

Article

Beyond Prosody: Reconfiguring the Quatrain as a Literary Form in the Arab-Islamic World

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Abstract

The Arabic–Persian quatrain (Pers. *robāʿī*; Ar. *rubāʿī/dūbayt*) has long been approached primarily through a prosodic lens, often discussed within debates on the autonomy or dependence of Persian and Arabic metrical systems. This article argues that this perspective obscures a more consequential development: the gradual transformation of the quatrain from a metrically codified structure in Persian into a conceptually and rhetorically flexible poetic form within Arabic literary discourse. Through philological, prosodic, and rhetorical analysis, the study examines the persistent terminological ambiguity between *rubāʿī* and *dūbayt*, the instability of its assimilation into the Khalīlian metrical system, and its broader conceptual reconfiguration across linguistic and literary contexts. Rather than a simple instance of formal borrowing, the quatrain emerges as a mobile poetic structure circulating across a multilingual Islamic literary sphere in which poetic authority and form were continually renegotiated. By foregrounding these dynamics, the article proposes a reassessment of the quatrain as a literary form shaped by interliterary exchange and, more broadly, invites a reconsideration of premodern literary entanglements beyond modern system-based models of world literature.

Keywords: Arabic literature; Persian literature; *robāʿī/rubāʿī*; multilingualism; Arab-Islamic literary world; literary ontology; comparative poetics

1. Introduction

Modern scholarship on Persian prosody has repeatedly addressed the origin of the quatrain (Pers. *robāʿī*; Ar. *rubāʿī*),¹ often presenting it as a metrical structure emerging from an indigenous Persian lyrical environment and serving as a key argument in favor of Persian prosodic autonomy vis-à-vis Arabic quantitative *ʿarūḍ*.² Much of the late twentieth-century debate developed in reaction to earlier Arabocentric interpretations grounded in the Khalīlian system, which had long functioned as the principal analytical framework encompassing both Arabic and Persian verse traditions. As a result, scholarly attention has largely focused on contesting the applicability of Khalīlian metrical categories to Persian poetry, rather than interrogating the historical processes through which that system came to be retrospectively applied to an already established Persian lyrical corpus.

Comparative prosodic studies across Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Turkish traditions—most notably those of Ashwini and Kiparsky (2011, pp. 147–73), building upon earlier generative approaches such as Prince (1989) and Paoli (2008)—have significantly refined our understanding of Middle Eastern metrics. Yet even within these advances, the quatrain continues to be approached primarily as a technical prosodic question. Such a framework, while methodologically rigorous, remains insufficient. When examined diachronically and



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across linguistic boundaries, the quatrain emerges not merely as a metrical pattern but as a stratified literary form whose conceptual status shifts according to the receiving tradition.

This broader perspective requires moving beyond models that presuppose clearly bounded literary systems. As Āurišin (1989, pp. 20–22) argued, both comparative literature and “World Literature” have often relied on assumptions of discrete cultural and linguistic units, assumptions that reflect modern national frameworks rather than premodern literary realities (see also Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee 2013, p. 12; cf. Domínguez et al. 2014). Even when reconfigured in Franco Moretti’s systemic formulations (Moretti 2000, p. 54), such models risk projecting retrospective structures of center and periphery onto earlier literary ecologies. By contrast, Āurišin’s notion of “interliterary processes” foregrounds the historical mechanisms through which forms circulate, transform, and acquire new functions across linguistic continua.

The Arabic–Persian quatrain constitutes a particularly revealing case in this respect. Its development unfolded within a cultural environment characterized by sustained multilingual interaction, prior to the consolidation of modern national literary boundaries. As Utas (1970, p. 218) and al-Musawi (2015, p. 36) have emphasized, literary production in the Arab-Islamic world between the ninth and fourteenth centuries operated within a dynamic constellation of poetics and poetics sustained by translation, bilingual authorship, and reciprocal adaptation. Within such a milieu, the quatrain cannot be adequately described as a simple instance of unilateral borrowing from Persian into Arabic, nor as a fully assimilated metrical import. Rather, it must be understood as a form whose ontological status shifted as it circulated across literary traditions.

The present study builds upon and substantially extends an earlier reflection of mine on the Arabic–Persian quatrain and,³ in doing so, advances a broader argument about the historical mobility of literary forms across the multilingual Islamic literary world. Rather than asking whether the quatrain should ultimately be understood as an Arabic or Persian prosodic phenomenon, the article argues that such a question alone is insufficient. Its central argument is that the quatrain progressively came to function not merely as a metrically codified structure but as a literary form whose identity was continuously renegotiated through processes of linguistic transfer, conceptual adaptation, and literary reconfiguration.

To develop this argument, the article combines philological analysis of Arabic and Persian primary sources with a close examination of prosodic theory, literary terminology, rhetorical practice, and thematic developments across different textual traditions. The argument unfolds in four stages. It first examines the terminological instability surrounding the relationship between *rubāʿī* and *dūbayt* in Arabic literary discourse. It then analyses the competing conceptualizations of the quatrain within Arabic and Persian prosodic traditions, showing how attempts to assimilate the form into the Khalilian system exposed deeper tensions between rhythmic practice and theoretical codification. The third part traces the gradual transformation of the quatrain from a metrically defined structure into a more flexible literary form, paying particular attention to its rhetorical and thematic development. Finally, the article situates these processes within the multilingual intellectual networks of the premodern Arab-Islamic world, arguing that the history of the quatrain provides a particularly revealing case study of interliterary mobility beyond modern system-based models of world literature.

2. Terminological Transmission and Conceptual Ambiguity: *rubāʿī* and *dūbayt* in Arabic Literary Discourse

The quatrain (*rubāʿī* in Persian, *rubāʿī* in Arabic) constitutes a well-defined lyrical form of Persian origin. In its earliest attestations, it appears to have been closely associated with musical performance and with a broader corpus of short lyrical compositions struc-

tured around four hemistiches. Although structurally related to the *dūbaytī*—a Persian compound term derived from *dū* (“two”) and *bayt* (“verse”)—the quatrain represents a distinct poetic form with its own metrical and literary conventions. As noted by Elwell-Sutton (1975, pp. 634–35), classical prosodic analysis in the Khalilian tradition is based primarily on the hemistich (in Pers. *meṣrāʿ*; Ar. *shaṭr*) rather than on the verse as a whole. Within this analytical framework, the terms *robāʿī* and *rubāʿī*, both literally signifying a structure composed of “four elements,” refer to a poetic configuration defined by the arrangement of four hemistiches distributed across two verses. The defining features of the quatrain therefore lie not merely in its division into lines but in the specific rhyming and prosodic relationships established among these four hemistiches.

It is against this background that one must understand the emergence of a potentially misleading terminological overlap between *dūbayt* and *rubāʿī* within Arabic literary discourse after the introduction of these poetic forms from Persian models between approximately the ninth and tenth centuries. According to Thiesen (1982, p. 172), the term *dūbaytī* designates a “two-couplet poem” composed in a variety of metrical patterns and “can be considered as the two initial lines of any lyric composition (ghazal or qasīda).”⁴ Within the Persian literary tradition, therefore, the *dūbaytī* constitutes a distinct lyrical form, whose structural and functional characteristics clearly differentiate it from the *robāʿī*, despite their shared brevity and superficial structural similarity.

