

# Omar Khayyam's Transgressive Ethics and Their Socio-Political Implications in Contemporary Iran

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ابریق می مرا شکستی ربی  
بر من در عیش را ببستی ربی  
من می خورم و تو میکنی بدمستی  
خاکم به دهان، مگر تو مستی ربی

O Lord! you broke my wine jug;  
O Lord! You barred the door of pleasure to me.  
I am drinking wine while you like a drunkard behave badly  
O Lord! May I perish [for asking], but are you drunk?<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Omar Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, ed. M.'A. Foroughi and Q. Ghani (Tehran: Nahid, AH 1373/AD 1994), 54; also see Sadiq Hidayat, *Tarana-ha-ye Khayyam* (Tehran: Ketabha-ye parastu, AH 1353/AD 1974), 15. The phrase *khakam ba dahan* means literally "may dust be at my mouth," implying remorse.

<sup>2</sup>All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

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This quatrain is part of an anecdote recounting how God broke Omar Khayyam's (ca. 1048–1131) wine jug when he wanted to drink. It is said that Khayyam composed this quatrain extemporarily to protest against God.<sup>3</sup> Immediately after these blasphemous words, his face turned black. To apologize to God, he composed the following quatrain:

ناکرده گنه در این جهان کیست بگو!  
 آن کس که گنه نکرد چون زیست بگو!  
 من بد کنم و تو بد مکافات دهی  
 پس فرق میان من و تو چیست بگو!

Tell me, who in this world has not sinned?  
 Tell me, how does one who has not sinned live?  
 I do wrong while you punish wrongly,  
 Tell me, what is then the difference between you and me?<sup>4</sup>

God accepted his apologies, and his face returned to normal.

This is one of the dozen anecdotes in which Khayyam is associated with wine and blasphemy. It is cited by two eminent scholars of Persian literary history, Qasem Ghani (1892–1951) and Mohammad-‘Ali

<sup>3</sup>On composing poems extemporarily in Persian literary tradition, see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, “Improvisation as a Chief Pillar of the Poetic Art in Persian Literary Tradition,” in *Images, Improvisations, Sound, and Silence from 1000 to 1800 – Degree Zero*, ed. B. Hellemans and A. Jones Nelson (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 131–44.

<sup>4</sup>Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, 55. This quatrain with a different first couplet is also attributed to Rumi. See Jalal al-Din Mohammad Rumi, *Kolliyyat-e Shams ya Divan-e kabir az goftar-e Mowlana Jalal al-Din Mohammad mashhur be Mowlavi, ba tashbihat va havashi*, 3rd ed., ed. Badi' al-Zaman Foruzanfar, 10 vols. (Tehran: Amir Kabir, AH 1378/AD 1999), 8:266, quatrain 1579:

ای جان جهان جز تو کسی کیست بگو  
 بی جان و جهان هیچ کسی زیست بگو  
 من بد کنم و تو بد مکافات دهی  
 پس فرق میان من و تو چیست بگو

In English, it runs thus:

Tell me, O soul of the world! Who else is there?  
 Tell me! Could anyone live without a soul and the world?  
 I am doing bad and you punish badly,  
 Tell me, what is then the difference between you and me?

Forughi (1877–1942), to highlight the problematic reception of Khayyam in Iran. They write:

it is disappointing that although these quatrains have made Khayyam famous, our people, both learned and uninformed, have not appreciated his worth and have created imaginings about him. . . Dry mystics and clerics have considered his words soaked with heresy, while people in general think of him as a wine drinker. They look at his poetry from the perspective of praising and prompting wine drinking. For the same reason, another group presupposes that he had no beliefs in the soul's Origin (*mabda'*) and the soul's Return (*ma'ad*) and have, therefore, become his enthusiasts, while the divines discredit him for the same ideas.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, which is dedicated to my teacher, colleague, and friend Dr. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, I would like to examine several social implications of Khayyam's poetry. Dr. Karimi-Hakkak's fascination with Persian poetry as a living tradition is a leitmotiv in his publications, examining the powerful artistic appeal of this millennium-old literary tradition in modern times.<sup>6</sup> This essay is just a droplet in the reception history of the Persian sage (*hakim*) Omar Khayyam, who has become a personification of transgressive ideas in Persian literary history.<sup>7</sup> The fascination I share with Dr. Karimi-Hakkak is due not only to Khayyam's poetic genius (although he is not the author of the majority of quatrains attributed to him), but also to his problematic reception in twentieth-century Iran and how he has been connected to the notion of modernity. Both religious and secular intellectuals have tried to position Khayyam in the modern intellectual history of Iran in their own ways.

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<sup>5</sup>Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, 54.

<sup>6</sup>See, for instance, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Continuity and Creativity: Models of Change in Persian Poetry, Classical and Modern," in *The Layered Heart: Essays on Persian Poetry, A Celebration in Honor of Dick Davis*, ed. A.A. Seyed-Gohrab (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers), 25–54.

<sup>7</sup>M. Aminrazavi, *The Wine of Wisdom: The Life, Poetry and Philosophy of Omar Khayyam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 18–66.

An exhaustive treatment of this topic would include a review of the ways in which influential figures in the modern cultural history of Iran have treated Khayyam's philosophy. Briefly, Khayyam's contemporary reception in Iran differs from the appreciation of other classical Persian poets such as Sa'di (ca. 1210–92), Rumi (1207–73), Hafez (1315–90), and even Ferdowsi (ca. 940–1029), although the last has also been connected to modern nationalism and Iranian identity. This essay concentrates on two aspects of Khayyam's reception: First, it investigates how Khayyam's faith and ideas on life and the afterlife are perceived by Iranian intellectuals generally and by scholars such as 'Abd al-Karim Soroush particularly. Second, it analyzes how Khayyam's quatrains dealing with bacchanalian themes and motifs have been received by several Persian literary scholars who try to contextualize them in Islamic ethics. In articles on Khayyam and in introductions to his quatrains, they have sought to defend Khayyam's religiosity and mitigate his allusions to wine.

