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Time: A Muse for All Times...

At a meditative moment, I was assailed with profound questions on issues that seem to have been the human race's only obsessions: time, existence, eternity!

We have been in an incessant struggle of existence from the beginning of time into eternity... Time, existence, and eternity have been three concepts for which there has not yet been an absolute measure... Our existence is a reflection of time, but is time, in its turn, a reflection of our own existence? Are existence and time two concepts that will endlessly remain parallel? Does any of the two control the other or are they independent?

What about eternity? It, too, is an abstract concept, in the minds of many. It is a challenge for many others. It is an unattainable goal for our mortal species. Or is it? Is eternity so far from us that we cannot delve into its core and conquer it? Or are we too indolent and how we squander the object of eternity itself? Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), a transcendentalist American essayist, is one of those who challenge us when he says: "As if you could kill time without injuring eternity." But does this mean that if we do not kill time, we may conquer eternity? Does eternity become attainable through our ability to tame the brute nature of time? Is our reality a shadow of time, and are we an expression of time itself? Is the endless strife of human beings a simple venture to surmount the superiority of time on us, its objects? Too many questions I stumbled upon at that moment of reflection, and I knew that I needed answers for them.

In an endeavor to lay my reflections on some solid grounds, I took the freedom to fly into my mind's space, and consign myself to a world of contemplation, unbound by limitations of time and space. Throughout the ages, time has been a high mountain which many have tried to conquer. It has been the Everest of time that has witnessed the fall of many, but also the rise of a very few. Some of those who have risen have stepped on the firm grounds of art. They have climbed, unyielding to the temptation of vanity. They have reached the mountaintop, and engraved their names in the rocks. Their names have stood solid in the face of tempests... Their existence has been immortalized throughout the ages. They are human beings who have challenged time, have struggled to traverse boundaries, limitations, hurdles and obstacles created by time. Poets, novelists, philosophers, painters, composers, and sculptors have been among the triumphant climbers of the seemingly unconquerable apex of time. They have not only engraved their names, but have raised temples and shrines in front of which we bow in respect, admiration, and awe.

Since time immemorial, different poets, novelists, intellectuals, and artists have pondered about the enigma of time; its profundity and greatness has been a muse for many artists throughout history. Masterpieces have been created inspired by its sublimity. Many have viewed it as an all-consuming whirl-wind, which does not have any sympathy upon its subjects. In an attempt to defy time, a very few have succeeded. Those who have done so remain engraved in the pages of human history. Sonnet 19 by William Shakespeare (1564-1616), English poet and playwright, is a manuscript wherein he converses with time, with mixed feelings of terror, awe and pride in himself. Shakespeare demonstrates his pride in himself through his confidence in his own lines. He is assured that his poetry will immortalize his love and not even time, the great devastator of all, will be able to eradicate her memory.

Admitting the supreme power of "devouring time," over beast, mother earth, the eternal phoenix, the never-ending cycle of seasons, Shakespeare's speaker denies Time's power to commit its "most heinous crime" of destroying his love through his mighty weapon, the pen,

through which , " do thy worst old Time: despite thy wrong/ My love shall in my verse ever live young."

This brings us to Jawdat Haydar "The Shakespeare of the Arabs," as he is considered by many. Our Shakespeare has not only written a single sonnet on time, but has a vast amount of his poetry dedicated to it. In this paper, I will attempt to demonstrate that not only does Jawdat Haydar mention the word "time" so many often in his poetry, but he also expresses his mixed feelings towards this *antagonistic friend* through diverse sentiments which portray their paradoxical and complex relationship of fear and admiration, of abhorrence yet of love, of appreciation and condemnation and time's pervasive existence in his world, as in the worlds of other great men of different epochs, as both a muse and an obsession.

