The Persian Sensation: The Rubāiyát of Omar Khayyám in the West
Introductory text

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   b. The British in Persia
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INTRO TEXT:

THE PERSIAN SENSATION: THE RUBÁIYÁT OF OMAR KHAYYÁM IN THE WEST

A century ago, The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám was one of the most widely known books in Britain and America. This exhibition explores how the verses of a medieval Persian poet found their way into all corners of life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from British drawing rooms and New York movie theaters to the streets of New Orleans at Mardi Gras. By 2007, over 1,300 versions of The Rubáiyát had been printed in English, most between 1890 and 1945. Today, it is difficult to imagine how a work of poetry could become such a sensation. One hundred fifty years after its first major translation into English, The Rubáiyát has fallen into obscurity.

The Ransom Center’s extensive Rubáiyát holdings offer visitors a unique opportunity to explore how Westerners transformed Khayyám’s poems to fulfill personal and cultural desires. The first section, The Poets’ Rubáiyát, explains how the poems came to be translated by Edward FitzGerald in 1859, at the height of the British Empire. The Cult of Omar investigates how the Rubáiyát became a precious “Oriental” commodity at the turn of the century. Everybody’s Rubáiyát documents the Rubáiyát craze that followed, when composers, playwrights, screenwriters, parodists, advertisers, and hundreds of illustrators interpreted the poet and his poems. Finally, In Search of Khayyám explores the question, “What is the place of Khayyám’s poetry in Iran today?”

Along the way, “Close Reading” stations offer an in-depth look at three famous stanzas. Visitors may read and comment on FitzGerald’s entire translation by using the eComma Collaborative Rubáiyát, located in the first section of the exhibition.

—Curated by Michelle Kaiserlian and Molly Schwartzburg with the assistance of Katharine Beutner, Jill Morena, and Kevin Endres

TEXT PANEL: THE POETS’ RUBÁIYÁT

The story of the Rubáiyát’s Western fame begins in Nishapur, Persia, in the northeast of modern Iran, where Ómar Khayyám was born in 1048 C.E. Khayyám was an important astronomer, mathematician, and philosopher who contributed to medieval Persia’s landmark discoveries in early astronomy and chronology. Like many members of the educated classes, he composed four-line meditative verses known as rubáiyát.

Khayyám’s poems often return to the following themes: indulgence in material pleasures in the face of death, doubts about the afterlife, frustration with the limitations of human knowledge, and the power of fate. These themes are investigated through symbols such as clay pots, blooming roses, bowls of wine, and the night sky.

In the constellation of great classical Persian poets, Khayyám would likely be only a faint star were it not for the phenomenal global success of Edward FitzGerald’s 1859 work the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám. FitzGerald’s admittedly loose translation captures many of Khayyám’s themes but is written in a voice that is FitzGerald’s alone, and in a language grounded in a Victorian world view.

The Rubáiyát was a direct product of the British Empire, and the broader imperial context provides some explanation for the book’s initial rise to fame. First, it appealed to readers seeking access to an idealized Orient far from industrialized Britain. Second,
its themes of faith and doubt were profoundly suited to the Victorian “crisis of faith,” itself brought on by archaeological and scientific discoveries born of empire. Notably, the *Rubáiyát* and Darwin’s *Origin of Species* were published in the same year. Finally, FitzGerald’s interpretations initiated a tradition of retranslation and criticism of Khayyám’s poems among Orientalist scholars across Europe and America. The objects in this section of the exhibition document the lives and works of Khayyám and FitzGerald, the ways in which British imperial movements in the East influenced the production and early reception of FitzGerald’s book, and the early publishing events—imitative, illustrative, and critical—that helped the *Rubáiyát* become one of the most important poems of the Victorian period.

**OMAR KHAYYÁM**

Ghiyasoddin Abolfath Omar b. Ebrahim Khayyami, known as Omar Khayyám, was born in 1048 C.E. and died in 1131. Few facts are known about his life, and all written stories about him date from at least a few decades after his death. It is likely that he came from a family of tentmakers, as that is the meaning of the name “Khayyám.” He was born near Nishapur in Khorassan in northeastern Persia. He did much of his scholarly training in Samaraqand under the rule of Saljuq Turk sultans, one of many foreign powers to rule Persian lands over the centuries.

Khayyám was an unorthodox thinker who avoided involvement in court politics in a dangerous time. As Christopher Decker writes, “many of Khayyám’s quatrains in favor of retirement from the heat of public life are merely pragmatic.” Due to his work in astronomy, mathematics, and Aristotelian-influenced philosophy, Khayyám was highly respected among his contemporaries and known by such epithets as “Sage of the World,” “Philosopher of the Universe,” and “Proof of the Truth.” After some years in Samaraqand, he returned to Nishapur where he lived a quiet life of study.

The items displayed here introduce some features of Khayyám’s work and place him in the context of other widely known Persian classical poets.

To read the most famous narrative of Khayyám’s life, please see the introduction to Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*, available in the *eComma Collaborative Rubáiyát* on the computer at the far right end of this gallery.

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The second edition of Joseph Scaliger’s *Opus de Emendatione Temporum* (Geneva, 1619) Van Wyck Chronology Collection

This work, first published in 1583, contains the first mention of Omar Khayyám’s name in a Western language. The reference to “Omar Elhaiamu” nine lines down on the left-hand page comes in a chapter about the Persian solar calendar. Khayyám is believed to have been one of a group charged by the sultan to build an observatory and to compile a set of astronomical tables as the basis of a new calendar. Created five hundred years
earlier than the Gregorian calendar that we use today, the Persian solar calendar is more
difficult to use but more accurate and is still in use in Iran and Afghanistan.

Daoud S. Kasir’s *Algebra of Omar Khayyám* (New York: Teacher’s College, Columbia
University, 1931)

Omar Khayyám is a major figure in the great tradition of Islamic mathematics that
began in the ninth century and gave “algebra” its name. This page shows a translation
of his work on cubic algebra, considered to be one of his most important contributions.
He made a significant discovery in which he showed that it is possible to express roots
of cubic equations using intersecting conics. This volume marks the first publication of
Khayyám’s algebra in English and was likely inspired by his great fame as a poet at the
time; his discoveries had long ago been incorporated or superceded by the work of
other mathematicians.

A bound manuscript of *rubáiyát* attributed to Omar Khayyám, ca. 1700s
Eastern Manuscripts Collection

*Rubáiyát* is a plural term, and the singular is *rubái*. A *rubái* is a 4-line poem akin to
the Japanese *haiku*: it is a pithy philosophical verse with an immediately recognizable,
strict form. Some *rubáiyát* are manifestly abstract and didactic, while others are
evocative descriptions of the natural world or social events. As Ali Dashti points out,
the final line of a Khayyám *rubái* often contains a “sting in the tail” that transforms or
elucidates the ideas or images presented in the previous lines.

No manuscripts of *rubáiyát* survive from Khayyám’s lifetime, and the earliest
significant manuscripts of Khayyám date from the mid-fourteenth century. The item
shown here is likely the earliest in the Ransom Center’s collection of several Persian
Khayyám manuscripts.

Qawam al-Kottab, calligrapher
An illuminated manuscript of Omar Khayyám’s poetry, 1900s
Eastern Manuscripts Collection

Over 2,000 *rubáiyát* have been ascribed to Khayyám at various points in history,
but nobody knows how many he actually composed. Like many Khayyám manuscripts,
this contains some *rubáiyát* by Khayyám, but also others written by other poets. For
instance, one *rubái* at the top of the second page was written several centuries after
Khayyám, and contains a war-like sentiment far from his usual themes. Mahmoud
Omidsalar translates it literally:
I carry a sharp sword
That brings me victory
The heart of my enemy is my kabob
And I drink wine in a cup made of his skull

The original date on the book’s colophon page is also misleading: it has been altered to read 1828—probably by an unscrupulous dealer attempting to attract a Western collector. It may have been produced originally for an aristocratic Iranian family. Until recently, it was common to hire calligraphers and artists to produce elegant copies of works available in print. An Iranian buyer would have known that calligrapher Qawan al-Kottab, named in the colophon, was a major twentieth-century figure also known for his lithographic editions of translations of European works.

A bound manuscript containing *rubáiyát* by Hafez, ca. 1800s
Eastern Manuscripts Collection

Hafez (d. 1389) is the best-loved poet in Iran; family copies of his works are handed down through generations. A mystic poet, he excelled in the lyric *ghazal*, a sonnet-like form often used for love poetry. He also composed *rubáiyát*, some examples of which may be seen in this item.

This manuscript, with its highly skilled, elegant calligraphy, was likely created for a king, governor or other wealthy person. Visitors who do not read Persian can make out some of the formal elements of the *rubáiyát* form on these pages. Lines appear in groups of four, beginning with two on one line, followed by two stacked below. The rhyme scheme of a single quatrain may be seen in the repeating calligraphic letters that appear at the end of each line (Persian reads from right to left).

John Richardson’s *A Specimen of Persian Poetry; or Odes of Hafez, with an English Translation and Paraphrase* (London: Printed and Sold at 76 Fleet-Street, 1774)

Hafez was first translated into English by the great Orientalist William Jones in 1771 in his *Grammar of the Persian Language*, on view elsewhere in this exhibition. Hafez swiftly became popular among Western readers, particularly the Romantic poets of Germany and England, and the American transcendentalists. Though Khayyám was more widely known at the height of his popularity, Hafez has remained the most highly regarded Persian poet in the West, and his popularity has outlasted that of Khayyám.

Readers of the verses of Khayyám and Hafez will recognize much overlapping imagery. Like Khayyám, the later poet refers repeatedly to taverns, wine, cupbearers, roses and nightingales. Wine is a particular favorite for Hafez, who lived in the famous wine-growing region of Shiraz (related only in name to today’s Shiraz wines). However, the verses of Hafez are rooted in his Sufism, and their worldly images are primarily read as metaphors for the relationship between man and God. In contrast, critics generally agree that Khayyám writes of actual worldly pleasures.
A bound manuscript of poetry by Rumi in Persian, opened to the illuminated dedication in Arabic, ca. 1900s
Eastern Manuscripts Collection

The mystic poet Rumi (1207-1273) is best known for his lyric verses—including a large number of *rubáiyát*—and his didactic epic *Masnavi-yi-Ma-navi*, or “Spiritual Couplets.”

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the most famous Persian poets in the West were Saadi, Ferdowsi, and Hafez. Rumi was less frequently printed in books and periodicals, and few editions of his work appeared before the 1890s. In recent years, he has become extraordinarily popular in the United States.

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This contemporary edition of *rubaiyat* incorporates elements of traditional Persian manuscript decoration and illustration. Khayyám’s poetry continues to interest Iranians, and new editions are regularly published. The final section of the exhibition, “In Search of Khayyám,” documents some of the places that Khayyám and his verse may be found in Iranian culture.

THE BRITISH IN PERSIA

These items offer a brief introduction to the economic, social, and political background of Edward FitzGerald’s England. In the 1850s, British rule in India meant that a broadening British audience was familiar with Eastern politics and culture. At the same time, the industrial revolution—funded by imperial wealth—encroached on everyday life, making the imagined timeless exoticism of the Orient an appealing fantasy world for many Britons.

The first English travelers to Persia, or Iran, arrived in the late thirteenth century. Until the early nineteenth century, contact was sporadic and mostly mercantile. Beginning in 1798, Britain’s involvement in Persian trade grew explicitly political as the empire’s investment in neighboring India grew deeper. Iran never became a part of the Empire, but by the mid-nineteenth century, generations of intense British involvement in Persian politics and warfare—both as an ally and as an enemy—had left permanent marks on the physical and political landscape. The Victorians viewed Persia with ambivalence: intimidated by the grandeur and political savvy of Persian leaders and the historical might of the ancient Persian Empire, many visitors were at the same time dismissive of the contemporary culture.

Many of the complex stories alluded to here are told in depth in Denis Wright’s *The English Amongst the Persians, 1787-1921* (London: Heinemann, 1977).
Robert Coverte’s *A True and almost incredible report of an Englishman, that travelled by land through many unknown Kingdomes, and great Cities* (London: William Hall, 1612)

Coverte’s description of the city of Isfahan, on the Silk Road, presents a wealthy, exotic, vibrant world that is already influenced by imperial Western powers. On the left page, he describes the city’s famous textile trade, the palace of the shah, and his attempt to visit Robert Sherley, the first in a long line of Englishmen to serve as an advisor to the Persian court. On the right, Coverte describes the Portuguese presence in Isfahan and the culture’s openness to Armenian and Greek Christian residents.

John Speed (c. 1551-1629), “Description of the Kingdome of Persia” in *A Prospect of the Most Famous Parts of the World* (London, Printed by M. F. for William Humble, 1646)

The Travel and Exploration Collection

For a long time, Persia was difficult for travelers to reach, so the country was little known to outsiders. Speed’s descriptions are indeed brief, and much of the text concerns the ancient Persian Empire: “not content with their own [rule]...they attempted the nearest parts of Africa and Europe.” Modern Persians “have now put off most of their antique barbarisme, and are become good Politicians, excellent Warriours, great Scholars, especially in Astrology, Physick, and Poetry.”

When this atlas was published, the British were already deeply involved in Asia. In 1600 the English East India Company was founded and by the mid-1600s Britain held strong trading positions in Madras, Bombay and Bengal.

Modern Iran fills the center of this map. Some familiar locations in surrounding modern nations include Cabul (Kabul), Afghanistan in the center right of the map and Mosul, Iraq just north of the western tip of the Persian Gulf. Diul, the city on the Persian Gulf accompanied by a picture of a temple, approximates modern Karachi, Pakistan.

The first volume of Jonas Hanaway (1712-1786), *An Historical Account of the British Trade over the Caspian Sea* (London: T. Osborne, 1762)

Hanaway joined the commercial Russian Company in 1743, and from St. Petersburg embarked on a voyage to Persia to experiment in trading English woolen cloth for Persian silk. His journey was marked by misadventure and his efforts failed, in part due to Russian resistance to any expansion of Persian power.

Hanaway surveys the history of the silk trade with Russia and Persia, his own experiences, and a variety of Persian social customs. The two classical figures in this frontispiece, equally supporting a map depicting trade routes across Asia, represent the strong trade relationship that Hanaway himself was unable to build.
Over the next century, Russian challenges to Persian borders played an important part in the complicated diplomatic relations between British imperial administrators in India and Persian leaders.

William Ouseley (1767-1842), *Epitome of the Ancient History of Persia: Extracted and translated from the Jehan Ara, a Persian Manuscript* (London: Printed by Cooper and Wilson, for Messrs. Cadell and Davies, Strand, 1799)
From the library of Alexander Parsons

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, British audiences knew less about contemporary Persia than they did about the Persian Empire, established by Cyrus the Great (ca. 576-530 B.C.E.). The empire fell to Alexander the Great in 330 B.C.E. after spreading Persian philosophy, government, language, and culture across three continents. The ceremonial capitol Persepolis was plundered by Alexander’s army. Westerners first visited Persepolis in 1602. Ouseley’s translation traces the kings of Persia.

Ouseley visited Persia in 1810, when he accompanied his brother Gore’s (1770-1844) diplomatic mission, and brought back one of the Khayyám manuscripts used by Edward FitzGerald. The mission marked a shift in British-Persian relations, now explicitly political.

Both volumes of Najaf Kuli Mirza’s *Journal of a residence in England, and of a journey from and to Syria, of their royal highnesses Reeza Koolee Meerza, Najaf Koolee Meerza, and Taymoor Meerza, of Persia* (London: privately printed, 1839), translated by Assaad Y. Kayat

As the British became more deeply invested in protecting interests in India, relations with Persia became complex. In 1834, several sons of the late Fath Ali Shah claimed the right to rule Persia, creating the possibility of civil war. The British entered the fray, supporting one son and containing other claimants. One who was imprisoned begged his sons to travel to England to plead the case for his release and protection of the family.

This memoir of the successful visit captures the British fascination with their first visitors of the Persian ruling class. While the government negotiated the diplomatic situation, the princes were toured through the country and fêted across fashionable London. The enthusiastic diarist offers extensive (and sometimes exaggerated) descriptions of his experiences, which included a meeting with Princess Victoria with introductions performed by Sir Gore Ouseley.

In the first volume shown here, the prince is met by crowds of curious Britons in Bath, including a lovely young woman. In the second, he visits cultural centers—including a flea circus.
Lady Sheil’s Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia, with notes on Russia, Koords, Toorkomans, Nestorians, Khiva, and Persia (London: John Murray, 1856)
From the library of Alexander Parsons

Lady Sheil’s is the first travel memoir of Persia written by a woman. Sheil’s husband was Minister Plenipotentiary Justin Sheil, an able diplomat who first visited Persia with the East India Company. Persia was considered a remote, “uncivilized” posting, and Lady Sheil was the first Englishwoman to join a husband in Persia, where she lived from 1849-1852.

The memoir describes all the aspects of the culture to which an Englishwoman could be exposed: religious practices, law, social conventions, crafts, farming, ancient ruins, silk manufacturing, desert oases, and even an attempt on the Shah’s life. Here, she describes touring the Shah’s palace with his wife.

In the preface, the author states that many have written about the history of Persia, but that she wishes to educate the English public in the “manner and the tone of feeling and society at the present day.” She implies that rising tensions between Britain and Persia compel her to do so. Indeed, in late 1856, British-Persian relations took a bad turn as the British sided against Persia in a Persian aggression into Afghanistan, in what is known as the Anglo-Persian War.

A view including the Persian exhibit in The Crystal Palace and its Contents: an illustrated cyclopaedia of the great exhibition of the Industry of All Nations, ([London]: W.M. Clark, 1852)

The Great Exhibition of 1851 presented six million visitors with manufacturing innovations, curiosities, and antiquities from around the world. With great emphasis on the British Empire’s products, the exhibition announced the preeminence of industry, that combination of labor and capitalism that fed the empire’s great spread.

Persia’s small display emphasized traditional craft over innovation. One observer noted that it contained items “of the usual Oriental type,” though the rugs and carpets suggested “industrial energy and activity of some importance.” Another observer confirmed the broader tendency to think of Persia always in relation to its ancient history: the “living scene, the faded yet still imposing pageantry” are “faithful transcripts of the former ages.” The Shah visited the exhibition as a guest of the Queen.