In today's Iran, Khayyam has the reputation of a cynical unbeliever. This reputation is constantly buttressed by both medieval Persian and modern Western evaluations of Khayyam. An example of the latter is a tourist guide about Iran by Maria O'Shea, published in the series *Culture Shock!* In one chapter, "The Language of Poetry and Sugar," the author examines the role of poetry in daily life in Iran, emphasizing that Persian poets have confirmed "the Iranian concept of poetry as a necessity of life rather than an abstract art form."<sup>8</sup> She emphasizes the "startling degree of erudition" in classical Persian poetry and names a few classical masters: Omar Khayyam, followed by Sa'di, Rumi, Hafez, and Ferdowsi. O'Shea describes Khayyam as follows: "Like many poets, his work protests against the established articles of faith and contains many possible blasphemies as well as exhortations to hedonism."<sup>9</sup> O'Shea is not simply repeating a Western appreciation of Khayyam; she is informing her potential travelers to Iran about the reactions they may receive if they mention Khayyam. This image of Khayyam as a blasphemous poet dates from the twelfth century.

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<sup>8</sup>Maria O'Shea, *Culture Shock! Iran*, 1999. (London: Kuperard, 2001), 88.

<sup>9</sup>O'Shea, *Culture Shock*, 90. Chapter three is devoted to poetry, 72–95.

## Khayyam's Reception in Medieval Persia

In the medieval period, there is little criticism of wine in Persian poetry. Wine drinking, *carpe diem*, hedonism, and similar motifs and themes occur extensively in the works of other poets and authors. Bacchanalia is not only an indispensable part of Persian poetry; it was an essential part of Persian courtly culture and Persian Sufism, as chapters in the “mirror for princes” genre and mystical manuals testify.<sup>10</sup> Khayyam's name is heavily associated with wine and is included in several anthologies of quatrains. In this respect, there is no disapproval at all. Criticism is directed rather at Khayyam's philosophy concerning God, his creation, and the hereafter. These issues were also addressed by other Persian philosophers and poets before and after Khayyam, but their discussions did not generate such persistent condemnation. The criticism is directed at Khayyam as a philosopher who discusses thorny theological issues, planting doubts in the hearts and minds of Muslims. Jamal al-Din Yusuf Qifti (1172–1248) refers to Khayyam's deviant ideas in his poetry, characterizing them as serpents for the Sharia.<sup>11</sup>

I limit myself here to two medieval authors who criticize Khayyam for his nonconformist opinions on God and as a materialist philosopher—namely, Farid al-Din 'Attar (died about 1221) and Najm al-Din Daya

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<sup>10</sup>See, for instance, *Qabus-nama* in which chapters on a *'in-e sharab-khari* (“rites of wine drinking”) are elaborated. 'Onsor al-Ma'ali Kay Kavus, *Qabus-nama*, ed. G.H. Yusofi (Tehran: 'Elmi va Farhangi, AH 1371/AD 1992); 'Onsor al-Ma'ali Kay Kavus, *A Mirror for Princes*, trans. R. Levy (London: Cresset Press, 1951). Also see mystic manuals such as Shabestari's *Golshan-e raz (The Secret Rose-Garden)*, which devotes chapters to the meaning and significance of wine, the winehouse, the cup, and the cupbearer. See Shabestari's *Golshan-e raz*, ed. A. Mojahed and M. Kiyani (Tehran: Ma, AH 1371/AD 1992), 184–90. For the consumption of wine in Islamic societies, see Shahab Ahmed, who conceptualizes that wine is constitutive of Islam. Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 36–38, 57–73; also see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, “The Rose and the Wine: Dispute as a Literary Device in Classical Persian Literature,” *Iranian Studies*, no. 1 (2013): 69–85.

<sup>11</sup>See A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, “Khayyam's Universal Appeal: Man, Wine, and the Hereafter in the Quatrains,” in *The Great 'Umar Khayyam: A Global Reception of the Rubaiyat* (Leiden, NL: Leiden University Press, 2012), 11–38, reference on p. 12; A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, “The Flourishing of Persian Quatrains,” in *A History of Persian Literature: Persian Lyric Poetry in the Classical Era 800-1500: Ghazals, Panegyrics and Quatrains*, vol. 2, ed. E. Yarshater (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019), 488–568.

(AH 573–654/AD 1177–1256).<sup>12</sup> In his *Elahi-nama*, ‘Attar tells an anecdote about Khayyam in his grave. A seer comes to his grave and sees that the soul of the learned Khayyam is covered with perspiration, for he has realized that despite all his wisdom, he cannot rely on his philosophical knowledge in the hereafter. ‘Attar’s message is that any knowledge, especially intellectual discursive reasoning, that does not contain trust in God cannot save humankind in the hereafter, even if one is as learned as Khayyam. In ‘Attar’s opinion, intellect is part of the whole and can never fully understand the whole. He compares it to a person who by the aid of a candle wants to see the sun. The anecdote removes Khayyam from mysticism and connects him to philosophers who are characterized as *nataamam*, “incomplete,” “deficient,” or even “faulty”.<sup>13</sup>

یکی بینندهٔ معروف بودی  
 که ارواحش همه مکشوف بودی  
 دمی گر بر سر گوری رسیدی  
 در آن گور آنچه می رفتی بدیدی  
 بزرگی امتحانی کرد خردش  
 به خاک عمر ختّام بردش  
 بدو گفتا چه می بینی درین خاک  
 مرا آگه کن ای بینندهٔ پاک  
 جوابش داد آن مرد گرامی  
 که این مردیست اندر ناتمامی  
 بدان در گه که روی آورده بودست  
 مگر دعوی دانش کرده بودست  
 کنون چون گشت جهل خود عیانش  
 عَرَق می ریزد از تشویر جانیش  
 میان خجلت و تشویر ماندست

<sup>12</sup>Mohammad-Amin Riahi, “Daya, Najm-Al-Din Abu Bakr ‘Abd-Allah,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2011, [www.iranicaonline.org/articles/daya-najm-al-din](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/daya-najm-al-din). For an overview of these medieval critics on Khayyam, see Aminrazavi, *Wine of Wisdom*, 40–66.

<sup>13</sup>For an excellent study of ‘Attar’s philosophy, see H. Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farid al-Din Attar* (trans. of *Das Meer der Seele: Mensch, Welt und Gott in den Qeschichten des Fariduddin Attar*), ed. Bernd Radtke, trans. John O’Kane (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2003).