The earliest attestations of the introduction of the Persian *dūbaytī* into Arabic literary tradition in written form are conventionally associated with al-Bākhazī (d. 1075), as noted by Talib (EI3, p. 96). At the same time, earlier references to similar poetic forms are attributed to figures such as Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940), al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/967), and al-Tanūkhī (d. 384/994), whose testimonies are preserved and discussed in later lexicographical and literary sources. Among these, the philologist al-al-Jawharī (d. 392 or 398/1002 or 1008) provides one of the most explicit statements, noting that “the *dūbayt* also called *rubāʿī*” had entered Arabic literary usage during this period (al-Jawharī 1987, vol. 3, p. 925). Further evidence of the presence of this poetic form in Arabic literary consciousness appears in an anecdote attributed to al-Tanūkhī, as preserved in al-Iḥṣānī’s (d. 850/1446) *al-Mustaṭraf*. In this account, a poet from Bānū al-Ḥārith is said to have encountered an anonymous Persian mystic who “started to sing something similar to *rubāʿīyyāt*, not finding, however, a great interest in his listener” (al-Iḥṣānī 2008, vol. 2, pp. 199–200). This episode is particularly significant in suggesting that the early transmission of the quatrain into Arabic cultural contexts may have occurred not solely through written literary channels, but also through oral and performative practices. Taken together, these early testimonies suggest that the circulation of the quatrain preceded its systematic conceptualization within Arabic literary criticism. By the seventh/thirteenth century, the genre had received a more systematic treatment in the prosodic writings of Abū al-Ḥakam Mālik b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Marḥal al-Balāfiqī (d. 699/1299). Discussing the form known among the Persians as *dūbayt*, he states: «*aʿlam anna al-wazna alladhī yuqālu lahu al-dūbayt ʿinda al-ʿajam zawj bayt*» (“know that the metre called *dūbayt* among the Persians consists of a pair of verses”). He additionally observes that compositions of this type were already familiar within Arab tribal poetic practice under the designation *muthannāt*—an allographic form of *muthannā*, meaning “doubled.” This classification is especially significant, as it situates the quatrain within a broader category of popular poetic expression that was closely associated with oral performance and musical recitation (Ibn al-Marḥal 1974, pp. 151 and 153).

Modern literary-historical analysis, particularly that of Dayf (2013, vol. 1, p. 192), makes it possible to propose a more historically grounded reconstruction of the relationship between the *dūbaytī* and the *muthannāt* than that suggested by earlier lexicographical accounts. In his discussion of early Arabic poetic forms, Dayf identifies the *muthannāt* as

closely associated with the pre-Islamic Arabic genre of *hazaj*, a metrical pattern that occupied an important position within both Arabic and Persian classical prosodic systems and that, in later modified form, became the characteristic meter of the quatrain. Citing the early Arabic anthologist al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (d. 163/780), Ḍayf further notes that *hazaj* was counted among the principal categories of lyric poetry employed in contexts of musical entertainment and that its rhythmic structure rendered it particularly suitable for the adaptation of poetic forms transmitted from Persian literary tradition. In addition to *hazaj*, Ḍayf identifies two other categories of early lyric composition, namely *al-naṣb* and *al-sinād*. The former, he explains, was associated primarily with religious and elegiac expressions of mourning, whereas the latter appears to have been connected to more formal poetic genres, possibly including panegyric compositions characterized by elevated thematic content (Ḍayf 2013, vol. 1, p. 193).⁵ Significantly, drawing on accounts attributed to the renowned musician al-Mawṣilī (d. 235/850), Ḍayf further argues that sustained cultural contact between Persian and Arab populations had likely been established well before the Islamic period. According to these accounts, the transmission of Persian musical instruments and performance practices—including forms of chanted poetry—occurred through direct interpersonal and courtly exchange, notably via Persian and Byzantine women who entered Arab tribal societies through marriage alliances with the Lakhmid and Ghassanid courts (Ḍayf 2013, vol. 1, pp. 194–96; cf. al-Mawṣilī 2001).

Elwell-Sutton (1975, p. 635), from the perspective of Persian literary history, similarly emphasizes the fundamentally oral character of the *dūbaytī* in its earlier phases, noting that it “has arguably been employed mostly as a form of oral folk-poetry.” The absence of direct written documentation for both the pre-Islamic Persian *dūbaytī* and the Arabic *muthannāt* makes it difficult to reconstruct their precise historical relationship. Nevertheless, this evidentiary gap strongly suggests the existence of multiple points of interaction between these parallel traditions of orally transmitted lyric composition.

In light of the associations established by medieval Arab scholars between the *hazaj* meter and forms of orally performed lyric poetry, the term *dūbayt* appears with increasing clarity and frequency in literary and critical sources from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is discussed explicitly in the works of authors such as al-Ḥillī (d. 1339), Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), and al-Ibshīhī (d. 1448), whose writings provide important evidence for the recognition of this poetic form within Arabic literary discourse. As documented by al-Ḥillī (1956, pp. 7–24), al-Ḥillī, in his treatise *Kitāb al-‘Aṭīl*, includes the *dūbayt* among the seven recognized genres of popular poetic composition, classifying it specifically among the three forms described as “Arabized” (*al-mu‘arraba*), alongside the *qarīd* and the *muwashshaḥ*.⁶ Al-Ibshīhī further observes that during the later Abbasid period, the designation *dūbayt* was increasingly replaced by what he explicitly refers to as “its synonym *rubā‘ī*” (al-Ibshīhī 2008, vol. 2, pp. 199–200). This remark is particularly revealing, as it demonstrates that by this stage the two terms were already being treated as interchangeable within Arabic literary usage, despite the clearer structural differentiation maintained within the Persian tradition. Ibn Khaldūn, while acknowledging that *dūbayt* is a Persian compound designation and effectively synonymous with *rubā‘ī*, maintains that its introduction into Arabic literary usage dates back to the tenth century (Ibn Khaldūn 2000, p. 349). Crucially, however, he distinguishes this poetic form by emphasizing the specific structural rules governing the relationship among its four hemistiches (*aḡṣān*),⁷ thereby treating it as a formally regulated composition rather than as a merely generic lyrical fragment. Ibn Khaldūn further notes the considerable popularity of this form within patterns of popular poetry in Baghdad, particularly in the district of Kazimiyya, and observes that it subsequently gained wide circulation in Cairo. In the Cairene milieu, he suggests, poets began to experiment more intensively with rhetorical embellishment and

stylistic variation—a development that has been corroborated in modern scholarship, notably in al-Musawi’s detailed reconstruction of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century street poetry in Cairo (al-Musawi 2015, pp. 262–64). If one distinguishes Ibn Khaldūn’s remarks concerning the diffusion of the *rubāʿī* in Egypt—which may plausibly be interpreted as referring to the mystical *rubāʿiyyāt* composed by figures such as Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1234) and al-Bahāʾ al-Zuhayr (d. 1258) during the Ayyubid period (twelfth–fourteenth centuries)—a further clarification becomes necessary. His observations regarding the popularity of certain forms of folk poetry in the Baghdadi district of Kaẓimiyya may not, in fact, concern the *dūbayt* proper, but rather what later sources identify as *al-murabbaʿ al-Baghdādī*. This latter form, itself structured in couplets and widely performed in Abbasid Baghdad, has been examined in detail in modern scholarship, notably in the study by al-ʿĀmirī (1988, pp. 52–54).

