁷ In his comparison to Shakespeare, Dāniş makes a direct allusion to the graveyard scene in *Hamlet*. Holding a skull in his hands, Dāniş (or Khayyām) addresses it directly, asserting that intelligence only exists on borrowed time, so one should rather fill one's cranial cavity with wine before being drenched in soil.⁶⁸

Rıza Tevfik published a solo edition of his Khayyām translations in 1945, with a dedication to his son Saîd, as well as to the memory of Dāniş, who had passed away a year earlier. In a note to his readers, Tevfik wrote that it took him only forty days to complete his introduction, whereas he worked for ten months straight on the edition itself to select the genuine quatrains of the poet. He needed to identify the authentic Khayyām so that he would be able to comment on the general features of his philosophy. In addition to his utilization of the study by Arab scholar Aḥmad Ḥāmad al-Şarrāf in 1931, Tevfik also introduced a newly discovered work in his chapter on Khayyām's source critique, a compilation of 393 quatrains housed at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris that had been studied and edited by Hungarian scholar Barthélemy Csillik.⁶⁹

Tevfik's interest in Khayyām went back to his early years of teaching, yet his earlier analyses lacked details about the poet's life or social circle. It was through Dāniş that he received a more contextual outlook, which brought him a new perspective over the years. Having quoted the designation of Khayyām by the Sufi Najm-al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 573/1177) in his *Mirşād al-'ibād min al-mabda' ilāl-ma'ād* as a "naturalist materialist" (*tabī'iyūndan dehrī*), Tevfik came to the conclusion that the poet's work reflected a synthetic array of thoughts from Islamic philosophy (*ḥikmet*), Illuminationism (*İşrākiyye*), and Sufism (*taşavvuf*)—a view problematically conflating all three schools into interchangeable categories—to various other schools, such as nihilism, agnosticism, determinism, spiritual pantheism, and naturalism, along with Schopenhauer's pessimism and a weaker form of materialism fused with Epicureanism.⁷⁰ These designations can be deemed problematic in terms of historicity since they refrain from assigning specificities to Khayyām's thought. As a conclusion, Tevfik underlined that the poet was neither a Sufi

⁶³ Dāniş, *Rubā'iyāt-ı 'Ömer Ḥayyām*, 82.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 75–77.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 91, 99–102; Lenepveu-Hotz, "Khayyām, 'Omar vi. French Translations," 516–17.

⁶⁶ See the poems "'Ömer Ḥayyām," "Ruba'iyāt-ı Ḥayyām," and "'Ömer Ḥayyām ve Şeykspir" in Dāniş, *Ḳārvān-ı 'Ömr*, 108–110, 133. For the text and translation of the last two poems, please refer to the Appendix.

⁶⁷ See the quatrain "Rubā'iyāt-ı Ḥayyām," *ibid.*, 108. See Appendix for the full text.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 133. See Appendix for the full text.

⁶⁹ Csillik, *Les manuscrits mineurs des Rubā'iyāt*; (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubāileri*, 131; Andı, "Türkçe'de Rubāiyāt-ı Hayyam Tercümelere," 21; Péri, "Khayyām xii, Hungarian Translations," 535–38.

⁷⁰ Rāzī (Dāya), *Mirşād al-'ibād*, 31; Bölükbaşı, *Sanat ve Estetik Yazıları*, 108; (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Felsefe Dersleri*, 41, 74; (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubāileri*, 2, 20–23.

nor an ascetic, and that he was not a true believer either, but a Hedonist philosopher with a sense of *panthéisme spiritualiste*.⁷¹

In another work, Tevfik wrote about the crossovers between Khayyām and French Symbolist poets, arguing that the poet should be regarded as a Symbolist par excellence since his verse did not fall into the trap of meaninglessness and strangeness (*ma'nāsızlık ve garābet*), two defective aspects that the French critic Max Nordau (1849–1923) claimed to have invaded French Symbolism.⁷² It should be further added that a poem that Tevfik wrote during exile in Amman, Jordan, “İssız illerde” (also translated into Arabic as “Mudun şāmeta”), might have been influenced by Khayyām, with regard to content and disposition toward life.⁷³

Another translation that did not see Khayyām as a mere poet but as a philosopher-mystic was the Mevlevī author Muştāfā Rüşdī's “Ravzatü'l-‘uşşāğ ve nüzhetü'l-müşţāk” (MS Atatürk Kitaplığı 530/1), a miscellany with six parts that includes 101 prose translations of Khayyām's quatrains along with accompanying anecdotes, commentaries, and translations by the author, as well as select works attributed to Rūmī and Shams-i Tabrīzī. Rüşdī wrote that the lack of interest in Khayyām was mostly motivated by bigotry and fanaticism (*ta'aşsub*), and that Khayyām never attacked ritual worship and fasting but criticized the religious hypocrisy of those who covered their real intention behind a display of piety.⁷⁴ Since the section on Khayyām refers to the early books of Cevdet and Dāniş-Tevfik, the manuscript should be dated after 1927. Muştāfā Rüşdī was a practicing Mevlevī who set Khayyām's poems in a Persianate background based on his readings and spiritual experiences as someone who engaged in the Persianate or Persian-speaking literary canon (*Fārsī ile mütevaggil olanlar*).⁷⁵ In his case, Persian would be regarded as more than a linguistic medium, but a shorthand for a mystical-philosophical field, which acquired a nonlegalistic symbolic meaning.⁷⁶ Yet Rüşdī had another vision: he argued that, unlike in the case of *‘Aşknāme*, a work that he attributed to Rūmī, one should not look for Sufism in Khayyām's quatrains, because they were rather literary and philosophical from head to toe.⁷⁷ In the vignettes dispersed among his Khayyām translations, it could be observed that Rüşdī closely associated Khayyām with *hikma* in its more general sense, that is, “philosophical wisdom,” instead of referencing Aristotelian-Avicennan philosophy.⁷⁸

Configuring the Prosody: Linguistic Nationalism and the Rubaiyat in the Early Republic

Starting in the 1920s, there was a new wave of Khayyām translations by writers who, in place of prose renderings, chose to use meter—whether the classical Arabic prosody (*‘arūz*) or the more popular Turkish syllabic verse (*hece ölçüsü*)—in their translations and renderings.

⁷¹ (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubailer*, 82–83, 93–99.

⁷² (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Sanat ve Estetik Yazıları*, 66–67.

⁷³ Qāsem, *Sanawāt al-Faylasūf Rezā Tawfiq fi'l-Urdum*, 121–24; Beyaz, “Osmanlı Bakıyesinde Bir Osmanlı Aydını,” 50.

⁷⁴ Ataman, “Mevlevī Mustafa Rüşdī ve Eserleri,” 14; Rüşdī referred to his Mevlevī connections at the end of his preface, *ibid.*, 40. See “Hayyām hāşā namāz ve orūca ta'arruz itmiyor ve maşşadı ancak bir tākım libās-ı zühde bürünmüş riyā'kârlara ta'rīzdir” (179).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 39. Ozdemir, “Translation after the Persianate?” 21–26.

