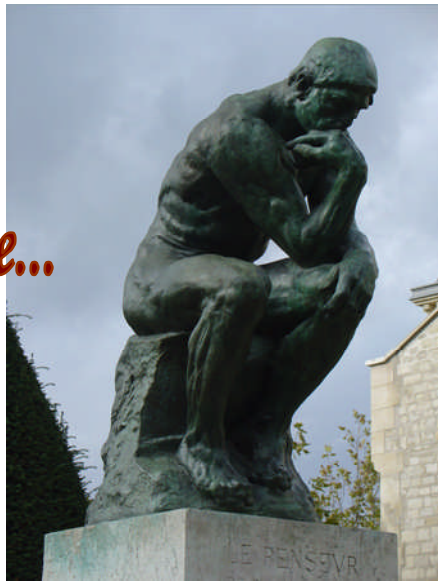
Jawdat Haydar...

The Albatross

"The Poet is like this monarch of the clouds
Riding the storm above the marksman's range;
Exiled on the ground, hooted and jeered
He cannot walk because of his great wings."

- Charles Baudelaire, "The Albatross"

To the Lebanese youth,
may they always have something to love...



Auguste Rodin, "The Thinker" (1906)

"Yes, he lies stilly with time never dead,
Never a fountain of wisdom seres to flow
Never a print can be marred of what's said
And what he has said in print, will ever glow."
- Jawdat Haydar, "Robert Frost"

Henri Martin,
Detail from "Intellectual Work" (1920)

"Please grieve not for me but rem'mber and try
To think of me one day a year where I lie"
- Jawdat Haydar, "My Will"

The Albatross

We are living in the age of "science, steel, speed, and the cement road" as Roy J. Cook considers. In the tumult of our modern age, our rush to accomplish our daily tasks as well as our human rashness renders it impossible for us to contemplate the little great things that surround us. And thus, our life, our love for it and the beauty it holds pass before us, unnoticed, unembraced. But because in the midst of this erratic world, there exists great souls, great men like Jawdat Haydar, we are unconsciously led to pause for some time, to contemplate and embrace life with all its love, pain, loss, tragedy, and happiness, to understand better the meaning of our existence, and to bow with reverence at those who are giving us the very best part of their being in their work. The magnanimous poet, an "albatross" as Baudelaire would have said, shatters the dead silence of the grave in which he lies and transcends the coldness of the earth that contains him to reach out with "his great wings" for that one individual that he has adored with unsatisfied relish- the other. When a poet, an artist or "a man of culture disappears, something is lost forever" wrote Roland Barthes upon the death of Gaetan Picon, true! Yet, "something" new is reborn, something fresh starts to grow; a spark is lit never to be dimmed again. The works, the poems, the thoughts an artist or a poet leaves behind, live, and because they were forged with immense passion, they touch other souls, change destinies, and give hope. Jawdat Haydar lives still; he has never really been gone. He is just being regenerated by those who knew him, those who loved him, and most important of all- those whom he has taught to love him without them really knowing him...

I have not read Jawdat Haydar's poems as a critic would have read them or as a literature major student should have read them. I just read them with all the enthusiasm of my Lebanese youth. My admiration for that universal poet had not ceased to grow ever since the day I attended the conference held for him at LAU. Perhaps our human nature prevents us from sincerely loving people we have not met in person; only the grand, eminent souls can inspire true affection and respect in the hearts of other men. And yet, as soon as I saw the elderly man with his sad eyes behind his thick glasses, something in me was touched. Hearing him talk has made me realize that Haydar is simply more than a poet. Father and lover, philosopher and leader, believer and husband, Haydar was a multi-dimensional man who had drunk life to the lees with all its bitterness and ecstasy! Haydar was a man, a man moved by other men, moved by the great, the beautiful, and the true. He was a man who loved the sea, the land, especially the land of "his" beloved Bekaa and Lebanon... No, Haydar's legacy is not restricted to the fascinating poems he wrote, neither is it confined to his deep philosophical thoughts. Rather his legacy extends to the love and sense of loss I have spotted in his daughters' eyes during that conference; to the affection with which those who were honored to know him during his lifetime spoke of him; and to the thirst and interest a centennial man could arouse in the spirit of a bunch of young people who are barely on the brink of life.