وزان تحصیل در تقصیر ماندست  
بر آن در حلقه چون هفت آسمان زد  
ز دانش لاف آنجا کی توان زد  
چو نه انجام پیداست و نه آغاز  
نیابد کس سر و پای جهان باز  
فلک گوئیست و گر عمری شتابی  
چو گویش پای و سر هرگز نیابی

Once, there was a famous clairvoyant  
to whom all souls were visible.  
He had only to approach a tomb for a moment  
to see what was happening in that tomb.  
A great man tested the ability of this clairvoyant;  
He brought him to the grave of 'Omar Khayyam  
and said to him: "What do you see in this grave?  
O pure seer, make me aware."  
The honourable seer gave him answer:  
"Here lies a man who is incomplete,  
because of the court to which he turned.  
Although he claimed to have knowledge,  
now, when his ignorance has become clear  
he is perspiring out of shame for his own soul.  
He is caught between sweating and shame.  
The pursuit of knowledge has left him open to blame.  
He made circles at the Gate like the seven revolving heavens.<sup>14</sup>  
How could he boast of knowledge in the hereafter!  
Since neither the beginning nor the end can be seen,  
no one can solve the riddle of the world.<sup>15</sup>  
The heavenly sphere is a ball, and like a ball,  
A lifetime of haste won't ever discover its head or its foot."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>This line can also be translated as "He knocked at the Door like the seven heavens." I have chosen the above translation to allude to the poet as an astronomer, drawing circles to measure heavenly bodies.

<sup>15</sup>Literally, *sar-o pa-ye jahan*, "the head and the feet of the world," referring to the beginning and the end of the world.

<sup>16</sup>Farid al-Din 'Attar, *Elahi-nama*, ed. H. Ritter (Tehran: Tus, AH 1368/AD 1989), 272, lines 8–18.

The second author is Najm al-Din Daya, who cites two quatrains in his mystic manual *Mersad al-'ebad* and uses them to criticize Khayyam for his materialist thoughts and his skepticism about the creation of the world. As a Hanafite, adhering to Ash'arite rationalist theology, Daya was "an enemy of the philosophers because of their claim that the intellect (*'aql*) could reach gnosis."<sup>17</sup> Intellectual ratiocination fails to perceive the truth. Daya cites Khayyam's quatrains to attack philosophers. The first is an example of Khayyam's agnosticism about human purpose, while the second is cited to condemn his doubt about God's purpose in creating humankind:

در دایره‌ای که آمدن و رفتن ماست  
 او را نه بدایت نه نهایت پیداست  
 کس می نزند دمی در این معنی راست  
 کاین آمدن از کجا و رفتن به کجاست

We come and go in a circle  
 whose begin and end are invisible  
 In this world, no one speaks a sincere word  
 about where we come from and where we are going.

دارنده چو ترکیب طبایع آراست  
 از بهر چه او فکندش اندر کم و کاست  
 گر زشت آمد پس این صورعیب کراست  
 ور خوب آمد خرابی از بهر چراست

Why did the Owner who created the arrangement of nature  
 cast it to include shortcomings and deficiency?  
 If it was ugly, who is to blame for these flawed forms?  
 And if is beautiful, why does he break it again?<sup>18</sup>

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Also see Ritter, *Ocean of the Soul*, 83–84; Aminrazavi, *Wine of Wisdom*, 62.

<sup>17</sup>Riahi, "Daya."

<sup>18</sup>Najm al-Din Daya, *Mersad al-'ebad men al-mabda' ila'l-ma'ad*, ed. M.A. Riyahi (Tehran: Scientific & Cultural Publications Company, 1992), 31. For an English translation of this book, see *Razi: The Path of God's Bondsmen*, Persian Heritage Series 35, trans. H. Algar (New York: Caravan Books, 1982). The quatrain appears with some alterations in Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Forugh and Ghani, 112 (quatrain 34) and 108 (quatrain 31), respectively.



The second quatrain is a popular one as it appears for the first time in Fakhr al-Din Mohammad b. 'Omar Razi's (d. 1209) exegesis of the Koran entitled *Resala fi 'l-tanbih 'ala ba'd al-asrar al-maw'dah fi ba'd al-surah al-Qur'an al-'azim* and is cited in connection with the concept of *ma'ad* or the place of the soul's return.<sup>19</sup> During Khayyam's time and later, there was a heated discussion as to whether the soul returns to the body on Resurrection Day. Philosophers generally believed that human beings would return to their original spiritual state after death.<sup>20</sup> The purpose of this temporal material life was to prepare oneself for eternal life in the hereafter. Humans were expected to purify themselves through ascetic training and to acquire knowledge of the world in order to know the Creator. The more one knows about the Creator, the more one knows about oneself, since the individual is created in the image of God and is a microcosmic representation of the universe. As de Bruijn explains, "according to this theory, life is to be conceived as a cyclical process which offers humans the opportunity to perfect their pre-eternal souls."<sup>21</sup> Theologians gave a different interpretation of *ma'ad*, as "the idea of a separation between body and soul in the afterlife was unacceptable to them because it contradicted the dogma of the resurrection of the dead held to be one of the foundations of Islamic orthodoxy. In their view, *ma'ad* could only mean the return of the souls to their resurrected bodies, which shall take place on the Day of Judgement."<sup>22</sup>

This difference of opinion between philosophers, Sufis, and orthodox theologians created the image of Khayyam the blasphemer, which has persisted to this day. While the accusations made against Khayyam in his own time and soon after suggest that he may be the author of these

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<sup>19</sup>See my discussion of Khayyam's quatrains in the unique miscellaneous manuscript *Safina*, which contains 209 works, copied between AD 1321 and AD 1323: A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Literary Works in Tabriz's Treasury," in *The Treasury of Tabriz: The Great Il-Khanid Compendium*, ed. A.A. Seyed-Gohrab and S. McGlinn (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers and West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007), 126–30. Also see Sayyed-'Ali Mir-Afzali, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam dar manabe'-e kohan* (Tehran: Nashr-e daneshgahi, AH 1382/AD 2003), 23–25.

<sup>20</sup>See J.T.P. de Bruijn's discussion on this topic: J.T.P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1997), 88–90.

<sup>21</sup>de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, 89.

<sup>22</sup>de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry*, 89.

quatrains, the unauthentic quatrains found in later collections, in which Khayyam defends himself against the accusation of heresy, show how a tradition was formed around his character. This tradition of accusing him of heresy also created a countermovement for those who identified with Khayyam to defend themselves. The authenticity of the apologia quatrains is most questionable:

دشمن به غلط گفت که من فلسفیم  
ایزد داند که آنچه او گفت نیم  
لیکن چو در این غم آشیان آمده‌ام  
آخر کم از آنکه من بدانم که کیم

The enemy wrongly accuses me of being a philosopher.  
God knows that I am not what the enemy says.  
But since I find myself in this house of sorrow  
The truth is, should not I know who I am?<sup>23</sup>

As previously noted, a reception history of Khayyam in the medieval Persian world is certainly a desideratum, as it would clarify the function of transgressive ideas in discussions of thorny theological issues. But that is beyond the scope of this essay.