⁷⁶ Ozdemir, “Translation after the Persianate?” 21–26. For “Persian(ate)” as a register in religious and literary canon, especially in the case of the Mevlevī sheikh Ankaravī vs. Kađızāde Meşmed, see Gürbüz, “Bilingual Heaven,” 218, 236. For the case of the Mamlūks, see Mauder, “Being Persian in Late Mamluk Egypt.”

⁷⁷ “Hayyām'ın rubā'iyātında da taşavvuf aranılmaz; o eşer de ser-ā-pā edebī ve felsefidür” (Ataman, “Mevlevī Mustafa Rüşdī ve Eserleri,” 39).

⁷⁸ See “hikmet çādırımı dođuyan Hayyām” (Khayyām who weaves the tent of philosophical wisdom), *ibid.*, 160; “her bir mışrā'ı hikmet-nümündür” (each of his lines are wisdom-ridden/revealing), 208; and “Hayyām 'ulemā'-ı ehl-i hey'etden oldığı hālede dahā dünyanın ne tarafā döndüğüne 'aql irdiremezse” (if Khayyām cannot provide a rational basis for the world's turning as a scholar of theoretical astronomy), 189.

In this context, the translation efforts during the early republic seem to be more concerned about finding a true national prosody to translate the works of Muslim poets, rather than assigning forefathers to his thought.

Poet, journalist, and humorist Hüseyin Rifat (1878–1954) was the first figure to translate Khayyām in verse based on the ‘arūz.⁷⁹ The work includes 158 translations along with appreciatory notes written by Dāniş and Cevdet, although the latter found Rifat’s choice of the ‘arūz unsuitable for the authentic voice of the quatrains.⁸⁰ As for the method employed, having ignored the first two lines of the quatrain, Rifat first set the last line into the ‘arūz, then recreated the previous parts based on the meter he chose for the last line.⁸¹ As a reply to the criticism that he did not retain the traditional quatrain conventions but simply created his own, Rifat defended his choice with an allegory, noting “a beauty was always a beauty no matter where, and whether her eyes were green or blue made no difference,” thereby suggesting that the corresponding form should not be considered the overriding criterion for the quality of a translation.⁸²

Setting Khayyām into the ‘arūz when translating him into Turkish was indeed a hard task. In a frequently cited anecdote, Rıza Tevfik expressed his admiration for the translations of poet-satirist Hamâmîzâde Mehmed İhsan (1885–1948) into Turkish based on Khayyām’s original prosody.⁸³ More than 336 translations by İhsan were published posthumously by his son Orhan, along with the masterful calligraphy by Kemal Batanay,⁸⁴ an apprentice of the Ottoman *ta’lîq* master Hulusi Efendi (Fig. 3). The preface by professor of Persian literature Ali Nihad Tarhan praises İhsan’s selection as being more encompassing and diverse than previous works, including those of Dāniş and Tevfik.⁸⁵

Another early translation in verse was by the mufti of Kırklareli, Mehmed Bahâeddin (1870–1941). His *Ḥurde-i Eş’âr* (1927) included thirty-one quatrains in verse translated originally from Persian. The translations were primarily inspired by Khayyām, so they were not verbatim but selected at random, rendered by meaning, and rephrased in verse (*gelişigüzel, me’alen ve nazmen*), with only six being translated corresponding to the original meter. Bahâeddin avoided literalism, but placed a specific emphasis on the meaning.⁸⁶ The majority of the quatrains in the selection focus on the love of life and wine as central themes.⁸⁷

A Turkish poet, bureaucrat, and translator, Feyzullah Sacit Ülkü (1892–1970), who is remembered for his nationalist approach to poetry, reflected in his choice of purely Turkish vocabulary and themes, published the first volume of Khayyām translations in verse based on the syllabic verse (*hece ölçüsü*), which he claimed to be “Turkey’s national prosody.” In his youth, Sacit composed poetry under the influence of the ideologue Ziya Gökalp’s attempt at creating a “Nationalist Literature” (*Millî Edebiyât*) and “New Language” (*Yeñî Lisân*) in the journal *Genç Kalem* (1909–12). Later on, he supported the early republican policies of linguistic purity, which promoted “nationalization” (*millîleşme*) in literature, as well as the syllabic verse over the Arabic prosody. And it may not have been pure coincidence that Sacit’s Khayyām translations came out in 1929 in Latin script immediately after the Turkish language reform. Around the time of Sacit’s fixation with the “national meter,” there was an early republic trend in translating Khayyām with a purist Turkish (*öz Türkçe*) reflex, as in the cases of Ahmed Rifat, İshâk Refet, Ahmet Hayyat, and Necmi Tarkan.⁸⁸

⁷⁹ (İşıl), Hüseyin Rifat, *Rubâ’iyyât-ı Ḥayyâm ve Manzûm Tercümeleri* (Istanbul: 1926); and 2nd ed., titled *Ömer Hayyam-Manzûm Rubâ’i Tercümeleri* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1943).

⁸⁰ (İşıl), Hüseyin Rifat, *Rubâ’iyyât-ı Ḥayyâm ve Manzûm Tercümeleri*, 13–14.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

⁸² See “Kim beni siyah yâhüd yeşil güzellerin daha câzîbedâr olduğuna iknâ’ idebilir” (*Ibid.*, 16).

⁸³ Kandemir, “Rubâ’iyi Pek Severim,” 116–17.

⁸⁴ See Serin, *Kemal Batanay*.

⁸⁵ In Hamâmîzâde İhsan, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâileri*, 4.

⁸⁶ Bulut, “Şeb-i Yeldâda Kalmış Bir Ömür,” 62.

⁸⁷ Avcı, “Mehmed Bahâeddin’in Hayyam’dan Serbest Tarzda,” 84–85.

⁸⁸ Karakan, *Türkçe Hayyam-Antoloji*, 10.

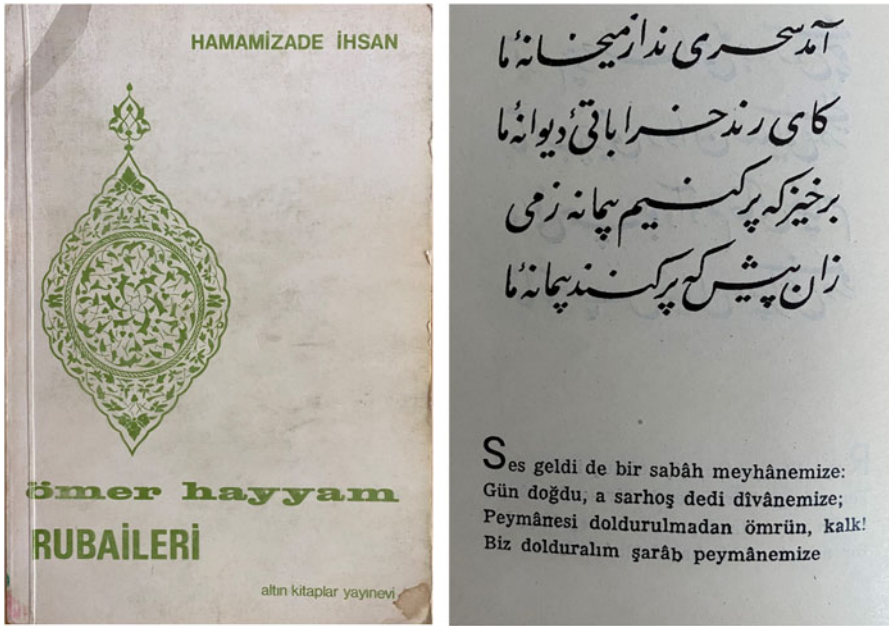


Figure 3. Kemal Batanay's Ottoman *ta'liq* and Hamâmîzâde's translation (right). "Amad saharî nidâ za mayhâna-yi mâ (At dawn came a calling from our tavern)," in Hamâmîzâde İhsan, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâileri* (Istanbul: Altın Kitaplar, 1966), 12.