Jawdat Haydar lived like all of us. Like all of us, he loved, suffered, dreamt, was shattered, and had to rebuild himself. However, unlike most of us, he attempted ardently to contemplate the world which contains him. And for that, his poetry is not merely writing; it is not merely art. It is a way to explore and observe ideas and ideals- or rather man's ideas and ideals. Jawdat Haydar, the poet, like an albatross, Baudelaire's albatross,

endowed with his giant wings, flew higher than any other living being, beyond the confinements of time and place. By "flying highest", the poet "saw farthest", resembling Bach's Jonathan Livingston. An albatross, Haydar was condemned to traverse the ocean, back and forth, between different countries; an albatross, he was always bound to the sea, for is not the bird itself a seabird? Jawdat Haydar's love for nature, then, for the land, surpassed the limits of the earth to reach the boundaries of the ocean.

Once at the sea shore I tried to find
What was working in my mind
Watching the distance devouring time
And a sun spit still on the sea swooning
Twilight wilting hue
Shrinking at the horizon swelling behind
And I stood
Gazing at the passing day shutting-lid shuttling eye.

Often, by contemplating the sea, the poet, Jawdat Haydar, as in these lines from his "Untitled" poem, contemplates his very self… Calm yet enraged, inviting yet repelling, immortal, in its circle of life, yet lethal in the fatalities it prompts... such is the sea; a fusion of discrepant paradoxes that can only remind one of another paradoxical being, man. Throughout the centuries, artists and poets have been drawn to the deep with all its mysteries and motion. Their contemplation of its shattering waves, its endless shores, and its turbulent foam has brought back memories, aroused deep philosophical thoughts, and questioned the very process of life. "I must go down to the seas again" passionately declares John Masefield in a verse that reflects the human yearning for the ocean, that special relationship between "man and the sea". Long before Masefield, in the eighth century, an anonymous poem entitled "The Seafarer" describes, along with the hardships of a life at sea, the fascination of the sea;

This tale is true, and mine. It tells
How the sea took me, swept me back
And forth in sorrow and fear and pain,
Showed me suffering in a hundred ships,
In a thousand ports, and in me.

In the nineteenth century, two other great literary figures had been contemplating the sea, and it is the poetry of these undisputed pillars that my reading of Jawdat Haydar's poems "A Mediterranean Memory" and "Wash, Wash, Wash" and has brought to mind. Haydar's poems on the sea have interesting similarities with the poetry of Byron and Tennyson; similarities that convinced me even more of Haydar's international literary status. Yet, probing these same similarities has made me perceive a number of differences; differences that further assured my heart and thoughts that Haydar is something else, beyond similitude.

What Lord George Byron and Jawdat Haydar shared goes beyond the writing of accomplished poetry. With the same passion that Lord Byron, the "lord of verse",

worshipped the sea, Jawdat Haydar adored it. Reading Jawdat Haydar's "A Mediterranean Memory" reminded me of Byron's pantheistic feelings and great love for the ocean as in his "Apostrophe to the Ocean". The two poems, although written about a century and a half apart, have many parallelisms. To start with, the opening verses of Haydar's poem, "Gallop, gallop thy white horses, O Sea," are very close to Byron's "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue ocean, roll." Both poets' address to the deep blue is an apostrophe, an order; roll, Byron, and gallop, Haydar. Moreover, stylistically speaking, that same order is repeated twice in the verse. Emphasizing the immortality of the sea, the two poets are more than conscious of the impermanence of man. The sea represents the "image of eternity" to the English poet, "a memory of past glory upon sand/ [that] whilst (…) ever beat, (…), against the strand" to the Lebanese one. The decline and feebleness of man and civilization is present in the two poems. Haydar alludes to Rome's and Carthage's failed attempts to conquer the Mediterranean, and Byron also alludes to these attempts in Stanza five of his "Apostrophe". In a sad philosophical tone, Haydar speaks of the fall of nations, of their mortality that fails to resist time, as contrasted with the eternal ocean. Byron similarly refers to those empires that are wasted around the ocean, while the ocean itself remains "unchangeable", untouched by time. "Knights, princes, countless kings" according to Haydar may take pride in their "battle fame", yet they are insignificant when compared to the sea. Byron in "Apostrophe to the Ocean" insinuates the defeat of these before the sea; "man", in stanza two, "marks the earth with ruin", but his control "stops with the shore". The sea, then, according to Lord Byron and Jawdat Haydar, defeats both nations and monarchs.