Wall items:

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King George III’s commission of Sir Gore Ouseley as Ambassador to Persia, 11 July 1810
Omar Khayyám Collection

This document marks the beginning of the Rubáiyát phenomenon documented in this exhibition. In 1810, Gore Ouseley was sent to Persia as Britain’s first ambassador,
accompanied by his brother William as secretary. Gore Ouseley had run a fabric factory in India in the 1790s and been involved in diplomacy in both India and Persia. His commission was precipitated by a power struggle between two envoys—both associated at some point with the East India Company—competing to control British diplomacy in Tehran. Britain realized it needed a formal government representative.

Both Ouseley brothers were scholars of the Persian language, and both built Persian manuscript collections while in the East: Gore in India in the 1790s, and William in Persia. In 1843, William’s collection was purchased by the Bodleian Library at Oxford. In the mid-1850s, Edward FitzGerald’s friend Edward Cowell was struck by an item as he perused the uncataloged manuscripts: poems of Omar Khayyám, which became the foundation of FitzGerald’s translation.

Appropriately, this artifact represents the intersection of British imperial strategy and scholarly study that brought many Eastern texts into Britain. Sir Gore was one of the founders of the Royal Asiatic Society in London in 1823 and served as president of the Society for the Publication of Asiatic Texts, founded in 1842.

Transcription from “On a Piece of Vellum” in Twenty Years of the Omar Khayyám Club of America ([Needham, MA]: Rosemary Press, 1921)

Text on reverse:
To my Good Cousin Abbas Mirza, The Prince Royal of Persia

Text on view:
Sir, My Cousin. I have received Your Royal Highness’s kind Letter from Tabriz on the subject of Captain Paisley’s arrival at Abushhest, and the possible injury both States might sustain from the supercession of Sir Harford Jones by an Envoy from the Governor General of India. I derive great satisfaction from the demonstration of Your Royal Highness’s Friendship and Regard for my Welfare.—Mirza Abul Hassan has no doubt long since informed Your Royal Highness how truly I lament the unfortunate circumstances which have occurred with respect to Our Royal Mission to the Court of Taehran. These Events have originated in error and misapprehension: I have employed every effort to prevent the recurrence of such Misfortunes. Accordingly I have appointed an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary directly from Myself to the King of Persia. My Ambassador will be responsible to this Government for his conduct and altho’ directed to co-operate with the Executive Government of India so far as His own Judgment and His instructions from My Ministers will warrant he will not however be in any manner under the control of the Indian Government.—I have selected for the situation of Ambassador at the Court of Taehran My Trusty and well beloved Sir Gore Ouseley, Baronet, a Gentleman whose Knowledge of your Language, Customs, and Manners peculiarly qualify Him for that appointment and whose Conduct and Character entitle Him to general respect and consideration.—Having the fullest confidence in My Ambassador’s Judgement and Discretion, I trust that the first Intelligence I shall have the pleasure of receiving from Your Royal Highness after the arrival of My Ambassador at Persia, will apprise me of the renewal of that Harmony which I hope will subsist for Ever between the States of Persia and Great Britain.—I
pray God to take Your Royal Highness into His best Care and Protection. I am with every Sentiment of Affection and Esteem,
Sir, My Cousin
Your Good Cousin
George R.
At My Royal Castle
at Windsor 11th July 1810

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Four plates representing Persian decorative styles from Owen Jones(1809-1874), The Grammar of Ornament (London: Day and Son, 1856), from a complete disbound copy

In the 1830s, the young Jones traveled to Egypt, Turkey and Spain, and spent six months studying the Moorish architecture of the Alhambra, resulting in a major book publication. He soon became known for commercial products of all sorts, bringing Oriental design into the middle-class British home in the form of wallpapers, textiles, stamps, tiles, and biscuit wrappers.

The Grammar of Ornament surveys a broad range of aesthetic types, from “Pompeian Ornament” and “Celtic Ornament” to “Mediæval Ornament” and “Ornament of Savage Tribes.” Jone’s book, which included his thirty-seven principles of decoration, influenced a generation of architects and designers. His emphasis on Oriental organic elements such as flowers and plant forms encouraged some of the tendencies of the Arts and Crafts and Aesthetic movements.

Jones is complimentary towards Persian aesthetics but concludes that it is “inferior to the Arabian and the Moresque,” which benefit from their “pure” color palates and simplicity of design. His sources for these plates included illuminated Persian manuscripts in the British Library and “a very curious Persian book at South Kensington Museum, which appears to be a manufacturer’s pattern book.”

EDWARD FITZGERALD

Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883) was born two hundred years ago to a wealthy landed family in Suffolk, England. Born Edward Purcell, he became Edward FitzGerald after his mother inherited a very large sum of money upon the death of her grandmother. Unsuited to his family’s wealthy lifestyle, he found his place as a student at Cambridge, and spent the rest of his life living quietly in various modest country homes, avoiding high society, and spending his time reading, writing letters, visiting friends, and sharing the society of locals, who considered him a bohemian eccentric.

FitzGerald, known to some as “Old Fitz” from a young age, had a special talent for making and keeping friends, and to these he wrote warm, entertaining letters. He maintained long friendships with several men whose own intellectual aspirations fueled his own work: writers William Makepeace Thackeray, Alfred Lord Tennyson, George Crabbe, and Thomas Carlyle, and the Persianist Edward Cowell.

In 1856, FitzGerald mystified his friends by suddenly marrying, perhaps fulfilling the deathbed request of the bride’s father. The terribly unhappy union ended with a permanent separation after several months (scholars have made a range of
claims about FitzGerald’s sexual orientation, which is unknown). After his separation FitzGerald escaped into his scholarly work, art collecting, his male friendships, and his kindly relationships with his nieces. Most importantly, he found at this time a kindred spirit in Omar Khayyám, whose pessimistic verses of doubt and retirement seemed to resemble FitzGerald’s own experience.

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A pencil drawing for Edward FitzGerald by William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) in A Voice from the Dormitory: being a collection of sacred poems, the majority of which are from old authors (London: Smith, Elder, 1835)

Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), “To E. FitzGerald” in Tiresias and Other Poems (London: Macmillan, 1885)
From the library of Arthur Waugh

While a student at Cambridge, FitzGerald began friendships with several fellow students, including Tennyson and Thackeray. These literary friendships first prompted him to try his hand at writing poetry. Here, symbols of these friendships may be seen. Thackeray has prefaced this anthology of canonical religious verse with a comic portrait, perhaps of his friend FitzGerald. Tennyson’s poem was intended as seventy-fifth birthday greeting the friend he called “Old Fitz,” but FitzGerald died before the poem was delivered. The verse is comic and tender at the same time; on the pages displayed, Tennyson writes of his failed effort to emulate FitzGerald’s vegetarianism, and of the greatness of FitzGerald’s translation of Khayyám.

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Edward FitzGerald’s Six Dramas of Calderon (London: William Pickering, 1853)
Inscribed from FitzGerald to George Crabbe
From the library of John Henry Wrenn

In 1844, FitzGerald met the much younger Edward Cowell (1826-1903), a talented, self-taught linguist who inspired FitzGerald to try his hand at translation. Cowell and FitzGerald became close friends, reading each other’s work and meeting regularly to read together. In 1850, Cowell instructed FitzGerald in Spanish, leading to this translation, the first that FitzGerald published. Cowell later introduced him to Persian and encouraged him to translate the poems of Khayyám.

FitzGerald’s translation is quite free, and reflects his love of brevity, as described in the preface:

I have, while faithfully trying to retain what was fine and efficient, sunk, reduced, altered, and replaced much that seemed not; simplified some perplexities, and curtailed or omitted scenes that seemed to mar the general effect...
This copy of his translation is inscribed to George Crabbe (1819-1884), grandson of the poet of the same name and a life-long friend of FitzGerald’s.

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Edward FitzGerald’s *Sea Words and Phrases Along the Suffolk Coast* (Lowestoft: Samuel Tymms, 1869)

FitzGerald was a collector of languages, sayings, and words. He recorded phrases, quotations, regional terms, and other scraps in commonplace books that he kept throughout his life. He also loved the sea; this charming dictionary captures the language of the sailors he knew while living in Suffolk in his later years.

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A letter from Edward FitzGerald to “Poshy” [Joseph Fletcher], undated
Digital reproduction of the verso
Edward FitzGerald Collection

Late in life, FitzGerald became close friends with Fletcher, a much younger man who worked as a fisherman and sailor, and whom FitzGerald supported financially. In this letter, he describes a recent trip to London, stating his wish that he had been at home instead. FitzGerald much preferred his country life to his time in the city.

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A letter from Edward FitzGerald to George Borrow, undated
Digital reproduction of the verso
Edward FitzGerald Collection

In this letter, FitzGerald asks his friend Borrow if he wishes to join him at the seaside locale of Lowestoft with three of his nieces, “perfectly quiet, versible and unpretentious girls.” In the middle of the letter, he turns to Persian manuscripts:

> I have got an MS of Bahram & his Seven Castles (Persian) which I have not yet cared to look far into. Will you? It is short, fairly transcribed, & of some Repute in its own Country, I hear. Cowell sent it me from Calcutta:—but it almost requires his Company to make one devote one’s to Persian, when with what remains of one’s old English Eyes one can read the Odyssey, and Shakespeare.

George Borrow was himself a self-taught scholar of Persian (and more than thirty other languages as well). He disliked the predominant scholarly approach to linguistics, and referred to academics such as Sir William Jones with contempt, as “philologers.”
Sir William Jones’s *A Grammar of the Persian Language* (London: Printed by W. and J Richardson, 1771)
Sir William Jones Book Collection

FitzGerald first read this edition of Jones’s *Grammar* in 1853, as he began tentatively studying Persian at Cowell’s suggestion. Later that year, he acquired a dictionary and some Persian texts, and coming back to Jones, began translating sections of it and sending his work to Cowell for correction. He learned enough to begin critiquing published English translations of Sa’di’s *Gulistan*, and in 1854, he composed his first Persian translation, Jámi’s *Salámán and Absál*. Throughout, FitzGerald’s letters to Cowell reveal his developing understanding of both Persian and the work of translation itself.

The great William Jones was a pioneering Persianist who believed that the study of Eastern literatures could help bring about a revival of English poetry. In this volume, teaches the Persian language through his own translations of Hafez, Sa’di and other Persian poets, many rendered here in English for the first time.

A postcard a photograph of Edward Figzerald, from a set of FitzGerald-themed souvenir postcards, undated

A few years after FitzGerald’s death, a four-volume edition of *Letters and Literary Remains* was published, and remained a popular text for years. Thought his letters are those of a warm, amiable person, this photograph (the only one of FitzGerald regularly reproduced) presents him with a serious, almost unfriendly countenance.

A bronze medal issued by the Omar Khayyám Club of America in honor of the 100th birthday of Edward FitzGerald, 1909
Omar Khayyám Collection

By the turn of the twentieth century, FitzGerald was a famous historical figure. His birthday was celebrated annually by the Omar Khayyám clubs in both Britain and the United States, as documented later in this exhibition. This medal would have struck FitzGerald’s friends as ironic, considering his extreme modesty and distaste towards ceremony and display. Never considering himself to be a significant writer, he wrote, “I have not the strong inward call, nor cruel-sweet pangs of parturition, that prove the birth of anything bigger than a mouse.”

THE BIRTH OF A PHENOMENON
These pearls of thought in Persian gulfs were bred,
Each softly lucent as a rounded moon;
The diver Omar plucked them from their bed,
FitzGerald strung them on an English thread.
—James Russell Lowell

The story of the Rubáiyát’s publication long ago achieved the status of literary myth. FitzGerald paid the firm of Bernard Quaritch to publish seventy-five quatrains translated from the Persian of Omar Khayyám. The anonymous publication was published in 1859, and did not sell. The books were packed away for storage, and two years later, they were put up for sale at the price of a penny each, where a Celtic scholar named Whitley Stokes bought a copy for Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti and his friend, the poet Charles Algernon Swinburne, returned to the shop and bought more copies to pass around to friends. Soon William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, Richard Burton, John Ruskin, and others in their circle had read the poem with enthusiasm, none knowing the name of the anonymous translator (Ruskin wrote a fan letter to the author, which reached FitzGerald a decade later). From this point on the poem began its slow rise to prominence.

A handful of Khayyám’s poems were available in English before FitzGerald’s translation. But something about this unassuming effort by an inexperienced translator took hold in the minds of readers. Jorge Luis Borges captures the book’s alchemy in his 1951 essay, “The Enigma of Edward FitzGerald”:

A miracle happens: from the fortuitous conjunction of a Persian astronomer who condescended to write poetry and an eccentric English man who peruses Oriental and Hispanic books, perhaps without understanding either of them completely, emerges an extraordinary poet who resembles neither of them.

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Thomas Hyde (1636-1703), Historia Religionis Veterum Persarum (Oxford: E Theatro Sheldoniano, 1700)

Hyde was the first to translate a Khayyám rubai into a Western language. The original Persian quatrain may be seen at the bottom of the right-hand page of this volume. A major figure in the history of Orientalist scholarship, Hyde was the librarian at the Bodleian Library at Oxford beginning in 1665, and in 1691 became Laudian professor of Arabic at Oxford. Hyde had studied Persian at Cambridge, where he worked on the Persian section of a polyglot Bible. He also published his own Persian poems, written for royal occasions.

Hyde’s Latin translation of Khayyam, which appears on the next page, reads as follows:

O combustus, combustus, combustione!
Væ, à te est Ignis, Gebennæ accensio!
Quousque dices, Omaro misericors esto?
Quousque Deum Caput misericordiae docebis?
FitzGerald translates the same verse in his own introduction:

“O Thou who burn’st in Heart for those who burn
“In Hell, whose fires thyself should feed in turn;
    How long be crying, ‘Mercy on them, God!’
“Why, who art thou to teach, and He to learn?”

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From the library of Evelyn Waugh

Costello’s was one of several translations of Khayyám that appeared earlier than FitzGerald’s. Whereas many Persian translations of this period were scholarly in tone and apparatus, Costello’s was meant to be read for pleasure. The first anthology in English of Persian verse, it includes more sumptuously decorated sections on the three most famous poets in England at the time: Saadi, Hafez, and Ferdowsi. Costello included a generous twenty-five further poets, and Khayyám is represented by 150 lines of verse.

Costello’s translation of Khayyám is based on the work of the German Orientalist Joseph von Hammer, and her introduction reflects his depiction of Khayyám as “The Voltaire of Persia,” a polemicist against religious conservatives. Costello’s brother designed the Persian-style borders of her collection, based upon Persian manuscripts at Oxford.

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Fitz-Gerald’s first translation was based on transcriptions of two manuscripts. The first, known as the Ouseley or Bodleian manuscript, contains 158 quatrains and dates to 1460. Edward Cowell found the strikingly beautiful manuscript in the Ouseley collection of Persian manuscripts at the Bodleian Library. He gave a transcription to FitzGerald as he prepared to leave on a trip to India, where he came across the second manuscript at the Royal Asiatic Society in Calcutta. It contained 516 quatrains and is now lost.

In 1856, FitzGerald wrote to Tennyson about reading the *rubáiyát* with Cowell: We read some curious Infidel and Epicurian Tetrastichs by a Persian of the Eleventh Century—as savage against Destiny etc. as Manfred—but mostly Epicurian Pathos of this kind—drink—for the Moon will often come around to look for us in this Garden and find us not.

During the year after he received the first transcription from Cowell, FitzGerald’s marriage ended. He went to stay at the home of an old friend in the aftermath, and wrote to Cowell of the visit:
When in Bedfordshire, I put away almost all books except Omar Khayyám, which I could not help looking over in a paddock covered with buttercups and brushed by a delicate breeze, while a dainty racing filly of W. Browne’s came startling up to wonder and sniff about me.

Charles Algernon Swinburne’s copy
The library of John Henry Wrenn

The first edition of the *Rubáiyát* is one of the rarest Victorian books. Once the *Rubáiyát* was discovered by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his friends, it began to sell, and Quaritch asked FitzGerald to produce a second edition. FitzGerald heavily revised and expanded the text for this edition, which appeared in 1867. Third and fourth editions appeared in his lifetime, and a fifth, representing his final changes, appeared after his death. This mass of texts prompted an industry of variorum editions, the most recent of which, edited by Christopher Decker (University of Virginia, 1997), is invaluable to serious readers of *The Rubáiyát*.

The ownership of this copy is extraordinary; the poet Swinburne was one of the first readers to embrace the *Rubáiyát*.

Visitors may read all five editions on the computer to the right, using the eComma Collaborative *Rubáiyát*. This online edition is also available on the Ransom Center’s website at [www.hrc.utexas.edu/rubaiyat](http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/rubaiyat)

The Book Catalog Collection
The first advertisement of the *Rubáiyát* belies the fame the poem was to achieve later. Submerged in Quaritch’s densely packed catalog, it did not draw the attention of readers. Quaritch (1819-1899) was both a publisher and a bookseller who specialized in linguistics and antiquarian items. As the other items listed for sale on this single page attest, Quaritch was particularly interested in exotic languages and texts, whether the “other” represented was Persian poetry or a collection of Irish folktales.

The first pirated edition of Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (Madras, India, 1862), one of an edition of fifty

Whitley Stokes, the man who introduced the *Rubáiyát* to Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his friends, also became the first to pirate the *Rubáiyát*. Not long after he came
across the first edition, Stokes traveled to India, bringing his Rubáiyát along, and produced this close imitation of the first edition.

Consistent with the spirit of his translation work, FitzGerald (who was also independently wealthy) was not particularly interested in protecting his literary property. Numerous pirated American editions appeared long before the book came out of copyright, and during that time publisher Bernard Quaritch struggled to maintain at least a semblance of control over the increasingly popular book.

A manuscript of Charles Algernon Swinburne’s “Laus Veneris,” undated
Charles Algernon Swinburne Collection

The novelist George Meredith said that upon discovering the Rubáiyát in 1862, the young Swinburne (1837-1909) read it aloud to friends as if it were a “Methodist tract.” Then, in a white heat, he grabbed pen and paper and began to compose “Laus Veneris” in FitzGerald’s stanza form (this manuscript is a later state). Swinburne added a feature: each pair of stanzas are linked by a rhyming third line. Swinburne’s is the earliest imitation of FitzGerald’s new English verse form, now known as the Omar Khayyám stanza or Rubáiyát quatrain.