This tendency was in line with the policies of Turkish language purification and nationalism of the 1930s, which were also effective in later decades. Translating quatrains in syllabic meter is still popular today, 7 + 7 being the most common form.⁸⁹

Sacit's volume includes 591 quatrains in syllabic meter and 101 in Khayyâm's original *aruz* prosody, along with the Persian text. Sacit reduced the poet's philosophy to sheer nothingness (*nihil*, Lat.) having claimed that the poet equated the ultimate truth with philosophical nihilism.⁹⁰ Following Cevdet's designation of "drunk with the love of God," that is, *dilmestî*, Sacit further defined this term based on Rûmî's definition as a way of creating a "divine wine language of infinity and beauty" (*nihayetsizliğin ve güzelliğin lâhutî şarabı*).⁹¹ In his long preface, Sacit included a section that critiqued past translators, arguing that Dâniş's highly Perso-Arabized prose was antiquated and Cevdet (along with FitzGerald) did not retain the original composition and thematic unity.⁹² As a response to these attempts, he took a more literalist approach (*kelime kelime tercüme*) by introducing Turkish vocabulary with a rhythm based on the spoken language.⁹³

A Philosopher or a Mystic? Contextualizing the Historic Khayyām

One of the earliest attempts at establishing the historical Khayyām was through the editions prepared by Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı (1900–82), a scholar of Oriental literatures and Sufism at Istanbul University, who published the first scholarly Khayyām studies in Turkish based on extant manuscripts. In 1953, Gölpınarlı printed a bilingual selection of 481 quatrains in prose translation and a philosophical treatise attributed to Khayyām called *Silsila al-tartîb*,

⁸⁹ Tandoğan, *Omar Hayyam Ruba'iyat*.

⁹⁰ (Ülkü), Feyzullah Sacit, *Hayyam'ın Rubâileri ve Manzum Tercümeleri*, 7.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 32.

on the knowledge of the universals (*kulliyāt*), as well as Ibn Sīnā's treatise on the metaphysics of God, the *Tamjīd*, along with Khayyām's commentary.

Gölpınarlı's introduction includes historical accounts of Khayyām along with a detailed list of early extant works containing his verse. Besides Zahirī Samarqandī's compilation *Sinbād-nāma* from the year 566/1060–61, Gölpınarlı based his edition on an anthology of Khayyām's quatrains compiled by Yār-Aḥmad al-Tabrīzī's *Ṭarab-ḥāne* found in an anthology (*majmū'a*) in the Istanbul University Library (see Farsça Yazmalar MS 593, dated around 895/1489–90).⁹⁴ Dāniş was the first scholar to introduce this compilation in his solo edition (1346/1927), yet neither describing the content nor noting the manuscript's history. This lack of detail led Gölpınarlı to conclude that the copy was probably defective.⁹⁵

The miscellany (*majmū'a*, MS 593) contains treatises on Sufi doctrine and etiquette composed by different poets including Nāsir-i Khusraw, Rūmī, and Fakhr-al-Dīn al-İrāqī, along with a selection of quatrains attributed to Afzāl-al-Dīn al-Kāshānī, and Khayyām.⁹⁶ By identifying that certain quatrains belonged to other historical figures, such as Afzāl-al-Dīn al-Kāshānī and 'Ubayd-i Zākānī, Gölpınarlı aimed to identify the authentic quatrains through academic source criticism.⁹⁷ One of the main intentions of Gölpınarlı's edition was to reconstruct an accurate profile of Khayyām from extant biographical and literary sources. Gölpınarlı portrayed him as a prototype of a Muslim philosopher (*ḥakīm*) akin to the image of Ibn Sīnā, depicting him as a premier scholar of *felsefe* (philosophy, mainly in Arabic), *ḥikmet* (postclassical Avicennan philosophy), and *hey'e* (theoretical astronomy). Yet, on the other hand, for Gölpınarlı, Khayyām also wrote poetry, having acknowledged certain beliefs derived from experiential/gnostic knowledge (*'irfānī imān*) that had reflections in Sufi expressivity of gnomic paradoxes (*ṣaḥīyāt*), and the blame-seeking disposition of Qalandarī dervishes (*melāmet*).⁹⁸ This did not, however, imply that Khayyām was a genuine Sufi, rather, he was an intellectual who achieved a sense of synthesis between Sufism and philosophy, sometimes ending up betwixt and between.⁹⁹ As an analogy, Gölpınarlı cites the works of Ömer Ferid Kam (1864–1944), a professor of Persian literature at the *Dārülfünūn*, saying that, similar to Khayyām's ups and downs, Kam found himself changing sides between Sufis and philosophers on a daily basis, not being able to decide which side had the most sound argument.¹⁰⁰

The second edition of this bilingual volume appeared in 1973. It included prose translations of 348 quatrains along with a commentary, but without the appendices of metaphysical treatises. However, Gölpınarlı's introduction linked Khayyām's verse more closely to classical Sufi works by associating him with the disposition of blameworthiness and the genre of *ṣaḥīyāt*, a point which was further developed in this new edition. Gölpınarlı's introduction also includes a specific section dispelling doubts on Khayyām's so-called "anti-religiosity" and "apostasy," followed by translations divided into creative thematic titles that probed the gist of Khayyām's outlook.

During the same years of Gölpınarlı's efforts, poet Âsaf Hâlet Çelebi (1907–58), who is remembered for his lyrics incorporating diverse religious cultures ranging from Buddhism to Sufism, was a celebrated littérateur who emphasized the importance of intuition and mystical union in search of pure poetry. For Çelebi, the divine union, a moment of effusion and eternal contemplation, was a possibility that could be explored in poetic aesthetics. For him, the most genuine form of poetry was that which touched one's inner spiritual world by

⁹⁴ A work later edited by the distinguished scholar of Persian literature Ahmed Ateş in 1948; see Muḥammed b. 'Alī az-Zahirī, *Sinbād-nāma*. Also Minorsky, "Earliest Collections of O. Khayyam," 115.

