

Death Deemed Undead: The Fragility of Life and the Theme of Mortality and Melancholia In Omar Khayyam's 'Rubaiyat'.

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Abstract: As literary genre the Rubai was tremendously popular in 11th and 12th century Persia. It consists of two stanzas which are further divided into Hemistiches, thus making four like altogether. Each of Khayyam's quatrains forms a complete thought: the first two lines generally pose a situation or problem, the third creates suspense, and the fourth offers a resolution. Khayyam is best known for his Rubaiyat, a collection of verse quatrains composed in the traditional rubai style and arranged in alphabetic order. Each rubai is complete in itself and has no connection with what goes before or follows after. The leading ideas are pleasure, death and fate and the predominant state of mind are the sensuous, the gruesome and rebellious. The term "Vairagya" refers to a deeply ruminative cynicism arising out of wisdom, knowledge and awareness about the ways of the world especially its perplexing transience and man's search for meaning in the grand scheme of things. No other topic engenders as much *vairagic* thinking as does the imponderability of life's purpose, its relevance and meaning. The manifestation of this thinking can be seen in prose tracts, poetry, schools of philosophy, expositions, sayings and aphorisms. Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat belongs to this manifestation. With death as the final and unyielding reality it was but natural for Omar Khayyam to bring out the perplexing nature of human existence and passions there in for questioning in his rubai. Like Lucretius before him and Keats after, in Khayyam's Rubaiyat too, is a constant reference to impermanence of life and attempt to laugh at the fleeting nature of relationships; man's craving for possessions and the need to accept death as a natural process of life which this essay strives to enlighten upon.

Keywords: Persian literature, Rubaiyat, ubisunt motif, death, Lucretius

First translated into English in 1859, by the English poet and scholar Edward Fitzgerald, Khayyam's Rubaiyat was immensely popular in the 19th century, giving rise to numerous other translations. Praised for their lyrical form and poignant insight, Khayyam was imitated by such poets as Swinburne and Tennyson. Moreover their diverse subject matter which often ranges from the sensual to the spiritual ignited and intense critical debate over the philosophic message of the Rubaiyat which has continued well into the 20th century after Fitzgerald translated twenty-five of the one hundred and fifty eight quatrains of the manuscript into English. Cowell believes that "*there is a depth in the vague mysticism which Omar's science has never voiced; it sprang from wants and feelings to which his own heart was a stranger and thereby although his poetry was real and full of passion, it moves in terrestrial animal life of the senses and seems dazzled at any prospect beyond the grave. His very idea of death seems confined to the body, as like Keats he feels "the flower going over him" as The Rubaiyat become Omar's medium of contemplation on his idea of death.*

*Oh heart, were thou pure from the body's dust,
Thou shouldst soar naked spirit above the sky;
Highest heaven is thy native seat,- for shame, for shame,*

That thou shouldst stoop to dwell in a city of clay.

Cowell notices the gloom overshadowing all of Khayyam's poetry "he was false to his better self and therefore ill at ease and sad, he was dissolved to ignore the future and the spiritual and anchored only by the material and tangible. But his very insight became blinded and misled him for he grasped darkness that could be felt." Had his thought only been epicurean, his poetry could have been perceived in a different light. In him the careless gaiety of Horace never loses its charm for it was the spontaneous outburst of its nature. In Omar there recites a resolute will and thereby his poetry reads to us – "like sweet bells jangles out of tune and harsh." His roses bloom in an earthly summer, his wine is of mortal vintage unlike the other Persian poets, and everything with him is real and concrete and overshadowed by a dominant deliberation on death. That tone of rivalry which in Hafeez and Jami was but a passing shadow under which their genius veiled its higher aspirations – like the petrarchan sonnet in the hand of Shakespeare or Milton – Omar terms these quatrains from his science and astronomy to drawn through its passing moments' pleasure, as he seems to mask his better self in his temporary epicurean disguise.

*My coming was not of my own design,
And one day I must go, and no choice of mine;
Come light-handed cupbearer, gird thee to serve,
We must wash down the care of this world with wine.*

The following lines

*Oh, come with old Khayyám, and leave the Wise
To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies;
One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.*

are one of the most famous verses of the Rubaiyat, the last line being a particularly poignant expression of Omar Khayyam's belief about the finality in life that death weaves. The use of the flower as a symbol of the transience of human life recalls the imagery used by Robert Herrick in his poem To the Virgins, to make much of Time (1648):

*Gather ye rosebuds, while ye may,
Old Time is still a-flying:
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.*

"Gather ye rosebuds while ye may" has become itself a carpe diem proverb, inspired two paintings by John William Waterhouse. But the idea behind it did not originate with Herrick, for it has ancient antecedents in a Latin poem known as De Rosis Nascentibus (On Budding Roses), which may actually have prompted Herrick's lines. At one time attributed to Virgil, this poem, now reckoned to be by the fourth century Roman poet Ausonius. In it the poet describes walking in a garden at dawn, musing over whether the dawn sky gives colour to the roses, or borrows it from them. Robert Burton, in his Anatomy of Melancholy, first published in 1621, quotes De Rosis Nascentibus on

gathering roses while youth is fresh, in the course of airing his views about the point at which virgins pass their sell-by date in respect of marriage: “for if they tarry longer, to say truth, they are past date,” Shelley used similar imagery in his poem Mutability – his second poem of that title, written in 1821:

*The flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow dies;
All that we wish to stay
Tempt and then flies.
What is this world's delight?
Lightning that mocks the night,
Brief even as bright.*

In his first Mutability poem, written earlier and published in 1816, Shelley also preferred the following image to express the same theme of transience:

*We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;
How restlessly they speed, and gleam, and quiver,
Streaking the darkness radiantly!–yet soon
Night closes round, and they are lost for ever;*

Horace, in his Odes (4.7), wrote of the irreversibility of death thus:

*“When once you have perished and Minos has passed his royal verdict, /
neither race, Torquatus, nor eloquence, nor righteous deeds shall restore
you.”* (Translation by W.G.Shepherd.)