Haydar expresses a diversity of emotions in his poetry through the various images he uses to convey his concepts of time. In both "From A Child Forlorn" and "The Chisel Beat," time becomes a "desert" with all its hardships and yet with its possible comforting oasis. In "The Lebanese National Resistance," time provides him with "et'rnal sheets" in "Yesterday," time becomes a "pyramid;" in "On Lebanon" he gives it "wings;" in "A Lost Hope," he feels the vastness of "The Hall of Time;" in "The Universe," he finds himself on the solid " floor of Time;" in "A Stone A Waiting Change of Identity" he is amazed by the grandeur of the "boulder mountains of time." All these images convey the depth of Jawdat Haydar's feelings for the concept of time and his perception of its intricacy. Time is such a creative fascination for Jawdat that he could draw images of it in his imagination, and put those images into concrete expressions that fill *our* imaginations with enthusiasm. Haydar has the skill to "draw" his words like paintings. What is also noteworthy is that in many instances Haydar capitalizes the initial letter of time referring to it as "Time." Might that be a hint as to how the poet sees time as a sublime concept? Yes, time is so transcendental a concept that in acknowledgement of its mystery, we as human beings see the timelessness of God; an undying, immortal, endless, and perpetual "existence." While we are unable to exist without time, we bestow that attribute upon our own creator, God.

Using the concept of time, Jawdat also honors each beloved member of his family. Not only does he immortalize them through his lines, but he also values them as being the joys of his life. To his daughter Shahina he writes

Ere you have stepped out of time into here
A gypsy fortune teller long before
Told me that I shall h've a child very dear
Sweetly pretty and whom I shall adore.

He also called her his "darling of the years" and to honor his "darling of the years" he writes for her "the song of a lov'ng dad left for you all/ To sing though he might be beyond recall." He knows that even after he is gone, the song will remain as a memory standing still in the face of the winds of time.

To his daughter Salwa he writes,

Your birthday was the day of my glory
the wealth of happiness I had all the time
Be'ng the God sent angel of my story
And the forget-me-not of my best rhyme.

Through these lines, he also immortalizes his "wealth of happiness" of "all the time" and defies time to make them the victims of his cruel tempests.

To his daughter Siham he writes,

Daughter I owe you a share of my fame
Having had a lift by your lore up high

And up a Lebanese I have carved my name
On the highest roof of the deepest sky
That's a glory that will never age or die
A triumph of the mind to apprehend

Take the distance of thought and multiply
By the speed of light you will comprehend
How a Lebanese poet came to land
On the skyey roof with a map in hand

Through the lines dedicated to his daughter Siham, one can feel the pride Jawdat Haydar takes in his victory over the gales and gusts of time. He is aware that through his lines, he has achieved "glory that will ne'er age or die." He knows that he has been triumphant in his struggle towards immortality. Through owing "a share of [his] fame" to his daughter, and by writing her these lines, he commemorates her as he does all his beloved ones and himself.

The immortalization is carried to his daughter Rima, too, in "A Gift from Heaven Above," where he writes,

I would that I could slow the speed of time
To have a budget of living more years
Then I could be with you to write more rhyme
About you being the bloom of the spheres

Remember my child, remember my love
That you're my gift from the heavens above.

He loves her so much that he finds time too swift in its passage. All he wants is for time to slow down; if only it could do that, he would remain longer next to his beloved daughter, and bequeath more honor upon her through engraving her into his poetic verses.

Oh Time, where do we stand as human beings from your sublimity? How far do I stand from your enflamed breath? How distant am I from your sharp claws? How secluded am I from being doomed eternally by your ceaseless darkness?

What a great well of paradoxes you have been, for Jawdat Haydar baptizes you as such, in memory of his son Bassam,

O time! What a trap of smiles you have made
My spring days were so delightful to taste:
But now I feel the keen edge of your blade
I suffer take me to your bosom in haste."

A muse for all times, time has been the spring of immortality attempts through arts. In his poem "Verse," Jawdat Haydar conveys how time has been an inspiration when he writes,

Verse, the lustrous galaxy of the mind
Radiating thoughts of wisdom well designed;
A torch of love lit on the palm of time
By the lively heart-glowing beats of rhyme.

