

FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*: A Victorian Invention

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(Signed)

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Abbreviations

- Letters** *The Letters of Edward FitzGerald*, 4 vols. ed. Alfred Mckinley Terhune and Annabelle Burdick Terhune, Princeton: University New Jersey, 1980.
- Life** *The Life of Edward FitzGerald*, Alfred Mckinley Terhune, London: Yale University Press, 1947.
- Rubáiyát** *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, 4th ed. E. FitzGerald, London: B. Quaritch, 1879.
- Works** *The Variorum and Definitive Edition of the Poetical and Prose Writings of Edward FitzGerald*, 7 vols. ed. George Bentham, New York: Phaeton Press, 1967.
- Whinfield** *The Quatrains of Omar Khayyam*, 2nd. ed. E. H. Whinfield, London: Octago Press, 1980.

Everybody became my friend out of his own surmise,
None sought to discover the secrets in my heart,
My secret indeed is not remote from my lament,
But Eye and Ear lack the light to perceive it.

(Rûmi, “the Song of the Reed”)

(tr. A. J. Arberry, *Tales from the Masnavi*, 21)

Abstract

This study was written in the belief that FitzGerald did not so much translate a poem as invent a persona based on the Persian astronomer and mathematician (but *not* poet) Omar Khayyám. This “invention” opened two different lines of interpretation and scholarship, each forming its own idea of a “real” Omar based on FitzGerald’s invention. One line sees Omar as a hedonist and nihilist; the other as a mystic or Sufi. My argument first is that the historical Omar was neither the former nor the latter; second, FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* is a “Victorian” product even if the raw material of the poem belongs to the eleventh-century Persia.

The **Introduction** tries to find a place for the *Rubáiyát* in the English nineteenth-century era.

Chapter One sets FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* in perspective. First, it surveys the general background and context to the lives and careers of Edward FitzGerald and Omar Khayyám in order to show how FitzGerald’s life was affected by some of the main concerns of the period; and that Omar was neither a hedonist nor a mystic; Secondly, it surveys four major critical studies which have generated different approaches to and emphases in the study and the translation of the *rubáiyát* attributed to Omar Khayyám.

Chapter Two reviews some examples of Persian language and literature as they were perceived by British readers and authors and shows the reception of Persian poetry in general up to and including the Victorian period. Then it traces FitzGerald’s progress with Persian literature, showing how the other Persian poets he read influenced his understanding or “creation” of the *Rubáiyát*, and how he discarded the great Persian poets but retained Omar Khayyám as “his property.”

Chapter Three traces FitzGerald’s career as a translator and attempts to give general characteristics of Victorian poetry to show how FitzGerald’s version can be seen a Victorian product. Study of the poetry of the period shows the heterogeneity of Victorian poetry and FitzGerald’s poem is another example of this multiplicity. The *Rubáiyát* should be read as a revolt against general Victorian values: optimism, earnestness, Puritanism, and science development.

Chapter Four accounts for the initial neglect of the poem and then for the popular reception of the *Rubáiyát* by the Pre-Raphaelites and shows aspects in particular appealed to his contemporaries (like R. Browning) which, in turn, is a way of measuring the success of FitzGerald’s “Victorian” invention.

Introduction

The third and final edition of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* to be published in his life time appeared in 1879. Another edition, however, published posthumously in 1889, reflected revisions that FitzGerald had made before he died. Since the revised edition of 1879, various translators have translated FitzGerald's "Epicurean Eclogue" (as he himself described it) into different languages. A. G. Potter in his *Bibliography of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* records some fifty different languages by 1929.¹ The extraordinary popularity of FitzGerald's rendering of the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám generated a significant academic interest in the works and renderings of quatrains ascribed to Omar Khayyám as well as in the relation between the quatrains and the works as a whole (about thirty editions in English before the end of the nineteenth century). Some scholars have attempted to challenge Omar's authorship of the rubáiyát and produce a more authentic version of the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám. Others, however, have worked on the faithfulness of FitzGerald's translation and some of these again have tried to create a more authentic version.

Nevertheless, what was significant to FitzGerald was neither the authenticity of the quatrains nor their literal translation, but something that existed for him *in* those scattered quatrains: something out of which he wished to "tessellate"² a beautiful eclogue which would "breathe a sort of consolation" to him. In those quatrains FitzGerald found certain doubts, fears, disillusionments and consolations which troubled a poet or poets centuries ago in Persia. He found in them a new voice for his age, the Victorian period: a

¹ A. G. Potter, *Bibliography of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (London: Ingpen and Grant, 1929) ix.

² According to the OED "tessellate" means "to make into a mosaic; to form a mosaic upon, adorn with mosaic; to construct (esp. a pavement) by combing variously coloured blocks so as to form a pattern." Forming a pattern refers appropriately to what FitzGerald did with the Persian quatrains. Interestingly

convenient voice with which he intended to express the agnosticism and nihilism which he felt as the major threat to the human spirit in his own scientifically minded time. As a voice of this new age, FitzGerald tried, through Omar as his *persona*, to express the scepticism which was later admired by the Pre-Raphaelites, and since then has been both admired and condemned by so many others. In this respect, FitzGerald was the forerunner and almost the guide of those rebels who did not share the current optimism.

There is enough evidence, both in FitzGerald's letters and in Persian scholarship, to suggest that it was FitzGerald himself who constructed the Omar he "found" in the quatrains: the passionate sceptic who wakes up at dawn sober and contemplative, but who as he thinks and drinks grows savage and blasphemous, until finding himself unable to solve the riddle of his existence he finally sobers back into melancholy at nightfall. Such a subject as well as this structure is entirely FitzGerald's invention; it is absent from the quatrains attributed not only to Omar Khayyám but also to any other Persian poets. Omar owes the very nature of his reputation as a poet in both the west and the east to FitzGerald's new version. In other words, without FitzGerald's so-called *Rubáiyát* there would only have been Omar Khayyám, an astronomer and mathematician, who occasionally uttered a few quatrains as a diversion when he became tired of his scientific activities. Edward Byles Cowell (1826-1903), FitzGerald's Persian teacher, to whom FitzGerald was indebted for his first acquaintance with the rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, had a completely different view from FitzGerald's of Omar and his rubáiyát. Cowell was eventually convinced that the poem was mystical and that Omar Khayyám was a Sufi. In contrast, FitzGerald perceived Omar Khayyám as a hedonist and a "material Epicurean" as FitzGerald called him in his preface to the second edition.

enough the OED cites FitzGerald's reference to his art thus: "It is most ingeniously tessellated into a sort of Epicurean Eclogue in a Persian Garden (1858)."

My project, then, entails at least a preliminary attempt to differentiate between the historical Omar Khayyám and the Omar of the quatrains in order to concentrate on FitzGerald's reception of Khayyám's work and the way in which his translation can be seen as "Victorian". The major Victorian writers – for example, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle – lived in an age of profound spiritual unrest brought about mainly by the new discoveries of science and the "Higher Criticism"; an age when the traditional institutions – religious, social, and political – were challenged from every corner. These writers were severe critics of their times and of life and all attempted, in one way or another, to establish new spiritual bases for their modern life. To begin with, the Victorian age might be regarded as an age of religion, since it took religious doubt so seriously. In other words, religion was present in every aspect of life, whether in social issues or in education. This age had to face sceptical controversy on an unprecedented scale, witnessing dramatic challenges to religious belief which led to internal theological controversy. The chief debates were generally between the Utilitarians, the followers of Jeremy Bentham (1772-1832), and the followers of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Utilitarianism, developed by James and John Stuart Mill from Bentham's principle, stressed the idea that all reform, whether political or social, religious or secular, should be done with regard to this principle: "It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong." This philosophy questioned the utility of "faith" and thus paved the way for the growth of scepticism and positivism. Set against this was the thought of Coleridge, which stressed the importance of "imagination" as the higher form of reason: as reason not only in the sense of intellectual reasoning, but in the sense of an activity of the whole soul of man, including intellect, understanding, and feelings. The religious debates started from the

problem of the nature of the church. The Oxford movement of the 1830s, led by J. H. Newman, J. Keble, and E. B. Pusey, all fellows of Oxford colleges, was a movement toward High Church principles within the church of England, emphasising the “Catholic” side of the church and its authority as ordained by Christ. The Broad Church enjoyed the support of Coleridge, and was open to the recent advances in ideas, particularly in biblical criticism. In the nineteenth century the Higher Criticism examined the Bible as a historical and literary text, ignoring its spiritual value. The Low Church or Evangelical movement put less stress on church rituals and the sacraments and more emphasis on personal experience: “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”³

Apart from the clashes within the Church and its Roman tendency, the growth of “infidelity” or “agnosticism” was another element of the Victorian debate. The word “agnosticism”, according to the OED, was later coined by T. H. Huxley, a follower and disciple of Darwin. This temper originated from different sources. The most significant element was the so-called “Higher Criticism”, as practiced most famously by David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74), a German scholar and theologian, who denied the spiritual value and supernatural elements of the Bible in *Das Leben Jesu* (1835-60), translated into English by George Eliot in 1846.

Under these circumstances, the major Victorian writers could be expected to have a prophetic role and to be very earnest in their mission. The pattern of Victorian thought can be seen in the poetry of the period; its poets can be regarded as among the best interpreters of the age. FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* was itself a poetic product of the same age and is no exception to the general trend of thought of the period. Yet his *Rubáiyát* should also be read as a revolt against certain widely-held Victorian values: optimism, earnestness, Puritanism, and scientific development. So in a sense,

³ W. Wilberforce, *A Pratical View* (Glasgow: W. Collins, 1797) 441-44.

FitzGerald is both Victorian and anti-Victorian. The initial neglect of his poem can partly be ascribed to this rebelliousness, and the progress of its reception corresponds to the gradual changes in the thought of the Victorians. The romantic melancholy of the *Rubáiyát* anticipated the pessimistic poetry of Arnold and James Thomson, and its Epicurean aspects suggested a growing mood of *fin-de-siècle*, exemplified in the writings of Swinburne and Pater.

This thesis is organised along the following lines. In Chapter One, I discuss the general background and context to the lives and careers of Edward FitzGerald and Omar Khayyám, concluding with a survey of the key earlier works of scholarship in this field. Chapter Two discusses the rise of interest in Persian literature in the West, and also the rise of interest in Persian literature in FitzGerald himself, with consideration of other Persian poets. The third chapter sets out the key reasons for regarding FitzGerald's poem as an unhistorical invention, and a Victorian poem rather than a translation of an old Persian one. The final chapter considers the subsequent fate of FitzGerald's poem as a work of its time and our time.

Chapter One

FitzGerald and His Invention

This chapter sets FitzGerald's poem in perspective. It first considers some aspects of FitzGerald's life as it was affected by some of the main concerns of the Victorian period. Then it considers the life and historical background of Omar Khayyám to show that the historical Omar was neither a hedonist or nihilist nor a mystic or a sufi; rather the *persona* in the *Rubáiyát* is FitzGerald's invention. Finally it surveys four major critical studies which have generated different approaches to and emphases in the study and translation of the rubáiyát attributed to Omar Khayyám. This survey suggests how deeply FitzGerald's invention has influenced subsequent "Omar Khayyám" scholarship.

1.1) FitzGerald's literary career and milieu

Despite its reputation for conventionality, England in the nineteenth century was a home for eccentrics. Edward FitzGerald belonged to such a company. His life spanned the nineteenth century: perhaps the greatest age of prosperity and transition that Britain has known. He was born on 31 March 1809 as Edward Purcell, the seventh of eight children in an Irish family living in the White House near Bredfield Village, Suffolk. His parents, who were first cousins, were Irish landowning gentry. His mother was the heir to numerous estates and fortunes. She was descended from one of the most distinguished Anglo-Norman families in Ireland and the family had adopted the capital G in their own names in order to show their Irish origin. Mrs. FitzGerald had no real love of country life and her married life was unstable. She was imperious and lived lavishly. She was not only often separated from her family but also indifferent to them. She had transferred the focus of her life to one of the most expensive addresses in

London, Portland Place. In London, she devoted her time to the theatre and the opera. For her trips between London and Bredfield, Mrs. FitzGerald was driven in a yellow coach drawn by four black horses. FitzGerald and his brothers used to hide in the shrubbery to watch their mother's arrival as if she were a guest. She overshadowed her husband; people referred to him as "Mrs. FitzGerald's husband": which indeed he had become by taking her name. The poet's father, moreover, could hardly fill the gap when their mother was away from home, because he had his own business to attend to. FitzGerald disliked his mother's luxurious style of life, devoid of any connection with her family. He felt that his family was different from others and regretted that he could not introduce his friends to his family:

I should be glad to get your acquaintance for my family, but we are different from other people, and I never have introduced any of my friends to my Father or Mother, as it is quite out of their way. We have absolutely no society whatever.¹

It is probable that FitzGerald's extreme shyness and reclusiveness – he was dubbed by his friend W. B. Donne "the Prince of Quietists"² – were reactions against his mother's gregariousness and sociability. He said of his mother later:

My Mother used to come up sometimes, and we Children were not much comforted. She was a remarkable woman . . . and as I constantly believe in outward Beauty as an Index of a Beautiful Soul within, I used sometimes to wonder what feature in her fine face betrayed what was not so good in her Character. I think (as usual) the Lips: there was a twist of

¹ *Letters* i: 94; to Allen, 15 March 1831.

² Quietism (or Molinism) stressed "withdrawal from worldly interests and passive meditation on God and divine things." (*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 1984).

Mischief about them now and then, like in the Tail of a Cat! –
otherwise so smooth and amiable.³

These remarks suggest the dominant influence of his mother in the family and how FitzGerald and his brothers and sisters were in awe of their mother. It is probable that FitzGerald's avoidance of marriage and his indifference to femininity are due to his unhappy experience of his parents' unhappy married life, and especially his mother's behaviour.

FitzGerald, like so many children, had his own boyhood hero, in this case a family friend, Major Edward Moor (1771-1848). Moor had a great influence on FitzGerald's eventual Orientalism as well as on his agnosticism. He was a retired Anglo-Indian officer and a student of Oriental literature who knew Persian well. He had published an authoritative work on Hindu deities, *The Hindu Pantheon* (1810). He had also published *Suffolk Words and Phrases* (1823) and *Oriental Fragments* (1834). Moor was a member of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta in 1796, of the Royal Society in 1806, and of the Society of Antiquaries in 1818.⁴ Moor invited the small shy Edward FitzGerald on walks. He talked to FitzGerald as if they were equals in age. Their talks were mostly about Suffolk dialects; this helped to provoke FitzGerald's interest in language. These talks later led FitzGerald to produce a dictionary on *Sea Words and Phrases*. He began by collecting a vocabulary of 'rural English, or rustic English: that is, only the best Country Words selected from the very many Glossaries.'⁵ Then he contributed these words to *The East Anglian* (1868-70); and finally he distributed them among his friends in pamphlets under the name of *Sea Words and Phrases*.

³ *Letters* iii: 331; to Fanny Kemble 27 February 1872.

⁴ Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., *Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 vols (London: Smith, Elder, 1909) xiii: 782.

⁵ *Letters* ii: 319; to Cowell, 3 September 1858.

Moor disliked the clergy and on the whole had agnostic tendencies. At the same time, he collected small statues of gods of all shapes and sizes. FitzGerald's doubting temper was no doubt partly formed by the influence of this particular hero, his statues and his anticlerical disposition. Of Moor's death, FitzGerald wrote to Allen: "My old friend Major Moor died rather suddenly last Saturday: and this next Sunday is to be buried in the Church to which he used to take me when I was a boy. He has not left a better man behind him."⁶

FitzGerald was sent to King Edward's School at Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk. According to FitzGerald's biographer, it was one of the best schools in England. The students owed their success to the encouragement and endeavours of their headmaster, Dr. Benjamin Heath Malkin. The humour and integrity of Dr. Malkin, as well as the mutual respect between students and teacher, had won their affection. Although the discipline of the school was agreeable to FitzGerald and its courses suited his talents, he proved to be an erratic student. The place where he was most likely to be found was at the door – so he could be the first to leave the classroom. In 1826 he went to Cambridge to enrol at Trinity College.

It is noteworthy that he was not concerned about current political issues even if his best friends (W. B. Donne, J. Allen, J. M. Kemble) were members of the "Cambridge Conversazione Society", known to its members as "The Apostles" or "The Society." The society succeeded in bringing together a group of distinguished undergraduates such as Alfred Tennyson, A. H. Hallam, Richard Monckton Milnes and Frederick Denison Maurice. The society had weekly meetings in which literature and abstruse problems of philosophy and theology were usually discussed. Peter Allen in his *The Cambridge*

⁶ *Letters* i: 596; 2 March 1848.

Apostles: the Early Years points out that FitzGerald and Thackeray were among the most talented and promising young men elected to the Society.⁷ Yet not much is known about the details of FitzGerald's involvement in the society's activities.

In his spare time, FitzGerald preferred to walk, talk, smoke, drink, draw sketches and sing rather than to involve himself with current political and theological issues. In spite of his shyness, he became a member of a musical society called "Camus" and played the piano in the society. On the whole, life at Cambridge suited FitzGerald's temperament; he was able to make friends and read widely without feeling any pressure to get a pass degree. In the end with the help of his tutor, W. Williams, he took his degree in 1830. During his last days at Trinity, his tutor introduced him to a freshman named William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63). FitzGerald found Thackeray to his liking; Thackeray's sincerity and humour fascinated FitzGerald. They were both carefree and humorous. Both spent much time drawing sketches. Their late acquaintance led to a deep and life-long friendship. Thackeray became "old Thack" and FitzGerald became "Ned", "Yedward", or "Teddibus." Both believed that academic responsibilities should not be taken seriously but should simply be a part of life. In spite of their similarities in character, on one matter they disagreed. FitzGerald disliked the lavish and ostentatious way of living favoured by his mother, while Thackeray approved of her life style, as he depicted it in *Vanity Fair*. That is why of all FitzGerald's friends, only Thackeray knew Mrs. FitzGerald and used to attend her dinner parties in London, the parties FitzGerald never attended.

On his last day in Cambridge, FitzGerald spent a long time with John Allen. Allen (1810-86), who was to become a close friend and "dear preacher" of FitzGerald, as

⁷ Peter Allen, *The Cambridge Apostles: The Early Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978) 136-37.

FitzGerald called him, entered Cambridge two years after FitzGerald. Allen later became the Archdeacon of Salop. He was very tolerant in matters involving nonconformists. At night the students had arranged a party for FitzGerald in Allen's room. When everybody left, Allen wrote in his diary, "[I] talked when alone with FitzGerald on serious subjects and begged him to think about religion, promised me he would – gave him Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying* – pray God that it might be of service to him.⁸ According to Allen's diary FitzGerald was "melancholy" as he left Cambridge the following morning. After leaving Cambridge, he spent his time moving around, staying with relatives and friends and tried to stick to "a Wordsworthian principle of 'plain living and high thinking' to which he remained constant throughout his life."⁹

In the spring of 1830, FitzGerald went to see his sister Eleanor and her family in Paris. He was still thinking of his promise to Allen. He tried to think about religion seriously and arrive at a firm commitment to faith but he failed:

I have not got on with Jeremy Taylor, as I don't like it much. I do not like subdivisions of virtue, making a separate article of each particular virtue or crime: I much more like the general, and artless, commands of our Saviour. Who can say anything new after him?¹⁰

This remark shows what might be regarded as FitzGerald's tendency toward the Low Church; he felt it unnecessary to have any intermediary or interpreter in his religious beliefs. He felt it an individual issue to create relationships with God without resorting to secondary books or interpretations. This desire for immediate and untroubled communion

⁸ *Life* 81.

⁹ *Life* 41.

¹⁰ *Letters* i: 80; to John Allen, 31 January 1830.

with God helps to explain why, like so many of his contemporaries, FitzGerald was both disturbed and excited by the social and scientific developments of the age:

The present day teems with new discoveries *in Fact*, which are greater, even as regards the Soul and prospect of Men, than all the disquisitions and quiddities of the Schoolmen. A few fossil bones in clay and limestone have opened a greater vista back into Time than the Indian imagination ventured upon for its gods: and every day turns up something new.¹¹

FitzGerald's graduate period coincided with the publication of Charles Lyell's *The Principles of Geology* (1830-33) which revolutionised ideas about the age of the earth. Lyell's revelation that the earth was vastly older than had been thought in the Bible put the validity of the Scriptures, as historical narrative, under question. FitzGerald was deeply impressed by Lyell's book:

My sisters are reading to me Lyell's *Geology of an Evening*: there is an admirable chapter illustrative of human error and prejudice retarding the truth, which will apply to all sciences, I believe: and, if people would consider it, would be more valuable than the geological knowledge, though that is very valuable, I am sure.¹²

FitzGerald agreed with Lyell that "human error and prejudice" have caused scientific discoveries, related to religious beliefs, to progress slowly. He thought that it was not the poetical imagination which revealed the truth but "bare Science that every day more and more unrolls a greater Epic than the Iliad – the history of the World, the infinitudes of Space and Time!"¹³ In the same letter, FitzGerald wondered how much longer the poets

¹¹ *Letters* i: 476; to Cowell, 28 January 1845.

¹² *Letters* i: 192; to Allen, 12 February 1837.

¹³ *Letters* i: 566; to Allen, 24 July 1847.

would be able to delve into their imagination to discover new things, “considering how soon the march of discovery will distance all [their] imaginations, [and] dissolve the language in which they are uttered.” FitzGerald continued that after two thousand years Martial, the Latin poet and epigrammatist, still lived. FitzGerald’s subject matter, dealing with the crucial questions of life and death and fate, would be beyond Time and Space. In other words it would belong to no specific time and place and would survive as long as man lives on.

Apart from the emergence of evolutionary theories, the growth of “positivism” was another blow which shook the intellectuals of the period. August Comte (1798-1857) through his *The Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830-42) denied the possibility of any knowledge about the ultimate cause of things. Comte, according to Frederick Ferré, had abandoned his belief in God by the age of fourteen.¹⁴ He studied the total development of human intelligence in its different phases of activity and came to believe that human thought had progressed through three stages: “We have first the theological method, then the metaphysical method, and finally the positive method.” Comte explains that in the theological state, man had thought religiously and had directed his thought “toward absolute knowledge.” In the metaphysical state, which is, according to Comte, a modification of the first state, “supernatural agents are replaced by abstract forces.” In the positive state, man has recognised that he is not able to obtain absolute truth and consequently he “gives up the search after the origin and hidden causes of the universe and a knowledge of the final causes of phenomena.” Comte felt that man needed a religion to give him emotional satisfaction. He proposed “collective Humanity” as the object of his worship. According to Comte, as John Stuart Mill wrote, “all education and

¹⁴ August Come, *Introduction to Positive Philosophy*, ed. and tr. Frederick Ferré (Cambridge: Hackett, 1988) 2.

all moral discipline should have but one object, to make altruism (a word of his own coining) predominate over egoism.”¹⁵

Robert Chambers’s *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) was another work which questioned the Biblical account of the Creation. FitzGerald was impressed by Chambers’s book. “How do you like *Vestiges of Creation*?” FitzGerald asked Barton; “are you all turned infidels – or atheists, as Mrs. Jarley was reminded to become?”¹⁶ FitzGerald took the question to Allen: “he [Allen] had heard of it – laughed at the idea of its being atheistical. ‘No enquiry’ said he, ‘can be atheistical,’”¹⁷ It seems that FitzGerald was happy with Allen’s response. He was both interested in Chambers and relieved at Allen’s rebuttal of its atheism.

Under such circumstances as his solitary life and his need for confirmation of his faith, cultivating and idealising friendships became the main purpose of FitzGerald’s life:

. . . being alone, one’s thoughts and feelings, from want of communication, become heaped up and clotted together, as it were: and so lie like undigested food heavy upon the mind: but with a friend one *tosseth* them about, so that the air gets between them, and keeps them fresh and sweet.¹⁸

Of his close friends, FitzGerald was closest to Allen and Thackeray; two friends representing two sides of FitzGerald’s character: Allen the spiritual and Thackeray the secular. In a letter to the former FitzGerald wrote:

If I had right to bless you, my dear Allen, I would do so: for
all your kindnesses to me: which, believe me, do not fall on

¹⁵ John Stuart Mill, *August Comte and Positivism* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press. 1961) 138-9; originally published in London, 1865.

¹⁶ *Letters* i: 469; 29 December 1844. Mrs Jarley is a character in Dicken’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1).

¹⁷ *Letters* i: 471; to B. Barton, 4 January 1845.

barren ground, but will some day or other bring forth a crop of something better than weeds. I may truly say that I improve every day in works, if not in belief and words. I still vacillate like a fool between belief and disbelief, sometimes the other for I have no strength of mind, and very little perception. When I get to England I mean to study the Bible incessantly.

Allen always encouraged FitzGerald in his faith. In this letter, FitzGerald shows how he felt it necessary to “have my dear preacher [Allen] near me” in order to overcome his doubt. Yet as FitzGerald aged, the frequency of his letters to Allen diminished, suggesting that FitzGerald found it ineffective to seek Allen’s sermons and that in due course his doubt outweighed his faith.

When FitzGerald returned from Paris, he spent the summer at Southampton expecting to hear from Thackeray. Allen, who was concerned about FitzGerald’s religious doubt, called on him; FitzGerald “jumped and almost cried for joy” to see Allen. They walked and talked while Allen “tried to make him steady in his views on religion. God, I hope and trust, in his good time will turn his heart,” reads Allen’s diary.¹⁹ Whenever FitzGerald felt ill or became despondent, he attributed it to his lack of faith. On one occasion he wrote to Allen:

The other night when I lay in bed feeling my head get warmer and warmer, I felt that if I should pray to some protector for relief, I should be relieved: but I have not yet learned the certainty of there being any. It is a melancholy thing that the want of happiness and security caused by scepticism is no proof of the truth of religion: for if a man is miserable because

¹⁸ *Letters* i: 133; to John Allen 24 February 1833.

¹⁹ *Life* 56.

he has not a guinea, it may make him happy to believe he had a guinea, but still he has it not. So if one can delude oneself into a belief, it is a happiness: but some cannot help feeling all the time that it is a delusion.²⁰

FitzGerald had realised that his wanderings in religion were due to an excess of introspection and loneliness and, above all, a lack of stimulation:

I very much feel the loss of you, my dear Allen, at many times, particularly in my religious wanderings and despondencies: which are very frequent and very distressing. I am tost [sic] very much, but I think I am coming very quick *round to a rooted belief in Christianity*. I shall say much and no more about myself, because I know you take some interest in my welfare: not to mention my everlasting welfare.²¹

In November of 1830, FitzGerald left Southampton for Naseby where he lodged at a farmhouse on the family property. He enjoyed the kind of life that suited him best: walking, reading, drawing and being in the company of the village people. It was here that he wrote his first published poem “The Meadows in Spring.” The poem was published in Hone’s *Year Book* on April 30, 1831 and reappeared in the *Athenaeum* on July 9 the same year. This was a great success for a young man of 22 without any background in writing either prose or verse; but FitzGerald was never a man to aspire to fame. The poem was, in fact, a formal and emotional pattern for much that we find in his later works and shows a surprising cynicism for one so young; we see him watching time passing, engaging himself in reading, having a companion, remembering the past, observing in the changes in nature and finally shedding a tear:

²⁰ *Letters* i: 119; 21 November 1832.

²¹ *Letters* i: 82; 21 April 1830.

'Tis a dull sight
 To see the year dying,
When winter winds
 Set the yellow wood sighing
 Sighing, oh! sighing!

When such a time cometh,
 I do retire
Into an old room
 Beside a bright fire:
 Oh, pile a bright fire!

And there I sit
 Reading all things,
Of knights and lorn damsels
 While the wind sings –
 Oh, drearily sings! . . .

Then, with an old friend,
 I talk of our youth –
How 'twas gladsome, but often
 Foolish, forsooth:
 But gladsome, gladsome! . . .

And sometimes a tear
 Will rise in each eye,
Seeing the two old friends
 So merrily;
 So merrily!²²

This is not a great poem, but it has certain qualities. The use of the repeated rhyming word at the end of each verse suggests a mood of peace and resignation and lack of

²² *Works* vii: 1-4.

effort. It shows the wistful mood of the author even at this early time: the mood which is so characteristic of FitzGerald. The theme of withdrawal into books is entirely true to FitzGerald's temperament, and it is not surprising that he writes in a mood of reminiscence as if at the age of twenty-two life has no future for him. In a letter to his publisher, FitzGerald wrote:

These verses are in the old style: rather homely in expression; but I honestly profess to stick more to the simplicity of the old poets than the moderns, and to love the philosophical good humour of our old writers more than the sickly melancholy of the Byronian wits. If my verses be not good, they are good-humoured, and that is something.²³

The editor of the *Athenaeum*, who believed Charles Lamb (1775-1834) to be the author of the poem, responded to FitzGerald: "They are fitted for any paper, and most welcome to us . . . they are deep in feeling, and sweet in harmony. . . . We have a suspicion that we could name the writer – if so, we are sure his name would grace our pages as much as his verses."²⁴ But FitzGerald was never in search of fame. When the poem appeared in the *Athenaeum*, others too supposed it to be the work of Lamb. But the suspicion was removed when Lamb wrote of the poem: "The *Athenaeum* has been hoaxed with some exquisite poetry. . . . I do not know who wrote it; but 'tis a poem I envy – *that* and Montgomery's 'Last Man' – I envy the writers because I feel I could have done something like them."²⁵ The following year, FitzGerald wrote "To a Lady Singing" on the death of Allen's sister:

CANST thou, my Clora, declare,

²³ *Letters* i: 98; to William Hone, Editor of *The Year Book*, April, 1831.

²⁴ *Life* 50.

²⁵ *Life* 51.

After thy sweet song dieth
Into the wild summer air,
Whither it falls or flieth?
Soon would my answer be noted
Wert thou but sage as sweet-throated.

Melody, dying away,
Into the dark sky closes,
Like the good soul from her clay
Like the air odour of roses;
Therefore thou now art behind it,
But thou shalt follow, and find it.²⁶

FitzGerald added two more stanzas to this song before he sent them to Allen. These extra two stanzas are very typical of FitzGerald's mood at his early stage of "vacillating between belief and disbelief." If we suppose these two moods correspond to two sides of his character, then this song represents a more spiritual side, where the *Rubáiyát* represents the secular side or his lack of faith. These two stanzas are:

Nothing can utterly die:
Music aloft up-springing
Turns to pure atoms of the sky
Each golden note of thy singing:
And that to which morning did listen
At eve in a Rainbow may glisten.

Beauty, when laid in the grave,
Feedeth the lily beside her,
Therefore the soul cannot have
Station or honour denied her;
She will not better her essence,

²⁶ *Works* vii: 6-8.

But wear a crown in God's presence.

FitzGerald expressed the same notion of interconnection in nature twenty-seven years later in his *Rubáiyát* but with one great difference. Unlike the *Rubáiyát* in which everything ends in nothingness, here “nothing can utterly die”: which shows, in turn, the transition of FitzGerald's cast of mind from faith to doubt. Comparing the last two lines of “To a Lady Singing” with the following quatrain reveals FitzGerald's transition from the belief in “God's presence” to a sense of descent into dust “sans End”:

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into Dust descend;
Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and sans End!

(No. 24)²⁷

FitzGerald believed that he was not capable of writing worthwhile poetry of his own: “I have not the strong inward call, nor cruel – sweet pangs of parturition”, FitzGerald wrote to Bernard Barton, “that prove the birth of anything bigger than a mouse.”²⁸ He had to find some other way to express himself; hence he devoted himself to the cultivation of friendship and the translation of poetry and with them he occupied himself for the rest of his time.

FitzGerald attended Thomas Carlyle's lectures on “Heroes and Hero-Worship” in 1840, before they made each other's acquaintance. Carlyle was born into a strict Scottish Calvinist family in 1795. His family, as Le Quesne writes, were “members of the Burgher Secession Church, one of the numerous splinter groups that had rebelled against

²⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all citations are from the text of the fourth edition (1879), the last to appear in FitzGerald's lifetime, with 101 quatrains.

²⁸ *Letters* i: 307; 19 February 1842.

the laxity of the established church of Scotland in the course of the eighteenth century.’²⁹

Hence his whole personality was imbued with the disciplined piety of Scottish Calvinism. He went to the village school at Ecclefechan and then to the neighbouring school at Annan. At the age of fourteen, he attended Edinburgh University (1809-14) where he showed his talent for mathematics. His parents hoped that Thomas would enter the ministry of his church and with such an intention he entered university. Yet the education he obtained from the university challenged the convictions of his childhood. After one year he came home and sceptically asked his mother, “Did God Almighty come down and make wheelbarrows in a shop?” In the university he familiarised himself with German literature. His childhood religious faith disintegrated over a period of ten years so that by his mid-twenties he was already seeking a substitute for his Calvinist Christianity. In 1817 he abandoned the idea of entering the ministry and became a schoolmaster for two years and then a tutor in a distinguished family. His first contribution to Victorian thinking was to introduce the German thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – Kant, Fichte, Schelling, the Schlegels, and above all, Goethe – to his contemporaries. This contribution was made through his critical essays and translations. His reading of Newtonian physics and eighteenth-century rationalism also undermined his inherited Calvinism. He found the religion of his parents insupportable without some new intelligent justification and in searching for it through a stream of essays, pamphlets, and lectures, he became the dominant social and cultural thinker of early Victorian England. In 1823-24 he published anonymously his “Life of Schiller” and in 1824 his translation of Goethe’s novel *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*. He attempted in these works to make his contemporaries perceive the disorder around them and see the gulf between the rich and

²⁹ A. L. Quesne, “Carlyle”, *Victorian Thinkers* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993) 10.

the poor. But Carlyle was also one of the first to perceive in 1843 that “England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want of every kind; yet England is dying of inanition.”³⁰

FitzGerald was proverbial for his sympathy for those in need, both neighbours and friends. When the Poor Laws of 1834 ensured the provision of public relief, he wrote to John Allen:

The new Poor Laws have begun to be set afoot, . . . I am no politician: but I fear that no political measure will ever adjust matters well between rich and poor. I have always thought that the poor have been neglected: and, if the rich will not relieve necessity from their superfluity, believe that the poor have a right to demand it.³¹

He gave small allowances to the poor. Once, as Terhune writes, a woman with seventeen children came to him for help. “I am in a rage with all the Gentry (so-called) of England,” FitzGerald wrote to George Crabbe [grandson of the Poet]. “My soul is sick at this meanness – and I think any Revolution is right that returns such ignoble aristocracies into the dirt which is their proper element.”³² But it was not in their feeling for the poor that Carlyle and FitzGerald most significantly coincided, so much as in their kind of spirituality.

Carlyle declared that “‘*Laissez-faire*’, ‘Supply-and-demand’, ‘Cash-payment as the sole nexus’, and so forth, were not, are not, and will never be, a practicable Law of Union for a Society of Men.”³³ F. D. Maurice, in a letter to the reviewer of Carlyle’s *Hero-Worship*, praised Carlyle’s position and wrote:

³⁰ *Past and Present* 10: 1. All quotations are from *The Collected Works of Thomas Carlyle*, 30 vols, H. D. Traill, ed. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1869-71) the Library ed.

³¹ *Letters* i: 175; 31 October 1835.

³² *Letters* ii: 27; May 1851.

³³ *Past and Present* 10: 33.

Now, no writer of the day. . . has been so truly our friend as Mr. Carlyle; no one has given us so much help, if we will use it, in understanding what kind of battle we have to fight, what manner of time we have fallen upon, what are its wants and cries, what abysses lie beneath our feet.³⁴

FitzGerald also accepted Carlyle's role as a kind of preacher and sought further advice:

I hope you will continue to teach us all, as you have done, to make some use and profit of all [i.e. substantial goodness among the people]: at least not to let what good remains to die away under penury and neglect.³⁵

Carlyle first assumed his prophetic role before Victoria came to the throne. It was a time, according to Carlyle, when "the King has virtually abdicated; the Church is a widow, without jointure; public principle is gone; private honesty is going; society, in short, is fast falling in pieces; and a time of unmixed evil is come on us."³⁶ This period coincided with the death of the great poets of the second generation of Romantics: Keats (1821), Shelley (1822), and Byron (1824). Thus Carlyle, as a product of the Romantic period, became the prophet of the next generation. In this period he wrote his powerful early essay "Signs of the Time", the first of his works to deeply impress his contemporaries. In this essay, which appeared anonymously in the *Edinburgh Review* in June 1829, he attacked, as David Daiches writes, "the assumptions of a *laissez-faire* society and the principle of Benthamite morality with weapons drawn from German romanticism and transcendentalism."³⁷ In "Signs of the Times", Carlyle tried to characterise his age:

³⁴ F. D. Maurice, "On the Tendency of Mr. Carlyle's Writings," *Christian Remembrancer*. VI (October 1843): 451-61; rpt., *Thomas Carlyle, the Critical Heritage*, ed. J. P. Seigel (London, 1971).

³⁵ *Letters* i: 580; 20 September 1847.

³⁶ "Signs of the Times" 27: 58.

³⁷ David Daiches, "Carlyle and the Victorian Dilemma," *More Literary Essays* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1968) 116.

Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it, not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age.³⁸

People “are grown mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand.” Ever since they began to be the victims of mechanism, they “have lost their belief in the Invisible, and believe, and hope, and work only in the visible.” Religion or piety was no longer important to people because “Our true Deity is Mechanism.” Citing the features of the period, Carlyle argues that “the Metaphysical and Moral sciences are falling into decay, while the Physical are engrossing, everyday, more respect and attention.” He further remarks that the French were the first who deserted metaphysics, but that later they tried to revive it. He continues that “in no nation but Germany has any decisive effort been made in Psychological science, not to speak of any decisive result.” In this way Carlyle justifies his return to “the Germans”, those German writers by whom, as Stephen Prickett writes, “his faith in a transcendent God, [was] destroyed”, despite his inability to “throw off the gloomy trappings of Calvinism.”³⁹ German literature and philosophy of the late 18th century enabled him to develop a “new” faith for himself.

When Carlyle first turned to Germany he found his first “gospel” in Goethe, who became his model for what he called “the hero as man of letters.” Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832) believed in a religion independent of all churches and creeds, which Carlyle described as “Hebrew old-clothes.” Goethe remained a permanent part of Carlyle’s thinking. As C. F. Harrold, the author of *Carlyle and German Thought 1819-1834*, writes:

³⁸ “Signs of the Times” 27: 59.

³⁹ Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976) 230.

Carlyle admired increasingly Goethe's union of the singer and the sage, his combination of the real and the ideal, his treatment of the actual as the raw materials of the ideal, his conception of renunciation as the preliminary act in true living, his reverence for sorrow, his pantheism, his wise silence on the unseen.⁴⁰

Harrold continues that in Goethe Carlyle found an escape from pessimism. He wore no "Hebrew old-clothes"; yet he stood as far as possible from the materialism of the eighteenth century and from the machine theory of the universe which Carlyle had identified in nineteenth-century thought.

FitzGerald avoided involving himself in such philosophical controversies, saying: "I am very tired of these heroics; and I can worship no man who has but a square inch of brains more than myself. I think there is but one Hero: and that is the Maker of Heroes."⁴¹ But like Carlyle he was in revolt against the theology of his time. Unlike Carlyle, FitzGerald did not seek his "new" faith in the German thinkers; but he tried to find one in the Orient, chiefly in the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám. He sought in Omar the equivalent of "the sustenance of the new Germany", to borrow an expression from Raymond Schwab, and through Omar he tried to give voice to the deepest doubts of his soul. He criticised both those who sought the "glories of this world" and those who tried to present a new faith, although his own offer, to enjoy life as it is, was a kind of "faith" too:

Some for the Glories of This World; and some
sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go

⁴⁰ C. F. Harrold, *Carlyle and the German Thought: 1819-1834* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1978) 10.

Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum! (No. 13)

Carlyle tried to convince the Victorians that there is an alternative to the “garb of Hebrew old-clothes” on the one hand, and the “nakedness of atheism” on the other. From his Calvinism and his understanding of Goethe and Fichte sprang his inclination to view all material forms as the clothing of something invisible and abiding. This was the essence of Carlyle’s religious belief, where he believed the secret of his spiritual salvation lay. This was the Germanism which, according to H. Walker and others, Carlyle introduced into English literature. It has been argued that, if Carlyle revealed Germany to England, Germany revealed Carlyle to himself.⁴² FitzGerald for his part had no sympathy at all with German and found it “uncouth.” He did not admire the “German school of English” because in his view it reintroduced transcendentalism and mysticism to the English mind, and FitzGerald disliked mysticism and subjectivity. In a letter to George Crabbe (the poet’s son) FitzGerald wrote: “You know that I have very little taste for metaphysics or argument . . . which, however, I know very well. One could scarce have strong argumentative talent without desiring to exert it.”⁴³ He thought that Carlyle had written the “troubulous times and scenes” in an “abrupt manner, as if you were carried away by what you have to describe: a writer should feel himself master of his subject;”⁴⁴ FitzGerald himself felt “master of his subject” in writing the *Rubáiyát*. All this said, however, FitzGerald found Carlyle’s essays “touching”. “We are all reading Carlyle’s *Miscellanies* – some abusing and some praising,” FitzGerald wrote to Bernard Barton. “I am among the latter. I am glad to hear that nearly all the edition that came from American is sold.” Referring to Carlyle’s “Chartism”, FitzGerald wrote:

⁴¹ *Letters* i: 349; to W. F. Pollock, 20 September 1842.

⁴² Hugh Walker, *The Literature of the Victorian Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1940) 30.

⁴³ *Letters* i: 653; 9 November 1849.

Carlyle is universally believed here to be *the* Carlile – the more decided one, I mean. All the invalids are warned by the Clergymen to be on their guard against him. He is all the more dangerous now that his meaning cannot be discovered.⁴⁵

Despite his dislike of his German transcendentalism, in other words, FitzGerald liked Carlyle because he believed that Carlyle “pulls one the opposite side to which all the world are pulling one.”⁴⁶ FitzGerald admired men of “actions” as Carlyle did; but FitzGerald was never himself a man of action. He found in Carlyle, however, a kind of fellow-traveller, a prophet of a new spirituality and a critic of the “Mechanical age.”

FitzGerald’s personal acquaintance with Carlyle began in September of 1842 when Samuel Laurence, the painter, took him to Carlyle’s house in Cheyne Row, Chelsea. It was a happy meeting. Carlyle was deeply involved in his book on Cromwell, writing a section about the battle of Naseby. FitzGerald happened to know the battlefield, because the greater part of it belonged to his family, and his father had set up an obelisk on the highest part of the field. FitzGerald was sure that Carlyle and Thomas Arnold (who was working with Carlyle) had been misled in believing that the obelisk, set up by his parents, marked the spot where the battle had been fiercest. FitzGerald’s friendship with Carlyle ripened over the exploration of Naseby Field. This friendship modified his view of Carlyle’s writings. Mutual respect levelled the differences between them. The historian wrote FitzGerald a long letter of questions concerning the evidences of the battle, and FitzGerald did his best to collect the required information. Carlyle respected FitzGerald and welcomed his letters.

⁴⁴ *Letters* i: 209; to Thackeray, 1 September 1837.

⁴⁵ *Letters* i: 243. Richard Carlile (1790-1843), as the editors of FitzGerald’s letters write, was a freethinker, controversialist, and publisher; one of the army that fought for freedom of the press.

Carlyle in his *French Revolution* (1837) concludes that “Faith is gone out; Scepticism is come in. Evil abounds and accumulates.”⁴⁷ By scepticism, Carlyle meant “not intellectual Doubt, but moral Doubt; all sorts of infidelity, insincerity, spiritual paralysis.” What we are certain of, according to Carlyle, is that we are surrounded by mysteries: “man begins in darkness, ends in darkness; mystery is everywhere around us and in us.”⁴⁸ This notion of seeking but never finding the solution to the mysteries of existence was also later expressed by FitzGerald in the *Rubáiyát*:

Earth could not answer; nor the Seas that mourn
In flowing Purple, of their Lord forlorn;
Nor rolling Heaven, with all his Signs revealed
And hidden by the sleeve of Night and Morn. (No. 33)

FitzGerald’s Omar finds the solution in the “lip to lip” touch of an “earthen urn”:

Then to the Lip of this poor earthen Urn
I leaned, the Secret of my Life to learn:
And Lip to Lip it murmured – “While you live.
Drink! for once dead, you never shall return.” (No. 34)

The “earthen Urn”, as subject to decomposition as any human body, is here a tangible evidence of mortality. FitzGerald, however, finds it harder than Carlyle to distinguish between faith and doubt or “False and True”:

Would you that spangle of existence spend
About THE SECRET – quick about it, Friend!
A Hair perhaps divides the False and True –
And upon what, prithee, may life depend? (No. 49)

⁴⁶ *Letters* i: 234; to Donne, August 1839.

⁴⁷ *French Revolution* 2: 14.

⁴⁸ “Characteristics” 28: 37.

Both Carlyle and FitzGerald were religious sceptics and denied personal immortality. FitzGerald in a letter to Bernard Barton reports how Tennyson and Carlyle once debated “immortality.” His account of this debate, which took place about thirteen years before FitzGerald’s acquaintance with Omar Khayyám, is very indicative of FitzGerald’s usual cast of mind. FitzGerald in his letter mentions part of the argument, but it is recorded more fully in Tennyson’s *Memoir*. FitzGerald writes:

I met Carlyle last night at Tennyson’s; and they discussed the merits of this world, and the next, till I wished myself out of *this*, at any rate. Carlyle gets more wild, savage, and unreasonable everyday, and I do believe, will turn mad.⁴⁹

FitzGerald concludes the argument in the same letter: “and even as it was yesterday, so shall it be to-morrow, and the day after that – in saecula saeculorum!” This occasion was to lead to the writing of a verse of the *Rubáiyát* on the riddle of existence thirteen years later; Carlyle and Tennyson reappear as “Doctors and Saints”:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same door where in I went. (No. 27)

The “great argument” as fully recorded in Tennyson’s *Memoir* starts with a typically robust contribution from Carlyle:

Eh! old Jewish rags: you must clear your mind of all that.
Why should we expect a hereafter? Your traveller comes to
an inn, and takes his bed, it’s only for one night, he leaves
next day, and another man takes his place and sleeps in the
bed that he has vacated.

⁴⁹ *Letters* i: 534; 5 May 1846.

Tennyson responds:

Your traveller comes to his inn, and lies down in his bed, and
leaves the inn in the morning, and goes on his way rejoicing,
with the sure and certain hope and belief that he is going
somewhere, where he will sleep the next night.

FitzGerald praises Tennyson's argument and says "You have him there."⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it is most interesting that after thirteen years FitzGerald in his *Rubáiyát* takes Carlyle's position, not Tennyson's, replacing the metaphor of "one night" in Carlyle's argument with "one day's rest." He writes:

'Tis but a Tent where takes his one day's rest
A Sultán to the realm of Death address;
The Sultán rises, and the dark Ferrásh* *one who spreads beds*
Strikes, and prepares it for another Guest. (No. 45)

FitzGerald again uses "tavern" instead of Carlyle's "inn", but conveys the same notion:

And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before
The Tavern shouted – "Open then the Door!
"You know how little while we have to stay,
"And, once departed, may return no more." (No. 3)

FitzGerald's exclamation of "You have him there" and his persona's utterance in the quatrains quoted show how FitzGerald himself vacillated between belief and disbelief. Finding Tennyson's image convincing, he praised him; but when he was lonely and pondered the mysteries of his existence, the balance of disbelief got heavier. That is why he always missed his college friend Allen (or his "preacher" as FitzGerald called him), but also why he found himself temperamentally drawn to Carlyle's bleaker vision.

⁵⁰ Hallam Lord Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 1899) 762.

FitzGerald nurtured his friendships by writing vast numbers of long letters full of intimate details. These letters contain a number of indications of his somewhat divergent views on modern literary taste. In a letter to Frederick Tennyson he wrote:

If you print any poem, I especially desire you will transmit them to me. I wish I was with you to consider about these: for though I cannot write poems, you know I consider that I have the old woman's faculty of Judging of them: yes, much better than much cleverer and wiser men: I pretend to no Genius, but to Taste: which, according to my aphorism, is the feminine of Genius.⁵¹

FitzGerald's distinction between "taste" and "genius", and his regarding himself as a man only of "taste", tend to confirm a general view that he did not have an extraordinary capacity for an imaginative or original work, which is what he too meant by "genius"; yet he had the judgment to know what would be likely to appeal to the public imagination; or, as he put it, what could be "readable." FitzGerald's friends were aware of his "taste", which is why Mrs. Cowell sent her poems to him to edit, and why Miss Barton (later Mrs. FitzGerald) asked him to edit her father's poems before they were published. His criterion for literary appreciation, the object of his "taste", was "beauty." "If the Arts are not beautiful," he wrote to W. F. Pollock in 1868, "they are nothing to me." In his first mention of the idea of his marriage FitzGerald talked of an un-named lady who "is healthy, and stout, and a good walker, and a gardener and fond of the country and thinks everything *Beautiful*."⁵² Furthermore, in his terminology he sought either "imagination" or "invention", along with simplicity of language, in a piece of art in order to appreciate it as a beautiful work. In criticising Tennyson's poems in 1874, FitzGerald

⁵¹ *Letters* i: 663; to Frederick Tennyson, 7 March 1850.

⁵² *Letters* i: 179; to John Allen, 4 February 1836. Stress is mine

defined the word “invention” as “to make a new and better thing of old Legend”, and it is with such a perception that FitzGerald looked at literature, whether in English or other languages. More importantly, FitzGerald intended to “invent” his *Rubáiyát* as a “new and better thing”: to make it, in other words, more appealing to a Victorian sensibility. The definition of “invention” helps us with “imagination”, another touchstone for FitzGerald. This word is closely connected to his perception of “genius”, and refers to the “creativity” of an artist and the originality of his work. So FitzGerald looked for either “imagination” or “invention” in calling a work beautiful: for simplicity of language and structure, and for originality. But he saw himself, the man of “taste”, as primarily inventive, not imaginative.

In contrast to the notion of “beauty” lies the grotesque, or the “ugliness” which belongs to the “Gurgoyle [sic] School”, as FitzGerald called it. The nature of FitzGerald’s appreciation of beauty and rejection of ugliness becomes more apparent when we consider his preferences in literature. In French literature, FitzGerald disliked Victor Hugo (1802-85) because of “Hugo’s Worship of Ugliness [the grotesque] – of which I find so much in Browning and other modern Artists, Literary, Musical or Graphic.”⁵³ The grotesque in modern thought, according to Victor Hugo (preface to his *Cromwell Hernani*, 1827), “has an immense role. It is everywhere; on the one hand, it creates the deformed and horrible, and on the other the comic and burlesque . . . the grotesque is the richest source that nature can offer to art.”⁵⁴ FitzGerald ignored the comic and amusing aspect of this school, and found it merely unpleasant and ugly because of its stress on deformity and weirdness. With such a perception, contemporary poetry was hardly likely to please FitzGerald. In a letter to R. C. Trench, Archbishop of Dublin, FitzGerald expressed his view on modern poetry:

⁵³ *Letters* iii: 396; January 1873.

As for modern poetry, I have cared for none of the last thirty years, not even Tennyson, except in parts: pure, lofty, and noble as he always is. Much less can I endure the Gurgoyle [sic] School (I call it) begun, I suppose, by V. Hugo. . . . I do think you will find something better than that in the discarded Crabbe. . . . So I must think my old Crabbe will come up again, though never to be popular.⁵⁵

FitzGerald never admired German literature, as we saw, because it seemed to him “uncouth” and awkward. In a letter to Tennyson in 1877 he said:

The German looks to me as uncouth as ever it did. I made one more trial – I suppose the dozenth – to admire Goethe’s Faust (in translation), I could not even read it through. There seems to me no Imagination or Invention in it.⁵⁶

He had a great devotion, however, to the Greek and Latin classics. He read Sophocles repeatedly and considered him as a “pure Greek Temple” and a “consummation of Greek art.” Comparing him with Aeschylus, FitzGerald came to believe that the writings of Aeschylus “*trouble* us with their grandeur and gloom; but Sophocles is always soothing, complete, and satisfactory.”⁵⁷ The words “trouble” and “soothing” are very characteristic of the author of the *Rubáiyát*, although not of Omar Khayyám. It was in this connection that FitzGerald once suggested to Tennyson that he should translate some of Sophocles’s or Aeschylus’s plays in order to revive his diminished powers.⁵⁸

FitzGerald also admired Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) and read his novels many times. Even in the days when his eyesight was failing FitzGerald had a boy read Scott’s

⁵⁴ Victor Hugo, *Œuvres Complètes De Victor Hugo: Cromwell Hernani* (Paris, 1912) 16.

⁵⁵ *Letters* iv: 325; 18 May 1880.

⁵⁶ *Letters* iv: 151; March 1877.

⁵⁷ *Letters* i: 613-14; to Cowell, late August 1848.

⁵⁸ *Letters* iii: 188; to Cowell, January 1870.

novels to him. He always intended to go to Edinburgh to visit the places Scott wrote about and lived in:

My visit to London followed a visit to Edinburgh: which I have intended these thirty years, only for the purpose of seeing my dear Sir Walter's House and Home: and which I am glad to have seen, as that of Shakespeare.⁵⁹

FitzGerald was "proud" that he had done his "little Pilgrimage to my Mecca" and "worshipped at the Scott Monument." What we get from FitzGerald's remarks on Scott is that FitzGerald found both "imagination" and "invention" in the writings of Scott. Scott's fascination with history and with familiar subjects, and his fluent mode of composition seem to appeal to FitzGerald's "taste", while Scott, as an original inventor of historical novels, also succeeded in revitalising his public's sense of the past. FitzGerald's admiration of Scott's pictures of places and times in his writings reveals an underlying feature of his "taste": his admiration for romance and his fascination with history and the past; in short, his interest in the exotic, the "other".

On a steam packet boat to Wales in 1832, FitzGerald formed an emotional friendship with a youth of sixteen named William Kenworthy Browne (1816-59). This friendship resembled in some ways the one between Tennyson and Hallam. This is a friendship which has sometimes raised the issue of homosexuality: especially taken together with FitzGerald's dislike of marriage. "You and Browne (though in rather different ways) have certainly made me more happy than any men living. Sometimes I behave very ill to him, and am much ashamed of myself," FitzGerald wrote to Allen in 1838; ". . . while I have Browne at my side I do not read much: he being very much

⁵⁹ *Letters* iii: 504; to Fanny Kemble, 21 July 1874.

better than any books in my opinion.’⁶⁰ Browne, son of a Bedford alderman, was fond of riding, shooting, fishing and playing billiards, and he had less affection for music and literature. Browne’s physical activities kept FitzGerald away from his readings. In Browne, FitzGerald found the balanced qualities which he admired: “quick to love and quick to fight – full of confidence, generosity, and glorious spirit of Youth; when a man of forty he was Farmer, Magistrate, Militia officer-Father of a Family – of more use in a week than I in my Life long.’⁶¹ Comparing Browne with “the hard-reading, pale, dwindled students” at Cambridge, FitzGerald came to believe that the curriculum of English schools failed to encourage students’ qualities in balance. To criticise the educational system and to show the effects of neglecting physical education in the curriculum, FitzGerald wrote his Platonic *Euphranor: a Dialogue on Youth* (1851). FitzGerald used to visit Browne’s home, where they often went riding, fishing and walking. His letters to Browne reveal FitzGerald’s deep emotions for him. In a riding accident, Browne was to wound himself mortally, and FitzGerald came from London to visit his friend a week before his death. FitzGerald held a copy of his *Euphranor*, and wandering about the house said: “This little book would never have been written, had I not known my dear friend William Browne, who, unconsciously, supplied the moral.’⁶² The character of Browne had an influence on the *Rubáiyát* as great as Carlyle’s version of spirituality; FitzGerald’s admiration of straightforward manliness emerges in the serenity and cheerfulness of his poem when compared, say, with *In Memoriam*.

Another associate of FitzGerald’s was George Crabbe (1785-1857), the poet’s son; and he later befriended the poet’s grandson, another George: FitzGerald died in his

⁶⁰ *Letters* i: 216; 28 August 1838.

⁶¹ *Letters*, “Biographical Profiles” 26.

⁶² *Letters* 27.

Rectory. FitzGerald frequented his cottage, about a mile distant. FitzGerald never met the poet but he became familiar with him through his family and his works. Crabbe's well-received work, *Tales of the Hall* (1819), was contemporary with the major works of the younger Romantics. FitzGerald admired the poet and this admiration made FitzGerald bring out privately his *Readings from Crabbe's "Tales of the Hall"* with an introduction in 1879. What FitzGerald found interesting in Crabbe was the fact that Crabbe described the lives of ordinary people, especially the poor, with such realism that Byron called him "Nature's sternest Painter" (*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 1: 588). Both FitzGerald and Crabbe had a strong perception of homely life. Both tried to depict the pathos of life; they both "felt the same intimate and almost passionate interest in humanity which made them minute and tender observers of men."⁶³ FitzGerald tried to defend the poet against Horace Smith's well-known description of him as "Pope in worsted stockings." FitzGerald wrote in his introduction to the *Tales* that "in truth, the comparison, such as it is, scarcely reaches beyond Crabbe's earliest essays."⁶⁴ FitzGerald found wit and humour in Crabbe's writings whereas Leslie Stephen, Crabbe's critic, could see very little humour and no epigram in him. "I think I could furnish L. S. with many Epigrams, of a very subtle sort, from Crabbe," FitzGerald wrote to C. E. Norton, "and several paragraphs, if not pages, of comic humour as light as Molière."⁶⁵ Then FitzGerald added that Crabbe "will outlive Morris, Browning and Co. in spite of his Carelessness." FitzGerald tried to have Crabbe read more than he was: "Women and young People never will like him, I think," FitzGerald wrote to Norton, "but I believe every thinking man will like him more as he grows older; see if this be not so with yourself

⁶³ A. C. Benson, *Edward FitzGerald* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1905) 60.

⁶⁴ *Works* vii: 111.

⁶⁵ *Letters* iii: 730; 22 December 1976. Stephen's article "Crabbe's Poetry" had appeared in the *Cornhill* in 1874, xxx: 457-73; but FitzGerald refers to its publication in *Hours in a Library*, 1876.

and your friends.’⁶⁶ To prepare his edition of Crabbe (1869), FitzGerald treated Crabbe as he had treated Calderon and Omar Khayyám: “Omitting some of the stories, retrenching others, either by excision of some parts, or the reduction of others into as concise prose as would comprehend the substance of much prosaic verse.”⁶⁷ Here again is FitzGerald’s inventive taste at work; and his championing of the worsted-stocking Pope could be seen as consistent with his invention of a worsted-stocking Tennyson.

Bernard Barton (1788-1849) was another friend of FitzGerald’s. He was a Quaker and worked as a clerk in a bank but his real sphere of interest was “his home, his books, his pictures and his poetry.” Barton’s wife had died in giving birth to their only child, Lucy, and he lived as a widower with his only daughter in Woodbridge. Barton was a cheerful and amiable person. Despite the twenty-five-year difference in their ages, he was a frequent guest at FitzGerald’s cottage. These two, with two other congenial spirits, George Crabbe (the poet’s son) and Thomas Churchyard, a solicitor, had formed a society of friends dubbed by FitzGerald the “Wits of Woodbridge.” The wits met whenever one of them wished to entertain. Barton was a letter-writer and composer of second-rate verses. His compulsion to write led him to publish eight volumes of verse. On his death, Barton asked FitzGerald to take care of his only daughter, Lucy. After Barton’s death, at Lucy’s request, FitzGerald prepared a volume of his friend’s poems and letters to be sold by subscription. The volume was well received and it was a great help to Lucy’s limited income. It is of value to observe the manner in which FitzGerald worked on Bernard Barton’s poems and prepared them for publication because it resembles what he was later to do with Omar Khayyám:

⁶⁶ *Letters* iv: 5; 1 February 1877.

⁶⁷ *Works* vii: 109.

I have . . . selected what will fill about 200 pages of print – as I suppose – really all the best part of *nine volumes*! Some of the poems I take entire – some half – some only a few stanzas, and these dovetailed together – with a change of a word, or even of a line here and there, to give them logic and fluency. . . . I am sure I have distilled many pretty little poems out of long dull ones which the world has discarded. I do not pretend to be a poet: but I have faculty enough to mend some of B. B.’s dropped stitches, though I really could not make any whole poem so good as many of his. As a matter of *Arts*, I have no doubt whatsoever I am right.⁶⁸

This was the method of distillation which FitzGerald adopted to satisfy his “taste” in creating a new work of art. The same method, as we will see in a separate chapter, was adopted in producing his *Rubáiyát* of 101 quatrains out of about 600 Persian quatrains. The result of this distillation was the invention of his “old Omar.”

On the death of his mother in 1855, FitzGerald inherited a fortune and decided not to postpone marriage any longer. On November 4, 1856, FitzGerald and Lucy Barton, both forty-seven, were married. It is recorded that “on the fateful day he looked like a victim being led to his doom; he walked by her side as one walking in his sleep, mute, and with head bowed.”⁶⁹ Incompatibility of temperament doomed their marriage from the outset. There was no love lost between them – FitzGerald did not want to change from his usual way of life and habits and Lucy “wished to convert her Bohemian husband into a model of Victorian propriety.”⁷⁰ FitzGerald could not yield to her wishes and finally, after eight months of unhappy marriage, they concluded that their marriage was a failure and decided to separate. This woeful interlude in his life affected FitzGerald

⁶⁸ *Letters* i: 633; to W. Donne, 15 March 1849.

⁶⁹ *Life* 195

profoundly, and coincided with his first acquaintance with the rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám. As his diversion, FitzGerald took refuge in the translation of Omar's quatrains, first into Latin and then into English, since he believed that the Persian poet "breathed a sort of consolation" to him.

As he grew older, FitzGerald became reluctant to leave his lodging and visit his old friends and grew more isolated. Instead, they tried to come to visit him. In one case he sent his Christmas letter to Carlyle in 1866 and asked the historian to give his Christmas regards to Mrs. Carlyle; Carlyle replied that his wife had died in the previous April.⁷¹ In 1879, Tennyson with his son Hallam came to visit him after twenty years. Tennyson with his son left his "old Fitz" with a happy memory. In introducing his "Tiresias", Tennyson wrote the dedication "To E. FitzGerald", recalling his last visit to FitzGerald. The poem was published in 1885, but his "old Fitz" had died in his sleep on 14 June, 1883. "The Laureate's eloquent tribute," as Arberry writes, "had been delayed too long to comfort him in his sad last days."⁷² Tennyson, therefore, concluded his poem by praising FitzGerald's "lay" as well as by mourning his old friend's death:

Who reads your golden Eastern lay,
Than which I know no version done
In English more divinely well;
A planet equal to the sun
Which cast it, that large infidel
Your Omar; and your Omar drew
Full-handed plaudits from our best
In modern letters, and from two,
Old friends outvaluing all the rest,

⁷⁰ *Letters*, "Biographical Profiles" 24.

⁷¹ *Life* 315.

⁷² A. J. Arberry, *The Romance Of The Rubáiyát* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959) 13.

Two voices heard on earth no more;

But we old friends are still alive. (32-4)⁷³

Tennyson's reading of Omar reveals the poet's belief in the notion that Omar's "infidelity" contributed to his hedonistic reputation which is, as we shall see in the study of the *rubáiyát*, undeserved on the evidence of the quatrains which FitzGerald used.

FitzGerald's independence of thought and frank confession of his doubts gave him a reputation as an agnostic. When the Rector of Woodbridge asked him why he did not attend the local church, FitzGerald answered in anger: "Sir, you might have conceived that a man has not come to my years without thinking much on these things. I believe I may say that I have reflected on them fully. You need not repeat this visit."⁷⁴ Nevertheless, he was far from indifferent to the religious issues of his time. When he observed how clergymen had adopted "ritualism and Romish tendencies" as the result of the Oxford Movement, he became so disturbed that in 1849 he wrote a letter to the Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, complaining about the matter. On FitzGerald's death, Robert Hindes Groom, Archdeacon of Suffolk, wrote:

He lived so retired a life that the outside world not only did not know our dear old friend, but spoke hard things of him, as [if] he had been a very heathen man. Some years ago – perhaps fourteen – the then Rector of Woodbridge called upon him and spoke, as it is termed, 'faithfully with him', for that he seldom if ever went to church. The sure result was that after that he never did go to church, at least at Woodbridge. So people said things of him which were not true.⁷⁵

⁷³ C. Ricks, ed., *The Poems of Tennyson*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1967) 3: 107.

⁷⁴ *Life* 64.

⁷⁵ *Life* 63.

The fact is that in spite of his loyalty to the Church, (he even set up a fund for construction of a new church building), FitzGerald could not overcome his fundamental Carlylean religious doubts. He wished to have a sudden death: “At any time,” he said, “the hair may break and the suspended sword fall. If it would but do so at once and effectually.”⁷⁶ On June 13, 1883, FitzGerald decided to go to the Crabbes for his annual visit “to meet his Sisters and talk over old Bredfield Vicarage days.”⁷⁷ George Crabbe took FitzGerald to the Rectory. The next morning when the servant went to wake up FitzGerald he found that the hair had broken and the suspended sword had fallen. FitzGerald had “crept silently to rest”, to borrow his own expression from the *Rubáiyát*, No. 22.

In his writings, according to his biographer, a line from the Bible was found which FitzGerald had chosen to be his epitaph:

“It is He that hath made us and not we ourselves.”⁷⁸

This line is an evidence of FitzGerald’s deep but perhaps neglected belief in God, whom he wished to reach without any intermediary; on the other hand it may also be something of an apology:

Oh Thou, who didst with Pitfall and with Gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with Predestination round
Enmesh me, and impute my Fall to Sin? (No. LVII, 1st. ed.)⁷⁹

In 1893, two Persian rose bushes were planted at his grave by FitzGerald’s admirers. A metal plate read:

⁷⁶ Richard B. Ince, *Calverley and Some Cambridge Wits of the Nineteenth Century* (London: G. Richards and T. Toulmi, 1929) 72.

⁷⁷ *Letters* iv: 594; to Samuel Laurence, 12 June 1883. This is FitzGerald’s last letter.

⁷⁸ *Life* 345.

⁷⁹ FitzGerald used Roman numerals in the first edition.

This rose-tree, raised in Kew Garden from seed brought by William Simpson, artist-traveller, from the grave of Omar Khayyám at Nishápûr, was planted by a few admirers of Edward FitzGerald in the name of the Omar Khayyám Club, 7 October, 1893.⁸⁰

On 25 March 1897, according to Arberry, the Omar Khayyám Club met for dinner and Sir George Robertson, the hero of Chitral, “Delighted the company by remarking that men of action were really ‘dreamers and sentimentalists’ and that his ‘chief pleasure in the mountains of Chitral was the reading of Omar Khayyám.’”⁸¹ But it was FitzGerald, admirer of Carlyle, seeker of the exotic, friend of the muscular Christian Browne, and not the real Omar Khayyám, whom Robertson read in the mountains.

1.2) Omar’s life and times

Little is recorded of the life of Omar Khayyám (1048-1131).⁸² What is certain is that he spent most of his life in his native Nishápûr and received a good education in the sciences and philosophy of his time in Nishápûr and Balkh. Then he went to Samarqand and where he busied himself, according to FitzGerald’s own preface, “in winning knowledge of every kind, and especially in Astronomy, wherein he attained to a very high pre-eminence.”⁸³ In Samarqand he completed an important treatise on algebra in Arabic. Omar’s treatise was not generally available to European scholars until 1851 when F.

⁸⁰ Quoted by I. B. Hassani Jewett, *Edward FitzGerald* (London: George Prior Publishers, 1977) 156.

⁸¹ Arberry 36-7.

⁸² Omar’s birthday has always been controversial. According to John A. Boyle’s article “Omar Khayyám: Astronomer, Mathematician And Poet”, Swami Govinda Tirtha, an Indian scholar, has calculated Omar’s birthday according to his horoscope recorded in detail in the oldest authority, *Tarikh-e Baihaqi*. At the request of Rozenfel’d and Yushkevich, Russian scholars and editors of Omar’s scientific works, the Institute of Theoretical Astronomy of the Academy of Sciences of Russia checked Govinda’s calculations and found the same result; that is, that Omar was born on 18 May 1048. [Bulletin of The John Rylands Library, 52. I, (Autumn 1969): 30-40]

⁸³ *Works* i: 8.

Woepcke published its French translation in Paris. According to his preface, then, FitzGerald himself was aware of the mainly scientific background of Omar Khayyám.

Omar Khayyám lived in an era of political, religious, and cultural confrontation following the decay of the central authority of the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad. He lived during the reign of the Saljuq Turks, which coincided with the early Middle Ages in Europe. In Persian history, the ‘Saljuq Period’ denotes the period between the year 1037, when Toghrul (the founder of the Saljuq Dynasty) seized Nishápûr (birthplace and burial place of Omar Khayyám) and was proclaimed sultan or *malik* at Marv (north west of Iran), and 1231, when the Mongols ransacked the country and took it over from the Saljuq Turks. The invasion of the Turks in the early eleventh century brought about major changes in the political and religious structures of the country. This inaugurated a period of turmoil, during which Iranians had to witness and endure the rule of nomadic Turks from the central Asian steppes and south-eastern Russia. These unbelievers had embraced Islam with great fervour in order to enjoy, and live in, and finally rule, an Islamic country. It was a time when deceit and hypocrisy spread widely and freedom of thought was very restricted. The Turks had found their greatest source of power in religion and as Ali Dashti, a Persian critic and scholar of European literature, writes, “they drew the practitioners of the Holy Law into their service and, in consequence, jurists, traditionalists, and preachers flourished while philosophy, logic, and other rational sciences became daily more suspect and feared.”⁸⁴ The importance of the Saljuq period then lies especially in its strong religious prejudice against the local sects and in the discrepancies of opinion which consequently led to clashes, massacres, and the burning of religious buildings. Since the Saljuqs belonged to the orthodox Sunni branch of Islam,

because the Caliph was Sunnite, they took severe measures against Shiism. In the previous period, that is, before the invasion of the Turks, different sects and even people from different religions worked together, even in the court. The king never cared about religious discrepancies. In Omar's time, however, the Saljuqs had become more zealous than the Persians. Sunnis believed that the Baghdad Caliphs were the rightful successors of the Prophet, whereas Shi'is denied the legitimacy of Caliphate and believed that the family of the house of the Prophet and their descendants, starting from Imam Ali, were the rightful successors. Due to the rise of these conflicts in Omar's time no-one was safe and no-one could express his ideas freely. A century before, one could discuss philosophical and scientific ideas quite openly; but when the Turks came to power the situation changed. In the introduction to his *Algebra* in Arabic, Omar Khayyám remarks:

We are the victims of an age when men of science are discredited, and only a few remain who are capable of engaging in scientific research. Our philosophers spend all their time in mixing true with false and are interested in nothing but outward show; such little learning they have, they expend on material ends. When they see a man sincere and unremitting in his search for the truth, one who will have nothing to do with falsehood, they mock and despise him.

However, we take refuge in God!⁸⁵

This important passage gives a vivid picture of Omar's time. Men of science were discredited and philosophers were interested in "outward show." The reason lies in the orthodox attitudes of the rulers of the Saljuqs who thought of little but satisfying the Caliph by the degree of their religious prejudice against all social institutions in order to

⁸⁴ Ali Dashti, *Dami ba Khayyám* [A Moment with Khayyám], 4th ed. (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publications, 1965) 49; trans. L. P. Elwell-Sutton, *In Search of Omar Khayyám* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971).

rule the country. Omar had nothing to do with such falsehood. He was a “man sincere and unremitting in his search for the truth”, even if he was mocked and despised. He was, above all, pious. The following quatrain, translated by Elwell-Sutton, does not appear in FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* but seems to be an authentic quatrain because of its harmony with Omar’s remarks:

If justice ruled the working of the heavens,
All the affairs of Men would prosper well,
 If sciences guided all our worldly acts,
Who would be sorry for the men of science.

It was in the reign of Malik Shah that Omar Khayyám, due to his merits, was invited to the court to undertake the astronomical observations necessary to reform the Persian Calendar, in such a way that the first day of the New Year would coincide with the first day of the spring (March 21). Then he was appointed the head of a commission to build an observatory in the city of Isfahán. This invitation suggests not only Omar’s scientific qualifications but also his religious and respected character. He simply could not have been the author of all those rubáiyát which have anti-religious sentiments, unless he was an exceptionally unlucky person who occasionally recited some lines to his close friends only, not in the role of a public poet but like any poetaster who wished to compose some epigrams impromptu, only to have them all recollected and used against him. As we know the Sultan, a Turk who had embraced Islam in order to live in and rule the country, was “more Catholic than the Pope”, and would certainly not invite an irreligious and anti-Divine Law poet to his court. His vizier too was very strict with religious issues to the point where those who were not of the same sect as the vizier could not enrol in the *madrasa* (colleges). It seems therefore that even though these quatrains

⁸⁵ Omar Khayyám, *Algebra*, quoted by A. Dashti 89; tr. by L. P. Elwell-Sutton 78.

were published only about a century after Omar's death, he could not have composed all or even very many of them. The reason is that if their number were very high, then everybody, at least at court, would have known that Omar was against the current religious thought of the period. Therefore it seems that either they should be interpreted extremely metaphorically or they could not have been composed by Omar. FitzGerald, according to his preface, was aware that Omar "attained great praise for his proficiency in science, and the Sultan showered favours upon him."

What should seem surprising to foreign readers of the *Rubáiyát*, who have an Epicurean and hedonist image of Omar Khayyám at the back of their minds, is the fact that Omar enjoyed the highest social and religious respect of his society and was accorded religious honours throughout his life. According to Qifti, author of *Tárikh ul-Hukamá* ("History of the Philosophers"), Omar "encouraged the search after the One Judge." He was considered to be "an expounder of the Koran" and a "champion of Greek learning and philosophy." The striking point is that none of his contemporaries referred to him either as a Sufi or a poet, in a technical sense of either word: nor as a hedonist and nihilist. Mohammad Awfi, who is the author of the oldest biographical dictionary of Persian poets *Lubábu'l-Albáb* ("Lives of the Poets"), written early in the thirteenth century, does not mention Omar Khayyám. The oldest and the most authoritative allusion to Omar Khayyám is in the *Cháhár Maqála* ("Four Discourses") by Nizámi Aruzi of Samarqand. The author, who actually spoke to Omar Khayyám, wrote his book in the first half of the twelfth century. *Cháhár Maqála*, as E. G. Browne writes, is "one of the most interesting and remarkable prose works in Persian, and one which throws a far fuller light than any other book . . . on the intimate life of Persian and central

Asian courts in the twelfth century of our era.”⁸⁶ Its author was a court poet whose pen name, Aruzi, means “the Prosodist.” Nizámi Aruzi enjoyed the company of Omar Khayyám at Nishápûr in 1112-13 and it was in later years that he visited Omar’s tomb and recorded his two visits in his book in such a way that it captured both FitzGerald’s imagination and, in due course, that of William Simpson, artist on the staff of the *Illustrated London News*. According to Arberry, in October 1884 Simpson went to Nishápûr to collect rose-bushes.⁸⁷ He found some along the end of the platform in front of Omar’s tomb. He sent to England some rose-hips which were planted in Kew Gardens and then on the tomb of FitzGerald to commemorate the connection between Omar and FitzGerald. The anecdote, as Browne translates, runs as follows:

In the year A. H. 506 (=1112-13) Khájé [Master] Imam Omar Khayyám and Khájé Muzaffar Isfizári had alighted in the city of Balkh, in the Street of Slave-sellers, in the house of Amir Abu Sa’d, and I had joined that assembly. In the midst of that friendly gathering I heard that Proof of the Truth (Hujjat-i-Haqq) Omar say, “My grave will be in a spot where the trees will shed their blossoms on me twice a year.” This thing seemed to me impossible, though I knew that one such as he would not speak idle words.

When I arrived at Nishápûr in the year A. H. 530 (=1135-36), it being then some years since that great man had veiled his countenance in the dust, and this lower world had been bereaved of him . . . his tomb lay at the foot of a garden-wall, over which pear-trees and peach-trees thrust their head, and on his grave had fallen so many flower-leaves that his dust was hidden beneath the flowers. Then I remembered that saying which I had heard from him in the

⁸⁶ Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1906) 2: 336.

city of Balkh, and I fell to weeping, because on the face of the earth, and all the regions of the habitable globe, I nowhere saw one like unto him, May God (Blessed and Exalted is He) place him in the Heaven, by his Grace and His Favour!⁸⁸

Apart from something about Omar's attractive and impressive character, this reliable anecdote, which fascinated FitzGerald, considers Omar as a religious person of his time, as his title "Proof of the Truth" shows; the title is not conventional but honorific, and is given to a person who really deserves it. Another point is that according to Nizami's account, Omar's tomb was covered with the blossoms of fruit-trees. The members of the "Omar Khayyam Club", founded by devotees of FitzGerald in 1892, took those flowers for "red roses" and the red rose became the sign of the club: all the members had to wear it any time they gathered together. The other interesting point in mentioning *Cháhár Maqála* is that its author mentions Omar in his section on "astronomy", not in the section on the poetry of the period in which the author talks about the poets of the period. This again is evidence that Omar was not a poet in the eyes of his contemporaries or, more importantly, of his disciples.

Another of the earliest references to Omar Khayyam is in *Mirsádu'l-Ibád* ("Observatory of God's Servants") written in A.D. 1223 by Najmu'd Din Rázi. Najmu'd Din Abdul Allah ibn Mohammad Rázi, called Najmu'd din Dáya, was a Persian theologian and mystic who became a victim of Mongol aggression. Dáya's book is a comprehensive source in its treatment of the major themes of Sufism. In his book, as A. J. Arberry writes, Dáya "elaborates the mystical purification of the human heart and spirit, the Sufi discipline and teaching, the relationship between instructor and discipline, and the

⁸⁷ Arberry, *The Romance* 30.

exercise necessary to spiritual regeneration.”⁸⁹ Dáya’s book does not give any biographical details of Omar’s life as a Sufi; yet he is the first writer to have cited two quatrains composed by Omar Khayyám. He criticises Omar and charges him with being “an unhappy philosopher, atheist and materialist”:

But those unfortunate philosophers and materialists who are shut out from . . . blessings, are bewildered and have gone astray with a certain man of letters, who is famous among them for his talent, his wisdom, his sagacity, and his learning and that man is Omar Khayyám. To form an estimate of his utter shamelessness and corruption, it is only necessary to read the following verses composed by him:

“To this circle which comprises our entry and our exit,
Neither end nor beginning is evident.
No one in the world tells us truly
Whence we come or whither we go.

Our Creator, when He settled the course of Nature,
Why did He subject it to Diminution and Decay?
If it turned out ugly, who was answerable for the form?
If it turned out fair, why was it allowed to perish?”⁹⁰

This account reveals how much Dáya was influenced by the dominant view of Omar’s time, that philosophy and its study was against the divine law. Philosophers were considered to be materialists and atheists. Omar always longed for the period in which philosophers could freely discuss philosophical issues. In Omar’s time the study of philosophy stopped and those who busied themselves with such issues were ridiculed. Once Omar excused himself from being a philosopher:

⁸⁸ Browne 2: 247.

⁸⁹ Arberry, *Classical Persian Literature* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958) 250.