The poem’s title loosely translates “Praise of Venus,” and retells the legend of Tannhäuser, the historical German poet who discovers the home of the goddess Venus deep in the mountains. Tannhäuser was a popular subject for ballads beginning in the fifteenth century, and was revived most famously by Wagner in his 1945 opera. “Laus Veneris” was first published in Swinburne’s Poems and Ballads in 1866.


The first fully illustrated Rubáiyát, Morris (1834-1896) and Burne-Jones’s (1833-1898) effort foreshadows the illustration phenomenon that was to come. More than 175 Western illustrators have chosen this text as their subject. Arts and Craft-style decorated borders appear in many Rubáiyát editions well into the twentieth century.

This facsimile copy is open to the beginning of the “Kuza-Nama,” or “Book of the Pots,” a self-contained section of FitzGerald’s work in which human-like pots debate—often humorously—the nature of God. The volume’s lettering and decorations were done by Morris, while most of the figures were drawn by Burne-Jones. On the title page, no author is credited because FitzGerald had published the volume anonymously. It was some years before FitzGerald’s early admirers knew his identity.

The original manuscript resides in the British Library.
Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), “The Rupaiyat of Omar Kal’vin” in Departmental Ditties and Other Verses (Lahore, India [now Pakistan]: The Civil and Military Gazette Press, 1886)

Digital reproduction of the poem

Kipling’s was the first parody of the Rubáiyát, and like the hundreds that followed, it uses the form and language of particular stanzas as the basis for commentary upon current events. Kipling is satirizing the policies of Auckland Colvin, finance minister of the government of India at the time.

In 1886, Rudyard Kipling was working as a journalist with the Civil and Military Gazette in Lahore, India. Born in Bombay and educated in England, he was just twenty-one when he published this satirical volume of poems about official life in colonial India. His deft appropriation of traditional ballad forms—and the relatively new Rubáiyát quatrain form—greatly entertained the audience it targeted, and foreshadowed his later successes.

Close Reading Wall 1: Awake!

The opening lines of FitzGerald’s first edition, on the wall above, rouse the reader to attention. Each phrase is packed with vivid imagery and strong verbs, moving the reader ahead in a rush of language. Complex metaphors require that the reader be intellectually “awake,” too. One scholar writes that this stanza produces a “brain-candy buzz”: in the first two lines, morning splashes drops of liquid (stars) out of a bowl (the night sky) with a stone (the sun). In the final two lines, a hunter (the sun) captures the turret of a palace (the earth) and pulls it towards him (mimicking the motion of the sun across the sky).

Many of FitzGerald’s stanzas differ radically from Khayyám’s originals. The original stanza is printed on the wall above, and the literal translation to your right shows that FitzGerald’s stanza derives only from the first two lines of Khayyám’s. Later editions, printed to your right, are even further removed from the original. The Persian rubái rhymes “aaaa” or “aaba.” Each line contains ten to thirteen syllables in a set meter. FitzGerald kept the “aaba” rhyme and added the most English of meters, iambic pentameter: ten paired syllables, with the accent usually falling on the second syllable of each pair. Persian rubáiyát are traditionally arranged in alphabetical order. FitzGerald arranged his selection to narrate a single day, the cyclical motion of the sun from morning to night representing the cycles of joy and melancholy, hope and resignation, knowledge and confusion, and birth and death.

Illustrated editions of FitzGerald’s translation add another interpretive layer to readers’ experience of this stanza, as may be seen in the facsimile examples to the right.

[Next to this main label, to the right:] Eben Francis Thompson’s transliteration and translation of the Persian stanza in the Bodleian manuscript (1907):

Khursheid kamand-i subh bar bām afganad
Kai Khusru-i rūz muhra dar jām afganad
Mai khur ki muńāči, e sahar gah khezān
Awāza-e asharbuā dar ayyām afganad.
The sun the noose of dawn over the roofs flings,
The King Khosrau of Day a stone in the bowl throws
Drink wine for the herald of Morning rising up
The cry of “Drink Ye,” into the days casts.

Cecil Trew (undated manuscript)

Edmund Dulac (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1909])

Trew (1897-1959) and Dulac (1882-1953) draw their readers into an Eastern fantasy world. Trew’s reader is far removed from the desert panorama, observing a drama unfold between the sun and the clouded city. Dulac’s reader, in contrast, is hovering on the same plane as the personified Sun. Dulac illustrates FitzGerald’s second edition:

Wake! For the Sun behind yon Eastern height
Has chased the Session of the Stars to flight;
   And, to the field of Heav’n ascending, strikes
The Sultan’s Turret with a Shaft of Light.

Dulac is most famous for his illustrations of children’s books. Due to his post-Impressionist style and choice of stanzas, this edition of The Rubáiyát might feel like a work of fiction, even a fairy tale.

Charles Robinson (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1929)

Herbert Cole (London and New York: John Lane, 1901)

The Rubáiyát’s abstract concepts and symbolic language have long presented an intriguing challenge to illustrators. Robinson (1870-1937) personifies Morning as a figure in Eastern garb, while Cole (1860-1930) presents it as a classical youth.

Adelaide Hanscom (New York: Dodge, [1905])

When they debuted, Hanscom’s (1876-1932) photographic illustrations were considered radical. A taboo for female artists of her day, Hanscom had her models pose fully nude.
Stylistically, she pioneered the technique of “stopping out” the negative—either by etching or drawing on the glass plate negative—to achieve a desired effect in the resulting print. Here, she uses this technique to “clothe” the models’ pelvic regions and to create the swirling vortex of night.

Illustrating FitzGerald’s fourth edition, Hanscom’s first image depicts a winged female Sun emerging from the “Field of Night.” The second image aligns with the last two lines of the stanza: a male Sun wields a sword at the shadowed figure of Night.

Wake! For the Sun who scatter’d into flight
The Stars before him from the Field of Night,
Drives Night along with them from Heav’n, and strikes
The Sultan’s Turret with a Shaft of Light.

E. A. Cox (Leigh on Sea, U. K.: F. Lewis, 1944)

Cox (1876-1955) illustrates FitzGerald’s first edition, but he includes imagery from the first, second, and fourth versions, and viewers may find it challenging to connect the images here with the specific actions described in the verse. This merging of editions in the mind of the illustrator demonstrates just how familiar people were with the Rubáiyát texts.

TEXT PANEL: THE CULT OF OMAR

The Rubáiyát’s rise to fame was slow and steady at first. In 1867 Rubáiyát publisher Bernard Quaritch advertised the remaining copies of FitzGerald’s first edition as “rare,” and in the 1870s, pirated editions debuted in America. The year 1884 brought a signal event: the first fully illustrated edition, designed by Elihu Vedder. This edition sparked glowing reviews, commercial reprints, and widening interest in the poem. It set the tone for The Rubáiyát’s future as a precious object that was inspirational to artists and craftspeople, lucrative for presses, and irresistible to collectors. From the sublime to the ridiculous, the artifacts displayed here reveal the foundations of The Rubáiyát’s sensational popularity in both Britain and America.

In the 1890s, admiration for The Rubáiyát spread among the cultural elite; the literary press on both sides of the Atlantic was peppered with mentions of “FitzOmar” and his admirers. Male writers, artists, and politicians joined the Omar Khayyám Clubs of London and Boston. Some critics were alarmed at the unseemly passion such readers shared for The Rubáiyát. The favored comic term used by critics and admirers alike, “The Cult of Omar,” had to it a sinister, exotic undertone.

Many “cultists” venerated Khayyám as the source of mysterious Eastern wisdom that could be possessed and understood by a select few. Such readers treated the poetry much like the idealized Persian garden it describes. They confined the text, both literally and symbolically, with heavily decorated borders, fine bindings, elaborate scholarly commentary, and subscription-only print runs. Other admirers preferred to erase the
book’s foreign origins, framing it as a work of universal wisdom and beauty. All these tendencies call to mind Edward Said’s seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978), and its claim that the problematic relationship between East and West is seated in the longstanding desire of Westerners to create, dominate, and order an imagined Orient. At the same time, this chapter of *The Rubáiyát*’s story led many new audiences to a better understanding of the historical Omar Khayyám and the aesthetics of Persian classical verse.

However one views the Cult phenomenon, the impulse to own the *Rubáiyát* provides us with most of the objects in this exhibition. In 1964 the Ransom Center purchased a 1200-item private collection of Rubáiyát-related books, manuscripts, and ephemera, much of which was originally gathered by members of both Omar Khayyám Clubs.

**THE ART OF TRANSLATION**

Better a live sparrow than a dead eagle.

—Edward FitzGerald, on his *Rubáiyát*

FitzGerald never stopped revising his translations of the *Rubáiyát*, and never expected to be able to capture the richness of Khayyám’s originals, though he did feel a profound kinship with the earlier poet. After the first edition of the *Rubáiyát*, FitzGerald stopped using the word “translation” for his ongoing Khayyám project. In the three further editions that appeared in his lifetime, he used the evocative term “rendering” instead.

Critics have argued vehemently over whether or not FitzGerald’s work should even be termed a translation. The more vociferous of these will be forever frustrated in their efforts to correct his errors and his readers’ misunderstandings of Omar Khayyám. By the early twentieth century the rhythms and phrasings of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* were ingrained in the English-speaking literary and social consciousness.

FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* spawned dozens of new translations of Khayyám into English and other languages, and a great number of retranslations of FitzGerald’s words. In his 1929 bibliography, Ambrose Potter listed translations of both Khayyám and FitzGerald into dozens of languages, including Basque, Gaelic, Tamil, Volapük, Welsh Romany, and Yiddish. The items shown here offer just a taste of the rich wealth of such translations in the Ransom Center’s collections.

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J. B. Nicolas’s *Les Quatrains de Khèyam* (Paris: L’Imprimerie Impériale, 1867)

While Edward FitzGerald was working on the heavily revised second edition of his *Rubáiyát*, this translation of a different Khayyám manuscript appeared in France. Nicolas was the first of many translators and scholars to claim that Khayyám wrote mystical Sufi poems, and his claims are expressed both in the volume’s preface and its footnotes. FitzGerald learned of Nicholas’ translation as he was preparing his second
edition, and included an extensive rebuttal to Nicolas’s claims in the preface. Scholars almost unanimously side with FitzGerald today.

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Justin Huntley McCarthy’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: Translated into English Prose*  
(Portland, ME: Thomas Mosher, 1896)

McCarthy’s admiration for FitzGerald’s work prompted him to retranslate the *Rubáiyát*. In the introduction to this work, he describes reading FitzGerald’s translation for the first time:

> I drank the red wine of Omar from the enchanted chalice of FitzGerald and gloried, as joyously as Omar himself, in the intoxication….From this Omar with infinite pains I made a small copy which I carried about with me, carried with me in wanderings to Italy to read and re-read in all manner of fair Italian cities….I made myself a kind of religion out of Omar; I became a burden to my friends; my writings—for I wrote even in those days—seemed with the persistency of Hotspur’s starling to do little save echo the name of Omar.

2

Four cards from *Omar: A Game of the Rubáiyát* (Monroe, N.C.: Clark W. Walton, 1936)  
Omar Khayyám Collection

As competing translations of the *Rubáiyát* piled up, readers became interested in comparing multiple versions. Scholarly and general audiences alike showed interest in these multiple translations. Parallel translations and heavily annotated editions produced for a general audience appeared through the mid-twentieth century. This deck of cards offers four translators’ versions of thirteen stanzas, providing a full deck for standard play.

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O’Kelly de Gallagh’s *Omar Khayyám* (Paris: Librairie Le Triptyque, ([1933]), with a frontispiece by Tania Balachowsky  
From the library of Compton MacKenzie

Hegyi Endre and Száz Endre’s *Robáiyát* ([Budapest]: Mágyár Helikon, 1959)  
The urge to create fine, beautiful editions of the *Rubáiyát* carried over as FitzGerald’s words were retranslated. De Gallagh’s retranslation into French is very faithful to FitzGerald, and alludes to FitzGerald’s most famous stanza in its hand-colored frontispiece. Hungarians Hegyi and Száz Endre emphasize the transformative nature of their joint project: at the opening of the book they term both the poetry and the prints “translations.”
Two copies of Hikozo Kakise’s *One Hundred Quatrains from the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* ([Worcester, MA], 1910)

Some retranslations of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* were composed not for readers of the translation’s language, but for English-language collectors, as in the case of this edition with a Japanese-style binding.


Oriya is the first language of 31 million people in India, mostly in the state of Orissa. The *Rubáiyát* has been translated often in India, Persia’s historical neighbor.

A page from Herman Charles Bosman’s Afrikaans translation of “Rubaijat van Umar Khajjam,” undated

Herman Charles Bosman Collection

Herman Charles Bosman is one of South Africa’s great short story writers, known for his depictions of rural Afrikaans culture. His Rubáiyát translation was published in 1948.

A bound manuscript of William E. Baff’s Esperanto translation, “Rubáiyát de Omar Kajam” (1909)

Omar Khayyám Collection

The *Rubáiyát* was considered by many early twentieth-century readers to be a poem of “universal” value, containing concepts and wisdom that transcended nationality or language. In this manuscript, the universal poem is translated into the universal language of Esperanto, which was created in the late 1870s. Esperanto grew quickly in its first decades. Four years before this translation was composed, the first world congress of Esperanto was held in France. Baff’s translation does not appear to have been published.

The curmudgeonly poet and translator Robert Graves turned bitter when it came to FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*. As this dust jacket shows, Graves and Ali-Shah wrap their work in strong claims for authenticity and surprisingly angry statements about FitzGerald’s methodology. The translation’s introduction argues that Khayyám’s verses are Sufi and that they are meant to be read as a narrative.

Critics pounced upon Graves and Ali-Shah’s translation, noting that some of Ali-Shah’s claims about Persian poetry in the introduction were inconsistent with the extensive body of scholarship in the field, even suggesting that his understanding of Persian was limited. More importantly, some scholars argued that Ali-Shah’s purported twelfth-century manuscript source was in fact derivative of Edward Heron-Allen’s commentary upon FitzGerald’s translation.

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This mid-century Iranian edition places FitzGerald’s translation and retranslations into French and German alongside the original Persian.

**ORIENTALIZING OMAR KHAYYÁM**

The *Rubáiyát’s* popularity in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries reflected a wider cultural passion for all things “Oriental,” an impulse that goes back centuries but which reached a pinnacle at this time. Adapted to varying degrees of accuracy, Asian aesthetics helped transform Western art and lay the foundations for Modernism. While some *Rubáiyát* illustrators, translators, and commentators were perceptive interpreters of Persian aesthetics, others perpetuated common stereotypes of the East even as they sought to venerate Omar Khayyám.

The *Rubáiyát’s* popularity provoked xenophobia among social conservatives: some claimed the text was “paganizing English society” with mystical Muslim beliefs, while others thought its Eastern “sensualism” would lead to amoral atheism. While many interpreters of Khayyám embraced or reviled his culture of origin, others did away with it altogether, finding in FitzGerald’s translations messages of “universal” cultural value, transcending time and place.

As early as the 1880s, commentators voiced concerns that Orientalist interpretations of the *Rubáiyát* threatened to “domesticate” Omar Khayyám, replacing the historical context of his eleventh-century life in Samarqand and Nishapur with a simplistic, ahistorical travesty of “Eastern” wisdom. The artifacts displayed here represent a wide range of orientalizing and universalizing interpretations of this malleable work.
The portrait set into this fine binding presents Omar Khayyám as a sage elder, as was common in the early years of the phenomenon and among wealthy collectors. As audiences will notice in the next section of the show, this is only one of many versions of the historical Khayyám imagined by audiences. Respectful representations such as this were countered by the widespread tendency to refer to the poet as “Omar,” eliding his cultural distance and claiming an intimate familiarity with a poet who had lived eight centuries earlier.

As the Rubáiyát became more famous, sharp class distinctions began to dominate conversations about the poem. While wealthy readers ordered fine bindings and handmade manuscripts, middle class readers began to claim the poem as their own. Their enthusiasm for The Rubáiyát seemed gauche to some Rubáiyát admirers, who awaited the day when the poem’s audience would once again be “fit and few.”

Two postcard photographs showing the Rubáiyát collections of Ambrose G. Potter, undated

One of the great collectors of The Rubáiyát, Potter was also its most important documenter. His 1929 bibliography has not yet been surpassed. These postcards hold images of his personal collection. Potter’s Chinoiserie cabinet reflects another popular Orientalist aesthetic at the time.

The first page of the anonymous ballad, “The Bard and the Bibliophile,” undated

This humorous poem was likely composed by a member of one of the two Omar Khayyám Clubs, to be read aloud at the Club’s annual dinner. It is characteristically humorous and self-mocking. Club members recognized that their obsession with an Oriental fantasy of Omar Khayyám was excessive. This anonymous writer is no exception, mocking the bibliophile’s passive, easy lifestyle; his preferred beverage, milk; and his cushy Morris chair.

Edward FitzGerald’s The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, illustrated by Adelaide Hanscom (New York: Dodge, 1905)

Hanscom (1876-1932) designed unique characters to represent the universalizing themes expressed in her illustrations to the Rubáiyát. Though she thanks a friend, Orlof Orlow, for assistance with Persian symbolism, her symbols bear no resemblance to
actual Persian characters, displaying an almost Egyptian aesthetic. However, Hanscom’s tri-color palette of gold, verdigris, and vermillion comes directly from Persian illuminated manuscripts.

Edward FitzGerald’s The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, illustrated by Willy Pogany (London: Harrap, 1913)

Pogany (1882-1955) designed the decorative borders for his illustrated Rubáiyát, as well as the hand-lettered verses, which are elaborately drawn to resemble Persian calligraphy. His inclusion of actual Persian script came out of his friendship with an Orientalist scholar from his homeland of Hungary, Julius Germanus (1884-1979). A note from Pogany to Germanus in the preface thanks the scholar for his advice and states Pogany’s willingness to “remain true to the spirit of Persian art.” It is notable that while Pogany went to great lengths to give the decorations shown here an authentic Persian quality, his illustrations, similar to those of Edmund Dulac, have little relationship with Persian art.

