



OMARIANA

Bulletin of the Dutch Omar Khayyám Society

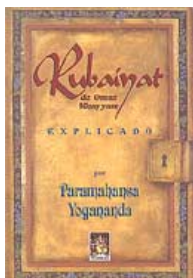
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info@omarkhayyamnederland.com

Omariana Eccentrica – Part 1.

Everyone reading this will be familiar with the debate over whether or not Omar was a Sufi mystic whose verses are to be interpreted symbolically, not literally. Put simply, when Omar talks of drinking Wine does he really mean drinking the Juice of the Grape, or does he use the drinking of wine as a symbol of achieving the divine intoxication of a revelation from God? And are the Taverns in his verses really taverns, or are they symbolic of the psychic state in which one achieves communion with God? My own view is that of FitzGerald himself, namely, that Omar's "Worldly Pleasures are what they profess to be without any Pretence at divine Allegory; his Wine is the veritable Juice of the Grape; his Tavern, where it was to be had." But my purpose here is not to debate how true or false this might be, it is merely to point out that the very fact of there having been a debate at all is sufficient to explain why some rather eccentric books have been written relating to *The Rubaiyat*.

Many readers are no doubt already aware of – though they might not actually have read it - Paramhansa Yogananda's book *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam Explained*, first published in book form in 1994, but written in the late 1930's and early 1940's. Here, for example, is Yogananda's interpretation of the famous opening verse of FitzGerald's first edition:



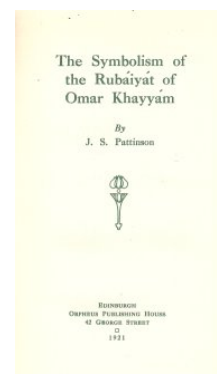
"For the dawn of wisdom has flung into the dark bowl of your unknowing the stone of spiritual discipline- that weapon of divine power that can break the bowl and put to flight the paling stars of earthly desire. Behold, Wisdom – 'the Hunter of the East' – has cast a noose of light to encircle the kingly minaret of your egoic pride; wisdom to free you at last from the long night of spiritual ignorance!" (p.3)

FitzGerald would have had a field day responding to this 355 page interpretation of his first edition, for he had a ready *reductio ad absurdum* answer to any Sufic interpretation, given at the end of the introduction to his second edition: when anyone has finished with their Sufic interpretation of Omar, they "may proceed to the same Interpretation of Anacreon – and even Anacreon Moore." (Anacreon was the ancient Greek "poet of love and wine"; Anacreon Moore was the nickname of the Irish poet Thomas Moore, who translated many of Anacreon's verses into English and also wrote some of his own in the same style.)

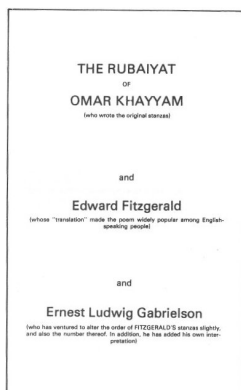
There are a number of other curiosities of

interpretation of *The Rubaiyat*, like J.S.Pattinson's little book *The Symbolism of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1921), which offers "a spiritual interpretation" (p.6) in which Wine is a symbol of the spirit (p.30) and the Grape a symbol of divine wisdom (p.31). This interpretation is very similar to that of the Sufis, of course. Other Sufi-like interpre-

tations come from the Theosophists, who readily find karmic law, the Door of Brahma and the non-reality of Time in Omar's verses – see, for example, Leo L. Partlow, "The Rubaiyat" in *The Theosophist* (Sept-Dec 1930), p.809-816, and Alice Leighton-Cleather, "Omar Khayyam" in *Theosophical Siftings*, vol.5, no.4 (1892-3), p.18-20.



Then there is *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam with Interpretations by E.L. Gabrielson*, whose full title, as given on the title-page of the book, is:



The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam (who wrote the Original Stanzas), and Edward Fitzgerald (whose 'translation' made the poem widely popular among English-speaking people), and Ernest Ludwig Gabrielson (who has ventured to alter

the order of FitzGerald's stanzas slightly, and also the number thereof: in addition he has added his own interpretation) (1977).

