

## FitzGerald's *Rubaiyât*: From Khayyâm to T.S. Eliot

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One of the most perennially popular poems in the English language, Edward FitzGerald's *Rubaiyât of Omar Khayyâm* belongs both to medieval Persian literature and to twentieth-century modernist English literature and thus links 'Omar Khayyâm (1048-1131) with T.E. Eliot (1888-1965) in English. Apparent paradox inheres in such assertions because neither the poem Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883) and nor his *Rubaiyât* (1859, 1868, 1872, 1879) belong to the literary age of either Khayyâm or Eliot. The explanation of the paradox is an aim of this paper.

But first, some myths need disposing of. Contrary to the popular view, *The Rubaiyât of Omar Khayyâm* is in no sense a translation of any single Persian work, much less a work by the historical figure of 'Omar Khayyâm. The much studied historical figure 'Omar Khayyâm (1048-1131) was not a professional poet and left no manuscripts containing any poems he authored. As for "his *rubaiyât*," no such thing as a single composition called *robâ'iyât* (which is the plural of the word *robâ'i* [quatrain]) existed in traditional Persian literature, much less a composition of connected *robâ'is* by 'Omar Khayyâm. In other words, in traditional Persian poetry *robâ'is* were composed as separate, self-contained, four-line poems.

Edward FitzGerald first looked at a manuscript of Persian quatrains attributed to 'Omar Khayyâm in the latter part of 1856. Less than two years later, he submitted thirty-five "translated" quatrains to *Frazer's Magazine* for publication. When they did not appear, FitzGerald retrieved his manuscript, added forty more quatrains, and in March 1859 published 250 copies of the *Rubaiyât of Omar Khayyâm*. This first edition was followed by a second, expanded to 110 quatrains. A third edition of 101 quatrains appeared in 1872.

These three editions appeared anonymously, FitzGerald not formally acknowledged as the "translator" until 1876. A fourth edition, again including 101 quatrains, appeared in 1879. Although the literary world, including Thomas Carlyle, Gabriel Rossetti, A.C. Swinburne, John Ruskin, and C.E. Norton (who was the first American critic to review the

*Rubáiyát*, had by the time FitzGerald's authorship was acknowledged recognized the poetic achievement of the *Rubáiyát*, the Khayyâm "craze" and worldwide acclaim of FitzGerald's poem, which has included hundreds of editions and translations and persists to the present day, did not commence until after FitzGerald's death in 1883.

From the moment FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyâm* began achieving its singular status in world literature as the most famous English language poem ever based on a foreign language model, scholars directed primary attention to its relationship to its Persian sources viewed either as literary inspiration or, at the other extreme, as Persian texts merely translated and arranged by FitzGerald in a particular order. At the turn of the century, Edward Heron-Allen investigated the issue in a book called *Edward FitzGerald's 'Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyâm' with their Original Sources* (1899).<sup>1</sup> There he conclusively demonstrated that FitzGerald's

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<sup>1</sup>Edward Heron-Allen, *Edward Fitzgerald's Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám with their Original Persian Sources* (Boston: L.C. Page, 1899), parallels FitzGerald's 101 stanzas with popular Persian quatrains which may have inspired him. Heron-Allen's arrangement of Persian quatrains inspired a famous fraud sixty-some years later when Omar Ali-Shah, brother of the self-styled Sufi guri Idries Shah, duped the English poet Robert Graves (1892-1985) into collaboration on a translation of a supposed thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Rubáiyát*. Their translation, published as *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam: A New translation with Critical Commentaries* (London: Cassell, 1968), was demonstrated to be based on a forged manuscript in L.P. Elwell-Sutton, "The Omar Khayyam Puzzle," *Royal Central Asian Journal* 55 (1968): 175-179. But although the specific claims made by Omar Ali-Shah and Robert Graves have been convincingly refuted, the larger issue of the misrepresentation of aspects of traditional Iranian literary culture by self-styled experts remains a continuing concern for serious Persianists. In the frankest terms, pseudo-scholars and charlatans exist in the field. The case of Omar Ali-Shah's brother Idries Shah illustrates the problems from the Persianist perspective. Idries Shah has written numerous books, mostly on the subject of Sufism, each exuding authoritative, authorial self-confidence. Although not taken seriously by Persianist scholars, Shah's claims may not be immediately perceived as baseless by non-expert readers. For example, Shah's *The Way of the Sufi* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969) features a section called "Classical Authors," in which Shah identifies Omar Khayyam as one of eight important Sufi authors. He asserts: "Khayyam was an important philosopher . . . and a practical instructor in Sufism . . . Khayyam's teaching poems, and those of other members of his school which have become an accepted part of this material [i.e., Shah's writings?], are based upon the special terminology and allegory of Sufism." According to Shah, one reason why Khayyam is not widely known as a Sufi is "Edward FitzGerald, who in Victorian times published a few of Omar's quatrains in English." FitzGerald's versions of Khayyam exhibit "poor- thinking capacity," and "His interpolation of anti-Sufi propaganda into his rendering of Khayyam cannot be excused even by his most ardent supporters . . .

