The Legacy of ʿUmar Khayyām in Music of the Netherlands

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The Sound of the Cup

How does ʿUmar Khayyām sound in music? We may try to answer this question by probing the quatrains ascribed to him for sound. By investigating a predominant figure in Khayyām – the drinking of wine – we may find a musical cue in the sound of cups. This is exactly the line Dutch composer Sylvia Maessen has followed. For her Rubāiyāt (2006), she requires a soprano who accompanies herself on six tuned wine glasses. By passing a moist finger along the rim of the differently filled glasses, or striking the rim with a stick, she produces a musical scale. The composer does not prescribe the kind of liquid, so we do not know whether to use wine or vinegar.

Musically it is interesting to note that the wine glass sound prescribed for the first song as a drone, provides a fundamental pitch for the voice to relate to. However, the vocal part of none of the quatrain's lines ends on a primary consonant to that fundamental pitch. In fact, the quatrain finishes with a harmonic pitch interval that has been considered in the European music tradition as the maximum of dissonance, the tritone (three whole tones). So, interestingly, in this song of inebriety, the sound of the wine glass does not lead to a stable music at all.

Introduction

This chapter explores how composers in the Netherlands responded to Edward FitzGerald's Rubāiyāt and other Khayyām renditions. A wide array of textual interpretations of this work has been published. Some point to its basic spiritual meaning, hidden though it may be at first sight. Others read this poetry as a summons to enjoy life, or as a testimony to fatalism.

What perspectives and meanings do composers emphasize in their musical settings and how? To what extent does, on the one hand, the dwelling on the moment (the single rubāʾ), and, on the other hand, linear temporality (FitzGerald's large-scale ordering of rubāʾyāt) play a role? Are these
orientations shaped into any form of polarity, by means of musical structures and processes? Is it possible to position the musical settings between spirituality and secularity? Are there traces of orientalism in the composers’ dealing with these perspectives and orientations?

Composers’ Interest in Khayyām/FitzGerald

The ‘Umar craze in the United Kingdom and the USA, following Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s discovery of FitzGerald’s 1859 rendition of Rubáiyát, also affected music. Among the composers worldwide who set the quatrains, we find many great names within consecutive generations up to the present day, such as Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), Virgil Thomson (1896-1989), Boris Blacher (1903-1975), Alan Hovhaness (1911-2000), Kara Karayev (1918-1982), Franco Donatoni (1927-2000), Sofia Gubaidulina (*1931), Krysztof Penderecki (*1933), Elena Firsova (*1950), and Thomas Adès (*1971).

Obviously we encounter quite some short song-like compositions. This is to be expected, given the conciseness of the rubāʿī. However, it is striking that quite a number of large-scale works have been composed, often involving extended ensembles of voices and instruments, and even choirs and orchestras. Such large works have been created from the beginning of the Western Khayyām craze. Cases in point are Liza Lehmann’s In a Persian Garden of 1896, and Granville Bantock’s Omar Khayyam, the Rubáiyát of 1906. Also cantatas, operas and symphonies have been based on Khayyām, such as Henry Houseley’s Omar Khayyam: A Dramatic Cantata of 1917, Robert Blum’s Symphony nr. 1 of 1924, and Firus Bachor’s Omar Chajjam of 1942.5

We may view this trend of creating large-scale works as the effect of FitzGerald’s 19th-century narrative rendering, which transformed a corpus of individual rubāʿīyat, not handed down thematically, into a convincing order, spanning human life from tender youth to death, while covering the seasons of the year from spring’s new beginning to winter’s oblivion. In this setting, the individual rubāʿīyāt function as stanzas of an extended poem.

Apparently both the conciseness of the original quatrain and the later large-scale thematic ordering of them have been attractive to composers.

The Reception of ‘Umar Khayyām’s Poetry by Composers in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands I have not found a real ‘Umar cult among composers. This does not mean that they did not pay attention to poetry hailing from the Orient. They showed a considerable interest in the work of Rabindranath Tagore, especially after 1913 when the Nobel Prize for
literature was awarded to him, the first Asian author to receive it. Tagore was one of the main poets to be set to music in the Netherlands during the interbellum. I found 66 Dutch compositions on his work within the same period as the Dutch ʻUmar Khayyâm pieces. We should take into consideration here that Tagore was a living poet, who actually visited the Netherlands in 1920, to speak before huge audiences. Yet Dutch composers did produce several fine examples of musical settings of rubāʾīyāt ascribed to ʻUmar Khayyâm. I have found some 14 compositions between 1916 and 2009, to which can be added several others, by foreign composers, published or commissioned in the Netherlands (see Appendix I).