Time has been the bearer of good news, but its bells have also tolled miserably. It has been the unavoidable road; it has been the path which every human being must stroll through. In "The Prince of Youth," Jawdat Haydar speaks of his journey. He tells us of how seasons of life change, bringing both smiles and tears. He continues to share his thoughts with us in his poem "The Prince of Youth,"

Yesterday I was the prince of my youth:
today I'm the emperor of my years.
My empire but a domain of the truth,
A smile in the spring in winter but tears."

Time has been the witness of births, for Jawdat Haydar sees that it has "mothered birth," yet it has also been a bystander in death, for "without notice your warrants of death/ Are mailed to the King of terrors by air."

Oh time, you are loved by many, but feared by most. When Jawdat Haydar writes "In Memory of My Wife Maliha," he is conscious of your existence, for he was "dreadful to bear the thought of long sleep, / to hush the divine voice of love in pain." Haydar also conveys his dread of time in his poem "Bluff No More" when he writes,

People of earth, be sane; bluff no more,
You are simply a fading wink of Time,
Others like you have come and came before
A breath jumbled with water, earth ad lime."

Time has been the dove that spreads peace, but also the owl that prophesizes war. Jawdat Haydar sees the owl in it when he writes in "O Time! O Fate!"

O Time! O Fate! Why have you been
So lethal to our homes and land?
Our hills were full of hope and green
But now they lie huge heaps of sand.

Is not time the lethal weapon of destruction at times? Does it not often render all hope into hopelessness as Jawdat Haydar expresses it in "Fountain of Faith"?

Time has been a garden of flowers, roses, butterflies and rainbows, but also a battlefield of houses destroyed, dreams shattered, and lives brought to an end. Wasn't Beirut a garden of flowers, roses, butterflies, and rainbows? But "Where's Beirut of yesterday?" This is a question Jawdat Haydar asks himself in his poem "Beirut." Where has all the beauty gone? Where is the grandeur of your golden days? He then consoles us when he says,

Never mind, history will record the crime,
and timing time timely will avenge blood for blood
Just to make the balance sheet right
And I stand here on the highest mound
To spit now and every year once on the whole world.

Time has been a friend to those who appreciate it, but an enemy to those who dread it. Jawdat Haydar sees the friend in time when in his poem "Yesterday" he writes,

Yesterday I sat threading them
Those beads of the past
A rosary of memories
The years each a gem buried
In the eternal pyramid of time

In spite of that, he is also aware of time's enmity towards human beings in one of his untitled poems, when he writes,

And vigilant time watching our effort mocks
Our trip around the milky way into here
And here we try to see the image of the past
But now we are wrinkled to climb the towers

And speed beats us time being too fast
So without hope we lie on
A pillow of despair
A mattress of sand
Looking at the sky
Our only field of flowers."

Time has healing powers, yet its tentacles have devastated a great many. Jawdat Haydar has been aware of its devastating capacity and has counseled a friend to be aware of your hands. In his poem "To his Friend" he says,

Look how the years fly and we miss the glare;
Look how a child grows on the ash of days;
Look at the mirror of life and be aware
Of the gloom ahead and the spreading haze.

In appreciation of the healing powers of time, Seneca (54 B.C. – 39 A.D.), Roman philosopher and dramatist, once wrote, "Time heals what reason cannot." He thought that "time is the wisest counselor," but is it?

Time comes at no cost, but it is priceless. Leonardo da Vinci dares us when he says, "Time stays long enough for anyone who will use it," for though time is always available, it will never be on the side of those who make futile use of it. A person who cannot make use of his time while alive and who slanders time would also be careless about eternity for as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), American essayist, poet, and leader of the Transcendentalist movement, has written, "What would be the use of immortality to a person who cannot use well a half an hour."

Though time is so grand, yet it may be captured. Jawdat Haydar had the urge to capture it when in his poem "On Lebanon," he wonders whether human beings "can [...] keep company with the wings of time?"