Although "A Mediterranean Memory" and "Apostrophe to the Ocean" seem to have many common aspects, they are relatively different. At a first glance, Haydar's poem seems to be simply a re-echoing of Byron's verses. But by looking deeper into "A Mediterranean Memory", one discovers that it is a complement of "Apostrophe to the Ocean"… The oriental, exotic, sensual and spicy East, resembling a seductive woman, has always had a way to lure "men" of the West. Whether they were monarchs, like Alexander, or painters, like Dinet, or writers, like Lamartine, Western men have been attracted to the East. Even Lord Byron, the ultimate literary symbol of European beauty, charm and style in the nineteenth century, has himself been fascinated by the East which he included in a number of his works; The Bride of Abydos, The Giaour, The Corsair… With extreme brilliance, Jawdat Haydar has brought the East Byron loved so much into his "Oriental" version of Byron's "Apostrophe to the Ocean". A number of images in "A Mediterranean Memory" are clear references to the East; mirage, desert, caravans, and sand… The sand in Haydar's poem no longer stands merely for the seashore sand; it gains a new dimension and becomes the hot Sahara sand. By skilfully "rewriting" Lord Byron's verses, Jawdat Haydar has added a new meaning, a new approach, and a new challenge to the poetry of the nineteenth century writer, a poet, who, according to Haydar himself, has built "isles of thought (…) and boulder rhymes out of the sea."

Even though the two poems mutually agree upon man's triviality before the ocean, the speaker's tone and outlook towards humanity differs considerably in each. The speaker of Byron's "Apostrophe" is none other than Childe Harold, the typical Byronic hero. Of the major characteristics of the Byronic hero is his feeling superior to the common run of

humanity and consequently his contempt for man. “There is a rapture on the lonely shore/ There is society where none intrudes” says Childe Harold. In Stanza three of “Apostrophe to the Ocean”, man is looked upon as a disease; the sea “shakes him” away and sends him “shivering (…) and howling to his gods.” Haydar’s poetry, however, shows no apparent contempt for mankind. The Lebanese poet’s attitude towards man is a more humane one, although the poet is aware of the impotence of the humankind before nature. Nowhere in his poem, does the speaker of Jawdat Haydar’s verses display disgust for the individual.

Another difference between “A Mediterranean Memory” and “Apostrophe to the Ocean” arouses wonder and insight. Nations and leaders, both Byron and Haydar observe, are defeated by the sea. However, Jawdat Haydar, with his profound apprehension of existence, goes further to include the poets and philosophers among those vanquished by the ocean. “Bards” he states and “wise men” will both decline, while the ocean remains immortal. Perhaps Jawdat Haydar, in referring to the decline of those, had in mind his own self; the sea reminds him of his own mortality. “A Mediterranean Memory”, by reflecting Haydar’s awareness of his own transience, stands apart from Byron’s “Apostrophe to the Ocean”. While Byron’s verses are basically a praise of the ocean and an emphasis on the insignificance of man, Haydar’s poem asserts, in more sombre philosophical tones, the inevitable collapse, the mortality of the poet himself. In the fourth stanza of the poem, and in powerfully moving verses, Haydar ponders on the extreme brevity of life and its being a subject to destiny, despair, and shame. Hence the sea engages Jawdat Haydar’s thoughts and, in a way, stirs them, agitates them like its waves on a raging stormy day. And thus, Jawdat Haydar’s contemplation of the ocean becomes that of life, of his life. The way with which Haydar beholds the ocean recalls Baudelaire’s “Man and the Sea”;

> Free man, you shall forever cherish the vast sea,
> The sea, that image where you contemplate your soul
> As everlastingly its mighty waves unroll.
> Your mind a yawning gulf seasoned as bitterly.
>
> You love to plunge into your image to the core,
> Embracing it with eyes and arms; your very heart
> Sometimes finds a distraction from its urgent smart
> In the wild sea's untamable and plaintive roar.