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who tend to ignore this amazing dishonour, and shout about other subjects instead" (p. 58). Shah follows this introductory note about Khayyam with English translations of quatrains and couplets he de attributes to the poet. But none of the translated verse derives from older manuscripts in which it is attributed to Khayyam. As for Shah's other assertions, he offers no evidence for Khayyam's alleged standing as a philosopher or Sufi instructor because none exists. In the case of FitzGerald's renderings of Persian quatrains and fashioning of his English poem from Persian sources, the already cited comparative study of Heron-Allen demonstrates FitzGerald's fidelity to the spirit of the original Persian sources and his creation of a new English poem structurally unrelated to anything Khayyam may or may not have authored. Readers can judge for themselves that such Khayyamian quatrains as quoted in translation in this chapter do not allow a Sufi interpretation. Finally, no reason exists for either FitzGerald or a contemporary Persianist such as myself to "interpolate anti-Sufi propaganda" into writing on Persian literature. Sufi poetry in Persian has constituted a brilliant chapter of Iranian literary culture. The works of Sana'i (d. 1150/1), 'Attar (d.c. 1220), and Rumi (1207-1273), discussed briefly in chapter 3, are acknowledged major works in Persian literature. The issue for the Persianist scholar is simply to designate as Sufi that for which the evidence allows such a designation. On the basis of historical and textual evidence, one is obliged to recognize that Ferdowsi and Khayyam, different in outlook from one another, were two literary figures not Sufi in orientation. A more interesting and debatable case is Hâfez, the subject of chapter 3. For more on Sufism, refer to footnote 65.

In general, Western scholarship focussing on determination of Persian quatrains attributable to the historical figure of Omar Khayyam has been unproductive. Arguing that the discovery of old manuscripts will resolve the problem of establishing an authoritative text of Khayyam's poetic output, A.J. Arberry published the texts and English translations of poems asserted to be in a manuscript dated 1259/60 in *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (London: Walker, 1949). Three years later, Yale University published *Omar Khayyam: A New Version Based Upon Recent Discoveries*, in which, on the authority of what the editor-translator Arberry takes to be an even earlier manuscript dated 1208, English versions of 252 quatrains are given. The Persian text and facsimile are available in Rostam Aliyef and Mohammad Nur Osmanoff, *Omar Khayyam: Rubaiyat*, 2 volumes (Moscow: Enstitu-ye Khavarshenasi, 1959). In a lengthy introduction, Arberry argues that, since all the quatrains in the 1259/60 manuscript appear in this 1208 manuscript, a larger collection earlier than the latter must have existed, from which later collections were drawn. This would destroy "the chief argument used by scholars challenging Omar's authorship of the Rubaiyat," that being that "of the manuscripts of his poems hitherto known, the earlier their date the fewer the verses they contained." Arberry's conclusion is that the two manuscripts and their obvious relationship argue to the "inescapable" surmise that Omar did compose a large number of quatrains, since "there would hardly have been time in seventy-five years to build up an almost mythical figure into an author of perhaps seven hundred seventy-five quatrains." Also in 1952, in an article entitled "Omar Again," *Bulletin of the School for Oriental and African Studies* 14 (1952): 413-419, Arberry reports the discovery of another collection of quatrains, 247 of them, which, when compared to the 1208 and 1259/60 manuscripts, lead him to assert that "there is no shadow of doubt that" the three manuscripts "belong the same family." But

*Rubaiyât* is an original work inspired by Persian quatrains mostly attributed to 'Omar Khayyâm. The earliest among such quatrains, all dating from the twelfth century, are the following poems:

From the hidden emerged this sea of life,  
its essence no one has ever pierced.  
Everyone has had something to say,  
but not about things as they really are.

\* \* \*

In the cycle of our coming and going,  
neither beginning nor end is visible.  
No one in this world has uttered the truth  
as to whence we come and where we go.

\* \* \*

When the combination of elements occurred,  
why did the Maker endow them with transience?  
If it did not work out well, fault is whose?  
And if it turned out well, why destroy it?

\* \* \*

As one can never add to days and lives,  
one should not try the heart with more or less.  
Our affairs, to where it is ours to choose,  
cannot be shaped as wax by hands.

\* \* \*

O you, who are the result of four and seven

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Arberry here also reveals misgivings about the authenticity of the manuscripts insofar as the colophons of 1216 and 1208 manuscripts are nearly identical.

In Iran, both Jalaloddin Homa'i, as quoted by Vladimir Minorsky, "The Earliest Collections of O. Khayyam, " *Yadnameh-ye Jan Rypka* (Prague: Academia, 1967), pp. 107-118, and Mojtaba Minovi, "Towzih" [Explanation], *Rahnema-ye Ketab* 6 (1964/5): 238-240, flatly declared that the manuscripts were forgeries. In the West, both Elwell-Sutton and Minorsky expressed suspicion at the coincidence of the discovery of four or five, supposedly thirteenth-century manuscripts within a period of less than ten years. Minorsky argues that there is no sense talking about the manuscripts without technical tests of paper and ink.

and are always disturbed by seven and four,  
drink wine; I've told you a thousand times:  
there is no second coming--once gone, you're gone.