I would like to underline the important role of poetic mediators in the Dutch reception of oriental poetry. One of the factors in Tagore’s popularity in the Netherlands was the fact that one of the most esteemed poets of the time acted as his spokesman and translator: Frederik van Eeden (1860-1932). ʻUmar Khayyâm also had authoritative mediators who were not just translators, but great poets in their own right. Several of them can be found in relation to Dutch Khayyâm music compositions: J.H. Leopold (1865-1925) in three cases, with the composers Daniël Ruyneman, Robert de Roos, and A. van Peski; P.C. Boutens (1870-1943) three times, with K. van der Knoop, R. de Roos and W. Smalt. The other composers set FitzGerald’s text, except for J. Röntgen, W. de Haan and Ruyneman (on one occasion), who used German translations. A special case is De Roos, who in his Cinq quatrains [sic] d’Omar Khayyam, employs translations by FitzGerald, Boutens, and Leopold, and had these selected rubāʾīyāt translated into French.

Between 1916 and 2009, I have found compositions in every decade of the 20th and 21st centuries, except between 1950 and 1973. There is a slight concentration in the 1920s. However, the number of compositions is small, so that these figures have limited significance.

Six of the Dutch compositions have been published, as have all those by foreign composers; the other pieces are in manuscript or private print.

### Setting ʻUmar Khayyâm to Music

This contribution began by investigating the sound aspects in Khayyâm’s poetry. Let us now assess the musical potential of the rubāʾīyāt from the perspective of the way the quatrains are edited, as well as their verse structure and meaning. In Dutch compositions, as in Khayyâm musical settings worldwide, we encounter two extremes. On the one hand we have the briefness of the single quatrain, and its compactness in terms of meaning. On the other hand, where FitzGerald’s rendition is used, we meet a large-scale narrative, spanning man’s life and the seasons of the year. In the Dutch musical settings of the rubāʾīyāt, we find examples ranging from
the epigrammatic to the drama of the grand story. This is reflected in their
duration, which varies from about 4 minutes to roughly 28 minutes.

The choice of a grand narrative frame does not preclude poetic-musical
reflection on the momentary. After all, a strong consciousness of the pas-
sing of time is the backdrop of FitzGerald’s sensitivity to carpe diem,
‘seize the day.’ In that sense the narrative frame fits well with the 19th-cen-
tury preoccupation with linear time, both in the sense of evolution and,
especially in the case at hand, of involution and decay.

The Dutch ‘Umar Khayyām settings that adopt the narrative frame, with
the many rubā ’yāt as ‘stanzas,’ fall into two types: those with and without
instrumental interludes between quatrains. Settings of both types are usual-
ly ‘through-composed,’ that is, though the composition is based on several
stanzas, it is relatively continuous, and does not typically employ repetition
(except for the end, to be discussed below).

Musical procedures of overall structuring and closure are explicit where
the composer responds to FitzGerald’s narrative ordering, but even where
the quatrains are treated as separate ‘songs’ there may be larger ordering
principles in the music, often drawn from musical conventions in the
European classical-romantic tradition of multi-movement compositions.
One such convention is to present the lighter and quicker tempos at later
stages in the concatenation of individual songs. Another is the application
of a familiar overall shape: the reiteration, at the end of the composition,
of musical data from its beginning, in order to attain closure. Of course,
such musical procedures affect the interpretation of the texts. I will come
back to this later.

Finally, there are wide differences of style in the Dutch ‘Umar Khayyām
compositions. Their are examples of musical orientalisms, but also of the
converse, for example in the final song of Ruyneman’s Four Songs on texts
by J.H. Leopold from 1937. After the preceding two, extremely lamenta-
tive, poems set to chromatic music, we hear in contrast the defiant voice
of ‘Umar Khayyām to a vocal line which is largely diatonic, with sudden
transpositions. No orientalism here, but the triumphant declaration of men-
tal freedom:

Wijn en een vroolijk wezen zijn mijn wet
Mijn godsdienst dat ik op geen godsdienst let
De wereld is mijn bruid; wat wil ze als gift?
“Op uw blij hart heb ik mijn zin gezet.”