With Baudelaire, the sea becomes the image in which Man contemplates his own soul. Personally, I have lately thought of that special image of Man’s soul, of Jawdat Haydar’s soul, contained within the sea as a painting- Theodore Gudin’s “Tempest on the Coasts of Belle-Ile”, (Quimper Museum). Gudin’s painting portrays the sea on a violent tempestuous day. The more I looked into the painting, the more I saw the resemblance of the sea with Jawdat Haydar. Like the ocean, Haydar is vast; he is multi-dimensional, rich, very rich with experiences, changing, and, in a way, everlasting, through his poetry. Like Gudin’s sea, our poet’s life has been agitated by innumerable gales. The great poet has suffered much and lost many people he loved. A close look, however, at Gudin’s work, reveals that the painting is not utterly gloomy. Despite the storm, a place is left for hope;

a golden sun breaks the greyness of the sky, predicting the sure end of the storm. Shaken by many tempests, Jawdat Haydar's life was painful, true. But despite the bitterness, a hopeful sun has always found its way back into the heart of the poet to erase the anguish. And sometimes, does not hope, despite all despair, become the quality of a great man?

"Wash, Wash, Wash" is the closer of Haydar's two poems on the sea to my heart. Its personal note and sad overtones touch me in a way that makes me smile with understanding at that great elderly man standing before the sea, looking back into his own life, his own pains, and his dying hopes. The ocean invokes Haydar's lost hopes, it reminds him of his old age, and brings back memories. The poet's "remembrance of things past" is a profoundly melancholic one, and the poet's wish to become a child is surely a hopeless one. A most noteworthy element of "Wash, Wash, Wash" is its resemblance to another poem written by a distinguished figure of the Victorian Age, Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break".

Drawing a comparison between Jawdat Haydar's "Wash, Wash, Wash" and Alfred Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break" might reveal many likenesses between the two poems. "Wash, Wash, Wash", even in its title, reiterates Tennyson's "Break, Break, Break". Both poets address the sea, "O Sea!" as in the second verse, with almost similar appeals; the English poet requests it "breaks" while the Lebanese wishes it "washes". Furthermore, the first and last stanzas of the two poems resemble one another to a considerable level. The sea, in the English poem, invocates numerous images; the fisherman's boy, the sailor lad, and the ships… In the Lebanese poem, the images are not less significant; the marks of old age, wrinkles, children at play… Both speakers yearn to go back in time but cannot; a failure that is expressed in a sorrowful tone. "But the tender grace of a day that is dead/ Will never come back to me" regretfully asserts Tennyson. "I would a day back to live again/ A child with children at play" sadly says Jawdat Haydar. The sea may

"wash, wash, wash" as much as it wants, but the speaker's dead hopes will never come back. This loss of hope in Haydar's poetry can be spotted in another poem, "A Lost Hope" where the poet wonders "Who are we, where are we going ahead/ Speeding, (…)/ Without hope, without choice, nothing at all." In as much as the first stanzas in each poem are similar, the last stanzas are also parallel whether in their moving, forlorn tone, or in their structure. The sea is eternal, continuous in its cycle and motion, and yet, by contemplating it, each of Haydar and Tennyson find that it has deprived them of something.

As a first impression, and after comparing Jawdat Haydar's poems to those of Byron and Tennyson, one might judge Haydar's poetry to be derivative. However, such a judgment, despite its seeming truthful, is enormously erroneous. Imitation, as a matter of fact, is often the fundamental step to innovation. Great art, and in some cases, great knowledge, is often created by and founded on imitation, that is learning from everything remarkable that has been produced in the past. After all, is not the whole of the distinguished European civilization during the Renaissance based on the thoughts and discoveries of those Arab scholars, who conceived revolutionary theories, while Europe-then was submerged in the passive slumber of its Dark Ages? Does not Byron's Romantic Manfred draw on Marlowe's Doctor Faustus? Does not much of Gibran's poetry, the poet himself much admired by Haydar, draw on that of Blake?

Modernist critic and poet, T. S. Eliot, who in the early beginnings of the last century was concerned with the emptiness that marked his epoch, had his own say about the importance of influence. In one of his major essays, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Eliot emphasizes the eminent role tradition plays in the writing of poetry. When evaluating a work, Eliot declares, we are often drawn to acclaim the aspects in a poet's work in which he least resembles others; "we dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors (…); we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed." However, T. S. Eliot deems such an approach to poetry wrongful, for "not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work, may be those in which the dead poets his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." Hence, if the poems Jawdat Haydar has written, resemble, in some aspects, those of the Romantic Byron or the Victorian Tennyson, these poems should not be depreciated hastily, but rather appreciated for that same reason. In "Tradition and the Individual Poet", Eliot seems conscious that not all imitation of tradition is constructive. Tradition "should positively be discouraged" if it becomes a mere and "blind" "adherence to the successes" of the generation before. The most significant statement of his essay is Eliot's asserting that "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone." Indeed, each and every great man is a "link" of that chain leading to the progress and evolution of humanity and civilization. What is really called for in a work of art is "conformity between the old and the new." "The past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past" says Eliot.