Omar’s quatrains give prove of the delicacy no less of the strength of his poetic nature, of the subtlety no less than the elevation of the thought. Seeking with the shrewd inquisitive and independent intelligence he fails to find a trustworthy answer to the problems of existence and eternity ; and his penetrating imagination searches thing no better than his understanding in his attempt to reach assurance concerning the nature of god and men. If we interpret some of Omar’s quatrains mystically, we find him sometimes seeking satisfaction in pantheistic abstraction, in efforts towards communion with and absorption in the divine and sometimes be taking himself to aesthetic speculation and admitting no other guiding principle than a blind impartial fate. “Omar with an intellect sublime and strong with an imagination full of fervency with a poets transcendental gift, remains unhappy, on the shadow’s side of clear fate; but has yet expressed with rare clearness and beauty, all the doubt which lofty nature feel. It is the blank of negation set to sweet and subtle music; it is endless question some in saddest but most splendid strains. Omar could not leave the veil but has sung his inability in verses which deeply touch the human heart. Even Lucretius with whom Omar is most naturally compared, seems to be inferior in depth, in force, in beauty, in glory of rhythm” (H. Wilson, The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, Contemporary Review, Vol. XXVII, March 1876)

Khayyam influenced the style and theme of many nineteenth century poets and critical study of the Rubaiyat has continued unabated. For its terseness of expression and vigour of thought, the Rubaiyat is unparalleled while for the passionate earnestness and concentrated sadness there is none that is equal to them except Lucretius. The

epicurean views which pervade them but at deeper gloom to the melancholy we know the gaiety is unreal and the poets simple is but a risus Sardonius of the despair. Edward Byles Cowell in his essay dated 1858 comments *"All things whisper in his ear of change and decay- the sad refrain rings even in his hearings even where in the world he reads the record of the inscription which Solomon commented "This also shall pass away"*

Oh threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise,

One thing is certain- that life flies.

One thing is certain and the rest are lies.

The flower that has once bloomed forever dies.

This law of corporeal transmigration occurs again and again in Khayyam's poetry that seems to jar on poets inner most soul and give him a peculiar pang. In too many of his poems, readers find the settled gloom which stand in striking contrast with the assumed carelessness. Cowell goes on to continue, *"Omar is ill at ease within and his internal discord reflects itself in an angry defiance with the world and its opinion and believes. Like Lucretius his very science led him astray for he had learned enough to unsettle to ancient instincts but not enough to rebuild them on a surer basis. In the sublime poems of Lucretius, we see the inevitable battle between the vague dreams of obsolete mythology and the progressive certainties of progressive science and the first intensity of the conflict, the iconoclasm extents itself beyond the ideals of the old believe to the very basis of belief itself within the soul."*

The most important property of time is that it unfolds and bears away with it all things subject to decay and mutability. The present is different from both the past and future, which in turn are completely different from each other, the past being fixed and the future changeable. This process of coming into being rolls on in an immutable way: while we can influence what happens in time, we cannot influence the way that time itself progresses on. As stated by Omar Khayam,

"The Moving Finger writes: and, having writ, Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit, Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line, Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it."

It is this fundamental a feature of time that is not captured by modern theoretical physics, even though it is a most obvious and crucial feature of time in everyday life. This disjunction is captured most clearly in Julian Barbour's book [The End of Time](#), proposing that the flow of time is an illusion. This conclusion is reached because solutions of the Wheeler-de Witt equation, the fundamental equation in quantum gravity for the wave function of the universe that Omar had summarised with the image of the potter's wheel that shapes and moulds and mutates the earthly clay into shape and form. W.H Mallock comments, *"This conclusion is that all conscious life comes into existence with the body, and disappears with its dissolution; that it is not the miraculous creation of any deity, or deities; and that if any deities exist, they emerge from the nature of things, just as man does, and have no concern with his actions... Omar is alternately possessed by the tragedy of the inevitable end, and by the desire to wring from existence every pleasure that it can yield us, before the night comes, in which no more pleasure can be taken. But Lucretius addresses his hearers in a very different tone. Omar's advice to man—*

“Drink, for we know not whence we came, nor why; Drink, for we know not why we go, nor where,”

Is rejected by him as a piece of ignorant folly which defeats its own ends. The only true pleasures, he teaches, are found not in excess but in moderation; and though even these are not perhaps very great, they are better than anything we can gain for ourselves by the excitement and agitation of excess.”

Mallock expounds the similarities between the philosophies of the Persian poet and the Greek Lucretius and comments, *“Life, according to him (Lucretius), would be naturally tolerable enough, and very often happy, if it were not for one thing; and this is the universal dread, not of death itself, but of the destiny that awaits us after death. Mankind at large, he says, labours under the horrible belief, which is always in the background of their minds, that they are born under the wrath of God, or of the gods, and that these monstrous powers have called them into life only in order that, after death, they may torment them in hell for ever. Here is really the root of all human sadness. It is the fear of what the gods will do to us—those all-seeing angry masters, vile in their vindictive righteousness, gathering where they have not strayed. Let us once, says Lucretius, rid ourselves of this nightmare of the imagination, and the aching of our hearts will cease. We shall rise up and be free”* Omar too, on a similar strain, portrays the brevity of life and the suddenness with which it ceases and the subsequent nothingness that is a manifest reality of death with the following words:

*“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 seem'd - and then no more of thee and me.”*

And concludes with the sublimity of the carpe diem motif: *“Drink! – for once dead you never shall return.”*

Omar's tetrastich are filled with bitter satires of the sensuality and hypocrisy of the pretenders to sanctity. He saw with a clear eye the evil and folly of the charlatans and empirics; but he was blind when he turned from these to deny the existence of the soul's desire. Like Lucretius, his poems trace the unsatisfied instinct – the dim conviction that their wisdom is folly – which reflects themselves in darker colours in the misanthropy and despair, which clouds their vision of life. Fate and Free Will with all their infinite ramifications and practical consequences – the origin of evil – the immortality of the soul – life and afterlife – and future retributions – all these questions reoccur again and again. Fitzgerald comments, *“Khayyam sat down to contemplate the mechanical drama of the universe of which he was part actor and... flung his own genius and learning with the bitter jest into the general ruin, which their insufficient only served to reveal, and yielding his senses to the actual rose and vine only diverted by balancing the ideal possibilities of fate, free will, existence and annihilation, with an oscillation which so generally inclined to the negative, as to make such stanzas as the following exception to his general philosophy.”*

*Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring
The Winter Garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way*

To fly - and Lo! The Bird is on the Wing.