### **Khayyam in Twentieth-Century Iran**

‘Attar and Daya’s evaluations of Khayyam have certainly contributed to his image among religious people in Iran. Even those religious people who furtively read him have mixed feelings. As the following anecdote shows, the first acquaintance of many Iranians from a traditional Islamic background with Khayyam is ambivalent. The prominent Persian scholar ‘Abd ‘l-Hosayn Zarrinkub (1923–1999) recalls:

I can never forget my first acquaintance with Khayyam. I was eleven years old when I was first introduced to this grey old man. I do not know which of my father’s friends gave me a cheap edition of his quatrains with a lot of spelling mistakes, but I know very well that my father’s strict and thorough approach to rearing

<sup>23</sup>Khayyam, *Roba’iyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Foroughi and Ghani, 149, quatrain 129.

and educating me could neither exclude this book (which is from end to end unbelief, scepticism and apostasy) from our house, nor withhold me from having the book and reading it. In those days, there was nothing else in our house but the sound of daily prayer and recitations of the Qur'ān. In those days, I was a frail child who sought pretexts [to go my own way] and I was just recovering from a long illness. I do not know how many times I read the book, on that Friday at the end of February, but I do know that at the end of the day, many of the heart-ravishing, melodious poems had been engraved on the blank tablet of my mind. [. . .] I remember that one day I recited the quatrains for my grandmother. Tears filled her eyes, she cursed the poet, and then she went out of my room. Perhaps it was the same attitude [on her part] that had made my father an enemy of Khayyam.<sup>24</sup>

This candid recollection reveals several aspects of Khayyam's reception. Although Zarrinkub does not say so directly, it is clear that his father feared that the book would sow seeds of doubt and unbelief in the heart of his young son. On the other hand, his father allows a friend—someone who values the poems—to give a cheap edition to his son. The father perhaps feels a paradox: on one hand, Khayyam reminds his readers that life is brief and the world is vanity, while on the other, he problematizes theological issues such as the role of the Creator, and the nature of the hereafter, in a way that disturbs readers with a religious disposition.

Another example of an ambivalent appreciation of Khayyam is 'Abd al-Karim Soroush's discussion of death in his chapter "The Services and Benefits of Religion (*khadamat va hasanat-e din*)."<sup>25</sup> This is a long chapter covering several topics. In treating the question of human existence on earth, he says, "If we have come to this world as guests, what does the descending mean?" The author explains that humans are guests of God, both originally in paradise and now on earth. He contrasts the views of Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–73) to the philosophy of Khayyam

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<sup>24</sup> Abd 'l-Hosayn Zarrinkub, *Ba karavan-e holla* (Tehran: 'Elmi, AH 1372/AD 1993), 127–28.

<sup>25</sup> Abd al-Karim Soroush, *Modara va modiriyat* (Tehran: Tolu'-i Azadi, AH 1376/AD 1997), 227–76.

by citing the following quatrain of Khayyam comparing humans with a cup of wine, a plaything of destiny:

جامی است که چرخ آفرین می زندش  
صد بوسه مهر بر جبین می زندش  
این کوزه گر دهر چنین جام لطیف  
می سازد و باز بر زمین می زندش

It is a cup that is struck by the elevated Wheel.  
It gives the cup a hundred loving kisses on his forehead.  
The pot-maker of Time makes such an elegant cup,  
He makes it and smashes it again to the ground.<sup>26</sup>

Here God is depicted as a pot maker who creates humans and smashes them into pieces again. Soroush rejects Khayyam's view, stating that those who consider the shortcomings and bitter experiences of this world as disappointments cannot see God and cannot have a loving relationship with God. Soroush observes that it would be senseless to create such a convoluted creature as a human being only to break that creature into a hundred pieces. Rational reasoning can never find an explanation for this. Soroush cites Rumi, who, like many other Persian mystics such as 'Attar and Daya, considers death as eternal life, a union between the lover and the beloved. He cites the following piece from Rumi's *Mathnavi*, in which he depicts death as the soul's union with the Creator:

مرگ دان آنک اتّفاق امت است  
کآب حیوانی نهان در ظلمت است  
همچو نیلوفر برو زین طرف جو  
همچو مستسقی حریص و مرگ جو  
مرگ او آبست و او جویای آب  
می خورد والله اعلم بالصواب  
ای فسرده عاشق ننگین نمود

<sup>26</sup>Soroush, *Modara va modiriyat*, 268. Also see Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Foroughi and Ghani, 143, quatrain 115

کو ز بیم جان ز جانان می‌رمد  
سوی تیغ عشقش ای ننگ زنان  
صد هزاران جان نگر دستک‌زنان  
جوی دیدی کوزه اندر جوی ریز  
آب را از جوی کی باشد گریز  
آب کوزه چون در آب جو شود  
محو گردد در وی و جو او شود  
وصف او فانی شد و ذاتش بقا  
زین سپس نه کم شود نه بدلقا

Know death, as agreed among the Islamic community,  
As the Water of Life hidden in the Land of Darkness.  
Grow like the water-lily from this side of the river-bank,  
Like one who suffers from dropsy be greedy and crave for death.  
To him, the water is death, yet he seeks the water  
He drinks it — and God best knows the right course.  
O frozen lover, in the felt garment of shame,  
Who, in fear of his life, flees the Beloved!  
O you disgrace to women! Behold a hundred thousand souls  
clapping their hands, [running] towards the sword of His love!  
When you see a river, pour your jug in the river:  
how could the water flee from the river?  
When the jug's water is in the river-water,  
it is dissolved in it, and the river becomes it.  
Its attributes have disappeared, while its essence remains.  
After this, it does not dwindle or become ill-favoured.<sup>27</sup>

Sorush uses Rumi's poem to argue that death is not like the pot that is fractured (*gosastan*), but like the water in it being united (*peyvastan*) with a flowing stream and then the ocean.<sup>28</sup> Sorush observes that in this

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<sup>27</sup>See Jalal al-Din Mohammad Rumi, *The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. R.A. Nicholson (London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1925–40). My translation is based on Nicholson's, using the critical Persian text edited by M. Este'lami, *Mathnavi-ye Ma'navi*, vol. 3 (Tehran: Zavvar, AH 1372/AD 1993), 180, lines 3909–16.

<sup>28</sup>Sorush, *Modara va modiriyat*, 268–69.

context, religion serves to reconcile humans with this world. As humans cannot do anything about death, religion offers a vision of the meaning of death. In this line of reasoning, religion comes to help when ratiocinating, intellectual deliberations fall short.