My critics call me a philosopher,
But Allah knows full well they greatly err;
I know not even what I am, much less
What is the reason that I sojourn here!

(Whinfield, No. 350)⁹¹

This was the general attitude toward philosophy in the Saljuq period. Al-Ghazáli, the dominant theologian of the period denounced the philosophers because they had, according to him, a wrong concept of God. Yet this does not mean they were irreligious, and we can see in Dáya's criticisms the beginnings of that misconception of Omar which eventually became FitzGerald's invention.

Another early reference to Omar Khayyám was in *Nuzhat ul-Arwáh* ("Recreation of Souls"), a biographical dictionary of Islamic and pre-Islamic philosophers, written by Mohammad Shahrázuri (1250-1300). The following passage refers to Omar Khayyám without mentioning him as a poet, Sufi or a nihilist:

Omar Al-Khayyámi was a Nishápûri by birth and extraction. He may be regarded as the successor of Abu Ali Sina [Avicenna] in the various branches of philosophic learning; but he was a man of bad character and disliked entertaining. While he was in Ispahan he perused a certain book seven times and then knew it by heart. On his return to Nishápûr he dictated it from memory and on comparing this with the original copy, it was found that the difference between them was but slight. He was averse both to composition and to teaching. One day Omar Khayyám went to see the Vizier Abdur Razzaq. The Chief of the Koran Readers, Abu'l

⁹⁰ E. D. Ross, "A Biographical Introduction," *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, tr. E. FitzGerald (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1900) 45-46.

⁹¹ Whinfield's collection contains 508 quatrains with Persian text on opposite pages. I am using this translation because of its range of quatrains and its literal faithfulness to the original. Furthermore, his edition includes both the Ouseley and the Calcutta quatrains.

Hasan Al-Gazzáli was with the Vizier at the time and the two were discussing the disagreement of the Koran readers in regard to a certain verse. As Omar entered, the Vizier said, “Here we have the authority,” and proceeded to ask Omar Khayyám for his opinion on the matter. Omar enumerated the various readings of the Readers, and explained the grounds for each one. He also mentioned the exceptional readings and the arguments in favour of each, and expressed his preference for one view in particular. Al-Gazzáli then said: “May God add such men as thee to the number of the learned! Of a truth I did not think anyone of the Koran Readers know the readings by heart to this extent-much less one of the secular philosophers.”⁹²

What we learn from Shahrázuri’s account is that Omar was an authority in the Quranic verses and a follower of Avicenna; also that he knew and met al-Gazáli who wrote so powerfully against the philosophers. This account also suggests that Omar was ill-tempered, unsociable and averse to writing; yet he was undoubtedly pious. His knowledge of the readings of the Quran was remarkable. Again, the germs of later misunderstandings are here.

Another mention of Omar Khayyám is in *Tarikh ul-Hukamá* (“History of the Philosophers”) written by Ibn al-Qifti, who died in 1367. This work was composed in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, about two hundred and fifty years after Omar’s death. In this account, apart from his religious title, Omar is represented as a champion of Greek learning and philosophy:

The Imam of Khorásán [i.e. Omar Khayyám], the Savant of the Age, was a master of the science of the Greeks, believing

⁹² Ross 42-43.

it to be the best guide to the arts of government. He counselled the true believer to refrain from bodily lusts and to purify his soul. In recent times the Sufis have fallen victim to the outward charms of his poetry, interpreting it according to their own tenets and employing it in their ceremonies. They do not realise that these poems are like beautiful snakes, outwardly attractive, but inwardly poisonous and deadly to the Holy Law.⁹³

The first point to note in Qifty's account is that Omar was the "Imam of Khorásán"; that is, he was the accepted religious chief of his province; he could not have been hedonist nor nihilist. Qifty does not cite any Persian quatrains written by Omar, but he cites four Arabic verses from Omar and considers them a "stinging serpent"; that is, they are beautiful outwardly but harmful inwardly. Nevertheless, he mentions that Omar encouraged theism and piety and denounced sensuality, thus trying to bring about the purification of the soul. Whatever else one may say of Qifty's Omar, he is not the easygoing hedonist of FitzGerald.

All these references show that Khayyám enjoyed a high reputation in the sciences, Quranic readings, and Greek learning. The last point to make here concerning Omar's character in the eyes of his contemporaries concerns the manner of his death. All the references to Omar's life and works agree that Omar's death occurred in the way it is recorded in Shahrázuri's account, which offers good evidence that Omar was not guilty of the charge of being a nihilist. It is related by Shahrázuri that Omar was one day picking his teeth with a toothpick of gold, and was studying the chapter on Metaphysics from Abu Ali Sina's *Shafá* ("Book of Healing"). When he reached the section on 'The One and the Many' he placed the toothpick between the two leaves, arose, performed his

⁹³ Dashti 31-32; trans. by Elwell-Sutton 42-43.

prayers, and made his last injunctions. He neither ate nor drank anything that day; and when he had performed the last evening prayer, he bowed to the ground and said as he bowed: “Oh God! verily I have known Thee to the extent of my power: forgive me therefore. Verily my knowledge of Thee is my recommendation to Thee.”⁹⁴ And so saying he died.

The rise of the Saljuqs witnessed the appearance of a new generation of panegyric poets and the rise of Sufi literature. The kings and courtiers patronised poets. Some sought the company of poets, others lavishly bestowed gifts – acquired by plundering – to see their own fame immortalised in panegyric poetry. To begin their poetic career in the court, they had to memorise several thousand lines from the works of the well-known poets of the past or the present.⁹⁵ They were then asked, as Z. Safá writes, to compose extempore a few lines on the given subject before the king, because it was strongly believed that nothing so pleased the king as improvisation. Sometimes they were asked to compose a few lines ending in a given word. Therefore, they had to be of extensive learning on different subjects and to be quick-witted.

Omar Khayyám’s reluctance to have an academic career or to produce any philosophical book, and the existence of pessimism in the quatrains attributed to him, originate from this mood created by the Turks of Saljuq. Pessimism in the quatrains under the name of Omar Khayyám (probably collected during the 200 years of the reign of the Turks) does not have a philosophical origin in a belief in the existence of evil in the world. Omar’s complaint about his time and his pessimism do not have a psychological origin either. The origin of this pessimism lies in his social circumstances. He lived in a society

⁹⁴ Browne 2: 251.

⁹⁵ Z. Safá, *Tarikh-i adabiyát dar Iran* [Literary History in Iran], 3 vols. (Tehran: Ibn Sina, 1963) 2: 347.

full of ignorance, religious prejudices, and self-ambitions. The dominion of an alien nation with its frequent wars and plundering and the widespread hypocrisy and corruption, as mentioned by Omar himself, led to an increase in the critical temper of contemporary poetry. Nevertheless, court poetry reached its highest development in this period. The kings, princes, and officials of the court patronised poets in order to see their fame become immortalised in panegyric poetry. Yet the pessimism prevalent in the period and reflected in the poetry resulted in the withdrawal of many poets from the court to the convents. As A. H. Johns writes, Sufism was “a kind of alternative to both the political and the religious establishments.”⁹⁶ For example, Saná’i, one of the great court poets of Ghazna, who earlier in his life practised panegyrics, withdrew to the convent, tried to use *ghazal* for mystical contemplation and later came to be the influential master of Rûmi. Sufism, which existed almost on a private basis, began in this period to grow into communities under the support and guidance of an influential scholar of the period, Abu Hámid Ghazáli, whose brother Ahmad was a great Sufi. Even the earliest criticism of Omar’s own quatrains, and of those attributed to him, ignored the effects on these quatrains of the cultural circumstances of their composition. In Omar’s own quatrains what we almost certainly find is the work of a pious man depressed at the moral and political climate of his times.

Omar Khayyám left a few technical writings such as *Algebra*, and others on the problems of Euclid, as well as a number of philosophical essays all written in answer to questions dealing with creation and the nature of God. He did not produce any major work on philosophy. As the Persian scholars M.T. Jafari and A. Dashti agree, it seemed to Omar that Avicenna had covered the whole field of philosophical inquiry and that there

⁹⁶ A. H. Johns, “Tariqah” [Spiritual path], *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 16 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1981) 14: 342-352.

was nothing left for him to add. It seems reasonable to assume that he felt no need to write on philosophy, because he saw no point in repeating the ideas of his master, Avicenna, and furthermore, the atmosphere of the period was not conducive, as we saw, to writing such books. On the other hand, in mathematics, he considered it his duty to write a whole book without even being asked. The preface to his *Algebra*, as cited in the previous section, reveals the spirit of the age and shows what the philosophers did and how he felt the demand of scientific work. Omar's character has always been judged, in the west, on the basis of the quatrains attributed to him and "tessellated" by FitzGerald following a presupposed pattern. "Omar" came to be the product of such a fabrication. The best antidote to such a view of Omar's character is his surviving reliable writings. Omar's philosophical writings and even the openings and conclusions of his scientific writings, such as *Algebra*, are not compatible with the spirit of some of the alleged genuine quatrains which do reflect the spirit of nihilism and hedonism emphasised by FitzGerald. Omar Khayyám, like all the Islamic religious philosophers and leaders, starts his writings without any pretension, by praising God in conventional spiritual and religious formulae, and ends with similar expressions. He starts his *Algebra*, written in his twenties, with praise of the Creator of all creatures and with the praise of all Divine Prophets and adds that all our needs are to be directed to Him because He resolves our problems with his grace and generosity.⁹⁷ Omar begins his "Some Difficulties of Euclid's Definitions" with "the praise of God who is Generous and Merciful and with the praise of His selected Servants, especially the last Prophet, Mohammad (peace be upon him)." Then he says that "the search for knowledge along with reason is necessary for those who are in search of salvation and eternal bliss; especially, the knowledge which proves the existence of

⁹⁷ Mohammad Taghi Jafari, *Thalil-i Shakhshyat-i Khayyám* (Analysis of Khayyám's Personality], (Tehran: Kayhán, 1989) 86. The Arabic text with its Persian translation is recorded by Jafari. English

resurrection and the survival of 'self'; the knowledge which helps us acquire attributes of the Exalted God according to our ability."⁹⁸ Then Omar enters into discussion of the difficulties in Euclid, which he concludes by saying "It is time to end my treatise with the praise of God . . . who is worthy of praise, and peace be upon His best creature, Mohammad and his immaculate descendants, God is sufficient for us and He sustains us." Jafari cites in all seven examples of opening and conclusions of Omar's writings, two of which I have mentioned.

Omar's treatise on "Existence and Obligation" is written in answer to a question posed by Abu Nasr Abdorrahim, a high-ranking magistrate in Fars. The question was: "What was the purpose of God in creating the world, and why did he impose obligation on man, while His nature requires neither creation nor human worship?"⁹⁹ Omar enters into discussion of existence, which according to him is the most puzzling point concerning creation. He maintains that God did not create the whole of creation at one and the same time but in sequence, descending from the highest creature. First pure reason issued from the Essence of God which is the closest creature to the Exalted God. This sequence continues until the creation of the lowest substances, which are subject to destruction. Then creation, on the basis of these lowest substances, rises from the lowest to the final and noblest which is the human being. The substances nearest to God are the noblest, which are also the farthest from transient substances. Then Omar raises the question, which may also be asked by his reader, "Why did God create opposites from whose conflict evil arises?" He answers that it was not God who created evil because God is the source of generosity; rather, evil is the result of opposites, and this is evil by itself: to

translations are mine unless they are cited.

⁹⁸ Jafari 87.

⁹⁹ The question has been translated from Arabic into Persian by Dashti 78.

avoid creating much good for the sake of a little evil; furthermore, greed and avarice cannot come from a force of generosity.¹⁰⁰

In the second part of his treatise, Omar deals with the matter of “obligation.” He states that obligation issues from God, puts man in the path of God, and encourages him toward perfection both in the secular and the spiritual life. Obligation makes man avoid cruelty and oppression, and refrain from committing evil and indulging in animal passions, because these prevent man from obeying wisdom.¹⁰¹ What we get from these remarks is evidence, first of all, that Omar was much influenced by Aristotle and the analytical tradition of Avicenna; and second, that he was inclined of anything to encourage moral behaviour and keeping to the divine path.

There is only one surviving treatise in the original Persian by Omar Khayyám: “The Science of Universals.” In this treatise, Omar first introduces himself and then explains why he has written it:

Thus says Abu'l Fath Omar b. Ebrahim Khayyám: when I had the honour of serving my great and just master Fakhrol-Molk, he was constantly requesting from me a treatise on the science of universals. I have therefore prepared this treatise in response to his request, in the hope that men of learning will appreciate that a brief summary is worth more than many volumes. May God bring my purpose to fruition!¹⁰²

The first chapter of the treatise, as Dashti writes, deals with the creation of the world, beginning with the issue of the first Intelligence from the Creator, which is followed by the issue of the many intelligences. In the third chapter, which deals with Omar's views about

¹⁰⁰ Jafari 62-71 and Dashti 78-81.

¹⁰¹ Jafari 77.

¹⁰² Dashti 109.

Isma'ilis (known as the Assassins) and the Sufis, he talks about four types of people who seek to know God:

1. Scholastics, who are content with logical arguments in knowing the Exalted God;
2. Philosophers, who base themselves on pure reason;
3. Isma'ilis, who maintain that knowledge of the Creator and His attributes is too complex to grasp, and that reasons and proofs are at a loss to understand it; so it is better to follow the righteous one;
4. Sufis, who do not seek knowledge through contemplation but through purification of the heart and refinement of morals. They cleanse the "self" from the filth of nature and body. Making it pure, they place it beside the angels; then its true nature is revealed shining. Without any doubt, this is the best way because it has been proved that no perfection is better than that of exalted God. In that place there is no veil and prohibition.¹⁰³

It is not too fanciful to detect here some traces of Omar's own position. We know from elsewhere that he would have seen himself as a "philosopher" rather than a "scholastic"; but as we know he was careful in the climate of the times not to appear too much of a philosopher. His polite description of Isma'ilis should not mislead us: such a man could never have set aside "reasons and proofs". What is most noteworthy is his clear admiration for Sufism. On the evidence of this passage alone the later tradition which sees him as a Sufi has some justification. The writer of this passage could never simply have "ridiculed" Sufism, and FitzGerald was surely misled when writing in his preface that Omar "is said to have been especially hated and dreaded by the Sufis, whose Practice he

¹⁰³ Jafari 90.

ridiculed.” But still, one must remember that Omar was being careful, and this passage should not be taken as clear evidence that he was a Sufi.

What emerges from Omar’s own writings and from references to him by his contemporaries is that he was anything but a hedonist or a nihilist; such a characterisation is rather FitzGerald’s own “invention”, through the *Rubáiyát*, “tessellated” on the basis of the quatrains attributed to Omar during the centuries, and derived partly from later accounts of his life. This “invention” opened two different lines of interpretation and scholarship, each forming its own idea of the “real” Omar, but both based on FitzGerald’s invention. One sees Omar as a hedonist and nihilist; the other, perhaps less misleadingly, as a mystic or Sufi. But the historical Omar was neither the former nor the latter: what we find in the poem is an entirely invented Victorian figure, bearing little or no relation to that historical Omar. The next part of this chapter shows the influence of FitzGerald’s invention on subsequent Omar Khayyám scholarship, and also casts further light on both the historical and the invented Omar.

1.3) Literature Review

1.3.1) Valentine Zhukovsky: “Wandering Quatrains”

The first academic study of FitzGerald’s poem was published in 1897 by the Russian scholar, Valentine Zhukovsky, who published an article entitled “Omar Khayyám and the Wandering Quatrains.”¹⁰⁴ Zhukovsky’s article opened a new field of research into those rubáiyát which could be attributed to Omar Khayyám, first in Europe and then in Omar’s own country Iran. The origin of Zhukovsky’s article lay in a visit to Iran in 1884. During the visit, he came across the following quatrain in the hymns of a Sufi poet

¹⁰⁴ Valentine Zhukovsky, “Omar Khayyám and the Wandering Quatrains,” trans. E. Denison Ross, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 30 (April 1898): 349-366.

called Abdolláh Ansári (1006-88) which had been attributed to Omar Khayyám in the Bodleian MS used by FitzGerald:

I am an erring slave, accept Thou me!
My soul is dark, make me Thy light to see!
If heaven be but the wage for service done
Where are Thy bounty and Thy charity?

(Whinfield, No. 93)

After this discovery Zhukovsky systematically checked all the quatrains in various manuscripts attributed to Omar Khayyám, in order to establish whether those that could be shown to be authentic showed Omar as an ascetic or as a hedonist.

Zhukovsky begins his article with an account of the conflicting views concerning Omar's character. He comments that no writer in history "attracted [so] much attention, or called forth so many various and sharply conflicting appreciations and criticisms as Omar Khayyám."¹⁰⁵ In his research, Zhukovsky felt the necessity of obtaining some biographical evidence about Omar's life in order "to fathom" his nature. But the problem was that since Omar's death, his native town had witnessed repeated savage assaults by the Mongols and the only authorised documents left bearing any relation to his life or character were not philosophical but scientific.¹⁰⁶ Zhukovsky concluded that the study of Omar's personality required not only the careful study of his collected quatrains but further research into his life and character based, if possible, on the discovery of new documentation referring to him. Only in this way, he believed, was it possible to dissipate the mist which shrouded Omar's true personality. He took account of the fact that none of Omar's contemporaries, even his student, Nizámi Aruzi of Samarqand, referred to

¹⁰⁵ Zhukovsky 350.

¹⁰⁶ At the time of the publication of his article, Zhukovsky had no access to Omar's "philosophical" writings which are in the form of answers to specific questions put to him by his disciples.

Omar as a poet.¹⁰⁷ Zhukovsky traced the earliest references to Omar's life and gave some biographical information.

Zhukovsky discovered that the older the manuscripts of works of poetry attributed to Omar, the smaller the number of quatrains that occurred in each. To start his extensive research, he compiled a list of the manuscripts of all works housed in European libraries. He listed the number of the quatrains found in each. As his major text, he adopted J. B. Nicolas's collection of 464 quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám with their French translation.¹⁰⁸ He then scrutinised all the available Persian anthologies and manuscripts to find out if any of Nicolas's quatrains occurred there. He entered those which did in his copy of Nicolas's collection. Zhukovsky then made a note of the works in which he found them and to whom they were attributed. Until the publication of his article (1897) he worked extensively for thirteen years on thirty-nine different Persian authors. The result of his inquiry was the discovery of eighty-two quatrains out of the 464 quatrains of Nicolas's collection which could not be safely attributed to Omar because of their "emigration" from one author to another; he described these as the "wandering" quatrains.

Zhukovsky's next step was to classify these eighty-two quatrains according to topics such as love, wine, self-indulgence, freethinking and fate. His intention, which does seem somewhat forced, was to show that the character of Omar Khayyám must be the opposite of the one which emerges in the 82 quatrains falsely attributed to him. Some interesting statistical conclusions arose from his study: such as that

¹⁰⁷ Nizámi Aruzi is the author of *Chahár Magálé* [Four Discourses] (1171) which is one of the most important sources for the biographies of the poets of the period.

¹⁰⁸ J. B. Nicolas, *Les Quatrains de Khéyam* (Paris, 1867).

. . . about 33 per cent. are devoted to Love, Wine, and Self-indulgence; about 43 per cent. give expression to complaint against Fate, the world and man, his frailty, helplessness, and folly; about 6 per cent. fall under the head of philosophic utterances and rules of conduct; and finally about 4 per cent. treat of freethinking and Mussulman religious speculation.¹⁰⁹

Zhukovsky concludes, reasonably enough, that “the great majority of the wandering quatrains enter into the province of Omarian Epicureanism, scepticism and pessimism.” It goes without saying that Zhukovsky’s procedure in attempting to fathom Omar’s character is inverted; in other words, he judges Omar’s character on negative grounds and he does not discuss whether the remaining 362 quatrains are authentic or not, or even what is in them. Therefore, the personality of Omar himself remains obscure and dispersed through a large number of quatrains. But his idiosyncratic conclusion is to put the emphasis on the mystical aspect of Omar’s character and poetry so as to claim that Omar was not “guilty” of the character attributed to him by the FitzGerald tradition.

1.3.2) Arthur Christensen: The “name” of Khayyám

The next scholar to take up the issue of the personality of the historical Omar Khayyám is the Danish scholar Arthur Christensen. In his article ‘Recherches sur les Rubáiyát de Omar Hayyám’ [sic] (Heidelberg, 1904) Christensen re-examines the “wandering” quatrains. He takes his cue from Professor Zhukovsky and decides that it is very unlikely that all the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám were the product of one mind. He casts doubts on the authenticity of the quatrains in all the remaining manuscripts, from the oldest one – that is, the Bodleian MS which FitzGerald used, which was written

¹⁰⁹ Zhukovsky 364-65.

in 1460 (about 350 years after Omar's death) and has 158 quatrains – to the collections compiled during the subsequent three centuries: for example the 800 quatrains in the Cambridge MS. Christensen's main argument was that since in the course of 300 years the number had increased from 158 to 800 quatrains, on what grounds could it be safe for us to accept the authenticity of those used by FitzGerald and compiled about 350 years after Omar's death?

On this basis he tried to do more systematic research into the problem. Like Zhukovsky, he divided the quatrains according to subjects: in this case "dignity of humanity", "enjoyment of life", "reflection on life and fate", "morals and repentance." Under each category, Christensen added quatrains not only from Omar Khayyám but also from other Persian poets. He concluded that neither their diction nor their contents revealed which of them might or might not have been written by Omar. The result of his research was only to increase the number of Zhukovsky's "wandering" quatrains from 82 to 108. Unlike Zhukovsky, nevertheless, Christensen did not regard these "wandering" quatrains as a basis on which to speculate about Omar's character or to decide on which were authentic. Rather, Christensen admitted as authentic only those twelve quatrains of all the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám above which the name of Khayyám appeared. He also admitted two others which appeared in the oldest sources then known. The main problem impeding Christensen's research was that at the time (1904) he had only three or four sources for Omar's quatrains.

It should be noted, however, that the name of Khayyám at the beginning of quatrains does not prove their authenticity, for they may have been composed in response to Khayyám, to attack him or to defend him. The following quatrain bearing Khayyám's name strongly suggests the invalidity of Christensen's claim. It is highly likely to have

been composed after Omar's death, simply because one cannot imagine anybody writing about his own death like this:

Khayyám, who was stitching the tents of wisdom, fell into
the furnace of affliction and was burnt all of a sudden.
The shear of death cut the tent-rope of his life. The
broker of hope sold him for nothing.

(Christensen, No.

LXVII)

In 1927, Christensen published his *Critical Studies in the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. By this time the range of sources had increased. In addition, Friedrich Rosen had published his German collection of the rubáiyát on the basis of an old MS (1321) with 329 quatrains.¹¹⁰ Considering the name of Khayyám in 12 quatrains Rosen had rejected six of them. Now drawing on eighteen primary and secondary sources related to the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám, Christensen offered a new direction for the inquiry into the study of Omar's quatrains. His main purpose was "to establish the relationship between the texts – especially the older ones – by comparing the succession of the quatrains."¹¹¹ His first step was to number all the quatrains so that any number would always represent the same quatrain in all the sources. As the basis of his task, he adopted the Lucknow library collection of quatrains dated back to 1894 with 770 quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám; he gave the numbers 1-770 to this collection. Thus, he numbered those quatrains which did not appear in the Lucknow library collection 771-1213. Christensen's main objective was "to draw up a list from which it

¹¹⁰ F. Rosen, *Rubaiyat-i-hakim Umar-i-Khayyam* (Berlin, 1925).

¹¹¹ Arthur Christensen, *Critical Studies in the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (København, 1927) 13.

may be seen in what and how many texts every quatrain is represented, and in what succession the quatrains are given in each text.¹¹²

On the basis of frequency of quatrains, Christensen accepted a collection of 121 out of 1213 quatrains as genuine. He discussed the personality of Omar Khayyám the poet on the basis of his new collection: it revolved, he said, around “but one true philosophy: Carpe diem” (p. 46). It never occurred to Christensen to talk of Omar in any other terms than as “the poet.” It is interesting that about 68 quatrains in his collection deal directly with the praise of wine or invitation to wine-drinking. That is why he emphasises that in Omarian philosophy “wine is the first and the last of all pleasures; . . . [and] to complete the pleasure, song and music and love is needed.”¹¹³ The portrait of Omar Khayyám as depicted by Christensen does not, indeed, differ very much from the one familiar to us through the version of FitzGerald. In spite of the fact that Christensen considered the Bodleian manuscript as the least authentic (because of its alphabetical arrangement), yet he admitted that ‘FitzGerald has grasped with sure psychological and aesthetical instinct the true kernel of the Omarian poetry.’¹¹⁴

Regardless of his conclusion, however, Christensen had started a systematic approach to studying the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám. Comparing them line by line with each other in eighteen different sources, he was able to determine alterations of even single words. Moreover, he gave a prose translation of all his 121 “genuine” quatrains in English. Nevertheless, the main problem with his approach is that the repetition of one quatrain in different sources does not prove its genuineness. Furthermore, Christensen completely ignored what Omar’s contemporaries had said and

¹¹² Christensen 19.

¹¹³ Christensen 50-51.

¹¹⁴ Christensen 53.

written about him as a scientist and philosopher. The result was that Christensen gave the usual picture of Omar as a self-indulgent tippler rather than the reserved and serious-minded astronomer and mathematician who had revised and designed the Persian calendar on the basis of the solar year: “more accurate than the Gregorian, although five hundred years earlier.”¹¹⁵

The following two quatrains selected and translated by Christensen illustrate the main problem of hit and miss with his approach:

Of that circle which encloses our coming and going we
can make out neither beginning nor end.
Nobody can utter a single word rightly to explain the
mystery, whence is our coming, and whither our going.

(Christensen, No. LXXX)

This quatrain, which is considered genuine by Persian scholars (for example, Ali Dashti, 1966), shows how Omar Khayyám, as an astronomer, stares at the bewildering scene of existence and asks one of those crucial questions about life, time, and eternity which have troubled the human intellect during the ages. But if it is true that Omar was the kind of consistently pious believer and scientist that I have suggested, how can we ascribe the following quatrain from Christensen’s collection to a man who is so lax in his religious observance that he considers banditry permissible?

As far as thou canst, do serve to the drunkards; lay
waste the foundations of prayer and fasting.
Hear this true word from Umar-i-Khayyám: “Drink
wine, be a highwayman, but do good.”

(Christensen, No. LVII)

¹¹⁵ J. A. Boyle, “Umar Khayyám: Astronomer, Mathematician and Poet,” *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975) 4: 659.

1.3.3) Edward Heron-Allen: the question of faithfulness

Contemporaneously with Zhukovsky's research into the authenticity of the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám, Edward Heron-Allen (1861-1943) worked on the faithfulness of FitzGerald's translation to the two Persian sources which were available to FitzGerald. He made no judgment on the authenticity of the sources. In 1899 Heron-Allen published his book *Edward FitzGerald's Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. As he states at the beginning of the book:

The object with which this volume has been compiled has been to set at rest, once and for ever, the vexed question of how far FitzGerald's incomparable poem may be regarded as a translation of the Persian originals, how far as an adaptation, and how far as an original work.¹¹⁶

Heron-Allen compared FitzGerald's quatrains with the two original Persian manuscripts which FitzGerald had used. He printed FitzGerald's quatrains on one page, and on the facing page, his comments on sources as well as the original Persian quatrains or fragments which he thought to have inspired FitzGerald's work, with their literal translation. Also as a result of his comparative research he found that of Edward FitzGerald's 101 quatrains:

Forty-nine are faithful and beautiful paraphrases of single quatrains to be found in the Ouseley of Calcutta MSS., or both;

Forty-four are traceable to more than one quatrain, and may be termed the "composite" quatrains;

¹¹⁶ Edward Heron-Allen, *Edward FitzGerald's Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám with their Original Persian Sources* (London: Quaritch, 1899) viii.

Two are inspired by quatrains found by FitzGerald only in Nicolas's text;

Two are quatrains reflecting the whole spirit of the original poem;

Two are traceable exclusively to the influence of the *Mantiq ut-tair* of Ferid ud-din Attár;

Two quatrains primarily inspired by Omar were influenced by the Odes of Háfiz;

And three, which appeared only in the first and second editions and were afterwards suppressed by Edward FitzGerald himself, are not – so far as careful search enables me to judge – attributed to any lines of the original texts.¹¹⁷

In conclusion, Heron-Allen states of FitzGerald's poem that "a translation pure and simple it is not, but a translation in the most artistic sense of the term it undoubtedly is."¹¹⁸ FitzGerald's poem, as he himself confessed, is "unliteral", and a tessellation of the scattered Persian quatrains collected on the basis of the final rhyming letter rather than on the subject. To arrange or tessellate them into his "prefabricated pattern", to borrow the expression from Professor Arberry, FitzGerald had to disrupt and disorganise them. Then according to his own artistic vision, he fitted them into his pattern. Therefore, FitzGerald's is not a "pure" translation of a hypothetical "original", but a paraphrase, adaptation or re-invention of an idealised original through his own understanding of the exotic pieces of literary work. Furthermore, as we will see when looking at FitzGerald's Persian background, he was apprenticed to E. B. Cowell for some time, then studied Persian on his own for about five years before he "created" the *Rubáiyát*. FitzGerald was never exposed to Persian in an academic way and never travelled to Iran to learn the language

¹¹⁷ Heron-Allen xi-xii.

in its environment. Therefore, I think, we must accept that what is beautiful is not always faithful and what is faithful is not always beautiful.

Heron-Allen's has always been an authoritative work in determining FitzGerald's faithfulness to his Persian quatrains. Nevertheless, he does not compare FitzGerald's quatrains with the Persian texts he used to see what has been lost in, or perhaps gained by, FitzGerald's translation. Rather, he only determines which Persian quatrain or quatrains were the sources of inspiration for FitzGerald's poem quatrain by quatrain. Interestingly enough, Heron-Allen's arrangement of Persian quatrains in his work, according to their sequence in FitzGerald's work, became, in the shape of a forged manuscript, the basis of Robert Graves's collection of quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám.

1.3.4) Robert Graves and Omar Ali-Shah: *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*

A work which questions both the authenticity of the quatrains which FitzGerald chose and the faithfulness of their renderings is Graves's and Ali-Shah's collection of 1967. Robert Graves and his Afghan collaborator, Omar Ali-Shah, both claimed that their translation was based on a manuscript of "uncontradictable authority" dated 1153 (about thirty years after Omar's death) containing 111 quatrains. They also claimed that this manuscript had been in the Ali-Shah family in Afghanistan ever since that time. It should be noted that nobody was allowed to see this treasure!

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám has two prefaces: the first by Graves, and the second by Ali-Shah. In his preface, "The Fitz-Omar Cult", Graves states that the celebrity of FitzGerald's "transmogrification" of Omar's quatrains was the result of "a

¹¹⁸ Heron-Allen xiv.

strong anti-devotional movement among young English ex-Protestants encouraged in their revolt by Charles Darwin's newly broached doctrine of Evolution." Charging FitzGerald with introducing Omar Khayyám to the west as a drunkard and a hedonist, Graves gives an account of Omar's life as a Sufi-initiate. He claims that Omar Khayyám "places himself in pupillage once more to a Sheikh, or teacher, who would treat him like a school-boy throughout the customary twelve years of Sufic training." Nobody knows on what grounds Graves bases the story; but he confidently continues that "it will, in fact, have been the Shaikh who gave him Wine as a subject for poetic meditation, rather than Oil, Bread or Figs, all of which [also] had mystical Sufic meanings attached to them." Graves concludes that Omar Khayyám treated wine as a metaphor of ecstasy excited by divine love:

. . . a simple concept not readily grasped by Westerners, if only because they are convinced that wine drinking was forbidden by Mohammed in the Koran. This is a mistake: only the drinking of date-liquor, which caused a great bloodshed and disorder in seventh-century Arabia, came under the Prophet's ban.

In making such remarks, Graves goes far beyond his competence in justifying wine-drinking in Islam; because in Islam any thing which disturbs the use of reason is forbidden and drunkenness is always a grave sin. Also, as we shall see, Omar was neither a Sufi nor a Sufi-initiate. Still, Graves is the first commentator we have seen to resist the received FitzGerald tradition and try to return to a more historical Omar.

The second point which Graves discusses is the "craftsmanship" of FitzGerald. He asks rhetorically: "how could a man like FitzGerald who was incapable of writing

first-class original work, recreate that of so extraordinary a predecessor?”¹¹⁹ He continues that FitzGerald’s basic mistake was to choose “a strict decasyllabic iambic quatrain with three rhyming lines and one unrhymed . . . which tires the alertest ear.” Graves then criticises FitzGerald’s famous “Thou beside me singing in the Wilderness” by mentioning how its popularity made it the subject of many of Burne-Jones’s paintings in which the poet’s companion is always depicted as a “handsome young houri.” Graves argues that since “thou” refers to the Sufi fellow-initiate with whom he meditates over a book of poems, that person does not sing and is not a houri. Despite Grave’s sound intentions, however, it is hardly possible to take these ingenious remarks seriously, because even in the Persian paintings this fellow-initiate is a beautiful lady. Graves, perhaps playfully identifying himself with Omar Khayyám and perhaps even parodying him, ends his preface with the following rendering of what he refers to as a “fugitive quatrain” from Omar Khayyám, a quatrain which does not appear either in their published text or in any other collection:

Conceal the mystery revealed to you
 From all nonentities, likewise from fools:
 In carefulness approach men’s inner selves,
 Letting none intercept your scrutiny.

Omar Ali-Shah starts his “Historical Preface” by stating that he and Graves have tried “to present a standard edition of Sheikh Omar Khayyám’s original Rubáiyát, freed at last of all accretions, interpolations and misunderstandings.”¹²⁰ Omar Ali-Shah exposes FitzGerald’s misunderstanding of Persian by presenting some examples from his letters to Professor Cowell. Then he concludes that FitzGerald misrepresented Omar Khayyám to

¹¹⁹ Graves 11.

¹²⁰ Graves 32.

the west because “he did not know much Persian and neither did his teacher, Professor Cowell (‘both scrawled badly like small children’).”¹²¹ It is interesting to note that the only source to which he refers to prove that Omar Khayyám was a Sufi and his quatrains should be interpreted in a mystical way is his so-called “standard work of Sufism”, *The Sufis*, written by his own more famous brother Idries Shah. It is also interesting to know that Annemari Schimmel, in her authoritative work *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (1975), referring to this “standard work”, remarks that the works of Idries Shah “should be avoided by serious students.”¹²²

It is not surprising that Omar Ali-Shah is concerned about the arrangement of FitzGerald’s quatrains because they have almost exactly the same sequence as his own manuscript of “uncontradictable authority.” In his preface, Ali-Shah insists that “FitzGerald or Cowell had access to yet another manuscript, or copy of one, which more closely followed the arrangement of the A.D. 1153 manuscript which I had used.”¹²³ All the evidence proves that FitzGerald used the Bodleian and Calcutta manuscripts; it is not clear where the Omar Ali-Shah manuscript is to be found.

Major J. C. E. Bowen, *The Times* reviewer (1968), was the first who cast doubts upon the authority of the Omar Ali-Shah manuscript of quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám because it seemed remarkably similar to FitzGerald’s poem. The controversy over the new version of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám was intensified when Robert Graves admitted that he had “never seen this authentic manuscript, knows [knew] no Persian, worked from a literal English translation supplied by his co-author,

¹²¹ Graves 44.

¹²² Annemari Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975) 9.

¹²³ Graves 41.

General Omar Ali-Shah of the Afghan army.”¹²⁴ Meanwhile, in an article entitled “The Omar Khayyám Puzzle”, Professor L. P. Elwell-Sutton argued that the Graves-Ali-Shah version was precisely based on the work of Edward Heron-Allen who had determined which quatrain or quatrains were the source of FitzGerald’s inspiration. Elwell-Sutton remarked that

. . . if we ignore all (but four) fragmentary rubáiyát in Heron-Allen’s note, omit eight duplicates or near duplicates, together with a further six at the end of an appendix to the notes, and reverse the order of two verses – we are left with a set of 111 rubáiyát arranged in exactly the same order as the 111 in the Ali-Shah manuscript.¹²⁵

Professor Elwell-Sutton argues that the order of quatrains in Graves’s edition is almost exactly the same as the order of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*. In addition, we are certain that FitzGerald selected Persian quatrains quite randomly to give his poem a sense of continuity from dawn to dust; how could a twelfth century Persian scribe have set out a manuscript in almost exactly the same order as FitzGerald’s in the nineteenth century? It seems much more probable that Graves and Omar Ali-Shah used Heron-Allen’s collection.

Since Robert Graves had not seen the manuscript and Ali-Shah refused to reveal it, scholars came to believe that it did not exist. “When the manuscript is revealed,” wrote Robert Graves, “any English Persicologist who cannot face the fact will have either to resign his lectureship or consult a psychiatrist.”¹²⁶ This is the myth of the Graves-Ali-Shah

¹²⁴ Quoted in Alexander Mitchell, “Did Mr. Graves Take a sheaf out of the wrong book?”, *The Sunday Times* (24 March, 1968): 3.

¹²⁵ L. P. Elwell-Sutton, “The Omar Khayyám Puzzle”, *Royal Central Asian Journal*, LV (London, June 1968): 176.

¹²⁶ Quoted by Alexander Mitchell, Graves: “The Final Clue”, *The Sunday Times* (7 December, 1969): 11.

version claimed by its authors to be both a faithful translation and an authentic version of quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám, but turning out to be actually still completely dependent on Edward FitzGerald. Still, the fundamental point is that Graves was right that FitzGerald misrepresented Omar Khayyám to the west, even if a study of Sufism and its history in Persian literature reveals that both Graves and Ali-Shah were wrong in claiming that Omar was a Sufi.

Since the first edition of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* and the subsequent acceptance of Omar as a hedonist and an Epicurean (as FitzGerald himself called him), scholars such as Christensen (1927) have tried to support FitzGerald's image of Omar Khayyám as a hedonist; while others (such as Nicolas and Graves) have tried to show that Omar was a Sufi. The disagreement began with the publication of Nicolas's French edition of *Les Quatrains de Khéyam* (1867), in which he first introduced Omar as a Sufi. FitzGerald studied the French edition and remarked, in his preface to the second edition of the *Rubáiyát*, "I can't see reason to alter my opinion formed as it was a dozen years ago when Omar was first shown me by one to whom I am indebted for all I know of Oriental, and very much of other, literature."¹²⁷ But the fact is that Omar was neither Sufi nor hedonist.

Professor Zhukovsky's extensive research (1889) on the authenticity of the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám revealed for the first time the philosophical aspect of Omar's thought, to which neither Cowell nor any other Oriental scholar had access. This research encouraged Persian scholars to ransack the libraries, whether public or personal, to find any other writing by Omar in order to demystify the shrouded character of Omar Khayyám. The point is that before the reception of FitzGerald's poem nobody

¹²⁷ *Works* ii: 15.

took Omar's life seriously into account; it was only after the introduction of FitzGerald's Omar that his life began to seem important. After Nicolas's French edition and Zhukovsky's research, two streams of thought became current in the west. Edward H. Whinfield, a Persian scholar and translator of both Khayyám's and Rûmi's poems, believed in "the spirit of revolt"¹²⁸ in Omar's quatrains and on this basis tried to give the best specimens of the quatrains recorded in different manuscripts available at that time. The first edition of his translation of 258 quatrains attributed to Omar appeared in 1882. In 1883, Whinfield published the Persian text of five hundred quatrains with their translation on facing pages. Of Whinfield's translation, FitzGerald wrote to Cowell: "I suppose that Mr. Whinfield sent you his Omar, as he did to me, If not, I will send it to you, if you like. In one respect you will certainly approve of it, as being much more faithful to the original."¹²⁹ Another stream of thought, on the basis of Nicolas's edition, showed itself in the Robert Graves-Omar Ali Shah edition, which tried to prove that Omar was a Sufi. Omar, as we saw, was not unfamiliar with Sufism, but reading the feeling of Sufism into poetry requires a kind of passion which was not compatible with Omar's scientific cast of mind. It is hardly possible to have Rûmi's Sufic passion with Omar's scientific propensity in one person because a Sufi completely divorces himself from worldly practices in order to busy himself with spirituality. This does not mean that these two moods are opposites, but one of them always dominates the other. Now let us see what Sufism is.