Taken together, the association of the *dūbaytī* with the pre-Islamic *muthannāt* and the retrospective identification of both forms under the label *dūbayt*—and at times even *rubāʿī*—suggest a possible extension of terminology by later Arabic scholars beyond its original scope. This interpretive move appears to have projected a Persian-derived designation onto an existing Arabic folk lyrical tradition that had not previously been conceptualized under that rubric and was only subjected to systematic evaluation by Arabic literary theorists in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. While classical Arabic scholarship did, in many instances, acknowledge the role of Persian literary influence in shaping Arabic poetic corpora between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, it also seems to have incorporated certain vernacular or popular poetic forms into its theoretical classifications through terminological choices that were at times imprecise or historically layered. In doing so, the Persian contribution may not always have been explicitly foregrounded, even where structural affinities were evident.

Even before turning to questions of meter, it is worth bracketing the most overtly ideological—and, frankly, methodologically fragile—etymological proposals circulating in some strands of the Arabic tradition. A case in point is al-Ḥillī’s explanation of *mawālīya* (a specific form of sung poetry) and *dūbayt*, according to which the former would derive from the Arabic *mawālī-nā* (“our masters”) and the latter from *ʿubūdiyya* (“slavery”), allegedly linked to the earliest non-Arab performers of these lyrical forms (Jawwād 1975, p. 367).⁸ Once these reconstructions are set aside, one may still be surprised to find, in twentieth-century literary criticism, historically even more speculative narratives concerning how *dūbayt* entered Arabic literary practice, as in (al-Rāfiʿ 1940, p. 172).⁹

At the same time, modern Western scholarship has not always escaped the inertia of an Arabized framework when describing the incorporation of *dūbayt* into Arabic corpora—an inertia that becomes visible, above all, in the way prosodic “templates” are reported as if they were customary and stable. Building on classical discussions, Adam Talib, for instance, states that “the meter of the Arabic *dūbayt* (*faʿlun, mutafāʿilun, faʿūlun, faʿilun*) takes three forms” (“*Dūbayt* in Arabic” Talib 2014), while Stoetzer similarly remarks that the same pattern “is more often used for a quatrain of a particular meter” (“*Rubāʿī* in Arabic” Stoetzer 2012). Yet, if one follows the detailed evidence gathered by Nāḥī (1974, pp. 161–65), the very history of Arabic prosodic reflection points in the opposite direction: prosodists repeatedly acknowledged the non-Arab origin of the *dūbayt*, at times describing its meter as an irregular and “unique” one (*farīd*), and nevertheless failed to converge on any fixed prosodic configuration. Accordingly, three competing reconstructions were advanced: by al-Qartājannī (d. 1284) (*mustafīlatun, mustafīlun, mustafīlun*),¹⁰ by AbūʿAbd Allāh al-Darrāj (d. 1294) (*faʿlun faʿlun mustafīlun mustafīlun*), and by al-Qalalawsī (fl. 12th–13th century) (*faʿlun, mutafāʿilun, faʿūlun, faʿilun*).¹¹ For this reason, the third proposal came to be treated as the most authoritative, plausibly because it remains closest to the four-footed Persian meters

al-hazaj and *al-robāʿī* and is also the configuration most frequently encountered in practice. Two clarifications are necessary, however. First, the three patterns supplied by these scholars are not presented as three “varieties” of the same meter, but rather as mutually exclusive candidates for what the correct pattern should be—each proposal effectively undermining the others.¹² Second, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1200) reports that, even though al-Qalalawsī set out thirteen derived variations for the *tafʿīlāt* (s. *tafʿīla*, i.e., metrical foot) implied by his pattern, together with sixty-nine possible *aḍrāb* (one meter’s variations), while another sixteen are deemed not entirely compatible (*ghayr ʿalā al-qiyās*) in order to account for recurrent inconsistencies in *dūbayt* compositions, one still encounters verses that do not conform to the alleged template, as illustrated by the example cited below:

من يرحمني ومن يظفي حرقى
من بعدهم وسهري وأرقى فقد جعل في الصدر
عسى أنست لبينهم بالأرق
فالجفن بدمعه أسير الغرق

(*al-Mudhish*, Ibn al-Jawzī 1971, p. 18)

Who has pity on me? Who turns off my fire?

So great is their distance,

Who calms my insomnia and the anguish that has already entered my chest?

Perhaps insomnia made me believe I was among them

And so, the eye is a prisoner, drowned in its tears.

(Translation mine)

A close scansion of the first hemistich immediately reveals an anomalous configuration: (*faʿlun, mutafāʿilun, faʿlun, faʿilun*–0///0/0/0//0/0/),¹³ where the third *tafʿīla* appears as “*faʿlun*–0/0/” rather than “*faʿulun*–0/0/”, which would constitute the regular form according to al-Qalalawsī’s model (p. 19). From the standpoint of classical Arabic prosody, such a substitution cannot easily be justified, since the system does not normally permit “low-impact” metrical variations (*ziḥāfāt*) in specific structural units such as *al-awṭād* (e.g., 0//; /0/).¹⁴ The second hemistich presents an additional irregularity, displaying the sequence (*faʿlun, mutafāʿilu, faʿūlu, faʿilun*). In this case, two alleged instances of *ziḥāf mufrad* (simple “low-impact” metrical variation), namely *al-qabḍ* and *al-kaff*,¹⁵ are invoked to account for the modifications occurring respectively in the third and fourth *tafʿīla*. Even so, the adjustments required to reconcile the line with the theoretical scheme remain strained. The third hemistich is even more problematic from a prosodic perspective. The solutions tentatively advanced by Ibn al-Jawzī do little to dispel the uncertainty surrounding its scansion, leaving its metrical status effectively unresolved. By contrast, the fourth hemistich returns to a regular configuration, corresponding to al-Qalalawsī’s proposed pattern (*faʿlun, mutafāʿilun, faʿūlu, faʿilun*). It is noteworthy that a different metrical reading of the same *dūbayt*, aligning instead with al-Qarṭājannī’s pattern (al-Qalalawsī 2009, p. 83), was later proposed by ʿAbd al-Ilāh Kanafāwī in his study (al-Kanafāwī 2008). Yet even in that alternative reconstruction, structural inconsistencies cannot be entirely eliminated.