\* \* \*

There was a drop of water, it merged with the sea.  
There was a speck of dirt, it merged with the earth.  
Your coming into the world is what?  
A fly appearing and disappearing.

\* \* \*

Should the world be arranged for your sake,  
do not incline toward what the learned reject.  
Many such as you go and many come.  
Steal your own share because you will be stolen.

\* \* \*

O wise elder, rise early  
and look carefully at the child sweeping.  
Advise him and say, Gently sweep  
the brains of Kayqobâd and the eyes of Parviz.

\* \* \*

Spring clouds have cleansed the tulip's cheek,  
So rise and fill your cup--the time is right.  
This lawn of grass, your scenery today,  
will spring tomorrow from your dust.

\* \* \*

Last night I dropped and broke my drinking bowl.  
I did this foolish thing while I was drunk.  
The bowl then mutely said to me:  
Like you was I--and you will be like me.

\* \* \*

Since I will not be in this world for long,  
to be without my wine and love is wrong.  
Till when will I have hope and fear of the eternal or created,

which will mean nothing when I am gone?

\* \* \*

It's dawn--so rise, o lovely one.  
Slowly pour wine and play the lute,  
because those here will not for long endure,  
and none of those departed will return.

\* \* \*

The fateful days hold in disgust that man  
who sits upset in sorrow of the days.  
From the crystal cup, drink to the lute's wail,  
before your cup lands on a stone.

\* \* \*

Drink wine: the universe means your demise,  
intends the death of your pure life and mine.  
Be seated on the grass and drink bright wine,  
for here will blooms bloom from your dust and mine.

This ancient caravanserai called the world,  
home of the multicolored steed of night and day,  
is where a hundred Jamshids feasted, and  
a hundred Bahrâms ruled in splendor, and left.

\* \* \*

This jar was once a sad lover too,  
caught in the tangles of a loved one's hair.  
This handle that you see upon its neck  
once, when a hand, caressed a loved one's throat.<sup>2</sup>

'Omar Khayyâm was born in 1048 in Nishâpur, now a small city in the northeastern part of today's Iran. His birth took place as the great Ghaznavid dynasty's rule over the province of Khorasan in which Nishapur was the chief city was ended by the Saljuqs, an even greater dynasty. From the name 'Omar, it is obvious that Khayyâm was a Sunni Moslem by birth. 'Omar was the second Caliph, much despised by Iranian Shi'ites who still

today curse his memory. Since the word *khayyâm* means "tentmaker," perhaps 'Omar Khayyâm's forebears practiced this trade.

In 1055, the Saljuq leader Toghril Beg occupied Baghdâd, thus gaining control over the Moslem Caliphate and Empire. At his death, his nephew Alp-Arslân succeeded to the Saljuq throne, in part through the machinations of Nezâmolmoluk, another famous man from Nishâpur, who was to serve the Saljuqs for over thirty years as a vizier. Alp-Arslân, who ruled from 1063 to 1072, was succeeded by his son Malekshâh who ruled until 1092.

Under Saljuq rule, Khayyâm studied first in Nishâpur and then in Balkh, a major eastern city in today's Afghanistan. From there, he went farther northeast to Samarqand, now in the U.S.S.R., where he wrote a treatise in Arabic on quadrilateral equations, available in Daoud S. Kaser's translation entitled *The Algebra of Omar Khayyâm* (1921). It is the most important of Khayyâm's extant works, ten or so short treatises, none of which offers glimpses into his personality, except to affirm his importance as a mathematician and astronomer whose public views were orthodox.

In Samarqand, Khayyâm was in the employ of a local magistrate and later the ruler of Bokhârâ, which led to his association with Malekshâh's court. Two of the projects on which Khayyâm worked were the construction of an observatory in the Saljuq capital at Esfahân in 1074 and the reform of the existing Persian calendar called "Maleki" after the monarch. The latter project is the autobiographical point to Stanza 57 of FitzGerald's *Rubâiyât*, in which the speaker Khayyâm says:

Ah, but my Computations, People say,  
Reduced the Year to better reckoning?--Nay,  
'Twas only striking from the Calendar  
Unborn tomorrow, and dead Yesterday.

Khayyâm was one of Malekshâh's favorite courtiers, but after the latter's death apparently never held important positions under other Saljuq rulers. In the mid-1090s Khayyâm made a hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and then returned to private life and teaching in Nishâpur. According to the next news of him, he was in Balkh around 1112. Several years later, he was in Marv where the Saljuq Sultan had summoned him to forecast the weather for a hunting expedition. After 1118, when Sanjar became the

sultan, no record exists of anything Khayyâm did. He died in 1131 at some eighty-three years of age.