⁹⁵ Gölpınarlı, *Hayyam-Ruba'iler ve Silsilat-al-Tartib*, xii.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, xii–xiii.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, xv.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, viii, xxxix, xli.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, xiii.

transcending physical reality.¹⁰¹ In its purest sense, poetry should be “contemplative,” and never anecdotal—breaking loose from the confines of this world and leading one to dissolve into the greater consciousness, which he termed “nirvana.”¹⁰²

Çelebi's early translations from Khayyām were included in a volume of select quatrains from classical Persian masters by the author, including quatrains by Naşir-al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, Afzal-al-Dīn al-Kāshī, Rūmī, Ḥāfiz, and Jāmī. The work is dedicated to Turkish abstract painter Princess Fahrelnissa Zeid in acknowledgment of her courtesy and favor, and includes a sketched figure by another Turkish abstract painter who belonged to the Paris School, Selim Turan (1915–1994) (Fig. 4).¹⁰³ The introduction of the selection focuses on the history and technicalities of the quatrain form, praising Cevdet's Khayyām translations for their textual aptness (*metne muvafik bir terceme*), as well as the skills of poets Yahya Kemal and Orhan Veli in 'arūz-based adaptations.¹⁰⁴

Çelebi's second volume, published in 1954, included 400 quatrains solely by Khayyām, with an introduction presenting his life, work, thought, and translation history. The introduction began with a discussion on the nature and uses of the quatrain form, focusing again on its prosodic features and historical significance. Çelebi suggested that the quatrain was the most suitable form for ideation, and especially the most powerful tool for disseminating philosophical ideas, refraining from assigning a Sufi character to Khayyām's use of wine and love imagery.¹⁰⁵ For Çelebi, Khayyām was a philosopher who consciously produced these quatrains with a tint of cynic skepticism to show the inadequacy of human knowledge in grasping the universe.¹⁰⁶ He was never a “drunken sloth,” rather a “freethinker” who dedicated his life to learning and teaching.¹⁰⁷

A Sufi Rogue? Yahya Kemal's Self-Righteous Designation and the Critics of the Image of the Unorthodox Khayyām

A leading nationalist neoclassical poet and writer, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (1884–1958), who is mostly remembered today for crafting a unique voice of Ottoman/Turkish nationalist identity in poetry, prepared highly original renderings (*söyleyiş*) and adaptations (*bāzserāyi*) from Khayyām during his later life.¹⁰⁸ These were collected posthumously in 1967 under the title *Rubâiler ve Hayyam Rubâilerini Türkçe Söyleyiş*, along with forty-one quatrains composed by him. Most of Kemal's original quatrains were dedicated to the memory of his friends, often recalling cherished moments and conversations. The volume includes an introductory epigraph in verse explaining his motives for the translation, asserting that the best way to learn about Khayyām's craft and views was to render (*söylemek*) or put his verse (*nazmetmek*) in Turkish, as suggested by the last two lines of the book's epigraph, *derdim ki rubâisini nazmetmelisin / Hayyam onu Türkî'de nasıl söylerse* (I used to say that you should write your quatrain / the way Khayyām would write it in Turkish).¹⁰⁹ Besides his own translations in the original prosody, Kemal often expressed his admiration for Aḥmed Rif'at's unpublished versions, and based his selection on Dāniş's 1927 edition.¹¹⁰

¹⁰¹ Güngör, *Âsaf Hâlet Çelebi*, 94–96.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 26–27.

¹⁰³ Sönmez, *Paris Tecrübeleri*, 58–59; Greenberg, *Fahrelnissa Zeid*. Selim Turan is known for utilizing the verticality of classical Islamic calligraphy in his abstract paintings. For Turan's works, his use of calligraphy, and the Paris School of Turkish abstraction, see Sönmez, *Paris Tecrübeleri*, 130; Sönmez, *Tez, Antitez, Sentez*, 45, and for his references to the Mevlevî order in his late paintings, 66–67.

¹⁰⁴ Çelebi, *Seçme Rubâiler*, 6–7.

¹⁰⁵ Çelebi, *Ömer Hayyam: Hayatı-Sanatı-Eserleri*, 4–5.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰⁸ Dāniş and Tevfik, *Khayyām-i Nishābūrî: zandagî, afkâr wa rubâiyyât*, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Beyatlı, *Rubâiler ve Hayyam Rubâilerini Türkçe Söyleyiş*, 325.

¹¹⁰ Morali, *Mütarekede İzmir—Önceleri ve Sonraları*, 91–94; Çiftçi, “Hayyâm'ın Türkçeye Çevrilmiş,” 47.

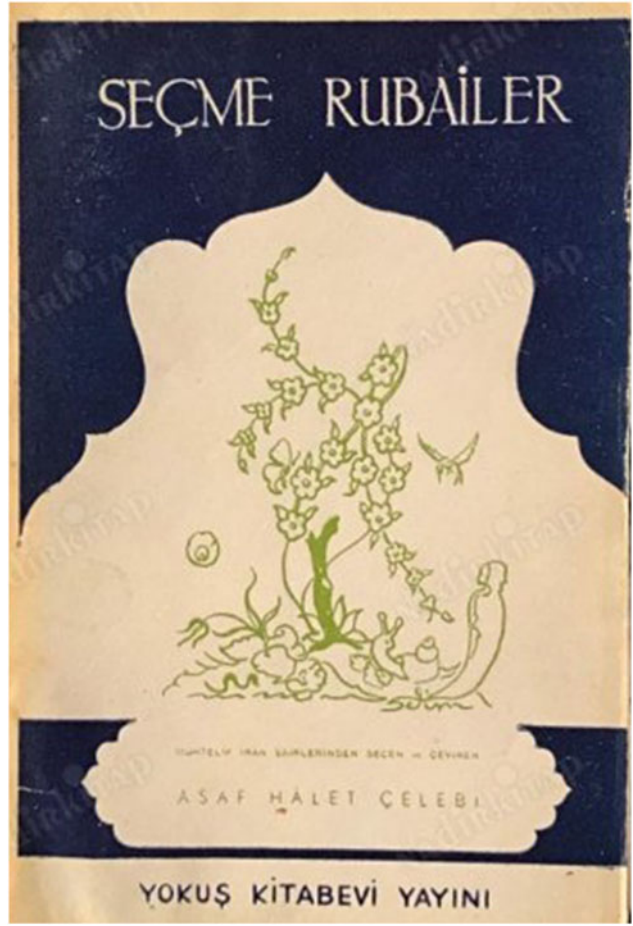


Figure 4. Âsaf Hâlet Çelebi, *Seçme Rubâiler* (Istanbul: Yokuş, 1945). Cover illustration by Selim Turan.

Along with novelist Yakup Kadri (1889–1974), Yahya Kemal led a short-lived literary movement called *Nev-Yunânîlik* (Neo-Hellenism).¹¹¹ Under the influence of the *École romane* of ex-Symbolist neoclassicist Jean Moréas (1856–1910), Kemal sought to revive classical forms and themes. This later led him to develop an interest in the canonization of Islamic classics as a way of establishing a historical basis for Ottoman/Turkish culture and civilization.¹¹² Informed by Moréas’ neoclassicist vision, Yahya Kemal developed his own poetry as an expression of Ottoman nationalism and identity.¹¹³ Moréas saw in Greek and Latin literature not only the origins of Mediterranean civilization but also the indispensable languages to be employed and imitated in French poetry to achieve a pure and sublime form of thought and lyrics in poetic culture.¹¹⁴ Kemal regarded this exploration for one’s own classics as a search for Turkey’s “white language” (*beyaz lisan*), a term inspired by the

¹¹¹ Toker, “Türk Edebiyatında Nev-Yunânîlik Akımı”; Demir, “Türk Edebiyatında Nev-Yunânîlik Akımının Kaynakları.”