Sorush appropriates the mystical philosophy of Rumi for his political ideology, but whenever he feels that the philosophy of Khayyam's quatrains fit his own ideas, he cites him. Khayyam is so much part and parcel of Persian culture that even scholars and politicians who disagree with his philosophy on life, death, and the hereafter cite him as rhetorical buttressing. Discussing the topic of "Ideology and Worldly Religion" (*ide'olozi va din-e donyavi*), Sorush posits that those who have not acquired the right perception of this world and the hereafter cannot claim to have fully understood the implications of religion for this world and the hereafter. He then demonstrates the relationship between this world and the hereafter through the metaphor of an embryo and the world, again citing Rumi:

چون جنین بد آدمی بد خون غذا  
از نجس پاکی برد مؤمن کذا  
[...]

گر جنین را کس بگفتی در رحم  
هست بیرون عالمی بس منتظم  
یک زمینی خرمی با عرض و طول  
اندرو صد نعمت و چندین اکول  
کوهها و بحرها و دشتها  
بوستانها باغها و کشتهها  
آسمانی بس بلند و پر ضیا  
آفتاب و ماهتاب و صد سها  
[...]

او به حکم حال خود منکر بدی  
زین رسالت معرض و کافر شدی

When man was an embryo, his food was blood:

Likewise, a believer finds some purity in the "unclean" thing.

[. . .]

If anyone were to tell the embryo in the womb,  
“Outside, there is a well-ordered world,  
A pleasant earth, broad and long,  
containing a hundred delights and so many things to eat,  
with mountains and seas and plains,  
fragrant orchards, gardens and sown fields.  
A sky that’s very lofty, full of light,  
sun and moonbeams and a hundred stars.”

[. . .]

The embryo would deny this, because of its present state, and would reject this message and be an unbeliever.<sup>29</sup>

Sorush cites these lines to explain humankind’s position in this world, and the reasons for human birth and death. He develops a mystic interpretation, stating that a human is separated from the world of non-existence through a set of veils in the same way that a fetus is concealed in the womb. Before citing the second couplet of one of Khayyam’s quatrains, Sorush explains this metaphor:

A foetus is both in the womb and in this world. This world has two phases: a prenatal and a postnatal phase. Only a veil separates these two phases. When we were still in the womb, we could not see the world and we did not know that we were in this world and that our mother was in this world and that our food was also from this world, etc. There was a veil between us and this world. We saw only the outward, i.e., we saw only ourselves, and the little world of the womb, but inside this embryonic world, which stands for this large and expanded world, was unknown to us and was veiled to us. As Khayyam says,<sup>30</sup>

أسرار ازل را نه تو دانی و نه من  
وین حرفِ معمّا نه تو خوانی و نه من

<sup>29</sup>My translation is based on Nicholson’s (p. 7), using Este’lami, *Mathnavi-ye Ma’navi*, 11, lines 50, 53–56, 60.

<sup>30</sup>Sorush, *Modara va modiriyat*, 184–85.

هست از پس پرده گفت و گوی من و تو  
چون پرده برافتد، نه تو مانمی و نه من

[Neither you nor I know the secrets of pre-eternity,  
Neither you nor I can read these enigmatic letters.]  
Our dialogue takes place behind the veil:  
When the veil drops, neither you nor I remain.<sup>31</sup>

Although this quatrain shows a good deal more agnosticism about the hereafter than either Rumi's poem or Soroush's reading, Soroush uses only the last couplet to emphasize the need for gnostic knowledge to understand the hereafter. Immediately after his citation, Soroush adds:

When this veil falls, we will enter into another world and the previous world falls away. At the moment we live in this world and [then] we are living in the Hereafter. We are the same embryos who are in the womb of this world, but this whole world and the embryos are together in the world of the Hereafter, which is the inner (*baten*) of this world. But the people who see the outward (*zاهر-bin*), only see the life in the outward world and are ignorant of its inside (*baten*) which is the Hereafter. You know that God says to people, especially the Prophets, on the Resurrection Day, 'Certainly you were heedless of it, but now We have removed from your veil, so your sight today is sharp' (Qur'ān 50:22). When you had not experienced this situation, you were ignorant of this. We removed the veil from your eyes, we tore apart the veils. Today, your eyes are sharp and seeing. This means that your eyes were not seeing previously, because a veil and a curtain were put before them. It is just enough to tear them, and in that case, all our eyes will be opened, and see the inner world (*bateni*) which we were barred from seeing.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Soroush, *Modara va modiriyat*, 185. This quatrain is included in neither *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Forughī and Ghani, nor Omar Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam dar manabe'-e kohan*, ed. Mir-Afzali (Tehran: Nashr-e daneshgahi, AH 1382/AD 2003).

<sup>32</sup>Soroush, *Modara va modiriyat*, 185.



While in the previous example, Soroush positions Khayyam and Rumi in an oppositional binary, representing two medieval belief systems, here he is integrating Khayyam's poem entirely in a mystical and Koranic context. For Soroush, the idea of removing the veil (i.e., dying) is attractive and suits perfectly his argument, while Khayyam's doubt about the existence of the hereafter is ignored here; even the first couplet is not cited. In a literal interpretation of the last couplet, Khayyam observes that "when the veil drops, neither you nor I remain," which implies that it is not clear what happens with a human soul after death. As I have analyzed elsewhere, the philosophy of this particular quatrain is not mystic, because in mysticism, the purpose of creation is defined.<sup>33</sup> God has created humankind out of love. In the first encounter between God and the souls of humankind, God asked Adam's souls, "Am I not your Lord?" to which the souls answered, "Yes, we witness you are." Mystics interpret this affirmative answer as the souls' being spellbound by God's beauty. The souls had become drunk by the beauty, and therefore, they answered positively. It is this moment of union with the Creator that the human soul craves. Orthodox Muslims may read Khayyam's quatrain as sheer blasphemy, as the poet is claiming that humans cannot understand the reasons for God's creation. From an orthodox point of view, God's purpose for humankind on earth is evident: humans are temporarily on this earth to sow the seeds of good acts in order to harvest them in the eternal hereafter.

Even more provocative assertions are expressed in a series of quatrains attributed to Khayyam. In his prose work, Khayyam follows the critical ideas of Ebn Sina (Avicenna, about AH 370–428/AD 980–1037) about God's knowledge of the particulars of what humans do and say, bodily resurrection on Judgment Day, and the existence of paradise and hell.<sup>34</sup> In several quatrains ascribed to Khayyam, he complains about a Creator

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<sup>33</sup>A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "There Was a Door to Which I Found No Key," Leiden Medievalists Blog, [leidenmedievalistsblog.nl/articles/there-was-a-door-to-which-i-found-no-key](http://leidenmedievalistsblog.nl/articles/there-was-a-door-to-which-i-found-no-key) (accessed 10 March 2020).