Time passes quickly throughout happiness, yet torture too long in times of agony. When Jawdat Haydar parts with his lover "days seemed centuries..." He feels that time was irrationally irrelevant sometimes; for when it desires, it takes on wings and flies, whereas at other times, it only seems to crawl... Did not Albert Einstein (1879- 1955), a German-born theoretical physicist, feel the same when he said, "When you sit with a nice girl for two hours, you think it is only a minute. But when you sit on a hot stove for a minute, you think it is two hours. That's relativity."

Time was in our past, is in our present, and will be in our future. Gibran Kahlil Gibran (1883- 1931), Lebanese American artist, poet and writer, has also expressed this thought when he wrote, "The timeless in you is aware of life's timelessness; and knows that yesterday is but today's memory and tomorrow is today's dream." Following this train of time, Jawdat Haydar has dreamt of traveling through its enormity when in "A Pensioner Made" he writes, "Oft I go dreaming of my early yesterdays. / Sailing on the seven seas of memory. / Until I feel living twice the teens of my days..."

He has a craving to live the past again, to breathe as a child. In his poem "Wash, Wash, Wash" he writes,

I value the years, the wrinkles deep
On my brow, around my eyes
But O! For the thoughts that come and heap
On my heart, a world of sighs.

I would a day back to live again
A child with children at play
Without envy, without hate or pain
A child, full of cheer and gay."

Here I am today, overcome by the grandeur of time. I am attempting to understand its essence, but I feel bound, bound by time itself. I contemplate your elixir, oh time, but I stumble upon you as the elixir of my own existence. As Shakespeare has once written, "time is the king of men; / He is both their parent, and he is their grave, / and gives them what he will, not what they crave." We are beings through time and we end in time...

Throughout the ages, people have delved deep into the core of time's being, but it has never been of any help to those who have sought it. They have sought it and they have fought it, but in most battles it has conquered all that was in its way. At rare times, it has been surmounted, defeated by the genius of human minds and victimized of by thoughts which could surpass all limitations and boundaries. Jawdat Haydar believes that the genius of Wordsworth has done just this, immortalizing himself through his thoughts in his poem "In Memory of Wordsworth And his sonnet Upon Westminster Bridge" where he writes

What a mental conquest, what a crusade.
Across the lofty fields of poetry!
What armies of deathless thoughts you have made
Across the living wilds of poesy!

He points out in the last stanza to how Wordsworth's lines bring him to life every time they are read,

Although you fell silent long ago
You are enlivened by your poesy
to remain time honoured in your chateau
Bearing the regal crown of prosody."

Time has been the canvas upon which paintings were made, the pieces of paper upon which poetry was written, the clay which was molded, and even the notes which ended as music to the ears. It has been the essence of all creation, for as Napoleon Bonaparte stated, "Time is the great art of man." Salvador Dali (1904-1989), the famous Spanish Surrealist artist painted his best known work *The Persistence of Memory*, also popularly known as Soft Watches, Droopy Watches, or Melting Clocks ; he glorified his canvas through the concept of time. In this painting, Dali introduced the "melting watches" claiming that "they are nothing else, but the Camembert cheese of space and time; tender, outlandish, solitary and critical-paranoiac." Salvador Dali, like many other artists, has been fascinated by the idea of time. Clocks in his paintings have a symbolic meaning; many critics believe that the clocks that are bending over the edge of the table in *The Persistence of Memory*, those hallmark soft watches suggest Einstein's theory that time is relative and not fixed.

Musicians are no different: in their soundscapes they create visual serenity, philosophical depth and waves of emotion, such as Mozart (1756-1791), one of the most prolific and influential composer of the Classical era. I wonder if he knew how great a masterpiece his "Four Seasons" would become during and after it's composition. The four seasons themselves represents the significance of time. Aren't we, human beings, confined to the laws of nature? Aren't we like the beautiful yet mild days of the spring as children? Don't we become as playful as summer days as teenagers? Yet, our playfulness fades away as the green leaves become orange... And at the end, even those orange leaves fall off the trees, as we die, become ash. Nothing of us remains. Time turns all of us into a mould of clay and a heap of ash. As time passes, human seasons change... Only time remains: the great enemy of the ages.