In the second stanza of the Rubaiyat, Omar sings:

*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."*

Dawn's Left Hand (which became "the phantom of false morning" in the second and subsequent editions) was referenced as follows by FitzGerald in his Notes to the First Edition:

"The 'False Dawn': Subhi Khasib, a transient Light on the Horizon about an hour before the Subhi Sadhik, or True Dawn; a well-known Phenomenon in the East. The Persians call the Morning Grey, or Dusk, 'Wolf-and-Sheep-While.'"

The rather puzzling 'Wolf-and-Sheep-While' sentence, which FitzGerald dropped from the note in subsequent editions, was probably taken from Robert B.M.Binning, A Journal of Two Years' Travel in Persia, Ceylon etc (1857):

"Most travellers in this country have noticed the frequent phenomenon of the false dawn; but this is of too common occurrence in India, to attract the notice of anyone coming from that country." The grey of morning just preceding daybreak, is called by the Persians "hava e goorg u meesh" (time of the wolf and sheep) a phrase is very similar to the French 'entre chien et loup.' and portrays life as a monumental stage of cosmic drama where illusion and reality play a deceptive game and reality, urging his readers to take notice of the fleeting moments before "Life's Liquor in its Cup be dry." This abundance in the use of similes to connect the notion of life, death and the unknown abounds in Omar's poems and Edward Fitzgerald in his Introduction to Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam,(1815) comments, "Although Lucretian as Omar's genius might be he crossed the darker mood much of Oliver De Basslin humour the result is sad enough : saddest perhaps when most of ostentatiously merry : and fitter to move sorrow and anger towards the Tentmaker, who after vainly endeavouring to unshackle his steps from Destiny and to catch some authentic glimpse of Tomorrow fell back upon Today as he perceived the only ground he got to stand upon however momentarily sleeping from under his feet"

Rarely has more poignant insight into the notion of life's brevity and the subsequent urgency to live it been depicted in more simple words:

*"How little while we have to stay,
And, once departed, may return no more."*

The feeling of the transitory and of the rapid fly of the ruthless time is very strong in Omar. His perception of it always leads to the doctrine of the hollowness of all things and to the Carpe Diem theory as a guide to practice. Pomp and powers seem to him as a hollow mockery as of all things else. Thus he sings

*Iram indeed is gone with all its Rose,
And Jamshyd's Sev'n-ring'd Cup where no one knows;
But still the Vine her ancient Ruby yields,*

And still a Garden by the Water blows.

The last two lines of the following quarten are a Sufistic version of Jamshid's Cup, meaning, as Whinfield says, that "*man is the microcosm.*" The overall theme of the fifth verse is that everything man-made must perish, but that nature herself continues on regardless of time – "still the Vine her ancient Ruby (grapes/wine) yields:

*"To find great Jamshid's world-reflecting bowl
I compassed sea and land, and viewed the whole;
But, when I asked the wary sage, I learned
That bowl was my own body, and my soul!"*

And an almost youthful desire to "*Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring*" by obliterating from the mind the forlorn gloom of death and despair through wine: "*The Winter Garment of Repentance fling*". Inevitably here "*tempus fugit*" (time flies) comes to mind, a phrase: "*fugit inreparabile tempus*" meaning "*time flies beyond recall*" deriving from Virgil's Georgics.

*And look – a thousand Blossoms with the Day
Woke – and a thousand scatter'd into Clay:
And this first Summer Month that brings the Rose
Shall take Jamshyd and Kaikobad away.*

For every thousand flowers that blossom, a thousand others die (return to dust, earth or Clay); more than this, at the same time as a single Rose blossoms in a garden, great kings may pass away like Kaikobad, a legendary Persian king, mentioned in the great epic poem of Persia, The Shahnama. The 'Blossoms' and the 'Clay' have deeper connotations, for the 'Blossoms' are symbolic of people, and the 'Clay' symbolic of "the dust of the ground" from which God created Man (Gen.2.7), and to which, on death, Man must return: "*Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust*", as it says in the Book of Common Prayer.

This image of flowers "scatter'd into Clay", may be compared Walter Crane's strange painting The Mower, in which the winged Mower – the Angel of Death – scythes down human-faced flowers in a meadow. The scythe also features in a similar sense in Millais' painting Spring (Apple Blossoms) and Time, the Reaper. Another unusual use of the image of Time as the Reaper is to be found in a clock designed by Gustave Doré, where the clock is being scaled by numerous cherub-like figures, who, as they reach the top, are scythed down by the winged figure of Time. In poetry, another use of the scythe of Time is to be found in Shakespeare's 12th Sonnet ("*nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence*") or in Edward Young's Night Thoughts:

*Each Moment has its sickle, emulous
Of Time's enormous scythe, whose ample sweep
Strikes empires from the root; each Moment plays
His little weapon in the narrower sphere
Of sweet domestic comfort, and cuts down
The fairest bloom of sublunary bliss.*

Omar's quatrains

*"With me along some Strip of Herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the sown,
Where name of Slave and Sultán scarce is known
And pity Sultán Máhmúd on his Throne."*

May be equated with one of his lesser known but equally intriguing verse:

*A Shaikh beheld a Harlot, and quoth he,
"You seem a slave to drink and lechery";
And she made answer, "What I seem I am,
But, Master, are you all you seem to be?"*

The equalising of Slave and Sultan in Fitzgerald's verse brings to mind an epigram from The Greek Anthology of the epitaph of a slave named Manes. Another aspect of Death as the Great Leveller is to be found in Lucian's Dialogues of the Dead, in particular in the dialogue of Nireus, Thersites and Menippus. The scene is set in Hades and Menippus says to Nireus, *"Neither you nor anyone else is handsome here. In Hades all are equal, and all alike."*