Charles Ricketts (1866-1931), frontispiece to Edward FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (London: Ballantine Press, 1901)

Louis B. Coley’s illuminated manuscript of Edward FitzGerald’s The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, 1903, created for Charles Dana Burrage, member of the Omar Khayyám Club of London, 1903

Omar Khayyám Collection

Edward FitzGerald’s The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, hand-colored by Harold H. R. Thompson (n.p.: Carolon Press, 1908)

Omar Khayyám Collection

The Western fascination with Persian gardens began centuries ago, and persists in the many Rubáiyát borders decorated with flowers and grape leaves. The enclosed garden, a space of spiritual contemplation, conversation, or erotic love, is emphasized in many Rubáiyát illustrations and implied in decorations such as these.

These Arts-and-Crafts-style borders universalize the Rubáiyát. The styles represented here were used to decorate a range of “great” texts in this period. The designs create a synthesis of cultures: the Rubáiyát’s Persian imagery here evokes Celtic knots, early Renaissance typefaces, and late-medieval illuminations on vellum.

Friedrich Rosen’s Rubaiyat-i-Omar-i-Khajjam: die Sinnsprüche Omars des Zeltmachers, with a decorated binding by M Schwerdtfeger (Stuttgart: Deutschen Verlags-Anstalt, 1914)
Orientalist decorations of many Eastern texts are eroticized, as in the image at the top of this unusual vellum binding for a finely decorated German translation.

THE RUBÁIYÁT IN MINIATURE

As the *Rubáiyát* became more popular, it became a favorite miniature subject for printers and binders. Its stanzas were short enough to fit on a very small page, and while some miniature editions contain FitzGerald’s entire work, others include only selected verses. The meditative nature of the quatrains made the *Rubáiyát* a natural subject for miniaturization: very small editions could be carried around and read over and over again.

Some of the miniature books shown here seem to have been created not to be read but to be possessed as a talisman representing the idea of the *Rubáiyát*. Some elegant miniature editions were conceived as collectors’ items, but others were inexpensive reading copies available to a wide range of audiences. Of particular note are the horizontal Rosemary Press editions, which are shaped to mimic the *Rubáiyát* stanza form. Early versions of today’s conference “swag,” they could be customized to be handed out at special events.

[The below will go on the wall next to the miniature case]
The books displayed in this case are listed here in chronological order. Unless otherwise noted, all are editions or abridgments of Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*.
2. London: Frowde, [1900]
3. London: Siegle, Hill, [1900]
4. London: Anthony Traherne, 1903
12. London: John Ouseley, [1909]
14, 15. Two copies of a promotional calendar issued by the Omar Tea Rooms containing *Extracts from The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (London, 1910)
18. Needham, MA: Rosemary Press, 1916. Prefaced with the words, “Dedicated to the Chile Club / A group of congenial souls, generous; self sacrificing; truly American; therefore chivalrous lovers of their wives.”
22. F. Roger-Carnaz’s Les Rubáiyát (Paris: Payot, [1916])
23. Needham, MA: Rosemary Press, 1921. Prefaced with the words “Presented to the representatives of the World’s Asiatic and Oriental Societies to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences by the Omar Khayyám Club of America 1921.”
28. Giorgio Constantini’s Rubáiyát ([Rome]: La Sfinge, [1957])
29. New York: Thomas Crowell, undated

Wall items:

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Edward FitzGerald’s The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (Cleveland, OH: C. H. Meigs, 1900) no. 15 of 57 signed copies
10 x 9 mm

Eben Francis Thompson’s The Rose Garden of Omar Khayyám: Founded on the Persian (Worcester, MA,1932) Accompanied by the printing proof sheets
4 x 6 mm

In 1900 and 1932, the publishers of each of these editions announced that they had produced “The smallest book in the world.” More accurately and impressively, each held the record for the smallest printed book in the world. These excessively small editions of The Rubáiyát are best understood as marvels of technical skill and curiosities of modern book collecting. Each demonstrates the photographic sophistication of its historical moment. Today, the record holder for the smallest book in the world is 0.9 x 0.9 mm.

Each book was sold with accompanying reading implements: the 1900 edition came with a magnifying glass and a silver spatula for page-turning, while the 1932 edition came with a magnifying loop, proof sheets for easier study, and a “large” reading edition that is smaller than most of the miniature books in the nearby wall case. Please exercise caution when attempting to read the 1932 proof sheets due to the chance of eyestrain.
During the last decade of the nineteenth century, groups of male artists, literati, and political elites formed the Omar Khayyám Club of London (founded 1892) and its American counterpart in Boston (founded 1900). Literary eating clubs of this sort were popular at the turn of the century; in London, the newly minted Omar Khayyám Club existed alongside famous old clubs such as the Garrick, Savile, Savage, and Whitefriars.

Over the course of four decades, Omar Khayyám Club members gathered to eat, drink heavily, and praise Khayyám and FitzGerald as “twin souls,” separated by time and place but united in the *Rubáiyát* text. Club members produced editions, further translations, bibliographies and many works of (often amateurish) scholarship on the *Rubáiyát*. At the dinners, members and special guests read poems composed for the occasion, such as this one by Austin Dobson (1840-1921):

Salaam to Omar! We that meet to-night
Have bid Black Care be banished, and invite
The rose, the Cup, the not-too-ancient Jest
To help and cheer us, but beyond the rest
Peaceful Digestion with its blissful Calm.
Therefore to Omar once again—Salaam!
Salaam to Omar! Life in truth is short,
And mortal man of many ills the sport;
Yet still th’Oasis of the Board commends
Its vantage-ground for cheerful talk of friends,
And brings Oblivion, like an Eastern Balm.
Therefore to Omar once again—Salaam!

Dobson’s verse captures the tone of the Club perspective on the *Rubaiyat*: the dinner is an idealized Eastern “Oasis,” a hedonistic paradise far away from crowded city streets and the cares of work and home.

Wall items:

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The seating chart for an Omar Khayyám Club dinner, London, 1897
Digital facsimile of original bound into a scrapbook
Omar Khayyám Collection

Club dinners were large events that drew an exclusively male celebrity crowd. The club’s first president was Edmund Gosse, called “Firdausi” by other members, after the pre-eminent Persian poet. Members included biographer Clement Shorter, M. P. Justin Huntley McCarthy, and anthropologist Edward Clodd. Over the years, dinner guests included such luminaries as J. M. Barrie, Andrew Lang, Charles Scribner, Henry James, George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, and William Butler Yeats.
The guest list for the Session of the Omar Khayyám Club of America at the New Algonquin Club, Saturday, March 30, 1907
Digital reproduction

The American Club dinners were more intimate affairs. Notable members at this dinner include Rubáiyát bibliographer Alfred C. Potter, translator and Rubáiyát editor Nathan Haskell Dole, printer Thomas Mosher, literary scholar George Edward Woodberry, and the abolitionist, scholar, and editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

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Both Clubs’ earnest, stereotype-ridden enthusiasm for Middle Eastern culture grated upon the ears of critics. While some literary dissenters scoffed at the club’s uncritical appreciation of the Rubáiyát, the writer of this article, first printed in Britain, worries that Khayyám’s poetry is cheapened by the London Club’s simplistic interpretations.

85, 86, 126, 129

A menu from the meeting of The Omar Khayyám Club of America, Young’s Hotel, Boston, 28 March 1925
Omar Khayyám Collection

A menu from the meeting of The Omar Khayyám Club of America, illustrated by Dorothy Hughes, Boston, 2 April 1921
Omar Khayyám Collection

A menu from the meeting of The Omar Khayyám Club of America, Boston, 1920
Omar Khayyám Collection

A menu from the meeting of The Omar Khayyám Club of America, illustrated by Dorothy Hughes, Exchange Club, Boston, 5 April 1919
Omar Khayyám Collection

Decorated souvenir menus of club dinners indulged Orientalist fantasies by depicting scantily clad women in Eastern garb. In accordance with the Club’s interpretation the Rubáiyát, annual dinners were held around the time of Edward FitzGerald’s birthday each year.

ELIHU VEDDER’S RUBÁIYÁT

Perhaps the most famous of all Rubáiyát illustrations are those of Elihu Vedder (1836-1923), an American expatriate who lived in Rome. Vedder’s lavish accompaniments (he preferred this term over “illustrations”) were also the first to be
published, and helped usher in the so-called Golden Age of book illustration and design. The artist’s control over the design of the entire book—from the embossed cover and the endpapers to the hand-drawn letters—set a precedent for artist-made books on both sides of the Atlantic.

For Vedder, the *Rubáiyát* became a vehicle for expressing his own ideals. In preparation for his design, Vedder rearranged the stanzas of FitzGerald’s fourth edition to portray the three stages of human life as he saw them: the sweetness of life and joy in the present moment; the search for solace in an unmerciful and irrational world; and, finally, the acceptance of life’s transience. Motivated by his identification with both FitzGerald and Khayyám, with whom he sensed a kindred bond, Vedder felt destined to complete his *Rubáiyát* masterwork.

Like many artists of the late Romantic period, Vedder melded Christian iconography with classical imagery and settings. Inspired by Greek philosophy and by his physical surroundings in Rome, Vedder depicted his figures in classical garb and included allegorical figures to represent abstract concepts. The resulting symbolic illustrations also recall the mystical aesthetics of William Blake, who was a profound influence upon Vedder. Vedder sought to portray a balance between Khayyám’s theme of transience—including indulgence in the sensual and material pleasures of life—and the promise of the everlasting offered by Christianity.

Vedder’s first edition debuted in two deluxe formats, just in time for the Christmas holiday. This is the larger, limited edition, for which the plates were mounted on heavy sheets of Japanese vellum. It cost one hundred dollars (equivalent to two thousand dollars today) and sold out in a matter of days.

Vedder worked with a combination of pencil, ink, chalk, and watercolor to create the original drawings. The 1884 editions were produced with a new photographic printing technique, heliotype, which captured the subtle gradations of tone of the originals. Many later editions used the more common halftone printing method.

Please do not lean on the console.

Vedder’s note for this page, printed at the end of the book, reads as follows: “This figure, representing Being, descends to a still profounder rest than that of sleep, as shown by the poppies falling from her hand. She is throwing aside the garment of life, and the flame of her existence is flickering to its close.”

Vedder’s note for this page, printed at the end of the book, reads as follows: “The saints and sages of old are dimly discerned, like dried forms caught in the spiders’ webs and
dust of Time. Their vain theories and prophecies are symbolized in the circle of books each overthrowing its predecessor, with the grim skull as the center.”

242, 200

The reduced phototype edition of Elihu Vedder’s *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1886)

The popular edition of Elihu Vedder’s *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1894)
From the library of Alexander Parsons

As Vedder’s edition grew more famous, the publisher issued larger editions in less expensive formats. The 1886 edition sold for $12.50 and the 1894 edition cost only $5.00. At the time, only the wealthy could afford these prices.

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Edward FitzGerald’s *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (Privately printed, 1905) no. 40 of 75

The four illustrations in this sumptuously bound edition were copied from Vedder’s originals. Though no publisher is given, the edition was likely printed by Thomas Mosher in Portland, Maine.

238, 145, 146, 147

Three lantern slides from a set of Elihu Vedder’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, with the accompanying brochure, “Mr. Eben Francis Thompson’s Illustrated Readings of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*,” ca. 1890
Omar Khayyám Collection

The brochure for this traveling lantern slide show proclaims Vedder’s *Rubáiyát* as “the greatest series of drawings in all modern imaginative art.” Eben Francis Thompson (1859-1939), a young *Rubáiyát* scholar who would later become president of the Omar Khayyám Club of America, provided a lecture accompaniment to the slideshow. The presentation was marketed towards an elite crowd, drawing the attention of such luminaries as Oscar Wilde. Colleges and art societies were among those encouraged to purchase the “illustrated readings” for both delight and edification.

A precursor to the motion picture, magic lantern slides were a popular form of entertainment during the late-nineteenth century. An example of a magic lantern show is displayed below.

[image here!]
[image caption]: from *Encyclopedia of the Magic Lantern* (London: Magic Lantern Society, 2001)
THE GREAT OMAR

The translation is excellent, the book itself a kind of jewel.
—Thomas Carlyle, 1873

No single copy of the Rubáiyát captures the tone of the Cult of Omar better than the finely bound copy known as “The Great Omar.” The firm of Sangorski and Sutcliffe was known for producing custom bindings of the finest quality. In an era when more and more books and magazines were being published, fine bindings became more popular as a way of making distinctions—among classes of literary works and classes of consumers. The firm bound several copies of the Rubáiyát, some with a predominant theme of grape leaves, and some with a peacock.

Around 1909, Francis Sangorski (1875-1912) became possessed with the idea of creating the greatest binding of all time: a jeweled work to hold the smaller of the two 1884 editions of Elihu Vedder’s monumental Rubáiyát. He sought and found investors, and produced a magnificent binding containing almost 1,200 jewels. In early 1912, the final product was shipped to the United States to be displayed for sale. At customs, a disagreement arose over the duty, and the book returned to England. Frustrated, the firm and funders put the book up for auction in England, where it sold for much less than expected, devastating Sangorski. The book, championed in the press, was sent to its owner on another ship to the United States: the “unsinkable” Titanic. Two months later, Sangorski drowned while sea bathing.

Vitrine:

62
Sangorski and Sutcliffe’s jeweled binding of a unique illuminated manuscript, “Nature Poems,” undated
This binding is smaller and less heavily jeweled than the binding of “The Great Omar,” which measured 16 by 13 inches.

Wall items:

117,

“This Gem-Studded Book is the Top Notch of the Binder’s Art,” The New York Times, 7 April 1912
Enlarged digital reproduction

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“Precious Book Lost when Titanic Sank,” The New York Times, 21 April 1912
Enlarged digital reproduction

After 1912, the most famous copy of the *Rubáiyát* was one that no longer existed. More than twenty years after the Titanic sank, Sangorski’s binding was still recognizable to readers.

70, 71

Two costume designs for the character Hajj in Edward Knoblauch’s play *Kismet: An Arabian Night in Three Acts* as performed at the Garrick Theater, London, 1911

The B.J. Simmons Company Collection

John Harrison Stonehouse, who helped fund the production of “The Great Omar” and carried the book on its first trip across the Atlantic, later recalled the influence of this production’s design on Sangorski’s binding:

> At this time *Kismet* was being played at the Garrick Theatre; Sangorski went to see it several times, and nearly always called at Picadilly the following morning, when he would describe the perfect riot of colour in the Scenes, which appeared to have had an almost intoxicating effect on him; and he would show me his Programme, the margins of which he had covered with sketches, to be used later on as the basis of designs for binding.

The costumes represented here are worn by the play’s main character, Hajj, a witty beggar-poet. When *Kismet* was rewritten as a musical in 1953, scriptwriters Charles Lederer and Luther Davis added a new character, a wise old poet named Omar.

[item with no particular relationship to a case:]

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H. J. Ford (1860-1941)

An illustration of quatrain XI from FitzGerald’s first edition of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, not dated

Watercolor

> Working in a late Pre-Raphaelite style, illustrator H. J. Ford imagines a romanticized medieval setting for FitzGerald’s famous stanza. The lushness of Ford’s “Wilderness” is heightened by his use of rich, variegated purples and greens. The
tropical fig tree under which the couple sit adds an element of exoticism, and its leafy branches and ripe purple fruit frame the woman, enhancing her sensual gaze at the viewer. She holds an oud, the Middle Eastern musical instrument that was the precursor to the Western lute.

Ford’s notes on the painting suggest that the image was slated to be reproduced as an illustration in a book; we have found no evidence of a published edition.

Close Reading Wall 2: Beneath the Bough

Many of FitzGerald’s quatrains are stitched together from multiple rubáiyát by Omar Khayyám. The most famous quatrain combines the language of the two quatrains translated on your right: he replaces this politicized language with “Paradise enow.” This word choice, however, does circle back to the Persian: FitzGerald would have known that the Greek root of the word “paradise” derives from the Old Persian for “walled garden.”

The quatrain describes a moment of sensory perfection in a life shadowed by the inevitability of death. FitzGerald’s word choice and grammar enhance the reader’s impression that this stanza describes a pause, a moment of withdrawal and stasis: notice that the stanza has only a conditional verb and eleven nouns.

This verse has become so famous in isolation that many readers assume that the dominant theme of the entire Rubáiyát is “wine, women, and song.” FitzGerald intended quite the opposite. In the introduction to the first edition he explains that in selecting poems to translate, he included “perhaps a less than equal proportion of the ‘Drink and make-merry’” emphasizing Khayyám’s darker themes. But he adds that even Khayyám’s brightest carpe diem verses are melancholy at their core, “saddest perhaps when most ostentatiously merry.”

Illustrated editions of FitzGerald’s translation add another interpretive layer to readers’ experience of this stanza, as may be seen in the facsimile examples to the right.

[Next to this main label, to the right]

Edward Heron-Allen’s translation of two stanzas in the Bodleian manuscript of Omar Khayyám (1899):

If a loaf of wheaten-bread be forthcoming,
a gourd of wine, and a thigh-bone of mutton,
and then, if thou and I be sitting in the wilderness,—
that would be a joy to which no sultan can set bounds.

I desire a little ruby wine and a book of verses,
just enough to keep me alive and half a loaf is needful;
and then, that I and thou, should sit in a desolate place
is better than the kingdom of a sultan.

[Image labels:]

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Edmund H. Garrett (Boston, LC Page and Co, 1899)
In illustrations of this stanza that thematize erotic love, one typically sees a scantily clad woman whose lover reads to her from a book or scroll. Garrett (1853-1929) uses a Western style that allows his readers to more easily envision themselves “Beneath the Bough.” Brangwyn (1867-1956) and Dulac figure Khayyám himself under the tree, suggesting that the “Book of Verse” might be imagined as The Rubáiyát itself.

Later illustrations became increasingly detached from The Rubáiyát text, as artists let their style overshadow the verse. In a style reminiscent of Aubrey Beardsley, Balfour (1896-1941) mixes French Rococo style and 1920s flappers with turbans and pantaloons to create scenes that seem to stand outside of time or place. Intricate detail of garments and foliage dizzy the eye, ultimately shifting the reader’s attention away from the poem.

Polish-American caricaturist Szyk (1894-1951) here imitates the style of nineteenth-century Qajar paintings from Persia. Consistent with Qajar painting but startlingly incongruous with the poem, Szyk depicts emblems that symbolize to Westerners the barbarisms of the Orient: a knife tucked under the man’s belt and a sword, partially hidden by the bread and wine. Such images, reproduced in a Western hand, reaffirm stereotypes of the East.