Besides these few known facts about Khayyâm's life,<sup>3</sup> one can learn a bit more about the man through examining his reputation as recorded by his contemporaries and his personality and views as revealed in his non-poetic writings. As to the former sources, although one can glean some information from contemporary accounts about Khayyâm's scientific

<sup>3</sup>Sadeq Hedâyat, *Taraneh'ha-ye Khayyam* [Songs of Khayyam], 4th printing, (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1963), first published in 1934. Although unavailable in English translation, Hedâyat's seminal study is discussed in Leonard Bogle, "The Khayyamic Influence in *The Blind Owl*, Hedâyat's '*The Blind Owl*' Forty Years After, compiled and edited by Michael Hillmann (Austin, Texas: UT Austin Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1978), pp. 87-98. The collaborative translations by Peter Avery and John Herth-Stubbs called *The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1985, first published by Allen Lane, 1979), pp. 47-82, nos. 1-143, are of Hedâyat's selection of Persian quatrains. The second important Iranian edition of Khayyamic quatrains is the compilation by Mohammad 'Ali Foroughi and Qasem Ghani called *Roba'iyat-e Hakim Khayyam-e Nishaburi* [Quatrains of Hakim Khayyam of Nishapur] (Tehran: Sami, 1942). The Persian texts of the *roba'is* in this edition together with English prose translations are published in *The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam*, translated and introduced by Parichehr Kasra (Delmar, New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1975). Avery and Heath-Stubbs in *Ruba'iyat* ignores Kasra's work and offer new translations of the Forugh--Ghani selections. Kasra's work constitutes the most recent contribution to the perpetuation of several Khayyam myths and exhibits numerous mistranslation, and other verbal infelicities. In support of the myth of "FitzGerald as Translator," Kasra asserts that over 40 quatrains from FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat* are "verse translations" of quatrains in the Foroughi-Ghani collection. At most, then, arguing against her own assertion, Kasra is saying that FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat's* 101 stanzas could be a 40% translation of Khayyam! Typical of that alleged 40% translation are stanzas 11 and 12 of the *Rubaiyat* which comparison with these literal translations of the original Persian quatrains which inspired FitzGerald show that "translation" is not a correct descriptive term for FitzGerald's work: #43--"I know not at all whether He who molded me made me of the folk of paradise or of ugly hell. A bowl (of wine, a beloved, and a harp, along the fringes of a sown field--these three are cash for me, and for thee a credit-paradise." #175--"If a loaf of wheaten bread could be had, two measures of wine and a leg of mutton, together (with a beloved) with tulip cheeks, and in the corner or a garden; it would be a luxury not in the power of every sultan." 'Ali Dashti, *Dami ba Khayyam* [A Moment with Khayyam] (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1965/66), revised and expanded in a 1969 edition. L.P. Elwell-Sutton translated the preface to the second edition together with the text of the first edition in a volume called *In Search of Omar Khayyam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971). Despite problems with Elwell-Sutton's translation, the subject of Michael Hillmann's review (in Persian) in "Dami ba Khayyam" [A Moment with Khayyam], *Rahnema-ye Ketab* 15 (1970/71): 632-644, *In Search of Omar Khayyam* serves adequately as an English representation of recent Iranian research on the subject.

reputation, no contemporary record exists of him as a poet. In fact, his acquaintance Nezâmi 'Aruzi, who visited his grave in Nishâpur around 1135, makes no mention of Khayyâm in the biographical-historical section on Persian poets in the famous prose work called *Four Discourses*, although he does relate two anecdotes about Khayyâm in the section on scientists.<sup>4</sup> The first record of Khayyâm as a poet does not come until nearly fifty years after his death in a chronicle of Islamic world poets in which an Arabic composition is attributed to Khayyâm.<sup>5</sup>

The upshot of Iranian scholarship is that the name 'Omar Khayyâm in conjunction with Persian quatrains has meaning only with reference to a small group of philosophically oriented poems which Khayyâm, never a professional poet, may be presumed to have composed. In view of this, it makes sense to use the name 'Omar Khayyâm in another sense in relation to Persian quatrains, somewhat in the sense that the names of Horace and Juvenal delineate kinds of satire. Assuming that Khayyâm is the actual author of some few poems, one can characterize the sort of quatrain that Iranian scholars attribute to Khayyâm as "Khayyâmic," as opposed to Sufi and romantic love quatrains, for example.

As for the man who made 'Omar Khayyam a household word throughout the world, Edward FitzGerald has generally been viewed either as a minor literary figure whose fame rests on the stroke of good luck at having discovered Khayyam's quatrains or as an inadequate scholar who

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<sup>5</sup>John Andrew Boyle, "Omar Khayyam; Astronomer, Mathematician and Poet," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, volume 4 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 658-664, sketches Kayyam's life and career; while E. S. Kennedy, "The Exact Sciences in Iran under the Saljugs and Mongols," *The Cambridge History of Iran*, volume 5 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 659-679, surveys Khayyam's contributions to science.

Nezami Samarqandi, *Chahar Maqaleh* [Four Discourses], manuscript edited by Mohammad Qazvini, edited by Mohammad Mo'in (Terhan: Zavvar, 1954/5); translated by E.G. Browne as Revised Translation of the *Chahâr Maqála* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1921).

Hedâyat, *Songs of Khayyam*, p. 85, no. 53, and p. 91, no. 72; Dashti, *In Search of Omar Khayyam*, p. 192, no. 28, and p. 194, no. 44.

felt no obligation to produce an accurate translation of his model. The facts are that FitzGerald was singularly equipped and prepared to undertake an English rendering of Khayyamic quatrains, that, in his own words, "very few people have ever taken Pains in Translation as I have," and that on the evidence of relative and enduring appeal of literary works, the *Rubaiyá of Omar Khayyám* is a major work in world literature.