Examining Jawdat Haydar's poetry in the context of Eliot's essay reveals this perfect balance between tradition and novelty. The Lebanese poet 's allusion to poetry written centuries before him on another continent is an added appeal to his work. Haydar's

poems become a delightful challenge and gain a new dimension. Readers are challenged to grasp the full significance of the combination between old and new. The result is definitely artistic and enriching. The whole process of writing a poem similar to those Haydar has in print resembles that of renovating a nineteenth century apartment in the sixth Parisian arrondissement. In the process, the old layers of colors are found on the ceiling, along with the original chimney patterns which had been covered with thick layers of dust, and the century-old parquet long veiled under an ugly layer of green fitted carpet… These components, rediscovered, and still possessing their ancient charm, are preserved along with the old wooden doors and their bronze doorknobs, the mirrors which at the time had been blended with mercury and the wavy glass of the windows… And yet, the house has to be personalized, in a way, and rendered more suitable for a modern living in a metropolitan city. An electric stove and a microwave may be added to the kitchen, which itself used to be a mere attic before the renovation of the house; a flat plasma screen television now imposes itself on the furniture of a Louis XIV living room… In brief, the house has now become a home that perfectly combines the old and modern for aesthetic and practical purposes, just like Jawdat Haydar's poems. Hence, the poet's allusions to past literature are neither passive nor merely imitative ones. They are rather clever references that only add to the fortification of his poetry.

Haydar is often referred to as "The Shakespeare of the Arabs". Jawdat Haydar and William Shakespeare had in common more than a talent and shrewdness for poetry. As a dramatist, Shakespeare wrote the most memorable plays of all time, and yet, rarely did he ever originally invent the initial plot of any. Most of Shakespeare's plays were based on previously existing stories, but Shakespeare's genius consisted of manipulating these stories, legends, and tales, adding to them a bit of his own creativity and eloquence, a bit of his own self, to perfect them. Had these stories not been "exploited" by Shakespeare, time would have forgotten them. Apart from adding ingenuity and creativity to the previous works, writers like Jawdat Haydar and William Shakespeare add a sense of immortality. To conceive Jawdat Haydar's poetry as a mere derivation of ancient verses is an underestimation not only of the poet, but also of our own selves. The true value, the strength of poetry sometimes lies in its polishing and recreating what already was there. Like the ocean, the Lebanese poet's verses were a receptacle for different fountains and currents of thought and poetry.

Not very long ago, at the Orangerie Museum, I have watched a documentary explaining Matisse's and Picasso's reciprocal influence on each other's art and life. Contemporaries, the two artistic giants belonged to different schools; Cubism, Picasso, and Fauvism, Matisse. Nonetheless, their lives, their children, and their mistresses were so interdependent that some of Picasso's work, his odalisques for instance, could be seen as a parody of Matisse's. Whether a poet or an artist wants to or not, he shall be inspired, motivated even, by someone else's work. After all, genius sometimes consists of cleverly manipulating or maneuvering another's work(s) to produce a creative piece, meaningful by itself. In his book, The Anxiety of Influence: a Theory of Poetry, Harold Bloom maintains that a poet is often tempted to produce a poem similar to a successful one written by his predecessors. Such a poem would eventually be deemed as frail, lacking originality and creativity. Therefore, a poet, and in order to overcome the "anxiety"

caused by the influence of the literary canon, often does a deliberate "misreading" of ancient brilliant works. For instance, Byron's Manfred is thought by many to be a planned misreading of Shakespeare's Hamlet where the former expresses what Shakespeare could not say through his Hamlet. A number of Haydar's poems, for instance, re-echo famous Romantic or Victorian verses. Personally, I am of those who believe that Haydar is far from being an "anxious" poet. While literary figures in the past depended upon their pen for financial revenues, Haydar, as a multi-dimensional man, did not write poetry for money, nor did he restrict himself to the one field of poetry. The Lebanese poet held a number of jobs in many different domains: education, business, politics… The head of the Universal College at Aley became an advisor in a petroleum company, the manager of a car sales company, and, later, the employer in a plastics industry… The jobs Jawdat Haydar was involved in, apart from their being dissimilar, were also miles away from poetry, proving, yet again, the diversity and eminence of the poet. As a result, his poems are relaxed, lacking that anxiety which usually haunts writers. Like the Mediterranean on a summer day, Haydar's poems invite us, embrace us, and give us a sense of relief from the stifling reality.