*Look to the Rose that blows about us – "Lo,
Laughing," she says, "into the World I blow:
At once the silken Tassel of my Purse
Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw."*

Comparison may be drawn between *"the too brief spell of the rose"* in Horace Odes. Other examples are: *"Pallid death kicks impartially at the doors of hovels and mansions"* (from Odes 1.4) and *"virtue can give no pause to wrinkles or imminent age or invincible death"* (from Odes 2.14)

*The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes – or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face
Lighting a little Hour or two – is gone.*

The aims of Worldly Hope are fleeting, no matter whether that hope ends in failure (burnt to Ashes) or success (for even success, like Snow, melts and disappears) for everything is transient. The insignificance of human "Worldly Hope" was famously captured by Keats in his poem When I have fears that I may cease to be (1818), in the closing lines:

*....then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.*

Depicted through Shelley, is the image of monuments crumbling away into oblivion, as he wrote in Queen Mab, (1813):

*Beside the eternal Nile
The Pyramids have risen.
Nile shall pursue his changeless way;
Those Pyramids shall fall.
Yea! not a stone shall stand to tell
The spot whereon they stood;
Their very site shall be forgotten,
As is their builder's name!*

The haunting image of former glory ruined and lost in desert sands is also to be found in Shelley's poem Ozymandias, published in 1818:

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: 'Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed.
And on the pedestal these words appear –
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.'*

The sumptuous character of oriental imagery lends often colour and charm to Omar's verse as he justifies his reasons for drinking:

*Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears
TO-DAY of past Regrets and future Fears -
To-morrow ? - Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years.*

Readers then witness a description of his experience in seeking truths about life and death from sage and priest and the sublime outpouring of the creed to which alone he could vitally attain.

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 as in I went.*

The feeling that men are mere pawns in the chessboard of life is finally expressed in the noble verse.

*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 seven sees should heed a pebble cast.*

The melancholy feeling of the nothingness of men as compared with the insensibility of the nature is one of Omar's most striking feature. He speaks of eternity but images it inhabited by a being who takes his pastime in contemplating the sorrows, struggles, vain aspirations of those of blind flies of a moment – men. Thus comes a touch of his despairing epicurean philosophy.

*Waste not your hour, nor your vein pursuit,
Of this and that endeavour and dispute
Better be jocund with the fruitful grape
Than sadden after none, or bitter, fruit.*

His later verses clearly prefigure Hamlet's doubts about "the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns".

*We are no other than a moving row
Of magic shadow Shapes that come and go
Round with this Sun-illumin'd Lantern held
In Midnight by the Master of the Show.*

*'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:*

Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,

*And one by one back in the Closet lays.
The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

Omar's heart though frightened by the shadow of impending death, throbs in the full notes of noble verse which roll "like major thunders" in glorious harmony gloomed by unspeakable infinite sadness. In another passage he denies scornfully the dark Calvinistic doctrine. He wrote little about love; for his sense of the beauty of nature is marred perpetually by the thought of the death and decay that overshadows all of mankind.

*Ah, with the Grape my fading Life provide,
And wash my Body whence the Life has died,
And in a Windingsheet of Vine-leaf wrapt,
So bury me by some sweet Garden-side.*

Khayyam's view of death is coloured by a strong dash of materialism for he talks of nothing but the death of the body – the kind of materialism is common enough oriental philosophy. Readers frequent references to burial, the washing of the body, the making of the bier, the loosening of joints, the separation of the members, the mixing with earth and returning to the elements – being used in the course of time by builder and the potter to make walls and palaces, to make jars and pots : "the future he contemplates the most complacency is that of returning to his old haunts and old friends in the form o a wine jug, when he is certain the wine will revive some sort of life in him. The grievance to him of death is not the dim future of his soul, but rather the living of the pleasant things in his mouth and by his side." (Jessie E.Cadell, The True Omar Khayyam, May 1879)

Fate appears commonly under the title of the wheel of heaven and the workings of the wheel are the most arbitrary.

*This tyrannous wheel which is set on high
Has never loosed hard knots for any man,
And when it sees a heart which bears a scar,
It adds another scar to that sore place.*

A minor key of sadness, of refined melancholy seem to recur in the English translation of the verse more frequently than its Persian forms. The sentiment of the original Omar is often reinforced in English and expressed in stronger, tender and more delicate strokes with the passing lines and note of the 19th century seems to mingle its tone with those of the 12th as if the ancient oriental melody were reproduced on the modern European instruments. The prevailing thought of the poem therefore are those about the brevity of life and the Horacian maxim Carpe Diem.

Charles J Pickering In his essay dated 1890 evaluates that as with Shakespeare in his middle period – that of Timon and of Troilus – there seem to have been a time in Omar's history "when the duty of life was as an apple of Sodon, the bitterness of self reproach of the very Marah to his soul", like Sir Henry Worton, he can picture to himself the blissful state of the man who is "Lord of himself though not of lands, and having nothing yet hath all." Here with the common with the mystics of every school, Khayyam seeks to solve the riddle of evil by questioning its existence all by assuming to be merely relative, a shadow who, rightly seen is swallowed up in the fullness in the infinite life.

Then to this earthen Bowl did I adjourn

*My Lip the secret Well of Life to learn:
And Lip to Lip it murmur'd – "While you live,
Drink! – for once dead you never shall return."*

This is the first of many references to earthen bowls or pots, which for Omar Khayyam are both drinking vessels and symbolic of people (via Adam being made from clay or earth) In some cases, he pictures the Clay from which an Earthen Vessel is made as being that formed from the body of some long-dead person which has turned back into earth again. Here, in drinking from the bowl, the poet's lip presses on the lip of the bowl whose clay intermingled with the dust of some long deceased mortal. Here again we have Omar's philosophy, repeated throughout the poem, but here expressed by the earthen wine bowl, "*Drink! – for once dead you never shall return!*"

The following lines by Hafiz involve not only the image of the cup of mortal clay touching the lips of the living, but also other Omarian images of the transience of Kings and of flowers growing from the dust of the dead or from their spilt blood:

*...Time's revolving sphere
Over a thousand lives like thine has rolled.
That cup within thy fingers, dost not hear
The voices of dead kings speak through the clay?
Kobad, Bahman, Djemshid, their dust is here.
'Gently upon me set thy lips!' they say.*

It is curious to observe how closely Omar's thoughts in the last verses resemble of Indian philosophy and old Sanskrit poet compared the visible universe to a game of chess that god was playing with Himself. Omar expresses almost the counterpart of an idea for the deity he tells us is never seen but only guessed. (21). This is a simile of a puppet show also an Indian one ; as the following lines are more imposing. (22) The oriental sense of destiny as divine has never been more grandly expressed in any other poetic manifestation. Jon Hay in an 1897 lecture speech commented, "*I can never forget my emotion when I first saw Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubaiyat. Keats in his Sublime Ode on Chapman's homer has described the sensation for all.*" :

*Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,
When a new planet swims into his ken*

F.P.Weber, in his book Aspects of Death and Correlated Aspects of Life in Art, Epigram and Poetry (1922), describes a large dish, adorned with shields of arms and various emblems, which bore the rhyming couplet "*Earth I am it is most true / disdain me not for so are you.*" Weber also describes a number of Graeco-Roman clay drinking vessels adorned with dancing skeletons bearing festive garlands of flowers, musical instruments, wine-jars etc, which are generally thought to have an Epicurean "*eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die*" significance:

*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!

Life is likened to a Caravan journeying through a desert (Annihilation's Waste) with an oasis (Well of Life). The end of the journey is the Dawn of Nothing (death; annihilation). The phrase "Dawn (Beginning) of Nothing" is presumably used as an effective opposite of "Dawn of the Afterlife" or "Dawn of Paradise".

In as much as there is a vein of pantheism in his poems, Omar maybe regarded as a Sufi but his Sufism is of a different kind and his wine, women and songs were undoubtedly no less real than were the material inspiration of Anacreon, Horace and Beranger. The shortness and uncertainty of earthly affairs were ever in his thoughts. His appreciation of the unavoidable separation from things mundane and the fewness of his wants led him to disregard wealth and honours. Frequently a vein of pessimism crops out in his writings, but it is of a healthy, aggressive sort, very different from article which the pseudo-pessimists of to-day in their solemn reasons of reflection upon their individual ills are wont to style "truth". Omar was a forerunner of Schopenhauer rather than of Leopardi. Although generally resolute and defiant, he is sometimes despondent, but his Epicureanism prevented his despair from reaching the pitch of the Italian's wail:

*-Or poserai per sempre,
Stance mio cor, Peri l'inganno estremo
Ch' eterno io mi credei.*

The great charm of the Rubaiyat is their note of evanescence, constantly heard above the poet's injunctions to eat, drink and be merry; so persistently and so insinuatingly does it sound that the listener almost led to believe that the poet's bacchanalian bravado was assumed to conceal his sensibilities from the brutality of the world.

The fleeting nature of time and its swift footed departure is portrayed in vivid metaphors:

*Ah! my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears
TO-DAY of past Regrets and future Fears –
To-morrow? – Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years.*

Any reference to tomorrows and yesterdays almost inevitably recalls that famous speech from Macbeth (Act 5, Scene 5):

*To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.*

The following of Khayyam's verse has a haunting sense of beauty in the brevity of life attached to it:

*We are no other than a moving row
Of magic shadow Shapes that come and go*

Round with this Sun-illumin'd Lantern held

In Midnight by the Master of the Show.

The reference here is to a Magic Lantern, a set of opaque images of people, animals and such like, imprinted onto a cylinder made of transparent material, which cylinder is made to revolve around a central lamp, in ancient times a candle. As the cylinder revolves, the shadows of the images are projected onto the walls of the room, revolving round the room as the cylinder revolves. The poet here likens the World to one of these Magic Lanterns, its central lamp being, not a Candle, but the Sun and we are its projected shadows – “come and go” having the double meaning of “come and go as the Lantern revolves” and “Live and Die” (as time marches on.) The fleeting shadow analogy is similar to that found in the famous speech from Shakespeare’s Macbeth (Act 5, Scene 5, Lines 19-28):

Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing.

The notion of a "Master of the Show" - a higher force that invisibly governs the events of our lives - is an interesting one with a long history stretching back at least as far as the Greek tragedians, notably Aeschylus. Thomas Hardy wrote, in the closing paragraph of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, that, "*the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess.*" As Hardy too subjects his protagonists on the bleak backdrop of chance and coincidence and the play of the Immanent Will over the actions of the mortal characters. In The Dynasts, Hardy's Epic Poem of the War with Napoleon, written in blank verse, he took this notion much further. The poem (or drama) is written, in places, in the manner of an ancient Greek play, in that the human action is witnessed, commented upon, and occasionally influenced by "Phantom Intelligences", such as the Spirit of the Years, the Spirit of the Pities, the Spirits Sinister and Ironic, and the Spirit . Here, what FitzGerald called "The Master of the Show" Hardy calls, through the mouthpiece of the Spirit Ironic, "*...the dreaming, dark, dumb Thing/ That turns the handle of this idle Show/ ...some hocus-pocus to fulfil.*" But actually such images occur throughout the poem. Indeed, the Fore Scene of Part 1 opens with the Shade of the Earth asking, "*What of the Immanent Will and Its designs?*", receiving the answer from the Spirit of the Years, "*It works unconsciously, as heretofore.*" A little later in this Fore Scene, the Immanent Will becomes "*This viewless, voiceless Turner of the Wheel*" with "*Its mindlessness of earthly woes.*" Later, Hardy has the Spirit Sinister say to the Spirit of the Years, that if he were to set about "*trying to prove that there is any right or reason in the Universe*" he would "*not accomplish it by Doomsday*" (Act 1, Scene 6.) Later still, the Spirit Ironic talks of "*Life's queer mechanics*", adding that, "*The groping tentativeness of an Immanent Will ... cannot be asked to learn logic at this time of day!*" (Act 4, Scene 5.) In another poem, Nature's Questioning, Hardy gives no less than four different images of "*The Master of the Show*". Besides "*an Automaton / Unconscious of our pains*" and a "*Godhead ... brain and eye now gone*", he has "*some Vast Imbecility*" who "*framed us in*

jest" and who leaves us now to the caprice of Chance. The best that Hardy can see is the possibility of "*some high Plan ... as yet not understood.*"