Born in 1809 the seventh child of a distinguished and wealthy Irish family, Edward FitzGerald attended the Grammar School at Bury St. Edwards and Trinity College at Cambridge, where he read widely and received a degree in 1830. After college, with a permanent allowance that made it unnecessary for him ever to work for a living, FitzGerald took a short trip to Paris, lived in London, and spent much time in the country as well. When in the city, he spent time on walks and visits with relatives and friends. Reading was a prime activity wherever he was. In addition, he consciously practiced plain living. Thackeray and Tennyson were among his friends, and FitzGerald followed their literary careers closely. The fact that they composed works with Middle Eastern themes, the former producing *The Tremendous Adventures of Major Gahagan* and the latter *Reflections of the Arabian Nights* and *Nadir Shah*, is a reminder that FitzGerald's subsequent fascination with Persian literature was typical of the influence things oriental had in nineteenth-century English intellectual and literary life.

In 1837 FitzGerald moved into a cottage outside the gates of the family estate near Bredfeld where he lived in apparent serenity, reading, writing, and enjoying the country. There he became friends with the Quaker poet Bernard Barton and George Crabbe, vicar of Bredfeld and the poet's son. In 1840 FitzGerald attended Carlyle's lectures on "Heroes and Hero Worship." In 1845 FitzGerald met Edward Cowell, who at nineteen years of age had already established himself as an orientalist with his translations of Persian poetry. A frequent visitor at the Suffolk cottage of Cowell and his wife, FitzGerald there began to work on Spanish, traditional ballads, and a play by Calderon.

FitzGerald's first published book, an edition of the *Poems and Letters of Bernard Barton*, appeared in 1849. Significantly, it was more a free adaptation than an edition in that FitzGerald reduced nine volumes of writing to 200 pages. In 1851, again without his name, FitzGerald published *Euphanor, A Dialogue on Youth*, a criticism of contemporary English education in the form of a Platonic dialogue. His next work, which

appeared in 1852, was *Polonius: A Collection of Wise Saws and Modern Instances*, an anthology of quotations on such topics as honesty, liberty, vanity, and charity. By the end of 1852, when the Cowells had moved to Oxford, FitzGerald had translated one of Calderon's plays. The following year appeared *Six Dramas of Calderon*, a selection designed, in FitzGerald's words, to give a fair idea of Calderon's Spanish life with the English text diverging from the Spanish wherever it suited FitzGerald's taste.

At Oxford in 1853, Cowell recommended to FitzGerald that he begin studying Persian. FitzGerald began with Sir William Jones' *Grammar of the Persian Language*, which features Jones' "A Persian Song," the famous free translation of Hâfez's "Turk of Shiraz" ghazal.<sup>6</sup> FitzGerald proceeded to read Hâfez closely, and by October 1853 he was translating Sa'di. In the same year, Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*, the second most famous English poem based on a Persian model, was first published. For the next eighteen months FitzGerald studied Persian and Persian poetry. In 1856 he published his version of the Sufi allegory *Salaman and Absal* by the famous Persian poet Jami (d. 1492).

Shortly before Cowell left England for India in 1856, he and FitzGerald together read some Khayyamic quatrains copied from a Persian manuscript in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. By early 1857 FitzGerald had worked more on Hâfez, read Jami's *Joseph and Zolaykha* and Nezami's *Seven Portraits*, most of 'Attâr's *Conference of Birds*, and had looked at some of Rumi's *Spiritual Couplets*. He seemed to be deciding upon a particular Persian poet on whom to work more deeply. By late March 1857 he narrowed his choice to Hâfez and 'Omar Khayyam, whom he characterized as ringing like true metal. Shortly thereafter, he prepared over thirty Latin quatrains based on the Bodleian manuscript of quatrains attributed to Khayyam. In the middle of June 1857, FitzGerald received a copy of a second Khayyam manuscript which Cowell had discovered in Calcutta.

In the next six months FitzGerald's "translated" many of the quatrains in the two manuscripts and was experiencing a real affinity to the Khayyamic mood and point of view. In March 1859, the first edition of the *Rubaiyât* appeared. After this first edition of the *Rubaiyât*, FitzGerald did not appear publicly in print until Quaritch issued the expanded second

edition in 1868. He was not, however, idle during these nine years. He finished his translation of 'Attar's *Conference of Birds* which remained unpublished until after his death. He also translated two more plays of Calderon, one of them being the famous *La Vida es Sueno*, of which FitzGerald's *Such Stuff as Dreams are Made On* is a radical reconstruction.

FitzGerald's later literary activities included a collection of material for a vocabulary of provincial English, and the printing of glossaries for *Suffolk Sea Words and Phrases*. In 1876 he published a version of the *Agamemnon*. In 1880 and 1881 his translations of Sophocles were privately distributed. In 1882 Quaritch published FitzGerald's *Readings in Crabbe*.