<sup>34</sup>For a discussion about the Islamic nature of such provocative ideas, see Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 11–13.

who has dumped human beings in a deprived world with many responsibilities and without interfering with their affairs:

یارب تو گلم سرشته‌ایی من چه کنم  
این پشم و قصب تو رشته‌ایی من چه کنم  
چون خار بلا تو کشته‌ای من چه کنم  
خود بر سر من نبشته‌ایی من چه کنم

O Lord, You have kneaded my clay, what can I do?  
You have spun this wool and linen, what can I do?  
When you've planted the thorn of affliction, what can I do?  
You yourself have written my destiny on my forehead, what I can I do?<sup>35</sup>

The topic points at the heated debates between the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite schools of theology during the poet's time, on theological issues such as God's unity, justice, reward, and punishment.<sup>36</sup> The Mu'tazilites rejected predestination and affirmed individual responsibilities, while the Ash'arites took the opposite view.<sup>37</sup>

Some editors of Khayyam's quatrains, especially in the introductions of critical text editions, make these philosophical ideas more palatable in an Islamic context by framing them as part of Khayyam's inquisitive spirit and his longing to know God. For instance, the eminent Persian scholar Ziya al-Din Sajjadi writes: "Khayyām is not a pessimist, not a sceptic and also not a denier of God, he does not belong to Islamic

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<sup>35</sup>This quatrain appears in neither Foroughi and Ghani's nor in Mir-Afzali's edition of *Ruba' iyyat-e Khayyam*. The quatrain was probably written by Sharaf al-Din Shafarva of Isfahan (in the twelfth century) and later attributed to Khayyam. On Sharaf al-Din, see Safa, *Tarikh-e adabiyyat dar Iran*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Ferdows, AH 1368/AD 1989), 740–43; Lotf-'Ali Beyg Adhar Bigdeli, *Tadhkera-ye atashkada adhar*, ed. Sayyed Ja'far Shahidi (Tehran: AH 1337/AD 1958), 182–83. However, this quatrain is not mentioned in these sources, and I do not have Sharaf al-Din's *Divan* in my possession.

<sup>36</sup>See M. Aminrazavi, "Reading the Ruba' iyyat as 'Resistance Literature,'" in *The Great 'Umar Khayyam: A Global Reception of the Rubaiyat* (Leiden, NL: Leiden University Press, 2012), 39–53. Aminrazavi gives many examples of quatrains attributed to Khayyam and reflecting the disputes between these schools.

<sup>37</sup>D. Gimaret, "Mu'tazila," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.

mystics, Sufis, neither does he belong to Esma'ili sect, and all these have their own arguments.”<sup>38</sup> To prove Khayyam’s sincere belief in God, Sajjadi refers to the report of Imam Mohammad Baghdadi, one of Khayyam’s sons-in-law, as recounted in ‘Abu ‘l-Hasan Bayhaqi’s *Chronicle*. When Khayyam was reading Ebn Sina’s chapter “Theology” from his famous *Ketab al-shefa*, he was cleaning his teeth with a golden toothpick. When he came to the section “Unity and Multiplicity” (*al-wahid wa al-Kathir*), he placed the toothpick in the book, asking for a pious person to come and write his will. After writing his will, he performed a prayer and started his fasting. Late in the evening, during his evening prayer, he knelt and directed his attention to God, saying:

یا رب به قدر قدر تو نشناختم تو را  
 در حد فکر کوه خود ساختم تو را  
 در دیست رنج غفلت و رنجیست درد جهل  
 افسوس با تو بودم و نشناختم تو را

O God! I have not known you to the degree you are worth.  
 I have made a ‘You’ within the small bounds of my thought.  
 My neglect is anguish, my ignorance is my grief.  
 Alas, I was with you but was unable to know you.<sup>39</sup>

After this prayer, Khayyam died. He had predicted that his grave would be in a place covered with blossoms in spring and autumn.<sup>40</sup> By citing

<sup>38</sup>Omar Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e 'Umar Khayyam*, ed. Ziya al-Din Sajjadi (Tehran: Karun, AH 1370/AD 1991), 5.

<sup>39</sup>This quatrain is included in neither Foroughi and Ghani’s nor in Mir-Afzali’s edition of *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*. Sajjadi summarizes this quatrain in prose on p. 5, and the poem appears on several Internet pages, but the authenticity of this weak poem is questionable.

<sup>40</sup>See Nezami ‘Aruzi, *Chahar-Maqala*, ed. E.G. Browne (London: Gibb Memorial Series, Luzac & Co, 1921), 71–72:

“In the year A.H. 506 (A.D. 1112-1113) Khwaja Imam ‘Umar-i-Khayyami and Khwaja Imam Muzaffar-i-Isfizari had alighted in the city of Balkh, in the Street of the Slave-sellers, in the house of Amir Abu Sa’d Jarrah, and I had joined that assembly. In the midst of our convivial gathering I heard that Proof of God (*Hujjatu l-Ḥaqq*) ‘Umar 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 Nishapur in the year A.H. 530 (A.D. 1135-6), it being then four years since that great man had veiled his countenance in the dust, and this nether world had been bereaved of him, I went to visit his grave on the eve of a Friday

the anecdote and emphasizing that Khayyam did not have any religious or mystical affiliations, Sajjadi absolves Khayyam of heresy, presenting him as a pious believer, who used his knowledge to know God.

Another Persian literary scholar, Baha' al-Din Khorramshahi, defends Khayyam through an extensive commentary on controversial quatrains. He explains the quatrains within the Perso-Islamic framework, citing poetry from Khayyam's predecessors to explain that specific ideas and opinions knitted to Khayyam actually belong to the Persian cultural and literary heritage, as in the following quatrain:

گر می نخوری طعنه مزین مستان را  
بنیاد مکن تو حیل و داستان را  
تو غره بدان مشو که می می نخوری  
صد لقمه خوری که می غلامست آن را

If you're not drinking wine yourself, do not despise the drunk.  
Do not prepare the ground for trickery and fraud.  
Be not proud that you're not drinking wine,  
You eat a hundred morsels, far, far, worse than wine.<sup>41</sup>

In Khorramshahi's opinion, the reason the poet invites people to drink wine is not the wine itself; he wants to explain that hypocrisy is a sin.<sup>42</sup> Khorramshahi conjectures that there are two types of wine in Khayyam's quatrains: grape wine (*bada-ye anguri*) and literary wine (*bada-ye adabi*). He says:

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(seeing that he had the claim of a master on me), taking with me one to point out to me his tomb. So he brought me out to the Hira Cemetery; I turned to the left, and found his tomb situated at the foot of a garden-wall, over which pear-trees and peach-trees thrust their heads, 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 city of Balkh, and I fell to weeping, because on the face of the earth, and in all the regions of the habitable globe, I nowhere saw one like unto him. May God (blessed and exalted is He!) have mercy upon him, by His Grace and His Favour! Yet although I witnessed this prognostication on the part of that Proof of the Truth 'Umar, I did not observe that he had any great belief in astrological predictions; nor have I seen or heard of any of the great [scientists] who had such belief."