It is also interesting, in view of Fitzgerald's Lantern image, that in Part 1 (Act 4, Scene 5) Hardy in The Dynasts, has the Spirit of the Years describe Napoleon as:

*Moved like a figure on a Lantern-slide,
Which, much amazing uninitiate eyes,
The all-compelling crystal pane but drags
Whither the showman wills.*

It is worth quoting here, too, another Omarian verse from The Dynasts, from Part 3 (Act 7, Scene 9.) where the Spirit of the Years again refers to Napoleon:

*Such men as thou, who wade across the world
To make an epoch, bless, confuse, appal,
Are in the elemental ages' chart
Like meanest insects on obscurest leaves.*

Finally, as Edward Heron-Allen pointed out in his commentary on Fitzgerald's second edition, the Magic Shadow Show of verse 46 calls to mind that curious image at the start of Book 7 of Plato's Republic in which the fettered dwellers in a subterranean cavern can only form their ideas of the outside world via the shadows cast on the walls of their cave.

*'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.*

Life is here likened to a game of Chess or Chequers, the black and white squares of the Chess-board being likened to Nights and Days. Destiny is the player who slays pieces in the course of the game; removing them from the board of life and putting them back in the eternal darkness of the 'closet'. The related image of Death playing Chess with Mortals to decide where and when they will die is probably best known to most people through Ingmar Bergman's film "The Seventh Seal" of 1957.

The idea that human life is a game of the gods is ancient. Thus, as Canter notes in his article Fortuna in Latin Poetry, the goddess Fortuna "*delights in mockery and in making man the victim of her sport.*" Thus, Virgil, in The Aeneid (11.425-7) talks of Fortuna mocking mankind by knocking them down then picking them up again, as fancy takes; Horace, in his Odes (3.29), talks of Fortuna pursuing her wanton sport by deliberately switching her favours from one person to another; and Juvenal in his Satires (3.39-40) talks of Fortuna raising men from the gutter to high office just to amuse herself. The Roman tragedian Pacuvius, who lived in the 2nd century BC, wrote of the goddess Fortuna as follows:

*Dame Fortune, some philosophers maintain,
Is witless, sightless, brutish; they declare
That on a rolling ball of stone she stands;*

*For whither that same stone a hazard tilts,
Thither, they say, falls Fortune; and they state
That she is witless for that she is cruel,
Untrustworthy, unstead; and, they repeat
Sightless she is because she nothing sees
Whereto she'll steer herself: and brutish too
Because she cannot tell between the man
That's worthy and unworthy. But there are
Other philosophers who against all this
Deny that there is any goddess Fortune,
Saying it is Chance Medley rules the world.
That this is more like unto truth and fact
Practice doth teach us by the experience;
Orestes thus, who one time was a king,
Was one time made a beggar.*

Bertrand Russell opened his essay A Free Man's Worship, first published in 1903, with an account of God's creation of Man, as given by the devil Mephistopheles to Dr. Faustus:

"The endless praises of the choirs of angels had begun to grow wearisome; for after all, did he not deserve their praise? Had he not given them endless joy? Would it not be more amusing to obtain undeserved praise, to be worshipped by beings whom he tortured? He smiled inwardly, and resolved the great drama should be performed."

It is not unlike that of Shakespeare's King Lear, Act 4, Scene 1:

*"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport."*

Again, if the image of Death playing dice recalls that phrase of Julius Caesar's: *"the die is cast."* A rather different type of image of Death playing a game is Alfred Rethel's print Totentanz III which views Death as a street-magician balancing a pair of scales containing a King's Crown in one pan and a Commoner's Clay Pipe in the other. Behind him, the sign on the wall says *"Freedom, Equality, Fraternity."* The crowd on the left of the picture are enthralled, but on the right an old woman (who has seen this all before, possibly in the French Revolution) hurries away a young child before he too becomes sucked into what can all-too-easily end in death and destruction. Rethel's and Dagley's images are the 19th century successors to the extensive medieval preoccupation with "The Dance of Death. A similar preoccupation with Death is evident in Verse 51 of the Rubaiyat:

*The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

May be compared with the famous Biblical episode of Belshazzar's Feast in Daniel 5.5, in which "the fingers of a man's hand" trace out the words Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin (Daniel 5.25) on the wall. Heron Allen translated one original verse thus:

*From the beginning was written what shall be;
Unhaltingly the Pen (writes) and is heedless of good and bad;
On the First Day He appointed everything that must be –
Our grief and our efforts are vain.*

A.J.Arberry translated a similar original verse thus:

*Nothing becomes different from what the Pen has once written,
and only a broken heart results from nursing grief;
though all your life through you swallow tears of blood
not one drop will be added to the existing score.*

This verse is an excellent example of how FitzGerald takes ideas from Omar Khayyam, and then creates something new and powerful from them which at the same time preserves the essence of the original. An interesting debate is ensured as critics have tried to determine the merit of Khayyam's Rubaiyat and its subsequent translation by FitzGerald and the Orientalism that has thus been overshadowed by the Victorian translator's morality. Linda Hutcheon in her A Theory of Adaptation evaluates: "As Kamilla Elliott has astutely noted, adaptation commits the heresy of showing that form (expression) can be separated from content (idea)- something, both mainstream aesthetic and semiotic theories have resisted or denied. The form changes with adaptation, the content persists" Thus, although Khayyam's poetry has undergone alterations and modifications, the poetic essence of the Persian philosopher persists.