¹¹² Ayvazoğlu, “Neo-Hellenism in Turkey,” 150. See “Kader bana Türk şiirini ve onun klâsiklerini öğrenme fırsatını Fransa’da vermişti. Yine eski şiire nüfûz etmeğe ve o tarzda mısırâlar söylemeğe çalışıyordum”, as well as his line that sets the Persianate sphere of cultural influence as an origin of the Rûmî identity and aesthetics “Acem-peresti-i Rûm’un imâle devrinde” in Banarlı, *Yahya Kemal’in Hâtıraları*, 99.

¹¹³ Mignon, “Yahya Kemal and Jean Moréas,” 71.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

“pure poem” (*la poésie pure*) of French priest Henri Brémond (1865–1933), which Kemal equated with the essentializing identification of Turkey’s “national soul.”¹¹⁵ The search for the essential poetic characters of pristine Turkish (*hâlis şiiir*) enabled Kemal to coin the term *derûnî âhenk*, an interior rhythm (*rythme intérieur*) based on a language’s own intonation contours.¹¹⁶

The discovery of Greek and Latin classics as the fount of Western civilization during his formative years in Paris helped Kemal formulate a general theory of Mediterranean civilization and culture, which shifted his interest from the Greeks to the Persians. In search for the classics of Turkish civilization, Kemal saw Persian culture as one of the significant steps in the formation of Ottoman/Turkish civilization. For him, the Turks became sedentary and civilized especially thanks to Persian cultural influence, and great classical poets, such as Khayyâm, Sa’dî, and Hâfîz, were a testimony to such influence because they were able to create a persona with a universalizing voice that was later embraced by European intellectuals.¹¹⁷

Kemal first read Khayyâm in Franz Toussaint’s French translations, which he found inadequate and flawed. Having been inspired by Moréas’ acclaimed volume *Les Stances*, he synthesized the sensual and intellectual aspects of both poets by reaching for a sense of rhythm and poetic harmony in his Khayyâm quatrains.¹¹⁸ Kemal initially had the aim of recreating Khayyâm’s voice in modern Turkish, which he could not make work in prosody. His prosodic preference rather lay in the *akhrab* form of ‘*aruż*’ that included twelve variations starting with the pattern *mafûlu*, and this form also had been praised by Rıza Tevfik as the most fitting in terms of harmony and concord (*âhenk*) in quatrains.¹¹⁹ Having switched to Ottoman Turkish, Kemal found a unique voice in his Khayyâm renderings and later decided to publish them in newspapers and journals such as *Akşam*, *Salon*, *Resimli Hayat*, *Akademi*, and *Varlık* in the 1940s.

Depicting Khayyâm as a universalist with a clear ethical vision, Kemal was mostly interested in the poet’s self-righteous and dissolute lifestyle, as well as his Sufi rogue (*rind*) image and disposition, linking both traits to Greek Epicurean philosophy.¹²⁰ He picked up the form quatrain again during his residency in Madrid from 1929–32 as the minister plenipotentiary (*ortaelçi*), a period in his life when he took to drink. Due to the scandals caused by his inappropriate behavior, as well as his alcohol-fueled absenteeism and poor health, Kemal resigned from his post and moved to Paris in March 1932 to stay at Hôtel Celtic in Rue Balzac on the Left Bank, where he composed dissolute (*rindâne*) quatrains from 1933 onward (see his famed cycle of poems *Rindler*).¹²¹ Kemal’s interest in the *Malâmâtîya* as well as Bektaşism shared a common ground with his preoccupation with Khayyâm’s religious expressivity, in the way that all three proved the possibilities of certain other religiosities within Islam.

In response to Khayyâm’s prevailing image of a dissolute Sufi, there have also been certain reactionary works written to discredit the poet’s reception based on a libertine lifestyle and irreligious behavior, including drinking. Many interpreters, who did not wish to see Khayyâm associated with atheism and disbelief, interjected lengthy introductory notes asserting that, when read between the lines, the poet could not be regarded as an unbeliever (*mülhid/dinsiz*), a denier (*münkir*), a religious impostor (*müra’î*), or an apostate (*zındık*). Contrary to such common perception, the Muslim apologists asserted that the authentic

¹¹⁵ See Decker, *Pure Poetry*, 9–37, 73. Ayda, “Yahya Kemal’in Şiir Dünyası IV,” 7–8.

¹¹⁶ Beyatlı, “Şiir Okumaya Dair,” 5–8; Beyatlı, “Derûnî Âhenk ve Öz Şiir,” 20–22; Akgül, *Anlamın Sesi*, 48–58, 92–93, 204.

¹¹⁷ Ünver, *Yahya Kemal’in Dünyası*, 59, 72, 85.

¹¹⁸ Hisar, “Rubâîleri ve Rubâî Tercümelere,” 68; Ayvazoğlu, *Yahya Kemal: Ansiklopedik Biyografi*, 324.

¹¹⁹ (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubâîleri*, 118–123; Ayvazoğlu, *Yahya Kemal: Ansiklopedik Biyografi*, 353.

¹²⁰ Ayvazoğlu, *Yahya Kemal: Ansiklopedik Biyografi*, 325.

¹²¹ Ayda, “Yahya Kemal’in Şiir Dünyası III,” 6; Ayda, *Yahya Kemal’in Fikir ve Şiir Dünyası*, 69–84.

Khayyām believed in one true God—whether transcendent or pervasive—upholding certain rules of religious propriety.¹²²

Kurdish Islamist poet and scholar Abdürrahim Zapsu (1890–1958) penned a refutation of Khayyām’s irreligiosity in the form of rhyming couplets in syllabic prosody (based on irregular fourteeners). He referred to Khayyām’s Islamic virtues and moral uprightness, contrary to the image of a libertine lifestyle. Zapsu noted in his poem that the poet never argued against the Qur’ān, and he was actually neither a Sufi nor insubordinate to God. His misconstrued image, as well as later misattributions, endowed him with the notoriety of irreligion and moral perversion.¹²³

Another curious work was by a local religious scholar from the town of Ödemiş near İzmir, Ruhi Tok, who penned a refutation against the libertine and irreligious image created around the poet. Rejecting the authenticity of some views and poems ascribed to him, Tok has argued that the poet’s rationalism and scientism conformed to religion, claiming that the real Khayyām neither denied the afterlife nor was he a nihilist pessimist who excessively drank alcohol.¹²⁴ To prove that the afterlife existed according to the current scientific research, Tok highly ironically resorted to certain pseudoscientific proofs based on Spiritualism, mediums, conjuring spirits, and UFOs in his defense, arguing that if life in space was a possibility, then an afterlife or the otherworld was also feasible.¹²⁵ What made this collection unique was that Tok included tens of modified renderings inspired by Khayyām, which arguably expressed Khayyām’s correct views in religion and life, also strangely and anachronistically making him a poet who recited anti-Darwinian verses.¹²⁶

The Humanist Discovery of the Vernacular: Khayyām’s Universalism and the Intellectual Left

Orhan Veli Kanık, together with the poets Oktay Rifat (1914–88) and Melih Cevdet Anday (1915–2002), was the founder of the Garip Movement and one of the most innovative poets of the early Republic of Turkey, publishing poems that promoted the use of simple language in a radical break from the elevated rhetoric of the past classical Ottoman poets. The Garip poets discarded meter, rhyming structure, and metaphorical imagery from their poems, and wrote simple lyrics in the vernacular about ordinary details in the lives of common people, bringing everyday lightness and randomness into their verse.¹²⁷ Orhan Veli’s posthumous volume that collected all his translations included eight quatrains in translation from Khayyām, some of which were published in journals and newspapers such as *Tercüman*, *Vatan*, and *Yeni Sabah* in 1946, as well as posthumously two days after his passing in 1950 and also later in 1953.¹²⁸ Although Orhan Veli eschewed the use of prosody and rhyme in his own poems, he was known for his skillful translations in the Arabic *‘aruz*—while not necessarily setting Khayyām’s quatrains into a more accessible language as in his poems.