<sup>41</sup>Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Forughī and Ghani, 99, quatrain 4.

<sup>42</sup>Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Forughī and Ghani, 175.

If we take Khayyam's allusions to, and themes of, wine, his praise of drunkenness, and his ignorance [of the hereafter] in his quatrains in a literal way, we will have a portrait of an irresponsible man, a vagabond, an alcoholic, a hedonist, a worshipper of wine, a waster of time, someone who throws away the fruits of his work and life, instead of a sagacious Khayyam who was an eminent sage and a mathematician, who was very possibly a student of Ebn Sina [and otherwise a follower of his philosophy].<sup>43</sup>

Khorramshahi rejects such ideas and bases his own on Mohammad 'Ali Forughi, who interprets Khayyam's use of wine in the same vein as Hafez's. According to Forughi, when Hafez refers to "two-years-old wine" (*may-ye do sala*) and a "fourteen-years-old beloved" (*mahbub-e chahardah sala*), he is using metaphors: the former refers to the Koran and the latter to the Prophet Mohammad.<sup>44</sup>

Many contemporary Persian scholars try to contextualize Khayyam in a Persian mystic tradition. The eloquent Iranian scholar Hosayn Elahi-Qomsha'i defends Khayyam by placing him in Persian and Indian mystic traditions. In his opinion, the image of Khayyam as a heretic has been created in the West. He writes:

It is a pity that in the opinions of many western readers he is a heretic, a lustful drunk, who has become a famous poet busy only with wine and worldly pleasures. This is the same current misinterpretation that people have about Sufism. The West looks at Khayyam from its own perspective. But if one wishes to appreciate the essence of Eastern literature, the reader should look at how indigenous readers interpret their own literature. It may be astonishing for the western public to hear that in Iran there is no discussion and difference of opinion about the true meaning of Khayyam's poems, and that everyone considers him as a great spiritual poet and a true believer.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Forughi and Ghani, 11.

<sup>44</sup>Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Forughi and Ghani, 12.

<sup>45</sup>Omar Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam-i Nayshaburi*, ed. Hosayn Elahi Qomsha'i (Tehran:

Although Qomsha'i later admits that there are a wide range of opinions about the quatrains in Iran, he puts Khayyam's actual Persian quatrains aside and offers a purely mystical interpretation of Edward FitzGerald's (1809–83) version in *Rubaiyat*.<sup>46</sup> For Qomsha'i, Khayyam's quatrains are so permeated by Islamic mysticism that even their English adaptations possess spiritual elements. To show this mysticism, he translates the English quatrains back to Persian and gives a commentary based on the philosophy of the Indian mystic and yoga master Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952). Afterwards, Qomsha'i gives his own mystical interpretation. Here I give one example of Qomsha'i at work:

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.<sup>47</sup>

Yogananda interprets this quatrain as follows:

Awake and leave the sleep of ignorance and simple-mindedness, because the dawn of wisdom and knowledge has arrived. Rise and throw the hard stone of asceticism in the dark cup of ignorance, and make the faded light of the stars that manifest your desire and endless worldly lusts take flight.<sup>48</sup>

Qomsha'i adds:

O inhabitants of the city of deceit and imagination, awake, because my sun of the mystic and Gnostic message, which awakes the sleeping people, can be seen on the horizons of your towns. Rise and break the scales of ignorance with the spiritual stone of asceticism. Divest yourself of this worldly and ephemeral pleasure which shines only for one moment and is extinguished again.<sup>49</sup>

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Khushrang, n.d.), 3.

<sup>46</sup>Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam-e Nayshaburi*, ed. Qomsha'i, 5, note 4.

<sup>47</sup>Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam-e Nayshaburi*, ed. Qomsha'i, 5; P. Yogananda, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam Explained*, ed. J. Donald Walters (Nevada City, CA: Crystal Clarity, 1994), 2–5.

<sup>48</sup>These are not Yogananda's literal words but a summary made by Qomsha'i. See Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam-e Nayshaburi*, ed. Qomsha'i, 5.

<sup>49</sup>Khayyam, *Roba'iyat-e Khayyam-e Nayshaburi*, ed. Qomsha'i, 5.

## Khayyam and the Antinomian Movement

What is perhaps most intriguing about this brief reception history of Khayyam is why he in particular has been the locus of accusations of heresy, although other philosophers and poets expressed the same ideas in a philosophical context. For later medieval mystic poets, he was an example of a rational and materialist philosopher whose ideas opposed mystic views on the Creator, creation, and the hereafter. There was (and is) an adversarial relationship between theologians and philosophers: while the letter of the Koran was enough for the religious scholars, philosophers problematized key notions of theology such as the soul's origin (*mabda'*), living in the material world (*ma'ash*), and the return (*ma'ad*). Why then would mystic poets and religious scholars focus their critique on Khayyam? He formulated complex theological issues in a simple style comprehensible to people of all walks of life. He was quotable, and a poet to whom dozens if not hundreds of "heretical" quatrains were attributed from the thirteenth century onwards. While some of the quatrains narrated in anecdotes show him as remorseful, there are other contexts in which such quatrains are read in an antinomian context. But is this fair to Khayyam?

The antinomian (*qalandari*) movement started to take shape gradually during Khayyam's life. Central motifs of the *qalandari* poetry are wine, homoerotic love, and the censure of outward piety. To provoke religious scholars, these *qalandars* drank wine publicly and criticized the most sacred rites and rituals (such as the pilgrimage to Mecca), the mosque, and even Islam itself; they preferred winehouses, Zoroastrian temples or Christian churches, and unbelief (*kofr*). This antinomian poetry is deeply religious, reflecting a paradoxical piety that rejected any show of religiosity. While this poetry is a provocative response to the theologians, the strength of Khayyam's poetry lies in its personal tone, in which the poet wonders about the mysteries of the universe, who the Creator is, why the universe was created, what the purpose of humankind is, and what the destination of the soul in the hereafter is. Khayyam's wine poetry is a means to mitigate the pain and frustration of humankind's inability to perceive the imperceptible.