Sufism is the name given to Islamic mysticism, which grew out of meditation on the Koran and the life of the Prophet. According to the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Religion* (1981), "Sufi" derives "most probably from the Arabic word for wool (şûf),

¹²⁸ Whinfield xxii.

since the early ascetics of Islam (Sufis) are said to have worn coarse woolen garments to symbolize their rejection of the world.”¹³⁰ They were also called *Pashmina-push*, which means “wool-wearers.” Sufism starts with love and through love a Sufi arrives at the culmination of perfection. The ultimate objective of Sufism is perfection of the individual and the union with God: that is, oneness. A Sufi sees everything, including himself, as a sign and part of God. Therefore, any believer (including Omar) has a more or less Sufi tendency in his heart. In response to the question “What is Sufism?” Abu Sa’id Abul Khayr, one of the first great Persian mystics, replied: “Sufism is patience before God’s commands and prohibitions, contentments and submission to destiny’s course.”¹³¹ At a public meeting, Abu Sa’id declared:

This is Sufism: [consciousness of] high rank in disgrace, wealth in poverty, lordship in service, satiety in hunger, attire in nakedness, freedom in slavery, life in death, sweetness in bitterness. Whosoever enters upon this path but makes no progress in these matters will become daily more lost.¹³²

These remarks show the detachment of a Sufi from transience and from all worldly desires and positions.

It was in lyric poetry that Sufism found its highest expression. The use of lyric poetry by the Sufis, who had penetrated the masses of the society, paved the way for the expansion and popular acceptance of Sufi literature. They used poetry extensively for singing (*samá*). Thus Persian literature in a deliberately simple language spread widely among the people in the Saljuq period. The Sufis and those influenced by them employed

¹²⁹ *Letters* iv: 460; December 1881.

¹³⁰ Peter J. Awn, “Sufism,” *Encyclopedia of Religion* 14: 104.

¹³¹ Javad Nourbakhsh. *Sufism* (New York: Khangahi-Nimatullehi Publications, 1981) 19.

¹³² Nourbakhsh 20.

the form of *mathnavi* (already used by Ferdowsi) to express the problems of unity and love by means of allegories and parables. Saná'i's *Hadigat al-Haqiqah* ("The Garden of the Truth"), Attar's *Manteq ut-tayr* ("The Birds' Conversation", translated in an abridged form by FitzGerald and by Arberry), and Rûmi's *Mathnavi* ("Spiritual Couplets") became the sources and expression of mystical ideas during the subsequent ages. With the rise of Sufi literature some words took on mystical dimensions and meanings and entered into Sufi idiom. "Friend" and "Beloved" are the commonest examples of those words which mean "God." To quote from Háfiz:

This borrowed life which the Friend entrusted to Háfiz,
I shall one day deliver up to Him when I see His face.

(Paul Smith, Ode 386)

The pronoun "Him" in the similar position to the "Friend" indicates that the "Friend" refers to God. Sufism imbued practically the whole of Persian poetry with its spirit. It is hardly possible to find Persian verses devoid of Sufi sentiments and passion or at least of Sufi images such as "beloved", "wine" and "tavern." Even those who were not Sufis used these images but with a lack of real Sufi passion.

Khayyám was not a Sufi, though like so many others he shared some Sufi sentiments. We can hardly find the deepest Sufi passion in the quatrains attributed to him. The earliest sources do not record any quatrains under Omar's name with Sufi feelings. According to Dashti, it was only in the anthologies and manuscripts of the later fourteenth century that the numbers of Sufi quatrains attributed to him began to increase.¹³³ A comparison of Omar's ideas with that of Rûmi's Sufism will clarify the point of difference between the Sufi passion and faith and its lack in Omar's poetry:

¹³³ Dashti 115.

You are a compound of the elements four;
The seven planets rule your fevered life.
Drink wine, for I have said a thousand times
That you will not return; once gone, you're gone

(Dashti No. 16; tr. Elwell-Sutton)

And Rûmi says:

Death raised me from the animal state to man;
Why then this fear that death may drag me down? . . .
The next time I shall rise above the angels,
I shall be higher than the mind can grasp!¹³⁴

The speaker in the first quatrain is worried about death and considers it as the end of existence; whereas the speaker in the second stanza, as a Sufi, is anxious for death because he considers death as a ladder to a higher position and rank in the hierarchy of existence. If the first speaker is representative of Omar's ideas, it is clear that he does not share the vision or passion that is characteristic of the Sufis. There are no unequivocally developed Sufi ideas in the poems attributed to him; he is not recognised or listed as a *Pîr* (Sufi master) or a disciple, which means that Omar was not formally a Sufi.

Sufism requires a spiritual master; this spiritual master is called *Sheikh*, *Murshid*, *Morád*, or *Pîr* in Persian and all other Muslim languages. In Sufi idiom, the *Sáki* or Cup-bearer denotes the true master and guide to God. A Sufi is either a disciple who is called *Sálik* or a master who is *Sheik*, or "heavenly rider", as Rûmi calls him. The Sufi master is "the representative of the esoteric function of the Prophet of Islam and by the same token he is the theophany of Divine Mercy which lends itself to those willing to turn to it."¹³⁵ Thus the Sufi master is connected through the chain of initiation (*silsila*) to the Prophet.

¹³⁴ Quoted by Dashti 116; trans. Elwell-Sutton 94.

¹³⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972) 57.

The spiritual master guides and assists his disciple along the spiritual path (*tarigah*). Hence the *Sheik* is able to deliver his disciple from the confines of the material world into the “illimitable luminous space” of the spiritual life, to borrow an expression from S. H. Nasr. Even when the master is dead, the disciple feels his master’s presence and lives on with the spiritual presence of his master. This may be why Rûmi called the master a “heavenly rider.” It may be argued that a man may attain the spiritual path by himself; but his attempt will never bear fruit unless the master is present. With the presence of the master, the disciple never feels his age. As S. H. Nasr writes, “the regenerated spiritual man is always inwardly in the prime of youth.”¹³⁶ Yet the separation from the master is painful:

I aged with his affliction, but when Tabriz
You name, all my youth comes back to me.¹³⁷

It is the power of the master which delivers man from his carnal soul and “enables him to behold the Universe as it really is and to rejoin the sea of Universal Existence.”¹³⁸ To become a Sufi master, one has to pass through the valleys of pilgrimage, or, to borrow Attar’s expression, through the seven valleys of Search: Love, Knowledge, Independence, Unification, Amazement, Destitution, and finally Annihilation.¹³⁹ The master must know the complications and also the intricacies of the Path. To quote again from Rûmi:

Choose a *Pîr*, for without a *Pîr* this journey is exceeding
full of woe and affright and danger.

¹³⁶ Nasr 57.

¹³⁷ Nasr 58. Shams-i Tabrizi was the spiritual master of Rûmi. ‘Shams’ means “sun”, and Tabriz is a city in NW Iran where Shams was from. For Rûmi, Shams was the representative of the Divine Truth.

¹³⁸ Nasr.

¹³⁹ Browne 2: 513. These seven valleys are also known as “seven cities of love” in Persian literature.

Without an escort you are bewildered (even) on a road you have
travelled many times before.

Do not, then, travel alone on a Way that you have not seen at
all, do not turn your head away from the Guide.¹⁴⁰

The disciples were proud of their masters, and in every society they wished to mention
their masters' integrity and virtue.

What is evident from Omar's life, even if we accept all the quatrains attributed to
him, is that he had never been such a spiritual master, despite all his religious propensities:
nor did he have one. We know Omar was neither a master nor a disciple, furthermore,
because his name is never recorded in either of these positions. Graves was wrong in his
claim that Omar "placed himself in pupillage once more to a Sheikh, or teacher, who
would treat him like a school-boy throughout the customary twelve years of sufic training.
. . . It will, in fact, have been the Sheikh who gave him Wine as a subject for poetic
mediation."¹⁴¹ There are numerous lists of masters and disciples but Omar's name occurs
in none of them. Thus we can conclude that Omar was not a Sufi, either formally or
privately. Yet this does not mean that he was an irreligious person, or without some Sufist
sympathies.

The initiation of the Sufi order reveals also that Omar was not a Sufi, even at a
disciple level. The reason is that a disciple, first of all, "must seek and find the master who
conquers his soul and dominates him as an eagle or falcon pounces upon a sparrow in the
air."¹⁴² Then he must be firm in his devotion to his *Pîr* in following all his master's
guidance. The disciple, as Abu Sa'id maintained, must love God more than the world and

¹⁴⁰ Jalal al-Din Rûmi, *Mathnawi*, trans. R. A. Nicholson (London: Luzac, 1925-40) ii: 161

¹⁴¹ Graves 3.

¹⁴² Naser 61.

whatever exists in it. The world dies in Sufi and he lives in the world without being seduced by it. That is why Z. Safá points out that “Sufis did not busy themselves with the sciences, because they believed that engaging oneself with science works prevents the ascetic from engaging in the beloved.” Therefore, it is hardly possible for a scientist such as Omar Khayyám with a mathematically-oriented mind to trace the path of Sufism in a professional sense of the word. It is not an accident that Nizámi Aruzi, author of *Cháhár Maqáleh* (“Four Discourses”), a disciple of Omar Khayyám, does not mention Omar’s name as a poet in the section on the poets of the period, but mentions Omar’s name in the section on astronomy; he was not known as a poet, let alone a Sufi.

Nevertheless, Graves was crucially right in charging FitzGerald with misrepresenting Omar to the west. Omar’s *Algebra* had been translated in 1851 eight years before FitzGerald’s poem was published. On the other hand, Persian literature is replete with the images of wine and love: yet none of the poets concerned would be seen, either in Iran or in the west, to be a hedonist and Epicurean in a sense of having an excessive love of drinking. Graves is also right in considering wine to be a metaphor in Persian literature. Even in the modern period the late Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, frequently uses wine (*bádeh* or *may* in Persian) in his sonnets, published posthumously, as a metaphor of ecstasy excited by Divine love. In one of his sonnets he says:

Cup of death came to my hand, but never cup of wine,
Years passed me, never came Grace from the Beloved.¹⁴³

So it is the Beloved who gives “wine” as a Grace to His lovers and sends death to them as well.

¹⁴³ Fatema Khomeini, ed. *Divan-i Imam* [Poetical Works of Imam (Khomeini)] (Tehran, 1993) 97.

The historical Omar, then, was neither a hedonist nor a Sufi, and the Omar introduced to the west through FitzGerald's version of the *Rubáiyát* was an invented character.

Chapter Two

The Persian Sources and their Reception

The first section of this chapter reviews some early images of Persian language and literature in Europe, at least as they were perceived by British authors, showing these images contributed to FitzGerald's invention of the *Rubáiyát* and how they led to the Victorian acceptance of FitzGerald's "Omar." The second part of the chapter traces FitzGerald's progress with Persian literature and shows how the other Persian poets he read influenced his understanding or "creation" of the *Rubáiyát*; and how FitzGerald discarded the great Persian poets and retained Omar Khayyám as "his property". In addition, it reveals how FitzGerald took great pains in his study of Persian to show his indebtedness to his teacher, E. B. Cowell, and to pay homage to "his" Omar by introducing him to the Victorians.

2.1) Reception of Persian Literature in Britain

The publication of FitzGerald's work in 1859 marks a kind of culmination of the Persian and oriental studies which commenced in Europe in the early eighteenth century with Antoine Galland's translation of *Les Mille et une Nuits* (1704-17). Galland's translation first brought the east before the eyes of French readers. The French version was immediately translated anonymously into English. The introduction of the *Arabian Nights*¹ was the starting point, according to Martha P. Conant, for the reception of eastern literature and culture in the west. The great success of Galland's translation, for example, gave rise to numerous imitations, such as *The Persian Tales* (1710), *The Tales of the Geni* (1964) by the Reverend James Ridley, *Persian Eclogues* by William Collins (1742), *Rasselas* by Samuel Johnson (1759) and

¹ The English title is not accurate because the tales are not purely Arabian. The book is based on a collection entitled *A Thousand Legends* which was probably translated from Sanskrit into Pahlavi, then into Arabic.

Vathek (1786) by William Beckford. These tales, apart from the interest of their stories, gave European readers the opportunity of “knowing” the customs and ceremonies of “the orient” without taking the trouble to travel to the far east.

The introduction of the *Arabian Nights*, “full of the life, the colour, and the glamour of the East . . . naturally opened a new chapter in the history of oriental fiction in England.”² English translations of these tales were made by Edward Lane in 1840 and by Sir Richard Burton in 1885-88. The repeated editions of the *Arabian Nights* (eighteen editions by 1793) show its great popularity in the eighteenth century. These stories, entertaining because of their exoticism as well as their tales of mystery and magic, stimulated the desire for the publication of more like them. Publication of Samuel Johnson’s *Rasselas* in 1759 paved the way for the hugely popular of *Vathek* (1786) and, eventually, FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* in 1859. The theme of *Rasselas* is often compared by critics to that of Johnson’s poem “The Vanity of Human Wishes.” *Rasselas*, the prince of Abyssinia, is tired of the pleasant life in the “happy valley.” The prince, with his sister Nekayah and an old philosopher Imlac, escapes to Egypt. *Rasselas* thinks that he can find happiness somewhere, but he finds unhappiness everywhere. He decides to return to Abyssinia. What the travellers have learned is simply

. . . to remember the shortness of our present state: they were, perhaps, snatched away while they were busy like us in the choice of life. “To me” said the princess, “the choice of life is become less

² Martha Pike Conant, *The Oriental Tales in England in the Eighteenth Century* (Columbia: Columbia UP, 1908; rpt. London: Frank Cass, 1966) xxii.

important; I hope hereafter to think only on the choice of eternity.”³

For Johnson, it seems, belief in “eternity” and a future existence was more important than the happiness or unhappiness of this world. Here the ancient theme of “vanity” was certainly given a new lease of life through oriental studies, and indeed linked with the orient.

With the expansion of the British Empire in India on one hand, and the encouragement of the knowledge of Oriental learning on the other, Persian language and literature became more significant in Europe. The Persian language became important because of British commercial and political interests in India. Hence, political impulses and the encouragement of Oriental studies brought the study of Persian literature to the close attention of the west. Britain owed part of its success in the advancement of its interests in India to the labours of Sir William Jones (1746-94), who was, according to Edward Said, “a poet, a jurist, a polyhistor, a classicist, and an indefatigable scholar whose powers would recommend him to such as Benjamin Franklin, Edmund Burke, William Pitt, and Samuel Johnson.”⁴ Said continues that “to rule and to learn, then to compare Orient with Occident: these were Jones’s goals.” Jones believed that if

. . . the study of Oriental languages were encouraged in Europe, a new and ample field would be opened for speculations; we should have a more extensive insight into the history of the human mind; we should be furnished with a new set of images and similitudes; and a number of excellent compositions would be brought to light, which

³ S. Johnson, *History of Rasselas: Prince of Abyssinia*, ed. George B.Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931) 157.

⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 1978; rpt. Penguin Book, 1991) 77.

future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate.⁵

As the very beginning of his preface to *Grammar of the Persian Language* (1771) states, Jones found the Persian language “rich, melodious, and elegant.” He felt it his duty to bring the riches of the Persian manuscripts to the attention of Europeans by producing a practical guidebook for learning the language. To accomplish this, he wrote an unprecedented book on Persian grammar and provided his readers, especially the employees of the Company, with various examples of Persian poetry. He also suggested reading Sa‘di’s *Golestán* along with its translation. Thus Jones introduced his readers not only to the grammar of Persian, but also, more importantly, to its literature. FitzGerald followed Jones’s instructions in his study of Persian and started to read Persian with Sa‘di. Jones’s selections from Persian poetry, with their transliteration and translation, encouraged his readers to dilute the “barren and unpleasant” subject of grammar by further reading of Persian literature.

Jones for the first time in Europe “set up the Oriental writers in competition with the revered ancients of Greece and Rome,” as J. P. Singh writes. “What he actually meant was that the Arabic and Persian poets were sublimer than Pindar, sweeter than Anacreon, and more polished than Sappho.”⁶ This is the point, surely: that readers of Persian felt they were in touch with another tradition as ancient and deep as their own. Hence part of “Omar’s” appeal goes back to the reception of oriental tales in the eighteenth century. At the end of his *Commentary* Jones related the story of an Arab who failed to appreciate the poetry of Milton and Pope in Latin translations and decided to learn English in order to enjoy them. Laudably, Jones encouraged his readers not to limit themselves to reading Persian literature in translation, but to acquire the language in order to read Persian literature in its original. *The Arabian Nights* and

⁵ W. Jones, *The Works of Sir William Jones, with the Life of the Author*, 13 vols. (London: J. Stockdale & J. Walker, 1807) x: 360.

⁶ Janardan Parasad Singh, *Sir William Jones: His Mind and Art*, diss. (New Delhi: S. Chand, 1982) 55.

Jones's *Works* paved the way for the future scholars of oriental studies on one hand, and stimulated popular demand for oriental works on the other. William Beckford (1759-1844) produced the *History of Caliph Vathek* (1786), the most successful piece of exotic fiction of the late eighteenth century. This tale was praised by contemporary reviewers for the "novelty of its machinery and its detailed knowledge of eastern manners."⁷ Beckford's Orientalism derived largely from the *Arabian Nights* and he was impressed by Jones's writings on Oriental literature.

Apart from the introduction of the folk literature of the Middle East into England, the introduction of the great poets of Iran began with the studies recorded in the works of certain travellers and scholars. Translations of Persian poets like Ferdowsi, Háfiz, and Sa'di "enjoyed a tremendous vogue in England, exercising a strong influence on poets like W. S. Landor, Southey, Byron and Moor."⁸ Sa'di's *Golestán* was the first literary work translated into English by Stephen Sullivan in 1774. With the rise of Romanticism and associated interest in exotic themes, the study of Oriental literature entered into a new phase. The east became a new source of inspiration for the Romantics. Writers such as Landor and Southey had prejudiced attitudes to the appreciation of other cultures; yet they preferred to write on oriental subjects because they could be the source of new and popular stories. Their indifference displayed "the conservatism of the English, who would not suffer the Orientals to share the glory of the classics."⁹ Byron and Moore were not deeply concerned with the philosophy of the east. Byron contributed to the socialisation of Persian imagery and themes, thus helping to provide a setting and context for FitzGerald. The "cloudless skies" of the east became for Byron, a refuge from his personal difficulties:

⁷ Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 20.

⁸ Leask 18.

⁹ H. Javadi, *Persian Literary Influence on English Literature* (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1983) 95.

I am sick, & sorry, & when I have a little repaired my irreparable affairs, away I shall march . . . back again to the East, where I can at least have cloudless skies, & a cessation from impertinence.¹⁰

Byron owed his first impression of Oriental literature mostly to Jones's *Grammar* and Beckford's *Vathek*. Before embarking on his Mediterranean voyage and producing the *Turkish Tales*, he knew of the well-known Persian poets through Jones's writings. In his *Journal* in 1807, Byron mentions Háfiz, Sa'di, and Ferdowsi. In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, he compares Háfiz to Anacreon, a famous Roman lyric poet of love and wine:

Love conquers Age – so Hafiz hath averr'd,
So sings the Teian, and he sings in sooth.

(Canto II, 63)¹¹

Byron increased the oriental colouring of his tales by making a more correct use of eastern terms. What distinguishes the Oriental atmosphere of Byron's writings, besides the Oriental names, is his usage of common eastern images and references to Persian and Islamic culture in such terms as "mosque", "muézzin", and "minaret" in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

Hark! from the Mosque the nightly solemn sound,
The Muézzin's call doth shake the minaret,
"There is no god but God! – to prayer – lo! God is great!"

(Canto II, 59)

Byron, like a Muslim, invites his reader to listen to the call of the "Muézzin" who calls Muslims to say their prayers; whereas FitzGerald's "Muézzin" from the "Tower of Darkness" cries: "Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There" (No. 25). The word "Muézzin" does not appear in the original Persian text (Calcutta Edition, No. 396) and it is FitzGerald's way of

¹⁰ Leslie A. Marchand, ed., *Byron's Letters and Journals*, 12 vols. (London: John Murray, 1973) 2: 54; to Francis Hodgson, 29 June 1811.

¹¹ Jerome J. McGann, ed. *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 2: 63.

“translating” the original “*monádi*”, which was “ a voice” or “herald”. By using what is in effect an exotic term for a religious messenger, FitzGerald was appealing to a kind of underlying scepticism in both himself and his audience.

Of the other Victorian writers of oriental tales, Arnold’s case is exceptional. He did not know Persian; yet his intuitive grasp of Oriental themes is embodied in his version of an episode from Ferdowsi’s “Rostam and Shoráb”, as it is written and pronounced in Persian. In 1814, James Alkinson produced a freely translated form of “Sohráb and Rustum” in English. Joles Mohl, a German Orientalist, commenced producing *Shah-Námeh* as *Les Livers des Rois* in Paris from 1838 to 1878. Sainte-Beuve in his review of Mohl’s translation gave a detailed account of “Sohráb and Rustum.” Mohl’s translation and Sainte-Beuve’s review encouraged Arnold to work on the episode. Arnold used also Sir John Malcolm’s *History of Persia*, in which the account of Sohráb and Rustum is recorded, and Sir Alexander Burnes’s *Travels into Bokhárá*, to give Oriental atmosphere and colour to his poem. What made Arnold’s translation close to the original was Arnold’s use of Sainte Beuve’s details in his review. “Sohráb and Rustum” deals with the tragic death of a son slain by his father. Sohráb, an unknown soldier in an alien army, is searching for his identity. He is son of the Persian hero Rustum and was born while his father was away at war. His mother, Tahmineh, “for fear/Rustum should seek the boy, to train in arms”, declares that she has borne a girl and returns to her own country with her son. Tahmineh fastens the sign of Rustum’s seal on Sohráb’s arm and asks him to search for his father. Sohráb challenges the bravest soldier of Persia to single combat. He does not know that he has the honour to fight with the greatest champion of Persia, Rustum. During the final battle, Rustum reveals his name and Sohráb

recognises his father. He recoils and Rostum strikes him down. Sohráb reveals his identity and Rostum recognises his son by the seal on his arm. It is too late. Sohráb dies in his father's arms.

The chief difference between the original and Arnold's version, as Javadi also notes, is that the catastrophe in Ferdowsi's episode is due to the "cunning motivation of human actions"¹²; whereas in Arnold's poem this part is completely omitted and is replaced with pure fatalism, which becomes the dominant theme of his "Sohráb and Rostum." This does not mean that fatalism is completely absent from Ferdowsi, but human impulses are also of importance. Another common point is the idea of the quick passing of time, in for example "numbered are my sands of life"; and the idea of "coming to this world." Both these concepts troubled FitzGerald too and he tried to find a solution to these questions:

What, without asking, hither hurried *Whence?*
And, without asking, *Whither* hurried hence!
Oh, many a cup of this forbidden Wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence! (No. 30)

The image of "wind" also appears in FitzGerald's poem:

With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
And this was all the Harvest that I reaped –
"I came like Water, and like Wind I go." (No. 28)

As for the language, the Persian original employs the plain language and ordinary similes which make it easy for readers to memorise the lines; whereas Arnold uses more decorative language, with epic similes closer to Homeric style. Thus the style of *Shah-Námeh* has been replaced with that of Greek epics, at least as the Victorians perceived them. The main reason for this seems to be a limitation in Arnold's knowledge of Persian. Yet his "Sohrab and Rostum" is one

¹² Javadi 134

of the rare Oriental translations which maintains a recognisable degree of closeness to the original, contrasting markedly with FitzGerald. Both Byron and Arnold, indeed, seem to have had a better sympathetic understanding of the Orient than FitzGerald.

2.2) FitzGerald and Persian Literature

It was in the house of the reverend John Charlesworth, a family friend, that FitzGerald found the conversation of a certain young man of nineteen very interesting. The young man was Edward Byles Cowell (1826-1903), FitzGerald's junior by seventeen years. Cowell's personality and commitment to studying foreign languages enticed FitzGerald into studying Spanish and Persian. Without Cowell's stimulation and FitzGerald's attachment to the Cowells, FitzGerald might never have persevered in the study of Persian. Cowell was the son of a corn merchant at Ipswich with less interest in corn than in his books. As a school boy at Ipswich Grammar School, then known as Queen Elizabeth's School, he showed a growing enthusiasm for learning languages. Cowell spent most of his leisure time at the town library, the Ipswich Literary Institution. There he became familiar with the works of the eminent orientalist and jurist of the time, Sir William Jones (1746-94) – the father of Persian studies in the west, as Arberry calls him – to whom all students of Orientalism owe so much. Studying Latin, Greek, French and German led him into studying Persian. At the age of sixteen, he contributed some translations of the odes of Háfiz to the *Asiatic Journal* (1842-5). On the death of his father in 1842, Cowell was compelled to abandon his schooling in order to take over his family business. He spent every day in his grandfather's counting house applying himself to figures, and in the early mornings and evenings he studied foreign languages. Despite all his success in learning foreign languages, he never sought fame and was not ambitious.

In the autumn of 1845, Cowell announced his engagement to Elizabeth Charlesworth, 14 years his senior. According to R. B. Martin, a family legend relates that when FitzGerald was told of the engagement, he exclaimed, “The deuce you are! Why! You have taken my Lady!”¹³ “You are a happy man and I envy you,” wrote FitzGerald later to Cowell. Some ten years earlier FitzGerald had intended to propose to Elizabeth, even writing to Thackeray to ask his opinion: “Now write me word quickly: Lest the deed be done! To be sure, there is one thing: I think it is extremely probable that the girl wouldn’t have me for her parents are very strict in religion, and look upon me as something of a pagan.”¹⁴ The name of the girl was never mentioned in the letter. Conjecture suggested that it was Elizabeth Charlesworth, whose age was much nearer to FitzGerald’s than Cowell’s; in addition, Elizabeth was intimate with FitzGerald’s sisters and frequented their house. FitzGerald remembered his old flame but he could do nothing but try “to keep the friendship on an even course.”

The significance of the Cowells’ marriage and their friendship in FitzGerald’s future success as a translator may be seen from different aspects. First, their marriage had put FitzGerald “into a peculiar triangular relationship” with them, to borrow the expression from Martin. Secondly, what FitzGerald found so appealing in Cowell was the intellectual stimulus he provided, his perseverance in studying foreign languages “to unlock literature” and his application to daily business without ambition. At the age of 42 his association with Cowell revitalised the passive FitzGerald. During a visit to his friend’s home, Cowell introduced FitzGerald to the work of Calderon (1600-81) by translating *El Magico Prodigioso*. FitzGerald became interested in Calderon’s plays and commented that his “head runs on that

¹³ R. B. Martin, *With Friends Possessed: A Life of Edward FitzGerald* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985) 141.

¹⁴ *Letters* i: 172; to Thackeray; 29 July 1835. FitzGerald’s sense of himself as a “pagan” at this early stage of his life shows his friends considered him to lack spirituality.

grand grotesque Spanish Play: fit to be acted in the Alhambra; I shall read Calderon one day.”¹⁵

In 1850 FitzGerald began “to nibble at Spanish: at their old Ballads; which are fine things.” In about six months FitzGerald worked on six less famous plays of Calderon and made them ready for publication. FitzGerald published his *Six Dramas of Calderon / Freely Translated by Edward FitzGerald* in July 1853. According to FitzGerald’s “Advertisement”, he had

. . . while faithfully trying to retain what was fine and efficient, sunk, reduced, altered, and replaced much that seemed not; simplified some perplexities, and curtailed or omitted scenes that seemed to mar the breadth of general effect, applying such omissions by some lines of after-narrative.¹⁶

Again we can see at work here FitzGerald’s tendency to alter his material so as to create something he felt comfortable with, something suiting his “taste”.

On December 10, 1852 FitzGerald went to Oxford to see the Cowells. During this visit he began to study Persian. “On a wet Sunday in Oxford”, wrote Cowell, “I suggested Persian to him and guaranteed to teach the grammar in a day. The book was Jones’s *Grammar*, the illustrations in which are nearly all from Háfiz.” FitzGerald probably began his study in late 1852 after his father died. His first Persian script in his correspondence appeared in a letter to Mrs. Cowell after he returned from Oxford on 29 December 1852. In this letter, FitzGerald wrote to Mrs. Cowell that he had just visited the Tennysons and “admired the Baby [Hallam] greatly and sincerely . . . I told A. T. he was to learn Persian at Oxford: and follow the example of yours truly.”¹⁷ FitzGerald signed this letter in Persian.

¹⁵ *Letters* i: 644; to Cowell, 23 June 1849.

¹⁶ *Works* iv: 6. These six plays were: *The Painter of His Own Dishonour*, *Keep Your Own Secret*, *Gil Perez: The Gallician*, *Three Judgements at a Blow*, *The Mayor of Zalamea*, and *Beware of Smooth Water*.

¹⁷ *Letters* ii: 83.

In his study of Persian, FitzGerald relied on the second edition of Sir William Jones's *Grammar of the Persian Language* (1775). FitzGerald started reading Persian and became familiar with the great poets of the Persian literature before he became familiar with the *rubáiyát* attributed to Omar Khayyám. It is worth knowing that Omar Khayyám was the predecessor of the great poets FitzGerald studied: Attár, Rûmi, Sa'di, Háfiz; but he read Omar after all of them. Jones's *Grammar* does not use poems by Omar. It seems probable to me that FitzGerald first encountered an essential mood of the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám in some lines of Háfiz when he was reading Jones's *Grammar*. These lines contain the images of "morning", "wine" and "passing of time" which are very dominant in the *Rubáiyát*. These lines in Jones's translation run:

It is morning; *fill* the cup with wine: the
rolling heaven makes no delay, therefore
hasten. The sun of wine *rises* from the
east of the cup: if thou seekest the delights
of mirth, *leave* thy sleep.¹⁸

These lines provide good evidence of the influence of the quatrains on Háfiz, whether they were written by Omar or somebody else; but the impact on FitzGerald as well as Háfiz is undeniable. And yet it is in fact Háfiz who is making the impact on FitzGerald, predisposing him to a certain view of Omar. Since FitzGerald studied Háfiz first, the impression of these lines on the *Rubáiyát* is visible in quatrains I, II, and VII of the first edition (1859) and 1, 3, and 7 of the fourth edition. Yet when he discovered Omar he found him so much more appealing than the other Persian poets that he put all of them, the great poets of Iran, aside, and took the lesser Omar as "his property" because "the philosophy of the latter [Omar] is , alas! one that never

¹⁸ William Jones, *A Grammar of the Persian Language* (London: J. Richardson, 1775) 87.

fails in the World! “Today is ours etc.”¹⁹ The following section will show what was in those poets that caused FitzGerald to discard them: and also what of them remained with him, becoming part of a supposed “Omar” who had little to do with the original.

FitzGerald’s first impression of Jones’s *Grammar*, according to his letters, was his interest in Ferdowsi. His first request of Cowell in his letter was that Cowell find him a copy of Ferdowsi and a cheap Persian dictionary. Abol-Qásem Ferdowsi (933-1020), the greatest of Persian epic poets from Tûs (Khorásan), is famous solely for his *Sháh-Námeh* (“Book of Kings”). The *Sháh-Námeh* contains over 60,000 couplets. It is about the mythical and legendary Persian kings and heroes up to the Arab conquest in the seventh century. Lord Byron called Ferdowsi the Oriental Homer:

What would be the sentiments of the Persian Anacreon,
Hafiz, could he rise from his splendid sepulchre at
Sheeraz, (where he reposes with Ferdousi and Sadi,
The Oriental Homer and Catullus), and behold his name
assumed by one Stott of Dromore the most impudent
and execrable of literary pouches for daily prints?²⁰

The whole poem covers a period of three thousand years in fifty chapters covering fifty reigns from king Kayûmarth, the first legendary king, to Yazdgerd III, the last historical king, who lost his throne to the Arabs. The tragic story of Sohráb and Rostum, familiar to readers of English poetry through Matthew Arnold’s poem, originated with Ferdowsi. Through the *Sháh-Námeh*, Ferdowsi succeeded in immortalising the glory and identity of the Persians during 3000 years of conflict and strife. Ferdowsi was the first great writer of Iran, after the invasion of the Arabs and neglect of the national thoughts and works, to remind the Persians of their own history.

¹⁹ *Letters* ii: 262; to Cowell, 4-20 March 1857.

²⁰ J. McGann, ed. *Lord Byron* 1: 233.

Through this work Ferdowsi revived the Persian language just as it seemed that Arabic was about to replace it.

FitzGerald had access to a mixed translation of the *Sháh-Námeh* in prose and verse by James Atkinson (1832). One very obvious result of FitzGerald's reading in the original and in this translation was his treatment of the mysteries of creation and fate, in the *Rubaiyat*; another was the employment of the legendary and historical names of the book in his *Rubáiyát*. Some of the proper names such as "Zál" and "Rustum" must have been taken from the *Sháh-Námeh*, since there are no such names in the Persian quatrains which FitzGerald used in his production of Omar Khayyám. Another more important influence is the concept of Time in *Sháh-Námeh*. As Amin Banani maintains, in the *Sháh-Námeh* the "drama of creation, the cosmic struggles of good and evil, the unrelenting force of nature, the deeds of men – all take place not only in time but under Time."²¹ In other words, Time is always present in the scene. This is the point that concerned FitzGerald in his *Rubáiyát*:

Whether at Naishápûr or Babylon,
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one. (No. 8)

Nevertheless, FitzGerald believed, following his non-Omarian sources, that time is not the dominant element and power in our life; there is a mysterious and potent power beyond the world which runs everything, rather like a wheel of fortune:

And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky,
Whereunder crawling cooped we live and die,
Lift not your hands to *It* for help – for *It*
As impotently moves as you or I. (No. 72)

FitzGerald began reading the Persian poets with Sa'di, the writer of *Golestán* ("The Rose-Garden") and *Bûstán* ("The Scented Garden"), who was called, as we saw, the "Oriental Catullus" by Byron. According to his letters, FitzGerald studied Sa'di's *Golestán* with the help of two English translations: one by James Ross (1823) and another by E. B. Eastwick (1852). "The idioms of the language and forms of Eastern Thought are becoming more familiar to me," FitzGerald wrote to Mrs. Cowell: "Persian is really a great Amusement to me."²² Mosleh al-Din Abdollah Sa'di (1184-1292) is a great Persian poet and moralist. He is known by his *nom de plume* Sa'di derived from the name of the rulers of Shiraz, his native city. He is also known as the "Master of speech" because, according to the late M. A. Fourouqi, it was Sa'di who taught Iranians how to speak in such a way that still now, after seven centuries, *his* Persian is the current language of the country.²³ Sa'di spent about thirty years in travel and pilgrimage far from his native Shiraz. He was for a time imprisoned during the Crusades. When he returned home (1256), he wrote his two celebrated books: *Golestán*, both in verse and rhymed prose (called *saj'*) and *Bûstán*, entirely in verse. The *Bûstán* (1257) is a collection of histories, apologies and moral instructions. The *Golestán* (1258) deals, in anecdotes and aphorisms, with the behaviour of kings and beggars, of lovers and sages. Because of its elegant language, the *Golestán* is still used as an introduction to Persian language and literature.

Sa'di was the first Persian poet translated into European languages. "His simple but elegant style, his practical wisdom, his charming anecdotes made him a poet who appealed greatly to the Europeans, especially during the age of Reason."²⁴ As FitzGerald wrote to Cowell, "The *Gulistán* is the Model of what a book of Morals ought to be – so various, and

²¹ Amin Banani, "Ferdowsi and the Art of Tragic Epic," *Persian Literature*, ed. E. Yarshater (New York: Bibliotheca, 1988) 109.

²² *Letters* ii: 118; 5 January 1854.

²³ Mohammad-Ali Fourouqi, Introduction, *Golestán-i Sheikh Mosleh al-Din Sa'di* (Tehran: Javidan Publications, 1984) 10-11.

picturesque.” For Sa‘di’s wise maxims, as W. G. Archer writes in his preface to E. Rehatsek’s translation of Sa‘di, are his roses, “pieces of wisdom, intuitions about life, clues to happiness. The Rose Garden is wisdom itself.” Sa‘di himself, in Eastwick’s translation, writes about roses as follows:

What use to thee that flower-vase of thine?
Thou would’st have rose-leaves; take then, rather, mine
Those roses but five days or six will bloom;
This garden ne’er will yield to winter’s gloom.²⁵

FitzGerald had access to the first edition of this translation published in 1852. A study of Sa‘di’s preface to his *Golestán* reveals why it first appealed to FitzGerald and why he eventually put him aside. Sa‘di conventionally asks his readers to thank God for all His graces:

Cloud and wind, and sun and sky,
Labour all harmoniously,
That while they thee with food supply,
Thou mayst not eat unthankfully.
Since all are busied and intend for thee
Justice forbids that thou a rebel be.

Sa‘di’s submission to God and destiny in the early pages of his preface shows that FitzGerald will not follow Sa‘di’s example. FitzGerald, as we will shortly see, was looking for a poet or a *persona* to be hostile to the force of destiny as Byron’s Manfred was. Yet there are points in Sa‘di that appealed to FitzGerald and clearly influenced his invention of the *Rubáiyát*. Sa‘di talks about the unworthiness of human beings, made of clay:

’Twas in the bath, a piece of perfumed clay
Came from my loved one’s hands to mine, one day.
“Art thou then musk or ambergris?” I said;

²⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, “The Genius of Shiraz: Sa‘di and Hafiz,” *Persian Literature* 214.

²⁵ Eastwick 2.

“That by thy scent my soul is ravished?”
“Not so,” it answered, “worthless earth was I,
But long I kept the rose’s company;
Thus near, its perfect fragrance to me came,
Else I’m but earth, the worthless and the same.”²⁶

FitzGerald takes up this conversation in the first edition of his poem under the name of ‘Kuzana-Nama’ [Book of Pots or Jars, or Urns]; and in the later editions he deletes the subtitle but still allocates eight quatrains to a conversation between jars, or urns. They discuss the issue of their creation, whether they are made for a purpose or without any purpose. If there is any purpose behind their creation, then why are they destroyed? They conclude as follows:

“Well murmured one, “Let whoso make or buy,
“My Clay with long Oblivion is gone dry:
“But fill me with the old familiar Juice,
“Methinks I might recover by and by. (No. 89)

Another point of influence on FitzGerald by Sa‘di is the vanity of worldly desires, which is mentioned everywhere in the latter’s poetry:

The world, my brother! will abide with none,
By the world’s Maker let thy heart be won.
Rely not, nor repose on this world’s gain,
For many a son like thee she has reared and slain.
What matters, when the spirit seeks to fly,
If on a throne or on bare earth we die?²⁷

FitzGerald practised in his poem the doctrine what Sa‘di had preached; yet he was not the poet FitzGerald wanted to introduce to the Victorians. FitzGerald thought that teaching moral behaviour was not the thing the Victorians needed. They needed, he thought, to follow the

²⁶ Eastwick 6.

²⁷ Eastwick 24.

example of his created Omar who lived in a “Persian Garden” free from the shackles of destiny. In other words, they needed to have a clear picture of “yesterday” with a blurred picture of “tomorrow” in order to live for “today.” This was what FitzGerald wanted to offer to his contemporaries.