If you fancy an interpretation which involves reincarnation, karma, astral and etheric bodies, the alchemy of the ego, the Akashic Records and Guardian Angels, then this book is for you, though be warned: despite its recent date it is surprisingly rare. Perhaps not surprisingly, Gabrielson believed that Omar Khayyam was indeed a Sufi, but that FitzGerald totally misunderstood this and misrepresented his rubaiyat as a result (p.86 & p.109.)

But strangest – and rarest - of all – and a totally different brand of interpretation to any of the foregoing - is *Life's Echoes by 'Tis True: a Possible Elucidation of the Mysteriously Cryptic Tessellations made mostly by Byron, FitzGerald and others from Omar Qayyam's Rubaiyat*. This was a privately printed book which was published in Paris in 1923. Being so rare, the only copies I have seen are those in the British Library and in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. The first problem with this curious volume is finding the beginning, which turns out to be in the middle of the book! The first page of the book is p.62, followed by p.61, 60, 59 etc down to p.1, then after p.1 comes p.128, then p.127, 126, 125 etc down to p.63, right at the back of the book! This suggests that the book consists of two halves which have been bound together the wrong way round, and that actually the first page of the book should be p.128, then p.127, 126, 125 etc down to p.63, and then comes p.62, followed by p.61, 60, 59 etc down to p.1 at the back of the book. This would fit with the fact that its author wanted it to be

read "in Mohammedan style"(p.24a). Having sorted that out (I think!), I should add that another oddity of the book is that there is a p.22a as well as a p.22, and there are pages 24a and 24b, but no p.24. Note, too, that a single page number covers both the left hand leaf and its facing right hand leaf. Right hand leaves are labelled "Life" and their facing left hand leaves are labelled "Echo." "Life" leaves usually bear three rubaiyat, whilst their facing "Echo" leaves bear illustrations (eg Persian miniatures) and/or lines by Byron (occasionally other poets – Cowley, Rochester & Dryden, notably) which relate to and elucidate those rubaiyat.

It is to be noted, though, that the lines by Byron are from a collection of verses allegedly written by him in Pisa in 1822 and "found by an English traveller at Pisa in an Italian's hut" (p.24a). Being of a sexual nature, shall we say, in addition to having turned up in suspicious circumstances, these verses do not appear in his collected works. Furthermore, the quoted rubaiyat are allegedly taken from "a hitherto unrecorded manuscript of Omar Qayyam's rubaiyat" transcribed by one Muhammad Issan in AD 1743 (p.9), a manuscript which also has a decidedly sexual slant to it, at least if the translations offered are to be believed. Certainly, I have never seen any translation like this one before! But whatever, in eastern poetry, we are assured, "the most erotic thoughts are invariably expressed in symbolic terms"(p.23), for which reason the author and compiler of *Life's Echoes* fully expects his unlocking of the symbolism to induce blushes in some quarters.

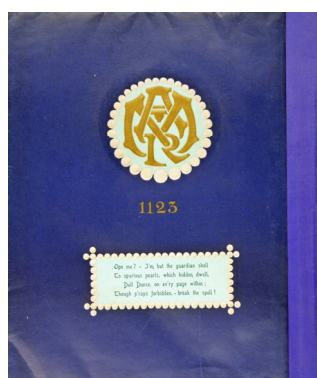
What we have in this book, then, are a set of hitherto unknown mildly pornographic rubaiyat illuminated by a set of hitherto unknown mildly pornographic Byronic verses. Not only that, but the English renderings of these rubaiyat are framed as a sort of sexual parody of FitzGerald's verses, so that one is left wondering if, in fact, this whole book is a very elaborate literary hoax. Here, for example, is one of the rubaiyat from p.38:

*Oft ere the Phantom False at morning Died,
Methought, a Voice within Love's Tavern
Sighed, -
When Temple's Altar's all Prepared – and
Waits –
Why Nods the Drowsy Worshipper outside?*

