



The Art of Omar Khayyam: Illustrating FitzGerald's Rubaiyat

William Mason, Sandra Martin

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This book describes a phenomenon unique in publishing history -- a book of poetry, published anonymously nearly 150 years ago -- purporting to be the translation of an 11th century Persian work -- which has remained almost continuously in print and stimulated at least 130 illustrators attempting to illuminate the verses it contains. The poetry in question is Edward FitzGerald's version of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Khayyam was a mathematician, astronomer and philosopher in 11th century Persia. Edward FitzGerald was first introduced to Khayyam's verses in the original Persian in 1859. Since then, there have been many hundreds of separate editions and reissues of the *Rubaiyat*, including many further translations of FitzGerald's work into other languages. Today, FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat* is one of the most universally known of all poems. It is also probably the most widely illustrated of all literary works. William Martin and Sandra Mason have produced the first serious attempt to examine the illustrated editions in detail. The authors tell the extraordinary story of the popularity of FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat*, and looks at how different illustrators have approached the task of interpreting the individual themes and topics of the fascinating poem. Although the book focuses on one literary work, it provides a history of the changes in book illustration, mostly in Britain and America, over the past century and a half. With some 300 color illustrations and covering the work of over 100 artists, it also provides detailed documentation on the illustrators and a bibliography of the illustrated version of FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat*. This will prove a unique reference tool for collectors and bibliographers.

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