In light of these examples, it becomes apparent that Arabic prosodists invested considerable analytical effort in attempting to assimilate the *dūbayt* into the Khalīlian metrical framework—even where such assimilation proved structurally unstable. The persistence of competing reconstructions and the need for increasingly complex justificatory mechanisms indicate that the difficulty did not lie in isolated textual anomalies but in a deeper structural mismatch. This tension is already thematized in classical thought. Al-Fārābī (d. 950), reflecting on the interaction between language and rhythm, remarks that “when

different peoples come to perform poetry through the same language [...], the rhythm (*īqā'*) could not be maintained without mispronunciation (*lahn*)" (al-Fārābī 1971, p. 172). His statement is illuminating on several levels. First, it implicitly recognizes that non-Arab performers (*'ajam*) may have introduced specific poetic frameworks into Arabic usage. Second, it foregrounds the primacy of rhythm (*īqā'*) over the formal grid-imposed *ex post* by theoretical prosody. What emerges, therefore, is not merely a technical difficulty in classification, but a more profound phenomenon: lyrical rhythms may survive linguistic transfer even when the metrical apparatus designed to describe them cannot fully accommodate their internal logic. Once these rhythmic structures are transposed into a new linguistic system and subjected to codification, their original musicality may resist the descriptive constraints of the receiving tradition. From this perspective, the very inconsistency of the *dūbayt* within Arabic prosody appears less as a defect than as a trace of its earlier performative vitality. Paradoxically, the repeated—and ultimately unsuccessful—attempts at metrical "canonization" ensured the survival of its distinctive cadence, even as prosodists found themselves caught in a theoretical impasse.

Reconsidering the persistent synonymy between *dūbayt* and *rubā'ī* within Arabic literary discourse, one is confronted with two interrelated implications. First, the semantic convergence of these terms reflects the extent to which processes of mutual borrowing, rivalry, and cultural negotiation shaped the conceptual vocabulary of both traditions. The ambiguity is not accidental: it is symptomatic of a long-standing interaction in which inspiration and resistance operated simultaneously. Second, this terminological proximity obscures a structural transformation. While the Persian *robā'ī* retained its identity as a metrically specific form grounded in a particular realization of *al-hazaj*, its Arabic counterpart underwent a conceptual shift. Certain prosodic features that could not be fully reproduced within Arabic phonological and quantitative constraints were either modified or neutralized. What emerged was not a simple borrowing but a resemanticized poetic frame whose internal logic differed from its Persian antecedent.

This situation complicates interpretive models that presuppose unilateral cultural transmission. As Schwarz (1992, p. 50) has argued in another context, modern world literature paradigms often rest upon assumptions of hegemonic, unidirectional flows grounded in modern West/East-centered epistemologies. Such frameworks risk projecting contemporary geopolitical hierarchies onto pre-modern literary ecologies. In contrast, the circulation of the quatrain between Persian and Arabic contexts during the ninth to fourteenth centuries unfolded within a culturally and linguistically intertwined environment, in which boundaries were permeable and authority negotiated rather than imposed. Rather than reflecting a unidirectional model of literary influence, this process took place within a shared literary sphere characterized by bilingual authorship, translational fluidity, and reciprocal adaptation. Within this milieu, the oscillation between *dūbayt* and *rubā'ī* should not be read merely as terminological confusion, but as evidence of a dynamic interliterary process in which poetic forms circulated, mutated, and acquired new ontological statuses.

3. Conceptualizing the Quatrain: Persian and Arabic Frameworks

A closer examination of the Persian *robā'ī* reveals that it is not merely a quatrain in a generic sense, but a highly codified poetic structure grounded in a specific realization of the *al-hazaj* meter. This configuration is marked by prosodic sequences that do not occur in other compositional schemes and from which twenty-four fundamental sub-variations are derived, often producing circular refrains within the internal architecture of the poem.¹⁶ It is precisely this metrical distinctiveness that led both pre-modern and modern scholars—among them Thiesen (1982, pp. 168–72)—to designate this particular variation of *al-hazaj*

explicitly as “the *robāʿī* meter,” thereby reinforcing the term’s polysemy within Persian tradition: it denotes simultaneously a verse form and a metrical system.

Yet the Persian *robāʿī* is more accurately understood as a verse typology rather than as a mere metrical template. Beyond prosody, it is defined by additional formal constraints, especially those pertaining to *qāfiya*. Rhyme is always distributed across the four hemistiches and may take the less frequent *tamām-maṭlaʿ* configuration (aaaa) or, more commonly, follow the model of *ghazal/qaṣīda* (aaba), where the third hemistich remains *fard* (“free”). In both instances, however, the composition remains fundamentally monorhymic and is traditionally associated with impromptu poetic performance.¹⁷ Elwell-Sutton (1975, p. 637) further identified the thematic repertoire of ninth–tenth-century *robāʿī*, whose formal consolidation is generally attributed to the poet al-Rūdhakī (d. 941). Early quatrains commonly engaged with wine celebration, amorous complaint, satire, gnomic reflection, and aphoristic wisdom. In subsequent centuries, this thematic field expanded to include more elaborate philosophical meditations on existence, frequently shaped by Sufi intellectual and devotional currents (De Blois 2004, p. 51).¹⁸

Despite these clearly articulated features, scholarship in Persian studies has often privileged prosodic analysis as the primary key to understanding the quatrain. The Persian *robāʿī*, although structurally concise, has generated sustained debate among prosodists, particularly because it became central to discussions concerning the relationship—and possible independence—between Persian and Arabic prosodic systems. Both traditions formally operate within the Khalīlian framework, yet that framework was devised in relation to Arabic phonological structures and was not originally calibrated for the distinct metrical dynamics of Persian. While the Persian *robāʿī* appears, at first glance, as a metrically compact and formally stable structure, its prosodic status has in fact generated sustained theoretical debate. A central point of contention has been whether Persian versification should be understood primarily within the quantitative parameters of the Khalīlian system or whether it operates according to distinct phonological principles.

In the 1930s, Benveniste developed the notion of a “syllabic versification” for Middle Persian (1st century BC–7th century AD) and New Persian (8th/9th–18th centuries) poetry as an alternative to the quantitative (long/short vowel-based) Khalīlian system (Benveniste 1930, pp. 193–225). His hypothesis was grounded in a retrospective philological and phonological analysis of the *robāʿī* pattern. Notably, the Khalīlian system—being based on the specific phonological structure of Arabic—does not formally acknowledge a syllabic organization of meter. More recently, Kiparsky and Ashwini, drawing on earlier debates among Arabic prosodists, have reconsidered the Khalīlian model itself. They suggest that the system may in fact be understood as “weight-sensitive”, that is, as one in which “the contrast between ‘light’ and ‘heavy’ syllables functions to mark the opposition in prominence between strong and weak metrical positions” (Ashwini and Kiparsky 2011, p. 148), possibly reflecting indirect Greek prosodic influence.

In the 1950s, Henning revisited Benveniste’s proposal and introduced the concept of a “stress/accental versification” for Middle and New Persian poetry (Henning 1950, p. 644). This line of inquiry was subsequently developed by Elwell-Sutton, Thiesen, and Lazard during the 1970s–1980s, leading to the identification of Persian prosody as fundamentally “accent/stress-sensitive”, though later reshaped through the incorporation of quantitative elements derived from Arabic. Elwell-Sutton and Thiesen also emphasized the rhyming and thematic characteristics of the Persian *robāʿī* (Elwell-Sutton 1975, pp. 633–57, 2017, pp. 674–75; Thiesen 1982, pp. 168–72). Lazard, for his part, traced the possible prehistory of the form to the Pahlavi poem *Āhū-ye kūhī* (“The Chamois”), tentatively dated to the Sasanian period (3rd–7th centuries), suggesting that later Arabic prosodic influence may

have obscured structural continuities between Middle Persian verse and the tenth-century Persian *robāʿī* (Lazard 1970, pp. 238–44).

