

Rubā'īyāt
of
Ḥakim 'Umar Khayyām

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Selected Quatrains of Khayyām Translated into
Simple English with Spiritual Interpretation

Edited and Translated by

Bahman Solati



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*Rubā 'īyāt of Ḥakīm 'Umar Khayyām:
Selected Quatrains of Khayyām Translated into Simple English
with Spiritual Interpretation*

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لین قافلہ عمر عجب می گذرد
دریاب دمی که با طرب می گذرد
ساقی غم فردای حریفان چه خوری
پیش آرییاله را که شب می گذرد

The caravan of life shall always pass
Beware what is fresh as sweet young grass

Let's not worry about what tomorrow will amass
Fill my cup again, this night will pass, alas.



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Introduction

After years of research into and study of 'Umar Khayyām's poems and philosophy, I decided to translate some selected quatrains into simple English. My goal is to make these poems easily understandable to readers unfamiliar with the poetry and literature of Persia.

It is often said, quite appropriately, that Khayyām was the poet of fate. It would be a mistake, however, to call him a fatalist, at least according to our common understanding of this word. Scholars seeking to categorize his *Rubā 'īyāt* can themselves be grouped into two major schools of thought. The first claims that he was highly influenced by Islamic mysticism, particularly Sufism, and that his references to wine and lovers are allegorical representations of mystical wine and divine love. A second school of thought rejects this view, claiming that Khayyām's references to wine and lovers are very literal and sensual. Where should we stand in this debate? Khayyām gives us a clue in the following quatrain:

Some are lost in deep thought seeking the right faith,
Some are lost, wandering in awe and disbelief,

I fear a hidden voice, coming from a lurking place:
"Awake, wanderers"! Neither this nor that is the right path.

قومی متحیرند در شک و یقین
کای بی خبران راه نه آنست و نه این

قومی متفکرند اندر ره دین
میتروسم از آنکه بانگ آید ز کمین

In my opinion, both the above schools of thought only half-understand Khayyām's wisdom and turn and twist his words to suit their beliefs. Khayyām was an advisor to ministers and kings. He was a mathematical genius, presenting solutions to problems centuries ahead of his time. The different sources of reference ascribe to 'Umar Khayyām somewhere between two hundred and six hundred quatrains. Some are widely accepted as attributable to him, while others seem to be pieced-together corruptions of his poetry.

The *Rubā 'īyāt*'s status as a masterpiece of world literature is supported by its translation into most of the world's major languages. The most famous English translation of the *Rubā 'īyāt* was undertaken in 1895 by Edward J. FitzGerald. It appears that FitzGerald frequently combined several quatrains into one, and sometimes it is difficult to trace the original and juxtapose it to the translation. However, FitzGerald clearly sought to adhere to the spirit of the original poetry. The Persian verses presented in this edition are almost universally believed to be of Khayyām's composition. They do not include all of the *Rubā 'īyāt*. For the benefit of the non-Persian-speaking reader, I have included two translations. The first is a literal translation that aims to convey the wording of the original poetry, leaving it to the reader to draw his or her own conclusions. The second is a "meaning" translation whose intent is to convey the spirit of the poetry as I understand it. This freer translation usually follows the quatrain form, but not always.

The Life and Times of Khayyām

During his life in eleventh- and twelfth-century Persia, Ghiyath al-Din Abu'l Faṭḥ 'Umar ibn Ibrāhīm al-Khayyāmī, otherwise known as 'Umar Khayyām, was not as renowned a poet as he has become in the past hundred years, especially outside Iran. Unlike the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Persian poets 'Urfī, Ṣā'ib, and Shukat, who were admired during their lifetimes in India and Turkey, Khayyām's greatest fame as a poet followed his death by many centuries. The publication of Edward FitzGerald's masterly summarized translations in 1895 gradually awakened an adoring, even snobbish enthusiasm in the West, especially in the English-speaking countries. This attitude long remained inexplicable to the Persians. In Europe and North America Khayyām has been the most celebrated of oriental poets and, rightly or wrongly, has left in the shadows other masters such as Ḥāfīz, whose praise was sung by Goethe; Firdawsī and Niẓāmī, who gained recognition at home and abroad for their jubilee celebrations; and Sa'dī, who was already long known in the West.¹

It is through his cult in the West that Khayyām has gained or recovered his status as a poet in Persia. This is not to say that Khayyām was not revered in Persia during his life, but his fame was for his scholarship and mathematical achievement rather than for his poetry. Although his renown as a scholar means that we know a bit more about his life than we do about those of other classical poets, this still amounts to only a few details. 'Umar Khayyām was born at the earliest in 412/1021–22 in Nayshābūr and died most likely in the same city in 1048–1131. Assuming that the former date is correctly estimated, there may be some truth to the legendary friendship between the Saljuq minister Niẓām al-Mulk, the feared militant missionary Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, and 'Umar Khayyām, who are said to have avowed in their youth to stand by each other no matter what, although it seems more likely that Ismā'īlī tendencies account for the tale. Khayyām's comprehensive studies and education in Nayshābūr gave him extensive knowledge in all branches of learning, the humanities as well as the natural sciences.² We even know the names of some of his teachers in astronomy and geometry. His given name would seem to indicate that he was Sunni, since for Shia Islam "Umar was an infidel and an enemy of the first Imam "Alī." Khayyām was of the Shafī'ī school of thought, however, and as a

¹ Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 189–91.