(Wine and a happy existence are my law;
My religion is that I do not care for one,
The world is my bride; what does she want as a gift?
“I have set my mind on your happy heart.”

ROKUS DE GROOT
Case studies: Ruyneman and van Delden

Among the Dutch Khayyām settings, I have chosen an epigrammatic and a large-scale composition for closer inspection.

When Daniël Ruyneman wrote his *Drei Persische Lieder* for voice and piano or cembalo in 1950, he was also engaged in composing *Quatre Chansons Bengalies*, for flute and piano on Tagore melodies. Moreover he had already completed earlier pieces on texts by Khayyām and Tagore, in 1937 and 1915 respectively.

*Drei Persische Lieder* consists of three separate songs, the first two, both called “Rubaiyat,” on Khayyām quatrains; the final one, “Diwan,” on a quatrain by Ḥāfiz. These Ruyneman songs reflect the compactness and incisiveness of the rubā īyāt quite well.

The first song typically opens the cycle as an invocation, as in countless other Western Khayyām compositions. We find the recurrent “come.” The night is fading to make place for the morning, and the beloved is invited to drink well before life is gone. The opening song is characterized by the composer as “mit Betrachtung” (“in contemplation”).

\[
\text{I} \\
\text{O komm, Geliebte, komm, es sinkt die Nacht,} \\
\text{Verscheuche mir durch deiner Schönheit Pracht} \\
\text{Des Zweifels Dunkel! Nimm den Krug, und trink,} \\
\text{Eh mann aus unsern Staube Krüge macht.}
\]

*(O come, Beloved, come, the night is vanishing, 
By the splendour of your beauty, frighten off for me 
The darkness of doubt! Take the jar, and drink, 
Before one makes jars out of our dust.)*

The second and third songs are in stark contrast with each other. The former, “mit Bitterkeit” (“with bitterness”), offers a nihilistic view on life, going so far as to wish not to have been born at all. The latter, “Extatisch” (“ecstatic”), on a Ḥāfiz quatrain, speaks of the total surrender to love as life’s single destination, regardless of one’s condition, be it one of darkness or of light. In this way an opposition is built between a song of utter nothingness and one of utter fullness.

Though the work consists of individuals songs, the composer arrives at an overall structure of his own invention, by pairing an invocation, which contrasts night and day, doubt and beauty, with the dark and bright sides of life respectively.
II
Was kann das Leben uns denn nun noch weiter frommen?
Was es uns nur etwa bringt, wird auch gleich genommen!
Wüssten die Ungebornen nur, wie wenig uns dies Erdenleben gibt,
Sie würden nicht erst kommen.

(What further advantage can life yield us?
Whatever it brings us, is just taken away!
If the unborn only knew, how little this life on earth has to offer,
They would not come in the first place.)

III
Liebe ohne Masz entflammt, Lieben ist mein einzig Amt;
Ob sie meine Bitte hört, ob sie meinen Trieb verdammt,
Ob sie mich in Dorne legt, oder in der Gnade samt:
Liebe ohne Masz und Ziel, Lieben ist mein einzig Amt.

(Love inflamed without measure, to love is my only occupation;
whether she hears my pleading, or whether she condemns my lust,
whether she lays me on thorns, or bathes me in grace:
Love without measure and aim, to love is my only occupation.)

These three songs are set without a fixed musical metre, which allows for a flexible temporal interpretation. This invites an open reading of the text.

The first song, the invocation, is encased in a piano texture of sonorous richness and harmonic uncertainty – there is no clear reference tone to function as a tonic, fundamental pitch or drone. We hear reminiscences of Claude Debussy's music, such as the striking use of the harmonic intervals of major thirds, structured into segments of the whole-tone and chromatic scales. As in Debussy, these intervals bring with them a touch of orientalism and strangeness.

The harmonic situation creates an impression of between-ness, which lends itself, in its lack of a fixed point of reference, to be related to a sense of drunkenness. The second song, in strong contrast to the first, is firmly bound to a fixed pitch identity, multiplied in positions of two or more octaves. During the song this octave interval is filled in, in several ways, but intermittently. Finally, it just remains as such, without any other pitches being stated: it is 'empty.'

