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Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations, edited  
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- 1 This volume, in the collection of Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations, which presents current criticism on widely read and studied literature of the Western world, gathers previously published articles on Edward Fitzgerald and his *Rubaiyat*, some of which date back to the 1970s and 80s, while the most recent one dates from 2001. Two of the eleven contributors are more particularly interested in Persian studies or comparative literature involving Persian literature, while the others are connected to the English literary scene. The studies touch upon Fitzgerald's life and work, focussing mostly, but not exclusively, on his *Rubaiyat* and thus provide insights and information on the creation and on the reception of this famous Victorian poem. On the negative side, it is to be pitied that these articles were not edited specially for this volume as several elements are re-told by almost each one of the authors, – albeit with different emphasis and details –, such as the story of the first and anonymous edition of the *Rubaiyat* and the placing of some copies at the bookseller Quaritch. This is detailed in Arthur Freeman, "Bernard Quaritch and 'My Omar': The Struggle for Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat*" (pp. 169-183). The article reviews the attitude of the publisher Bernard Quaritch and his correspondence with Fitzgerald, showing how he reacted to the steady increase in success of the *Rubaiyat*. The publisher moves from condescension to fiery battle for the publishing rights. Several other papers set out the story of the eventual and sudden success of the *Rubaiyat* and its fame spreading through the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood into Victorian England and America.

John Hollander, in "Paradise Now" (pp. 165-194) also looks at paraphrases and satires inspired by the *Rubaiyat* and at editions and illustrations of the work. This again is the angle of "The Fin de Siecle Cult of Fitzgerald's 'Rubaiyat' of Omar Khayyam" (pp. 5-19), where John D. Yohannan describes how the *Rubaiyat* was recognised as "a disintegrating spiritual force in England and America" and how in the Omar Khayyam clubs the veneration for the translator tended to surpass worship of the poet. In "The discovery of the Rubaiyat" (pp. 77-95), Robert Bernard Martin considers the death of Fitzgerald's great friend, William Browne, as the significant event which shaped the author's life. The consensus to explain the *Rubaiyat*'s success is that "the times were ripe" for works repudiating the traditional religious morality and attempting to find an alternative to it. It is indeed startling to realise that the date of the *Rubaiyat*'s first appearance, 1859, coincides with that of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

- 2 This is confirmed in "Larger Hopes and the New Hedonism: Tennyson and Fitzgerald" (pp. 151-168). Norman Page compares Tennyson's *In Memoriam* with the almost contemporary *Rubaiyat*. The author's analysis is that, even as he confronts the threats to faith posed by the new science (Darwin), Tennyson remains conservative and reassuring with the strength of his convictions, while the *Rubaiyat*, a fin-de-siecle poem "born before its time", is uncompromisingly unorthodox and challenging with the power of its scepticism. The reception to the *Rubaiyat* in America is further presented in "Young Eliot's Rebellion" (pp. 119-149), where Vinni Marie D'Ambrosio introduces us to the influence it had on T.S. Eliot who discovered it in 1902. The ambiance of the time was pervaded by the rage for or against the *Rubaiyat*, which was considered to have played a role in the breakdown of America's Protestant religion and of the Temperance ethic that the religion had subsumed. This cultural milieu of Eliot as a youth explains several of his poems and, as the author concludes, the youthful Eliot may have felt he was "not an imitator of Omar, but a manly, if secret, disciple of him".
- 3 Iran B. Hassani Jewett, "The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam" (pp. 21-58), pinpoints interesting moments in the correspondence between Fitzgerald and his mentor, Cowell, comparing their versions of the same Khayyam quatrain, thus illustrating "dramatically the difference between translation and creation". The importance Fitzgerald attached to his earlier translation of Jami's *Salaman and Absal* is also touched upon. Fitzgerald emphatic stipulation that Omar never be published without *Salaman* was apparently disregarded after his death. The article further gives a brief treatment of the problem of the Persian quatrains' authenticity and of Khayyam's possible authorship and possible mysticism. Little of the lightheartedness of the rubai survives in the English version. In choosing to translate only the "Epicurean" quatrains, Fitzgerald gave the *Rubaiyat* a superficiality and a one-sidedness not found in the original. However, Tracia Leacock-Seghatolislami's "The Tale of the Inimitable Rubaiyat" (pp. 195-207), presents contrasting opinions. Divorcing the English poem from the Persian rubai, she exposes Fitzgerald's lack of knowledge of Persian, the result being "a text so discombobulated that it is hard to trace in the Persian". Despite this, Fitzgerald's rendering "displays a sensitivity, a delicacy in the turn of phrase, which suggests that the poetic Muse was permanently encamped on his doorstep" (pp. 198-9). Though forcefully asserting the "true significance of much of Khayyam's poetry, which often has a Sufistic feel to it", the author fails to give convincing references or arguments for this.
- 4 In his paper "Fugitive Articulation: An Introduction to the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam" (pp. 59-76), Daniel Schenker takes an innovative and challenging look at the *Rubaiyat*,