What is striking, however, is that while Persian scholarship has devoted considerable attention to defining the internal logic of the *robāʿī*, reciprocal engagement with Arabic conceptualizations of the quatrain has remained comparatively limited (cf. Ghahramani Moghbel 2016, p. 62). A rare comparative intervention is offered by Ashwini and Kiparsky, who, employing phonological terminology, describe the Persian quatrain as a “four-moras-tetrameter with a catalectic foot” (Ashwini and Kiparsky 2011, p. 155), a formulation they also consider applicable to the Arabic quatrain. By contrast, Arabic prosodic manuals typically retain the classical terminology, according to which each hemistich consists of four *tafīlāt* (al-Hāshimī 1997, p. 141).

In both traditions, therefore, the quatrain is described as comprising four metrical feet per hemistich, the final foot often involving a “high impact” metrical variation (Pers. *ʿelal*—Arabic *ʿilla*).¹⁹ Yet Arabic practice displays a greater degree of metrical plurality: beyond *al-hazaj*, additional meters such as *al-rajaz*, *al-raml*, *al-mutaqārib*, *al-basīṭ*, *al-sarīʿ*, and *al-mutadārik* are also recorded in connection with quatrain compositions (Nāji 1974, pp. 161–65). This flexibility contrasts with the more restricted prosodic variation typical of Persian poetry, where metrical consistency tends to be maintained throughout the poem, whereas Arabic verse admits numerous intra-hemistich “low-impact” variations, the *ziḥāfāt* (Elwell-Sutton 2017, p. 675).²⁰

If, in the Persian tradition, the *robāʿī* retained a relatively stable identity as both a verse form and a metrically codified structure, its conceptualization within Arabic poetics followed a different trajectory. Drawing on al-Qartājannī’s reflections (al-Qartājannī 2008, p. 243), the Arabic *rubāʿī* appears to have been understood as a literary borrowing from Persian, composed exclusively in *fuṣḥā* and functioning neither strictly as a distinct meter nor merely as a generic verse type.²¹ Rather, it emerged as a compositional frame organized around distich-based symmetry, rendering it prosodically difficult to distinguish from the *dūbayt*. The Arabic quatrain thus came to be defined less by exclusive metrical identity than by a combination of rhyming conventions and rhetorical structuring. Like its Persian counterpart, it maintained recognizable rhyme schemes; yet its *mūsīqā khārijīyya* (external rhythm determined by meter and rhyme) was characterized by greater variability. This variability stemmed from the alternation of meters and the admitted presence of intra-hemistich *ziḥāfāt*. At the same time, a comparatively stable *mūsīqā dākhiliyya* (internal euphonic rhythm) was achieved through systematic deployment of *balāgha* devices.

According to al-Hāshimī’s canonical formulation (al-Hāshimī 1997, pp. 140–41), Arabic quatrains are divided into seven typologies. The first two, which most closely resemble the Persian model, are distinguished primarily by rhyming structure: *rubāʿī kāmil* (complete quatrain) and *rubāʿī khaṣīyy* or *al-aʿraj* (crippled quatrain).²² The remaining five (*rubāʿī khāṣṣ*, *rubāʿī mumanaṭṭaq*, *rubāʿī muraḥḥal*, *rubāʿī mardūf*, and *majzūʿ al-dūbayt*)²³ are defined by the structured deployment of rhetorical embellishments, especially various forms of *jinās* (paronomasia, pun, alliteration), belonging to the branch of Arabic rhetoric known as *ʿilm al-badīʿ*.²⁴ The following example of *rubāʿī muraḥḥal*, cited by al-Hāshimī (1997, p. 141), illustrates the interrelation between prosody and rhetoric:

بدرٌ ، وإذا رَأَتْهُ شَمْسُ الأفقِ
كسَفَتْ، ورَقَى في يومٍ أحدُ
عوذْتُ جمالَهُ، بربِّ الفلقِ
وبما خَلَقَ مِنْ كلِّ أحدُ

(al-Hāshimī 1997, p. 141)

A full moon—which if only the sun at the horizon saw it,
it would eclipse—rises on a Sunday.

May its beauty be cursed, in the name of the Lord of the Universe
and in the name of all that He has created.

(Translation mine)

From a metrical standpoint, the first and third hemistiches follow the sequence most commonly associated with both Arabic *dūbayt* and *rubāʿī*, namely *faʿlun, mutafāʿilun, faʿūlun, faʿilun*. However, the second hemistich appears to consist of only three *tafīlāt*—*faʿilun, mutafāʿilun, faʿūlun*—rather than four. This could be interpreted either as an incomplete or improperly applied *majzūʿ* form (which would require symmetrical truncation across all hemistiches)²⁵ or as adherence to an alternative three-foot pattern. The fourth hemistich, in turn, presents the sequence *faʿilun, faʿilun, faʿlun, faʿūlun*, further complicating attempts at strict Khalīlian classification. Al-Ḥāshimī does not provide a detailed scansion but remarks that the second hemistich “consists of three *faqarāt* (i.e., parts) which enrich its prosody” (al-Ḥāshimī 1997, p. 141). Such a formulation appears to aestheticize what might otherwise be viewed as structural inconsistency, reframing irregularity as ornamental variation rather than as evidence of prosodic tension.

The rhetorical architecture of the poem, however, is unmistakable. Two instances of *jinās nāqīṣ* may be identified: (a) *ufuk/falak* (horizon/universe), representing *jinās nāqīṣ nawʿ al-ḥurūf wa-l-tartīb* (first/third hemistiches); and (b) *falak/khalak(a)* (universe/He has created), constituting *jinās nāqīṣ nawʿ al-ḥurūf* (third/fourth hemistiches). Additionally, a case of *jinās tāmm* appears in the second and fourth hemistiches, where *aḥd* assumes distinct semantic values (*yawm aḥd*, Sunday; *kulli aḥd*, everyone/everything).²⁶ The text further exhibits *al-ṭibāq al-ijābī* (antithesis)²⁷ between *kasafat* and *raqā* (eclipses/rises), intensifying the imagery through semantic opposition. In this example, therefore, poetic cohesion is achieved less through rigid prosodic conformity than through rhetorical orchestration. The Arabic *rubāʿī* thus evolves from a potentially borrowed metrical structure into a rhetorically codified compositional scheme. As previously argued (Fontana 2025, pp. 132–36), this shift reflects not merely terminological confusion but a deeper reconfiguration of the quatrain’s ontological status within Arabic poetics. In other words, the Arabic reception of the quatrain did not simply preserve a Persian poetic model but gradually redefined its literary function.

4. Thematic Specificities and the Modern Reconfiguration of the Quatrain

Beyond formal and prosodic considerations, the thematic trajectory of the quatrain across Persian and Arabic traditions reveals a complex process of religious, philosophical, and cultural resemanticization. Drawing on Lazard’s reconstruction of the origins of the *robāʿī* (Lazard 1970, pp. 238–44), the Persian quatrain may be interpreted as inheriting structural and stylistic features from Middle Persian literary culture in Pahlavi. This language, recognized as a “courtly, elegant literary language” (Lazard 1971, pp. 361–62, 385; Tafazzoli 1999, pp. 158–62), coexisted with other Middle Persian varieties and preserved a largely oral poetic heritage, fragments of which survive only indirectly (De Blois 2000, pp. 82–95).