² Ibid., 190. Cf. Garrard, *A Book of Verse*.

philosopher followed the same path as Avicenna, which bore a powerful similarity to the Ismā'īlī branch of Shi'ism and to Sufism.³

From the widely-known theologian and grammarian Zamakhshari (d. 538/1143–4)—to whom we owe the earliest data as the result of a personal meeting between the two men—we learn that Khayyām was familiar with the work of the Arab sceptic Abu'l 'Alā' al-Ma'ari (d. 449/1057).⁴

A significant turning point in Khayyām's life came in 467/1074, when he was selected by Sultan Malik-Shah and his minister (*vazīr*) Nizām al-Mulk to lead a council of scholars charged with improving the existing calendar. The success of this work in 1079 made Khayyām famous throughout the enormous empire and earned him the lasting admiration of his monarch.

In 485/1095 Nizām al-Mulk was assassinated by an Ismā'īlī activist belonging to the faction of Hasan-i Šabbāḥ (the Assassin), and Malik-Shah died almost immediately afterward. 'Umar Khayyām's work at the court, where he no longer enjoyed much consideration and where there was little money for research, stopped for some time. Slander by his rivals and later religious disputes in Nayshābūr compelled Khayyām to break off his academic activities. As much out of fear of the harm that his continued presence might bring to his friends as out of piety, he set out on a pilgrimage to the holy places of the Prophet. On his return to Nayshābūr he resumed his teaching and his discussions of scientific problems with his peers, among them Muhammad Ghazālī, who was widely respected in the court outside Nayshābūr for his gift of predicting the future.⁸

Khayyām's erudition also extended to physical sciences such as medicine and chemistry. He was an admired philosopher and teacher. The *Rubā 'īyāt* proves his profound perception, a vision that we still have difficulty comprehending. A man who achieved so much in his life is certainly not a mystical fatalist, a believer that "whatever will be will be." To the contrary, Khayyām saw the foolishness in being mesmerized by mysticism, whose impressive visions of reality cannot, so long as they remain visions, be truth or reality itself. Furthermore, a man who changed the world of his time is clearly not one who would say, "Since we are all going to die, let us concern ourselves with sensual pleasures only." He understood that, if momentary mystical passion offer mere visions, sensual

³ *Tūṭīnāma*.

⁴ Mirza, "Mutahhari-i Kara"; Shervani, "Qasa'id-i Mutahhar-i Kara." Cf. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 190.

pleasures are also only representations of a deeper joy and not in themselves the truth either.

Anyone who can clearly pose the question of mortality and the temporality of our existence has obviously struggled deeply with the human facts of life and death. Khayyām understood the meaning of not being in control of these facts, and he found the limits of our freedom. He understood what was important in life and through his life, his teaching, and his *Rubā 'īyāt* conveyed that meaning to us, in somewhat cryptic form but nevertheless complete and intact. Khayyām understood that it is our fate, our destiny, something beyond our control, to be born into this world. He understood that our mortal bodies come from dust and clay, and he comprehended the fantasy of worrying about the future, as well as the neurosis of living in our past. He saw that all we have is this ever-slipping moment, this timeless now. He also perceived that in life what is important is the deeper joy and love for which we have infinite yearning, as well as the capacity to both receive and give. His *Rubā 'īyāt* forces us to ask ultimate existential questions and leads us down a path that, unless we lose ourselves along the way, must inevitably reach the same answer: that in life all that matters is love and joy; all else is fantasy and fallacy.

Illustrated English Translations of the *Rubā 'īyāt*

The stimulus to illustrate Khayyām's *Rubā 'īyāt* originally came from outside Persia, in response to translations in the West.⁵ Foremost among these translations was of course the one by Edward FitzGerald, which inspired a legion of artists who created what amounts to a subcurrent of art nouveau and art deco. Khayyām's quatrains, which largely responded to Khayyāmian's school of thought, are full of imaginary "bridges," a term frequently employed in Persian to refer to poetic images of the blessings that God has provided to humankind. Many illustrators and painters have thus created illustrations that match Khayyām's poetic language and setting. In this chapter I will discuss some of the most famous illustrations used in translations of the *Rubā 'īyāt* produced by FitzGerald and later writers.