This is a clear parody of the second verse of FitzGerald's 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th editions. Part of the poem of Byron which accompanies this parody reads:

*How oft in dreams, that ape the hour of bliss,
Youth's passions wander, till they, waking,
miss
The lovely phantom, clasped in their embrace,
And find a lost emission in her place!*

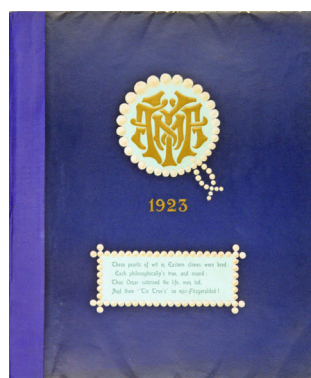
As to whether or not this book is a literary hoax of some sort, the book's covers (see the accompanying illustrations) may contain a clue. One cover – intended, I think, to be the front cover when read “in Mohammedan style” – bears an elaborate monogram of the name Omar, the date 1123 (at one time held to be the year that Omar Khayyam died) and the verse:



*Ope me ? – I'm but the guardian shell
To spurious pearls, which hidden dwell,
Dull Dunce, on ev'ry page within;
Though p'raps forbidden – break the spell.*

The other cover – the back cover when read “in Mohammedan style” – bears an elaborate monogram of the name Qayyam, the date 1923 (the date of publication) and the verse:

*These pearls of wit in Eastern climes were
bred;
Each philosophically's true, and sound:
Thus Omar satirised the life men led,
And them 'Tis True's' so mis-FitzGerald!*



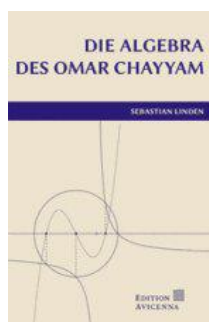
Copyright images “Life's Echoes” by Trinity College

So who was ‘Tis True, the author of *Life's Echoes* ? According to two letters tucked inside the copy in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, he was Robert J. R. Brown, and it seems he was a retired colonel in the Indian Army, who had taken up residence at Houilles, just outside Paris. Unfortunately, I have been unable to discover any more about him than this, though I am hoping that more might be discovered through his army career. His extraordinary book was published as a limited edition of 600 copies, priced at 15 guineas per copy (a huge amount at the time), and intended “for the private amusement of philosophical bibliophiles only”.

(To be continued)

Bob Forrest
July 2012

Khayyam's algebra



Edition Avicenna published a study on Omar Khayyám's algebra by Sebastian Linden, that explores Omar Khayyám's mathematical work, and the social and scientific conditions and circumstances of his days.

The first part of the book gives an account of Khayyám's times, the early sources of Persian science, and describes Khayyám as a historical figure, and his relevance for modern times. The two following sections present Khayyám's essays on algebra with extensive comments.

Khayyám's poetical work and its journey through the ages are only briefly discussed, as this is of course a book on algebra. However, as Linden says, the reader who is not familiar with algebra does not need to worry, because he will find out that Khayyám's work is “grundlegend, elegant, und für den modernen Leser erstaunlich leicht verständlich”.

Die Algebra des Omar Chayyam. Sebastian Linden. München, Edition Avicenna, 2012. 326 p. ISBN: 978-3-941913-103
€ 24,90

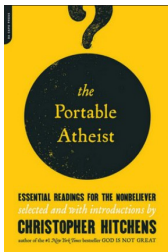
Omar Khayyam: food for atheists

Christopher Eric Hitchens (April 13, 1949 – December, 15, 2011) was a well-known English-American author, who loved to seek the media to express his explicit opinions on a large variety of (current) affairs, unscrupulous of established reputations such as that of Bill Clinton, Henry Kissinger, pope Benedict XVI and many others.

He became best known through his fierce position against any form of religion, not as an atheist, but as an anti-theist. Someone may be an atheist and yet fervently hope that God does exist, but an anti-theist is someone who, to his great relief, has come to the conclusion that there is no rational evidence for God's existence. Hitchens' best known books in this field are *God is not great. How religion spoils everything* and *The portable atheist: essential readings for the nonbeliever*, both published in 2007.