While illustrations of this stanza sometimes omit key objects such as the bread, wine, or book, most adhere to the image of two lovers beneath a tree. Anderson omits a human “Thou” from her composition, instead depicting a contemplative solitary reader accompanied by a small songbird at the center of the composition.
Cecil Trew (undated manuscript)

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Stephen Gooden (1940)

Most illustrators ignore the dark undertone of The Rubáiyát while illustrating this stanza, representing lovers who are “living in the moment.” These two illustrators focus on the idea that death is lurking in a landscape that is only an imitation of Paradise. In contrast to many illustrations, Trew’s oasis is not framed by lush vegetation, rivers, or mountains, but by a desert that stretches infinitely to the horizon. His figures seem engaged in philosophical conversation, not romance. Gooden’s (1892-1955) stand-alone etching represents Death as an almost comic skeleton who lurks within the paradisical landscape.

Gooden defies the conventions of Rubáiyát illustration by depicting two male figures. Though neither FitzGerald nor Khayyam specify gender, the mention of a beloved in classical Persian poetry traditionally connoted a pretty young boy.

TEXT PANEL: EVERYBODY’S RUBÁIYÁT

At the turn of the century, the number of published works related to The Rubáiyát shot up dramatically, and the book soon became a popular sensation. As the items on display here reveal, diverse interpretations and transformations of The Rubáiyát appeared across British and American culture. In America in particular, industrialized book production joined with innovations in marketing and consumer spending to transform The Rubáiyát from a work of literature into a vernacular, a common language that reached across the culture.

Visitors will notice that few editions of The Rubáiyát are displayed in this section of the exhibition. Instead, the artifacts shown here demonstrate that its pithy, memorable stanzas were uniquely suited to appropriation and transformation. Writers of imitations, illustrated parodies, musical settings, and political cartoons captured The Rubáiyát’s rhythms, phrases, and themes of fate and mortality while often divorcing the poems from their Persian context. Films and plays reshaped the life of Omar Khayyám, immersing audiences in a distant fantasy world. Religious writers sought to claim or deny Khayyám’s words in relation to their own faiths, and advertisers appealed to audiences who sought to define themselves through The Rubáiyát. Modernist writers scattered their works with allusions to the poems, demonstrating ambivalence about its poetic value and its popular appeal.

Looking back, it seems that The Rubáiyát’s meteoric rise in the early years of the twentieth century practically fated the book to burn out. It did so, slowly declining in popularity from World War II on. The Rubáiyát is well-known today among many older readers, but has been discovered by few young readers, and scholarly studies are rare. Numerous factors contributed to its near disappearance from the literary canon and the broader culture, and it is doubtful that it will ever recover a large readership. With these considerations in mind, The Rubáiyát may be seen on the one hand as an case
study in the shifts and turns of literary reputation, and on the other as an object lesson in the importance of preserving our material culture.

THE RUBÁIYÁT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

America experienced great social, cultural, economic, and technological change in the early twentieth century. A large middle class rose to prominence and became the center of a burgeoning consumer culture. At the same time, a constant flood of immigrants made America their home, and cities swelled with newcomers searching for opportunity. Such rapid changes destabilized long-held traditions and social roles and blurred boundaries between classes and ethnic groups.

The more British and American readers embraced the Rubáiyát and transformed the text to suit their own purposes, the further detached it became from its Eastern origins. At the same time, the combination of the text’s foreignness, its newness to a Western audience, and its familiar Victorian form made it both alluring and comforting. The perception of the Rubáiyát as something at once foreign and familiar made this text a safe place to broach new and uncomfortable issues in contemporary life. Rubáiyát parodies explored the boundaries between sameness and difference and were used to define personal, class, and group identity. Through this new, common language of rubáiyát verse, people could assert who they were and, more importantly, who they were not. In this way, the Rubáiyát brought a sense of stability and order to an increasingly fragmented world.

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Wallace Irwin’s *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, Jr.*, illustrated by Gelett Burgess (San Francisco: Paul Elder, 1902)

As young people experienced greater independence and opportunity in urban centers across the country, traditions of courtship and marriage quickly began to erode. Marriage rates fell while divorce rates skyrocketed. Elders sensed a loss of tradition, as they no longer had the same level of control over selecting their children’s mates. Many saw the modern bachelor as a troublesome figure whose presence signaled an epidemic.

Irwin’s parody tells the story of Omar Khayyam, Jr., a bachelor who boldly resists societal control over his personal life. Sharing his “father”’s desire to live in the present, he indulges equally in tobacco and women, and ultimately succeeds in maintaining his freedom by postponing marriage indefinitely. Burgess’s illustration suggests that single women did not enjoy the same freedoms of modern courtship. Ashamed for accepting a kiss from her suitor, the woman cries, “Oh, how can you respect me after this?”

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Helen Rowland’s *The Rubáiyát of a Bachelor*, illustrated by Harold Speakman (London: Simpkin, 1915)
Humorist Helen Rowland presents a woman’s take on modern bachelorhood. In this story, the woman becomes fed up with her suitor’s reluctance to commit. With a rolling pin hidden behind her back, she prepares to take control of the relationship. Portrayed as sheepish and effeminate, Rowland’s bachelor finally succumbs to the institution of marriage. In this version of the bachelor story, societal forces win out over individual will.

44

Mrs. Ambrose Madison Willis’s *The Social Rubaiyat of a Bud*, illustrated by Elsie A. Harrison (San Francisco: Paul Elder, 1913)

In this light but thoughtful study of the bachelorette or “bud,” Willis outlines the serious obstacles faced by women who attempted to live an autonomous—unmarried—life. She acknowledges the failure of old-fashioned Victorian courtship rituals and recognizes women’s increasing preference to have an independent lifestyle. But when it came to the practical issue of finances, many middle and upper class women found it to be more of a struggle than it was worth. Torn between her personal goals and the prospect of a rewarding family life, Willis’s bachelorette retreats to marriage:

> This Scheme of Fate is mine, I’m in it—of it,
  > But yet some spark of Soul that soars above it
  > Invalidates my Computations, and
  > At once I hate, deplore—but dearly love it.

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Clare Victor Dwiggin’s *Rubáiyát of the Egg*, illustrated by the author (Philadelphia: J. C. Winston, 1905)

Perhaps the most visually compelling of the Ransom Center’s *Rubáiyát* parodies, this book’s ovoid shape marks it as a gimmick, and the book’s title page seems to bear this promise out: there, the author refers to his poem as “A Persian Omelette” and “Egg Philosophy.” But egg puns become the light cover for the book’s broad survey of social issues ranging from the eroding institution of marriage to social responsibility for the poor. In stanza XI, contemporary fears about delayed marriage and the bearing of children are projected onto a “spinster hen” who weeps after producing yet another unfertilized egg. Stanza XXVI depicts a “scentful” or rotten egg. Poor and crippled, he becomes the butt of society’s joke. But, as the author demonstrates, such jokes turn sour when one is confronted with the outstretched hand of the needy. In the 1930s, a number of Depression-themed *Rubáiyát* parodies revisited this theme.

110

Ned Nafe’s *The Rubaiyat of a College Student* (New York: Broadway, 1911)
While a student at the University of Washington in Seattle, Ned Nafe composed this *Rubáiyát* parody about college life. Nafe explored the predicament of collegehood—a period of life in which many young people first taste independence but are still financially dependent on their parents. Excited by his newfound freedom, Nafe tears into the streets with a fistful of “Papa’s cash.” While attending college was an opportunity available to a widening segment of the population that included women, among others, it was still a rather exclusive experience, financially out of reach for most Americans.

James Witcomb Riley’s *Rubáiyát of Doc Sifers*, illustrated by C. M. Relyea (New York: The Century, 1897)

Written in “Hoosier” dialect, Riley’s poem about a rural Indiana doctor mocks highbrow taste and demonstrates the author’s allegiance to the common folk. Riley uses dialect to cultivate a sense of regional distinctiveness and pride, portraying Doc Sifers as a man who holds the same small-town values as the patients he serves. Riley downplays Sifers’s status as a well-educated professional, painting him instead as a man of faith and a good-natured, likeable person. The perception of the *Rubáiyát* as a nostalgic, Victorian text made a fitting template for Riley’s portrait of a character that is loved for his conservative values. Even though Riley attempts to distance himself from highbrow taste, his very knowledge of the *Rubáiyát* at a time when the text was still a token of the elite places the author among the very group that he mocks. Riley’s own conflicted social status as a man of letters and a “People’s Laureate” is mirrored in the life of his protagonist, Doc Sifers.

F. F. D. Albery’s *Omar von Berlin* (Columbus, OH: The Lea-Mar Print Shop, 1904)

At the turn of the twentieth century, America saw the highest immigration rates in its history. In the year 1900, immigrants and first-generation Americans together made up one third of the country’s population. A number of Rubáiyát parodies explore anxiety on the part of established communities over increasing ethnic and racial diversity, and also demonstrate a fascination with cultural traditions unlike their own. *Omar von Berlin* completely ignores the *Rubáiyát*’s foreign origins yet, at the same time, uses it to think about people of foreign descent living in one’s own country.

In this spoof of German-American culture, Albery employs an exaggerated German accent and plays up cultural stereotypes such as beer drinking. The poem follows a German immigrant who cannot make sense of the *Rubáiyát* because he interprets it in a purely literal fashion. Through the character’s inability to penetrate the deeper meaning of the *Rubáiyát* (by then a symbol of American culture), Albery implies that citizens of German ancestry were not true Americans. By painting the speaker of the poem as dim-witted, Albery mocks one of the crowning achievements of German culture—its educational system. Though humorous in its day, *Omar von Berlin* seems to contemporary eyes a manifestation of American intolerance.
The rising middle class extended its concern over society’s ills to the treatment of animals. It promoted a domestic ethic of kindness, which recognized animals as sentient beings with emotions, morals, and even souls. The phenomenon of pet keeping—owning animals primarily for companionship, rather than for work—became increasingly popular. During this period, pets became widely considered as members of the family in the manner of pet ownership today.

To make a case for kindness towards animals, some authors wrote animal autobiographies in poetry or prose. This powerful literary technique gave animals a voice in their own guardianship and allowed people to imagine the world through their pet’s eyes. In *The Rubáiyát of a Omar Dog-yam*, a group of dogs gather to discuss their masters’ ungratefulness and neglect of them. Such stories served as lessons to those who did not bestow proper affection on their furry companions. The inclusion of pets in the *Rubáiyát* craze reflects their elevated status in the eyes of the middle class.

The vast fame of the *Rubáiyát* by mid-century is perhaps best documented in this, a standard reference guide to common quotations. Almost two-thirds of the *Rubáiyát* is represented; while other authors are represented by more pages of entries than FitzGerald, the single text of the *Rubáiyát* is surpassed only by the Bible and a handful of other texts. A similar depth of coverage may be found in John Bartlett’s *Familiar Quotations* from the same era.

**SPECIAL TEXT PANEL: THE QUATRAIN CRAZE**

The most striking aspect of the *Rubáiyát* phenomenon was the turn-of-the-century fad of parodies and imitations, both humorous and serious. Rudyard Kipling first parodied FitzGerald’s translation in 1886, but the practice did not become common until the turn of the century. Over three hundred parodies and imitations were
identified in a 1929 bibliography of the *Rubáiyát*. Many more likely exist but have not yet been documented.

*Rubáiyát* parodies are unusual: they most often use the form and themes of the *Rubáiyát* to parody not the poem, but modern culture itself. They tend to concern the dramatic social, economic, and technological changes confronting the parodists and their readers. *The Rubáiyát*’s theme of fate offered readers a means to cope with the forces of modernity: like FitzGerald’s speaker, they could control neither the course of their lives nor the world around them.

The humor and social critiques in *Rubáiyát* parodies are fashioned through intricate imitation of lines and stanzas. The parodists’ reliance on the original text reveals that a broad audience was not only expected to be familiar with the *Rubáiyát* but to know the poem intimately.

PARODIES AND IMITATIONS IN BOOK FORM

The following list includes most of the known parodies and imitations in the Ransom Center book collections, including short parodies that appear in longer books:

“The Rupaiyat of Omar Kal’vin” (1886)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Doc Sifers (1897)  
The Golfer’s *Rubáiyát* (1901)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Mirza-Mem’n (1902)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám Junior (1902)  
Poker *Rubáiyát* (1903)  
Omar von Berlin (1904)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Omar Cayenne [1904]  
The *Rubáiyát* of the Tourist (1905)  
The *Rubáiyát* of a Persian Kitten (1904)  
The *Rubáiyát* of the Egg (1905)  
The *Rubáiyát* of a Motor Car (1906)  
Omar de Profundis (1906)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Hope (1906)  
“Rubáiyát of Summer Khayyám” (1906)  
The *Rubáiyát* of the Roses (1907)  
Wise and Otherwise: The footballer’s Omar Khayyám [1907]  
A Smoker’s *Rubáiyát* [1908]  
Omar Repentant (1908)  
The *Rubáiyát* of a Huffy Husband (1908)  
Omar in Hades [1909]  
The *Rubáiyát* of Bridge (1909)  
The *Rubáiyát* of a College Student (1911)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Omar Cigarettes [1912]  
Omar in London (1913)  
The *Rubáiyát* of a Minor Statesman [1913]  
The Social *Rubáiyát* of a Bud (1913)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Omar Konigram (1913)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Golfer Guyem (ca. 1913)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Omar Dog-Yam (1914)  
The Ruby Yap of Homer K. Yam (1915)  
The *Rubáiyát* of an Actor, and other Stage Rhymes (1916)  
The *Rubáiyát* of Omarred Wilhelm (1916)
The Rubáiyát of a Photographer (1918)
“The Naval Officer’s Rubáiyát” (1919)
Rubáiyát of O’Mick-I-Am (about a fox terrier) [1919]
The Rubáiyát of a Maconochie Ration (1920)
The Rubáiyát of Omar, M.P. (1921)
The Rubáiyát of the Twentieth Century (1922)
The Rubáiyát of Ohow Droyam (1922)
The Doctor’s Rubáiyát (1922)
Omar Khayyám in Mufti (1927)
The Rubáiyát of Canada, or, Omar Up-to-Date (1929)
Rubáiyát, with reverent salaams to Omar and Fitz (1933)
“The Depression Rubáiyát” (1934)
Rubáiyát of Account Overdue (1935)
The Sacred The Rubáiyát of Omar Ki-Yi and other Waggish Rhymes (1938)
The Rubáiyát of a Golfer (1946)
Baker Street Rubáiyát, by Sherlock Holmes (1949)
The Rub-ya-out of Omore Diem in a new translation (1962)

EPHEMERAL PARODIES
The Ransom Center’s Omar Khayyám manuscript collection includes an anonymous typed transcription of short parodies from American newspapers and magazines dating from 1902–1905. Listed here are the parodies from that document whose titles are particularly descriptive:
“The Auto Rubáiyát”
“The Baby’s Omar”
“The Bowery Omar”
“The Fisherman’s Rubáiyát”
“From the Rubáiyát of Mr. Hennessy”
“The Home Comer’s Rubáiyát”
“How Granny Reads her Omar”
“The Irish Omar”
“The Linotype Proofreader’s Omar Khayyám”
“Omar Adulterated”
“Omar at the Dump”
“Omar at the Horse Show”
“Omar at the Spring Openings (fashion shows)”
“Omar for Housewives”
“An Omar for Ladies”
“Omar in the Fashion News”
“Omar in Wall Street”
“Omar Khayyám on Massachusetts”
“Omar of If”
“An Omar of Rural Joys”
“Omar on a Roof Garden”
“Omar on the Omar Craze”
“Omar, the Sausage-Maker”
“Omar Up to Date”
“The Patriyat”
“The Piker’s Rubáiyát”
“The Poets’ Rubáiyát”
“The Rubáiyát of a Chorus Girl”
“The Rubáiyát of Coney Island”
“The Rubáiyát of ‘Old Žrods’ (the weatherman’s predictions)”
“Rubáiyát of the Old Red Moving Van”
“The Rubáiyát of a Persian Lamb (a fashion item)”
“The Rubáiyát of St. Nick”
“Rubáiyát of the Unemployed”
“The Ruby Yacht of Henry Morgan”
“The Rube’s Rubáiyát”
“Signs of Summer by Omar”
“The Spinster’s Rubáiyát”
“The Subwayat of Omar Khayyám”
“The Umpire’s Rubáiyát”
“Whereamiat of Away from Homar Khayyám”
“Yuletide Rubáiyát”

A PARODY SAMPLER
The Rubáiyát’s most famous stanza was also its most frequently parodied. This is not surprising, since a wide audience could expect to remember the iconic three objects it describes: a loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and a book of verse. While some of the stanzas translate effortlessly into today’s language, others are filled with slang, jokes, and social commentary that are obscure to us today.

A Penny Trumpet underneath the Bough,
A Drum that’s big enough to make a Row;
A Toy Fire-engine, and a squeaking Doll,
Oh, Life were Pandemonium enow.
from Carolyn Wells’s “The Baby’s Omar” in Life, 19 February 1903

A paper wid de latest sporti’ noos,
A san’wich an’ a shell uv beer, an’ youse
A-spielin’ wid me down ter Coney isle—
If dat ain’t heaven den de angels lose.
from “The Bowery Omar” in The Judge, 9 August 1902

A Book of Bartha Clay’s—a’nt that great stuff?
A Stein of Suds—one stein?—that’s just a bluff;
And me on Broadway with a six months’ run,
I guess that would be Paradise enough.
from Ned Nafe’s The Rubáiyát of a College Student, 1911

A Soaking Towel upon a fevered Brow,
An Ovid text, a Pony true, and Thou
Beside me plugging for the next Exam,
Oh, College-life, in spots, is hell enow!
from H. W. Boynton’s The Golfer’s Rubáiyát, 1901
A Grand Piano underneath the Bough,
A Gramophone, a Chinese Gong, and Thou
Trying to sing an Anthem off the Key—
Oh, Paradise were Wilderness enow?

from Wallace Irwin’s *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám Jr.*, 1902

A book of rules, a frown upon my brow,
An indicator, a good eye and thou
Beside me, shrieking “Lobster, thou art rank!”
Oh, this, methinks, were agony enow.

from “The Umpire’s Rubáiyát” in *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, not dated

Und den you vant to lay down by a Dree
Und read a book and drink some CATNIP TEA,
But when you got your DEAD O’ COLD I bet
You vish you took some BIER inside mit me.

from Mary Louise Clarke’s *Omar von Berlin*, 1904

A pipe of Boer tobacco ’neath the blue,
A tin of meat, a bottle, and a few
choice magazines like Harmsworth’s or the Strand
I sometimes think war has its blessings too.

by Henry W. Nevinson, untitled, undated transcription

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Even those who bemoaned the seemingly endless stream of parodies couldn’t resist the temptation. Here is the closing quatrain of Wilbur D. Nesbit’s “A Plea to the Parodists,” published in *The Saturday Evening Post* at the height of the craze in 1904:

So let us put the Quatrain craze away,
Let’s write no jangling *Rubáiyát* to-day.
Aye, Brothers, Sisters, Cousins of the Pen,
O, mar not Omar any more, I pray!