The greatest efforts at setting Khayyām in free verse and accessible language can be attributed to Sabahattin Eyuboğlu (1909–73), a Turkish socialist writer, critic, and translator, who developed a penchant for Khayyām after coming across Gölpınarlı’s prose renderings. Mostly remembered for his translations from French literature and philosophy, as well as his affiliation with the literary movement “Blue Anatolia” (*Mavi Anadolu*), Eyuboğlu was

¹²² Kocatürk, *Ömer Hayyam’ın Rubâileri—Hayat, Ölüm, Aşk ve Şarap Şiirleri*, 5; Yücebaş, *Ömer Hayyam: Hayatı-Felsefesi-Rubâileri*, 5–6; Gençosman, *Hayyam’dan Rubâiler*, 2–4; (Necfezâde), Yakup Kenan, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubâileri*, 88; Cennetoğlu, *Ömer Hayyam—Büyük Türk Şairi ve Filozofu*, 91–108; Hatemi, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâiler*, 13.

¹²³ Zapsu, *Ömer Hayyam’a Hücum!* 18.

¹²⁴ Tok, *Hayyam’a Reddiye ve Tenkidiye*, 4–5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 150; Tok, *Ruhlarla Konuşmak Mümkün Müdür?*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Wade and Murad, “The Garip Preface (1941),” 199.

¹²⁸ Veli, *Bütün Çeviri Şiirleri*, 37–39.

part of a group of Turkish intellectuals who envisioned the Anatolian culture as a continuum, from prehistory to the present. This group also promoted the study of the past sources of Anatolian civilizations as a way of discovering the pre-Islamic Anatolia and finding a fresh voice that would foster a new form of cultural humanism in Turkey and abroad.¹²⁹

Eyuboğlu was not well versed in Persian. Having consulted with Gölpınarlı regarding certain Persian expressions, he initially prepared a selection of 160 quatrains in 1961 under the title *Dörtlükler* (not *Rubailer*) with two short notes introducing his method and intentions. The second edition of the text came in 1969, with 162 additional quatrains and a new introduction, and the tenth edition of this work has been arguably the most read and published translation of Khayyām in Turkish, with tens of editions to date.

According to the initial preface, when Eyuboğlu read Khayyām for the first time in Turkish, he was led to believe that the poet's language had an overly elaborative style with an abundance of bombastic words. This, he later realized, was due to the stylistic preferences of previous translators. Moreover, having discovered Gölpınarlı's edition, he concluded that Khayyām also cherished everyday vernacular language.¹³⁰ Those earlier interpreters who had opted for an excessively ornate style were similar to French translators in the past who had made the mistake of making Homer (a figure like Dede Korkut) speak with the voice of a Sorbonne professor. Therefore, Eyuboğlu ascribed a new mission for the new generations of Anatolian Turks: refraining from hyperbolic language like the aforementioned *Garip* poets, a fresh new simplicity should be the main thrust of translations from poets like Khayyām, Sa'dī, and Hāfız, so that their universal wisdom would be accessible to all. To be true to the original Khayyām, Eyuboğlu decided, instead, to translate him with an abundant use of vernacular Turkish vocabulary (*halk dili*) and a specific emphasis on the simplicity of expression (*sadelik*), transmitting Khayyām's universal message in a language intelligible to the common man.¹³¹

Eyuboğlu described his translation effort as a way of reinterpreting Khayyām while rendering him into modern Turkish—yet without undermining the trends and sensibilities that existed in modern Turkish poetry. As an untitled epilogue to his translations, he even vernacularized an Arabic poem attributed to Khayyām (with some changes) as the poet's *ars philosophica*.¹³² Thanks to Eyuboğlu's efforts to vernacularize Khayyām, a new wave of vernacular Turkish translations began to appear from the 1980s onward, by amateur researchers and poetry enthusiasts, who set the poet's verse into modern lyricism by expressing certain secular aspects of his "philosophy of life," turning Khayyām into a people's poet. By this way, people of all walks of life in Turkey was able to respond to Khayyām's message and quatrains by assigning him ever-changing social and cultural roles.

In the second preface, Eyuboğlu argued that the East-West dichotomy was a sociopolitical construct. Culturally speaking, there existed no such division, and Khayyām's fame in Europe was a proof of his universal humanism.¹³³ Furthermore, Eyuboğlu developed an interest in Khayyām's libertine lifestyle, skeptical rationalism, and criticism against religious dogmatism. Known for his preference for vernacular Turkish vocabulary over Arabic and Persian loanwords, he was a staunch supporter of the language reform, secularism, humanism, and leftist politics, which made him associate Khayyām's revolutionary language with Anatolian figures such as the thirteenth-century Alevite poet and mystic Pir Sultan Abdal (executed c. 1560).¹³⁴ Similar to the poetic personae of the legendary Anatolian figures

¹²⁹ Bilsel, "Our Anatolia," 223–227.

¹³⁰ Eyuboğlu, *Ömer Hayyam-Bütün Dörtlükler*, 1998, 5.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³² See the untitled epilogue "Last night I had a conversation with the mind" (*akilla bir konuşmam oldu dün gece*). In the fragment, the narrator (or Eyuboğlu?) asks the mind/reason (*akıl*) what it thinks about Khayyām's quatrains, only receiving the answer that they are a relentless chatter of an immortal man. See the last two lines: *dizmiş alt alta sözleri / hoşbeş etmiş derim* (he laid words together / [and] I say he is chattering). *Ibid.*, 208.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

Yunus Emre and Koroğlu, Khayyām, in the words of Eyuboğlu, became a public figure whose memory has transcended linguistic and cultural boundaries throughout centuries—by way of gaining a special personality in the cultural consciousness that gave voice to anonymous masses who felt the same way.¹³⁵ This attitude was also taken up by the socialist poet Enver Gökçe (1920–81) who integrated the language of the Bektaşî-Alevî poetry into the Khayyāmian revolutionary and materialist worldview.¹³⁶ Through the image of Khayyām, Turkish humanists found a new venue to promote freethinkers of the Islamic world, establishing him as a perennial classic who achieved a universal humanist voice in world poetry with a timeless wisdom of realism.¹³⁷