In both books Hitchens deals with Omar Khayyam. *God is not great. How religion spoils everything* opens with three quotations that apparently serve as a motto for this book. One of these quotations is the following quatrain by Omar Khayyam, as translated by Richard le Gallienne:

And do you think that unto such as you
A maggot-minded, starved, fanatic crew
God gave a secret, and denied it me?
Well, well—what matters it? Believe that, too!



In the second book, *The portable atheist : essential readings for the non-believer*, Omar Khayyam is one of a number of authors, from Lucretius to Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who Hitchens believes to be obligatory stuff for the unbeliever. Chapter 2, on Omar Khayyam, comprises about thirty-five quatrains, also translated by Richard de Gallienne. The quatrain quoted above, which Hitchens cited as his “favorite quatrain” in an account of a journey to Iran (in *Arguably: Selected Essays*, published in 2011) is also included here. Other examples are:

Yea! what is man that deems himself divine?
Man is a flagon, and his soul the wine;
Man is a reed, his soul the sound therein;
Man is a lantern, and his soul the shine.

Would you be happy! hearken, then, the way:
Heed not TO-MORROW, heed not YESTERDAY;
The magic words of life are HERE and NOW—
O fools, that after some tomorrow stray!

Men talk of heaven,—there is no heaven but here;
Men talk of hell,—there is no hell but here;
Men of hereafters talk, and future lives,—
O love, there is no other life—but here.

Of all my seeking this is all my gain:
No agony of any mortal brain
Shall wrest the secret of the life of man;
The Search has taught me that the Search is vain.

Yet sometimes on a sudden all seems clear—
Hush! hush! my soul, the Secret draweth near;
Make silence ready for the speech divine—
If Heaven should speak, and there be none to hear!

Allah, perchance, the secret word might spell;
If Allah be, He keeps His secret well;
What He hath hidden, who shall hope to find?
Shall God His secret to a maggot tell?

The Koran! well, come put me to the test—
 Lovely old book in hideous error drest—
 Believe me, I can quote the Koran too,
 The unbeliever knows his Koran best.

“Did God set grapes a-growing, do you think,
 And at the same time make it sin to drink?
 Give thanks to HIM who foreordained it thus—
 Surely HE loves to hear the glasses clink!”

From God’s own hand this earthly vessel came,
 He shaped it thus, be it for fame or shame;
 If it be fair—to God be all the praise,
 If it be foul—to God alone the blame.

These quatrains are preceded by a short introduction in which Hitchens writes: “Medieval Persia also produced a long and beautiful poem satirizing the claims and practices of religion. Though Omar Khayyám (1048–1131) is best remembered for his warm recommendations of wine, women, and song (preferences that would land him in trouble in today’s Iran, as well) he was actually a very serious astronomer and mathematician who made many contributions to algebra, helped refine the calendar, and may have been an early proponent of the idea that the earth revolved around the sun. Khayyám clearly doubted that god had revealed himself to some men and not to others, especially in light of the very obvious fact that those who claimed to interpret the revelation were fond of using their claim in order to acquire and wield power over others in this world. He was not the first to notice this aspect of religion, but he was among the wittiest.” Despite the fact that Hitchens presents Omar Khayyám’s quatrains within the framework of denying any form of religion as such, they are used here specifically to support an attack on the special position of the clergy.



Richard le Gallienne

Regarding Hitchens’ choice for Le Gallienne’s version, he states: “The most celebrated translation of his immortal *Rubáiyát* into English was done by Edward Fitzgerald, but the verses as rendered by Richard Le Gallienne are sometimes better at conveying the pungency that underlies the ironic charm of these quatrains.” However, the question remains whether Le Gallienne can be considered of the same congeniality of mind as Hitchens, as he seems to suggest in choosing for this translation. In his introduction Le Gallienne talks of “a mystic materialism which, obviously, is the very heart of his philosophy.” At the same time he points to the fact “in his [Omar’s] attitude to the Deity, the ‘he’s a good fellow’ note is more frequently sounded, a curiously complete and abandoned faith alternating paradoxically with the most savage criticism and despair. In this my paraphrase accords more nearly with the Omar of the more literal translators—for Omar is always ready to curse God with one cup and love Him with the next.” It seems to me that the grim determination that Hitchens exposes in his attitude against God and religion is strange to Le Gallienne.