I remember once taking a walk to the Pere Lachaise Cemetery in Paris to find myself before the tomb of Jim Morrison. The guide was telling about the singer- a genius whose life integrated both success and excess. One of her most memorable and moving moments of speech was her narrating about finding a youth asleep beside Morrison's tomb. After waking him up, she had a conversation with him. The guide had asked the boy about the reasons that drive young men and women like him to drugs, alcohol, violence… "They do not teach us to love", he replied, "so we revolt." Hundreds of thousands of adolescents around the globe lack something to look up to, an ideal to follow, a dream to pursue, and in order to fill the emptiness caused by that lack, they consume illegal substances and kill the spirit within them…

Had that same youth been introduced to the poetry of Jawdat Haydar, he might have found in it something to love, an initiative to follow… Personally, one of the many things that the poetry of Jawdat Haydar has given me is a reinforcement of my ideals. His poems have somehow solidified my belief in Man, in nature, in beauty, in God and life. Despite his immense pain and sufferings, the poet still believed in Man, and if somebody like Jawdat Haydar, still believed in humanity, why should I not believe in it?... Sensible to beauty, he was genuinely touched by it;

> The world is beautiful, with the rose, the grass,
> The plum in flower, the bush, and the briar,
> The plains, the spring, the winter, the life we pass
> With our children, (…)

Furthermore, the Lebanese poet retained his belief in God. To believe in Him, despite all and everything, even despite one's own greatness, is greatness by itself.

> O God! Knock into our heads to walk straight
> To love the whole world and forget our hate

To believe in Man, nature, beauty, and God proves that Jawdat Haydar believed in life. Life is often an attribute of youth; it is to be squandered, in a way, enjoyed, drunk to the lees and fulfilled. Because he was the poet of life, this centennial Man immersed in his sorrows, hopes, regrets, contemplations, and understandings becomes the poet of youth. Wide like the sea, Haydar could not restrict himself to a particular shore, to a certain category of individuals; he is for all, but above all the youth, because of an immense capacity in them to love and to make a difference.

The disappearance of a poet, an intellectual, or a man of culture is not really an end; it is rather a beginning, a re-reading of the treasure he has bequeathed humanity. The fall of the curtains does not imply the ending of the play; it rather indicates a subtle change of setting for a new scene. The mistral is hushed, true, but a soothing and delicate melody can be heard from afar. Because he was a man, Jawdat Haydar resembled us; because he was a great man and a man of experience, he saw beyond us; because he was poet and an intellectual, he taught us; but because he was all those, he will be loved, he will be remembered, and he will be regenerated. No, Jawdat Haydar will not simply be regenerated; the centenary poet will also be rejuvenated by the youth he has understood perfectly. In each and every young man and woman resides the spirit of that boy once found asleep upon Morrison's tomb, a spirit torn between the realm of the grand, the beautiful, the true, and that of the limited, the threatening, and the corrupt. Because there exists, in the poetry of Jawdat Haydar, a rare magic and magnetism, it becomes a guide for adolescents, teaching them to love, telling them about life, and gently awakening them to the realities around them. And youth resembles that sailor, crossing the sea of life towards an unknown horizon. The sailor knows that along his voyage, he will face innumerable gales; he will sometimes be lonely; and he will even cry of hunger and cold. Yet, in his moments of weakness, he looks at the sky and smiles. Up there he perceives an albatross and realizes he is not alone; the albatross sees beyond him; the bird knows the sea; it knows life. Reassured, the sailor resumes his journey; a journey along which he might love the stars above, the stars below, an undiscovered seashore; it does not matter, as long as he loves…

"That's the film of life, all living will die
And the ink will hence be read fame or shame."
- Jawdat Haydar, "Bluff No More"

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