During his last years FitzGerald was working on selections from Dryden's *Prefaces* and a dictionary for Sevigne's correspondence. A projected biography of Charles Lamb went no further than a brief chronology of the essayist's life. A prodigious letter writer throughout his adult life, FitzGerald's letters were posthumously collected and published in several multi-volume editions.

This brief thumbnail sketch of Edward FitzGerald's life demonstrates that the author of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* was a relatively competent Persianist and an intellectual very much in tune with his own age. As for his world-famous poem, one can expect from the poet a fair

life of this fictional title character, who is the poem's speaker. FitzGerald's poem opens at dawn and closes at dusk on this particular day, which the speaker spends brooding about things in the tavern outside of whose doors he stands impatiently at the poem's beginning.

FitzGerald's representation of a day in the life of its title character exhibits four moods or phases. The first section of the poem (stanzas 1-24) establishes the setting and voices both *carpe diem* and *eheu fugaces* themes. In the much quoted stanzas 11 and 12 appears Khayyâm's most positive statement of possible earthly happiness for human individuals:

11

With me along the strip of Herbage strown  
That just divides the desert from the sown,  
Where name of Slave and Sultan is forgot--  
And Peace to Mahmud on his golden Throne!

12

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread--and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness--  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

He asserts that the simple life of adequate sustenance (bread), shelter (tree), art (verses, singing), and companionship (thou) could make a sort of paradise out of an idyllic setting. These stanzas represent the speaker's attempt to think of the world as a paradise garden, as distinct from a sown field, which is what results from man's impact on the environment, and from a desert, which is presumably the pristine world as created. But Khayyâm is unable to maintain this faith in happiness in a world envisaged as a garden because of the fact of impending individual death that his musing about the great figures in the Middle Eastern historical and mythological past impresses upon him. Still, nostalgia about the past offers the speaker a sense of comfort, and he can conclude the first section of the poem with a realistic appraisal of life as worth living to the fullest despite its limitations and imperfections:

24

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,  
Before we too into the Dust descend:

Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie,  
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and--sans End!

The poet-speaker turns in the second section (stanzas 25-54) to man's attempts to deal with the world, i.e., Khayyâm's reflections on the world as a sown field. These attempts he verbalizes as the efforts made in the realms of science and religion to explain life's secrets and the meaning of things. The vision of the world as a possible garden has fled the field of his mind's eye, and he deals with the realization of the inadequacy of religion and science to make sense of an indifferent and predetermined world through making light of the findings and pretensions of both science and religion.

25

Alike for those who for TO-DAY prepare,  
And those that after some TO-MORROW stare,  
A Muezzin from the Tower of Darkness cries:  
'Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There.'

26

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd  
Of the Two Worlds so wisely--they are thrust  
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn  
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

Of course, mocking others' failures does not resolve his problem. So, in the third section of the poem (stanzas 55-81) Khayyâm recognizes that the world is really a desert, as opposed to a garden or a sown field. It is an unsympathetic, ultimately lethal environment in which individual human beings are at the mercy of the force that brought them into existence. The poet-speaker rages--he has presumably had a lot to drink by this time of day--at the injustice of the human condition and holds Allâh to blame for human shortcomings:

78

What! out of senseless Nothing to provoke  
A conscious Something to resent the yoke  
Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain  
Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke!

79

What! from his helpless Creature be repaid  
Pure Gold for what he lent him dross-allay'd--  
Sue for a Debt we never did contract,  
And cannot answer--Oh, the sorry trade!

80

O Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin  
Beset the Road I was to wander in,  
Thou wilt not with Predestin'd Evil round  
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin!

81

O Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,  
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake:  
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man  
Is blacken'd--Man's forgiveness give--and take!

Then, in the fourth and final section of the poem (stanzas 82-101) the poet-speaker reflects more calmly on the human predicament. The day is nearly over as he reviews his thoughts. The world, he knows, is a desert which his imagination cannot turn into a garden. Nor can human ingenuity in the forms of great governments, scientific enterprises, philosophical inquiry or religious faith turn the world into a sown field. The poet-speaker expresses regrets at the inexorability of the passage of time, the loss of youth and the inevitability of impending death beyond which, his logic has proved for him, there can be no afterlife, just as there has never been a just God:

96

Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!  
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!  
The Nightingale that in the branches sang,  
Ah whence, and whither flown again, who knows!

97

Would but the Desert of the Fountain yield  
One glimpse--if dimly, yet indeed reveal'd  
To which the fainting Traveller might spring,  
As springs the trampled herbage of the field!

98

Would but some winged Angel ere too late

Arrest the yet unfolded Roll of Fate,  
And make the stern Recorder otherwise  
Enregister, or quite obliterate!