Within this historical continuum, Utas (1994, p. 143) suggests that ninth- and tenth-century poets such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Jaʿfar Rūdākī (d. 329/941)²⁸ may have drawn upon earlier oral models—including *dūbayt*, *robāʿī*, and *tarāna* (regional or rural song)—before consolidating the *robāʿī* as a refined artistic form distinct from its popular antecedents.²⁹ In its early New Persian manifestations, the quatrain—much like the lyrical form of the *qīṭʿa*,³⁰ a brief and typically monothematic poem—proved particularly well suited to epigram-

matic expression and was frequently embedded within prose texts in order to highlight specific rhetorical or thematic moments within a discursive or narrative context (de Bruijn 2015, p. 31). Thematically, early *robāʿiyyāt* encompassed aphoristic wisdom, brief panegyric, love poetry, and satirical or gnomic reflection, their brevity allowing the first three hemistiches to build toward a climax resolved in the fourth (Elwell-Sutton 1975, pp. 633–57; 2017, p. 679).

By the eleventh century, however, the *robāʿi* increasingly became associated with spiritual and philosophical meditation. De Blois (2004, p. 51) notes that although it never achieved the formal prestige of extended genres such as the *mathnawī*, the quatrain expanded into an independent monorhymic composition capable of sustained existential reflection. This development cannot be separated from broader transformations within Islamic intellectual culture. As Utas (1970, p. 208) and al-Musawi (2015, pp. 266–68) observe, Persian Sufi preachers—often bilingual and operating within a religious milieu that privileged Arabic as the language of revelation—turned to Persian poetic forms to communicate mystical teachings to broader audiences. Poetry, especially concise forms such as the quatrain, facilitated memorization and oral transmission. Thus emerged a corpus of mystical *robāʿiyyāt* attributed to figures such as Bābā Ṭāher (d. 400/1010), Abū Saʿīd ibn Abī l-Khayr (d. 441/1049),³¹ and ʿAbd Allāh Anṣārī of Herat (d. 481/1089), and later elaborated in the works of Sanāʿī (d. 545/1150), ʿAttār (d. 618/1221), and Rūmī (d. 671/1273) (Utas 1994, pp. 138–39). As Gould (2011, p. 228) observes, however, many of these authors worked primarily in other genres; the association between the quatrain and Sufi spirituality emerged gradually rather than as an intrinsic generic identity.

The reciprocal influence of Persian mystical poetics on Arabic production is evident in the thirteenth century. Ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), particularly in his *al-Khamriyya* and in sections of the *al-Tāʾiyya al-Kubrā*,³² incorporated quatrain-like structures within his Sufi lyricism (Scattolin 2006, pp. 217–31). Similarly, Bahāʾ Zuhayr (d. 656/1258) demonstrates familiarity with Persian *robāʿiyyāt*, reflecting a transregional exchange of spiritual motifs and formal experimentation (Massignon 1922, pp. 63–68). In this context, the quatrain functioned not merely as a technical form but as a flexible vehicle for articulating themes of divine love, ecstasy, and existential ambiguity. Thematic multiplicity within Sufi quatrains has been extensively discussed by Scheindlin (1994, pp. 111–12), Meisami (1987, pp. 37–38), and al-Musawi (2015, pp. 170–81), who emphasize the coexistence of homoerotic imagery, agnostic undertones, sensual metaphors, and devotional symbolism. Importantly, such imagery cannot always be reduced to allegorical representations of divine love; rather, the quatrain served as a space in which spiritual, philosophical, and corporeal registers intersected.

By the nineteenth century, however, the reception of the quatrain underwent a decisive transformation under the influence of European philology and translation. The case of ʿUmar Khayyām (d. 525/1131) is emblematic. FitzGerald’s widely disseminated English rendering of the *Rubāʿiyyāt*—including numerous spurious attributions (Zhukovsky 1898, pp. 349–66)—contributed to consolidating the modern image of Khayyām as a mystical skeptic or free-thinking Sufi sage (Graves and Ali Shah 1967, pp. 24–27; Seyed-Gohrab 2012, pp. 20–22). As Simidchieva (2011, pp. 62–67) and Saʿūd (2004, p. 21) have shown, attempts to retroactively align Khayyām or Abū al-ʿAlā al-Maʿarrī (d. 449/1057) with Sufi orthodoxy often obscured the philosophical and intellectual heterogeneity of their works (cf. Dashi 2011). This reinterpretive process unfolded within broader currents of literary modernization in both Persian and Arabic contexts. As Rezaei Yazdi and Mozafari (2018, p. 63) and Jayyusi (1977, pp. 162–64) observe, twentieth-century poetic experimentation increasingly relaxed classical prosodic constraints and privileged thematic innovation. In

Iran, Ṣādeq Hedāyat (d. 1951), in *Moqaddam bar robā'īyyāt-e Khayyāmī* (Hedāyat 1990), reengaged the quatrain as a philosophical instrument suited to modern existential inquiry.

In Egypt, Najīb Surūr (d. 1978), in *Rubā'īyyāt Najīb Surūr*, preserved classical meter while infusing the form with political and social critique, articulating the predicament of the modern intellectual under Nasser and Sadat (Fontana 2025, pp. 135–36):

يا رفيقي لم أحن عهد الهوى
والهوى رغم وفائي خان عهدي
هنا انا ما بين شوقي والجوى
أقطع الأيام كالأدغال وحدي

(Surūr's *Rubā'īyyāt*, quoted in Fontana 2025, p. 215)

Oh, my companion,
be sure that I did not betray the principles,
although the principles—despite my loyalty
betrayed the vow I made them.
It is I who, suspended
between longing and burning passion,
wander through my days as though through woods.
(Translation mine)

In this example—as in the collection as a whole—Surūr's quatrains retain a clear and traditional prosodic and rhyming structure (meter: *al-ramal al-tāmm*; rhyme scheme: *abab*) and employ rhetorical devices commonly associated with pre-modern *rubā'īyyāt*, including *jinās*, *muqābala*, and *majāz*. More striking, however, is Surūr's attempt to renew the genre thematically by introducing explicit political reflection and by framing the quatrain as a vehicle for exploring the condition of the modern public intellectual.

Likewise, Maḥmūd Darwīsh (d. 2008), in his brief anthology *Rubā'īyyāt*, reconfigured the quatrain as a form of intimate resistance within conditions of political persecution:

أرى ما أريدُ من السجن: أيامُ زهرةٍ
مَضَتْ من هنا كي تدلَّ غريبين في
: على مقعد في الحديقة، أغمضُ عيني
ما أوسع الأرض! ما أجمل الأرض من ثقب إبره

(Darwīsh 2000, p. 788)

I see what I want in prison: days of flowering
that led from here to two strangers in me
seated in a garden—I close my eyes:
How spacious the earth! How beautiful the earth
through the eye of a needle.
(translation by Saadi Simawe and Doré Watson)

Darwīsh does not strictly reproduce the classical metrical structure of the *robā'ī*; nevertheless, his quatrains retain the concision and reflective closure traditionally associated with the genre, transforming it into a vehicle for metaphysical meditation and political introspection. These developments suggest that the modern conceptualization of the quatrain increasingly privileges thematic resonance over strict technical adherence. Whereas

classical *rubāʿiyyāt* were defined by precise prosodic and rhetorical constraints, modern appropriations often preserve only the structural brevity and reflective intensity of the form. The result is a gradual shift from a metrically codified genre toward a thematically marked literary mode.