The history of *Rubā 'īyāt* illustration

Abundant doubt surrounds the authorship of the couplets credited to 'Umar Khayyām. This uncertainty may partly explain why early manuscripts of the poem were seldom if ever complemented with artwork, in contrast to the many miniatures displayed in manuscripts of Firdawsī's *Shāh-nāma* or Nizāmī's *Khamsa*. The earliest known illustrated version of the *Rubā 'īyāt* dates to around 1500 and was published in a facsimile edition by the Indian scholar Mafuz ul-Haq in 1939.⁶ This manuscript consists of numerous miniature images, including at least one attributed to the fifteenth-century painter Behzād.⁷ Most other early manuscripts including all or part of the *Rubā 'īyāt* have modest (if lovely) decoration. These include the famous Ouseley manuscript in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, dated to 1460–61, which Edward FitzGerald used as one of the foundations for his first edition of the *Rubā 'īyāt* in English in 1859.⁸

The earliest translations of the *Rubā 'īyāt* published in the West do not include illustrations. Nor do the first three editions of FitzGerald's version. FitzGerald's fourth edition, published in 1879, reproduced a Persian

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mahfuz-ul-Haq, *The Rubā 'īyāt of 'Umar-i-Khayyām*, 1–17.

⁷ See appendix

⁸ Arberry, *The Romance of the Rubaiyat*, 41–42.

drawing, but the picture refers to his translation of Jāmī's *Salāmān o Absāl*, which was presented in the same volume. The first completely illustrated version of the *Rubā 'īyāt* in the West was published in Boston in 1884 by Houghton Mifflin. Based on FitzGerald's third edition, it featured custom illustrations by the American artist Elihu Vedder⁹ and was reprinted several times. From the 1870s onward, a steady stream of new unillustrated editions of the *Rubā 'īyāt* appeared, including other translations into English, as well as into French, German, and other languages. It was not until 1898 that the publication of illustrated editions began in earnest. Seven dissimilar illustrated editions of FitzGerald's *Rubā 'īyāt* were published in that year by six new artists; the work by two of them, Gilbert James and Edmund Garrett,¹⁰ was included in more than one new version.¹¹ From then on, the trickle of illustrated editions became a flood, reaching a peak in 1909–10; 1909 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of FitzGerald's first edition and the centennial of his birth.

Many of these new illustrated *Rubā 'īyāts* were printed in the United States and in the United Kingdom. The notable progress in interest reveals both the charm of the verses themselves and the viewpoint characterized in them (as understood by Edward FitzGerald) as well as the parallel growth in printing technology that allowed book illustrations to be presented in a less costly and more striking form. Furthermore, with increasing wealth in the upper strata of American and British society, the book market was growing, and the illustrated *Rubā 'īyāt* made outstanding material for eye-catching gift books, special Christmas editions, and calendars.¹²

The year 1909 brought more than 100 new illustrated or ornamented editions of FitzGerald's *Rubā 'īyāt*, including the work of over 50 different artists. Many of the latter, such as Edmund Dulac, René Bull, Robert Anning Bell, and Jessie King, were leading figures in the art nouveau movement. Dulac's work adorned one of the 15 new illustrated editions that appeared in 1909 alone. Between then and today few years have passed without either the publication of a new illustrated edition of the *Rubā 'īyāt* or the reprint of an existing version.¹³ The 2001 edition illustrated by Andrew Peno is an example of a recent work.

Since the 1920s the publication of illustrated versions of the *Rubā 'īyāt* by translators other than FitzGerald has increased. Interest in the *Rubā 'īyāt*

⁹ Martin and Mason, "Khayyam, Omar x."

¹⁰ See appendix

¹¹ Martin and Mason, *The Art of Omar Khayyam*, 1–14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8–10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

has spread around the world, with versions in over 70 languages.¹⁴ Although these versions have been illustrated less often than FitzGerald's was, quite a number do include illustrations, some reprinting work that the artists initially produced to accompany FitzGerald's translation; work by Edmund Dulac, Gilbert James, and Willy Pogány has been used in this way. In Western countries, illustrations by new artists are mostly apparent in versions from France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Spanish-speaking countries. Many new editions of Khayyām's *Rubā 'īyāt* have appeared in Iran, in both the pre- and postrevolutionary eras. These typically include the original Persian *Rubā 'īyāt* alongside translations in numerous other languages, frequently extravagantly illustrated by contemporary Iranian artists.¹⁵

The artists and their work

Over the 120 years since 1884, at least 220 different artists worldwide have illustrated or decorated editions of Khayyām's verses. As might be expected, the variety of types and technique of illustration is enormous, reflecting the general trends in artistic styles and forms in the period. Traditional Victorian engravings, rich art nouveau designs, colorful art deco paintings, line drawings and more modern abstract approaches are all well represented, in addition to the traditions of Persian miniatures and many personal idiosyncrasies.¹⁶

The approach to illustrating the poems has also varied. Some artists endeavored, or were appointed, to illustrate or "illuminate" particular verses, while others sought to depict the overall theme or feel of the poem. Since, in most cases outside Iran, the artists were working with a translation, it is not surprising that some of the illustrations offered a rigorously Western understanding. This is the case, for example, of the early editions by Elihu Vedder.¹⁷ Many artists displayed what can be called an "orientalist" interpretation, with only a few showing more

¹⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., 25–27.

¹⁶ Martin and Mason, "Khayyām, Omar x."