Omar's original verses refer to the unstoppable nature of events which are predestined anyway, but FitzGerald's version could just as easily refer to time itself. One of the most dramatic references to this unstoppable nature must be that in the closing scene of Christopher Marlowe's play Dr Faustus, at the point where Faustus realises that the time for his damnation is getting inescapably closer:

*Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of Heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come;
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!
O lente, lente, currite noctis equi!
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The Devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.*

Shelley, at the beginning of his poem Time, written in 1821, addressed Time thus:

Unfathomable Sea! whose waves are years,

*Ocean of Time, whose waters of deep woe
Are brackish with the salt of human tears!*

The motif of Spring and the Rose is in The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam used by the philosopher poet of Persia to signify fading youth. The Nightingale here seems to be the Bird of Youth, which, once it leaves our branches, flies off beyond mortal sight and perception:

*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 whither flown again, who knows?*

Shakespeare, in the well-known love-song O Mistress Mine! (Twelfth Night, Act 2, Scene 3) wrote of love and youth thus:

*What is love? 'tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What's to come is still unsure;
In delay there lies no plenty;
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure.*

For Andrew Marvell in To his Coy Mistress, Death on its winged chariot comes all too soon, he tells his mistress, and then:

*Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long preserv'd virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust:
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.*

The same complaints, this time from a young man named Asclepiades, are to be found in The Greek Anthology. The translation is again that of W.R.Paton:

"Thou grudgest thy maidenhead? What avails it? When thou goest to Hades thou shalt find none to love thee there. The joys of Love are in the land of the living, but in Acheron, dear virgin, we shall lie dust and ashes." (5.85)

Another epigram from The Greek Anthology reads thus:

"I send thee this garland, Rhodoclea, that with my own hands I wove out of beautiful flowers. There are lilies and roses and dewy anemones, and tender narcissus and purple-gleaming violets. Wear it and cease to be vain. Both thou and the garland flowers will fade." (5.74)

Robert Herrick in His Age wrote, using words which are reminiscent of FitzGerald's phrase, "*nor all thy Piety nor Wit*":

*Ah, Posthumus! Our years hence fly,
And leave no sound; nor piety,
Or prayers, or vow
Can keep the wrinkle from the brow."*

Looking from a different viewpoint at "*youth's sweet-scented manuscript*", in 1833 Richard Monckton Milnes, published a poem called Carpe Diem:

*Youth, that pursuest with such eager pace
Thy even way,
Thou pantest on to win a mournful race:
Then stay! oh, stay!*

In art, Millais' painting Spring (Apple Blossoms), painted in 1859 is an interesting symbolic reference to the transience of youth. The painting forms an interesting symbolic pairing with his other painting, Autumn Leaves.

Omar has a marvellous power of arousing certain ideas in the mind by the means of material imagery. His suggestiveness is more profound than that of the purely objective poet, who with one or two deft touches present the perfect picture to the imagination, - a picture sufficient in itself. In the Rubaiyat, however beautiful and striking the imagery maybe, it is always the intellectual element that always prevails. For Omar achieves his poetic ends through his power of imagery.

It is not the suggested magnificence of the palace of the old Lords but the vision of ruin and desolation which holds Omar's fancy. It is the idea of mutability decay of all things earthly that haunts the quatrains of his creative outpour. And at last, feeling that death alone was certain he resigned the task in despair exclaiming to his pupil Nizami "*I shall soon be buried where the north wind will strew roses over my grave*" and Nizami wondered greatly at the words for in the Quran it is written that man knows where he shall be buried ; but returning to Nishapur of few years later he found his master's last resting place beside a garden wall where the blossoms had fallen from the spreading branches to completely hide the tomb from view.

*Lo! some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That Time and Fate of all their Vintage prest,
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to Rest.*

The endless procession of Birth and Death and the best of humanity are likened to a good wine Vintage; their lives are likened to drinking a cup of wine before they creep off to Rest (die). The following of Omar' quatrains denoting the notion of the finality of death:

*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!*

Reminds attentive readers of Jacques' speech on the Seven Ages of Man in Shakespeare's play As You Like It (Act II, Scene VII, lines 163 –166):

*"...Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."*

And of Robert Herrick's, poem addressed to his mistress Sapho / Sappho:

*"Let us now take time and play,
Love, and live here while we may;
Drink rich wine, and make good cheer,
While we have our being here;
For once dead and laid i'th' grave,
No return from thence we have."*

Herrick expressed similar sentiments in the last verse of Corinna's going a-Maying, a poem about celebrating May Day with Corinna. They should enjoy this "harmless folly of the time" while youth allows, he urges, for all too soon they will "grow old apace, and die" and "all delight" will be, like them, "drowned ... in endless night." He adds:

*"Our life is short, and our days run
As fast away as does the sun;
And, as a vapour or a drop of rain,
Once lost, can ne'er be found again."*

The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam entered the arena of Art when the Renaissance that shone through William Blake and Keats and eventually established by Dante Gabrielle Rossetti and his circle was in his early manhood. And naturally the rich sensuous feeling of the Persian dreamers found admiration in the leading spirit of the aesthetic inspiration which had changed the tone of all English artwork. The vivid atmosphere of the eastern muse thereby bore great influence upon their works. Although the English circle had not all things common with the Persian but imbibed certain characteristics that drew them in the very close union. That love of freedom and determination to allow no convention to stand in the way of an individual artistic expression and the feeling of regret at the evanescence of earthly beauty found a ready sympathiser in the oriental muse and perhaps nowhere has this feelings so beautifully put as by him:

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

In Omar, philosophy is stripped of its technicalities and theology is naked of its ill-fitting vestment of sect and convention is laid low and the individuals stand free self-centred and sincere viewing life as the moments fleet by on the swift feet of Hermes, Omar provides the motto

*Ah, fill the cup, what boots it to repeat,
How Time is slipping underneath our feet,
Unborn Tomorrow, and dead Yesterday,
Why fret about them if To-day be sweet!*

Always not far from "The Masters" he feels "that perhaps a hair divides the false and true" and all things as subject to decay and mutability and he the great unknown remains and the feeling of regret re-asserts itself in dissatisfaction.

Sufism as creed embrace within itself elements drawn from various religions- from Vedantism and Mohammedanism and at the same time embedding one of the characteristics tenets of Christianity – the doctrine of self-sacrifice. This Pantheistic element of Sufism is dominant in Khayyam's poetry as the outward observances of religion are superfluous for him and life in its rapturous beauty, joy and the profound sorrow of eternal partings appeal to his sensibility. Like Maeterlinck, Omar sees God in the form of Fate. As "some monstrous external force which compels and enslaves human beings from outside". Men are but "Puppets, swayed hither and thither by the mysterious influence of a destiny which they cannot understand but only obey". Overwhelmed by the sense of this mysterious and awful power there are moments when Omar becomes forgetful of his philosophy and burst into prayer that is half a protest.