Time has been an ongoing challenge, for it "contain [s, but is] never contained" as Jawdat has written in "Rome and John Keats." Words have been written in hope that they will defy time through their immortality and paintings have been painted in hope that they will rebel against its heartlessness. They did, dear "time", they did. They wrote with all their hearts, and painted with all their souls. It was with their hearts and souls that they could triumph over you. Jawdat Haydar in his poem "Today I Am Over Ninety Years Old" writes, Kipling Tennyson Byron and Shelley/ Keats Arnold poets of matchless fame/ Poets who stand time pillars of po'try..." Poets who built pillars of their thoughts: pillars which stood unharmed by the claws of time. As Shakespeare has once written, "Death makes no conquest of this conqueror: For now he lives in fame, though not in life."

Here I am today, confined by the wheel of time. I have the urge to write, express, let it out, utter, communicate, say, convey, inscribe and engrave my thoughts and feelings, but how much time do I have? Is a lifetime enough for one's reflections? Is a lifetime enough for one to carve oneself in the journey of time, your journey? Is a lifetime enough to immortalize oneself? Is a lifetime enough to conquer you, the great enemy of all times? Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), English author and poet, in his poem "If" wrote: If you can fill the unforbearing minute / With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,/ Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,/ And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!"

Another painter who exhibits a fascination with the thought of time is Simon Vouet (1590 - 1649), a French painter who helped introduce the Italian Baroque style into France. In one of his most famous paintings *Father Time overcome by Love, Hope and Beauty*, we see how time has been conquered by the three elements which outlast human creation.

Time remains an unfathomable labyrinth, a cave which once entered cannot be escaped, and whose darkness blinds one's being and diminishes one's existence into nothingness. As Charles Dickens (1812 - 1870), English novelist of the Victorian era, has put it, "Old Time, that greatest and longest established spinner of all!.... his factory is a secret place, his work is noiseless, and his hands are mutes."

Time, how have you become the essence of reflections? How have you rendered the spirit of thoughts? How have you grown into a challenge? You are a judge who obliques each and every one of us to face you. We face you all throughout our lifetime, through our thoughts and deeds. Yet even after all the struggle, the final decision remains in your power, for only you are entitled to immortalize us and only you are entitled to turn us into ash... Ralph Waldo Emerson has once written "Tobacco, coffee, alcohol, hashish, prussic acid, strychnine, are weak dilutions: the surest poison is time."

As I look at the clock, I see how the seconds pass, how the minutes follow, and how the hours fly by. I remembered what Ben Jonson (1572- 1637), English Renaissance dramatist, poet and actor, has once written,

It strikes! One, two,
Three, four, five, six. Enough, enough, dear watch,
Thy pulse hath beat enough. Now sleep and rest;
Would thou could'st make the time to do so too;
I'll wind thee up no more.

As the hours fly by us, we get lost in the tempo of the days, then the weeks, and the months, and the years... We celebrate our birthdays, and at every birthday, we are hypnotized by time... It seems as though time itself freezes so we can realize how it has been engraving our journey. Oh time! How invincible you may seem! Oh humanity! How victimized you may be under the spell that has been cast upon you by the hands of fate! For as Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 - 1821) put in his *Maxims*, "There is one kind of robber whom the law does not strike at, and who steals what is most precious to men: time." Jawdat Haydar has commemorated Napoleon in his poem "Napoleon Bonaparte" and has bequeathed upon him the tribute of being "still a flame in the cave of Time."