**DEBATING THE RUBÁIYÁT**

A deep understanding of the *Rubáiyát* craze depends upon studying the wide and varied reaction to the poem as a doctrine—a philosophical, spiritual, or religious manifesto. The surge in the text’s popularity around 1900 can be attributed in part to the famous “crisis of faith” of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Advances in science, new archeological discoveries, and new modes of biblical criticism delivered a flood of evidence that compromised religious stability. Due in part to rapid modernization and perhaps to the rigidity of Christian dogma, believers more commonly began seeking answers outside the boundaries of their faith.

The *Rubáiyát*’s pleasure-seeking fatalism offered a refreshing alternative to the Christian focus on preparation for the afterlife. Khayyám’s poetry, as translated by FitzGerald, appealed precisely because it broke radically with tradition. Many found that Khayyám’s philosophy of “living in the moment” better suited the challenges of an ever-changing modern world.

While some wholeheartedly embraced the way of the *Rubáiyát*, others railed against the dangers of a doubting creed and against its cult-like influence. Critics such as journalist Mark Sullivan even blamed the *Rubáiyát* for “sapping and undermining”
American morals. The heated dialogue that developed between writers on either side—those who championed the Rubáiyát’s philosophy and those who sought to defame it—fueled already fevered interest in the poem.

Herschel Family Library

Though FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát and Darwin’s Origin of Species debuted in the same year, Darwin’s scientific treatise on the theory of evolution had an immediate, profound impact. Darwin’s seminal work started a chain of events that laid the groundwork for the Rubáiyát’s popularity a half century later. After Darwin, the gulf between faith and science grew rapidly as the Western world began to value, above all else, the truths of the physical world—that which could be discerned through empirical evidence. Concrete methods of observation, experimentation, and intellectual thought were increasingly favored over intangible concepts like intuition, faith, and hope.

Just as the philosophy of the Rubáiyát seemed particularly applicable to the modern world, Khayyám, a man of science, was regarded as an ambassador of modern rational thought. What intrigued modern readers further was the poet’s frank admission that even science could not answer the eternal questions of humankind.

H. A. Bjerregaard, Sufi Interpretations of the quatrains of Omar Khayyam and Fitzgerald (New York: J. F. Taylor, 1902)

Despite FitzGerald’s insistence that Khayyám was not a mystic but a rationalist, firmly rooted in this world, numerous scholars and translators nevertheless claimed Khayyám as a member of the mystical Islamic tradition of Sufism. Sufi poets such as Rumi and Hafiz use the metaphor of the earthly lover and beloved to explore the spiritual relationship between humans and God. In Sufi poetry, mentions of wine and physical inebriation become metaphors for spiritual union with the divine.

This elaborately printed text “decodes” FitzGerald’s quatrains, purportedly revealing Khayyám’s true Sufi voice. A vigorous debate on this topic continued throughout the decades of the Rubáiyát’s great popularity. The vast majority of scholars today do not consider Khayyám a Sufi.

Amanda T. Jones (1835-1914), Rubáiyát of Solomon (New York: Alden Brothers, 1905)

John Franklin Genung (1850-1919), Ecclesiastes and Omar Khayyám; a note for the spiritual temper of our time (New York: Crowell, 1901)
Several writers saw parallels between the philosophy of Omar Khayyám and the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Hebrew Bible. Like Khayyám, the author of Ecclesiastes (once thought to be King Solomon) advocates the enjoyment of simple pleasures and focuses on the fleeting nature of human life. Amanda T. Jones demonstrates the compatibility of the two works by arranging the text of Ecclesiastes in the meter of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*.

A professor of literary and biblical interpretation at Amherst College, Genung finds the texts of Ecclesiastes and the *Rubáiyát* to be not only compatible, but relevant to the present era of spiritual searching. Unlike other critics of his time, Genung asserts that to listen to the *Rubáiyát*’s philosophy of doubt does not mean to renounce one’s Christian faith. While some railed against Khayyám’s purported disbelief in an afterlife, Genung reminds his readers that, when reading the *Rubáiyát*, “we are never moved to deny the reality of a future life.”

George Viett (1868-1943), *New Rubáiyát from a Southern Garden* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1915)

A number of devout Christians spoke out against Khayyám’s supposed disregard of immortality. Viett deemed “Omar”’s skepticism a threat to his faith and warned his readers of the poem’s sweet seduction, calling out “Beware this Persian rhyme!” The author took particular offense to the following stanza from the *Rubáiyát*, which proclaims the finality of death:

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust into Dust, and under Dust, to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and—sans End!

Viett responds with utter conviction:

Thus much, old Omar, I’ll not yield to thee—
I will nor hail nor praise thy blasphemy;
I do protest—by Love’s Immortal Soul
Protest—the Dust is not my Destiny!

N. B. Ripley, *Omar or Christ* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1914)

Ripley’s provocatively titled story describes in poetic verse the author’s hypothetical journey into the beyond. Ripley is guided by Death, who is set upon persuading the author that there is no heaven, nor will Christ meet him on the other side: “Thou, O son of man, must find the tomb thy final bed.” Death tempts Ripley again and again, but the author never wavers in his beliefs. Finally, Death reveals that
their journey has been a test. At that moment, a brilliant white light appears and Christ stands before them to usher Ripley into the everlasting.

Ripley’s simple story reminds Christians to remain steadfast in their beliefs. When choosing to live by Omar or by Christ, this author demonstrates that it is too risky to follow the path of doubt when salvation is at stake.

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Jay Gee See, The Sacred Rubáiyát (Louisville: Privately printed, 1933)

Countering Viett’s and Ripley’s warnings to steer clear of the Rubáiyát’s invitation to doubt, J. G. Clem, writing under a pseudonym, finds just as much danger in following the evangelical Christian church. In The Sacred Rubáiyát he writes,

Go to Church—so commands the Clergy,
Accept Opium Dreams of the Bible on faith;
Trade Reason for Piety, or be dammed to
Fricassee àla Queen with Satan all Eternity.

Clem believes that such forms of faith are fear mongering, preying on the desperate and dumb. He suggests that people would be better off if they listened to their hearts and to common sense rather than followed the “Zealot’s riddle of Eternity.” In Clem’s view, a saner religion would find “The Rubáiyát for a Testament near the Altar”; then church would be “Paradise enow.”

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H. Justus Williams, The Last Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (London: Sisley’s, 1908)

This work tells the little-known story of Omar Khayyám’s ill-fated conversion to Christianity. Fully endorsing the Rubáiyát’s call to enjoy worldly pleasures, this humorous account enumerates the pitfalls of the Christian faith, as experienced by the Persian poet. “Omar” soon returns to his epicurean ways, shaking off the morbid asceticism of Christian ritual, which has been exaggerated by Williams for effect.

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Stirred by Khayyám’s vision of fate, Rev. E. F. Dinsmore focuses his sermon on the famous quatrain (featured on the nearby wall) that inspired much religious debate. While conceding that Khayyám is correct in stating that we are unable to change the past, Dinsmore reminds his congregation that the future is in our hands. He believes that we are the masters of our fate and that, through free will, we can affect what the “moving finger” ultimately writes. Dinsmore closes his sermon with a quatrain that describes his view on fate:

“The Moving Finger writes,” and by no power
Shall what it writes be blotted from the scroll?
Then will I make the record, every hour,
Reveal the upward movement of my soul.


Lafferty pays homage to the *Rubáiyát*’s philosophy of “living in the moment,” before taking the Persian poet to task for his often pessimistic tone. In Lafferty’s own “metaphysical theory,” the author aims to uplift his audience and lead them to a “sane, temperate, and happy existence.” Rooted in the Protestant work ethic, Lafferty’s stanzas put a positive, practical twist on Khayyam’s foreboding message:

“The Moving finger writes”—how true, how true,
Then it “moves on”; but let me say to you
If you have made an error, rub it out.
Trial and Error prove what’s best to do.

**CONSUMING THE RUBÁIYÁT**

Historian T. J. Jackson Lears describes the turn-of-the-twentieth-century fascination with chance, risk, and luck as a revolt against the certainty of modern life. Leisure activities—such as sports, games, and automobile riding—and new social norms for drinking and smoking fulfilled the urge to break out of a world that had become increasingly stable and secure due to advances in science, technology, and medicine. Fittingly, the philosophy of the *Rubáiyát*, which emphasized life’s unpredictability and man’s inability to control fate, mirrored the thrill of such leisure pursuits.

The *Rubáiyát* flourished in a new democratic consumer culture that encouraged all Americans, regardless of socio-economic background, to desire and acquire the same material comforts. Advertisers quickly capitalized on this notion by connecting their products to the *Rubáiyát*. Just as the poem became “everybody’s *Rubáiyát,*” advertisers promoted the idea that everyone was entitled to the same “joy of life” espoused by the poet himself. Popular culture transformed Omar into a character, a spokesperson for “living the good life.” Advertisers and enthusiasts alike pushed aside serious aspects of the *Rubáiyát* in favor of Omar’s new mantra of materialism.


The enjoyment of life through leisure activities was the focus of a group of *Rubáiyát* parodies in the early twentieth century. Boynton’s *The Golfer’s Rubáiyát* is a lighthearted account of this middle-class leisure sport, a British import that flourished in America at the turn of the century. Verse XLVIII cleverly parodies the popular
“Moving Finger” quatrain, suggesting that, once “the swinging Brassie strikes,” the fate of the ball is sealed, and nothing can be done to change one’s score.

To our contemporary eyes, the accompanying illustrations to this parody belie the lighthearted nature of the text; among scenes of golfers dressed in turbans and pantaloons stands a black caddy, a reminder of the segregated culture in which this fantasy was based.

Kirke La Shelle (1862-1905), *Poker Rubáiyát*, illustrated by F. Holme (1868-1904), (Phoenix: Bandar Log Press, 1903)

La Shelle encourages readers to join in on this risky game where the stakes are high: “Come, take a Hand; Forget your frigid Feet.” He cajoles the reader with the attitude of a gambling addict, saying that a game is “never lost till won,” and that a win is sure to be had in the next hand. At the same time, the graphic quality of Holme’s cartoon-inspired woodcuts makes a light-hearted commentary upon the game. The captions under each illustration, such as “The Bluffer’s Foolish Face,” underscore the humor of the images in counterpoint with La Shelle’s text, which alone could be read as a cautionary tale on gambling.

Although poker was widely viewed by the middle and upper classes as a working-class vice, its seedy reputation likewise appealed to those who believed that the Rubáiyát’s *carpe diem* philosophy gave them permission to transgress social codes of conduct.

Omar Khayyám Collection

One can only imagine what a Rubáiyát game might have entailed. A deck of fifty-two cards—each suit represented by the stanzas of a different translator—this set could be used to play traditional card games as well.

North Carolina mill owner Clarke W. Walton amassed a Rubáiyát collection of over 6,000 items, purchased by the Cleveland Public Library after his death.

Carolyn Wells (1862-1942), *The Rubáiyát of Bridge* (New York: Harper, 1909)
In contrast to La Shelle’s *Poker Rubáiyát*, Wells’s parody describes the more respectable game of bridge, which was wildly popular among the upper classes. Wells focuses on the relationship between skill and luck, admitting in the end that no matter how much one studies its rules and strategies, the game is “Played to the Last Trump by the Hand of Fate.”
We know little about the Omar Tea Rooms other than what can be gleaned from these quaint souvenirs. Located in the heart of London’s West End, at the time a vibrant literary and multi-ethnic community, the Tea Rooms shared the block with a thriving law office and the headquarters of the British suffragettes, The Women’s Social and Political Union.

Advertisers’ introduction of Omar-branded products testify to the currency of the name and image of Khayyám at the time. While advertisers linked certain products—notably sweets and tobacco—to the spirit of Omar’s indulgence in material pleasures, other products, like Omar Tooth Powder, had no real connection to the sentiments expressed in the Rubáiyát. The sale of this product relied solely on the popularity of the text and its association with the famed Persian poet.

Bates’s Rubáiyát parody was published in six serial installments with advertisements for DRYCO milk on alternating pages. The lengthy advertisements contain technical language and instructions for prescribing the product to patients, suggesting that the booklet’s distribution was focused on medical practitioners.

While the verses themselves do not advertise the product, the parody plays a significant marketing role. Still in its infancy, the profession of medical doctor had not yet gained the wide respect it now holds today. Verses stroke the doctor’s ego, assuring him that “Honor and Praise by Right to him belong, /Whom we by the Title of the Doctor Call.” One verse even proclaims that he “is greater than King or Czar.”

The American Tobacco Company introduced Omar Cigarettes to the public in 1912 with an advertising ploy that capitalized on the popularity of the Rubáiyát. Posters for Omar cigarettes focused on Khayyám’s supposed hedonistic indulgence in worldly pleasures. “Joy of Life” became the product’s slogan. By evoking an Eastern fantasy
world led by a jolly, round-bellied Omar, American Tobacco effectively sold consumers a much-desired escape from their hectic, workaday lives.

The *Rubáiyát of Omar Cigarettes* features the lighthearted Omar as a fictional character in this parody-advertisement. In it, Omar explores modern-day America in a series of twenty-nine mini-adventures. Four selected adventures are displayed on a wall at your right towards the front of the gallery.

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Stanley Wisdom, *Rubáiyát of Canada, or, Omar up-to-date* (Montreal: Consolidated Distilleries, 1929)

During American Prohibition (1920-1933), Canadian distilleries flourished. Their products were either consumed by visiting Americans or illegally exported to the U.S. Stanley Wisdom’s parody-advertisement tells the story of a New Yorker who travels to Montreal in search of drink. The verses sing the praises of various liquors produced by Consolidated Distilleries and facing pages feature drink recipes for popular cocktails made with their premium liquors.

While temperance groups disparaged the *Rubáiyát* as a “bible for drunkards,” advertisers saw a natural link between Khayyám’s passion for wine and the sale of alcoholic beverages. Consolidated Distilleries capitalized on the popularity of the *Rubáiyát*’s philosophy to make Prohibition seem especially unjust. The booklet’s alternate title, *Omar up-to-date*, proposes a revival of Omarian values at a time when living by the poet’s philosophy, taken literally, would have been illegal.

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Michael Kaiserlian

A snapshot of Mary Jo Kaiserlian in front of Omar Khayyam’s restaurant, O’Farrell St. at Powell St., San Francisco, CA, 1962

Gelatin silver print

Loan courtesy of Michelle Kaiserlian

Armenian immigrant George Mardikian (1903-1977) opened Omar Khayyam’s in San Francisco in 1938, serving specialties of the Near East. A die-hard *Rubáiyát* enthusiast, he also hosted a weekly radio program called “Dinner at Omar Khayyam’s” that drew more fan mail than the Bay Area radio station had ever received. Mardikian felt that the *Rubáiyát* resonated in particular with his experience as an immigrant in America. Alluding to the stanza in which Khayyám strikes from the calendar “Unborn Tomorrow, and dead Yesterday,” Mardikian writes,

You who have been born in America, I wish I could make you understand what it is like not to be an American—not to have been an American all your life—and then suddenly with the words of a judge in flowing robes to be one, for that moment and forever after. One moment, you belong with your fathers to a million dead yesterdays—the next you belong with America to a million unborn tomorrows.
Wall items:

72, 73, 74, 75


In his introduction to his *Rubáiyát* portfolio, the young Indian artist Sett described his style as combining “a true Oriental atmosphere with just a dash of the West.” Though educated at Cambridge and well known in Aesthetic circles there, Sett denied the artistic influence of the late Aubrey Beardsley. Humorously snobbish, Sett proclaimed the superiority of his illustrated edition over the sea of “illustrated Omars.” He felt that his knowledge of Persian literature and his Parsi heritage (of Persian Zoroastrian descent) gave his work unparalleled authenticity.

On the wall to your right:


Digital reproductions

North Carolina mill owner Clarke W. Walton amassed a *Rubáiyát* collection of over 6,000 items, which was purchased by the Cleveland Public Library after his death. His charming alphabet book summarizes the popular themes of the *Rubáiyát*; accompanying the letters of the alphabet are relevant stanzas representing a wide range of translators.

Frederick Lewis Allen (1890-1954), “Omar Moran,” from an unidentified newspaper, 1908

This rare American political parody of the *Rubáiyát* lampoons Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan who ran unsuccessfully against William Howard Taft in 1908. Some of the political figures mentioned in the parody, including the title character, John Moran, are lost to history. Other key players, such as newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst, have endured.

Bryan, a prohibitionist and opponent of Darwinism, ran on a Populist platform that would seem conservative by today’s standards. However, in 1908, his views were considered so liberal that he became an easy target for political conservatives and a favorite politician to satirize.

The parody’s author, Harvard freshman Frederick Lewis Allen, later became a notable scholar of popular history and the editor-in-chief of *Harper’s Magazine.*
Carolyn Wells (1862-1942), *Rubáiyát of a Motor Car* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1906)  
Digital reproductions of four page spreads

In 1903, Dr. Horatio Nelson Jackson, his mechanic Crocker, and his dog Bud became national heroes after making the first transcontinental crossing of America in an automobile. Three years later, Carolyn Wells’s *Rubáiyát* parody explored both the thrills and frustrations of owning a car.

When the automobile debuted, it promised to be an efficient mode of transportation. But early vehicles were riddled with defects and demanded constant maintenance. Already a strain on middle class purse strings, car ownership meant the added expense of auto accessories, such as a proper driving outfit and goggles. In the end, Wells concludes that the temporary thrill of speeding along in a motor car is worth any cost. With palpable excitement, Wells indulges in her newfound entertainment, championing the *Rubáiyát*’s call to seize the day.