A similar tendency can be observed in other modern appropriations of the form. The South Mahjar poet Ilyās Farāt, in his *Rubāʿiyyāt Farḥāt*, and the Egyptian poet Ṣalāḥ Jāhīn (d. 1986)—who notably composed his *Rubāʿiyyāt Ṣalāḥ Jāhīn* (Jāhīn 1974) in Egyptian Arabic—likewise employed the quatrain as a medium through which to reflect on the relationship between intellectual discourse and the public sphere.

5. Conclusions

Adam Talib’s reflections on the Arabic epigram and on the permeability of pre-modern Arabic genres offer a productive lens through which to reassess the quatrain’s trajectory. In *How Do You Say “Epigram” in Arabic?* (Talib 2017, pp. 3, 216), he argues that the apparent instability of certain genres reflects not formal incoherence but shifting modes of reception and classification. Literary categories, in other words, are historically contingent constructs, shaped as much by readerly expectations as by intrinsic structural features. Such an approach allows us to reinterpret the evolution of the *rubāʿī/rubāʿī* beyond purely formal parameters. If the classical quatrain was defined through precise prosodic and rhetorical constraints, its modern reconfiguration corresponds to a broader epistemological shift: changes in the way readers and critics historicize a genre inevitably produce transformations in the ontology of the genre itself. In Žižek’s (2006, p. 17) formulation, the object is not merely perceived differently; it becomes different through the transformation of the interpretive frame.

Applied to the quatrain, this insight clarifies why modern authors may abandon strict adherence to classical metrical patterns while still invoking the label *rubāʿiyyāt*. The gesture is not primarily legitimizing but dialogical: it signals an engagement with a layered literary past, reactivated under new sociopolitical and intellectual conditions. The quatrain thus survives not as a rigid prosodic schema but as a condensed space for reflection, tension, and existential interrogation. At the same time, caution is required. The emergence of a modern, thematically defined understanding of the quatrain within Iranian and Arab literary contexts should not be conflated with a homogenized transnational perception of the past. The quatrain remains embedded within distinct national, linguistic, and ideological trajectories, especially in the aftermath of nineteenth- and twentieth-century processes of modernization and nation-building. As Blondel Saad (1996, p. 32) has argued, the consolidation of “new-born cultural and national boundaries” often reconfigured earlier patterns of literary exchange, sometimes obscuring the dense interconnections that characterized the pre-modern Islamic literary sphere.

Within that earlier milieu—what al-Musawi (2015, pp. 21–26) describes as a vibrant Islamic “republic of letters”—literary forms circulated across Persian and Arabic without rigidly policed cultural demarcations. The quatrain’s oscillation between *dūbayt*, *rubāʿī*, and *rubāʿī* should therefore be understood not as evidence of confusion but as testimony to a shared and dynamic interliterary ecology. Rather than a simple case of formal borrowing, the relationship between these forms reflects processes of literary transmission in which rhythmic patterns, rhetorical expectations, and thematic conventions moved across Persian and Arabic with varying degrees of formal adaptation.

The circulation of literary forms was not confined to linguistic transfer alone. It could also involve the reconfiguration of materials belonging to different textual traditions, as illustrated by instances in which ḥadīth narratives were rendered into Persian *dū-baytī* form during the Timurid period (Rashwan 2024, p. 178). More broadly, the quatrain also circu-

lated across different textual environments beyond the *dīwān*, including biographical and hagiographical compilations (*tadhkiras* and *malfūzāt*) as well as exegetical writing (*tafsīr*), where its formal concision lent itself to ethical reflection, mystical instruction, and scholarly commentary. As studies on Persian literary historiography have shown, such textual environments actively contributed to the transmission and reinterpretation of poetry within broader traditions of literary knowledge (Farghadani 2022).

Read in this light, the movement of the quatrain across languages also reflects its circulation across different genres of knowledge within the multilingual literary culture of the premodern Islamic world. In this sense, the circulation of the quatrain reveals a literary sphere that is difficult to accommodate within modern systemic models of world literature, which tend to presuppose hierarchical center–periphery dynamics (Moretti 2000, pp. 54–68; Schwarz 1992, p. 50). The pre-modern Islamic literary sphere was not structured around modern imperial or economic asymmetries but rather around multilingual intellectual networks in which translation, adaptation, and recomposition were normative practices. Seen from this perspective, the quatrain emerges as a particularly revealing site for observing how poetic forms migrate, transform, and acquire new meanings across languages and literary traditions.

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Notes

- ¹ The allographic form رباعي is transcribed here according to its respective Persian and Arabic pronunciations. While some studies (e.g., Elwell-Sutton 1975) render the Persian term as *rubāʾī* following Arabic-based transliteration conventions, the present article distinguishes the Persian pronunciation (*robāʾī*) from the Arabic (*rubāʾī*). The plural forms *robāʾiyyāt* and *rubāʾiyyāt* are used accordingly. Titles of Arabic and Persian works are transliterated without further modification.
- ² The term *ʿarūd* is itself Arabic, originally designating both the metrical system employed by Arabic poets and the method of scanning and classifying its metres. The same terminology was subsequently applied to Persian poetry, despite the substantial differences between the Arabic and Persian metrical traditions (Pellat, “‘Arūd,” *El*²). For its later adoption in Turkic literary contexts, see (Toutant 2024).
- ³ An earlier discussion of some of the issues addressed in this article appeared in: (Fontana 2019).
- ⁴ Indistinguishable in form and meter from each other (Elwell-Sutton 2017, p. 678).
- ⁵ Regarding *sinād*, al-Ḍabbī merely notes that it refers to circular compositions marked by repetition (“dhū al-tarjīʿ al-kathīr al-naghamāt wa-al-nabarāt”), while Ḍayf further describes *al-sinād* as a “heavy” or serious (*thaqīl*) genre, without offering any additional clarification (al-Ḍabbī 1942, vol. I, pp. 193–94).
- ⁶ Three of the seven forms are classified as *malhūna*, that is, compositions influenced by dialectal or non-Arabic linguistic elements. These include *al-zajal*, *al-kān wa-kān*, and *al-qawma* (cf. al-Musawi 2015, pp. 263–65). Among them, the form regarded as the most refined—since it “follows the syntactic rules of *al-fuṣḥā* and *al-iʿrāb*” (Jawwād 1975, p. 364)—is known as *al-mawālīya*, from which the modern popular *mawwāl* later developed (Cachia 2011, pp. 203–13; Fontana 2020, pp. 19–39).
- ⁷ More canonically defined pl. *ashṭur* (s. *shaṭr*). See al-Ḥāshimī (1997, pp. 6–8).
- ⁸ According to an etymological reconstruction proposed by al-Ḥillī—generally regarded as unfounded—the term *dū-bayt* would derive, through metathesis, from the alleged (and erroneously compounded) form *būdhiya* > *abū adhiya*, meaning “[belonging] to one who offends or angers” (see Fontana 2025, pp. 259–62). It remains unclear why al-Ḥillī further connects this questionable derivation to *ʿubūdīyya* (“slavery”), unless this association reflects an ideological attempt to diminish or discredit the Persian element within the cultural context of his time.
- ⁹ Overlooking the substantial body of earlier scholarship on the subject, al-Rāfiʿ maintains that the *dūbayt* entered the Arabic literary tradition from Persian only as late as the 7th century AH (i.e., the fourteenth century).
- ¹⁰ Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Tilmisānī (d. 1370) also endorses this metrical pattern (Nāji 1974, p. 163).