¹⁷ See appendix

understanding of traditional Persian imagery.¹⁸ A small number of the artists were celebrated in arts beyond illustration. The foremost among these is Sir Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956), whose artistic production also included paintings, frescoes, and the decoration of furniture and porcelain ware.¹⁹ His two sets of illustrations for the *Rubā 'īyāt*, printed in the early years of the twentieth century, were based on small oil paintings, some of which still survive. His blurred style has an orientalist touch. Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98), the Pre-Raphaelite artist, also made illustrations for a single-copy edition of the *Rubā 'īyāt* hand produced by William Morris in 1872.²⁰

Most of the new artists illustrating the *Rubā 'īyāt*, however, were dedicated book illustrators. They include Aubrey Beardsley and Arthur Rackham, both famous as illustrators during the years when the first illustrated editions of the *Rubā 'īyāt* were published. Probably the most important illustrators of FitzGerald's version of the *Rubā 'īyāt* were Vedder, Dulac, James, and Pogány, who created distinctive illustrated editions that continue to be reissued. For example, a new edition with Pogány's paintings appeared in 1999, and Dulac's edition was reprinted in the United States in 1996.²¹

Elihu Vedder (1836–1923) was an established artist in the United States when he was commissioned to create the first portfolio of illustrations for FitzGerald's *Rubā 'īyāt*. He spent nearly a year in Rome working on ideas for his illustrations, and the resulting images have something of a classical feel, although his drawings have been called “some of the earliest examples of Art Nouveau in America.”

Vedder's work contrasts sharply with that of the next most important illustrator, Gilbert James (fl. 1895–1926), whose illustrations for the *Rubā 'īyāt* were first published separately, in black and white, mostly in the journal *The Sketch* between 1896 and 1898. Very little is known about James, who created three different sets of drawings for editions of FitzGerald's *Rubā 'īyāt* in the early twentieth century. He was apparently born in Liverpool, illustrated some editions of fairy tales, and worked for a number of British magazines.²²

¹⁸ Martin and Mason, *The Art of Omar Khayyam*, 14–15.

¹⁹ Horner and Brangwyn, *A Mission to Decorate Life*, 7.

²⁰ Braesel, “William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and ‘The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.’”

²¹ Martin and Mason, *The Art of Omar Khayyam*, 19–21.

²² Houfe, *The Dictionary of 19th Century British Book Illustrators and Caricaturists*, 190.

The life and work of Edmund Dulac (1882–1953) is much better documented. Born and educated in France, he moved to London in 1906 and became a British citizen in 1912. His famous illustrations for the *Rubā 'īyāt* were first published in 1909 (the centennial of FitzGerald's birth), subsequent to his previous work on *The Arabian Nights* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.²³ Dulac's art nouveau, orientalist paintings represent, for many, the golden age of *Rubā 'īyāt* illustration.

The first set of *Rubā 'īyāt* illustrations created by the Hungarian artist Willy Pogány (1882–1955) was published in 1902. He too had somewhat of an orientalist attitude toward the imagery of the *Rubā 'īyāt*, although his work is less decorative in style. Pogány settled in the United States and created illustrations for many books, including two additional and somewhat different editions of the *Rubā 'īyāt*, published in 1930 and 1942, respectively.²⁴

Two other *Rubā 'īyāt* illustrators of particular note are Edmund Sullivan (1869–1933) and Gordon Ross (1873–1946), both of whom took on the challenging task of illustrating every one of the 75 quatrains in the *Rubā 'īyāt* from FitzGerald's first version. Despite their different eras (the editions appeared in 1913 and 1941, respectively), the two sets of black-and-white drawings are remarkably similar and have a quality rather like that of animation. Both were published in softcover editions of the *Rubā 'īyāt*.²⁵

A couple of artists of Indian origin, Mera K. Sett (dates unknown, published 1914) and Abanindro Nath Tagore (1871–1951), were early illustrators of the *Rubā 'īyāt*; Sett's black-and-white work exemplifies the very emblematic way some artists have approached this poem. Prominent art deco illustrators who undertook the *Rubā 'īyāt* in the 1920s included the British artists Anne Fish (1890–1964),²⁶ Doris Palmer (d. 1931), and Ronald Balfour (1896–1941). The mid-twentieth century saw noteworthy influences from John Buckland-Wright (1897–1954), also British, who contributed subtle line illustrations to a well-known version published by the Golden Cockerel Press, and from Arthur Szyk (1894–1951), a celebrated American artist of Polish origin. Innovative illustrations of continental European translations of Khayyām's *Rubā 'īyāt* have frequently been controlled in style and based on line sketches. The work of P. Zenker (dates unknown, published 1924) in France and Endre Szász (1926–2003) in Hungary has been frequently reprinted in those countries. There are also

²³ Ibid., 123–24.

²⁴ Greer, "The Published Illustrations of Willy Pogány."

²⁵ Martin and Mason, "Khayyam, Omar x."

²⁶ See appendix

illustrators of the *Rubāʿīyāt* from as far as South Africa (Hope Beck, dates unknown, published 1950) and Uzbekistan (M. Karpuzas, dates unknown, published 1997).