Wallace Irwin’s *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, Jr.*, illustrated by Gelett Burgess (San Francisco: Elder, 1902)  
Commercial publishers and private presses fueled the demand for *Rubáiyát*-related items by putting many distinctive items on the market. San Francisco’s Paul Elder used different colored papers and inks to create variant covers of the same book, as displayed by these three copies, thus creating multiple variants for collectors to track down. The interior of Burgess’s book may be seen in the exhibition case entitled “The *Rubáiyát* and Social Change.”

Digital reproductions of four page spreads

In this parody-advertisement for Omar cigarettes, the fun-loving Omar and his female companion, Angel Shape, take on Manhattan in a series of twenty-nine adventures that tout the many benefits of smoking “Omars”: they enhance the fun of any activity and can even serve as a buffer in sticky situations. Omar sometimes shares his ‘joy of life’ by tossing packs of cigarettes to those he meets. By the end of the parody, it becomes clear that Omar owes his *carpe-diem* spontaneity and laid-back attitude to the mood-enhancing properties of his cigarettes.

*Through The Rubáiyát of Omar Cigarettes*, American Tobacco appealed to people’s desire for a collective American experience and cultural harmony in an increasingly stratified society. Omar, a foreigner, and Angel Shape, a waitress, interact seamlessly with the working, middle, and upper classes from scene to scene. After being thrown out of a gambling house, the couple attend the opera. Later they take in a vaudeville show before enjoying Pink Tea with a group of high society women.
PERFORMING THE RUBÁIYÁT

The living, breathing medium of performing arts became the ultimate vehicle of the Rubáiyát craze, bringing to life both humorous and parodic visions of “Omar” and the serious, philosophical content of the Rubáiyát’s text. The favorite theme of the Rubáiyát, the call to live in the moment and enjoy worldly pleasures, found its fullest expression through the entertainment industry.

The synthesis of creative forms—literary, visual, dramatic, musical—in performance genres allowed performers and audiences to physically and emotionally engage with the text and live vicariously through the imagined figure of “Omar,” if only for a brief moment.

The creators and performers of these dramas took great liberties in their interpretation of the text of the Rubáiyát and the biography of Omar Khayyám. In order to tell a story within a given time frame, performances, by necessity, highlighted—even exaggerated—certain themes from the poems or facets of Khayyám’s persona and downplayed or eliminated others. This selectivity led to a wide variety of Rubáiyát's and many different faces of Omar.

Sir Granville Bantock, (1868-1946), score for Omar Khayyám (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1906)

The most extensive musical setting of the Rubáiyát, Bantock’s Omar Khayyám required three soloists, a large chorus, and a full orchestra with a double string section. The three-part work was not performed in its entirety until 1910. Bantock envisioned Khayyám’s text dramatically, employing a cast of characters—the Poet, the Beloved, and A Philosopher—to portray different sentiments expressed in the poem. The composer used Orientalist devices and motifs to create an atmosphere of the East. Between Khayyám’s quatrains, Bantock inserted interludes that have no foundation in the text, such as the voices of worshippers at a mosque chanting the Koran, or the distant sound of bells from a passing camel caravan.

The work reaches its climax in the duet between the Poet and the Beloved as they sing “A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,” the most popular stanza of the Rubáiyát.

Liza Lehmann (1862-1918), score of In a Persian Garden (London: Metzler, 1896)

Lehmann’s song cycle is the earliest known musical setting of the Rubáiyát, composed at a time when the text was popular among society’s elite. First performed in the salon of a London socialite, the score later won fame in both England and America, and was reprinted numerous times. Unlike many other contemporary settings of the Rubáiyát, Lehmann composed her work in a Western style. FitzGerald’s text and the title of Lehmann’s song cycle are the only remaining links to the Eastern origin of the poem.
Two copies of the program for Rev. Kent’s The Pageant Play of “Omar Khayyam,” (Watton, U.K.: Harvey and Sons, 1920)
Omar Khayyám Collection

Rev. Dr. Kirby, playing the lead character of Omar Khayyám, was surrounded by an unusual cast of characters not found in the Rubáiyát, among them a soothsayer, Princess Vashti, and a Christian disciple studying Christian manuscripts. In order to make the story of a Persian doubter acceptable to his congregation, Rev. Kent concluded the play with “The Message of Christianity.”

This performance of the Rubáiyát had added historical significance for the Merton townspeople: Edward FitzGerald had been a frequent visitor to their church some forty years earlier. The famous translator of the Rubáiyát died in the church’s rectory on a visit to see his good friend Rev. George Crabbe in 1883.

Lehmann’s In a Persian Garden (1896) accompanied the pageant play, a sign of the song cycle’s enduring popularity.

Levey arranged the stanzas of the Rubáiyát in dramatic form to emphasize the allegorical nature of the poem and the universality of Khayyám’s verses. Levey even described the stage set in symbolic terms: “A Tavern (of Unbelief) on the left, a Temple (of Faith) on the right, a Rose Bower (of Doubt) center, back of stage.” By having different characters deliver Khayyám’s quatrains, including two philosophers—one “a Believer,” the other “an Unbeliever”—Levey fashioned a thought-provoking dialogue that prompted audience members to reconsider the meaning of a poem they most likely already knew by heart.

Sargent arranged FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát and Robert Browning’s poem, “Rabbi Ben Ezra,” in dramatic form so that the two poets—Omar and Ben Ezra—could respond to each other’s philosophies as if in conversation. It is not known whether Browning intended his 1864 poem as a direct retort to FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát, though many have interpreted it as such.

Sargent points out in his preface that the two poems fit strikingly well together. Born in the same century as Khayyám, Ben Ezra (1092-1167) was also a mathematician and an astronomer. Note the exchange between the two poets on page 25: Browning’s
Ben Ezra adopts Khayyám’s metaphor of the Potter (God) and his Pots (human beings) and questions Khayyám’s insistence on the finality of death. Calling Khayyám’s *carpe-diem* philosophy foolish, Ben Ezra asserts that “Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure,” both “Potter and Clay endure.”

47

The score of James G. Thurber’s production, *Oh My! Omar* (Columbus: Scarlet Mask Club of Ohio State University, 1920)

This lighthearted musical was written and performed by drama students at Ohio State University, including the young James Thurber, later a famous humorist and cartoonist with the *New Yorker*. In reconstructing the life of Khayyám to suit a modern American crowd, lyricist John Waldron Jr. chose certain aspects of the poet’s personality that were admired in popular culture. Imagining the poet with “A Book of Verses underneath the bough, / a Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou,” Waldron paints Khayyám as a ladies’ man. In one line, “Omar” sings, “With a girlie on each knee, we had gay repartee.” The song emulates Khayyám’s imagined persona, referring to him as “a wonderful guy” who led “a wonderful life.” Towards the end of the chorus, the students lament the commercialization of the poet in American culture: “You were the Oriental ladies’ pet, / Now you’re just the name of a cheap cigarette.”

97

Selected stanzas from Tomfool’s “An Eastern Invitation to the Dance” (*Daily Herald*, June 26, 1919)

Omar Khayyám Collection
This newspaper parody uses one fad—the *Rubáiyát* craze—to discuss the passing popularity of dance styles, from jazz to the foxtrot and from tango to ragtime. In light of the current Omar mania, the pseudonymous “Tomfool” suggests that an “Oriental Boom” in dancing might be next.

157

Genevieve Stebbins (b. 1857), *The Rubáiyát: A Pantomime* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1903)

This grouping of expressive poses corresponds to twelve of the most popular verses from the *Rubáiyát*. *The Rubáiyát: A Pantomime* was intended as an instructional manual for performers. The dramatic effect of the resulting performance was to be heightened by its musical accompaniment, a “nocturne” or lyrical piano piece that is often moody and pensive in character, and is printed in the volume.

In addition to the illustrative poses demonstrated by Marie Macdonald, Stebbins, an American practitioner of Modern Dance, provided written instructions with each photo, such as “Weight right foot retired, body and head droop right. Face laughing. Right hand on a line with cheek, left hand near wrist of right.”
The special Mardi Gras edition of the New Orleans Picayune, with lithographs of parade floats decorated to represent stanzas of the Rubáiyát (T. Fitzwilliam & Co. Ltd., 6 March 1905)

Digital Reproduction
Courtesy of The Historic New Orleans Collection
Accession number 1980.192.16 i-xx

An anonymous Picayune reporter gave this eyewitness account of the parade:
A marked feature of the pageant was its grace and lightness. None of the gloomier passages of the poem were given scope. The ruling theme of Omar…a love for the light-hearted joy of life, was represented in a manner that was calculated to drive away dull care and to be a fitting symbol of the Carnival spirit. Feasting and rejoicing, jolly pomp and power, capable of reveling in the good things of life, these themes were chosen rather than the occasional bitter raillery against Fate that sometimes marks the passages of the great poet. Many of those on the balconies and on the sidewalks recalled the quotations from which various illustrations were chosen, but the pleasures of memory were at no time greater than those of actual sight, for the pageant was beautiful as a spectacle from beginning to end.

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“An Omar Parade” (Los Angeles Times, 9 April 1909)
Digital Reproduction

In contrast to the actual Rubáiyát-themed Mardi Gras celebration, this satirical newspaper piece creates an imaginary Rubáiyát-themed parade. Published during the height of the craze, just a week after the centennial of FitzGerald’s birth and the fiftieth anniversary of his translation of the Rubáiyát, this hypothetical parade is a parody of the fad itself. Some familiar characters in the lineup include a procession of Rubáiyát parodists in shackles and caged “Quatrain Misquoters.”

153, 154, 155

A cabinet photograph of celebrities including Isadora Duncan’s “Omar Done into Dance” (New York: Jacob Schloss, 1899)
The Dance Collection

Two cabinet photographs of Isadora Duncan performing poses from “Omar Done into Dance” (New York: Jacob Schloss, 1899)
The Dance Collection
Considered by many to be the mother of Modern Dance, Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) composed “Omar Done into Dance,” a series of poses set to the entire Rubáiyát, in 1899.

A souvenir program from Richard Walton Tully’s play, *Omar, the Tentmaker*, 1914
Verso is a digital reproduction
Theater Biography Collection

While for some interpreters the figure of Omar Khayyám represented hedonism, for others his name became synonymous with romance. The popular persona “Omar” was merged with Khayyám’s historical biography in productions such as *Omar, the Tentmaker*, which treats Khayyám as “one of the most romantic figures in history.” His biography, widely known from the introduction to FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*, was largely ignored in favor of an heroic fantasy image.

An advertisement for Omar Pearls, featuring Richard Walton Tully’s silent film *Omar the Tentmaker* (*Theatre Magazine*, April 1924)
Digital Reproduction

Companies that offered *Rubáiyát*-branded products, such as Indra Pearl Company’s “Omar Pearls,” utilized cross-advertising to capitalize on Omar mania.

Two costume designs for the character Omar Khayyám in the 1955 stage production of the musical *Kismet*
B. J. Simmons & Co. Costume Design Records

In this popular musical production, set in Baghdad in the days of *The Arabian Nights*, Philip Coolidge (1908-1967) played an aging Omar Khayyám. The slender, white-bearded Khayyám is portrayed as a sage, his status accentuated by richly colored robes decorated with stars, a nod to the historical Khayyám’s astronomical achievements.

Alton Kelley (1940-2008) and Stanley Mouse (b. 1940)
A poster advertising the Grateful Dead at the Avalon Ballroom, San Francisco, 1966
Screen print
Digital reproduction
Courtesy of the South Austin Museum of Popular Culture
This poster introduced the Grateful Dead’s most famous emblem: the skull and roses. When perusing the stacks of the San Francisco Public Library, Mouse and Kelley came across Edmund Sullivan’s frequently reprinted 1913 illustrated edition of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*. Mouse says that after seeing this image, he and Kelley looked at each other and exclaimed, “there it is, the perfect picture.” Sullivan’s drawing accompanies the following stanza:

Oh, come with old Khayyám, and leave the Wise  
To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies;  
One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies;  
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.

A digital reproduction is displayed because the original poster is delicate, having been torn off a telephone pole in San Francisco by the original collector.

[image here, please!]  
[Image caption:] Edmund J. Sullivan’s original illustration in Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám* (London: Methuen, 1913)

THE RUBÁIYÁT AND THE GREAT WAR

No less popular in Britain than in America in the 1900s and 1910s, the *Rubáiyát* was embraced by enthusiasts in the working, middle, and upper classes. Like their American counterparts, diverse interpreters used the poem as a vehicle to express deep social concerns. World War I and the political events that followed prompted numerous responses to the shared language of the *Rubáiyát* to cultivate communal relationships among Britons, whether on the home front or the front lines.

Unlike American parodies of the *Rubáiyát*, British parodies of this period are often overtly political and have a sober, critical tone. These imitations of *Rubáiyát* form are often so biting that the term “parody,” commonly understood as light spoof, does not seem appropriate. Not surprisingly, some political parodists used pseudonyms to distance themselves from their inflammatory texts. Political cartoons, displayed on the wall to your left, sometimes parodied the *Rubáiyát*, but often simply juxtaposed FitzGerald’s original verses with the political concerns of the moment.


*Omarred Wilhelm* is one of three known parodies that attack the notorious monarch of Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm II. FitzGerald’s diatribe is the most inflammatory, and accuses the Kaiser of unspeakable acts and demands retribution.

Parodies of Kaiser Wilhelm served a deeper purpose beyond providing an outlet for anger towards the German leader. They became propagandistic tools to win British support in the war effort, both at home and on the front. The seething hatred fueling Colin Fitzgerald’s stanzas, and the parodist’s insistence on retribution, encouraged
readers to act, whether they understood his words as a call to arms or as encouragement to support British troops.

45

“de C”’s *A Rubáiyát of the Trenches* (London: Fawcett, 1917)

William Edward Clery, under the pseudonym “de C,” wrote this poem from the perspective of a British soldier. At times, the author invokes the name of Omar, a kindred spirit who would understand his concerns. The trenches become a backdrop for larger questions of human mortality, ethics, and the Christian concept of a “just” war fought in God’s name. In response to the senselessness of war, Clery pleads for a better future for humankind using the template of the *Rubáiyát*. Utterly detached from the concept of war, Omar’s philosophy presents a radically alternative way to live.

11

Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, stamped “K. Meawad / Cairo,”
undated
Miniature Books Collection

This tiny *Rubáiyát* is inscribed “M. J. Jones / 19th Rifle Brigade / Egypt / Oct 1st 1917.” Around this time, British troops in Egypt undertook offensive attacks against the Ottoman Empire, an ally of Germany, at the Gaza front. Throughout the book, the owner has underlined passages that address the ephemeral nature of life and the certainty of death.

48, 49

Two copies of “T.I.N. Opener”’s *The Rubáiyát of a Maconochie Ration* (London: Gay and Hancock, 1920)

Author James Gay used a comic pseudonym to sign his parody. The Machonocie ration is described as follows by R. Derby Holmes in *A Yankee in the Trenches*:

Maconochie ration is put up a pound to the can and bears a label which assures the consumer that it is a scientifically prepared, well-balanced ration. Maybe so. It is my personal opinion that the inventor brought to his task an imperfect knowledge of cookery and a perverted imagination. Open a can of Maconochie and you find a gooey gob of grease, like rancid lard. Investigate and you find chunks of carrot and other unidentifiable material, and now and then a bit of mysterious meat. The first man who ate an oyster had courage, but the last man who ate Maconochie’s unheated had more.
In *The Rubáiyát of a Maconochie Ration*, James Gay recounts his experience as a soldier in the years immediately following WWI. The shared experience of eating a Maconochie ration serves as a foil for the discussion of other “unsavory” issues, including the psychological transition between military and civilian life and resentment towards able-bodied British men who did not join the forces during the war.

40


Rubáiyát parodies after the war continued in a political vein. Burnet’s parody imagines Omar Khayyám as a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons who aspires to become a representative, or “peer,” in the House of Lords. In verses XXIV and XXV, Burnet insists that neither position has any real power. Black’s illustration portrays three peers with identical features and disposition, all dressed in the same royal costume. The fur shawls and crowns exaggerate their perceived status, suggesting that they are mere figureheads with little, if any, authority as individuals.

Wall items:

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Scott Calder’s, “Sharing the War-Loaf,” in *The Star and Echo*, 1 June 1915

Mehmed V, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, declared on 29 May 1915 that the Ottoman Empire would take military measures to defend their Egyptian territory from the French, and that they would extend hostilities to the Suez Canal, where there was a heavy British presence. In this cartoon, Mehmed V sits with his ally Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany. On the “Bough,” a pair of lovebirds can be seen. It is notable that Calder leaves out the last line of this famous stanza:

“Oh, Wilderness is Paradise enow!”

92

“The Waster’s Fourth Round,” in the *Liverpool Weekly*, 4 August 1917

The quoted lines are from this stanza of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát*:

> Ah, fill the cup:— what boots it to repeat How time is slipping under our Feet: Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday, Why fret about them if To-day be sweet!
An advertisement for Crayol Virginia Cigarettes in *John Bull*, 2 September 1916

This cigarette advertisement parodies the famous “Beneath the Bough” stanza, equating the “Paradise” of Omar Khayyam’s original to “Blighty,” a British soldier’s term for “home.” In italics at the bottom of the ad, Crayol capitalizes on the Rubaiyat’s popularity to sell the “Karam,” a cigarette made with oriental tobacco.

94

William Dyson’s cartoon, “Take the Cash and Let the Credit Go,” in *The Daily Herald*, 26 September 1912

On 23 September 1912, British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey (right) made an agreement with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonoff (left) that the two powers would defend southern and northern Persia, respectively. Russia’s questionable intentions in the region created unrest among the British. Sazonoff used his control of the north to exploit the first railway from Persia to Europe, giving the Russians an upper hand on the British in the region. The British feared that a disagreement over Persia (which was of small importance to Britain at the time) might lead Russia to sever its ties with Britain and form an alliance with Germany.

Dyson quotes two *Rubáiyát* stanzas, one in the title and one as a caption below. The title quotation suggests that the cartoonist believes that Grey was taking a risk “beneath the bough” with Russia, sacrificing future needs (credit) for immediate gratification (cash). Grey’s gamble worked out well: Russia and Britain’s allegiance remained strong into and throughout the Great War.