In this way the music strikingly underlines the theme of the text, the emptiness of life, setting the second song off against the mysterious richness of the first. By reiterating the same empty octave interval, it emphasizes the idea that the emptiness of life is something which is inalterable, and indifferent to human efforts to change it.
Finally, the last movement is modeled after Stravinsky’s energetic folk-orientalism, such as in his *Pribaoutki* songs (1914), with melodic lines descending stepwise from high pitches, and with a characteristic static drone harmony, based on the interval of the fifth plus dissonant tones.

To conclude this section I should like to note several other ways of creating an overall structure to the composition, both textually and musically. Robert Sims’s *Quintessence* orders 21 *rubāʿiyāt* into five groups, named after the five elements of nature. The texts range from the first to the last quatrains of FitzGerald’s collection, that is, from “Awake! for Morning in the Bowl of Night / Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight” to “And in thy joyous Errand reach the Spot / Where I made one – turn down an empty Glass!” To this depiction of the course of human life, however, we hear a musical context in which the beginning returns at the end: the music sinks back into the same drone A from which it arose.

We encounter a similar musical course in Sylvia Maessen’s *Rubâiyât*. Though it is composed of separate songs, with clearly distinctive melodic lines and accompaniment, we hear an overall structuring of cohesion and closure. Songs 3 and 4 are interrelated by accompaniment (with melodic inversion). The final song recapitulates the texture of the beginning, with the same drone, and proceeds with going back the accompaniment of song 3.

Lex van Delden’s *Rubâiyât* also deserves attention in this context. This large-scale piece for soprano and tenor solo, 4-part mixed choir, 2 pianos and percussion dates from 1948. It not only uses a selection from FitzGerald’s translation, but also closely follows its overall narrative. The piece traces a course between an initial joyous “Awake!” and a final subdued “gone,” – repeatedly sung to different minor triads –, the first and last words of the text. It may be heard as a story of life in the sense of a development of consciousness. The initial emphasis on the enjoyment of life ‘now’ gives way to a sense of linear time, in the growing realization that life will soon be gone. However, the piece does not end on the low and soft tones of “gone,” but at the very end brings back the same *fortissimo* joyous piano chord that opened the piece, announcing the possibility of a new round of *Rubâiyât*, and a new “Awake!”

All these examples may be viewed within the perspective of the powerful Western classical-romantic music tradition of closure (and re-opening!), by returning to the main key or main reference tone or chord at the end of a composition. At the same time, this musical procedure has an effect on the interpretation of the ‘Umar Khayyām poems: the course of life is expressed as not singular, but recursive. After one cycle of *rubâʿiyāt*, the next is already audible. This may be a typically musical contribution to Omar
Khayyâm readings, basically a positive, life-affirming one. There is a coming and passing away of individual lives, but life goes on.

## Appendix I

List of compositions by Dutch composers on texts ascribed to ʿUmar Khayyâm and their translations

### Abbreviations:

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>MCN</td>
<td>Muziekcentrum Nederland, Amsterdam</td>
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<td>NMI</td>
<td>Nederlands Muziekinstituut, The Hague</td>
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<th>S</th>
<th>soprano</th>
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<td>A</td>
<td>alto</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>tenor</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>bass</td>
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Amsterdam: Les Éditions Internationales Basart, 1948; Amsterdam: Donemus [MCN], 1996.

Autograph at NMI.


Text: ʿUmar Khayyâm, transl. E. FitzGerald [8 quatrains]; Jalâl ad-Dîn Rûmî, *Divan-e Shams-e Tabrizi* [4 quatrains].

Dedicated to the Nederlands Kamerkoor and Leo Samama, at the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the publication of Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*.

Amsterdam: MCN, 2009.


Dedicated to A. Noordewier-Reddingius and P. de Haan-Manifarges.

Autograph at NMI.
Hekster, Walter (*1937),
*Six Persian songs*, for baritone and piano, 1981.
Dedicated to Peter Goedhart.
Amsterdam: Donemus [MCN], 1981.

Knoop, Karin van der,
*Kwatrijnen van Omar Khayyam*, based on texts by J.H. Leopold [P.C. Boutens], for 4-part choir [SATB], soprano solo, three flutes, bass clarinet and percussion, 1995.
Composer's autograph.