Eyuboğlu's third preface problematizes the question of language games and textual correspondence in Khayyām's famed quatrain that ended with "kū kū kū kū," a double entendre that meant both the question word "where?" and the sound of a collared dove.¹³⁸ Based on the variety of Turkish translations of this specific quatrain, contemporary poet Enis Batur (b. 1952), who was known for his experimental texts of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, prepared a set of essays along with a leading group of composers and litterateurs about the possible ways to approach this verse through music, hermeneutics, and word choice in translation.¹³⁹

Besides Eyuboğlu, Khayyām's universal humanism and materialism influenced a group of leftist Turkish poets and intellectuals, inspiring them to write quatrains with similar content and style. In his quatrains, the famed socialist poet Nâzım Hikmet did not particularly follow the rules of prosody, but used quatrains as a medium for employing philosophical criticism or expressing love and longing ([*Piraye'ye*] *Rubailer*, 1966). Hikmet's early quatrains, for instance, included a Marxist-Leninist materialist critique of philosopher George Berkeley's subjective idealism (i.e., the poem "Berkley," 1926, which starts with the address "Behey / Berkley"), an acknowledgment of Rūmî's Neoplatonist Sufism as reflected in Hikmet's version of the story *Ferhad ile Şirin* (1948), reminiscent of Khayyām's image.¹⁴⁰

A socialist poet and translator, A. Kadir (1917–85), started to work on the quatrains prompted by a request from poet Hüseyin Karakan (b. 1931) for his 1962 anthology of Khayyām quatrains in Turkish translation. At the time, Kadir had already immersed himself in translating the *Odyssey* with another Blue Anatolia scholar and classicist Azra Erhat (1915–82) and could not devote his full time to the project, yet the translations flowed naturally after a few months. Having identified certain parallels with his own worldview, Kadir described the poet as a freethinker, who believed in egalitarianism and human freedom.¹⁴¹ Similar to the leftist poets Gökçe and Kenan Sarioğlu (b. 1946), he also rendered Khayyām's voice in the lyrical vernacular mode, making the quatrains new (*yenileştirerek*) while also benefiting from past versions by Cevdet, Çelebi, and Gölpinarlı.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Gökçe, *Dost Dost İlle Kavga ve Rubailer*, 18. Hayyām's persona became a popular designation among the socialist left in the 1970s. For instance, see the revolutionary fisherman Ömer Sandıkçı, also known as Hayyām, who led a bohemian life in his "tent" in Kalamış, İstanbul. Having worn a red beret in the style of the Italian communists, Hayyām was killed during a night assault by right-wing militants just before the 1980 coup. See poet Atal Behramoğlu's poem "Ömer Reis Ağdı"; also Mehmet Bedri Muharrem, *Siyah Beyaz Kalamış*, 81–87.

¹³⁷ Eyuboğlu, "Ömer Hayyām," 53.

¹³⁸ Quatrain 149 in Furūghî and Ghanî, *Rubā'iyāt-i Ḥakīm Ḳhayyām Nişābūrî*. Rıza Tevfik, on the other hand, paraphrases "ku . . . ku . . . ku . . . ku . . ." as "Where is now that civilization? That glory? Where is that felicitous and splendid royal era?" (Ozdemir, "Translation after the Persianate?" 18).

¹³⁹ Batur, ed., *Heptameron*, 11–19.

¹⁴⁰ Gürsel, "Nâzım Hikmet'in Rubaileri," 7–12.

¹⁴¹ Kadir, *Bugünün Diliyle Hayyām*, 10.

¹⁴² Ibid., 9. In the same spirit of Ezra Pound's maxim 'Make It New', A. Kadir's early experiments with "yenileştirmeler" included various ghazals and quatrains by Rūmî. In order to set the poet's language into the Turkish vernacular (*halk dili*), which he believed akin to Rūmî's original vernacular Persian, A. Kadir turned Rūmî's classical couplets into three, four, five and sometimes a single line based on expressivity and semantic correspondence. Yet he never attempted at translating those that he did not grasp the gist (Gölpinarlı, "Birinci Baskının Önsözü", in A. Kadir, *Bugünün Diliyle Mevlânâ*, 7, 10).

What the Quatrains Say: Prevalent Themes, Style, and the Message

Assigning a consistent philosophical perspective to Khayyām's quatrains has been a much discussed question, a problem closely linked to the questions of source criticism and textual authenticity. There has been an open-ended debate among Khayyām's Turkish translators as to whether he had a unique sense of systematic philosophy or whether his views could be viewed as a blend of various syncretic doctrines. There have been those who saw Khayyām as a rationalist (*uşçu/akılcı*) scholar par excellence in Islamic philosophical tradition, that is, a Muslim philosopher (*hakim*), who has been sometimes anachronistically associated with today's "scientific positivism" due to his interest in mathematics and astronomy.¹⁴³ In addition to this group, there also have been those who saw Khayyām simply as a freethinker who had a syncretic outlook, blending an array of sometimes contradicting worldviews, including rationalism, naturalism, pessimist realism, subjectivism, humanism, nihilism, Epicureanism, and materialism, yet never linking him to idealism (with the notable exception of Orhan Veli).¹⁴⁴

Defining Khayyām's poetry is not indeed an easy task to undertake. On the one hand, each quatrain seems to have a clear message concerning the fleetingness of life and worldly ambitions, as well as agnosticism about the knowability of God and the universe. And, on the other, his poems follow previous models and discourses, such as asceticism, the romantic genre of the Sufi chaste love, *carpe diem*, divine intoxication, and nihilistic materialism. In his 1932 book, the Turkish encyclopedist and educator İbrahim Alâettin gave an outline of common themes and ideas, arguing that Khayyām's poetry held a wide variety of views, which could be deduced to themes, such as (1) the beauty and uniqueness of life; (2) *carpe diem* or joy of life; and (3) the universe's being beyond comprehension and reasoning; as well as two doctrines from classical Arabic philosophy: (4) the rejection of afterlife; and (5) the material transformation of the body as a way of uniting with earth after death.¹⁴⁵

Scholars such as Dāniş, Gölpınarlı, Çelebi, historian Harold Lamb (1892–1962) (through Islamist writer and journalist Ömer Rıza Doğrul's 1944 translation), and a historian of mathematics, Hamit Dilgan (1901–76), assessed Khayyām's extent of scholarly output through the contextualization of his scholarly engagements, often associating him with classical Arabic philosophers. Yet, there are certain other translators who saw him simply as a "reason-first" positivist who argued for strict rationalism, often acting against religious pretension, dogmatism, and bigotry.¹⁴⁶ Having realized the diversity of topics included in Khayyām's quatrains, most translators have identified certain traces of perennial attitudes and beliefs in his philosophy, arguing for Khayyām's unique syncretism.¹⁴⁷ Most readers in favor of syncretism also underlined that his rationalism did not deem him irreligious per se, although strictly speaking he should never be regarded as a Sufi.¹⁴⁸

Besides rationalism, the pervasiveness of Sufi discursivity in Khayyām has been the subject of debate by many interpreters. As well as a few figures who have read his language through the prism of Sufism, many interpreters of Khayyām saw him rather as a "rationalist

¹⁴³ (Necefzâde), Yakup Kenan, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubâileri*, 88.

¹⁴⁴ Veli, *Bütün Çeviri Şiirleri*, 122.

¹⁴⁵ (Gövsâ), İbrahim Alâettin, *Ömer Hayyam*, 19–20.