Six o'clock, fifteen minutes, and forty-five seconds... On a piece of wood designated to etch out the image of time, irony threw me the image of the tree of life at that precise moment in time frozen on the old wooden clock. The image of the tree fused and engraved itself into my psyche, out from a device bearing the responsibility of informing us of our brief ephemeral existence. Cultures were born and have died under this passing of time, and as I write, near-infinite amounts of fleeting moments were built, lost and destroyed in a whirlwind of thought and emotion, only to be resurrected and recast into the shadows yet again. And yet, knowing this, we have never ended our quest for immortality. What started out with grandiose stories of our existence and our after life morphed into the realm of physical possibility with the advent of new technology centuries later, but artists, poets and some say madmen, never allowed themselves to let go of the origins of the idea, of the written expression for eternal life, of the intense desire to fortify an instinctual need to trespass over our boundaries and our weaknesses. From this desire lies the foundation of

art. Creations are meant to outlive their source, are meant to provide the artist with means which to prolong his or her short-lived existence, and meant to inspire those very thoughts in the hearts and minds of others. Consequently, have poets been looking for the fountain of youth all this time, while forming, shaping and painting their words? Have painters been attempting to catch a glimpse of the fountain of youth to achieve immortality? Have musicians been seeking to quench their thirst for eternity by drinking the waters of the perpetual fountain?

Jawdat Haydar has entered his winter peacefully. He has lived his winter in tranquility, harmony and serenity. When one looks at how he has handled his own life, one cannot but admire him. "On [his] Eightieth Birthday" he writes,

Though eighty years are a burden to bear
They were the true colorful shades of my life;
the lovable world I lived where there were
The sweat of age and labor in strife.

He has befriended time which at many instances has betrayed him. It has stolen away from him his most precious ones, but he has been forgiving. He has not seen time as an enemy, but has made it his endeavor to gain it to his side. And so he has managed to do. In "Old Age" he goes on to say

My years waxed old and my shoulders began
To spare like a sparrow hawk in the air
That's the natural destiny of man
Who wears out in the waste of Time un'ware.

He has lived for one hundred and one years, during which he has picked the fruit of each season of his life and has devoured it... In his poem "That's Why I Say" we see how Jawdat Haydar was so harmonious with the seasons of his life. He goes on to say,

Though I'm bound to the cliff of the eighties soon
I never believed in my wrinkles to sorrow
Even now my season minus sun plus moon:
I stand against the menace of tomorrow

And so I have no worries to bear in mind
As never had I a lock without a key
Having explored the code of wisdom to find
The cryptic secret betwixt the world and me.

Time was quite grateful. Today, Jawdat Haydar has won his race against time, for he is made eternal through his words. Jawdat spent most of his life writing, and his days were appreciative. Jawdat Haydar breathes today at his poetry readings I attend, and draws a smile on my face, proud today at every attempt I make to understand his thoughts. He comes to life at every moment of appreciation and admiration I sense towards his thoughts, his "deathless thoughts" as he considered Wordsworth has done in his time.

Throughout my lines, I have mentioned different men of different epochs and different nationalities. Despite their differences, it is their genius that has made them the undying heroes of history. Jawdat Haydar, through his genius in his verse, has been able to solidify

himself in mud of time. He has been immortalized through his lines, engraved in our memories as the "Shakespeare of the Arabs." It is through this that Jawdat Haydar has successfully triumphed over time. The last stanza of his poem "That's Why I Say" he writes, "there is nothing sure in a moving tide/ Of a world changing faces day by day/ for life and death are always side by side/ And we come here but not for long to stay." In response to this last stanza I wrote my own poem by the same title fated.

That's Why I Say

The timely tides of time infinitely envious remain,
Envious of all the glory you could grandly maintain
through your lines, an ocean you have created,
an ocean of thoughts for immortality fated.

You remain engraved on the highest mountains,
For you have shaped inspirational fountains.
It is with every mention of your name,
That light shines upon your fame.

I found you have written in your lines, one day,
"We come here but not for long to stay"
It is with honor and pride that now I say,
"You are here and forever you shall stay."