One of the first modern illustrated editions of the *Rubāʿīyāt* from Iran was published by Ṣādiq Hidāyat in 1934.²⁷ Its illustrations, credited to Darvish, are very traditional in style, whereas the work of artists such as Muḥammad and Akbar Tajwidi (fl. 1950s) and Ḥusayn Behzād (1894–1968), which appears in Iranian editions from the late 1950s onward, is more modern, while nonetheless retaining the layout and some of the images of the Persian miniatures.²⁸ The illustrations of later Iranian artists, such as A. Jamālīpūr (dates unknown, published 1996), Ḥujjat Shakībā (b. 1949), and Maḥmud Farshchiān (b. 1930), are much more colorful and nontraditional.²⁹

The variety of artwork for the *Rubāʿīyāt* is extensive and varies in quality as well as popularity. Some artists have created imagery that appears only marginally relevant to the manuscripts that include them. Other images are not only attractive in themselves but also interpret, and “illuminate,” the stanzas they accompany. Appreciated from the viewpoint of the early twenty-first century, the sustained publication of illustrated versions of this short work for more than 130 years is astonishing testimony to the ability of Khayyām and his interpreters to sustain the interest of publishers and readers in our distracted modern world.

Khayyām’s Impact on Literature and Western Society

Thomas Hyde (1636–1703), was an English orientalist and the first scholar outside Persia to study ʿUmar Khayyām. In his *Historia religionis veterum Persarum eorumque magorum* (1700), he investigated Khayyām’s life and work and translated one quatrain (*rubāʿī*) into Latin. Henry George Keene (1781–1864) published the first translation of a Khayyām quatrain in English, in the famous magazine *Fundgruben des Orients/Mines d’Orient* in 1816.³⁰

²⁷ Hedayat, *Tarānahā-ye Khayyām*.

²⁸ See appendix.

²⁹ See appendix. Martin and Mason, *The Art of Omar Khayyam*, 25–27.

³⁰ Biegstraaten, “Khayyām, Omar.”

Although the founder of the *Fundgruben*, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856), translated a few of Khayyām's poems into German in 1818, and Sir Gore Ouseley (1770–1844) into English in 1846, Khayyām was to remain relatively unknown for some time.³¹

In 1859 the London bookseller Bernard Quaritch published the first edition of *The Rubā 'īyāt of 'Umar Khayyām*. The translator, Edward FitzGerald (1809–83), had anonymously printed 250 copies, of which he kept 40 for his private use.³²

FitzGerald circulated copies among a few friends, but although some advertisements tried to draw attention to the *Rubā 'īyāt*, they remained “amazingly ineffective.”³³ In 1861 the booklets ended up in Quaritch's remainder box, where they were offered for a penny apiece. No copies were sold until Whitley Stokes, a Celtic scholar, bought one in 1861. He came back to purchase additional copies, one of which he gave to Dante Gabriel Rossetti. From Rossetti the poem found its way to Algernon Charles Swinburne and George Meredith, both of whom sang its praises and recommended it to fellow members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, including William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. The latter passed the book to John Ruskin, who in 1863 wrote a letter to the still-unknown FitzGerald declaring that he had never read anything so magnificent to his mind than this poem and requesting more. The Pre-Raphaelites were captivated by the *Rubā 'īyāt*. Swinburne wrote his *Laus Veneris* in the Omarian stanza (1866), and Morris and Burne-Jones wrote out and irradiated a copy on vellum, which was given to Burne-Jones's wife, Georgiana, in 1872. It was also through Burne-Jones that the young Rudyard Kipling discovered the poem.

The poem's rise in fame is described in detail by Carl J. Weber³⁴ and John Arthur Arberry.³⁵ In the 1890s the popularity of FitzGerald's *Rubā 'īyāt* rose to great heights, both in Britain and the United States. In America the poem had been introduced by Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908), the famous intellectual and scholar. When he visited England in 1868, Georgiana Burne-Jones showed him her husband's copy of the *Rubā 'īyāt*. Norton found a copy of the second FitzGerald edition (1868) and brought it to the attention of American friends, including James

³¹ Dole, *Rubā 'īyāt of Omar Khayyām*, 1:ix–xv.

³² Biegstraaten, “Khayyām, Omar.”

³³ Decker, *Rubā 'īyāt of Omar Khayyām*, xxxiii–xxxiv.

³⁴ Weber, *FitzGerald's Rubā 'īyāt*, 17–31.

³⁵ Arberry, *The Romance of the Rubā 'īyāt*, 23–30.