¹⁴⁶ Tarkan, *Ömer Hayyam'ın Rubâileri*, 9; Kocatürk, *Ömer Hayyam'ın Rubâileri—Hayat, Ölüm, Aşk ve Şarap Şiirleri*, 3; Karakan, *Türkçe Hayyam-Antoloji*, 8; (Necefzâde), Yakup Kenan, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubâileri*, 88; Gürtin, *Ömer Hayyam-Rubâiler*, 7; Yiğitler and Yiğitler, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâiler*, 9–14; Şardağ, *Bütün Yönleriyle Hayyam Rubâileri*, 39; Güzelyüz, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâiler*, 12.

¹⁴⁷ Dāniş and Tevfik, *Rubâ'iyât-ı 'Ömer Hayyâm*; (Gövsâ), İbrahim Alâettin, *Ömer Hayyam*, 19–25; (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubâileri*; (Necefzâde), Yakup Kenan, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubâileri*, 88; Gürtin, *Ömer Hayyam-Rubâiler*, 6; Şardağ, *Bütün Yönleriyle Hayyam Rubâileri*, 39.

¹⁴⁸ (Gövsâ), İbrahim Alâettin, *Ömer Hayyam*, 16–17; Esen, *Şarkın En Büyük Şairleri: Ömer Hayyam*, 3; (Bölükbaşı), Rıza Tevfik, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubâileri*, 92–102; Şardağ, *Bütün Yönleriyle Hayyam Rubâileri*, 36–37.

freethinker” or a “Muslim philosopher” who also had Sufi leanings or, at least, opened some leeway for Sufi discursivity.¹⁴⁹

The most controversial aspect of Khayyām’s poetry is indeed his extensive use of wine imagery in a favorable light. Most interpreters do not associate him with excessive consumption of wine or alcoholism, yet with regard to the imagery of wine there have been various positions acknowledged in the secondary literature, such as (1) wine was simply a symbol/metaphor—whether literary or Sufi; (2) the use of wine was sometimes real and sometimes metaphoric; or (3) wine was simply real, with no Sufi connotations.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion: A Poet of Many Faces

Khayyām has been translated for a variety of reasons: academic, cultural, political, and social. Translation is indeed a volatile process that reveals the interpreters’ ideological and linguistic biases in tackling the issues of translatability, political vision, hermeneutical volatility, and choice of form. For most scholars Khayyām provided a vehicle for bolstering their own poetic skills and intellectual background; they utilized him for literary inspiration and acknowledgment. For a great number of Muslim reformers, the content of Khayyām’s verse offered an antithesis to the social conservatism of everyday life in an Islamic society, opening some leeway for freethinking and self-righteous libertine life. Intellectuals like Abdullah Cevdet, Rıza Tevfik, and Yahya Kemal used Khayyāmian themes to justify their progressive lifestyles or to cherish certain liberal phases in their life, by depicting him as a cultural, political, and intellectual model who proved that Islam can accommodate the conventions of modern life forms. In a similar fashion, a generation of Turkish leftist poets and intellectuals, such as Nâzım Hikmet, Sabahattin Eyuboğlu, A. Kadir, and Gökçe, appropriated Khayyām to justify their socialist worldview by giving him a humanist voice in the vernacular. As Khayyām now gained a new voice in spoken Turkish, he also became a people’s poet since the 1980s—with a record number of published books and translations that reinvented his historicity. On the other hand, instead of an outright acceptance of Khayyām’s perceived sociocultural image historically, scholars like Dâniş, Tevfik, and Gölpınarlı believed that source criticism, as well as the identification of genuine quatrains, was a desideratum and a prerequisite in the search for the authentic Khayyām.

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Appendix

The quatrains “Rubâ’iyyât-ı Hayyâm” and ““Ömer Hayyâm ve Şeykspir” by Hüseyin Dâniş from his *Qârvân-ı ‘Ömr* (Istanbul: Yeni Matba’a, 1926), 108, 133.

¹⁴⁹ For those who read him through the prism of Sufism: Cevdet, *Rubâ’iyyât-ı Hayyâm ve Türkçe’ye Tercümelere* (1926); Çelebi, *Seçme Rubâiler*; Yücebaşı, *Ömer Hayyam: Hayatı-Felsefesi-Rubâileri*, 6; Beyatlı, *Rubâiler ve Hayyam Rubâilerini Türkçe Söyleyiş*; Gölpınarlı, *Hayyam ve Rubâileri* (1973); and for those who saw him as a rationalist philosopher with some Sufi leanings: Meriç, *Rubâiyyât-ı Melûl*, 36–38; Kocatürk, *Ömer Hayyam’ın Rubâileri—Hayat, Ölüm, Aşk ve Şarap Şiirleri*, 3; Gürtin, *Ömer Hayyam-Rubâiler*, 4–5; Gençosman, *Hayyam’dan Rubâiler*, 1; (Necefzâde), Yakup Kenan, *Ömer Hayyam ve Rubâileri*, 90; Hatemi, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâiler*, viii–xi.

¹⁵⁰ For those who do not associate him with excessive drinking: Güzelyüz, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâiler*, 12; Kırca, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâileri*, 21; Hatemi, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâiler*, xi. For the case of (1), see Dâniş, *Rubâ’iyyât-ı ‘Ömer Hayyâm*, 91, 99–102; for (2), see Kırca, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâileri*, 21–22; Hatemi, *Ömer Hayyam Rubâiler*, ix–xi; and for (3), see Esen, *Şarkın En Büyük Şairleri: Ömer Hayyam*, 7; Lamb and Doğrul, *Ömer Hayyam-Tarih ve Sanat Gözüyle*, 302; Dâniş and Tevfik, *Rubâ’iyyât-ı ‘Ömer Hayyâm*, 144; Şardağ, *Bütün Yönleriyle Hayyam Rubâileri*, 44–45; Karahasan, *Farsça Asılları ve Türkçesiyle Rubâiler*, 13.

Rubā'iyāt-ı Hayyām

A'mākına gömmüşdü derin bir yem-i zeh̄hār
 Biñlerce la'lā'i duruḡşende vü dilber;
 Қа'rımdan o bahrın o la'lā'i-i güzini
 Naql itdi söküb sāhile Hayyām-ı şınāver.
 Eylül 1921

Khayyām's Rubaiyat

Buried in deep is an abundant forage
 A thousand pearls resplendent and heart-ravishing;
 At the bottom of that sea, Khayyām the Diver
 Plucked those select pearls pulling them ashore.
 September 1921

'Ömer Hayyām ve Şeykspir

— kıru insān kellesine —
 Mādām ki bir gün gelecek ey ser-i derrāk,
 Boşluqlarına hep ıolacak ḡāk ile ḡāşāk,
 İç durma hemān, fırşatı fevt itme ki ıolsun
 ıoprak ıolacak yerlere şahbā-ı ıarabnāk.
 18 Teşrin-i evvel 1924

Omar Khayyam and Shakespeare

— to the human skull —
 Since now a day will come, O the Intelligent Head,
 Your cavity will be filled with soil and trash,
 Drink now, do not behold, don't let the moment pass
 So that mirthful wine should congest sites—not earth.
 October 18, 1924

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