Johan ter Haar
June 2013

PS. Hans de Bruijn alerted me to an article on Le Gallienne’s translation of Khayyám, by Adam Taleb: “Le Gallienne’s Paraphrase and the Limits of Translation”, published in *Fitzgerald’s Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: Popularity and Neglect*, edd. Adrian Poole, Christine van Ruymbeke etc., (London: Anthem Press, 2011, pp. 174-192).

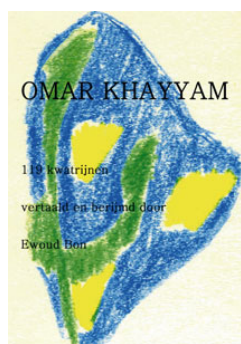
New books



Sadegh Hedayat. Liederen van Khayyam; vertaalwerk Ali Soleimani. Drachten, Het Talenhuis, 2013. 350 p. ISBN: 9789078660217.

The first translation into Dutch of Hedayat's Taraneh-haye Khayyam.

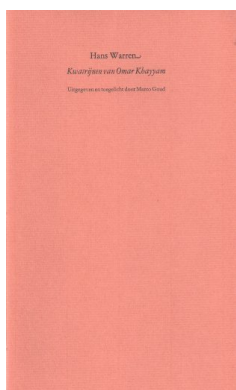
Voorwoord, p. 7; Inhoudsopgave, p. 9; Noot van de vertaler, p. 11; Inleiding van Sadegh Hedayat, p. 13; Filosoof Khayyam, p. 33; Dichter Khayyam, p. 77; Liederen van Khayyam, p. 99; Het geheim van de schepping, p. 101; De pijn van het leven, p. 119; Het vaststaande lot, p. 131; De levensloop, p. 141; Draaiende stoffen, p. 167; Laat maar waaien! p. 185; Het stelt helemaal niets voor! p. 215; Geniet van het moment! p. 233; Een korte levensbeschrijving van Omar Khayyam, de heer van de wijn, p. 261; Nawoord, p. 279; Een korte levensbeschrijving van Sadegh Hedayat, p. 307; Plattegrond van de begraafplaats Le Père Lachaise, p. 337; Foto van het grafmonument van Sadegh Hedayat, p. 339; Literatuurlijst, p. 341; Verdere literatuur, p. 343; Gevonden resultaten uit ISBN-bestand, p. 345; Het grafmonument van Omar Khayyam in Neishabour - Iran, p. 351.



Omar Khayyam. 119 kwatrijnen. Vertaald en berijmd door Ewoud Bon. Barneveld, Boekenbent, 2011. 127 p. ISBN 9789085709084

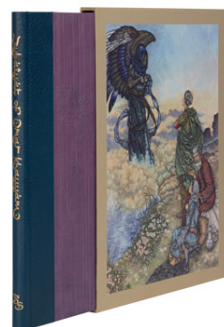
Translation into Dutch of a selection from various earlier translations.

Inleiding, p. 5; Selectie uit de vrije Engelse vertaling van Edward FitzGerald, 5th edition 1889, p. 7; Literal translation by Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs, p. 64; Übertragen von Cyrus Atabay, p. 87; Translation Robert Graves & Omar Ali-Shah, p. 101; Vertaling Frits Pijl, 1947, p. 109; Traduction Franz Toussaint, L'Édition d'art (H. Piazza, Paris), p. 110; Traduction de J.B. Nicolas, p. 125.; Verantwoording, p. 126.



Hans Warren. Kwatrijnen van Omar Khayyam. Uitgegeven en toegelicht door Marco Goud. Woubrugge, Avalon Pers, 2012. 5 p.