‘Attar is one of the prominent *qalandari* poets, who criticize the holiest tenets of Islam, emphasizing the individual’s spiritual growth, but he does not take Khayyam as a *qalandar*; rather, as we have seen, he sternly criticizes him. Much of the poetry of other Persian poets such as Hafez, Sa‘di, and Rumi embodies a *qalandari* philosophy, both in its emphasis on wine and in criticism of the holiest Islamic tenets. Yet even *qalandari* poets such as ‘Attar looked with a suspicious eye at Khayyam’s ratiocinative worldview.

The growing body of heretic poetry attributed to Khayyam probably did not help to make his *Roba‘iyyat* seem unequivocally spiritual. Any poet could write a quatrain and use Khayyam’s name as a cover, making the corpus grow to some thousands of quatrains. Several *qalandari* quatrains are attributed to Khayyam. One appears in the thirteenth-century collection of quatrains *Nozhat al-majales* by Jamal Khalil Shervani. In this collection of some 4,000 quatrains, he devotes a chapter to *dar ma‘ani-ye ‘Omar Khayyam*. This heading is ambiguous because it may be understood as “On the Ideas of ‘Omar Khayyam,” referring to a popular genre in which poets write on the same themes and motifs, such as *carpe diem*, *bacchanalia*, and complaints about fate. The heading can also be understood as “On the Meanings of ‘Omar Khayyam,” which refers to the readings of his poetry. As the authorship of several of the poems cited in Shervani’s chapter is unclear, Shervani is probably referring to poems with the themes and motifs for which Khayyam had become the personification. The chapter also includes quatrains by other poets, such as Sana‘i, Sayfi, and Mujir, which reinforces my interpretation of the chapter heading. Shervani also cites quatrains attributed to Khayyam elsewhere in the collection. The following quatrain on the *qalandari* way appears in the first chapter “On Unity and Gnosis” (*towhid va ‘erfan*), but it is hard to accept it as authentic, based on the above line of reasoning:

تا راه قلندری نیویی نشود  
 رخساره بخون دل نشویی نشود  
 سودا چه یزی تا که چو دلسوختگان  
 آزاد به ترک خود نگویی نشود



So long as you do not walk the path of qalandari, it may not be;  
So long as you do not wash your cheeks with the heart's blood, it  
may not be.  
Why boiling your passion like those with burnt hearts,  
unless you freely renounce your own ego, it may not be.<sup>50</sup>

Rahim Rezazada Malik dismisses the attribution of this quatrain to Khayyam, stating, “the composer of this quatrain is so distanced from the logic of scholasticism and he is so unfamiliar from such tradition that he does not explain what it means to say [the lines above].”<sup>51</sup> Rezazada continues his criticism, stating that the composer of this poem is not at all clear about what he wants to say and the usage of the “gargantuan” word *qalandar* points to the author’s vagabond (*qalandari*) origin.

## Conclusion

The popularity of Edward FitzGerald’s adaptation of the quatrains in the West initiated a new evaluation of Khayyam and the quatrains in Iran. While influential intellectuals such as Sadeq Hedayat (1903–51) saw in Khayyam the rebellious Arian spirit who fought against Semitic beliefs, other less-well-known authors such as Siddiqi Nakhjavani published books and articles condemning Khayyam for giving unbridled advice to drink wine and disrespecting religion.<sup>52</sup> Soroush’s application of Khayyam’s quatrains in modern religious-political contexts exhibits this oppositional binary. In one place, Soroush cites Khayyam as an opponent of Rumi, to convey the functionality of religion and how religion does help humankind understand death and the hereafter;

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<sup>50</sup>Jamal Khalil Shervani, *Nozhat al-majales*, ed. M.A. Riyahi, AH 1366/AD 1987. (Tehran: Maharat, AH 1375/AD 1996), 145, quatrain 33. The chapter on Khayyam appears as chap. 15, pp. 671–76. This chapter consists of thirty-eight quatrains, twelve of which are attributed to Khayyam. Also see *Roba’iyyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Mir-Afzali, 39–48. Sadeq Hedayat includes one of these *qalandari* quatrains in his collection. See *Tarana-ha-ye Khayyam*, 99; Khayyam, *Roba’iyyat-e Khayyam*, ed. Foroughi and Ghani, 126, quatrain 72.

<sup>51</sup>Rahim Rezazada Malik, ‘*Omar Khayyam: Qafela-ye salar-e danesh* (Tehran: Maharat, AH 1377/AD 1998), 125–26.

<sup>52</sup>Hedayat, *Tarana-ha-ye Khayyam*, 27; R. Seddiqi Nakhjavani, *Khayyam-pendari va pasokh-e afkar-e qalandarana-ye u* (Tabriz, IR: Soroush, AH 1320/AD 1931).

in others, he simply cites Khayyam to strengthen his arguments about death, without going into Khayyam's views on the hereafter. In the latter cases, Khayyam's poetic memorability and popularity count more than his critical philosophy of the origins of creation.

Scholars such as Sajjadi, Khorramshahi, and Qomsha'i seek to create an Islamic context for both Khayyam's personality and his quatrains, so that his poetry can be viewed within the bounds of Islamic ethics. It remains fascinating that, despite all these heated discussions on the "Islamic" or "heretical" nature of Khayyam's quatrains, he has been among the best-selling authors in Iran, perhaps the most translated medieval poet in the world,<sup>53</sup> and a symbol of Persian spirits, philosophizing the mysteries of the universe in poetry while drinking wine and loving his friends.

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<sup>53</sup>See Jos Coumans, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam: An Updated Bibliography* (Leiden, NL: Leiden University Press, 2010). Coumans's bibliography lists 1,015 editions of the translations and is the first bibliography of the *Rubaiyat* since 1929, when A.G. Potter published his *A Bibliography of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (London: Ingpen and Grant, 1994). Also see Jos Biegestraaten, "Khayyam, Omar xiv. Impact on Literature and Society in the West," in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 2008, [www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khayyam-omar-impact-west](http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/khayyam-omar-impact-west); A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Edward FitzGerald's Translations of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*: The Appeal of Terse Hedonism," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to World Literature*, ed. Ken Seigneurie (John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 2059–70.