THE RUBAIYAT IN THE MODERN LITERARY CONSCIOUSNESS

His reputed cultivation was generally regarded as a slight obstacle to easy intercourse, but Lily, who prided herself on her broad-minded recognition of literature, and always carried an Omar Khayam in her travelling-bag, was attracted by this attribute…

—Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*, 1905

Like all generations, the moderns rebelled against their parents. Victorian poetry in particular suffered at the hands of poets and critics in the early to mid-twentieth century. Its highly wrought formalism and imagery, caricatured by critics as a repetitious cliché of flowers and songbirds, became a foil for self-conscious efforts to remake English poetry for the modern age. The Rubáiyát holds an interesting place in this story. It was derided by many critics, in part due to its formalism, but also due to its extreme popularity among middle-class readers.

As the *Rubáiyát* grew more popular among the middle classes, it became less appealing to its original high literary audience. When Edith Wharton gives her character Lily Bart a copy of the *Rubáiyát*, she is signaling to her readership that Lily is a middlebrow cliché. Wharton’s opinion of the *Rubáiyát* was shared by many other critics.
at the time, such as the sharp-tongued Andrew Lang, who was embarrassed by the Rubáiyát’s popularity among certain readers: “Omar is the businessman’s poet...To quote Omar is to be cultured.”

The items displayed here represent a range of responses to the Rubáiyát on the part of major modern writers. Some—like T. S. Eliot—were ambivalent towards the Rubáiyát, while others, like Ezra Pound, embraced it as a work of brilliance. Still other writers, such as James Joyce and Eugene O’Neill, reveal how the text became part of the fabric of the English language and American culture respectively.

The Rubáiyát did not weather modernism well. As poetry itself was read by smaller audiences into the late twentieth century, the dominant critical dismissal of the Rubáiyát meant that it was less often assigned to be read by college students. Today, the Rubáiyát is rarely read, though it is still included in whole or in part in many college English anthologies.

Eugene O’Neill’s Ah, Wilderness! (New York: Random House, 1933)

O’Neill’s (1888-1953) only comic play is titled after the most famous stanza of FitzGerald’s translation. The Rubáiyát plays an important part in the plot, which concerns a young man’s rebellion against the social conservatism of America circa 1906. The Rubáiyát is one of the favorite literary works of young Richard Miller, whose parents find his free thinking inexplicable. In the scene shown here, Richard’s family discusses the Rubáiyát and other of Richard’s shocking readerly choices.

Visitors may recall a similar comic reference to the Rubáiyát as a scandalous text in the 1950s musical and film The Music Man, in which the conservative mayor’s wife in River City, Iowa describes the implications of “People lying out in the woods eating sandwiches, and drinking directly out of jugs with innocent young girls.”

James Joyce’s Finnegans Wake (London: Faber, 1939)
The library of Robert Guy Howarth

In both Finnegans Wake and Ulysses, Joyce (1882-1941) includes the Rubáiyát as a part of the vernacular, a textual object that floats through the minds and speech of his characters. On this page, an extended allusion begins eleven lines down with the phrase “quatrain of rubyjets.” The color red is a key subject on this page, bringing to mind the Rubáiyát’s red wine and roses. “Rubyjet” echoes the word “rubric” (text written in red in medieval manuscripts) a few lines earlier, and even the red-themed word “lobster” connects to the Rubáiyát: the French word for lobster, “homard,” is pronounced “omar.”

Joyce alludes to the second and third stanzas of FitzGerald in the line “those who arse without the Temple.” The page is thick with further references to the Rubáiyát, such as the cup, the “jug jug” song of the nightingale, Fate (the roll of the dice), and an Irishman named “K. M. O’Mara.” This chapter is replete with references to The Book of Kells, other illuminated manuscripts, and the history of printing, and Joyce may well have intended to allude to the frequent fine printings of the Rubáiyát by including it
here. Much later in this work another reference appears in the sentence, “O wanderness be wondernest and now!”

The Rubáiyát’s most famous stanza also appears in the “Circe” chapter of Ulysses (1922), in a conversation between Stephen Dedalus and Lynch as they walk through Dublin’s red-light district.

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A scrapbook containing a magazine clipping photograph of Nancy Cunard posing from the Rubáiyát, undated
Nancy Cunard Collection

Liza Lehmann’s 1896 song cycle treatment of the Rubáiyát, In a Persian Garden, was extremely popular well into the twentieth century. In this undated image, poet, translator, publisher and activist Nancy Cunard (1896-1965) is shown performing poses to accompany Lehmann’s settings of FitzGerald’s stanzas.

In the later years of World War I, when this photograph was likely taken, Cunard socialized in bohemian circles that included Ezra Pond, Wyndham Lewis, and the Sitwell family. In 1916, Cunard undertook her first effort in avant-garde publishing: the annual anthology Wheels created in collaboration with Edith Sitwell. An important figure who discovered and published major modern writers, Cunard was known for her innovative dress and sexual openness; the exotic Rubáiyát was a fitting subject for her youthful experiments with performance and identity.

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T. S. Eliot’s “Gerontion” in Poems (New York: Knopf, 1920)

Edward FitzGerald and his Rubaiyat haunt the writings of T. S. Eliot, who was ambivalent towards both. Over the course of his life, he often said that it was his first reading of the Rubáiyát in 1902, at age fourteen, that made him a poet. In one retelling he attempts to explain

the almost overwhelming introduction to a new world of feeling which this poem was the occasion of giving me. It was like a sudden conversion: the world appeared anew, painted with bright, delicious and painful colours...

As Vinnie-Marie Dambrosio describes it in her book on this subject, Eliot spent the remainder of his life “struggling against ‘possession’” by FitzGerald and his work. Notably, he later emphasized that the Rubáiyát was a poem that affects one in adolescence, a sentiment expressed by many critics who saw the poem as a lesser work of little interest to sophisticated readers.

“Gerontion” opens Eliot’s second important collection, and these opening lines are lifted almost verbatim from a description of FitzGerald’s later years in A. F. Benson’s 1905 FitzGerald biography. Lines and phrases from the Rubáiyát are likewise to be found throughout Eliot’s works.
Ezra Pound’s “Yeux Glacques” in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley by E. P. (Ovid Press, 1920)

Pound was heavily influenced by the *Rubáiyát*, not least because of his own profound interest in the nature of translation. He returned to the *Rubáiyát* often throughout his writings, and repeatedly telling the story of its initial failure to sell, here called its “stillbirth.”

Pound alludes to the *Rubáiyát* parody phenomenon in his 1934 “textbook” on poetics, *ABC of Reading*, in which he instructs readers to attempt imitations and parodies of poems. He adds,

Note: No harm has ever yet been done a good poem by this process. FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* has survived hundreds of parodies, that are not really parodies of either Omar or FitzGerald, but only poems written in that form of strophe.


Frost’s poem is the most famous to use FitzGerald’s stanza form, though Frost modifies it: his stanzas have eight syllables per line, rather than ten. Frost links the quatrains by using the rhyme in the third line of one stanza to open the next stanza, producing a chain: aaba, bbcb, ccdc. He breaks the chain and concludes the poem with four rhymed lines: dddd.

The famous lines of this poem take on new shades of meaning when the reader considers the similarly meditative themes of the *Rubáiyát*, in which the speaker is tempted to withdraw from his worries into a wilderness landscape. But the two poems’ differences are as profound as their resonances: the winter New England landscape could not be further removed from the Persian garden imagined by Edward FitzGerald, and Frost’s speaker seems tempted by the oblivion that FitzGerald’s speaker dreads.

A notcard containing instructions for printing a *rubái* in Louis Zukofsky’s *55 Poems*, ca. 1941

Digital reproduction of verso
Louis Zukofsky Collection

The late Modernist poet Louis Zukofsky (1904-1978) inherited Eliot, Pound, and Joyce’s interest in collage and translation—and the *Rubáiyát*. This card is part of the manuscript material for his collection *55 Poems*, and on it he explains that he wishes to use a single *rubái* to open the collection, and specifically wants it to be written in the hand of his friend, the English poet Basil Bunting. Like Edward FitzGerald, Zukofsky
was a translator himself and undertook several experiments in translation over the
course of his life.

55 Poems opens with one of Zukofsky’s best known poems, “Poem Beginning
‘The,’” a collaged manifesto that breaks with Eliot’s style in The Waste Land and lays the
groundwork for a new kind of collage poetics. It contains an allusion to FitzGerald’s
translation in its opening lines: “The / Voice of Jesus I. Rush singing / in the
wilderness.”

Ezra Pound’s The Pisan Cantos (New York: New Directions, 1948)

In the great Pisan Cantos, Pound again alludes to FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát, using his
stanza form to conclude this canto. The first stanza is a close imitation of two
consecutive FitzGerald stanzas from the 1859 edition:

Irám indeed is gone with all its Rose,
And Jamshyd’s Sev-n-ring’d Cup where no one knows,
But still the Vine her ancient Ruby yields,
And still a Garden by the Water blows.

And David’s Lips are lock’t; but in divine
High piping Pĕhlevi, with “Wine! Wine! Wine!
“Red Wine!”—the Nightingale cries to the Rose
That yellow Cheek of her’s to‘incarnadine.

In the context of Pound’s larger œuvre, the hybrid Khayyám/FitzGerald rhyme scheme
shares space with Chinese characters, fragments of Old English epics, and the songs of
medieval Italian troubadours: all distant poetic forms that Pound felt could help revive
the English language when merged with his own distinctive voice.

Close Reading Wall 3: The Moving Finger

Since the first review of FitzGerald’s translation in 1859, readers have called
attention to the “crushing fatalism” of this stanza, as one reader puts it. The decisive
power of the “Moving Finger” stands in counterpoint to other stanzas that seek respite
in the present moment. Some interpreters have critiqued this and other fatalistic
stanzas’ suggestion that fate’s omnipotence leaves us with no reason to act. This theme
is discussed in the nearby exhibition case on religious responses to the Rubáiyát. As the
translations printed to the right show, God, not fate, is the actor in some English
interpretations of the Persian verse.

This stanza has been quoted widely, by speakers such as Martin Luther King in his
1967 sermon, “Why I am Opposed to the War in Vietnam.” Notably, he uses the stanza
not to express resignation, but to call for human action. King’s “Moving Finger”
represents several things at once—conscience, the will of the American public, and the
danger of “writing” permanent damage into the “book” of history:
It is time for all people of conscience to call upon America to come back home. Come home, America. Omar Khayyam is right: “The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on.” I call on Washington today. I call on every man and woman of good will all over America today. I call on the young men of America who must make a choice today to take a stand on this issue. Tomorrow may be too late. The book may close.

In 1998, another national figure, President Bill Clinton, quoted the same stanza to a very different end. In his apology to the nation just before he was impeached following the Monica Lewinsky affair, he read the entire stanza and added, “So nothing, not piety, nor tears, nor wit, nor torment can alter what I have done. I must make my peace with that.”

Illustrated editions of FitzGerald’s translation add another interpretive layer to readers’ experience of this stanza, as may be seen in the facsimile examples to the right.

Eben Francis Thompson’s translation (1907):

From the beginning the marks of things to be have been Continually the pen is unmoved by good or bad. On the first day whatever must be He ordains To grieve or to resist is all in vain.

Edward Heron-Allen’s translation (1899):

From the beginning was written what shall be; Unhaltingly the Pen writes, and is heedless of good and bad; On the First Day He appointed everything that must be— Our grief and our efforts are vain.

The stanza’s theme of human fate prompted many illustrators to depict angels, celestial messengers sent to carry out divine will. Angels were especially popular among British and American artists working in the late Romantic tradition. While Bull’s (1872-1942) angel holds an hourglass, a symbol of fate, other illustrators focused on the act of writing or recording that fate. Trew’s image includes the human response in the form of hands raised in supplication—our futile effort to prevent or alter our destiny.
The popular edition of Hanscom’s Rubáiyát featured hand-colored versions of her photographic illustrations. The rich colors draw attention to superimposed disc shapes on which the women write. The circle becomes a recurring motif in Hanscom’s Rubáiyát portfolio, appearing in ten other scenes, including the first stanza, “Awake!” Her circles echo Khayyám’s imagery, from heavenly bodies to earthen pots, and from the poet’s inverted bowl of sky to his cup of wine. Further, Hanscom’s circles symbolize the cyclical nature of human life and death, a central theme of the Rubáiyát.

A number of Rubáiyát illustrators incorporated Persian script into their works. In Eardley-Wilmot’s photograph, the word gesmat, or “fate,” appears as graffito on a wall, scrawled by a shadowed hand. Eardley-Wilmot’s unusual illustrations of The Rubáiyát intentionally resemble travel snapshots, and were, in fact, likely taken on her travels as the wife of a British colonial administrator in India.

In Fish’s (1890-1964) image, much of the “Persian” script above the foreboding arm of Fate is nonsensical. Some Persian phrases do appear, suggesting that Fish may have miscopied a text from another source. The statement, “Our becoming is in vain” appears in the second line of script and echoes the emotions implied in the posture of the masses below: stripped of free will, their lives are seemingly without purpose.

Sullivan (1869-1933) is one of the few illustrators to honor Khayyám’s irreverent sense of humor, much of which was lost in FitzGerald’s translation. He depicts a woman who has collapsed into a swoon after realizing her own fate. She cannot erase the discredits to her name, for they have already been reviewed and verified by none other than “Allah,” whose has even signed the register

TEXT PANEL: IN SEARCH OF KHAYYÁM

Since the days of Sir Gore Ouseley’s diplomatic travels in the 1810s, the political and social landscape of Persia, or modern-day Iran, has gone through complex changes. Through generations of shahs, the creation of a constitution in 1906, decades of internal political struggle and foreign intervention, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Omar Khayyám’s poetry has retained relevance and significance for readers. Today’s Iran is a
country that continues to hold poetry in high esteem, and Khayyám’s verses appear in both published editions and as ephemeral quotations in Iranians’ everyday speech. Khayyám’s questioning of religious authority and his celebration of present enjoyments are often controversial when viewed through the lens of the Islamic establishment. And yet Khayyám remains for many Iranians a source of delight, wisdom, and inspiration.

This final section of the exhibition presents a snapshot view of representations and interpretations of Omar Khayyám in Iran today. During a trip through the northern part of the country in May 2008, Ransom Center staff member Jill Morena looked for evidence of Khayyám in the material culture around her—in bookstores, films, objects, and public spaces. She listened to Iranians who were interested in discussing or reciting the poet’s words. Some of these encounters were planned; others were serendipitous. While offering no definitive conclusions, the souvenirs, photographs, and documentary film presented here explore the question, “What do Iranians think of Khayyám today, and how is he present in the larger culture?”

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A selection of Jill Morena’s digital photographs of Khayyám- and poetry-related images and locations in Iran, 2008
Loan courtesy of Jill Morena

Left column: These images demonstrate the immense aesthetic differences between the classical design of the poet Ferdowsi’s tomb, completed in the 1930s (left), and the dynamic modernist design of Khayyám’s tomb, commissioned nearly three decades later (right). A local resident of Nishapur revealed that the shape of Khayyám’s tomb is that of a wine glass overturned, as in the stanza that appears at the end of FitzGerald’s translation, while the geometric shapes acknowledge Khayyám’s contributions to mathematics.

Middle Column: The Arabic and Persian inscriptions on Khayyám’s octagonal tombstone, found in the center of the monument, contain the basic details usually found on a grave, including Khayyám’s full name and his approximate age and date at his death (left). The tombstone is reached by walking through the large, open diamond shapes that display Khayyám’s verses in calligraphy, seen on the right.

Top right: The image of Khayyám as a wine drinker and constant companion of women is prevalent in traditional Iranian arts and crafts such as painting, ceramic tiles, and metalwork. On the left, a wall painting appears in a traditional restaurant that is part of a film studio in Tehran. The female wine bearer in the painting is obscured by a verse of the Quran written on animal skin. It is impossible to verify the exact context for this censorship. It could be possible that a scene involving a holy person or event was filmed in the restaurant, and the image was not considered appropriate for the scene.

Bottom right: While the image of Khayyám is often presented as befits a famous poet, his name is also associated with irrelevant popular culture and mundane products, as is evident here.

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Unidentified artist
A poster commemorating the May 17 Commemoration of Hakim Omar Khayyám, 2008
The commemoration day for Khayyám in Iran generally falls on his birth date, May 17 or 18, depending upon the equivalent date in the Western calendar. The commemoration takes place at Nishapur, and is largely a gathering of scholars, poets, students, and government officials who come together to present and discuss Khayyám’s work and legacy.

The poster’s central image is the small bust of Khayyám that is displayed in a vitrine not far from his tomb in Nishapur. The bust, surrounded by feverish script, places the visual emphasis on Khayyám’s poetry.


Omar Khayyam Collection

This article, published in the 100th anniversary year of FitzGerald’s translation, offers a glimpse of Omar Khayyám’s modest tomb before the construction of the larger modern monument, which now rests on the side of the garden opposite the mosque. The authors make the argument that the popularity or modern relevance of Khayyám’s verse inside Iran is solely due to the translation of the Rubáiyát by Edward Fitzgerald. While praising Fitzgerald and claiming that he should have a special commemoration at the site, the authors also acknowledge Fitzgerald’s loose translations of text and his lack of rigor in verifying authentic sources for his translations. It is true that many verses believed by scholars to be inauthentic, whether translated by Fitzgerald or not, have become very popular today both inside and outside Iran.

Mohammad Shirvani (b. 1973)

*Khayyám, 2008*

Digital Video, 5 minutes

Mohammad Shirvani is a filmmaker currently living and working in Iran. His experimental short films, documentaries, and feature films have been shown in over 200 film festivals worldwide, including The International Critics’ Week at Cannes and the Tribeca Film Festival in New York. Shirvani creates intimate, layered portraits of his subjects, often in an unstructured or unconventional narrative form. *Khayyam* is a film in this same artistic vein. While Hollywood films depict Khayyám as a historical character in an eleventh-century context, Shirvani’s film is set in a timeless space, and is an ahistorical abstraction of the essence of Khayyám’s words and ideas. The first title screen displays the title of the film, “Khayyám.” The final title screen reads, “By Mohammad Shirvani.”

Label for Jill’s documentary (no item number):
Jill Morena (b. 1971)
in search of khayyam, may 2008
Digital Video, 17 minutes

This film runs on a continuous loop.