Maessen, Sylvia (*1959),
*Rubaiyat* for soprano and six tuned wine glasses, 2006.
Text: 'Umar Khayyām, transl. E. FitzGerald [9 quatrains].
Dedicated to soprano Irene Maessen on the occasion of the music festival of Tharaux, France.
Composer's autograph.

Peski, Aad van,
*Oostersche kwatrijnen en verzen*, for soprano voice, and alto or tenor recorder, n.d.
Composer's autograph.

Röntgen sr., Julius (1855-1932),
*Persischer Divan / Aus dem "Rubaiyat" (Vierzeiler)*, for baritone, flute, horn and piano, 1923.
Text: 'Umar Khayyām, German translation.
Two autographs at NMI.

Roos, Robert de (1907-1976),
*Cinq quatrins [sic] d’Omar Khayyam / avec une introduction instrumentale; Vijf kwatrijnen van Omar Khayyam / met een instrumentale inleiding*, for alto voice and orchestra, 1928.
Also extant in a version for alto voice and 8 instruments.
Sketch of score in autograph, and four autographs of a piano four hands reduction at NMI.
Rossum, Alfred J. van (1917-1991),
*Rubáíyat of Omar Khayyám (rendered into English verse by Edward Fitzgerald)*, 7 Quatrains with instrumental prelude, interludes and postlude, for mixed choir, 2 oboes, harp and percussion, 1973.
Autograph at NMI.

Ruyneman, Daniël (1886-1963),
*Vier Liederen op teksten van J.H. Leopold* [Four songs on texts by J.H. Leopold], for tenor and small orchestra, 1937.
Dedicated to Albert Dana.
Amsterdam: Alsbach, piano reduction [1944].
Autograph of 1937 (with German transl. by A. Jonckers) and one of 1939, another one with a fragment and a sketch, all at NMI.

Ruyneman, Daniël,
*Drei Persische Lieder*, for voice and piano/cembalo, 1950.
Text: 'Umar Khayyâm (Rubá‘ıyât), Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn Ḥāfiz (Dīvān).
– Rubā‘ıyât ['Umar Khayyâm]
– Rubā‘ıyât ['Umar Khayyâm]
– Dīvān [Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn Ḥāfiz]
Amsterdam: Donemus [MCN], print 1951, with hand-written corrections.
Autograph at NMI.

Staak, Pieter van der (1930-2007),
*Three Quatrains of Omar Khayyam*, for voice and guitar, s.d.
Composer's autograph.

Smalt, Willem,
*Vijf Kwatrijnen* from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, translated by P.C. Boutens, for 4-part mixed choir (SATB).
Amsterdam: De Nieuwe Muziekhandel, n.d. [1916?].

*List of compositions on texts ascribed to Omar Khayyâm and their translations, published in the Netherlands*

Hidayat Khan (*1917),
*Awake for morning, on a melody of my father [Inayat Khan]; and from the words of Omar Khayyam*, 1975.
Several versions, all published in Amsterdam by Annie Bank, and dedicated to Inayat Khan.
1. opus 20, TTBB a cappella;
2. opus 21, choir a cappella;
3. opus 22, choir a cappella;
4. opus 27, TTBB a cappella;
5. opus 31, choir and organ;
6. opus 32, choir and organ.

Sims, Richard (*1961, U.K.),
Quintessence, for chamber choir, 1998.
Dedicated to Truike van der Poel and the Nederlands Studentenkoor (Student Choir).
1. Gaia
2. Agua
3. Aeola
4. Pyra
5. Stella.
Amsterdam: Donemus [MCN], 1999.

Composition by an Iranian composer commissioned by the The Nederlands Kamerkoor (Dutch Chamber Choir)

Kambiz Roshanravān, Asrār-e-avan, for choir a cappella (3S, 3A, 3T, 3B).
Text: ʿUmar Khayyām (Persian) [2 quatrains].
Composed for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of FitzGerald's Rubāiyāt.
Appendix II

Compositions on texts by 'Umar Khayyām commissioned by The Nederlands Kamerkoor (Dutch Chamber Choir).