99

Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire  
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,  
Would not we shatter it to bits--and then  
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

Khayyâm expresses these regrets maturely, almost courageously as an individual willing to stand alone without false hopes, props or opiates. In a sense, he accepts the view that he expressed toward the end of the first section of the poem (stanza 24), now better understood by himself and through him by the reader. Of course, Khayyâm's reflections as the poem proceeds are not without confusion. He is naturally hard put to find a satisfying answer to his questions about life's meaning especially under the pressure of the fact that his own individual bird of time has long since begun to flutter (stanza 7). The reappearance and restatement of issues and questions throughout the poem, as well as its meandering qualities as a monologue, may persuade readers that Khayyâm will face the same questions again tomorrow, and the day after. This does not make him less of an individualist standing on his own; but it does imply that in the cultural history of individualistic Iranians, there are no final or permanent answers. Such individualists are likely to struggle throughout life with the dilemmas posed once they reject material progress and religion. Of course, in FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*, Khayyâm would really like to be able to forget everything, to be relieved of his anxieties. He drinks not with the classic *carpe diem* purposes of enjoying a transient life to the fullest at the moment and of finding a love with whom to enjoy that moment, but rather to escape from the present, to deaden his perceptions and senses, and to drown out the thought of death.<sup>7</sup>

This Khayyâmic escape from the present through the reduction of one's capacity to feel may be philosophical in its inspiration, but it seems to parallel the reaction to the facts of the political present in the case of a

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<sup>7</sup>Joanna Richardson, *Edward FitzGerald* (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1960), on which the following biographical sketch is largely based, is a handy starting point.

startling number of modernist literary figures around the world. Khayyâm obviously seems to fail in his attempts to avoid facing the facts of life; but still he is honest about his failure, and will begin anew on the morrow.

As individualistic as Khayyâm is in FitzGerald's *Rubaiyât* and even in his rejection of religious and other establishment values associated with Iranian culture, he nevertheless sees and represents things in Iranian terms. For Khayyâm, the physical *Irânzamin* is transmuted into a cultural homeland of the imagination of the medieval Persian intellectual. In that mental homeland live David, Moses, Jamshid and Bâhram Gur and Mahmud of Ghazneh, Zoroastrian priests and Sufi *pirs* [elders], the mountains, plains, salt deserts, caravanserais, bazaars, Islamic schools, and the like. He may reject Zoroastrianism and Islam as faith systems, but he is sensitive to them as images bound together distinctively in his Persian Iranian culture of the Saljuq era. When the contemporary Iranian intellectual and social critic Jalâl Al-e Ahmad argues that the bases of Iranianness in the latter half of the twentieth century are Shi'i Islam, the Persian language, and Iranian cultural traditions, he may mean them as literal, narrowly construed facets of Iranianness. But even the Iranian Zoroastrian or Turkish-speaking Azarbâyjâni deals today with Iranian life in terms created and maintained through Islam and the Persian language. Khayyâm's Iranian world was that of Islam and what preceded it, with Arabic and Persian elements, in a physically distinctive Iranian environment. And the cultural nationalism that he displays toward the features of this environment as evidenced by the images used in FitzGerald's *Rubaiyât* remains true of educated Iranians today, even those who are secular-minded. The texture of imagery in Hedâyât's *The Blind Owl* is a good example.

The influence of the physical environment in this Khayyâmic cultural nationalism is also Iranian. It is the nature of the Iranian plateau region, with its difficult terrain and harsh climate of cold winters, hot summers, and general aridity, but with a springtime which in its greenness gives Iranians a glimpse of an ideal, that prompts Iranian poets to attempt to see the world in garden terms. After all, that would make Iran perfect, heavenly in fact. But the lessons of the physical environment offered through avalanches, earthquakes, springtime floods, and the brown barrenness make the poet wary of claims that human endeavor can change the environment into a "sown" field. On the other hand, the land naturally has been a hotbed for the development of religions because its inhabitants

seem easily disposed to think of their world as a desert, as a desolate environment prompting them to put faith in a god to save them or at least to provide for them or to repay them in a hereafter for suffering in the desert.

The special appeal of Iranian springtime as the ideal moment in the year is not lost on FitzGerald's *Khayyâm*. In stanza 7, he urges that the "winter-garment of Repentance" be flung "in the fire of Spring," while he observes, in stanza 4, "the New Year reviving old Desires." *Khayyâm*'s point in the latter allusion has to do with the fact that the Iranian new year, called *nowruz* [new day] in Persian, occurs each year on the vernal equinox, the very beginning of spring, March 21st usually.

The Iranian New Year is the most joyous moment in the Iranian calendar. Preparations for it begin with spring house cleaning and the purchase or sewing of new clothes. On the last Tuesday evening of the old year, a ceremony is held at which people jump over small fires, imploring as they do so that the yellow sallowness of the old year be drawn from them and that the red life of the new year become theirs. On New Year's eve, there is a formal dinner, with a special fish platter not served at other times during the year. Throughout the New Year celebrations, a special collection of objects, seven of them whose names begin with the letter 's,' is displayed on a table or mantelpiece. *Nowruz* is a time for family togetherness, visits to friends, and vacation trips. Traditionally, employees are given a special bonus at this time. Schools and offices close for a week or two. The last official event in the celebration occurs on the thirteenth day of the New Year, when everyone makes an effort to leave their homes and get to the countryside for a picnic. They take with them on this excursion the greens they have grown at home during the holiday, that are now thrown away, presumably absorbing all of the old atmosphere in the home.