- His exact dates of birth and death remain unknown. He lived in Granada and was a contemporary of Abū Ja'far al-Zubayr (1230–1308). In his work he systematized the possible metrical patterns of the *dūbayt* that had earlier been proposed by the poet Mālik Ibn al-Murāḥḥal (Sayf al-Islām 2014, p. 167).
- With regard to the other two proposed patterns, al-Qalalawsī explicitly remarks: *wa-kilā al-qawlayni bāṭil* (“both of these views are incorrect”), as cited in Nāḥi (1974, p. 161; cf. al-Darrāj 1982).
- For the schematic representation of prosodic patterns, the present study adopts the standard Khalilian notation commonly used in major Arabic prosody manuals (e.g., al-Ḥāshimī 1997).
- The Arabic term *ziḥāf* (sing.; pl. *ziḥāfāt*) designates a “low-impact metrical variation” (Fontana 2025, p. 268) involving the shortening of particular sound units (*majmū'āt ṣawfiyya*) known as *asbāb* (e.g., //, 0/). Since this modification does not substantially alter the structure of the meter, it is considered *maqbul wa-laysa ḍarūrī*—that is, permissible but not required throughout the entire poem (see al-Ḥāshimī 1997, pp. 12–28).
- These terms refer respectively to the omission of either the fifth or the seventh non-vocalized letter within the *taf'ila* (al-Ḥāshimī 1997, p. 15).
- The alternation between the sequences (◡ - ◡ -) and (- ◡ ◡ -) does not occur in other Persian meters (Elwell-Sutton 1975, pp. 633–35). For the diagrammatic representation of prosodic patterns, the present study follows the standard syllabic notation of the Khalilian system commonly adopted in Persian prosody manuals (e.g., Thiesen 8–15; Elwell-Sutton 1976, pp. 5–10). The most common realizations of the *robā'ī* meter are the *hazaj mothamman akhrab makfūf majbūb* (- ◡ ◡ - - ◡ - - ◡ -) and the *hazaj mothamman akhrab maqbūz majbūb* (- ◡ ◡ - ◡ - ◡ - - ◡ -), from which up to 126 subvariations may derive (Elwell-Sutton 2017, p. 672).
- Certain rhyme patterns, such as (aabb) or (abab), fall outside the canonical structure of the *robā'ī*. See Elwell-Sutton (1975, p. 634).
- The *mathnawī*—literally “doubled”, as indicated by its etymology—is the canonical form of rhymed couplets in Persian literature and is traditionally employed in extended epic, didactic, romantic, or philosophical compositions (Elwell-Sutton 2017, p. 678).
- In the Arabic prosodic tradition, this type of variation (*'illa*) refers to a modification affecting the final foot of a hemistich, which may either lose or acquire an additional group of sounds (*majmū'at ṣawfi*), broadly corresponding to what is described as a “light” or “heavy” syllable. Such a modification alters the realization of the meter and, according to the governing rules, must be applied consistently throughout the entire poem; it is therefore considered *ḍarūrī* (necessary), or a “high-impact metrical variation” (Fontana 2025, pp. 247–48). A significant difference in Persian prosody is that *'elal*—although only rarely—may also occur in the first foot of a hemistich. See al-Ḥāshimī (1997, pp. 12–28; Elwell-Sutton 2017, pp. 675–76).
- Ar. *ziḥāf* (sing.)/*ziḥāfāt* (pl.)–Per. *zehāf* (sing.)/*zehāfāt* (pl.). Cf. note 19. Although the concept is essentially the same in both Arabic and Persian traditions, Persian prosody generally requires the *zehāf* to be applied across the whole composition, in a manner comparable to *'elal*. See Elwell-Sutton (2017, pp. 670–79).
- “*Lā yajūzu fi-hi al-laḥn muṭlaqan.*” Concerning the *rubā'ī*, al-Qartājannī also expresses a personal judgment: “*lā ba's bi-l-'amali 'alay-hi, fa-inna-hu mustazaḥfun wa waḍ' u-hu mutanāsibun*” (“there is nothing wrong with employing it; it is pleasant, light, and widely used”) (al-Qartājannī 2008, p. 241).
- The first adopts the rhyme scheme (aaaa), whereas the second follows the pattern (aaba) (al-Ḥāshimī 1997, pp. 140–42).
- In a previous study I proposed the recognition of rhetorical typologies of *rubā'īyyāt*, identifying for each category the corresponding rhyme patterns and the presence of *jinās* across the hemistiches (Fontana 2025, pp. 134–35 and 259–61). For the different types of *jinās*, see the note below.
- Jinās* represents one of the most frequently employed euphonic devices within Arabic rhetoric (*balāgha*, specifically the discipline of *'ilm al-badī*). Its effects vary according to its different forms. These include *jinās tāmm*, involving homographic words that carry distinct meanings, and *jinās nāqīṣ*, referring to types of alliteration or paronomasia between words that differ semantically but resemble one another phonetically. Such similarity may arise from variations in the type, vocalization, number, or order of letters (respectively: *jinās nāqīṣ al-ḥurūf*, *ash-shakl*, *al-'adad*, *al-tartīb*). See Maṭlūb (2007, pp. 450–55). For a recent and insightful reappraisal of *jinās* in contemporary scholarship, see Rashwan (2020).
- The rule mentioned above is known as *ṣūrat al-majzū' li-l-baḥr*. See al-Ḥāshimī (1997, p. 12).
- For the different typologies of *jinās*, see note 24.
- This device corresponds to a specific rhetorical embellishment within Arabic rhetoric (*balāgha*, particularly *'ilm al-badī*) known as *tibāq* (antithesis or oxymoron), whereby a word appears alongside its semantic opposite within the same passage (Maṭlūb 2007, p. 522).
- He is generally regarded as the founding figure of the *robā'ī* in New Persian.
- The limited sources concerning the poem *Āhū-ye kūnī* do not allow scholars to reconstruct its thematic content, which is otherwise attested in other lost compositions sharing a comparable structure (Lazard 1970).
- It was primarily employed for satirical and topical poetry.
- His quatrains were later collected by his great-great-grandson Muḥammad ibn Munavvar (fl. twelfth century) (Nicholson 2011, p. 46).
- For the alphabetical organization of Arabic and Persian poetic anthologies according to rhyming letters between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, see Schimmel (1992, pp. 33–34) and Badawī (1992, vol. III, p. 491).

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