Russell Lowell and Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1869 he published an admiring article in the *North American Review*. The article stimulated the interest of many Americans and attracted the attention of more readers in England. Many people wanted to own a copy of the poem. An unauthorized printing of the 1868 edition appeared in Columbus, Ohio, in 1870, and in 1872 FitzGerald had a third edition printed by Quaritch.³⁶ This became very popular in America. The book's fame was furthered the artist Elihu Vedder, whose edition of the *Rubā 'īyāt*, in an gorgeous cover and embroidered with fifty-six drawings, was acclaimed when it was published in 1884. The exhibition of the original drawings at the Arts Club in Boston drew up to 2,100 visitors a day. The book sold out in six days and was reprinted several times.³⁷ Other editions were reprinted many times as well: "Competing editions cropped up like dandelions all over the literary lawn."³⁸ As John D. Yohannan points out, the adoration of FitzGerald and the epicurean vein that runs through his translation "produced the true agents of the fin de siècle cult of the *Rubā 'īyāt*; namely, the 'Umar Khayyām Clubs of England and America."³⁹

In 1892 admirers of the poem founded the 'Umar Khayyām Club of London. Justin Huntly McCarthy, who had published his own *Rubā 'īyāt* version in 1889, was elected its first president. Related clubs were established in other places but, with the exception of the American club, left little trace. The main activity of the members of the London club was (and still is) gathering twice a year to dine and to honor 'Umar, Fitz (as he is referred to admiringly), and the *Rubā 'īyāt*, in more or less serious and comic sacraments. The club issued two books, in 1910 and 1931, respectively, funded by its members. They featured poems praising Fitz and Omar, pictures of menus, and lists of members and guests. Among these can be found the names of many famous scholars, literary men, and artists, among them Edward Heron-Allen, Edmund Gosse, Andrew Lang, Thomas Hardy, Max Beerbohm, Lawrence Alma Tadema, Arthur Rackham, G. K. Chesterton, Arthur Conan Doyle, Aldous Huxley, and William Butler Yeats.⁴⁰ Membership was limited to men, but beginning in 1910 women were permitted to join distinctive dinners as guests.⁴¹

Eight years after the establishment of the London club the 'Umar Khayyām Club of America was founded. On March 31, 1900, FitzGerald's

³⁶ Biegstraaten, "Khayyām, Omar."

³⁷ Soria, *Elihu Vedder*, 183–86.

³⁸ Weber, *FitzGerald's Rubā 'īyāt*, 30.

³⁹ Yohannan, *Persian Poetry in England and America*, 202.

⁴⁰ Burrage, *Twenty Years of the Omar Khayyām Club of America*, 1, 168–81.

⁴¹ Biegstraaten, "Khayyām, Omar."

translations anniversary, Eben Francis Thompson, Nathan Haskell Dole, and others held the first session of the club in Boston. The club was formed “on the basis of good communion as well as Oriental scholarship, with good partnership as the leading feature.”⁴² Just as in London, members of the club had drawings made for the menu cards of their dinners, often in an elegant art nouveau style. The character of the American club differed from that of the London club. The Americans published their own translations, printed attractive and expensive books, and contributed to conferences with lectures on ‘Umar Khayyām’s theoretical and mathematical work. The club passed into obscurity around 1930, but from its publications, most remarkably *Twenty Years of the ‘Umar Khayyām Club of America* (1921), one can appreciate its many contributions.

In “The Cult of the *Rubā 'īyāt*,” a chapter in his book *Persian Poetry in England and America*, Yohannan gives a sparkling explanation of how the ‘Umar cult advanced in the two countries, and produced an anti-cult to contest it.⁴³ But ‘Umar Khayyām, presented to the public in the form FitzGerald had molded him into, was not only the hero (or antihero) of scholars, men of letters, and artists; for “‘Umar itis” had taken hold of businessmen, schoolgirls, and soldiers as well, especially in the United States.

In Ambrose Potter’s *Bibliography of the Rubā 'īyāt of Omar Khayyām*, published in 1929, we find not only a long list of books and articles pertaining to ‘Umar Khayyām but also an account of him in different arts (music, drama, film, dance) and in advertisements for tobacco, cigarettes, cigars, fountain pens, coffee, chocolate, perfume, toilet soap, pottery, as well as in post cards and crossword puzzles.⁴⁴ ‘Umar Khayyām had become a poet of everyman. Eminent men of letters, like Kipling, Mark Twain, and Arthur Quiller Couch, borrowed FitzGerald’s quatrains in order to turn them into pastiches. After them myriad writers made their own *Rubā 'īyāt*, which took as their subject nearly anything that moved people.⁴⁵ The ‘Umar Khayyām trend began to fade in the 1920s.

Undoubtedly ‘Umar Khayyām had the greatest influence on literature and society in the English-speaking countries. Among the writers deeply influenced by FitzGerald’s Khayyām were T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.⁴⁶ But ‘Umar Khayyām was translated and discussed in other countries as well, especially in France and Germany. In his *Bibliography*, Potter lists

⁴² Burrage, *Twenty Years of the Omar Khayyām Club of America*, 7.

⁴³ Yohannan, *Persian Poetry in England and America*, 199–244.

⁴⁴ Potter, *A Bibliography of the Rubā 'īyāt of Omar Khayyām*, 205.

⁴⁵ Biegestraaten, “Omar with a Smile,” 33.

⁴⁶ D’Ambrosio, *Eliot Possessed*.

114 versions of Khayyām's *Rubā 'īyāt* in twenty-five languages, of which 18 versions are in French and 37 are in German.⁴⁷ And an endless stream of editions and translations followed in the years after 1929.