The relevance of spring and the Iranian New Year for the Persianist is manifold. The description of spring happens to be the most popular aspect of nature depicted in Persian verse throughout history. In addition, spring is the season of romantic love, the most depicted emotional state in Persian poetry. The two images coalesce in the following typical poem by *Qatrân*, an eleventh-century *Azarbâyjâni* poet:

The New Year's festival comes once each year for one day;  
in seeing you I have a perpetual New Year's.

The rose bush is full of roses for one day;  
in your face a rose ever blooms for me.  
I can pick violets from the garden for one day;  
your thick tresses are violets always.  
The narcissus appears on the plains one week only;  
your eyes are narcissus visible all year long.  
The narcissus is not fresh if not wide awake;  
your black narcissi are ever fresh asleep or awake.  
The jasmine appears in spring; on the hyacinth  
of your hair are jasmine night and day.<sup>8</sup>

Because Khayyâm himself realizes that he cannot maintain his springtime garden life, what is ultimately most significant about the Khayyâmic view for Iranian intellectuals today is the individualistic, non-establishment skepticism it voices. Throughout Iranian history, literary Iranians have seemed to feel special appreciation for other Iranians who refuse to accept the view of the powers that be and who live their own lives. In twentieth-century Iran, Khayyâm has been mythologized into a figure quite different from what the known facts about his biography imply. But no matter, the view is that he bucked the tide of religious orthodoxy and dared to say what many Iranians feel in their heart of hearts: that answers which governments give about human and social progress buttressed with technology and science and the answers offered by religion neglect to account for that occasional or perhaps frequent flash of insight to the effect that the only meaning to human life lies in the individual lives of human beings. 'Omar Khayyâm remains a hero for many secular-minded Iranian intellectuals for this reason.

Over a century after Khayyâm's death appeared a literary work which presents an opposite Iranian stance, that of the literary intellectual who survives by adjusting to the powers that be and living personally and artistically within existing social and political constraints. In addition, the work, which is called *Golestân* [The Rose Garden] (1258), represents another and contrary Iranian view of the ideal garden and human mortality. *The Rose Garden* is the most famous and imitated work of Persian prose in history. And its author Sa'di (c.1215-c.1290) is the acknowledged master stylist of Persian prose and verse in the classical

period. More about Sa'di as a poet appears in the next chapter, while here a brief description of his *Rose Garden* and its cultural significance seems an appropriate balance to the already represented Khayyâmic view and stance.

Sa'di lived in a particularly violent and difficult age. Shortly after his birth the first wave of Mongol invasions devastated much of the Iranian plateau, although his home town of Shirâz was spared because of an accommodation between a regional dynasty and the Mongols. Sa'di travelled widely in youth and became a court poet and writer. He chose his pen name "Sa'di" in honor of a royal patron to whom he dedicated his *Rose Garden*. A second Mongol wave led by Changiz Khân's grandson Hulagu brought the Baghdad Caliphate to its end in 1258, the year in which Sa'di completed *The Rose Garden*. In every regard, Sa'di's was an age in which survivors had to be realistic, make compromise, and espouse a utilitarian ethics and in which the death and destruction wreaked on much of Iran inevitably encouraged literary Iranians to turn to religion either for an explanation of such inexplicable events or surcease from them.

Sa'di's stylistic brilliance and practical outlook make him a more typical literary Iran than the mythologized individualistic and heterodox Khayyâm. But a consequence in modern times has been mixed feelings on the part of some readers, much impressed by Sa'di's mastery of Persian and somewhat disappointed at his accommodating style of professional life.

As for his *Rose Garden*, a work which brought Sa'di popularity during the Age of the Enlightenment and special appreciation on the part of such American Transcendentalists as Emerson and Thoreau, it presents an Iranian world with monarchy at its fore and, through anecdotal prose tales interspersed with apposite verses, advocates a commonsensical dervish life style for its readers. Both its recognition of the centrality of the patriarch monarch in Iranian life and its didactic tone are significantly typical of pre-modern Persian literature. But what is more significant in the context of the Khayyâmic view of the ideal life and world and his concomitant skepticism is Sa'di's vision of the organizing image and metaphor of his work, the rose garden.

Sa'di's *Rose Garden* promises to bloom forever, to offer its readers permanent springtime throughout the year and a refuge from the harsh climate and facts of life beyond the book. In this light, *The Rose Garden* serves purposes similar to other important Iranian art forms and monuments, among them the paradise garden in stone represented by the Apadana at Persepolis, the heavenly garden depicted in many traditional

Persian pile carpet patterns, the decorative elements in many pre-modern illuminated manuscripts, and actual formal Persian gardens with their distinctive communication of perfect order, rationality, and tranquillity, qualities that Iranian life beyond those walled enclosures presumably did not often offer. It is no exaggeration to suggest that almost every work in imaginative Persian literature needs at least momentary appreciation as its author's reflection of views about the ideal Iranian world as a paradise garden, as a potentially enduring *nowruz* [new year]. At the same time, Sa'di sees his *Rose Garden* as a means by which he might survive. In other words, he expects to live through his art and the good name it will give him forever.