The Nederlands Kamerkoor (Chamber Choir) commissioned two compositions for its concerts in 2009, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Edward FitzGerald's rendering of rubā'īyāt ascribed to 'Umar Khayyām. They are Asrār-i-azal by Kambiz Roshanravān, and Bee bade mast!—Drunk without wine! by Rokus de Groot.11 The performance of the former, in particular, requires some training in Persian classical music and the pronunciation of Persian poetry, besides Western choral expertise. Earlier the Kamerkoor commissioned Rubā'īyāt, the piece by Lex van Delden discussed in the main text.

Because these pieces represent quite different attitudes towards Khayyām’s poetry, some observations about them will be made here. Van Delden's work represents an epicurean interpretation, Roshanravān's a mystical one. De Groot's composition combines them in counterpoint.

1. Lex van Delden, Rubā'īyāt (1948).

Van Delden was familiar with 'Umar Khayyām due to the age in which he lived, and through his family and social environment. The composer belonged to a family of enlightened socialists, striving for a paradise on earth, 'now.' Orientation on German literature with its strong tradition of orientalists had acquainted them with poetry from, or modeled after, Eastern literary traditions. They read Khayyām in various Dutch translations. In this socialist context, the quatrains ascribed to Khayyām were neither read as 'spiritual' literature, nor as 'oriental.' With his Khayyām rendition, FitzGerald had already made the quatrains part of 'world literature.' In an age of secularization, they could serve as a reference point for a non-religious outlook on life.

There are indications that 'Umar Khayyām’s quatrains played a special role during, and shortly after, the Second World War – a time in which both the power and the nothingness of life were experienced in an exceptionally intense way. Rubā'īyāt translator J.A. Vooren has testified that Khayyām’s quatrains saved him from mental destruction in a Japanese concentration camp. The theologian L.J. van Kolk is reported to have given a memorable Khayyām lecture in the German camp for Dutch hostages, St. Michielsgestel, in 1943.12 In 1944 Lex van Delden obtained a copy of the Rubā'īyāt through a friend of the Dutch anti-German resistance. He kept it with him, and a few years after the War he wrote his Rubā'īyāt composition.13

Van Delden composed his Rubā'īyāt in a short time, between March 10 and May 18, 1948. On the one hand it was a happy period, as the
composer was just married, and was blessed with a son to whom the composition is dedicated. Against the joy of this new-born life, he felt the grief of loss: about thirty persons from his Jewish family and close environment had been killed in the Second World War. This background illuminates the composer’s basic concept of the Rubáiyát: “Seize the day, enjoy life – because it is so short.” The quatrains he chose from FitzGerald’s Khayyám rendition emphatically move between “Awake!” and “gone,” the first and last words of the selected poems.

The instruments are offered ample opportunity to manifest themselves, in extended purely instrumental episodes, exuberant in the beginning, more subdued later on. The tension between “Awake!” and “gone” which characterizes the composition as a whole, may also be heard on a smaller scale. While the first half of the quatrain “Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring” is fixed on one fundamental tone as a bass drone, the second half, ”The Bird of Time has but a little Way to fly,” wavers from one bass tone to the other, making it harmonically unstable.

An intimate moment is created with “Wilderness is Paradise enow,” as the music becomes very delicate.

Van Delden’s Rubáiyát attracted a lot of attention immediately after its first performance. It received the “Muziekprijs van de Gemeente Amsterdam” (the Amsterdam Municipal Music Prize) in 1948. In the following year it was performed in the Holland Festival with much acclaim.


This composition may be seen in the context of the considerable Iranian interest in ʿUmar Khayyám’s rubâ’īyāt due to FitzGerald’s rendition, which caused a re-assessment of Khayyám’s position. The same has happened in the Arabic world; for example FitzGerald has inspired Āḥmad Muḥammad Râmî to translate Khayyám into Arabic, and Umm Kulthum to make his work immensely popular in the Near East.14

This appreciation is quite different from the past. If Khayyám is mentioned in Persian tadhkiras (biographical dictionaries) at all, it is in a negative way. Khayyám is denounced as an unbeliever, heretic, blasphemer, scepticist, materialist, hedonist and the promoter of a carpe diem mentality. It is quite probable that his relative obscurity as a poet is due to the rise of orthodoxy in Iran in his age, which tried to silence his voice. Indeed, it was precisely this orthodoxy which was the target of Khayyám’s critical intellectual response.15

In Iran there have been several breaks in this process of revaluation and rehabilitation, especially after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, when Khayyám was all but banned, even though Khomeini himself wrote poems about wine. One of his critics was the philosopher ʿAbd al-Karîm Surūsh, who received the Dutch Erasmus Prize in 2005.
However, during his presidency, Mohammad Khatami launched a veritable 'Umar Khayyām rehabilitation. Due to his Western popularity, this 'lost son' of Persian poetry was reclaimed as an object of national pride. This process clearly had a political motivation, in order to create a new image for Iran.

