The Rubái'yát of Programmer Khayyám

Awake! For Morning's fickle Hand doth load
Updated Software in the daylight Mode.
    Return from sluggish Subroutine of Night:
DIM the Array, but brilliant the Code!

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
The Mainframe Room, and heard great Argument;
    But evermore it seemed I must emerge
By that same Interface wherein I went.

Ah, but my Computations, people say,
Process the Text to clearer Meaning? Nay,
    Though Man may seek the Symbols to construe,
The Greater Editor will have his way.

The User programs while the Disk-Drives whisk;
Taps the mad Keyboard of a Mind at risk.
    The work of Years comes suddenly to Naught
As random Noise corrupts the floppy Disk.

Some for the Glories of this World, and some
Sigh for a Pointer to the World To Come.
    Ah, seize the Output, let the Record go,
Nor heed the Rumble of magnetic Drum!

A User-Manual 'neath a labelled Tree,
A pint of Beer, a Ploughman's Lunch and Thee!
    What care I then for Megabytes?
Thy tiniest Bits yield Megabytes for me.

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

But wait! say ye: The Console's Cursor Keys
Can Backspace, Rubout, Edit as we please?
    Not so! These merely tidy the Display:
Still the grim Input's in the Memories.

Some peek the ROM of Time's predestined Flight;
Some seek within Life's RAM new Lines to write.
    In vain each strives t'assemble faultless Code,
For still Death's Digits poke the final Byte.

Ian Stewart and Robin Jones

Early 1980s

Amended by Reuben Thomas summer 1993 and 25th July 2000