In a visit to the Cowells at Oxford, FitzGerald began to study the Persian Sufi poet Jami with Cowell. Jami was a poet who always remained with FitzGerald and whom he tried to introduce to others. Abdul Rahmán Jami (1414-1492) is the greatest writer of romance in Persian literature. He wrote seven epic poems called *Haft-Orang* (“The Seven Thrones”). Of these poems, three are didactic, three romantic, and one historical, dealing with the story of Alexander the Great. His three romantic epics are *Salámán and Absal* (1480), *Yuséf and Zolaykhá* (1483) and *Layli and Majnûn* (1484). The first romance, as we will see, was translated and published in a free and abridged form by FitzGerald. The story of the *Yuséf and Zolaykhá* is based on the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife related in Chapter XII of the Koran. This became the most popular story in the book, which was published with a German verse translation by Rosenweigh in 1824. FitzGerald read Jami’s mystical allegory *Salám and Absál* with Cowell. The story is that the Shah of Yunán (Greece) prays for a son as his own successor. The king’s counsellor, who is a misogynist sage, condemns passion and prevents the king from taking a wife. A divinely gifted child, without a mother, named Salámán, extraordinarily beautiful, is sent to him. The child is nursed by a young foster-mother named Absál. As he grows up, they fall in love with each other. Salámán is rebuked by the Shah and the sage. He elopes with Absál to the desert; then, remorseful, he returns. Unable to choose between duty and passion, he decides to die with Absál. They fling themselves onto a pyre; Absál perishes, but Salámán is rescued by magical arts. Salámán overcomes his despair and

learns wisdom and finally is crowned king. He marries a woman called Zohra (Venus). According to Jámi, and in FitzGerald's translation, the king represents "Active Intelligence" and Salámán "The SOUL OF MAN; / A Child of Heaven, in raiment unbeshamed / Of Sensual taint, and so SALÁMÁN named."²⁸

Cowell suggested to FitzGerald that the story be translated into English; so he attempted a translation. FitzGerald worked on the *Salámán* at intervals. To be more familiar with Persian, he also studied travel books on Persia, including *Travels in Various Countries of the East, more particularly Persia* (3 vols., 1819-23) by Sir William Ouseley who had accompanied his brother Sir Gore, Ambassador to Iran, as his private secretary. In Ouseley's *Travels*, FitzGerald found helpful information about *Salámán and Absál* which he was busy translating. Through Ouseley's book, FitzGerald became familiar with some of the spoken sounds of the Persian characters. Apart from Ouseley, he found Friedrich Tholuck's *Sufismus* helpful in understanding the meaning of Jámi's *Salámán*. In January 1855, FitzGerald wrote to Cowell: "In looking over my *Salámán* I think I see how *that* could be compressed into very readable form: and should like to manage it with you." He sent his *Salámán* to Cowell for correction and comment. In April, he submitted his work to *Fraser's Magazine* but it was rejected because it was too long. FitzGerald insisted to his publisher on its publication:

. . . both because I like it so much, and as a record of our pleasant study together [with Cowell]; there can be no great Vanity in the desire I suppose, since really (whatever merit my Translation may have) I have done nothing in this but compacted *the Story* into a producible Drama and reduced the rhetoric into perhaps too narrow a compass.²⁹

²⁸ *Works* iii: 102.

²⁹ *Letters* ii: 161; to Cowell, 2 May 1855.

FitzGerald's insistence on its publication shows how deep and important his friendship with the Cowells was and how FitzGerald felt it his duty to pay homage to Jámi by introducing him to the Victorians. In December, FitzGerald started again working on his *Salámán*. He "lightened the Stories, . . . cut out *all* the descriptions of Beauty etc. which are tedious, and are often implied."³⁰ FitzGerald's editorial intention did not excessively distort Jámi's text, as it happens, because the story of *Salámán* remains complete. FitzGerald, by his free translation, cut out the supporting and explanatory descriptions; yet the plot summary of the main story in both texts is the same. But this tendency to remake the original is clear, and in the case of Omar the outcome is quite different. The *rubá'is* are independent quatrains and no story is expressed through them. The *Rubáiyát* with its created speaker is FitzGerald's invention.

FitzGerald sent the text of *Salámán* to Childs to print only a few copies privately. He wrote the preface as a letter to Cowell to acknowledge his debt to him:

Here is my reduced Version of a small Original. What Scholarship it has is yours, my Master in Persian, and so much beside; who are no further answerable for *all* than by well linking and wishing publisht [sic] what you may scarce have Leisure to find due fault with.³¹

FitzGerald was happy with his rendering and always preferred it to all his other translations.

Later in his life FitzGerald wrote to Cowell:

I really read *Salámán* with interest the other day: it seemed fresh to me. I believe it is the best done of all; really fusing the story into a – better *Ring* than Browning seems to have made of his; and retaining more of the Oriental flavour than Omar. A few corrections, & I think I shd. like it even if some one else had done it.³²

³⁰ *Letters* ii: 192; to Cowell, 3 January 1856.

³¹ *Works* i: 41

³² *Letters* iii: 139; 25 April 1869.

Hearing that the Cowells were preparing to leave for India, FitzGerald hurried to Oxford and gave a copy of the *Salámán* to Cowell, including the dedicatory letter to Cowell, as a “little monument” to his studies with him. His delightful life with the Cowells was passing too quickly and he knew he would deeply miss his friends. FitzGerald was worried about Cowell’s health, so he consulted Doctor Carlyle (“Great Tom’s Brother”, as FitzGerald calls him) about India and the doctor gave “but an ill account of the Climate of Calcutta.” FitzGerald insisted that his friend stay in England and “prosper well in England instead of that exile.” He suggested financial aid to his “Master”:

Let me say that should you want Money to make it up, I *have* it, and shall (without regard to you) take care to have some to spare every Year. . . . Would I not – *will* I not – pay a good Sum to keep you both here? What is to become of my Stupendous Learning when you go? I scarce see my old Friends, and make no new ones. I shall die starved of human regard; and besides that [I] shall become a filthy *Miser* if I keep laying by.³³

FitzGerald’s insistence on helping his friend and teacher reveals how he needed stimulation to continue his study of Persian; and above all, how he needed “human regard.” But Cowell was determined to leave for Calcutta. A few weeks before leaving Oxford for Calcutta, Cowell came across, in the Bodleian Library, a beautiful Persian manuscript “written on thick yellow paper, with purplish black ink, profusely powdered with gold”: a manuscript which was destined to survive and make widespread the name of both its author and its translator. Cowell sent FitzGerald a transcript of some portions of the manuscript. called *Rubáiyát-i[= of] Omar Khayyám*.

On 15 July 1856, FitzGerald wrote to Tennyson that he had spent the last fortnight with the Cowells, who were about to sail for India.

³³ *Letters* ii: 213-14; to Cowell, March 1856.

In this letter FitzGerald gave his first impressions of reading some of Omar's poems with Cowell:

We read some curious Infidel and Epicurean Tetrastichs by a Persian of the 11th. century – as savage against Destiny, etc., as Manfred but mostly of Epicurean Pathos of this kind – “Drink – for – the Moon will often come round to look for us in this Garden and find us not.”³⁴

This highly revealing first impression shows how FitzGerald was predisposed by the earlier Persian poetry he had read to see Omar Khayyám in such a light. Omar's supposed “infidelity” and “Epicureanism” were what struck FitzGerald. More importantly Omar's “revolt” against destiny, his stress on the passing of time, captured FitzGerald's imagination as appropriate to a man of action: not in everyday matters but, against God's will, in eternal ones.

When the two friends were parting in August 1856, Cowell gave FitzGerald a complete copy of the manuscript discovered at the Bodleian, containing 158 quatrains and named the Ouseley MS. Returning to his cottage at Bredfield, FitzGerald looked over the quatrains and wrote down some preliminary questions to Cowell. When the Cowells left for India, FitzGerald put the quatrains aside for almost one year, and continued his reading in another poet, Háfiz. It seemed to FitzGerald that Hafiz's imagery of wine and love would keep him busy for a while. Mohammad Shams al-Din, known as Háfiz (meaning the Koran-memoriser), was born about 1320 in Shiraz. He is the greatest of all the lyric poets of Iran, and he took the *ghazal* (ode) to its peak. The *ghazal* generally deals with love and wine; it varies in length from 7 to 14 couplets with the same rhyme throughout; and the poet's *nom de plume* is generally expressed in the last couplet. Háfiz has a unique position in the history of Persian literature because he is the last

³⁴ *Letters* ii: 234. Manfred is the hero in Byron's *Manfred*, proud and independent, feeling guilty of some mysterious crime is outcast from society. He leads a solitary life in the Alps.

practitioner of this literary form. With him the *ghazal* reaches its perfection, especially in his melodious and elegant diction. His choice of words coupled with their pregnant brevity is the principal characteristic of Háfiz; that is why words can hardly be replaced in Háfiz because they lose the pregnancy and melody. Unfortunately this feature of Háfiz is lost in translation. FitzGerald rightly believed that Háfiz's "*best* is untranslatable because he is the best musician of Words."³⁵ Háfiz's concerns about the transitoriness of life, his anxiousness to seize the time, and his professed inability to fathom the mysteries of creation remind us of the influence of Omar Khayyám on him. However, "Khayyám's revolt against creation and his desperate pessimism," as H. Javadi writes, "is replaced with something of a fatalistic submission to a merciful God."³⁶ This feature of Háfiz, as we shall shortly see, seemed to be repellent to FitzGerald.

Háfiz is also known as the "Tongue of the Unseen": (that is, the interpreter of invisible mysteries). His *Divan* (collected poems) is a source of mystical thought as well as aesthetic joy for lovers of poetry. After the Holy Koran, his *Divan* is considered to be the first book of prophecy by the Iranians. Von Hammer (1812-13) translated Háfiz into German and it inspired Goethe to compose his *West-östlicher Divan* of 1819. Reading Háfiz was important to FitzGerald's progress in reading Persian in two respects. First, most of the illustrations in Jones's *Grammar* were from Háfiz, and FitzGerald could easily progress in reading and understanding him even if only at a superficial level. He also had a German translation of the odes of Háfiz by Von Hammer. Through Hammer's translation he could "hammer" Háfiz's odes, to use FitzGerald's pun. Secondly, all the travel books that FitzGerald studied about Persia had referred to Háfiz as well as to his native city Shiraz as *gol* and *bolbol* (flower and nightingale): images of later importance to FitzGerald. He worked on Háfiz with Tennyson and

³⁵ *Letters* ii: 261; to Cowell, 2-4 March 1857.

asked Cowell to correct and “send back the enclosed as soon as you can – giving us the metre and sound of any words very necessary to the music. . . . A. T.[i.e., Alfred Tennyson] will only look at Háfiz – in whom he takes interest.” Tennyson’s producing the intercalary songs of *The Princess* coincided with FitzGerald’s studying Háfiz. Háfiz influenced Tennyson, as Killham also points out, in producing his erotic song “Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal.” This song is sung to herself by Ida when she is thinking of the Prince’s proposal. Like Háfiz’s sonnets it is highly structured and the pattern makes the reader feel he is reading Háfiz. The repeated “Now” in the first lines, the imagery of the cypress, peacock, lily, rose slipping “into my bosom”, and the repetition of the final identical “me”, are typical of Persian *ghazal* practised by Háfiz.

FitzGerald worked hard on Háfiz, and after a few weeks in August 1854 he wrote to Cowell that “I shall die with Háfiz, or the *Mathnavi*, half discovered. There are some pretty things” [the remainder of the letter is missing]. It is strange that less than a year later his feeling about Háfiz had changed: “I read an Ode or two of Háfiz by the day; but it is weary monotony after all! Can’t one get some Jaláleddin [Rûmi]?”³⁷ FitzGerald found Háfiz repelling, finally, because Háfiz found himself in harmony with the design of God. Háfiz never tries to revolt against “this sorry Scheme of Things” (No. 99). (FitzGerald was to find Rumi unsympathetic too in the end, as we shall see.) FitzGerald felt that ‘Háfiz’s Sakis and Goblets were not mystical. He is always apologising for them; always asking Heaven to forgive him, etc.’³⁸ FitzGerald probably felt “weary monotony” in the odes of Háfiz chiefly because of his inadequate knowledge of Persian mysticism, which totally permeates the collections of great Persian poets, especially Háfiz and Rûmi. Thus the greatest lyricist of Persian literature is set aside; but his

³⁶ Javadi 182.

³⁷ *Letters* ii: 172; to Cowell, 5 August 1855.

³⁸ *Letters* ii: 181; to Cowell, 4 September 1855.

invitation to wine-drinking and his sense of the fleetingness of time remain with FitzGerald forever, and appeared everywhere in his *Rubáiyát*.

Jalál al-Din Rûmi, known in Iran as Mowláná and in the west as Rûmi (1207-73), the greatest Persian mystical poet, was the major exponent of Sufi teachings as well as a profound philosopher. According to Talat S. Halman, a Turkish poet and critic, Rûmi's two celebrated works, the *Mathnavi* and the *Diván-i Shams*, "represent perhaps the world's most resourceful synthesis of poetry and philosophy, embracing the lyric, narrative, epic, didactic, epigrammatic, satiric and elegiac forms."³⁹ According to Halman, Hegel praised him as one of the greatest poets and most important thinkers in world history. Sir Mohammad Iqbal of Pakistan proclaimed: "Mawláná [our Master, i.e. Rûmi] turned the soil into nectar . . . I became drunk on his wine; now I live with his blessed breath." Gandhi used to quote a couplet from the story of "Moses and the Shepherd": "To unite – that is why we came; / To divide – that is not our aim."

Rûmi's *Divan-i Shams* (collected poems under the name of Shams) is the "spontaneous overflow" of emotion raised from his acquaintance with and separation from Shams, Rûmi's spiritual teacher. C. Shamisa, a Persian scholar and lecturer, in his introduction to *Gozideh Ghazaliyat-i Shams* ["A selection of the Odes of Shams"] discusses Rûmi philosophy in detail. I have tried to summarise and translate part of this introduction as follows:

1) Death does not exist. Death and life are identical. Death is merely a kind of change from one shape to another, just as a seed planted in the earth dies in one form in order to be born as a tree.

³⁹ Talat S. Halman, "Jalal al-Din Rumi: Passions of the Mystic Mind," *Persian Literature* 191.

2) Death is joining to God which means eternity. Therefore death is union and it makes us happy. Thus death is a wedding for lovers.

3) We are but guests in this world with this material body; then we will return to our permanent home. Therefore think about this spiritual and delightful journey and be happy. This element of Rûmi is present in FitzGerald's quatrain No. 44:

Why, if the Soul can fling the Dust aside,
And naked on the Air of Heaven ride,
Were't not a Shame – were't not a Shame for him
In this clay carcass crippled to abide?

4) Everything, animate or inanimate, is a sign of Him. So all creatures can hear, discern, and be merry because everything is from Him and carries His attributions and eventually returns to Him. Therefore they praise God's greatness; and nothing happens but by his Will.⁴⁰

Rûmi's poetry, as A. Schimmel rightly maintains, "is nothing but an attempt to speak of God's grandeur as it reveals itself in the different aspects of life."⁴¹ Love is a key word in the understanding of Rûmi. Love, even a secular love, finally leads the lover to the ultimate Beloved. Love, according to Rûmi, "is the ultimate transcendence of Human consciousness – analytical and rational, intuitive and holistic, but above all devotional and passionate."⁴² FitzGerald was as unfamiliar with this sort of "love" as he was unfamiliar with the "love" in Browning's poetry (see his comment on the *Ring and the Book*, above). So it seems likely that he should not have found Rûmi appealing to his temper.

FitzGerald was not able or did not want to see this greatness of Rûmi in order to regard him as a "great Artist." It is no wonder that FitzGerald disliked Robert Browning's poetry

⁴⁰ Cyrus Shamisa, *Gozideh Ghazaliyat-i Shams* [A Selection of the Odes of Shams] (Tehran: Sepehr, 1989) 29-36.

⁴¹ A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalaloddin Rûmi* (London: East-West Publications, 1978) 225.

because of its strangeness and grotesqueness. To begin with, FitzGerald disliked “subjectivity” in literature, as he wrote to Frederick Tennyson in 1846: “The whole subjective scheme (damn the word!) of the poems I did not like.”⁴³ By “subjectivity” (the OED in its entry on the work refers to this letter) FitzGerald meant the expression of original materials mainly drawn from the individual’s own imagination. He found such originality unfamiliar and uncongenial. It is noteworthy that FitzGerald was aware of this characteristic. His letter of March 4-20, 1857 to Cowell clearly reveals his impression of and predilection for the great poets of Persia:

I don’t speak of Jaláleddin whom I know so little of (enough to show me that he is no great Artist, however) nor Háfiz – whose *best* is untranslatable because he is the best Musician of Words. . . . I am sure that what Tennyson said to you is true: That *Háfiz* is the most Eastern – or, he should have said, most *Persian* – of the Persians. He is the best representative of their *Character*, whether his Sakis and Wine be real or mystical To be sure their Roses and Nightingales are repeated enough; but Háfiz and old Omar Khayyám ring like true Metal. The philosophy of the Latter is, alas! one that never fails in the World! “Today is ours!” etc.⁴⁴

This fragment reveals why FitzGerald discards Rûmi and Háfiz: the former because of the subjectivity and mysticism of his poetry, and the latter because of his being a pure Persian, inaccessible in translation because of the melody of his verse and his submission to fate and to God’s design of the world. FitzGerald’s preference for Omar Khayyám suggests that in his view Omar was not “the most *Persian* of Persians” like Háfiz, but a blend of East and West: or at least more amenable to being blended. Omar’s revolt against destiny seems to be the

⁴² Halman, *Persian Literature* 202.

⁴³ *Letters* i: 528; March 1846. The OED quotes FitzGerald’s letter as the earliest application of “subjectivity” to literature and art.

⁴⁴ *Letters* ii: 261-2.

“western” side of his character. But this objection to God’s design is also FitzGerald’s invention:

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
Remold it nearer to the Heart’s Desire! (No. 99)

In the original there is no conspiracy against the divine design of the world except that the speaker wishes he had, like God, control of the heavens. FitzGerald was accurate enough in his recognition of Omar’s idea, or “philosophy” as FitzGerald calls it, of “Today is ours.” This philosophy has made Omar popular in the literature of both the east and the west. But what makes FitzGerald’s Omar diverge from the Persian Omar of the 11th century and makes him a Victorian Omar is the matter of *what to do with* “Today is Ours.” FitzGerald failed completely to take Jámi’s advice, in his own translation. The king advises his son Salámán:

‘My Son, the Kingdom of the World is not
‘Eternal, nor the Sum of right Desire;
‘Make thou the Faith-preserving intellect
‘Thy Counsellor; and considering TO-DAY
‘TO-MORROW’s Seed-field, ere That come to bear,
‘Sow with the Harvest of Eternity.’⁴⁵

FitzGerald failed to consider “Today” the “Seed-field” of tomorrow.

FitzGerald did not work seriously on Omar Khayyám until July 1857. The Cowells sailed for India in August 1856. Cowell’s departure for India was a real calamity for him and his reluctant, unsuccessful and brief marriage was in a sense its outcome. “I believe there are new Channels fretted in my Cheeks with many unmanly Tears since then, ‘remembering the days that are no more,’” FitzGerald wrote to Cowell, “in which you two are so mixt up. Well,

well – I have no news to tell you.’⁴⁶ Unlike the speaker in *Rubáiyát* who invites his readers to live in the present and forget both the past and future, FitzGerald always lived in the past and was anxious about the future. It seems that FitzGerald in his poem invites his readers not to be as he was; that is, not to live in the past. A few days before his death, he paid a visit to his school at Bury St. Edmunds in order to recall his school days:

And we, that make merry in the Room
They left, and Summer dresses in new bloom,
Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
Descend – ourselves to make a couch – for whom? (No. 23)

For his consolation, FitzGerald turned to Persian in remembrance of those happy days he had spent with the Cowells. One would have expected him to resort to “old Omar” in such a desperate mood, with his supposed theme of “Today is Ours”, but instead, strangely enough, he started reading Attár’s *Mantiq al-tayr* (“Discourse of the Birds”), a mystical allegory on the quest of the birds for the mythical bird named Simorgh. According to the OED, Simorgh (or Simurgh which literally means thirty birds) is a “monstrous bird of Persian legend, imagined as rational, having the power of speech, and of great age.” Perhaps FitzGerald’s resort to Attár and his engagement in the journey of the birds gave him a sense of satisfaction and a hope of re-union with the Cowells. Farid al-Din Attár (1136-1230 as his name signifies (it means “druggist”), practiced the profession of curing patients and personally attended to his large number of customers. He is one of the greatest Persian mystical poets. Rûmi met him when he was a boy, and chose him as his guide and Master. Attár’s *Mantiq al-tayr*, translated partly as the *Bird Parliament* by FitzGerald, had attracted FitzGerald’s attention in 1856, before “old Omar” cast his spell on him. Garcin de Tassy, a French orientalist, who had already worked on

⁴⁵ *Works* i: 121.

the analysis of Attár's book, published the Persian text with its French translation in 1857. The book relates how the birds under the leadership of the hoopoe set out on a long pilgrimage in search of Simorgh. At the end of the Journey, of all the birds only thirty were left. Thus these thirty birds saw themselves as Simorgh, that is as One bird. Birds represent Sufi pilgrims and Simorgh God or Truth. The whole story symbolises the quest of man's soul for union with God. FitzGerald studied the book very carefully. At intervals he worked on the verse translation of the *Mantiq* and in 1862 he finished the translation and sent it to Cowell asking him to write an introduction and to make it ready for publication in the *Journal of the Bengal Asiatic Society*. Cowell did not reply to his friend's demand until FitzGerald wrote to him for the third time: "I don't hear from you: I rather think you are deterred by those Birds which I asked you to print. . . . But don't let anything of this sort prevent your writing to me now and then."⁴⁷ Cowell hesitated in publishing his friend's *Bird Parliament* because he believed that "some parts of it are really magnificent, but I felt that it was too free and unscientific to be printed in such a Journal."⁴⁸ FitzGerald's *Birds* was never published in his life time but its influence can be traced to the *Rubáiyát* in quatrains 33, 34, and 81.

Earlier in 1857, FitzGerald had occasionally worked on the Ouseley manuscript. He became interested in obtaining other versions of "Omar." He wrote to de Tassy in Paris to see if there were any texts of the supposed Omar Khayyám in the libraries of Paris; and copied a few quatrains as a sample for de Tassy. De Tassy, who had not heard of Omar's quatrains, became fascinated by them, and wrote an article on Omar Khayyám with some quotations from the quatrains which FitzGerald had provided. He read the article before the Persian Ambassador at a meeting of the Oriental Society. De Tassy, who had introduced Omar as a

⁴⁶ *Letters* ii: 245; 22 January 1857. "Remembering the Days that are no more" refers to a poem by Mrs. Cowell.

⁴⁷ *Letters* ii: 491; 5 August 1863.

saint, published his article in the *Journal Asiatique* (No. IX, Paris, 1857). Thus FitzGerald already began to interest scholars in the work.

FitzGerald studied two different collections of quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám to create his first edition of the *Rubáiyát*: the Ouseley Manuscript, No. 140 in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, dated 1460 (A. H. 865)⁴⁹ with 158 quatrains; and the Calcutta Manuscript, No. 1548 in the Bengal Asiatic Society's Library at Calcutta, containing 516 quatrains. FitzGerald had enough time to study the Ouseley manuscript; but he received the Calcutta manuscript in June 1857, only a few months before his publication of the *Rubáiyát*. Therefore it is likely that the influence of the Oxford manuscript on the creation of his work was much the stronger; furthermore, according to Cowell, the Calcutta copy was "exceedingly difficult to read."⁵⁰ In addition, FitzGerald's letter to Cowell containing a long string of questions about the Calcutta manuscript shows that he had many problems with reading and deciphering the quatrains in it. The impression the Ouseley manuscript made on FitzGerald is revealed in a letter, already cited, to Tennyson. Omar Khayyám as an 'Epicurean' and a man who was "savage against destiny" remained with FitzGerald in a way that his subsequent correspondence with his teacher, Cowell, could not change.

An examination of the sequence of the Persian quatrains which FitzGerald chose and used as the source of his poem shows how randomly they have been used. For instance, FitzGerald used the quatrain number 134 of the Calcutta MS as the source of his first quatrain. He used numbers 13 and 80 in the Ouseley MS as the origin of his inspiration for number 4; numbers 41 and 134 from the same manuscript to produce his quatrain number 72, and so on.

⁴⁸ *Letters* ii: 467.

⁴⁹ This manuscript is the oldest single collection of quatrains ever discovered and was written three hundred and twelve years after Omar's death in 1048. The officials of the Bodleian Library have kindly provided me with a photocopy of this manuscript.

⁵⁰ Heron-Allen ix.

As we saw in the first chapter, Heron-Allen in 1899 tried to give the origins of FitzGerald's poem quatrain by quatrain on the basis of the mentioned manuscripts. As I have stated earlier, the manuscripts contain independent quatrains arranged on the basis of the final rhyming letter. Nevertheless, the first two quatrains in the Ouseley MS are out of alphabetical order. I believe the scribe wanted in this way to emphasise the monotheistic side of Omar as well as his belief in "heavenly grace", which are the subject of the first quatrain; and his Sufi tendency, which is the subject of the second one. The first quatrain, in Whinfield's translation, runs:

No pearls of righteousness do I enlace,
Nor sweep the dust of sin from off my face.
Yet since I never counted One as two,
I do not quite despair of heavenly grace.
(Whinfield, No. 268)

The speaker feels sorry for disobeying God and not trying to repent of his sins; yet he is hopeful that God will forgive him because he has never doubted His existence and Oneness. The very opening of the manuscript goes against FitzGerald's first impression of Omar Khayyám as an "infidel" sort of character. FitzGerald therefore thought that this quatrain "is *not* Omar's own, but a provisional Malediction upon him."⁵¹ The very beginning of the manuscript shows that the speaker is a monotheist and not a person opposed to one of Islam's fundamental beliefs; that is, he believes in the Oneness of God (*towhid*) and is not a person "striving to break free from the yoke of harsh and inflexible Semitic law." FitzGerald, however, had already made up his mind, and had a different mental portrait of Omar, or the speaker, as one who was against the Divine Law. This suggests that FitzGerald was searching for a presupposed Omar whom he had already found.

⁵¹ *Letters* ii: 288; to Cowell, 24 June 1857. FitzGerald himself, for the first time in the history of the study of the quatrains, raises the issue of authenticity.

The second quatrain conveys a Sufi tendency with the use of the word *kharábát*: a Sufi idiom meaning “tavern”; it hardly seems characteristic of Omar’s temper, occurring only once throughout the manuscript. This quatrain must be later than Omar since it was only later that this image came to dominate Persian poetry. This point raises the question of the contemporaneity of the quatrains in this manuscript with Omar. In Whinfield’s translation, this quatrain reads:

In taverns better far commune with Thee,
Than pray in mosques and fail Thy face to see!
O first and last of all Thy creatures Thou;
'Tis Thine to burn and Thine to cherish me!

(Ouseley No. 2; Whinfield, No. 262)

Here the speaker prefers to be in a tavern to commune with his Beloved rather than to be in a mosque, and fail to talk intimately with Him. In other words, it is better to be in hell to see God, than in heaven not to see Him. The third line alludes to a verse from the Koran: “We all are from Thee and shall return to Thee.” There is parallelism in this quatrain: the “tavern” burns (Hell) and the “mosque” cherishes (Heaven). This quatrain inspired FitzGerald to produce the following one:

And this I know; whether the one True light
Kindle to Love, or Wrath consume me quite,
One Flash of It within the Tavern caught
Better than in the Temple lost outright. (No. 77)

Both deal with the theme of God’s presence in taverns rather than in religious places; in taverns honesty and self-sacrifice is represented as being without any pretension, whereas in religious places honesty and self-sacrifice are supposedly only pretensions. FitzGerald changes the images of “burning” and “cherishing” to the ideas of “love” and “wrath”; and also the image of “mosques” to “Temple” to give a universal or a Christian theme to the quatrain. FitzGerald felt

in no danger from the “divines” of his time in making such changes; yet when he wanted to express the scepticism of his time he disguised himself under the mask of a Muslim forerunner:

Alike for those who for TODAY prepare,
And those that after some TOMORROW stares,
A Muézzin from the Tower of Darkness cries,
“Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There. (No. 25)

FitzGerald succeeded in evoking a certain kind of scepticism through the voice of that exotic symbol of organised Islam – the Muézzin. This is the Victorian aspect of the *Rubáiyát*: FitzGerald’s way of expressing a peculiarly Victorian mood of religious doubt. This evocation is reminiscent in some ways of J. A. Froude’s *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849), in which Froude expresses the weakening of his faith by Newman’s conversion to Rome through the story of Markham Sutherland, a young man who is to become a clergyman. The book was publicly burnt⁵², however; FitzGerald disguised himself better.

I will try now to group the quatrains in the Ouseley MS under different headings in order to show what it was in them that appealed to FitzGerald; and how FitzGerald’s interpretation differed from the original in a way that created a completely different *persona*. It is in some ways difficult to group the quatrains under general headings, because each of them is a separate poem; nevertheless, certain themes do emerge and I have tried to group the quatrains thematically under these.

The majority of the quatrains in the Ouseley manuscript deal with praise of wine and invitations to wine-drinking; and Omar’s reputation in the west is mainly connected with these two subjects. It is worth mentioning that in the oldest and most reliable sources the number of this kind is very small. The reason seems to be that it was with the gradual introduction of

⁵² A. J. Froude, *The Nemesis of Faith* (London: John Chapman, 1849); rpt. with an introduction by Rosemary Ashion, London: Libris, 1988.

Sufism to Persian literature that “wine” and “wine-worshipping” started permeating literature. This introduction takes place after Omar’s time. With Háfiz it reaches its peak. In the collection of *Nazhat ul-Majális* (written in 731/1331), out of thirty-one quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám there are only five quatrains dealing with wine-drinking, and again only five out of the fifteen quatrains in *Mo’nes al-Ahrár* (written in 740/1340). With the passage of time the number of these quatrains increased in such a way that in the Ouseley MS, written about three hundred years after Omar’s death, we have seventy-two quatrains out of 158 dealing with praise of wine or invitation to wine-drinking. The language of these seventy-two quatrains shows that they cannot be the product of one mind; rather, the scribe has tried to collect these quatrains from different sources in order to have a large bulk of quatrains under the name of Omar and to fill out the gaps between lines with alphabetical rhymes. It seems that the broadly Sufist author or authors of those quatrains dealing with wine-drinking wanted to take advantage of Omar’s name as a support or a protector. The important point, as A. Dashti also stresses, is that in the quatrains mentioned in the earliest sources, even if they are only few, “wine” is not the subject of the quatrain *per se* but is always accompanied with and symbolical of some deeper complex of ideas.⁵³ For example, in the following quatrain from Dashti’s selections (translated by Elwell-Sutton), the speaker is wondering about the fact that those who are alive will not stay here long, and that as they pass away they will not return into this world; therefore he proposes wine and music:

The down is here; arise, my lovely one,
 Pour slowly, slowly wine, and touch the lute:
 For those who still are here will not stay long,
 While those departed never will return.

⁵³ Dashti 215.

This quatrain may be more easily attributed to Omar than the following one in which a frivolous drunkard without any deeper or philosophical thought becomes distressed as a wind overturns his jar of wine:

Thou hast smashed my jar of wine, O Lord!
Thou hast slammed the door of pleasure in my face!
Thou hast split my precious wine upon the ground;
My mouth is parched, art Thou then drunk, O Lord?
(Ouseley, No. 141)

In this quatrain wine, or perhaps disappointed pleasure, is really the only subject of the poem and there seems to be no point beyond it. Even though this quatrain was not used by FitzGerald, it and others like it had some impact on him. At the time of FitzGerald's creation of the *Rubáiyát*, the authenticity of the quatrains had not been raised as an issue, even though, as we saw, FitzGerald did doubt the authenticity of the second quatrain in the Ouseley manuscript, although that was because it did not seem hedonistic enough.

Out of seventy-two quatrains dealing with wine in the Ouseley MS, there are five in which the speaker is accompanied by his "beloved":

Give me a skin of wine, a crust of bread,
A pittance bare, a book of verse to read;
With thee, O love, to share my solitude,
I would not take the Sultan's realm instead!
(Ouseley, No. 149; Whinfield, No. 452)

This quatrain, together with No. 155 in the Ouseley MS, with their two repeated hemistichs, became the originals of FitzGerald's well-remembered stanza. No. 155 in Whinfield's translation runs

So long as I possess two maunds of wine,
Bread of the flower of wheat, and mutton chine,

And you, O Tulip-chicks, to share my cell,
Not every Sultan's lot can vie with mine.

(Whinfield, No. 479)

FitzGerald "mashed" these two quatrains into one and created his own celebrated and beautiful:

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! (No. 12)

The image of song is absent in the Ouseley and Calcutta manuscripts; yet this quatrain celebrates simple living with a high enjoyment of life. This celebration has been the subject of illustrations in the east and also, according to Graves, of "countless Burne-Jonesian illustrations." According to C. Brown the image of "Wine, Women and Song" also became an appropriate motto for Monto in Joyce's *Ulysses*.⁵⁴

About twenty-nine quatrains in the Ouseley manuscript deal with the theme of *tempus fugit*:

Oh threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise!
One thing at least is certain – *This* Life flies;
One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.

(Ouseley, No. 35; FitzGerald, No. 63)

This group of quatrains represents the ending of all beauty, growing age (No. 60), missing friends (Nos. 83, 84), withering of flowers, and the end of earthly kingdoms and glory (No. 13). In this group the image of the handle of a pot resembles the hand of a lover round the neck of his beloved (No. 9); and any part of a violet becomes a mole on the face of the beloved:

Where ruddy tulips grow and roses red,

⁵⁴ Carole Brown, "Omar Khayyam in Monto: A reading of a Passage from James Joyce's *Ulysses*," *Neophilologus*, 68 (1984): 623-636.

Know that a mighty monarch's blood was shed;
And where the violet rears her purple tuft,
Be sure some black-moled girl doth rest her head.

(Ouseley, No. 43; Whinfield, No. 104)

FitzGerald renders this rubá'i as follows:

I sometimes think that never blows so red
The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled;
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in her Lap from some once lovely Head. (No. 19)

FitzGerald replaces the oriental images with images more familiar to his readers. These quatrains are intended to remind readers of the mortality of the creatures of this world and of its transitoriness, and to recommend that we should not be deceived by the superficial values and beauty of this world.

About twenty-one quatrains in the Ouseley manuscript deal with the theme of *Carpe diem*:

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! (No. 24)

The main divergence, caused by a misreading of the Persian symbolism, takes place here. According to FitzGerald's interpretation one is invited to stupefy oneself by drinking, so that in due course one will forget about the deeper truths of existence with all their mysteries:

You know, my Friends, with what a brave carouse
I made a Second Marriage in my house;
Divorced old barren Reason From my bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse. (No. 55)

But according to the Persian interpretation of the quatrains, as well as to Islamic culture, seizing the time should be productive and fruitful. We are aware that time is passing, and that with the passage of time everybody and everything is growing old and leaving this world for the next. Nobody anywhere has promised us that we will return to this world; as a baby never returns to the womb. Therefore, we have to do our best as long as we are in this world. There is an Islamic view of *carpe diem* according to which we should work for this world as if we were going to live in this world forever, and at the same time, work for the next world as if we were going to die tomorrow.⁵⁵ This saying stimulates man to be productive and helpful concerning himself in relation to others, and to feel no worries for tomorrow, because according to another saying from our Prophet “this world is the field for the next world”; that is, what you sow in this world, you will reap in the next. FitzGerald expressed this idea in his *Salámán* but his reinvention of it in the *Rubáiyát* caused him to misinterpret the notion of “seizing the day” and to depict a different picture of the Persian “Omar.”

Thirteen quatrains in the Ouseley MS deal with the apparent absurdity and pointlessness of this life; we are not sure of the other world because no one has returned to tell us of it:

Drink wine! long must you sleep within the tomb,
Without a friend, or wife to cheer your gloom;
Hear what I say, and tell it not again,
Never again can withered tulips bloom.

(Ouseley, No 35; Whinfield, No. 107)

In addition to this point, there are seven Ouseley quatrains dealing with the notion of predestination:

O Heart! this world is but a hollow show,

⁵⁵ The Arabic text with its Persian translation is quoted by Jafari 315.

Why should its empty griefs distress thee so?

Bow down, and bear thy fate, the eternal pen

Will not unwrite its roll for thee, I trow!

(Whinfield, No. 257)

Therefore we are acting like puppets and have no choice:

But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays

Upon his checkerboard of Nights and Days;

Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays.

And one by one back in the Closet lays. (No. 69)

The small number of these quatrains in Ouseley reflects the fact that “predestination” in Persian literature is not a dominant issue; whereas FitzGerald puts much more emphasis on it by allocating more than seven quatrains to it out of 101. He also implicates God Himself in the atmosphere of predestination by making Him the figure which moves the pieces. It would not be normal in Persian literature to do this.

There are five quatrains which deal with “quest for God”, “Sufic love”, “observing Divine law”, “feeling ashamed of oneself” and “philanthropy”, for instance:

Whate'er thou dost, never grieve thy brother,

Nor kindle fumes of wrath his peace to smother;

Dost thou desire to taste eternal bliss,

Vex thine own heart, but never vex another!

(Whinfield, No. 15)

There is one quatrain complaining to God about the wind which broke a drunkard's goblet (Ouseley, No. 141) and another quatrain dissuading the reader from observing religious obligations (Ouseley, No. 123):

Hear now Khayyám's advice, and bear in mind,

Consort with revellers, though they be maligned,

Cast down the gates of abstinence and prayer,
Yea, drink, even rob, so you be kind!

(Whinfield, No. 368)

What we get from the groupings of the quatrains used by FitzGerald is the fact that he caught in some respects the essence of Omar: his world-weariness, his love of ease and comfort, his scepticism and sophistication, his romantic yearning and passionate regret, his fatalism, his inquisitiveness, and his love of beauty. It would certainly be unfair to claim that FitzGerald was totally fabricating a new persona. But time after time we see him subtly shifting the quatrains he chooses (themselves already a smaller group, so that the choice too is important) in the direction of a hedonism and a deep religious scepticism which were alien to Omar himself.

FitzGerald wrote his questions about the text in diary like letters to Cowell. About the middle of June 1857, Cowell sent FitzGerald the transcript of a second “treasure” of Omar’s verses which he had found in the Library of the Bengal Asiatic Society at Calcutta. This MS (which is called the Calcutta edition) had been written in “an atrocious cursive hand.” In spite of all his difficulties in reading the manuscript, FitzGerald found it very interesting; especially he found the piece about Omar’s tomb very touching. FitzGerald worked very hard and enthusiastically on its decipherment because of “its connecting me with the Cowells – now besieged in Calcutta.” FitzGerald’s weak eyes suffered from much reading and close comparison of the Calcutta manuscript with the Bodleian version. Wherever he noticed any problems he also recopied all his questions to Cowell quatrain by quatrain. He took pains to complete his first reading of the Calcutta edition in a few weeks, until he was able to tell Cowell: “Tuesday, July 14. Here is the Anniversary of our Adieu at Rushmere. And I have been (rather hastily) getting to an end of my first survey of the Calcutta Omar, by way of counterpart to our

Joint survey of the Ouseley MS *then*.⁵⁶ FitzGerald closed this letter with his first verse inspired by Omar walking in his garden. He promised to Cowell: “I will not stop to make the Verse better”:

I long for Wine! oh Saki of my Soul,
Prepare thy Song and fill the morning Bowl;
For this first Summer Month that brings the Rose
Takes many a Sultan with it as it goes.

This quatrain is the result of “mashing” three separate quatrains. translated by Heron-Allen as follows:

Sit in the shade of the rose, for, by the wind, many roses have
been scattered to earth and have become dust.