It should be added that in this rehabilitation, Khayyām’s rubā’iyāt were re-read in a way completely different from FitzGerald’s epicuraneism. Some defenders praised Khayyām’s freedom from prejudices and his rejection of hypocrisy. However, his poems were now mainly conceived in an Islamic mystical way, and great pains were taken to soften the sharp edges of the rubā’iyāt through the mediation of Quranic interpretation. This is probably the last thing Omar Khayyām would have expected.

Roshanravān’s interpretation of Khayyām’s text confirms that his piece Asrār-e-avan may be understood in this more recent Iranian perspective of mystical interpretation.\(^{16}\) The title means “Secrecies of Pre-eternity.” The first of the two selected Khayyām rubā’iyāt refers to the Quranic sura 7 verse 171.\(^{17}\) This text speaks of the so-called Day of the Covenant (Alast), when God assures man of his primordial love, asking “Alastu,” “Am I not your Lord?” and man responds with “balā,” “yes.”\(^{18}\) In the Sufi way, to which Roshanravān refers, tasting “the goblet of alast” refers to the longing to recover this original love. So the first rubā’i’s opening, set by Roshanravān, may be read as:

\[\text{Neither you nor I can fathom the Secrets of Pre-eternity.}\]

Musically, Asrār-e-avan closely relates to Iranian classical music. It is based on the dastgāh’s (melodic modes) Shur and Dashti. Common to both is the minor third and the half flat second, that is, a ¾ tone above the final note. These pitch intervals are especially evident in the cadences, as b flat, a ¼ flat and g.

Roshanravān also makes use of tahrir, vocal yodel-like trills which are distinctive for Iranian classical music.

This melodic and sonorous framework is paired to homophonic and polyphonic choral writing hailing from Western classical music traditions. In this way the piece bridges very different cultural traditions, so that its performance requires various ways of schooling. In the first performance, conductor Klaas Stok was responsible for the Western components of the composition, while the choir’s mastery of both the subtleties of dastgāh tuning and tahrir were supervised by the composer himself at rehearsals; Asghar Seyed Gohrab tutored the pronunciation of the Persian language.

This composition is about a key notion in Omar Khayyām’s poetry, drunkenness, intoxication, ecstasy (*mast*).

The fact that Edward FitzGerald published his Khayyām-rendition *Rubāiyāt* 150 years before the commission to the present composition, originally inspired the composer to investigate the theme of “translation.” Initially the original Persian *rubā’iyāt* ascribed to ‘Umar Khayyām were to be used alongside FitzGerald’s English versions. However eventually the composer chose to develop something more radical: “translation” became “counterpoint.”

The composition sets out to create a counterpoint between two interpretations of ‘Umar Khayyām, one epicurean and the other mystical. The epicurean interpretation has been brought into Western consciousness by its promoter, Edward FitzGerald. This interpretation was also known in Iran, where it used to be heavily censured. The mystical interpretation was, and is, also found in Iran, and has become dominant since around 2000, as has been noted above. It was fostered in Europe, in contrast to FitzGerald’s conception, through *Les quatrains de Kheyam*, the 1867 translation of J. B. Nicolas, chief interpreter of the French Embassy in Persia.19 We also find these two readings in the Netherlands, the epicurean one in translations by Johan Hendrik Leopold (1865-1925), and the mystical one in those by Pieter Cornelis Boutens (1870-1943).20

The counterpoint between the two interpretations involves two kinds of drunkenness from different wines. As the Persian poetic tradition has it: *bāda-yi angurī*, “wine from grapes;” and *bāda-yi manšūrī*, “the wine of love.” The former is usually connected with a *carpe diem* mentality. As for the latter, *bāda-yi manšūrī* means literally “the wine of Mansur al Hallaj,” the 10th century Sufi mystic and martyr – that is: spiritual love and self-negation in absolute surrender to *dūst*, the Beloved.