In France 'Umar was introduced by Franz Woepcke, who published *L'algèbre d 'Omar Alkhayyāmī* in 1851. In 1867 Jean-Baptiste Nicolas published *Les quatrains de Khèyam*, containing 464 quatrains in Persian and French, with extensive comments and notes. Although FitzGerald rejected the Sufi interpretations of Nicolas, the latter's translation was an important source for his 1868 version. Nicolas's work has been reprinted and translated many times. After Nicolas, many scholars and translators published their own French versions of the *Rubā 'īyāt*, among them Charles Grolleau, Franz Toussaint, Claude Anet and Mīrẓā Muhammad, Arthur Guy, A.-G. E'Tessam-Zadeh, and Mahdi Fouladvand.

In his translation, *Rubaiyat von Omar Chajjam*, Henry Nordmeyer references thirty-one translations of the *Rubā 'īyāt* in German from 1881 to 1963.⁴⁸ Among the translators we find such renowned figures as Friedrich Bodenstedt, Graf Adolf von Schack, Friedrich Rosen, Hector Preconi, Hans Bethge, and Christian Herrnholt Rempis. Rempis, a professor at Tübingen University, founded a German version of the English and American 'Umar Khayyām clubs. The club had its own publishing company, Verlag der Deutschen 'Umar Chajjam-Gesellschaft, where Rempis issued his translation *'Umar Chajjam und seine Vierzeiler* in 1935. After the Nuremburg laws of 1935, Jewish members of the club were no longer able to take part in its activities, and the club was liquidated in 1937. In Nazi Germany, Khayyām was out of favor. As Rempis stated in 1960: 'Umar Khayyām's approach to life was not mainly attuned with Nazi dogma. It was only after the end of the war that the reprints and new translations of 'Umar Khayyām found their way to German readers.⁴⁹

Although 'Umar Khayyām's hold on the literary and communal scene declined as the twentieth century progressed, readers remain interested to this day in his life, philosophy, and poetry. Rationalists, symbolic artists, composers, choreographers, and poets all over the world have been moved by his work, generally through FitzGerald's versions.

A new club even surfaced in the Netherlands in 1990: the Nederlands 'Umar Khayyām Genootschap (Dutch 'Umar Khayyām Society). Members gather twice a year and have plenty of activities. So far the club has published four *jaarboeken* (yearbooks) in Dutch, printed by the Avalon

⁴⁷ Potter, *A Bibliography of the Rubā 'īyāt of Omar Khayyām*, 133–58.

⁴⁸ Nordmeyer, *Rubaiyat von Omar Chajjam*, 102–4.

⁴⁹ Gittleman, "The Reception of Edward FitzGerald's *Rubā 'īyāt* of Omar Khayyām in England and Germany," 189–93.

Pers, a private press belonging to one of the members. The club was also responsible for two exhibitions on 'Umar Khayyām, one in The Hague Museum of the Book and the other in the library of Leiden University.⁵⁰

The year 2009 was commemorated in many places as the anniversary of Edward FitzGerald's birth, and the 150th anniversary of his first edition of the *Rubā'īyāt of 'Umar Khayyām*, which played such a significant part in producing and preserving interest in 'Umar Khayyām to this day.

Musical Works Produced Based on the Rubā'īyāt

The continuing admiration for the verses in the *Rubā'īyāt* of 'Umar Khayyām is echoed in a great number of musical works inspired by it. One of the most famous large-scale masterpieces is *Omar Khayyam* (1908–10), for solo singers, chorus, and orchestra, by Sir Granville Bantock (1868–1946). This three-part work presents all the quatrains from the fifth edition by Edward FitzGerald (1809–83). Many other poets have also inspired musical settings: Shakespeare has been a perpetual favorite for composers in the West, and other poets, including many nineteenth-century poets such as Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–92), have been set to music.⁵¹ Nonetheless, given the comparative brevity of the *Rubā'īyāt*, no more than 110 verses in the longest version by FitzGerald, it is remarkable that well over 150 composers have used this work as their source of inspiration.⁵²

The range of music that has been made in response to the *Rubā'īyāt* is considerable. The works comprise contemporary popular music, as well as classical music from the late nineteenth century onward. Most works include both the setting of words from the *Rubā'īyāt*, frequently in English and from one of FitzGerald's versions, and/or a corresponding recitation of the verses. "But there are also film scores, orchestral works and simple piano pieces, as well as jazz suites and pop records."⁵³ While the music mostly originates in the West, mainly in the United Kingdom and the United States, there are also works by a number of musicians from Russia,

⁵⁰ Razavi, *The Wine of Wisdom*, 275–77.

⁵¹ Gooch and Thatcher. *Musical Settings of Early and Mid-Victorian Literature*, 509–629. Cf. Gooch and Thatcher. *Musical Settings of British Romantic Literature*, 43–177. Cf. Martin and Mason, "Khayyam, Omar x."

⁵² Coumans, "Omar Khayyam." Cf. Garrard, *A Book of Verse*, 224–28.