(Ouseley MS. No. 135 ll. 3 and 4)

By the coming of Spring and the return of *Day* [December]
The leaves of our life are continually folded.

(Calcutta Edition, No. 500 ll. 1 and 2)

For it has flung to earth a hundred thousand Jams and Kais,
This coming of *Teer* [July] and departing of *Day* [December].

(Calcutta Edition, No. 481 ll. 3 and 4)

FitzGerald revised and improved this quatrain according to his own taste and some sense of its mysticism was missed in the published editions, No. VIII in the first edition and No. 9 in the fourth:

And Look – a thousand Blossoms with the Day
work – and a thousand scatter’d into Clay:
And this First Summer Month that brings the Rose
Shall take Jamshyd and KaiKobád away.

(No. VIII, 1st ed.)

⁵⁶ *Letters* ii: 289; to Cowell, 3-14 July 1857.

FitzGerald carried “old Omar” with him on his walks. He tried “to look through it a second time, clearing away some Difficulties which had puzzled me on first reading, but also leaving many others, which perhaps a third or fourth Reading may dissipate.”⁵⁷ FitzGerald’s first impression of Omar Khayyám was the strongest one when he wrote to Tennyson in 1856 of his reading Omar with Cowell. One year later, on July 18, 1857, again writing to Tennyson, FitzGerald expressed the same opinion about Omar but more strongly:

But also I have really got hold of an old Epicurean so desperately impious in his recommendations to live only for Today that the good Mahometans have scarce dared to multiply MSS of him.

This is a misunderstanding; indeed FitzGerald’s whole recreation of Omar is based on a misunderstanding. First, Omar Khayyám, until FitzGerald’s adaptation of his quatrains, was not known as a professional poet in Iran. Therefore Iranian scholars did not produce his quatrains. Secondly, the majority of the quatrains deal with the same subjects, such as “passing of the time” and “praise of wine”, as permeate the poetry of other Persian poets, who are not charged by FitzGerald with being Epicurean. Thirdly, it is not clear how many of the quatrains chosen by FitzGerald were Omar’s. Fourthly, he chose those which suited his preconceptions about Omar. Finally, language and words which suggested hedonism and Godlessly to FitzGerald did not do so to the Persian poets. There is no evidence indicating where FitzGerald got this impression of Omar Khayyám as a “material Epicurean”, as FitzGerald calls him in his preface, other than from his own speculations about the quatrains. The French translation of Omar’s *Algebra* (1851) had already showed that Omar was a serious religious scholar. FitzGerald, however, had his own impression of Omar. “I suppose we may conclude our Omar is the Man of Algebra, “wrote FitzGerald to Cowell, “and you see De Tassy thinks he is [a] Saint also: but

⁵⁷ *Letters* ii: 297; to Cowell, 22 August 1857.

I never feel certain about French or Irish Conclusions.” Thus, his selection as well as his tessellation of Omar’s quatrains was based on such an impression. “Those here selected,” he wrote in his preface, “are strung together into something of an Eclogue, with perhaps a less than equal proportion of the ‘Drink and make – merry’ which . . . recurs over – frequently in the Original.”⁵⁸ As we have already seen, invitation to wine-drinking and being merry do not signify being a “material Epicurean.” At least an invitation to wine-drinking, apart from its symbolic meaning, might have the sense of “forgetting one’s concerns.”

It took FitzGerald six months to tessellate “a pretty Eclogue out of Omar’s scattered quatrains.” He worked on his translation while walking in his garden, pondering, polishing, correcting and rejecting, even borrowing from other Persian poets, such as Jámi and Attár, in his desire always to get the spirit rather than the letter. “What is genius,” he asked, “but the faculty of seizing things from right and left – here a bit of marble, there a bit of brass, and breathing life in them?”⁵⁹ This was FitzGerald’s method so he could make something readable “not for Scholars” but for those who were ignorant of Persian. FitzGerald adopted the same method as in translating his Spanish plays and editing Barton’s verses. To prepare his preface, FitzGerald asked Cowell for an account of Omar’s life. Cowell provided him with some portions of *A Biography of Persian Poets* written by Ali Beg Adhar (1711-81). FitzGerald found the “story of the three friends” very fascinating: “it is pretty about the three Boys making a vow of mutual Promotion.” The story of three school-fellows is worth mentioning here since this story fascinated FitzGerald so much that he allocated about six pages to it in his preface to the *Rubáiyát*. What we get from this story, even if there are problems with it, is a correct characterisation of these three figures. The story was that in Nishápûr there was one of the

⁵⁸ *Life* 225.

⁵⁹ R. B. Ince, *Calverley and Some Cambridge Wits of the Nineteenth Century* (London: G. Richards and Toulmi, 1929) 53.

greatest wise and learned man of the time, called Imam Mowaffaq. He was highly honoured and revered. It was believed that whoever became his pupil would attain a good position in the government and a good fortune in the future. These three young men, that is Omar, Nizám al-Mulk and Hasan Sabbáh (the would-be leader of the Assassins) were Imam Mowaffaq's pupils. These three made a vow and promised that whoever obtained fortune, he would share it equally with the two others. It is related that when Nizám al-Mulk became the administrator of affairs Hasan went to him and claimed as his share a position in the government. The vizier kept his promise and offered him a position. Omar also claimed his share, not in the shape of a position in the government but as a yearly pension to continue his studies. FitzGerald found their vow of mutual promotion fascinating because as we have seen, this sort of friendship was sacred in FitzGerald's view. Yet, there are two problems with the story. We know that Nizám al-Mulk was murdered by the assassins (led by Hasan) in 1092 at the age of seventy two. Omar was born in 1048. With a twenty-eight year difference in their ages it is not possible for these two figures to have been school-fellows, although the historical accounts show that they had at least met each other, since it was during Nizám al-Mulk's premiership that Omar was invited to the court as a chief astronomer. Furthermore, Hasan Sabbáh was a Shi'a living in Ray (a Shi'a part of Iran at that time). Regarding the severe conflict between the two sects, it is hardly possible for a Shi'a to send his son from Ray to Khorásán which was the main centre of Sunnis. Therefore the whole story of these school-fellows is apocryphal from both a chronological and an ideological perspective. However, Omar's characterisation as a man of knowledge rather than a man of the world and of position has been rightly depicted.

When J. W. Parker, who had published FitzGerald's *Salámán* in 1856, asked FitzGerald to contribute to *Fraser's Magazine*, he selected thirty-five of the quatrains which he

thought “less wicked” and sent them to the publisher. We have no evidence of what those quatrains contained except that FitzGerald warned his publisher that “he might find them rather dangerous among his Divines.” The publisher was probably of the same opinion because he kept them for almost a year, neither publishing nor rejecting them. FitzGerald retrieved his quatrains and added forty stanzas which he had kept out “for fear of being too strong.” He was determined to print his poem because he believed that

When one has done one’s best, and is sure that the best is better
than so many will take pains to do, though far from the best that
might be done, one likes to make an end of the matter by Print.⁶⁰

In the same letter, FitzGerald described the pains that he had taken: “I suppose very few people have ever taken such Pains in translation as I have: though certainly not to be literal . . . Better a live Sparrow than a stuffed Eagle.” In fact, FitzGerald had really taken pains in “mashing” and “tessellating” the quatrains. In spite this he felt Cowell “will repent of ever having showed me the Book” because of his re-invention of Omar’s character. He had two hundred and fifty copies of the poem printed and bound in ordinary brown paper. He kept forty of them and gave the rest to Bernard Quaritch, an Oriental bookseller, to place on sale. FitzGerald asked his publisher to send review copies to various magazines at his expense. On April 9, 1859, the following advertisement appeared in the *Athenaeum* (No. 164) and the *Saturday Review* (vol. VII, No. 180):

Just published, price 1s
Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, the
Astronomer-Poet of Persia, translated into English Verse.
B. Quaritch, London, Castle Street,
Leicester-Square

The book was published anonymously.

⁶⁰ *Letters* ii: 335; to Cowell, 27 April 1859.

Chapter Three

Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám

A Victorian Product

The *Rubáiyát* appeared unnoticed at a time of great material prosperity in England. The opening of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, commonly known as the Great Exhibition of 1851, was visible and concrete evidence of the industrial achievements of England. This achievement had brought a strong sense of superiority and optimism to the Victorians of the mid-century. They felt that the age was a time of progress. The message of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*, meanwhile, was desperate hedonism (pleasure as the highest good), cynicism, scepticism, and the spirit of fatalism: we know nothing of the world after death; life is vanity; therefore make the most of the life – eat, drink, and be merry. This awareness, according to FitzGerald, was a “desperate sort of thing, unfortunately found at the bottom of all thinking men’s minds.” This perception of life was introduced into the culture at a time when Christianity was weakening and religious doubt in the light of science was growing. What a new reader of the poem might have found were its sensuous elements (wine, woman, music), a notion of pleasure set against the background of mid-Victorian priggishness, and a *reductio ad absurdum* of Victorian materialism.

3.1. FitzGerald’s Reinvented Poem

FitzGerald’s rendition of the *Rubáiyát* cannot be called a “translation” in the technical sense of the word, but an “adaptation”. A translation seeks to retain the meaning of the source language text within its culture; whereas with an adaptation an author seeks to retain some of the meaning of the original text while using the source language text as a raw material to

express a new idea within the framework of the author's culture. Thus an adaptation might create cultural distance between two languages, as FitzGerald's rendition did. In such an adaptation the author endeavours to remain faithful to *his* own culture or idea. FitzGerald's letters to Cowell and his selection of the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám proves that his knowledge of the Persian language and culture was not sufficient for an accurate translation; indeed he never intended to render a literal translation, as he himself called his translation "unliteral". FitzGerald's aim was to be of service to something he had perceived in the original, and to express something deep in his own Victorian consciousness under the guise of an "Omar". He brought to these verses a set of beliefs and predispositions, and gave them the shape of an "Epicurean Eclogue in a Persian Garden" in order to enunciate the scepticism of the period. As we have already seen, FitzGerald studied Persian mostly through translations of Persian literary texts, either in English or French, and he even studied Jámi through a German translation. FitzGerald was not interested enough to delve deeply into the Persian language, nor did he believe in the need for a literal translation. This was not because of his inadequate knowledge of Persian but because he believed that he was a man of "taste", meaning that he had the faculty of making some things "readable" which others had left unreadable. FitzGerald succeeded in getting his message across through his own idiosyncratic methods of deleting, adding, and interpolating, following the notion that "at all costs a thing must live." So what FitzGerald did was to try to capture something of the essence or the spirit of the original Persian sources (Háfiz, Sa'di, Attár, Ferdowsi, Jámi, and above all Omar) and, reading his own concerns into them, "tessellate" them together into a "transmogrified" English version. But FitzGerald missed much of the richness of the mystical essence of the Persian sources, so that despite some accurate translations the result must be called an "invention." Since his readers, in his view, were not "scholars" and not familiar with Persian literature they would not miss the

symbolism and subtle meanings. The consequence of all this is that a detailed section-by-section comparison of the two versions, even if it had not already been attempted by Heron-Allen, would be a futile attempt and would lead us nowhere. Not only did FitzGerald not convey and in some cases not comprehend the whole of Omar's philosophy; there are not even many comparable whole quatrains to discuss. It is the expression and spirit of the poem in English, not its fidelity to or divergence from the original, which has given FitzGerald his place in the literary history of England; but this expression and spirit are impossible to compare in detail with any Persian original or originals.

It is commonly believed that a word for word translation of poetry is impossible, because in the process of translation one must sacrifice either the form or the content. Or, looked at another way, one must sacrifice either the accuracy or the beauty. And in fact, FitzGerald's attempt, especially compared with other faithful translations, can be cited as a perfect illustration of this common belief. He sacrificed literalness or faithfulness in the interests of preserving the spirit, or what he saw as the spirit, of the original. If we compare FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* with his other Persian translations, we see again here that FitzGerald put more of himself and less of the original into creating the *Rubáiyát*. Professor C. E. Norton was right when he said, after comparing FitzGerald's poem with Nicolas's French translation in 1869, that "It [the *Rubáiyát*] is the work of a poet inspired by the work of a poet; not a copy, but a reproduction, not a translation, but the redelivery of a poetic inspiration."¹ As FitzGerald's editor, Aldis Wright, confessed, and as we shall see, it "must be admitted that FitzGerald took great liberties with the original in his version of Omar Khayyám." FitzGerald did not want to or else could not translate literally; he considered that if he did so the result

¹ C. E. Norton, "Nicholas' Quatrains de Kheyam," *North American Review*, CIX (October, 1869): 575-576; quoted by Terhune 209.

might not be “readable” to an English public. His motives were clarity of language and of theme. Therefore he deleted, added and suppressed, to gratify his fastidiousness, anything which he believed might interfere with the fluency of the English diction and the progress of its thought. Several faithful translations have appeared since FitzGerald’s version, but none of them has succeeded in replacing FitzGerald’s poem in the popular imagination. It was not the “true” Omar, which others translated, that fascinated the Victorians, but the Omar of FitzGerald who, in his Oriental guise, captured the Victorian imagination because of his unfamiliar exoticism and remote imagery on the one hand, and the familiar and universal theme of fatalism and seizing the day on the other. In other words, it was the English, rather than the Oriental, spirit and expression of thought that placed FitzGerald’s poem in its position in world literature. The *Rubáiyát* was an expression of FitzGerald’s own experience as well as his personal response to the misfortunes of his friends and his fellow-men in a world which he saw as fast surrendering to scientific determinism. FitzGerald, as a Victorian, read his own concerns and debates, and above all his anxiety about the future, into the *rubáiyát*; and sang his “Song” through the *Rubáiyát* in the voice of the *persona* of Omar, the *persona* he created in place of the Oriental mathematician and astronomer.

FitzGerald attempted to make use of the main themes of the quatrains discussed in the previous chapter and construct his poem according to his “prefabricated” pattern. As we saw, there is not any particular structure in the original except in that the quatrains, despite being independent of each other, can be arranged under certain headings. Secondly, the *Rubáiyát* is in temper the product of the Victorian era. FitzGerald was not content with the current optimism and the complacent religion of his time. So he moved in a different direction, reluctant to offer any kind of moral instruction to his contemporaries; what he thought they

needed was to follow the example of his “Omar”, who lived in a happier world in a “Persian Garden” and was freed from the shackles of destiny. He interpreted “Omar”, or rather a number of ancient poets whose work was attributed to an “Omar”, in such a congenial way that an English readership felt it was discovering this ancient poet for the first time. FitzGerald’s poem would have caused great controversy if it had not been presented as a translation, as its title suggests. If *In Memoriam* was an elegy on a disintegrating form of faith which could not be held any longer by open-minded people, FitzGerald’s poem was an elegy on all faiths since it belonged not only to the west of the nineteenth century, but also to the east: the cradle of ancient civilisations and religions. His *persona*, through his hedonistic philosophy, offered escape from a scientifically-minded world in which the religious authorities themselves were at odds with one another. To counter despair, he suggested withdrawal from “this sorry scheme of things” and offered “seize the day” as a kind of doctrine of the survival of the fittest. In addition, FitzGerald succeeded in teaching a higher lesson, which was to preach “knowledge of ignorance” and the “piety of blasphemy”: to borrow the expressions from W. Cadbury.² While the Epicurean aspects of the *Rubáiyát* resonated with a growing mood of *fin-de-siècle*, exemplified in the writings of Swinburne and Pater, its melancholy also echoes the pessimism of Matthew Arnold and James Thomson (1834-82).

If we changed the title, or even omitted it, the first impression of the reader would be that apart from some Persian words or allusions, the poem was an original composition rather than a translation. Laurence Housman in his introduction to the Collins edition of the *Rubáiyát* (1928) remarked on how FitzGerald’s

. . . fortunate *paraphrase*, so full of ease and grace, so supple in its diction and its imagery, makes us forget – as we never forget in

² William Cadbury, “FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* as a Poem,” *ELH*, 34 (1967); 541-563.

reading a translation of Homer or Dante, however good – that it is a translation. . . . FitzGerald, by his superlative tact, has done us the favour of deceiving us, making either the East seem West, or the West seem East.³

FitzGerald felt and thought with Omar and thus read him as his own contemporary in such a way that Omar's voice became his own voice. He felt that he suffered from the same problems of dreary scepticism and desperate philosophy which had afflicted the mind of a man working in quite different fields of knowledge seven centuries ago in the remote east:

With them the seed of wisdom did I sow,
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
And this was all the Harvest that I reap –
“I came like Water, and like Wind I go.” (No. 28)

FitzGerald found in the Persian quatrains a deep scepticism, an assertion that it is useless to ask questions when there is no answer; he rendered this scepticism thus:

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discussed
Of the Two Worlds so learnedly, are thrust
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are Stopt with Dust. (No. 26)

Yet the universe does have a kind of system:

The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes;
And He that tossed you down into the Field,
He knows about it all – He knows – HE knows! (No. 70)

³ L. Housman, Introduction, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, E. FitzGerald (London: Collins, 1928) 9. The emphasis is mine.

FitzGerald asserts emphatically that there is Somebody who “Knows about it all!” His Omar with all his knowledge was ill-at-ease and unhappy, full of melancholy over his wasted life. He was unable to unravel the knot of existence and wished that he had never come to this life:

Up from Earth’s Centre through the Seventh Gate
I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,
And many a Knot unraveled by the Road;
But not the Master-knot of Human Fate. (No. 31)

“Savage against destiny as Manfred”, ‘Epicurean Pathos’ and the “Infidel” cast of mind were the salient characteristics FitzGerald found in the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyám. On the basis of his first and strongest impression of the verses attributed to Omar, FitzGerald particularly delighted in Omar’s impiety; that is, his religious scepticism. For FitzGerald, Omar without impiety was Hamlet without “the Prince”. It was this aspect of Omar which FitzGerald tried to emphasize in his adaptation. Further, it is the pathos rather than the epicureanism that FitzGerald wanted to emphasize; the invitation to wine-drinking is a response to the pathos of man’s ignorance rather than to hedonism. FitzGerald believed that the philosophy of Omar never “fails in the world! Today is ours.” He is attracted to Omar by what he sees as the latter’s attitude to life: seize the day because death is certain, tomorrow is unsure, youth and beauty pass. Of course FitzGerald’s interest in these things was connected to his personal circumstances when he was working on the *Rubáiyát*: his father died in 1852, his mother in 1855; his unhappy marriage and subsequent separation took place in 1856; and Browne’s death was in 1859; the withdrawal of the “sea of faith” intensified all these misfortunes. Hence FitzGerald approached the Persian quatrains with a prior sense of the meaning of the whole obtained from his response to his first reading of Omar with Cowell. This kind of approach made it possible for a new meaning to be culled from the text which perhaps

never existed in the text before. As we have already seen, Cowell never agreed with FitzGerald's reading of Omar.

Hermeneutic critics such as E. D. Hirsch attribute this type of reading to the realm of "significance" distinguished from "meaning" which belongs solely to the author (*The Aims of Interpretation*, 1976); and for Hans-Georg Gadamer (*Truth and Method*, 1975) such interpretative reading is part of the very character of the work itself.⁴ There seems no longer to be any possibility of reading a text "as it is". Rûmi himself believed that

Everybody became my friend out of his own surmise,
None sought to discover the secrets in my heart,
My secret indeed is not remote from my lament,
But Eye and Ear lack the light to perceive it.⁵

In these lines, quoted on the flyleaf of my thesis and frequently quoted by Persian scholars, Rûmi postulates that everybody reads him from his own surmise or "angle of vision", or responds to him through his own lenses. A literary text functions as a mirror, to change the metaphor, and the reader sees his own reflection in it. Hence, a literary work may mean different things to different people in different situations. In other words, as a literary text passes from a historical or cultural context to a different context new meanings may be obtained by the reader, which were never be anticipated by its author or its own contemporary readers. Still, although different readings might bring new light to a text we can not entirely escape from its originally cultural context. Not every conceivable interpretation is valid, if it does violence to the text's own social and cultural context, which must have a shaping effect on all interpretation. It is, I believe, an error to read and appreciate Omar in

⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) 71.

⁵ A. Arberry, tr. *Tales From the Masnavi* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961) 21

complete isolation from the literary history of Persia, especially as convention is such a dominant feature in Persian poetry.

Persian words and names such as *máh*, *máhi*, *Jamshyd* and *Rustum* are employed by FitzGerald to give an Oriental and exotic colour to this invented poem. A comparison of FitzGerald's poem with the quatrains available to him in manuscripts shows that he omitted quatrains which were difficult for him to read. This is understandable; any reader, even a native speaker, may find some problems in reading these manuscripts. On the basis of a study of the Persian MSS available to FitzGerald, I conclude that FitzGerald has used about 66 quatrains from the Ouseley manuscript (out of 158), and about 56 quatrains, with rather similar themes, from the Calcutta manuscript (out of 516). Some of those omitted may be regarded as repetitious, or as having a different subject from the one he had in mind, or being difficult to read and understand. The following, in Whinfield's translation, is an example which may fairly be regarded as Omarian in temper but was excluded from FitzGerald's poem because he thought that mysticism, in the sense of achieving communion with God through contemplation and love without the medium of human reason, had no place either in a scientifically-minded era, or in the work of the "Omar" he had already decided on.

Alas for that cold heart, which never glows
With love, nor e'er that charming sadness knows;
The day misspent with no redeeming love; –
No days are wasted half as much as those!

(Ouseley, No. 10; Whinfield, No. 117)

In this quatrain the speaker, or the poet, feels pity for a person who spends one day without thinking about and loving the beloved; and the "beloved" of course, is also God. This kind of love or communion is present in Browning's and Rûmi's verses, but FitzGerald could not or

did not want to feel and understand it because it did not fit into his conception of “Omar”, or of his poem.

Between 1859 and 1879, the first and fourth editions of the *Rubáiyát*, FitzGerald made many changes, whether properly considered or not, in both the wording and the sequence of his stanzas. Through these changes he gradually moved further away from the original text and lost all closeness to Omar in order to speak more in his own voice. The gradual changes over about twenty years show, among other things, the changes taking place in Victorian culture, especially its increasing readiness to accept the philosophy presented by the *Rubáiyát*: the notion that pleasure is not wicked. The early admirers of the poem regretted these changes, but the changes merely carried to its conclusion a process of rewriting Omar which was already present in the first version. The first edition of the poem opens in the early morning with this famous stanza:

Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:
And Lo! the Hunter of the East has caught
The Sultan's Turret in a Noose of Light.

In the second edition this became:

Wake! For the Sun behind yon Eastern height
Has chased the Session of the Stars from Night;
And, to the field of Heav'n ascending, strikes
The Sultán's Turret with a Shaft of Light.

and finally the following revision approached closer still, we assume, to FitzGerald's preferred version:

Wake! For the Sun, who scattered into flight

The Stars before him from the Field of Night,
Drives Night along with them from Heav'n, and strikes
The Sultán's Turret with a Shaft of Light.

The original quatrain attributed to Omar in the Calcutta MS (No. 137) reads:

The Sun has cast the lasso of the morning on the roof,
The Emperor of day [= the sun] has cast the pebbles into the cup,
Drink [in Arabic], for the cry of Love at dawn
Invites you to drinking.

In his first version FitzGerald is the closest to the original, keeping the image of the noose/lasso and the stone/pebbles. But he has altered the "Emperor of day" to the Sultan, introduced the new idea of the "Hunter of the East" instead of the Emperor and also that of the stars, and dropped the important idea of God's or Love's summons to drinking as well as the pebbles in the cup. In these changes FitzGerald shows his ignorance of the real meaning of the stanza, which is a summons to contemplation and to drinking what is allowed: wine even in its symbolic sense is not mentioned in the original. Instead of this, FitzGerald has introduced a piece of gorgeous Victorian pseudo-Oriental exoticism ("Hunter of the East"). In later versions he concentrates even more heavily on the role and significance of the sun, and thus moves even further from the religious to the pagan. His early admirers were right to deprecate these changes but could not of course see what he had done even in the first version, the most impressive in itself as well as the closest to the original.

The following examples illustrate how FitzGerald's quatrains are a remarkable example of Victorian *pastiche*. The inspiration for the second stanza in the first edition came from no. 5 of the Calcutta manuscript; yet one can also trace the influence of Háfiz. This stanza in the first edition runs:

Dreaming when Dawn's Left Hand was in the sky
I heard a Voice within the Tavern cry,
 "Awake, my little ones, and fill the Cup
"Before Life's Liquor in its Cup be dry."

The original Persian quatrain is:

There came one dawn a cry from our tavern:
"Ho, our crazy, tavern-haunting profligate!
Arise and fill up the measure with wine,
Before our measure of life is filled up."

Here is part of the ode of Háfiz translated by Cowell in *Fraser's Magazine*, September 1854,
which FitzGerald greatly admired:

The morning dawns and the cloud has woven a canopy,
The morning draught, my friends, the morning draught!
It is strange that at such a season
They shut up the door of the tavern! Oh, hasten!
Have they still shut up the door of the tavern?
Open, oh thou Keeper of the Gates!

In the second edition, FitzGerald changed his stanza completely:

Before the phantom of False morning died,
Methought a Voice within the Tavern cried,
 "When all the Temple is prepared within,
Why lags the drowsy Worshipper outside?"

"False morning" refers to the dim and transient light before dawn. In the final edition "lags" was
changed to "nods".

The
influence of the above stanza as well as that of Háfiz is carried on into the next quatrain and the
image of "cock" crowing is introduced in the place of "False morning":

And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before
The Tavern shouted – “Open then the Door!
“You know how little while we have to stay,
“And, once departed, may return no more.”

This stanza remained unchanged through different revisions of the poem. Its origins were nos.
478 and 247 of the Calcutta MS:

Since Time is in a hurry, O Saki,
Place in my hand the pure wine, O Saki!
At the time of morning-draught, we locked the door [of tavern],
Serve wine, for the sun has already come up, O Saki.

And the second Persian quatrain in the original is:

It is the time of dawn; Arise, oh essence of loveliness!
Gently, gently drink the wine and play the harp;
For these who are present [= alive] will not remain long,
And those who have gone, none will ever come back.

The sense of using time productively is emphasised; in FitzGerald it is not the main point.

Another example illustrates how FitzGerald moved away from a closer sympathy with
Omar; here is no. XLVIII in the first edition:

While the Rose blows along the River Brink
With old Khayyám the Ruby Vintage drink
And when the Angel with the darker Draught
Draws up to Thee – take that, and do not shrink.

The image of the “Rose”, sometimes accompanied with the image of “thorns”, is mostly used in
Persian poetry to indicate a beautiful beloved, and thorns indicate difficulties in getting access
to the beloved. Here the rose by the river and drinking wine with “old Khayyám”, themselves

misunderstood even in the first version, have been removed in the second, with the new figure of the Angels and Death, more familiar to western ears, being introduced. In the second edition this quatrain was changed to:

So when at last the Angel of the Drink
Of Darkness finds you by the river-brink,
And, offering his cup, invites your Soul
Forth to your Lips to quaff it – do not shrink.

The “Angel of the Drink of Darkness” referring to death or the Angel of Death finds man in the garden, enjoying his life by the river-brink and offers his cup of death; man has to accept it. In the second edition FitzGerald has left out the rose, “old Khayyam” and “the Ruby vintage”, clichéd renderings of misunderstood Persian symbols, and, as he sees it, purified his diction and moved closer to the original. But here is the original:

In the circle of the firmament, whose depths are invisible,
There is a cup which all in turn is offered to drink;
When thy turn comes, do not sigh,
Drink the wine joyously, since it is thy turn

(Calcutta, No., 256)

There is no mention of “Angel” or “Darkness” here. In Persian poetry “sherbet” is generally offered by *Ezrael* (Angel of Death), and mystics and saints call it “honey”. So although FitzGerald has removed some inappropriate diction, he has left other examples in place, and his overall tone remains quite out of keeping with original. Another place in the opening stanzas where we can see the kind of “invention” practised by FitzGerald is no. 5, where the speaker is both nostalgic and reassuring:

Írám indeed is gone with all his Rose,
And Jamshyd’s Sev’en-ringed Cup where no one knows;

But still a Ruby kindles in the Vine,
And many a Garden by the Water blows.

But this is an entirely interpolated or fabricated quatrain. The reference to “Ruby” occurs in Ouseley nos. 39, 87, 149, and in Calcutta nos. 296, 304, 413, and 460; the image of the garden of “Írám” and the “Cup” of Jamshyd are absent from these originals, but they can be traced to other Persian poetry read by FitzGerald. As Professor Arberry has shown, FitzGerald in his *Salámán and Absál* (page 49 of the first edition) had written

Here Irám Garden seem'd in Secrecy
Blowing the Rosebud of its Revelation.

In the Appendix to the first edition, FitzGerald explains that this garden was “planted by King Schedad, and [is] now sunk somewhere in the Sands of Arabia.”

Stanza no. XII in the first edition is another composite quatrain:

“How sweet is mortal Sovranty!” – think some:
Others – “How blest the Paradise to come!”
Ah, take the Cash in hand and waive the Rest;
Oh, the brave Music of a *distant* Drum!

In the second edition this stanza became:

Some for the Glories of this World; and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Promise go,
Nor heed the music of a distant Drum!

In the final revision FitzGerald substituted “Credit” for “Cash” and “rumble” for “music”. There are various stanzas in both the Ouseley and Calcutta manuscripts which provided the inspiration for this quatrain:

It is said the Garden of Eden with houris [beautiful ladies] is pleasant,
I say the juice of grape is pleasant.
Take this cash and keep thy hand from that credit,
Oh my brother, the sound of the drum from afar is pleasant.
(Ouseley, No. 34)

It is said there will be Heaven and the Spring of Kausar [head-stream of
Paradise]
And there will be the pure wine, honey, and sugar;
Fill up the cup and place it in my hand,
For a ready cash is far better than thousands of credits.
(Calcutta, No. 156)

FitzGerald, through a metrical and intellectual structure absent from the original, succeeded in creating a continuity between the present and past on one hand, and present and future on the other. This continuity starts from the Garden of Eden, or Heaven, and goes through present life to the promised Paradise. Through this continuity the past is available to us and we can contact it; so it is possible that we will also be available to the future. The “Hyacinth the Garden wears” is supposed to be “Dropped in her Lap from some once Lovely Head” (No. 19); and the speaker, the present inhabitant of the garden, asks us to “lean upon it lightly” because who knows for whom we “Descend ourselves to make a Couch” (No. 23). Thus the central opposition in FitzGerald’s poem is a tension between an idea of continuing happiness and life on one hand, and death and the passing of life on the other. The *persona* confronts a world where beauty and art pass away, but new beauties still arise. And yet all this is alien to the poets of the Ouseley and Calcutta manuscripts, who feel no need to reassure themselves or us about the continuing beauty of the world, or lament its passing. They *know* God is good and is present to us. They believe in the here-and-now of God’s word, not in myths about Eden or Heaven. In no. VI, first edition, the religious divines are silent while the nightingale speaks:

And David's lips are lockt; but in divine
High-piping Pehlevi, with "Wine! Wine! Wine!"
 "Red Wine!" – the Nightingale cries to Rose
That sallow cheek of hers to incarnadine.

The original is:

It is a nice day, and the weather is neither hot nor cold;
The rain washes the dust from the cheeks of roses,
The nightingale in Pehlevi to the sallow rose
Is crying: "Thou must drink wine." (Ouseley, No. 67)

As we see, in the original there is not nearly such a stress on "wine", and FitzGerald's reference to David seems to be taken from his other Persian readings, as it recurs continually in Persian poetry. Or it could be taken from a line of the Calcutta manuscript, no. 92:

Sit with the wine, for this is the sign of the kingdom of Mahmud,
Listen to the lute, for this is the chant of David.

What is stressed in FitzGerald is the fact that speech has its limits and that the living words of the prophets have become old wives' tales or empty sayings. At a time when Christian religion was under attack, FitzGerald was saying that it is not the religious divines who best support it but the poets, with their emphasis on beauty and song. Yet this was not Omar's point; he was interested simply in the fact that this was the right season for worship.

In nos. XXIII and XXIV (first edition) a similar issue arises:

And we, that make merry in the Room
They left, and summer dresses in new bloom,
 Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
Descend – ourselves to make a Couch – for whom?

The inspiration of this quatrain comes from various stanzas in the original:

Arise, and do not sorrow for this passing world,
Be at ease, and pass this world with joy,
If there were any affection in the world,
The turn of others never allowed it to pass on to you.

(Calcutta, No. 388)

This vendure which is our pleasure-ground today,
Who knows whose vendure would be our clay?

(Calcutta, No. 82)

O my idol, sit on the green, for it will not be long
Ere of our dust a green would grow.

(Ouseley, No. 129)

In these original stanzas the emphasis is on *not* caring for “this passing world”, and on its impermanence by comparison with the eternal; but FitzGerald’s speaker suggests that since we too will soon join the dead, we should “make the most of what we yet may spend/Before we too into the Dust descend” (No. 24). This is of course the central message of FitzGerald’s poem, that we live on “the strip of Herbage” (No. 11) between the desert and the field:

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

Make the most of what you have, in other words, because there is nothing beyond the desert, and the business of this world is pointless. It is not easy to decide on the origin of this stanza, but it is traceable to no. 70 of the Calcutta MS which runs:

In spring time if a houri-like mistress
Gives me a cup of wine along the fringes of a field,
A dog will be better than I

If I mention the name of Paradise.

The second part of FitzGerald's stanza, referring to Mahmud, has been inspired by the last line of Ouseley no. 149 or 155. Mahmud (of Ghazna) is mentioned in Calcutta no. 92. In the second and subsequent editions "some Strip" became "the Strip", and the last two lines were changed from: "Where name of Slave and Sultán scarcece is known,/And pity Sultán Máhmúd on his throne" to: "Where name of Slave and Sultán is forgot – /And Peace to Máhmúd on his golden Throne!" In general, then, the Persian poet is trying to focus his mind, and ours, on the immanence of God in everyday life and objects, and the pointlessness of thinking about "Paradise", while FitzGerald is observed by the brevity and limitations of life, and thus its sweetness. FitzGerald characteristically uses contrasts and opposites throughout his poem: day/night, desert/field, sweet/bitter, here/there, now/tomorrow, summer/winter, known/unknown, life/death, mirth/sorrow. And of course the more positive term is always the one recommended or chosen. In the quatrains above, for example (Nos. 11, 24, 25 in the fourth edition), FitzGerald is offering a non-religious or at least non-Christian consolation in the face of morality by simply asking us to notice positive terms and ignore negative ones. But the point of the original is more profound. FitzGerald is able to contrast the "sown" field, power, riches, and civilisation, the place of Sultán and slave, with the desert, place of prophecy and death, and prefers to walk between both in a pleasant garden, avoiding extremes. But in the original the Saki offers wine, symbol of Heavenly love and wisdom, to his fellow. The speaker is profoundly aware of Paradise, but knows that its delights are far beyond those of wine, woman and springtime.

This leads us into FitzGerald's most famous stanza:

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! (No. 12)

What FitzGerald is doing here is to celebrate the sensory and aesthetic pleasures of lyric, food, and leisure as a way of forgetting the “wilderness” of morality and care, as an antidote to the somewhat Puritan Victorian taboos on these things. But in the original Omar says:

If I had access to a loaf of wheaten bread,
Two measures of wine with a haunch of mutton,
Accompanying a tulip-cheeked beloved in a desolation,
It would be a luxury never enjoyed by any Sultán.

(Ouseley, No. 155)

First of all Omar says nothing about any “Book of Verses”; it was not customary to take a book to a picnic. Secondly, in Omar’s “desolation” or “wilderness”, in FitzGerald’s word, there is no “bough” to sit under; FitzGerald was still thinking of the garden: the “strip of Herbage”, mentioned in his previous stanza. The original has a line of bodily images running through it which FitzGerald ignores: *dast* means hand or “having access to”; *maghz* means brain, core or “pith of wheat”; *rání* means thigh, leg, haunch; *dil* means heart as in *dilbarak*, “a sweetheart”. Thus Omar develops a bodily or sensory pattern of images to emphasise the immediacy of their pleasure compared to the far-off luxury of a Sultan’s life. But again behind this is the idea that God is in such a simple life. The contrast with the decadent luxury of a Sultan is lost by FitzGerald. Of bodily images, FitzGerald mostly uses “lips”:

And this reviving Herb whose tender Green
Fledges the River-Lip on which we lean –
Ah, lean it lightly! for who knows
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen! (No. 20)

David's "lips" are also locked while the nightingale pipes on about wine in a dead Persian language. The speaker turns to the "Lip of the poor earthen Urn" to find the key to the riddle of existence and the urn "Lip to Lip" murmurs the answer (No. 35). In describing his mother's character, FitzGerald said, "I used sometimes to wander what feature in her fine face betrayed what was not so good in her Character. I think (as usual) the Lips."⁶ For him, it seems, the lips were the gateway to the soul and to the meaning. The Persian is both more rich in bodily imagery and more pious in its message.

In the first edition of FitzGerald's poem, there are two successive stanzas (Nos. XXXII and XXXIII) which suggest an exposition of Sufi doctrine: emanation of man from the Creator and his union with Him.

There was a Door to which I found no Key:

There was a Veil past which I could not see:

Some little Talk awhile of ME and THEE

There seemed – and then no more of THEE and ME.

The image

of "ME and THEE" has different connotations in Persian literature. It refers, in the mystical sense, used by both Attár and Rûmi, to the unity of "Self" in which "I" and "You", signs of individuality, are removed and changed to the Superior Soul. When a man gets to such a state that he destroys his "self" and sees himself as a reflection of Him, then he is said to attain the stage of "annihilation": the last stage of unity with God in Sufic terms. Attár's *Mantéq ut-Tayre* and the pilgrimage of Symorgh (which literally means thirty birds) is the best example of this unity, discussed in Chapter Two in the section on Attár. In Omarian ideology, the case is different. The image of "ME and THEE", especially when it is used with the fall of a Curtain, has a philosophical basis. It refers to separation, or the distance between Man and the secrets of

⁶ *Letters* iii: 331; to Fanny Kemble, 27 February 1872).

existence. Man here does not understand the secrets beyond the sensory world; he is vacillating between certainty and doubt; the riddle of existence is solved for him when he witnesses his own death; yet then it is too late. He finds the “key” only when he cannot use it and he cannot return to this world to tell others of the secrets beyond the “veil”. In the mystical level, however, the life of a gnostic starts from his certainty of the secrets beyond the “veil”. So there is an important difference between the mystics, Attár or Rûmi, and the scientist, Omar. FitzGerald’s speaker muddles the two; he is sure that there is “Some talk awhile of ME and THEE”, yet he is unable to discover anything:

Then to the rolling Heav’n itself I cried,
Asking, “What Lamp had Destiny to guide
“Her little Children stumbling in the Dark?”
And – “A blind Understanding!” Heav’n replied.

FitzGerald was not following any particular stanzas in the original to compose these two quatrains. Changes were made in later editions, mainly to the second quatrain, and they indicate that he was not following any particular source, unless perhaps we trace their origin to the Calcutta edition, no. 387:

Neither thou nor I know the secret of Eternity,
Neither thou nor I can read the letters of this riddle,
There is a talk of me and thee behind the curtain,
When the Curtain fall neither me nor thee remain.

or the Ouseley manuscript, no. 29:

No one can pass through the Curtain of the Secret,
No one knows what *is* there.

In both these places, however, there is a calm acceptance of the “curtain” alien to FitzGerald, who seems to want the mystical understanding of a Rûmi, and yet to be in despair at not having it. In the second edition, FitzGerald changed no. XXXIII to:

Then Of the THEE IN ME who works behind
The Veil of Universe I tried to find
A Lamp to guide me through the darkness; and
Something then said – ‘An Understanding blind’.