*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.*

But if Omar does not approach even Shelley in the reverence in which he views the power which runs through all the arteries and the minute veins of life, certainly Shelley never expressed anything like Omar's magnificence of grasp.

*Strange, is it not? That of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too.*

*"I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that After-life to spell:
And by and by my Soul return'd to me,
And answer'd: 'I Myself am Heav'n and Hell"*

In other parts of the Rubaiyat, the poet is quite explicit about the function of wine to make the mortal self oblivious of Death's impending doom and thereby praises the

grape for its power confute the “two and seventy jarring sects and to transmute life’s leaden metal into gold. (*The Grape that can with Logic absolute/The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects confute:/ The subtle Alchemist that in a Trice/ Life’s leaden Metal into Gold transmute.*) Richard Halt Hutton in his 1906 essay comments, “*Drunkenness has the power to erase distinction as the Carpe Diem poem lives upon the difference between life and death. Wine serves as a metaphor of obliterating the reality and getting closer to divinity. The effect of intoxication is furthered by the elaborate way in which images flow in the out of one another constantly changing their meaning. For example in stanza forty-one, “tomorrow’s tangle” is quickly transmuted to a tangle of a girl’s hair, only to become the tangle headedness produced by alcohol. The great irony of the Rubaiyat which removes it even further from the typical Carpe Diem poem is that the poet fails to in his attempt to abandon the day. He says that he has “Divorced old barren Reason” even as he philosophises. Such inconsistencies, suggestive of semi-drunkenness indicates the unapprehended failure of his arguments. It is in this context that readers should evaluate the poet’s Carpe Diem sentiment. They become one more of the poses that his deep despaired permits him not to uphold.*”

His Carpe Diem sentiment is allowed to collapse to the poet’s sense of the bankruptcy of life. For although he talks about making merry in the twenty third stanza and been “*Jocund with the fruitful grape*” he himself fails to enjoy. He finds no joy in the grape just as there is no forgetfulness. In one of his essays dated 1969, David Sonstroem comments, “*As a hedonist, the poet is a failure, a living refutation of the advice that he offers in these passages. He fails because he has answered the Carpe Diem attitude to death with the attitude towards life of Ecclesiastes: Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, and therefore he has no ‘cash’ of life to put up against death’s toll. Marvell’s witty, complicating balancing sense of triviality of life’s activity has grown to such dominance in the Rubaiyat that life is failed to be valueless and thereby powerless to offset death.*” Whereas Come My Celia and To The Virgins To Make Much of Time weaken their Carpe Diem sentiment with their blunted sense of life, the Rubaiyat with its sense of death upholds it. Omar in his effort to flee the problems of life and thought of death, drinks to flee from his visions of the future, he drinks to insulate himself from his predicament but the drunkenness only exaggerates his sense of unbearable and impossible confusing his notion of death which he tries to escape.

Wandering between two worlds, one death and the other powerless to be life, Omar dramatizes one more version of the pervasive Victorian predicament. In his languid hand, emphasis on wine and women and its search for stupor, meandering inconclusiveness, its troubled perplexity ; he suffering finds no effective vent in meaningful action, dwells in a world “*in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done*”.

Omar in his Rubaiyat sings of his longing and sorrow and despair as his thoughts is revealed to us in perfect openness. And behind the philosophic calm of sage, we can see dim visions of those phantoms scattered ever ready to haunt the minds of thoughtful men. Omar’s mind was too active not to be sceptical, and too sceptical to possess any faith.

Sufism was a mere shell for mock piety – a form without a substance – and the earnest, honest mind of Omar could not be content with it, and he went back to the motif of the Carpe Diem as the key-note of his verse to seek divinity in the mundane. But to

understand aright the relation between Omar and his 'ostentatiously merry' words, something more necessary than to regard him as a mere hedonist.

From his vantage-ground one as of the wise men of his time, Omar could see nothing ahead but dreary wastes of existence and the clouds of death hanging black on the horizon, it is little wonder that he waited passively until Fate should bear him away. Forerunner of the wasteland myth, Omar portrays man as the Hollow man traversing the angst ridden world through time to meet his Creator. But much like the Shakespearean fool, Omar, the 'Hollow Man' would perceive the bleakness in the manifestation of the contemporary religious creed and in the way mankind evaluates life and specially life after death. In his paper Fugitive Articulation: An Introduction to the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (pp. 59-76), Daniel Schenker compares its effect on an audience with that of an "unimpeachable contemporary masterpiece, T.S. Eliot's The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." The Rubaiyat's wide appeal might be that it "institutionalizes a cult of spiritual resignation" and that it is "sufficiently void of meaning to be recyclable in any number of contexts". In his analysis of the poem, the author recognises its "verbal claustrophobia", follows an interesting analysis of the function of speech in the Rubaiyat and the conclusion that Fitzgerald began with a very modern-looking poem, but proceeded as the years went forward to bring his work in line with a more conservative ideal.

Fatalism is as common in the orient as is uncommon in the Occident for Christianity in large part is best on the freedom of the will and idea of the predetermined destiny is forcing us in general a foreign one. The quaint charm of Omar's verse shows a marked attitude regarding fatalism, but rises above in another set of verses when treating the same theme but in a more indignant strength.

The Rubaiyat leaves the readers as spectators of a "life drama", a master spirit's progress and development through the clash and conflict of life and death. As readers trace their way through the sad jumble of thoughts in the quatrains, he cannot but be conscious of three dominant moods of mental development- epicurean, sceptical and mystic. Infinite are his musings upon the passage of youth and the ubisunt motif as the joyous and thoughtless spirit of youth passes into the bitter and sorrowful question of a soul without God or hope in the world and then again, through the self abasement of conscious sin, into the calm and deliberate resignation to death; the half-enigmatic raptures of one who sees behind the veil.

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