As a side remark it should be added that the *carpe diem* mentality need not be considered as superficial. In fact, it is by no means easy to enjoy life without any thought about past or future. However, there is a difference between *carpe diem* drunkenness and love drunkenness, for the former involves an enjoyer, while in the latter the enjoyer has ideally been dissolved into *dūst*, the Beloved.

The two kinds of drunkenness each involve their own language and music in *Bee bade mast!–Drunk without wine!* The epicurean one is connected with the English narrative of FitzGerald and a continuous, cyclical, largely homophonic music in straight notes. It is motivated by fascination with time’s passing, and the urge to find moments of enjoyment. On the other hand, mystical intoxication is represented in quatrains in Persian from Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s *Divān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, for text, with a polyphonic texture with ornamented melodic lines for music.
The latter music breaks into the former one, both vertically (when all voices interrupt the English FitzGerald narrative) and horizontally (when single voices sing in counterpoint to that narrative). These ruptures occur at key words shared by the poetry in both the FitzGerald/Khayyām and Rūmī poems, like “wine”/mey, and “Paradise”/khāna-yi dust.

Two *rubā’iyāt* may illustrate the counterpoint of intoxications:

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.  
(Omar Khayyām/FitzGerald, *Rubā’iyāt* nr. 7)

*Bee daf bar maa mayaa, ke maa dar-sooreem*  
*Barkheez-o dohol bezan, ke maa mansooreem*  
*Masteem, nah mast-e baadeye angooreem*  
*Až harche kheeyaal borde’i, maa dooreem*  
(without a frame drum to us don't come for we are in festivity  
get up and the drum play, for we are victorious  
we are drunk not drunk of wine of grapes  
of any thoughts you have we are far)

**Appendix III**


Concerts by the Nederlands Kamerkoor (Dutch Chamber Choir) to celebrate the 150th anniversary of FitzGerald's rendering of *rubā’iyāt* ascribed to Omar Khayyām.

Conductor Klaas Stok

**Program**

5. Paul Hindemith, *canon "Oh threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise!"* (1945)  
July 1, Haarlem, Philharmonie (Large Hall), International Choir Biennale.  
July 5, Amsterdam, Muziekgebouw aan ‘t IJ.  
July 9, Amsterdam, Conservatory of Amsterdam, Bernard Haitinkzaal.  
Congress International Musicological Society (IMS), and International Association of Music Librarians, Archives and Documentation Centres (IAML).

Notes

1 I am grateful to Dr Asghar Seyed-Gohrab and Jos Biegstraaten for sharing their most engaging inspiration by, and extensive knowledge of 'Umar Khayyam's legacy.
2 When the expression rubâ‘îyât "by 'Umar Khayyâm" is used later in this chapter, it should be taken as "ascribed to" this name.
3 This 'instrument' is also known as glass harmonica or glass harp. Composers who wrote for it include Mozart, Beethoven, Donizetti and Richard Strauss. It is already described by European Renaissance music theorists in the late 15th century. The use of tuned glasses, metal cups or bowls in Asia predates that.
4 The pitch intervals between the voice and the wine glass sounding at the end of the consecutive quatrain lines are: E flat–A (tritone); E flat–B (augmented fifth); E flat–F (major ninth); E flat–A (tritone).
7 Of the composers involved, De Groot, De Haan, and Ruyneman also set Tagore poems to music.
8 Most of the latter are easily accessible through the Nederlands Muziekinstituut in The Hague (Dutch Music Institute, NMI), or through composers, performers and CD’s.
9 The first quatrain is to be recited, and is not counted as a song here.
10 I thank Jos Biegstraaten for this comment.
11 See data about the performances in Appendix III.
13 Personal communication Lex van Delden jr., March 10, 2009.
14 See the contributions by J.J. Witkam and M. Alsulami.
15 See the contributions by Mehdi Aminrazavi
16 Personal communication, Amsterdam, July 2, 2009.
17 Texts in Persian, corresponding to FitzGerald’s Rubâ‘îyât, nrs. 32 and 20.
20 J. de Hond, Verlangen naar het Oosten, p. 167-68.

Bibliography