In the third and fourth editions, FitzGerald changed this stanza to:

Then Of the THEE IN ME who works behind
The Veil, I lifted up my hands to find
A lamp amid the Darkness; and I heard,
As from Without – “THE ME WITHIN THEE BLIND!” (No. 34)

There is no particular quatrain in the original which can be read as a source of this stanza; yet there are two passages in the *Mantéq ut-Tayre* (new ed. Tehran, 1993), starting at distich no. 3067 and distich no. 3111, which can be. In the first passage there is a reference to the talk of the Creator with the Prophet David from behind the curtain. The Creator says: “For every thing in the world, either good or bad, visible or invisible, thou canst find a substitute, but for Me, thou canst find neither a substitute nor an equal. So never cease to abide in Me; I am thy soul and do not destroy thy soul. Never seek to exist without me.” The second passage, starting at distich 3757, reads: “Thou art Me, or I am thee? Is there any duality in the matter? Either I am thee, or thou art Me, or thou, thou art thyself. If I be thee, and thou be Me, our two bodies wilt be one: Congratulations.”⁷ Again, though, even if FitzGerald was drawing on these passages, he misunderstood them, and produced a strange composite of the *Mantéq* and Omar. FitzGerald’s persona is disappointed in a God who refuses enlightenment to him,

⁷ Farid al-din Attár, *Mantéq ut-Tayre* (Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications, 1993) 210.

but Omar just accepted that there are things God will not show him, while in the *Mantéq* the Creator is vividly present and only proclaims his own uniqueness.

The matter of “thee and me” continues in another stanza:

When You and I behind the Veil are past,
Oh, but the long, long while the World shall last,
Which of our Coming and Departure heeds
As the Sea’s self should heed a pebble-cast. (No. 47)

The origins of this composite quatrain are the Ouseley manuscript nos. 26 and 51:

Know that you will go from this world without thy soul,
You will pass behind the Curtain of the secrets of God.
(No. 26 lines 1&2)

From my coming the world made no profit,
And by my departure nothing was added to his dignity.
(No. 51, lines 1&2)

But FitzGerald, as Heron-Allen also mentions, was more influenced here by the edition used by Nicolas (No. 123):

Even if we shall be no more, the world will continue to exist,
It will continue to exist without any sign or fame of us,
As we did not exist before, the world had no problem for it,
Afterwards, if we no more live, again there would be no problem for it.

What mostly bothers FitzGerald’s speaker, unlike his counterparts in Persian, is the riddle of existence, to which he is not able to find a “Key”. He is bewildered at the “Master-Knot of Human Fate.” An interesting contemporary point of comparison is Tennyson, who in “The Two Voices” discusses the question whether the future is worth awaiting or not. His answer is in the affirmative. There are two internal voices in the poem; one raises the question of suicide

and urges putting an end to life: “Thou art so full of misery/Were it not better not to be?”; whereas the second voice argues that the universe is not pointless and that there exists something divine in it or beyond it. Tennyson was in the end as unable as FitzGerald’s Omar to untie the “knot” of the riddle of existence

‘Much less this dreamer, deaf and blind,
Named man, may hope some truth to find,
That bears relation to the mind.’ (ll. 175-8)

But Tennyson tried to untie the knot by an assertion of faith in the life and happiness of the world around him:

A second voice was at mine ear,
A little whisper silver-clear,
A murmur, ‘Be of better cheer.’ (ll. 427-9)

In FitzGerald, however, failing to apprehend the mysteries by recourse to his scientific background, the speaker turns to a “poor earthen Urn”:

Then to the Lip of this poor earthen Urn
I leaned, the Secret of my Life to learn:
And Lip to Lip it murmured – “While you live,
“Drink! for once dead, you never shall return.” (No. 35)

The “urn” reminds him of a pottery where a “potter” was pounding some wet clay until the “clay”, which was once a man, starts talking: “Gently, Brother, gently, pray” (No. 37). The “urn” takes him back to the beginning of time when the Maker was moulding human beings (No. 38). Here FitzGerald works on a famous metaphor of Persian literature, and also a biblical allusion: the pot, and how it is helpless in the potter’s hands. It reminds him of the creation of man, composed of two elements of water and clay, which the potter will “knead”,

and which finally will dissolve into dust. What is missing in FitzGerald is the element of soul, the spark of the eternal in man. The speaker wonders why the “potter” destroys the “pot” that he has made by his own hand, and can find no answer to his own question. He is unable to believe that this destruction is followed by a better life. The cast of mind is thoroughly materialistic in the end, unlike Omar’s, and unlike even Tennyson’s. The problem of immortality, which Tennyson dealt with in *In Memoriam* too, eventually resolving it by means of faith in the Knowing One, is in FitzGerald not resolved by faith, but by inventing metaphors about “familiar juice” and “turning down an empty glass” (1st. ed., No. LXXV). FitzGerald’s drinking vessels remain entirely earthly and without faith in the divine spark. The pot is subject to decomposition; it changes to dust; again it is made out of clay and then again it turns to dust, and so on. What terrifies FitzGerald’s Omar is not a mere annihilation but the feeling of everlasting loss and never ending dying: “Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie/Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and – sans End!” (No. 24).

There is one quatrain in the Calcutta edition (no. 19) which directly deals with the matter of scepticism. In this quatrain, the boundary of faith and doubt is as thin as a hair; they are as close to each other as the time between two breaths:

From the home [= state] of infidelity to that of faith is but a breath,
And from the world of doubt to that of certainty is but a breath;
Hold this breath [i.e., moment] dear,
For the outcome of our being is *this* moment.

FitzGerald in the second and following editions of his poem talks of this scepticism as the “False and True”:

Would you that spangle of Existence spend
About THE SECRET – quick about it, Friend!

A Hair perhaps divides the False and True –
And upon what, prithee, may life depend? (No. 49)

and continues:

A Hair perhaps divides the False and True;
Yes; and a single Alif were the clue –
 Could you but find it – to the Treasure-house,
And peradventure to THE MASTER too; (No. 50)

Whose secret Presence, through Creation's veins
Running Quicksilver – like eludes your pains;
 Taking all shapes from Máh to Máhi; and
They change and perish all – but He remains. (No. 51)

The origin of these three quatrains is in both the Ouseley and Calcutta manuscripts. Calcutta no. 19 was quoted above; the reference to “Alif” comes from Ouseley no. 28:

My heart said to me he craves for the inspired knowledge,
Teach me if you have access to that knowledge;
I said, “Alif”; he said, “Say no more.”
If you take it to heart, one letter is enough.

“Alif” is the first letter of the Persian and Arabic languages and indicates the first reading of any knowledge. What we can see comparing FitzGerald's three quatrains with their Ouseley and Calcutta sources is the difference in their qualities of faith. For FitzGerald a rather facile concern with “false” and “true”, and with a teasing and hollow “secret” and “master”, has replaced the Persian moment of faith, the “Alif”, the breath of knowledge. FitzGerald's speaker is trapped in a modern Western sense of loss, in which he cannot even quite remember what he has lost in all its fullness. All he can do is recommend a debased hedonism:

Waste not your Hour, nor in the vain pursuit
Of this and That endeavour and dispute;

Better be jocund with the fruitful Grape
Than sadden after none, or Bitter, Fruit. (No. 51)

The origin of this quatrain lies in no. 50 of the Ouseley edition:

Those who are enchanted by intellect and discernment,
And have perished in the grief of existence and non-existence,
Now that you are ignorant, choose wine,
For the ignorant have become unripe grapes from eating dry raisins.

Clearly the Persian original distinguishes between the wise and the ignorant. FitzGerald's Omar treats everyone an ignorant. He has discussed all these matters with doctors and sages and even saints, "With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow" (No. 28). But the result of this research was only that: "I came like Water, and like Wind I Go". Those who have spent their lives obtaining a kind of knowledge are still called ignorant, since the secret of existence is withheld. As "Prophets burn'd/ Are all but Stories", why waste our "Hour" in the vain pursuit of idle knowledge and not just stay in the tavern:

And lately, by the Tavern Door agape,
Came stealing through the Dusk an Angel Shape
 Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder; and
He bid me taste of it; and 'twas – the Grape!
(1st. ed., No. XLII)

Needless to say time has nothing to do with the attitude of the Persian poems. In the second edition the word "stealing" was changed to "shining", and in the subsequent editions the stanza became:

So when that Angel of the darker Drink
At last shall find you by the river – brink,
 And, offering his Cup, invite your Soul
Forth to your Lips to quaff – you shall not shrink. (No. 48)

FitzGerald has tried to ‘spiritualize’ his stanza, adding a kind of surface religiosity (“soul” instead of “grope”) but this does not affect the basic attitude. In the original there is no mention of “Angel Shape”, but just *piri* [an old man], a recurrent image in Persian poetry, especially in Rûmi, which refers, as we have already seen, to the *master*, a concept with real depth of meaning in the Persian tradition, empty outside that tradition. A young tippler encounters an old man (*piri*) coming drunk out of the tavern. He is shocked to see an old man (signifying piety) become drunk. The younger tippler asks whether he was not ashamed of his unlawful act against the Islamic law. The old man replies that God is Gracious and will forgive those who commit sins. FitzGerald’s translation of *piri* to an “Angel Shape” attempts the same connotation but does not achieve it.

The great success of FitzGerald’s poem lies in the stanza-form, the *rubá’i*, he took from the Persian. Each stanza is almost complete in itself. Because of its brevity and compression, the *rubá’i* is the right form to express such themes as the brevity of life, the dropping of rose-leaves, and above all, the quick passing of youth. In the following stanza (1st ed., No. XXXVIII), FitzGerald effectively conveys the urgency and anxiety about the future felt in the mid-Victorian era in four lines, adopting the old verse form to these new concerns:

One Moment in Annihilation’s Waste,
One Moment, of the Well of Life to taste –
The stars are setting, and the Caravan
Starts for the Dawn of Nothing – Oh, make haste!

In “Annihilation’s Waste” and the Well of Life” one can see a deep undertone of melancholy beneath FitzGerald’s epicurean views: a melancholy far better expressed here than in either the original or FitzGerald’s later versions. In the second edition “Starts for” was changed to “Draws to”, and the final revision (No. 48) produced:

A Moment's Halt – a momentary taste
Of BEING from the Well amidst the waste –
 And Lo! – the phantom Caravan has reach'd
The NOTHING it set out from – Oh, make haste!

The source of his quatrain lies in both the Ouseley (No. 60) and the Calcutta (No. 138) manuscripts:

How amazingly this caravan of life passes;
Seize the moment , that it passes happily!
O Saki, why grieve about the to-morrow of thy companions?
Give us the cup of wine, for the night passes by. (Ouseley, No. 60)

We are sure of the past, as it is crystallised in the present; of the future we know nothing; why not get on with the enjoyment of our life in the present? FitzGerald's Omar asks the reader not to perplex himself "with Human and Divine", but to resign "Tomorrow's tangle to the winds" and grab "the tresses of /The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine" (No. 41). He is certain of but one thing: "The Flower that once has blown for ever dies" (No. 63). He considers all "revelations" as but "stories." He talks of heaven and hell as mere reflections of himself, of his own moods and passions:

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfilled Desire,
And Hell the shadow from a Soul on fire,
 Cast on Darkness into which Ourselves,
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire. (No. 67)

In all these places FitzGerald's persona expresses a melancholy and a sense of futility and emptiness completely absent in the Persian, but utterly typical and expressive of his own age.

He turns to the issues of "predestination" and man's lot. He considers human beings a "moving row/Of Magic Shadow-shapes" that come and go, arranged by a semi-pagan

“Master of Show.” We are nothing but “helpless Pieces” on a chess board and moving balls struck by the “Player” and “tossed” by him “down into the Field” (No. 70). The speaker is quite certain, it is true, of the existence of this “Player” and “Master of Show”, but his attitude to Him is Thomas Hardy’s, not Omar’s or Rûmi’s. If this is God he never puts His existence under question, but he loses his temper because of the dilemma he has caused himself. He cannot accept that evil can come from a divine source of mercy and grace. He reaches the height of his rebelliousness in a series of exclamatory protests against man’s lot:

Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with Predestined Evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my Fall to Sin! (No. 80)

and then he asserts that we have never had freedom and our knowledge of it is a kind of knowledge of bondage:

Oh 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! (No. 81)

There is no original equivalent for the image of “snake” in the second line of this stanza in the quatrains attributed to Omar. FitzGerald has adopted it from Attâr and the Christian biblical tradition. This stanza was the favourite of Hardy and Swinburne; and according to Arberry, it was also the favourite of Mark Twain. FitzGerald intended “Man’s forgiveness give – and take” as a something of a shocking contrast, an equivalence between God and Man; but it was a misunderstanding of the original. In the original (Calcutta, No. 286) the lines run:

Oh, Lord! Grant me repentance and accept my excuses,
Oh! Thou who givest repentance and acceptest the excuses of all.

In the original, “repentance” as a mystical idea is a grace from the Merciful. Another stanza (No. 115) in the Calcutta edition can equally be considered the origin of FitzGerald’s quatrain:

I am a sinful servant, where is Thy mercy?
My heart is dark, where is Thy light and grace?
If Thou grant me Heaven for my serving,
This is my reward, but where is Thy grace and favours?

This is a good example of the kind of revision FitzGerald made. His despairing faithlessness or paganism looks at first like a facsimile of the original, but in reality the two are totally unlike. The faith makes all the difference in the world. Later Cowell said that he had written about this misunderstanding to FitzGerald when he was in Calcutta, but that FitzGerald had replied “but I do not add dirt to Omar’s face.” But of course FitzGerald had changed the pious and devout Omar into a Victorian cynic.

To quench the speaker’s anger over having to suffer evil at the hands of the source of mercy and grace, the “pots” start to speak. In the fourth edition, FitzGerald allocates stanzas nos. 83 to 90 to the talking pots in the workshop of the potter. In the first edition, a section (quatrains 59-66) was entitled KUZA-NAMA [= Book of Pots]. It is hardly possible to find the origin of this section unless we consider it FitzGerald’s poetical reflection upon the rubáiyát attributed to Omar. The comparison between the human body, made by the great Potter, and a pot made by the potter, is a recurrent image in the quatrains attributed to Omar. The most famous one, often quoted by the Persians, uses the image of the handle of the pot as a sign of the hand of a lover round the neck of his beloved. In this section FitzGerald’s speaker seems to be parodying himself in the conversation of the pots. One of them says:

“Surely not in vain
“My substance of the common Earth was ta’en
“And to this Figure molded, to be broke,
“Or trampled back to shapeless Earth again.” (No. 84)

Another says:

“Ne’er a peevish Boy
“Would break the Bowl from which he drank in joy;
“And He that with his hand the Vessel made
“Will surely not in after Wrath destroy.” (No. 85)

The third pot invites them both to silence, and suggests that “He’s a Good Fellow, and ’twill all be well” (No. 88). The last one asks the maker and buyer not to forget to “fill me with the old familiar Juice” in order that it will “recover by and by” (No. 89). The mention of the “old familiar Juice” makes the speaker take up the point and wonder “what the Vintners buy/One half so precious as the stuff they sell” (No. 95). But after all this reassuring talk from the pots or vessels, contemplating the unconquered mystery of life and death and the sad lot of man as a plaything of the Supreme Potter, the persona now proceeds to an even more blasphemous revolt:

Ah Love! could you and I with Him conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Thing entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits - and then
Remold it nearer to the Heart’s Desire! (No. 99)

As Arnold in “Dover Beach” pleads with his love that they be true to each other in a threatening world, a world which has “nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain”, FitzGerald also invites his equally profane love to be with him in order that he can conspire against the sorry scheme of things and remould it according to *their* heart’s desire, not God’s.

But now it is too late to do anything. He has to stop contemplation and make himself ready to witness the fall of the “Curtain” by enjoying the wine served by the “Angel of Darkness”, (all quite alien to the Persian mood):

Yon rising Moon that looks for us again-
How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;
How oft hereafter rising look for us
Through this same Garden-and for *one* in vain! (No. 100)

FitzGerald ends his poem with an image of the moon, before the final death of the speaker, his invented Omar, in the last quatrain:

And when like her, oh Sáki, you shall pass
Among the Guests Star-scattered on the Grass,
And in your Joyous errand reach the spot
Where I made One – turn down an empty Glass! (No. 101)

Thus the final result of this day of reflection, of waking up at dawn and searching for knowledge and living in the garden, is in the end nothing more than a descent into melancholy and even blasphemy, because of the realisation of man’s mortality. What FitzGerald meant by “Epicurean” is that sense perception is the only guide to or vehicle of “Knowledge” and that the best life is the one associated with withdrawal from effort in the world, including the struggles of marriage and begetting children. This doctrine looked attractive to a society gripped by rampant industrialisation, belief in the theory of evolution and intolerant Puritanism. But it is a fundamentally godless doctrine, and Omar himself was not godless. Thus for example the theme of spiritual quest, present in the poetry of Omar’s period, takes the shape in FitzGerald’s case (as in Tennyson’s) of the mere quest for knowledge:

“I sent my soul through the Invisible,

Some letter of that After-life to spell:

And by-and-by my soul returned to me,
And answered, "I myself am Heav'n and Hell. (No. 66)

Religious values are only projections of ourselves:

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire,
And Hell the shadow from a Soul on fire,
Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.'" (No. 67)

The result of this Victorian quest is that man is the measure of every thing, or rather *is* everything, and that Heaven and Hell are nothing but reflections of "goodness" and "evil" in man's own soul. This is entirely unlike Omar.

The poem's subsequent success indicates how FitzGerald in his very opposition to the dominant Victorian optimism and religiosity was nevertheless in tune with many of his contemporaries.

What, without asking, hither hurried *Whence*?
And, without asking, *Whither* hurried hence!
Another and another Cup to drown
The Memory of this Impertinence. (3rd. ed. No. 30)

The word "Impertinence" was changed to "insolence" in later editions. In the original the last line runs: "I will wash the concerns of this world with wine." Thus the moderate expression of the original, with its coded reference to God, has been changed to the sharpness of the blasphemy and daring in which the Knowing One is charged with being impertinent and even insolent. This reference to God's will as an "Impertinence" clearly shows the divergence of the spirit of the translated text from the original.

But what makes FitzGerald's poem immortal, Victorian product as it is, is the recurrent themes that not only hold the poem together but make it a classic in the sense of having lasting significance and worth, a work deeply expressive of its period that speaks also to others. The dominant theme is the brevity of life: the dropping of rose-leaves, the quick passing of spring and youth and all that is dear and good. Faced with the brevity of life, the speaker's doctrine of "eat, drink, and be merry" seems to make sense. The inevitability of fate and man's inability to change what has already been predestined are continuing themes in a poem which became a turning point in the shift from the earnestness of mid-Victorianism into the aesthetic movement of "art for art's sake." In the Omar he created, FitzGerald found an appropriate voice to utter his disillusion and distress. He used the figure of a learned man of another time to crystallize the conflict between his desire to accept things as they are without any complaint and to turn away from convention: a typical later-Victorian manoeuvre.

3.2. Victorian Poetry and FitzGerald's Poem

There are so many different varieties in Victorian poetry of subject-matter, imagery, tone and diction that it is difficult to find any overall common features. One might conclude that this multiplicity is in itself the chief characteristic of Victorian poetry. Public education and its extension to the middle classes, along with their new commercial, political and social attitudes, seemed to reduce the importance of the poet and produce this variety in response. Studying Victorian poetry requires the consideration of the position and function of the poet in that age. The writers were mostly isolated not only from the current and dominant movements of the period but from each other. With the exception of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood there is not any well-defined school of poetry in this era. Those poets who are traditionally grouped as "the Romantics" possess an altogether more definite identity than "the Victorians". There were

certainly some defined groups and movements, such as the Utilitarians, the Evangelicals, and the Oxford Movement; yet G. M. Hopkins had no audience to read his poetry at all. The growth of the natural sciences and of tendencies in social and political life, philosophy, and religion led to the minimization of poetry and even a hostility toward it. It seemed that these new tendencies called all in doubt. The poet felt no security of cultural status. The variety of Tennyson's poetry seems to be partly the result of this sense of cultural insecurity. He tried different types of poetry to satisfy his readers and above all his critics. Browning was no exception to either; he also tried many different ways of securing his position. Arnold called the age an "unpoetical" age. Thomas B. Macaulay (1800-59), the cultivated spokesman of the middle class, believed that "as civilisation advances, poetry almost necessarily declines."⁸

Paradoxically, alongside this devaluation of the poet and poetry, there is a growing emphasis on the prophetic nature of the poet. FitzGerald's criticism of Tennyson's poetry and his asking him to "guard territory they had won" shows that in his view poetry by the middle of the century was a marginal discourse which did not seem to suit the needs and wants of most people. This "territory" might refer partly to the inherited forms of either lyric or narrative after the experimentation of the Romantics, but FitzGerald particularly wanted Tennyson to consolidate prophetic ground by addressing the social and moral needs of the time. One of the main conflicts in the period is between public duty and personal sensibility. The poet vacillated between a commitment to social and moral needs and his personal sensibility. One highly characteristic Victorian solution to this problem was by creating an alternative voice to express difficult emotions by means of a *persona*, like FitzGerald's Omar, or one of Tennyson's or Browning's speakers. The great Victorian success in poetic form was the dramatic

⁸ T. B. Macaulay, "Milton," *Critical and Historical Essays*, 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1854) 1: 5.

monologue, which enabled a poetic “I” or a poetic voice to express private feelings indirectly, through another speaker. The speaker gives the opportunity to the poet to speak out his private feelings. But unlike the Browning monologist, who is partly defined by his circumstances as revealed in the poem, the voice in the *Rubáiyát* has no character by which we can know him except in what he expresses of himself: he reveals his hidden self, “as Savage as Manfred” in its desire to shatter the sorry scheme of things and remould it closer to its own desire. The speaker in the *Rubáiyát* is able to voice what many Victorians, including FitzGerald, felt, but they did not feel secure to express it directly, and neither did he.

The variety of form and theme in Victorian poetry reflects the new social and cultural variety following on industrialization and scientific progresses. But although Tennyson and Browning, for example, chose different paths, yet they had a good deal in common. Both were interested in the legends of the past and both were modern in thought and expression. FitzGerald too chose to set his poem in the past, the Middle East of the eleventh century. The consolation found (including by Queen Victoria) in *In Memoriam* was also found, in a different way, by FitzGerald in the verses he attributed to Omar; the Pre-Raphaelites and Thomas Hardy found it there too. We should look now at the ways Tennyson’s kind of consolation and solution both resembled and differed from FitzGerald’s.

FitzGerald’s first enthusiastic praise of Tennyson’s poetry appeared in a letter written to John Allen in 1831. “I have bought A. Tennyson’s poem. How good Mariana is.” “Mariana” had appeared in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (June, 1830) – the first collection of Tennyson’s poems. The underlying nature of the appeal of his early poetry for FitzGerald, as a recluse, is a deep understanding of grief in private lives rather than in public issues. It seemed

to FitzGerald that Tennyson could subject contemporary private life, which was undergoing remarkable changes as a result of wider influences, to his poetical attention. Apart from the subject matter, Tennyson's appeal to many of his readers lies in the fact that he could conform to popular taste by writing in a style that was easily understood and enjoyed. The dominant characteristic of his style was its clarity, melody, and dignity. Tennyson's talent for melody seems to be his most recognisable characteristic. FitzGerald's praise of Tennyson's earlier verse shows his own notion of or "taste" for what poetry, including in its subject matter and technique, should be. Tennyson tried to evoke a mood of grief, loss, and despair in these poems, often using a classical setting. In this exotic setting as well as in an easily understandable style FitzGerald owed a lot to Tennyson.

FitzGerald found similarities between his life and some of Tennyson's early poems. He may well have identified "the moated grange" in "Mariana" with his own cottage in a remote corner of Suffolk away from his family and city life. Sometimes, for example, he expressed his sense of monotony in almost Tennysonian terms. "Day follows day with unvaried movement," he once wrote; "there is the same level meadow with geese upon it always lying before my eyes: the same pollard oaks: with now and then the butcher or the washerwoman trundling by in their carts." The dreariness of the grange with its surroundings represented to him FitzGerald's his own isolation and loneliness. The theme of isolation and longing for release in "Mariana" found a ready echo in FitzGerald's low spirits, living as he was away from his family, and craving for companionship. Mariana is obsessed by waiting; she is certain that even if her lover does not come, death will: "Oh God, that I were dead." FitzGerald was always concerned about death and his happiness often was spoiled by the thought that with the passing of time death is drawing closer. FitzGerald wished to die as a "broken sword" falls. "I did not

know that I had been so foreboding of Death in my last letter,” FitzGerald wrote to Thackeray in 1831. “I want to live long and see everything.” The feeling of passage of time and growing old is exquisitely expressed in his “The Meadows in Spring” (1831):

’Tis a dull sight
To see the year dying
When winter winds
Set the yellow wood sighing
Sighing, oh, sighing. . . .
I never look out
No attend to the blast;
For all to be seen
Is the leaves falling fast
Falling, Falling!

Apart from the mood of melancholy in “Mariana”, which appealed to FitzGerald, he also found fascinating the images through which Tennyson had succeeded in expressing the mood in which Mariana lived. Tennyson had a powerful ability to express mood through landscape. His images, “all painted from nature and true to the subject,” as Leigh Hunt called them, reflected FitzGerald’s mood of melancholy back to himself.

In contrast with the stagnation of “Mariana”, the poem “The Lady of Shalott” conveyed, for FitzGerald, a mood of action, the mood which as we saw FitzGerald always admired. As D. J. Palmer points out, “action is an important element in saving the Lady from morbid stagnation, imprisoned and isolated as she is in her island tower.”⁹ FitzGerald not only enjoyed her world of silence but also admired her confrontation of new experience by ignoring the consequences of the “curse.” The Lady cannot endure the burden of isolation any more

⁹ D. J. Palmer, “Tennyson’s Romantic Heritage,” *Tennyson* (London: G. Bell, 1973) 41.

and decides to suffer the “curse” without knowing “what the curse may be.” But the Lady, as James R. Kincaid maintains, “exchanges one kind of imprisonment for another; her presumed freedom is her death.” She prefers to sing “her last song”, like a dying swan, on her way to Camelot. FitzGerald identified the world of silence and loneliness filling his cottage with that of “the silent isle” of the Lady of Shalott. Above all, he may have found evidence here of the fruitlessness of action, a central theme of the *Rubáiyát*; and he found “imagination” and “invention” – as we saw two key words in FitzGerald’s theory of poetry – both in “Mariana” and in “The Lady of Shalott.” Above all, he admired what he might have called “pure beauty” in all Tennyson’s early poems:

Tennyson does no little [morally] by raising and filling the brain with noble images and thoughts, which, if they do not direct us to our duty, purify and cleanse us from mean and vicious objects, and so prepare and fit us for the reception of the higher philosophy. I think that you will see Tennyson acquire all that at present you miss: when he has *felt* life, he will not die fruitless of instruction to man as he is.¹⁰

This remark shows how Tennyson’s early poems, for FitzGerald, were at the service of morality, and how FitzGerald considered them as a means of *catharsis* or purgation of emotions raised by “mean and vicious objects.” This is consistent with his evident view in the *Rubáiyát* that art is a kind of moral alternative to religion, all that there is in a meaningless world.

Tennyson’s preoccupation with the problem of isolation seems partly to have been a reflection of the general vulnerability of the poet’s role in early Victorian society. “Christopher North” (John Wilson) accused the poet of being remote from common sympathies:

¹⁰ *Letters* i: 168; to Allen, 4 July 1835.

What all the human race see and feel, he [Tennyson] seems to think cannot be poetical; he is not aware of the transcendent and eternal grandeur of commonplace and all time truths, which are the staple of all poetry.¹¹

The hostile reception he was given by the reviewers after the publication of *Poems* (1832) and his sensitivity to criticism meant that Tennyson did not appear again in print until 1842. Those ten years of silence combined with the experience of bereavement and love had transformed him into an experienced and mature poet able to produce “such a volume as has not been published since the time of Keats”, as FitzGerald wrote to Barton, “and which, once published, will never be suffered to die. This is my prophecy: for I live before Posterity.”¹² FitzGerald was right in his assessment of Tennyson’s early verses and his poetry’s value. The silence was broken by the insistence of his friends: mainly of FitzGerald, who urged the poet to publish another volume. But publication of *The Princess* (1847) made FitzGerald give up his hopes of Tennyson’s creating a great work. FitzGerald was genuinely disappointed that the poet had been lost, as he put it, in “coterie worship”, and was not thinking about “what he was born to do.” “This really great man thinks [more] about his bowels and nerves,” FitzGerald wrote to Cowell in 1848, “than about the Laureate wreath he was born to inherit.” He wished Tennyson to create “something like Dante and Milton.” FitzGerald never mentions what he meant by being “like Dante and Milton”, but he seemed to expect Tennyson to create a national epic to respond to the new age – one which challenged traditional institutions, whether religious, social or political, and which would show the Victorians what to do and how to live.

¹¹ Christopher North, “Poems, Chiefly Lyrical 1830,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, xxx (May 1832): 721-41; republished in *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*. ed. John D. Jump, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967) 50-65.

¹² *Letters* i: 315; 17 March 1842.

In May 1850, Tennyson published *In Memoriam*. FitzGerald never cared for the poem, although he said that it was “full of the finest things.” He did not consider it the work the Victorian era needed or that Tennyson was capable of. In a letter to W. B. Donne in 1845, FitzGerald expressed his view that “if Tennyson had got on a horse and ridden twenty miles, instead of moaning over his pipe, he would have been cured of his sorrows in half the time.” But the poems published under the general title of *In Memoriam* established Tennyson as the great poet of the period and led to his becoming Poet Laureate later in the same year. *In Memoriam* recapitulates many of Tennyson’s previous themes of loss, grief, frustration, and recovery. The opening sections deal with the sorrow of separation and loss. This theme seems to be the one FitzGerald found among “the finest things” of the book. There is a parallel, of course, between the passionate friendship of Tennyson and Hallam and FitzGerald’s friendships with Cowell and Browne; and, less directly, with the friendship with the “beloved” in the *Rubáiyát*. In addition, Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* is not just an elegy, as FitzGerald thought, but a philosophical poem dealing with the vexed questions of religion, science and the hereafter; it ends with an epithalamium, a happy ending. The questions it deals with are universal: does life have meaning? does man possess an immortal soul? Science, with all its ambition, cannot dispel the poet’s doubt, but he finally finds comfort in that very doubt: “There lives more faith in honest doubt/Believe me, than in half the creeds” (stanza 96). *In Memoriam* sums up Tennyson’s religious position. It examines the poet’s states of mind, starting from grief, through doubt, to its optimistic ending with the celebration of his sister’s marriage.

It seems evident that the structure of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* influenced FitzGerald in “tessellating” his *Rubáiyát*. In Tennyson’s work each poem is self-contained but, at the

same time, is related to the sequence of events and thoughts throughout the book; the same style, completely absent in the original manuscript, was adopted by FitzGerald in his own poem. Even if FitzGerald can be argued to have “tessellated” his selected quatrains in such a way as to construct one poem, still each stanza of the original should be regarded as a poem. FitzGerald made a unity where there was not one before, expressing his own ultimately less convincing hedonism and materialism instead of either Tennyson’s complex emotional development or Omar’s genuine faith in God. FitzGerald mourned over Tennyson as “over a Great Man lost” due to his belief that Tennyson had “not risen to the Greatness that was in him.” FitzGerald was certain that the poet “has become more artist than Poet” since 1842, meaning that the prophecy he wanted had not materialised. FitzGerald was right, perhaps, if one agrees that Tennyson cared more for the melody and beauty in his poetry than for its thought, and that even *In Memoriam* was not a great epic for the age. In addition, Tennyson was trying more to satisfy his critics than to follow his function as a poet. In fact FitzGerald, by creating his *Rubáiyát* with the man of science as its *persona*, tried to do what Tennyson, as FitzGerald thought, had failed to do. Perhaps it was not accidental that FitzGerald chose a scientist-poet from Persian literature to enunciate the doubts and fears raised by the findings of science as the major contemporary threat to the human spirit:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
 Doctors and Saints, and heard great argument
 About it and about: but evermore
 Come out by the same door where in I went. (No. 27)

FitzGerald not only described the situation but also proposed a solution, a kind of *Carpe diem*:

You know, my Friends, with what a brave Carouse

I made a Second Marriage in my house;
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the Vine to Spouse. (No. 55)

On the whole FitzGerald, like some other critics, did not consider Tennyson a successful poet after 1842. He believed that Tennyson's failure was due to his trust in "the Coteries", and that the poet cared too much about those he wrote for. But some of the broad characteristics of Tennyson's poetry can be followed into FitzGerald's poem: the recurrent motif of isolation, the dramatic technique, the grappling with religious doubt. And FitzGerald, it must be said, avoids the real struggle of Tennyson. His solution is relatively facile.

In Tennyson FitzGerald found "unforgettable Things", whereas in Browning, another great poet of the period, he found nothing but "Cockney sublime, Cockney energy." FitzGerald mocked Browning's philosophical cast of mind as "Cockney Profound and Metaphysical" and dubbed him "the great Prophet of the Gurgoyle [sic] School." In 1869 FitzGerald explained his use of the word "Cockney", rather snobbishly it must be said:

. . . by Cockney I mean the affected and overstrained style in which men born and bred in a City like London are apt to use when they write upon subjects with which neither their Birth nor Breeding (both rather plebeian) has made them familiar. So . . . I think Browning's Books cockney Profound and Metaphysical.¹³

FitzGerald was right, it seems to me, to deny much similarity or commonality between Browning's poetry and Tennyson's. Browning had chosen a different path through the post-romantic world. Tennyson belonged to the tradition of church and classics; whereas Browning belonged to a strong nonconformity. Whereas Tennyson was a member of the Cambridge poets, school and college played no part in Browning's life. As for their literary taste,

Tennyson was the heir of Keats; whereas, Browning, even though for a short time, was the heir of Shelley. Of Shelley, FitzGerald believed that he was not worth 'Keats's little finger'; and similarly he preferred Tennyson to Browning. Tennyson cared less for ordinary human nature, Browning less for aesthetic finish. F. L. Lucas, in his *Ten Victorian Poets*, interestingly compares their attitudes: Tennyson's earliest recorded verse was "I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind"; while Browning's was the more robust:

Good people all, who wish to see
A boy take physic, look at me.¹⁴

As Lucas comments, the little Tennyson listens, but the little Browning demands to be looked at. Even in the poems of their old age, "Crossing the Bar" (1889) and "Epilogue to Asolando" (1889), we can see the same characteristics. Tennyson listens to the "evening bell", whereas Browning calls the attention of the world to the way he has lived and will die:

One who never turned his back, but marched breast
forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
triumph
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to rise. (11-15)¹⁵

The awkwardness or obscurity of Browning's style did not appeal to FitzGerald, compared with Tennyson's "smoothness." This smoothness was present in FitzGerald's own "The Meadows in Spring" (1831). From the beginning of his literary career, Browning was seen as

¹³ *Letters* iii: 145; 6 may 1869.

¹⁴ F. L. Lucas, *Ten Victorian Poets* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1963) 36.

¹⁵ All the references are from *Robert Browning: The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980).

a “difficult” poet. As Isobel Armstrong maintains, ‘Browning’s poems are really incomplete until they have been created, synthesised and interpreted in a reader’s mind.’¹⁶ E. D. H. Johnson argues that “whereas Tennyson was content to locate his themes in a familiar context . . . to present this material in conventional forms, Browning was naturally inclined to recondite subject-matter and to experimental method.”¹⁷ J. Hillis Miller described Browning as “a huge sea – massive, limitless, profound, but at the same time, shapeless, fluid, and capricious.”¹⁸ Miller adds that Browning’s body “is the whole mass of the ocean, and his mind is dispersed everywhere throughout that ocean, to its farthest depths.” It is not an easy task, especially for a FitzGerald, to understand such an “ocean”. To one critic, George Santayana, Browning had a barbarous mind, “a mind full of chaotic sensation, objectless passion, an undigested idea.”¹⁹ To another, G. K. Chesterton, defending Browning’s “artistic energy”, his verse “in so far as it is grotesque, is not complex or artificial; it is natural and in the legitimate tradition of nature.”²⁰ Unlike Tennyson who tried to satisfy Victorian “taste” (that is why, perhaps, his poetry underwent conspicuous changes), Browning never swerved from his conviction of the need to express himself in a dramatic form. His art from beginning to end reflected the variety of human nature. All this is to say that FitzGerald, like many other Victorians, failed to perceive what lay behind and within Browning’s poetry. Faced with Browning’s obscurity, FitzGerald was certain to prefer a diction without any ambiguity, a diction more suitable, he thought, for feelings which arise straight from the heart. But this preference does not augur well for his understanding of Omar, whose feelings and images can be as complete as Browning’s. Like

¹⁶ Isobel Armstrong, “Browning and the ‘Grotesque’ Style,” *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) 93-123.

¹⁷ E. D. H. Johnson, *Alien Visions of Victorian Poetry* (Hamden: Archon Book, 1963) 71.

¹⁸ J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1967) 81.

¹⁹ George Santayana, “The Poetry of Barbarism,” *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: P. Smith, 1900) 166-216.

²⁰ Gilbert K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (London: Macmillan, 1936) 149.

FitzGerald, many of Browning's contemporaries found it difficult to digest his poetry. Browning was ahead of his generation in that it was the next generation, the Pre-Raphaelites, who made Browning their favourite. Indeed, they even founded the Browning Society to explore his poetry and philosophy.

Apart from the issue of style, the nature of "love" was another matter which separated FitzGerald from Browning. While Browning is primarily noted for his dramatic monologues, he wrote a great deal of love poetry: "a subject which he handles with greater candor and penetration than any other poet of the early and mid-Victorian periods."²¹ To Browning, love is the ultimate experience in life. Its highest manifestation is marriage, in which, according to Browning, a man and woman find the true meaning of existence. For FitzGerald, love meant friendship between him and his older or younger male friends. Browning's love for Elizabeth Barrett was the central experience of his life. His love-poems were written between 1845 when he first met Elizabeth, and 1861, when she died. The love he writes of is the love between man and woman. For Browning

. . . love is not merely an aid in finding universal harmony; it is, rather, a power and a source of strength which makes harmony out of disorder. It enables the beholder to see the smallest flaw in the object of love, and makes the flaws themselves a source of new affection.²²

For Browning, love in the human heart was the best evidence of God's providential love. This notion of love indicates similarities, important from our point of view, between Browning and Rûmi, the great Persian mystic poet whom FitzGerald preferred not to speak of. Rûmi's name

²¹ Johns 100.

²² Thomas J. Collins, *Robert Browning's Moral-Aesthetic Theory 1833-1855* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967) 34.

has always been associated with love: "Save love, save love, we have no other work/Save affection, save love we plant no other seeds." The happiness of secular loves, of any sort, sooner or later vanishes, but true love, directed toward the maker of love, God, is permanent. Thus, worldly love comes to be a preparation for and introduction to true love. Love, in Rûmi's view, is the physician of all illnesses:

From love bitterness becomes sweet, from lover copper
becomes gold,
From love the dregs become pure, from love the pains
become medicine,
From love the dead become alive, from love the king is made
a slave.²³

FitzGerald could never feel and understand such a passion. Love for FitzGerald crystallised in friendship of a certain kind, and this friendship was conducted much more through letters than physical contact. FitzGerald's seven years of engagement and his short marriage show that he could not cope with this marital love which according to poets like Browning and Rûmi is the beginning of a pathway to divine love and union with the infinite. Thus in FitzGerald's failure to understand Browning we see an important clue to his failure to understand not only Rûmi but an important element in Omar, who himself influenced Rûmi.