⁵³ Martin and Mason, "Khayyam, Omar x."

Central Asia, and the Middle East, including Iran,⁵⁴ where there is a long, well-known practice of uttering or singing verses from major poets with musical accompaniment.⁵⁵ The *ghazals* of Ḥāfiẓ, Sa 'dī, and Rumi have been constant favorites in this respect. As far as the *Rubā 'īyāt* is concerned, we do not know of recorded performances of music based on it in the early decades of the twentieth century. There is, however, a renowned recording from the 1970s, still available from the Māhūr Institute, of the original Persian text with music by Fereyduṅ Shāhbāziān, recitations by Aḥmad Shāmlū, and singing by Muḥammad Riḍā Shajarian.⁵⁶ Verses from the *Rubā 'īyāt* have also been included, together with works of other major Iranian poets, in *Ascension*, a composition by Kāmbiz Rushan-Ravān, released on CD by Technoor in 2002.⁵⁷

The effect of FitzGerald's interpretation

Western interest in music for the *Rubā 'īyāt* goes back to the late nineteenth century, when FitzGerald's translation (first published in 1859) began to attract many readers and admirers.⁵⁸ The earliest known setting of a selection of these verses, and one that became very popular in the early part of the twentieth century, was by the famous English singer and composer Liza Lehmann (1862–1918). In 1896 she created a song cycle, *In a Persian Garden*, for four soloists and piano, using thirty-one quatrains from FitzGerald's versions of the *Rubā 'īyāt*.⁵⁹ Some of the songs in this work became very well-known, particularly "Ah, Moon of My Delight!," which was sung by the American tenor Mario Lanza (1921–59), among others. The complete work has also been recorded, most recently by the Cantabile Vocal Quartet on a CD released by Quattro Voci Records in 2000.⁶⁰

Lehmann's setting of verses from FitzGerald's *Rubā 'īyāt* was followed by a steady flow of works by other composers. Almost every year from 1900 to 1940, some work or other based on the *Rubā 'īyāt* was produced in

⁵⁴ Martin and Mason, "Khayyam, Omar x."

⁵⁵ Yarshater, "Affinities between Persian Poetry and Music," 59–78.

⁵⁶ Martin and Mason, "Khayyam, Omar x."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Martin and Mason, *The Art of Omar Khayyam*, 7–8.

⁵⁹ Garrard, *A Book of Verse*, 224–25.

⁶⁰ Martin and Mason, "Khayyam, Omar x."

the United States or Europe.⁶¹ Many pieces were forthright settings of one or more verses for voice(s), accompanied by piano or other instruments. Some of these works fall into the category of popular or drawing-room folksongs, which were sought after in the early years of the twentieth century. Others are more in the nature of the “art song.”⁶² They include various pieces by composers such as Roger Quilter (1877–1953), who set verses from the *Rubā 'īyāt* for solo voices in 1902. Vivian Ellis (1904–96), an English composer of musicals, set three songs from the *Rubā 'īyāt* for voice and piano in 1921. Some artists from the rest of Europe were also vigorous in the field; for example, a French composer, Jean Cras (1879–1932), set five quatrains for voice and piano in 1925, while in the Netherlands around 1916 Willem Smalt set quatrains from P. C. Boutens’s Dutch translation for a cappella choir.⁶³ Not all the works based on the *Rubā 'īyāt* in the first half of the twentieth century were short. Perhaps the best large-scale work of this period is Sir Granville Bantock’s *Omar Khayyam*, for soloists, chorus, and orchestra. Most of Bantock’s works were lengthy, and his *Omar Khayyam* is no exception. Its three parts include all 101 quatrains from FitzGerald’s fifth edition, and its performance lasts nearly three hours. Bantock composed the “oratorio” in 1906–9, and it was first performed during these years in separate parts with the composer conducting.⁶⁴ The complete work has been broadcast and recorded a number of times in Britain; the most recent recording is from 2007 by Chandos, with the BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Vernon Handley.

A limited number of other composers produced orchestral works based on the *Rubā 'īyāt* in the years before the Second World War. The American Arthur Foote (1853–1937) created an orchestral suite, *Four Character Pieces after the Rubā 'īyāt of 'Umar Khayyām*, in 1912, based on an earlier work for voice and piano. Charles Cadman (1881–1946), another American, was commissioned to create a musical score for a silent film about 'Umar Khayyām, released as *A Lover's Oath* in 1925. Cadman’s music for orchestra was published as *Oriental Rhapsody* in 1921. In 1917 Henry Houseley (1851–1925) published a cantata for soloists, chorus, and orchestra titled *Umar Khayyām*. In 1924 the Swiss composer Robert Blum (1900–1994) gave his first symphony, which featured a baritone soloist, the title *Umar Khayyām*. Most of these works seem to have vanished from

⁶¹ Martin and Mason, *The Music of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, 4–7.

⁶² Northcote, *Byrd to Britten*, 96–97.

⁶³ Martin and Mason, “Khayyam, Omar x.”

⁶⁴ Foreman, “Omar Khayyam,” 10–11.