questioning why we fail today to respond to it as a work of serious literary art (p. 60). The author compares its effect on an audience with that of an “unimpeachable contemporary masterpiece, T.S. Eliot’s *“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”*. The *Rubaiyat*’s wide appeal might be that it “institutionalizes a cult of spiritual resignation” and that it is “sufficiently void of meaning to be recyclable in any number of contexts”. In his analysis of the poem, the author recognises its “verbal claustrophobia”. Follows an interesting analysis of the function of speech in the *Rubaiyat* (pp. 70-73) and the conclusion that Fitzgerald began with a very modern-looking poem, but proceeded as the years went forward to bring his work in line with a more conservative ideal (p. 73). As to the supposed value of the poem as a piece of wisdom literature, Schenker feels that the Victorian era “saw the development of all kinds of self-help books for the benefit of the masses, and perhaps this is the genre to which the *Rubaiyat* ultimately belongs: “infinite resignation made simple”.

- 5 Erik Gray, in “Forgetting Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat*” (pp. 209-226) humorously argues that critics seem to have taken Fitzgerald at his word, who constantly advises in the *Rubaiyat* to ‘forget’. After a brief discussion of Tennyson’s poetry (also very concerned with the question of memory), Gray moves to examine the formal means Fitzgerald uses to efface his poem from the reader’s memory. Considering the poem’s publication history, the author suggests that “readers have never forgotten the *Rubaiyat* paradoxically because they are unable to remember it precisely” (p. 210). “The poem is forgetful, or at least absent-minded, at every level: the rendition of the Persian, the rhymes, the quatrains, the different editions – all simultaneously recollect and efface dead selves.” (p. 223).
- 6 Frederick A. de Armas, in “The Apocalyptic Vision of *La Vida es Sueno*: Calderon and Edward Fitzgerald” (pp. 97-118), argues that Fitzgerald’s interest in Spanish literature was as intense as his concern with Persian, and was introduced to him by the same friend, Edward Cowell. In his translations of the Spanish seventeenth century playwright Pedro Calderon de la Barca, Fitzgerald’s translation technique appears to be similar to what he produced in the *Rubaiyat*, a view encapsulated in his oft quoted “A Thing must live: with a transfusion of one’s worse Life if one can’t retain the Original’s better. Better a live sparrow than a stuffed Eagle” (Letters, vol. 2 p. 335). Regrettably– but this would have exceeded the boundaries of this particular paper –, no detailed comparative study is given between Fitzgerald’s translation techniques from Spanish and from Persian into English.
- 7 The volume also contains a Chronology of Fitzgerald’s life (pp. 227-234), the Contributors’ details (pp. 235-237), an, albeit very brief, Bibliography (pp. 239-241), followed by Acknowledgments and an Index.
- 8 As a conclusion, this volume gives interesting insights into Fitzgerald’s life and creative process. It highlights the difference between the Persian original and Fitzgerald’s English poem and it puts special emphasis on the puzzling dichotomy between the *Rubaiyat*’s immense success and the realisation of how little scholarly attention the English poem has enjoyed. Hopefully, this collection might open up the floor for academic research in the future.

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## INDEX

**Thèmes** : 11.1.1. Littérature persane classique  
**nompropre** Khayyām, Jāmi, Omar Khayyām

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