FitzGerald can partly be understood in differentiation from and opposition to Browning's cast of mind. One of Browning's achievements which was impenetrable to FitzGerald was the resolution of the problem of doubt: a problem which, as we have seen, troubled many of Browning's contemporaries, such as Tennyson and Arnold, and, of course, FitzGerald himself. Browning was deeply concerned by the religious issues of the day, but he

²³ Annemarie Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalâloddin Rûmi* (London: East-West Publications, 1980) 335.

never suffered the agonies of doubt experienced by Tennyson and Arnold. At a time when Newman converted to the Church of Rome in 1845 and when Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* (translated into English by George Eliot in 1846) put the basis of Christianity under question, Browning showed life to be joyful as long as it was perfected by a belief in the hereafter. Thus doubt became evidence of God, whereas FitzGerald gloomily accepted it as evidence of godlessness, at least in his *Rubáiyát* where he denies the certainty of creation and doomsday:

And if the Wine you drink, the Lip you press,
End in What All begins and ends in – Yes;
Think then you are TODAY what YESTERDAY
You were – TOMORROW you shall not be less. (No. 42)

FitzGerald required the most perfect evidence of facts to believe:

Religious people are very angry with one for doubting: and say
“You come to the question determined to doubt, not to be
convinced.” Certainly we do: having seen how many follow and
have followed false religions, and having our reason utterly against
many of the principles of the Bible, we require the most perfect
evidence of the facts, before we can believe.²⁴

FitzGerald, in his *Rubáiyát*, prevents his reader from involving himself in real thought and encourages him to resort to wine, a wine furthermore lacking the religious overtones it has in the Persian tradition:

Perplext no more with Human or Divine,
Tomorrow's tangle the winds resign,
And lose your fingers in the tresses of
The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine. (No. 41)

The original quatrain

Limit thy desire for world and live content,
Cut thy bonds of dependence upon the good and bad
of the wheel of fortune;
Take wine in hand and play with the lock of the beloved,
These few days pass away and will not remain. (Ouseley, No. 73)

does not deal with the issues of “Human or Divine”. It first prevents the reader from setting his heart on worldly things and desires and then suggests taking “wine in hand” and playing with the tresses of a beloved. The whole point of the quatrain is that the world is unimportant because of what is to come. In other words, Browning’s kind of resolution of the problem of religious doubt is much closer to the spirit of FitzGerald’s original Persian quatrains than FitzGerald’s own *Rubáiyát* is. Browning and the Persians celebrate the joy of earthly love but see the promise of divine glowing through it. FitzGerald gives up on the latter and so his celebration of the former is a poorer thing.

Through his religious poems, Browning tried to find a secure ground for his faith. He found this secure ground in the final triumph of “right”, which was based upon his belief in “Divine love.” For FitzGerald’s Omar, on the other hand, doubt was the ultimate stage, because FitzGerald could not see beyond this level: “There was the Veil through which I might not see” (No. 32). In this quatrain, as we have already seen, FitzGerald confesses that there is a world beyond his perception and comprehension, but he is unable to perceive it. He is also aware of the “curtain”, a recurring image in Persian literature, that veils the mysteries of God; yet he is unable to decipher the secret beyond. The original quatrain ends with the idea that “when the curtain falls neither thou nor I are there”, which refers to the annihilation of individuality and attaining union with the Maker. Yet in FitzGerald’s rendering, the mystical

²⁴ *Letters* i: 103; to W. M. Thackeray; 10 September 1831.

sense of the quatrain becomes nihilism and simple destruction of individuals. Another religious poem in which Browning shows that doubt is a part of faith is “An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician.” Browning understood the scientific attitude of his period towards religious issues and he had already expressed his hostility towards the “Higher Criticism” in *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day*. In “Karshish” he tried to show how a scientific pagan physician, as a representative type, struggles against a living evidence of Christianity; that is, the miracle of Lazarus. Being unable to explain his experience scientifically, the physician tries to justify the case in one way or another. In this poem, Browning shows how an important mystical or spiritual event seemed to be unacceptable to the scientifically-minded people of the era. The poem remains, as Colville argues, “one about the psychological impact of religious doubt in an empirical mind of an unfamiliar culture.”²⁵ The character of Karshish as a man of science makes him thrust the story aside; but what mostly impresses him is the concept of the *love* of God: “the All-Great, were the All-Loving too.” As Patricia M. Ball concludes in “Browning’s Godot”,

Karshish henceforth must live with his memory of Lazarus, and he is no longer unconsciously enclosed in his role of Arab physician: he knows what he is, where his boundaries are, and what lies beyond them.²⁶

In this poem Browning deals with a scientifically inexplicable spiritual knowledge of the validity of which FitzGerald failed to be convinced. “If you can prove to me that one miracle took place,” FitzGerald wrote to Thackeray, “I will believe that he is a just God who damned us all because a woman eat [sic] an apple; and you can’t expect greater complaisance [than] that, to

²⁵ Derek Colville, *Victorian Poetry and the Romantic Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970) 144.

²⁶ Patricia M. Ball, “*Victorian Poetry*, III (1965): 245-53; republished in *Browning: Men and Women and Other Poems*, ed. J. R. Watson (London: Macmillan, 1974) 173-183.

be sure.”²⁷ Yet it is not God’s existence but man’s attitude to it that differs in Browning and FitzGerald. Browning in his poetry found a way of dealing with faith and doubt which FitzGerald could not find in his letters, or his poems. Nevertheless, FitzGerald never put the actual existence of (some sort of) God under question; he merely doubted his value to Man:

The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Here of There as strikes the Player goes;
And He that tossed you down into the Field,
He knows about it all – HE knows – HE knows! (No. 70)

Even these brief references to Browning’s poems show, in contrast to FitzGerald in the *Rubáiyát*, they managed to hold out to humanity the possibility of divine love and consolation beyond the undoubted pleasures of life. FitzGerald’s doubt is much more Tennysonian; Browning was much nearer the mood of FitzGerald’s Persian originals.

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909), a Victorian poet associated with Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites, was one of the earliest admirers of the *Rubáiyát*, while he rejected the poetry of his great contemporaries, Tennyson and Browning. He belongs to the tradition of rebels like Byron and Shelley. He was part of the revolt against Victorian complacency. He found his place among the poets of his time with *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865); then came the *Poems and Ballads* in 1866, with sixty-two poems written in the first thirty years of his life. Like his contemporaries who were interested in exotic figures and subject matter, Swinburne was interested in the Italian struggle for liberty. Swinburne’s poetry in its treatment of sexual aberration and its anti-Christian tone and view of life, as in “The Garden of Persephone” (“That no life lives for ever/That dead men rise up never”), is reminiscent of FitzGerald’s voice in such places as quatrain no. XV in the first edition of the *Rubáiyát* (1859):

²⁷ *Letters* i: 103; 10 October 1831.

And those who husbanded the Golden Grain
And those who flung it to the Winds like Rain,
Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd
As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

The speaker openly states that there is no life after death, and that no man is precious enough to dig up again. Swinburne, with his deliberately shocking language and theme, threw Victorian religion away, seeming to give voice to the disintegration of Puritanism and conventionality. FitzGerald was less shocking but fundamentally just as nihilist.

FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* is perhaps the archetypal Victorian poem. It has dramatic form through its invented persona of Omar; it has mysticism, Epicureanism, melancholy, loss of faith, anxiety about the future, and unfamiliar exoticism as well. As others tried to introduce classical figures into Victorian art, FitzGerald also introduced a historical scientist from a remote time and culture. The melancholy in the quatrains attributed to Omar also had a philosophic basis in the quatrains: what we have, even if its duration is brief and uncertain, is worth having. It is better to live and enjoy life as it comes. According to FitzGerald, the theme of the *Rubáiyát* was "a desperate sort of thing, unfortunately found at the bottom of all thinking men's minds: but made music of"; and its message was sceptical: it is useless to ask questions because on one hand you will find no answers, and on the other the universe has its own meaning, which simply remains forever hidden from us. After stating his belief in God the speaker discusses the impotence of humanity:

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it. (No. 71)

Reacting against Calvinism, he protests against the divine punishment of those who enjoy life in the way they like, and against those who consider pleasure wicked:

Oh 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 blackened – Man's forgiveness give – and take! (No. 81)

FitzGerald was opposed to the official theology of his time. He could not be indifferent to it, but he did not dare to reveal his views unless he disguised them under the name of an eleventh-century scientist (he seemed unaware that a number of anonymous Persian poets had used Omar in exactly the same way). The quatrain just quoted, as we have already seen, does not have any original; it is created by its Victorian environment. In its outlook Tennyson's poem *In Memoriam* stands midway between FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* and Browning's *Easter Day*, blending the two characteristics of the day: a wistful hesitancy and a religious optimism. FitzGerald's poem is nevertheless an immortal song, about which Tennyson in the lines added to *Tiresias and Other Poems* (1885) rightly stated:

Than which I know no version done
In English more divinely well;
A planet equal to the sun
Which cast it, that large infidel
Your Omar; and your Omar drew
Full-handed plaudits from our best
In modern letters

Chapter Four

Reception of the *Rubáiyát* by the Victorians

The copies of the *Rubáiyát* remained on Quaritch's shelves for almost two years. No one approached them. The bookseller reduced the price to half; still no one wanted them. Finally they were moved to the penny-box outside the shop. Who would have foreseen that "seventy-five years later a copy of the *Rubáiyát* in original wrappers and containing a note by Swinburne would be offered for sale by Quaritch's firm for nine thousand dollars"?¹ The long wait for the discovery of the *Rubáiyát* made FitzGerald weary at heart and he began to feel 'a sort of terror at meddling with Pen and Paper. The old *Go* is gone – such as it was. One has got older: one has lived alone: and, also, either one's Subjects, or one's way of dealing with them, have little Interest to others.'² Omar's freedom of thought on religion and morality were perhaps too daring for the conservative climate of the mid-Victorian period. Then, according to Terhune³, one day early in 1862 a friend of Dante Gabriel Rossetti caught sight of the *Rubáiyát* in the penny box. He found the book interesting and gave Rossetti a copy. Rossetti showed it to Swinburne. The two friends bought some copies and gave them to their friends. Swinburne took a copy to George Meredith. They returned to buy more and found that due to the demand the price had been raised. William Morris took pleasure in it. Swinburne gave a copy to Burne-Jones who showed it to John Ruskin in 1863. Ruskin became so impressed by the book that he wrote a letter to the unknown author:

My dear and very dear Sir,

¹ *Life* 208

² *Letters* iii: 465-66; to Cowell, 1 December 1862.

I do not know in the least who you are, but I do with all my soul pray you to find and translate some more of Omar Khayyám for us: I never did – till this day – read anything so glorious, to my mind as this poem – (10th. 11th. 12th pages if one were to choose) – and that, and this, is all I can say about it – More – more – please more – and that I am ever gratefully and respectfully yours.

J. Ruskin⁴

The letter remained with Burne-Jones for passing to the author of the *Rubáiyát* when he was recognised. FitzGerald did not receive the letter until ten years later in 1872, when the third edition of his *Rubáiyát* was published. Ruskin refers to quatrains 44-58 in the first edition. In these quatrains there are some crucial points that seem to have appealed to Ruskin as a Victorian. For example, that we are “Phantom Figures” who come and go without any intention of our own; that man is subject to predestination and moves like a ball in polo, struck from one side to another without any power to resist. We are impotent before fate and cannot do anything to change it:

With Earth’s first Clay They did the Last Man’s knead,
And then of the Last Harvest sow’d the Seed.,
Yea, the First Morning of Creation wrote
What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.

(No. LIII, 1st ed.)

The “Nights and Days” are a “Chequer-board” on which destiny is the player and we the pieces (No. XLIX). So why are there punishments for us who have been made of “baser Earth”, along with all kinds of evils?

Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,

³ *Life* 207.

⁴ MS letter, Trinity College Library; quoted by Terhune 212.

And who with Eden didst devise the Snake;
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd, Man's Forgiveness give – and take!
(No. LVIII, 1st ed.)⁵

Given that everything, even what is dear to us, ends in “nothing”, why then not seize the day?

And if the Wine you drink, the Lip you press,
End in the Nothing all Things end in – Yes –
Then fancy while Thou art, Thou art but what
Thou shalt be – Nothing – Thou shalt not be less.
(No. XLVII, 1st ed.)

FitzGerald's frank fatalism appealed to only a select few at first, however. This *carpe diem* attitude towards life was not the earned disinterest of a learned man, but something more wistful:

Alas, 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 wither flown again, who knows!
(No. LXXII, 1st ed.)

This was the aspect of the *Rubáiyát* which appealed to the Pre-Raphaelites, who tended to prefer exotic and unfamiliar subjects as a reaction against the scientific spirit and conventional tasks of the period. The exoticism of the *Rubáiyát* and its introduction of “fatalism” as a new attitude probably made the poem catch their imagination, and their praises were enough to advertise it.

⁵ According to Michael Millgate's *The Life and Works of Thomas Hardy* (Macmillan, 1984), Thomas Hardy on his deathbed asked his wife to repeat to him this quatrain from the *Rubáiyát*. She took a copy of Omar from his bedside and read to him. When she finished it “he indicated that he wished no more to be read.” (480-81) This quatrain, as we have seen, does not have any Persian equivalent in the manuscripts attributed to Omar Khayyám; but it has much in common with Hardy.

The initial neglect of the poem can be taken as suggesting that the *Rubáiyát* ran counter to the powerful mid-Victorian optimism, utilitarianism and belief in the pieties of everyday life. Then its acceptance can be seen as expressing the reverse side of Victorian Puritanism. As we saw, this reaction was Victorian also. On one hand FitzGerald's contemporaries were not prepared for the notion of pleasure without considering it wicked; on the other they felt that if man was ignorant of the ultimate purpose of the universe, he had better seek satisfaction and consolation in "A book of Verses", where wine, woman and wilderness would become Paradise. Furthermore, one might read into the poem a kind of stoic resignation which also has its place in the Victorian makeup. Any pessimistic attitude toward the position of man was considered by some to be weak; the poem showed a cynical view of human life by lowering man "into the Dust" or to the lowest degree, without any value. But at the same time others held beliefs reflecting both optimism and perversity as later advocated by the decadents. And Darwin's scientific researches seemed to many to decree that a man's place was in a world ruled not by God, but by mere chance, which determined the survival of the fittest.

The subsequent success of the *Rubáiyát*, notably after the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), was a kind of natural selection itself, and its discovery by the Pre-Raphaelites was especially significant. Touched with pessimism and melancholy, as well as exotic imagery, it appealed to those who rejected conventional Victorian art and who were against the didactic use of art for moral, social and religious edification. This appeal was the greater because FitzGerald, unlike the great poets of the period who were intellectually involved with current social problems, actively avoided such an involvement:

Waste not your Hour, nor in the vain pursuit
Of This and That endeavor and dispute;
Better be jocund with the fruitful Grape
Than sadden after none, or bitter, Fruit. (No. 54)

The impression made by the poem on the Pre-Raphaelites – especially on Ruskin, who begged for more – illustrates, too, that the poem was moving in the direction of Aestheticism: a disengaging movement or tendency associated with Pre-Raphaelitism.

The sudden enthusiastic demand for the *Rubáiyát* by the Pre-Raphaelites made Quaritch ask FitzGerald to prepare a new edition. FitzGerald showed no desire to do further work on the poem, however, and in any case he was not interested in seeking fame or fortune. Nevertheless, when he received a letter from Mrs. Tennyson (who often used to write on behalf of her husband) telling him that Tennyson had admired the *Rubáiyát*, FitzGerald decided to work on the poem:

To think of Alfred's approving my old Omar! I never should have thought he even knew of it. Certainly *I* should never have sent it to him, always supposing that he would not approve anything but a literal Prose Translation – unless from such hands as can do original Work, and therefore do *not* translate other People's.⁶

As we have already seen, it was FitzGerald who encouraged Tennyson to break his ten years of silence and publish his volume of 1842; now, in return, it was Tennyson who encouraged FitzGerald to work on “his” poem. In 1867, while FitzGerald was working on the second edition of the *Rubáiyát*, Nicolas published his prose translation of the 464 quatrains of Omar Khayyám under the name of *Les Quatrains de Khéyam* (Paris, the Imperial Press, 1867), based upon a manuscript discovered in Iran while he was a consul there. Nicolas had described Omar Khayyám as a Sufi and claimed that his song of wine had a mystical meaning. FitzGerald studied Nicolas's translation and found inspiration for some new quatrains in his second edition (Nos. 46, 47):

And fear not lest Existence closing your

⁶ *Letter* iii: 59; to Mrs. Tennyson, 4 November 1867.

Account, and mine, should know the like no more;
The Eternal Saki from that Bowl has pour'd
Millions of Bubbles like us, and will pour.

When you and I behind the Veil are past,
Oh, but the long, long while the World shall last,
Which of our Coming and Departure heeds
As the Sea's self should heed a pebble-cast.

Crucially, however, FitzGerald did not change his view about Omar's character as a "material Epicurean." According to his preface to the second edition, FitzGerald was wondering naively how "wine" might have a mystical allusion: "Were the Wine spiritual, for instance, how wash the body with it when dead? Why make cups of the dead clay to be filled with – 'La Divinite' – by some succeeding Mystic?" He believed, without any evidence, that Nicolas was wrong in his conclusion about Omar Khayyám. He added thirty-five stanzas to the seventy-five of the first edition and revised some of the quatrains. He also altered the sequence and printed the second edition in 1868.

The alterations drew protests from his first admirers. Thomas Hinchliff in a letter to Quaritch expressed his disappointment with the alterations: "We were grieved to find that Mr. FitzGerald, in altering the text here and there, had grievously injured the Original. So much so that we agreed to send our friend in Japan an old copy which had to spare instead of the new and smarter edition."⁷ To begin with, FitzGerald's manifest intention in the alterations was to construct his selected quatrains as a single poem and to diverge from the original in such a way that his creation would become an original poem. In a letter to Bernard Quaritch, FitzGerald justified his changes in terms which reveal his lack of true sympathy with Omar:

⁷ Iran B. H. Jewett, *Edward FitzGerald* (London: George Prior Publisher, 1977) 94.

I daresay Edition 1 is better in some respects than 2, but I think not altogether. Surely, several good things were added – perhaps too much of them which also gave Omar’s thoughts room to turn in, as also the Day which the poem occupies. He begins with Dawn pretty sober and contemplative: then as he thinks and drinks, grows savage, blasphemous, etc. and then again sobers down into melancholy at nightfall.⁸

In spite of its popularity among the Pre-Raphaelites, the poem was ignored by reviewers until Charles Eliot Norton published an article in the *North American Review* in October, 1869. Norton had been shown the book by Burne-Jones when he was visiting Ruskin in England. Norton obtained the second edition of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* and a copy of Nicolas’s French translation before he returned to America. Norton’s article comparing the two translations and stating his preference for FitzGerald’s won the first public recognition for the *Rubáiyát*. In his article, Norton stated:

He [the translator] is to be called “translator” only in default of a better word, one which should express the poetic spirit from one language to another, and the re-presentation of the ideas and images of the original in a form not altogether diverse from their own, but perfectly adapted to the new conditions of time, place, custom, and habit of mind in which they reappear . . . its excellence is the highest testimony that could be given, to the essential impressiveness and worth of the Persian poet. *It is the work of a poet inspired by the work of a poet; not a copy, but a reproduction, not a translation, but the redelivery of a poetic inspiration.*⁹

As a result of Norton’s article, the *Rubáiyát* won popularity in the United States, whose people “are my Omar’s best friends”, as FitzGerald said. The author, however, was still

⁸ *Letters* iii: 339; 31 March 1872.

unknown. The publisher now persuaded FitzGerald to prepare a new edition of the poem in view of its popularity. At the same time, an anonymous writer (later identified as Thomas W. Hinchliff) in an article published in *Fraser's Magazine* likewise compared FitzGerald's translation with Nicolas's prose translation and preferred the former.

He has certainly achieved a remarkable success, and it would be difficult to find a more complete example of terse and vigorous English, free from all words of weakness or superfluity. The rhythm of his stanzas is admirable.¹⁰

Due to demand from its American admirers in Philadelphia, the third edition of the *Rubáiyát* was published in 1872. Upon hearing from Cowell that the first edition of the poem had been reprinted by someone in India, FitzGerald commented: "I have lived not in vain, if I have lived to be pirated." The name of the translator of the *Rubáiyát* was still unknown in England but in America it was rumoured that its author is "a certain Reverend Edward FitzGerald, who lived somewhere in Norfolk and was fond of boating."¹¹ Norton in his visit to England mentioned the rumour of the authorship of the *Rubáiyát* to Carlyle. Carlyle was very surprised:

The Reverend Edward FitzGerald? . . . Why, he is no more Reverend than I am! He is a very old friend of mine – I am surprised, if the book be as good as you tell me it is, that my old friend has never mentioned it to me.¹²

In February of 1875, FitzEdward Hall, a philologist and student of Eastern languages and literature, identified FitzGerald as the author of the *Rubáiyát* in *Lippincott's Magazine*, published in Philadelphia, writing an explanatory paragraph on the works of FitzGerald. In the

⁹ Charles Eliot Norton, "Nicholas' Quatrains de Kheyam," *North American Review*, CIX (October, 1869): 575-76; quoted in *Life* 209.

¹⁰ *Life* 210.

¹¹ *Life* 210.

¹² *Life* 211.

following year, Henry Schütz Wilson, a minor writer and critic, for the first time publicly identified FitzGerald in the *Contemporary Review* (March, 1876, XXVII: 559-570) as a “masterly” translator. A critic in the *Spectator* (March 1876, 334-36) observed that FitzGerald’s Omar is “a great poet of denial and revolt.” He continued in his review that “it is somewhat a disgrace to us that such a poem should have been amongst us for fifteen years without becoming generally known.” In late 1878 in America, James R. Osgood published five hundred copies of FitzGerald’s third edition of the *Rubáiyát*, “a handsome, too handsome – edition of Omar”, as FitzGerald called it, followed by a second printing before the end of the month. Recognising the celebrity of the poem in America, Bernard Quaritch asked FitzGerald’s permission to publish another edition of the *Rubáiyát*. FitzGerald refused: “I think I will, as I said, leave Omar for the present; there has been enough for him here, and now will be more in America. One day I may bring him out in better company.”¹³ Offering FitzGerald twenty-five guineas as the honorarium, Quaritch insisted on a reprint of the poem:

Do let me reprint the *Rubáiyát*! I have so many inquiries for copies that it is painful to be unable to supply a want felt by that part of the public with which I desire to be in connexion, and which you, as the poet idolized by a small but choice circle, ought to be anxious to gratify personally, rather than throw into the hands of American pirates the opportunity of reprinting and misprinting ad libitum.¹⁴

FitzGerald was determined, at least, not to print “his” Omar alone any more. He intended to print it with *Salámán*. He wrote to Cowell inquiring of him whether he wanted the *Rubáiyát* to be reprinted along with *Salámán*. Cowell agreed to FitzGerald’s suggestion. In December 1878, FitzGerald allowed Quaritch to publish the third edition of his “old Omar”

¹³ *Letters* iv: 93; to Bernard Quaritch, 27 January 1878.

¹⁴ *Letters* iv: 158; to FitzGerald, 18 November 1878.

with a condition: “If Omar be reprinted, Cowell wishes *Salámán* to go along with him.”¹⁵ In this way FitzGerald wished “to stitch up the Saint [i.e. *Salámán*] & the Sinner [i.e. Omar] together.” Moreover, he was certain that *Salámán* would survive as long as the *Rubáiyát* was remembered. He also wished “Omar to stand *first*, be never reprinted separate from Jámi” (the author of *Salámán*).¹⁶ In the same letter, FitzGerald asked Quaritch not to mention his name in the book. On the second of August 1879, FitzGerald received his *Rubáiyát-Salámán* volume. His printing of the *Rubáiyát* with *Salámán* reveals that he saw the former as a statement of nihilism and materialism and the latter as a statement of belief and spirituality. Thus, the *Rubáiyát* and *Salámán* can possibly be seen as representing two sides of his character: the *Rubáiyát* represents the Epicurean and the *Salámán* the spiritual; one was the representative of disbelief and the other of belief. Upon stitching “the Saint & the Sinner” together, FitzGerald felt he had achieved a great triumph, moving from the nihilism and hedonism of his invented Omar to the spirituality of Jámi’s *Salámán*. He wanted to find a balance not only in his celebrated work but also in his own life in particular and man’s life in general. FitzGerald was well aware that in the *Rubáiyát* man descends to earth or “into the Dust”, or to the lowest level of value; meanwhile, in *Salámán* man soars into the kingdom of heaven. If the *Rubáiyát* showed a cynical view of human life, with suggestions of debauchery and hedonism, then *Salámán* showed the highest of spiritual values. It is significant that FitzGerald wanted Omar’s poetry published first and Jámi’s second in order to indicate the progression in his own life from a carefree to a contemplative existence. Finally I believe his choice of epitaph shows the pinnacle of his spiritual Journey: “It is He that hath made us not we ourselves.” Above all, the format of his newly-designed *Rubáiyát* along with *Salámán* made the scale of his contemplative existence heavier. In both the *Rubáiyát* and *Salámán*, FitzGerald showed his belief that life

¹⁵ *Letters* iv: 161; to B. Quaritch, 9 December 1878.

inevitably ended in death, with the difference being that Salámán found hope in life beyond the earthly one. FitzGerald achieved this hope by the deliberate choice of his epitaph. I think this epitaph might be seen as continuing the reflection in the speech of one of the “pots” or vessels:

. . . “Surely not in vain
“My substance of the common Earth was ta’en
“And to this figure molded, to be broke,
“Or trampled back to shapeless Earth again.” (No. 84)

What we need to be aware of as readers of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*, however, is that no matter how important the poem was to him as a statement of one side of his nature and of a certain position in regard to contemporary matters of faith and doubt, the poem he published and re-published had not much to do with the quatrains he was supposedly translating or reinterpreting, with their own (or at least Omar’s own) cast of mid or spirit.

A direct response to FitzGerald’s celebrated poem was “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, Browning’s great religious poem, was first published in *Dramatis Personae* in 1864. This poem, according to De Vane, was actually inspired by FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*.¹⁷ The poem is generally believed to be an expression of Browning’s own attitude to life (i.e. it is not so “dramatic” as others). It is significant that Browning chose, as his *persona*, a Middle Eastern historical scientist, apparently selected by him in response to FitzGerald’s Omar. As the poem opens, the Rabbi invites his young friends to accompany him in his survey of life from youth to old age. The Rabbi welcomes age because it is “the last of life, for which the first was made” (1. 3). The speaker does not “remonstrate” against the indecisions, yearnings, “hopes and fears/Annulling youth’s brief years”, because they are the conditions of growth. It is “doubt” and “care” which distinguish man from animals:

¹⁶ *Letters* iv: 173; to B. Quaritch, 16 January 1879.

Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed
beasts? (l. 24)

But man is disturbed by “a spark” because he is nearer to God than are the recipients of God’s
inferior gifts:

We are allied
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.
(ll. 25-30)

This is why the Rabbi asks his young friends to “welcome each rebuff” which turns “earth’s
smoothness rough.” In this connection what divides us from the brute is aspiration not
achievement. To Browning, as J. H. Buckley writes, “the fulfillment of desire meant spiritual
death, for it removed the high remote ideal that had given motive power to the soul.”¹⁸
Browning refuses to denigrate the physical side of human nature. He seeks a model for human
satisfaction, distinct from the animal, through a balance of the physical and spiritual sides of
human nature. The body is intended to serve the highest aims of the soul:

Let us not always say
‘Spite of this flesh today
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!’
As the bird wings and sings;
Let us cry ‘All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!’
(stanza 12)

¹⁷ William Clyde De Vane, *A Browning Handbook* (London: John Murray, 1937) 259.

¹⁸ Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978) 89.

While Browning's Rabbi sees life as a process which death completes, FitzGerald's Omar views life and its end in the following way:

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! (No. 24)

The repetition of the image of "dust" is FitzGerald's invention. In the original the reader is asked "not to allow sorrow to embrace" him, "nor an idle grief to occupy" his days; the reader is then asked not to forsake the book, the beloved's lips and the bank of a spring before the earth embraces him. The recurring image of "dust" seems to be FitzGerald's way of emphasising a fashionable Victorian nihilism which Browning was too strong to be influenced by. The Rabbi sees the whole design of life as "perfect" and thanks God that he is "a man":

Not once beat 'Praise be Thine!
I see the whole design.
I, who saw power, see now love perfect too:
Perfect I call thy plan:
Thanks that I was a man!
Maker, remake, complete, – I trust what Thou shalt do!' (stanza 10)

FitzGerald's Omar, unlike Browning's Rabbi, rebels against this divine design, and wishes he had the power to "shatter" it and "remold" it according to his own heart's desire:

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
Remold it nearer to the Heart's Desire! (No. 99)

In the original, there is no talk of conspiracy, of wishing for a power such as God's to construct another wheel of fortune closer to the heart's desire,

The last line of Browning's stanza 10 anticipates the metaphor of pot and potter in stanzas 26-32. These stanzas contain the most striking imagery in the poem, of "clay", "pot", and "potter". In the strained metaphor of the potter's wheel, as Erickson points out, the Rabbi finally finds the proper image for describing the formlessness of man's striving after God.¹⁹ In stanza 26, the Rabbi addresses FitzGerald's Omar when he says:

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay, –
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
'Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize today!'

The last line alludes to and summarises the whole drift of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*. In this stanza the Rabbi, who is modelled on a historical commentator, philosopher, and astronomer of the twelfth century, mocks the philosophy of FitzGerald's Omar, mathematician and astronomer of the early twelfth century, when he chants:

Oh threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise;
One thing at least is certain – *This* life flies;
One thing is certain and the rest is lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies. (No. 63)

The first two lines do not belong to the original and are FitzGerald's composition, but the second two, with their important substitution of "dies" for the original "blooms", are Omar's. FitzGerald describes man in his *Rubáiyát*, stanzas 82-90, as a "pot" made of clay by a "Potter." Through this image, however, FitzGerald, unlike Browning, reduces man to a worthless lump of clay who has no duty but to seize the day, because all he knows is that life passes quickly:

¹⁹ Lee Erickson, *Robert Browning: His Poetry and His Audience* (London: Cornell UP, 1984) 212.

Oh 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 blackened-Man's forgiveness give-and take!
(No. 81)

Browning, on the other hand, celebrates the physical delights of life and welcomes the old age, which itself represents the culmination of a rich life, as the gateway to something even better. For FitzGerald old age represented the end of life and of everything, even his friendships. FitzGerald feared old age and death. Unlike his *persona* who lived and recommended living in the present, FitzGerald lived from his early youth with a vision of old age, feeling how rapidly life was passing. This mood is present in his "The Meadows in Spring" first published in 1831. If FitzGerald, through Omar, announces that man is merely a "consumer", Browning, through his Rabbi, suggests that

. . . man is distinct from the mere *consumer*, to whom satiety is an end in itself: he is more akin to God the Provider. From this follows the Rabbi's whole argument – that man is a being with higher duties than the rest of creation but with correspondingly higher rewards."²⁰

The only place where such a notion of man is present in Omar Khayyám's writings and also in FitzGerald's reproduction is the quatrain No 44:

Why, if the Soul can fling the Dust aside,
And naked on the Air of Heaven ride,
Were't not a Shame – were't not a Shame for him
In this clay carcass crippled to abide?

But FitzGerald, in the character of the invented "Omar", denies this higher reward:

Alike for those who for TODAY prepare,

²⁰ Drew 184.

And those that after some TOMORROW stare,
A Muézzin from the Tower of Darkness cries,
“Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There.” (No. 25)

FitzGerald’s inability to see a particular aspect of life in Browning and especially in Omar reveals a peculiarly later-nineteenth-century cynicism and nihilism, while grappling with exactly the same issues and spiritual contexts as Browning, Tennyson – and Omar. FitzGerald fails to find the richness of response they did, but finds another kind of response, a sceptical and ultimately a cheaper kind.

FitzGerald’s Omar problematised the general conception of a “real” Omar to such an extent that it stimulated Persian scholars to address the question of the authenticity of the quatrains attributed to Omar by FitzGerald. Some of these scholars, like M.T. Jafari and M. Motahari, concluded that we have in effect two Omar Khayyáms: one the religious scientist of the eleventh century, the real Omar who sometimes improvised *rubá’is*; and the other the author of a large quantity of quatrains, who has no discoverable historical identity. They were not aware, however, that their speculations were founded on FitzGerald’s invention, a *persona* created by him and called “Omar”.

Another result of the popularity of FitzGerald’s Omar was that copyists tried to collect *rubá’is* under the name of Omar Khayyám and forge the date of their compilation: the older date being better for the foreign markets. The Cambridge and Chester Beatty manuscripts are of this kind. The Cambridge manuscript translated into English by Professor Arberry “suddenly appeared in London and was offered for sale to Cambridge University Library. . . . [it] comprised 252 quatrains; and was written only 75 years after Omar’s death.”²¹ M. Fouládvand’s extensive research (1968) on the authenticity of the quatrains attributed to Omar

Khayyám, both in French and Persian, revealed the fact that these manuscripts were forged.²² Apart from a comparison of the quatrains with other sources and the type of paper and ink, Fouládvand noted that the very beginning of both manuscripts was in Persian; whereas all genuine Persian manuscripts open with an Arabic doxology. This detection showed, he argued, that the manuscripts were modern, for it was only in modern times that Iranian officials tried to replace the Arabic praise of God at the beginning with one in Persian. This was sufficient evidence for Persian scholars to conclude that the manuscripts were forged; yet discoveries of this kind never reduced the popularity of FitzGerald's created *persona*, or led to any questioning of its relationship to the real Omar.

The popularity of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* as compared with that of his other "Persian" works (*Salámán and Absál* and *Conference of the Birds*) can be explained in other terms, than that of his greater freedom of invention there. As we saw above in the section on FitzGerald's Persian background, both of those other poems deal with a mystical idea which was almost absent from British thought in the middle and later Victorian periods; while FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* deals centrally with the questions of faith and doubt which were the dominant spiritual issue in a period when one could "only hear/ melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of the "Sea of Faith." The *Rubáiyát*, as John Killham writes, "appealed to a public perplexed by the constantly-debated problems of faith and conduct which deepened every year after 1859 (in which *The Origin of Species* was also published)."²³ FitzGerald believed that his contemporaries would share the anxiety about the future he thought he found in Omar, and that thus his *persona* could become a voice for the Victorian age. It is worth noting that in his revisions, as Daniel Schenker also points out, FitzGerald progressively deleted the

²¹ Arthur J. Arberry, *Omar Khayyám: A New Version Based upon Recent Discoveries* (London: John Murray, 1962) 12.

²² Mohammad Mehdi Fouládvand, *Khayyám-Shenási* [A Study of Khayyám] (Tehran, 1968) 48.

name of Khayyám in the quatrains so that by the fourth edition there is no citation of Omar's name in the poem except in the title. Thus FitzGerald "seems to have consciously decided to remove all traces of intimacy"²⁴ and as it were openly lay claim to a work which even in earlier editions was already really his. Another way of putting this is to say that FitzGerald, unlike the other Oriental translators, believed he *felt* and *thought* with the Omar Khayyám of the quatrains that he had selected:

But in truth I take old Omar rather more as my property than yours: he and I are more akin, are we not? You see all [his] Beauty, but you can't feel *with* him in some respects as I do. I think you would almost feel obliged to leave out the part of Hamlet in representing him to your Audience: for fear of Mischief. Now I do not wish to show Hamlet at his maddest: but mad he must be shown, or he is not Hamlet at all.²⁵

This quotation suggests that FitzGerald could not imagine Omar without impiety, as he could not imagine *Hamlet* without the prince. The source of FitzGerald's great popularity lies partly, perhaps, in his supposed identification with the *persona* of the oriental literature. A good translation requires a true sympathy of the translator with the text and its author; what FitzGerald produced was a work of true sympathy with an author with whom he had just enough in common to be able to identify with something in him and then change it.

There is another point which I think can also be considered as a key to FitzGerald's success. That point concerns the Persian *form*, the *rubái*, which FitzGerald happened to come across. This form, as we have already seen, is a short independent unit in four lines rhyming a a a or a a b a. Its brevity and the simplicity of the language in Persian make it easy for the

²³ John Killham, "Tennyson (and FitzGerald)," *The Victorians*, ed. A. Pollard (London: Sphere Books, 1969) 386.

²⁴ Daniel Schenker, "Fugitive Articulation: An Introduction to *The Rubáiyát of Omar khayyám*," *Victorian Poetry*, West Virginia University, 19 (1981): 49-64.

reader to learn and memorise, and it deals with the great issues of life in an unambiguous way. At the same time, unlike long poems, its brevity and simplicity of language have made it very difficult to attribute to any particular poet (especially in the case of Omar who never wrote any other type of poem) and have inevitably raised the issue of authenticity. In fact, in the Persian tradition, each *rubá'i* is said to talk in the “whispers of the heart.” Poets felt much freer to put their feelings into a *rubá'i* than into long poems. In other words, the *rubá'i* is a concise private *form* for a private thought; it is a short poem for the shortness of life and for the transitoriness of time. Perhaps that is why this form with its content enchanted FitzGerald. It is in the nature of this form that the poet talks of his thought freely, and with precision. Yet the simplicity of the language does not mean that we should ignore the symbolic value of the images and fail to receive the message in its context. In other words, FitzGerald thought it was simpler than it was.

As a result of the popularity of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* and the presentation of Omar as an infidel and an Epicurean (in the sense of having a luxurious taste for drinking), a number of western scholars agreed with FitzGerald about Omar's character and considered the “poem” as an expression of “a revolt against Islamic culture” or as “an outstanding example of Aryan [old Persian] free thought striving to break free from the yoke of harsh and inflexible Semitic laws.”²⁶ Those who charged Omar with being a constant “tippler” and thus hostile to Islam were unaware of FitzGerald's invention of the real meaning of “*Seize the day*”, and of the symbolic effect of Persian imagery, particularly of wine-drinking. FitzGerald himself found the “old Epicurean [Omar] so desperately impious in his recommendations to live only for *Today* that the good Mahometans have scarce dared to multiply MSS of him.”²⁷ In fact it can be established historically that Omar was opposed not to Islamic law but to the pessimism and

²⁵ *Letters* ii: 305; 8 December 1857.

²⁶ This is Dashti's reading of Ernest Renan; trans. Elwell-Sutton 158.

²⁷ *Letters* ii: 291; to Alfred Tennyson, 18 July 1857.

suspicion which had been created by the Sunni Saljuq intruders who had become, as it were, more Catholic than the Pope. The study of Omar's writings and his contemporaries' account of him revealed that he was a religious and serious-minded scientist who suffered in the atmosphere of his time. Without exception, everybody who mentions him gives him his reverend and religious titles, and that in a time when all conduct was measured from a religious perspective.

With the growth of scepticism and pessimism in the second half of the Victorian period, we observe many substitutes for religion. One was "art", and the Pre-Raphaelites were its primary advocates. Pessimism paved the way for writers like John Davidson (1857-1909), Earnest Dowson (1867-1900) and A. E. Housman (1859-1936). The hedonism of FitzGerald's poem is present in Oscar Wilde's essays and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. And its fatalism is present in Hardy's novels, in which man never seems to be free, and mysterious forces control his life. It is worth noting that in the twentieth century, with the rise of existentialism and nihilism, the *Rubáiyát* has attracted even more widespread and popular attention. British soldiers, according to Professor Arberry, took it with them to war in both World Wars. Its rebellion against the prevailing conceptions of God, Heaven, and Hell, its complaint against fate and predestination, its pessimism, its stress on the here-and-now and its Epicurean nature have made the poem continually popular.

Although the *Rubáiyát* was unnoticed by the mid-Victorian English public, once it was noticed, it was never allowed to fall into neglect again. Christopher Ricks in his *Victorian Verse* (Oxford, 1990) prints FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* in its entirety as one of the "four substantial masterpieces" of Victorian verse.

Tamám

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