12 quatrains, translated from the French version by Anet and Muhammad (1920), published for the first time. 25 copies printed by Avalon Pers, Woubrugge. Also in "Liber amicomm Jos Biegstraaten" (2012).

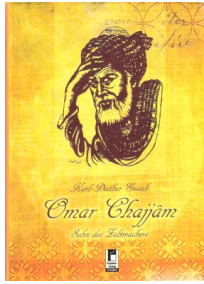


Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám the Astronomer-Poet of Persia. Translated into English verse by Edward FitzGerald. Introduced by A.S. Byatt. Illustrated by Niroot Puttapipat. London, The Folio Society, 2012. 69 p. 16 colour illustrations.

This edition reproduces all of Niroot Puttapipat's original illustrations from the 2009 Folio Society Limited Edition: a frontispiece, 15 full-page illustrations and 5 small line drawings in total. The text is set in 16-point Van Dyck, with four quatrains to a page, and with an illustration opposite each page. The verse pages are unpaginated. In gold coloured box, with illustration on front.

Introduction, p. 7; Omar Khayyám, the Astronomer-Poet of Persia by Edward FitzGerald, p. 17; Rubáiyát, p. 25; Notes by Edward FitzGerald, p. 67.

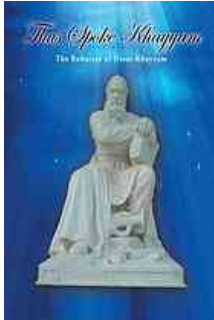
The illustrations in this work can be viewed on this website:
<http://cizgilimasallar.blogspot.nl/2013/02/niroot-puttapipat-rubaiyat-of-omar.html>



Omar Chajjâm. Sohn des Zeltmachers. Karl Dieter Gussek. Halle, Projekte-Verlag Cornelius, 2012. Illustrated, 65 p. ISBN: 9783954862634 .

Contents:

Ausgewählte Strophen von Omar Chijam in der Übersetzung von A.F. Graf von Schak, p. 7. Omar Chajjâm. Essay von Karl-Dieter Gussek, p. 31. Literatur, p. 65.

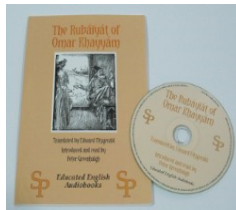


Thus spoke Khayyam. The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. Translated by Ayob Palani and Adnan Talabani. Bloomington, Balboa Press, 2012. Decorated. X, 129 p. ISBN: 9781452507415.

English and Persian text on opposite pages, within decorated borders. The translators state that “so far, the magnitude of his poetry have not been presented with a full consideration for his unique expression and usage of words”. To illustrate what they mean by this (quatrains 61):

*I'm proud of Tavern, for its belongs belong
With fair as you observe, simple are its wrong
In School did not up rise, any belonger of heart
Ruin be on this place, for it's an ignorance mart*

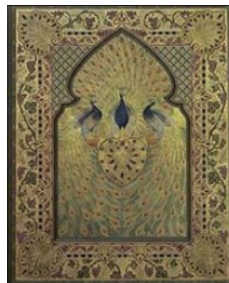
and judge for yourself...



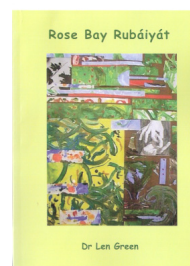
The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam Translated by Edward FitzGerald. Introduced and read by Peter Greenhalgh. Published by English Speech and Pronunciation, 2012. (Educated English Audiobooks). ISBN 978-1 908001-18-4
Paperback, 43 pages, with 29 illustrations from Rene Bull, Gilbert James and Edmund Sullivan. Audio-CD included.

Available from: <http://speechandpronunciation.com/audioBooks.html>

A **print** featuring an exquisite turquoise peacock-design book cover of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* is for sale from the British Library's archives. The binding is 20th century and was created by **Stanley Bray**. The print comes in various printing techniques and sizes, Frames can be included.



More information: http://prints.bl.uk/art/406043/Rubiyt_of_Omar_Khayym



Rose Bay Rubáiyát (Khayyám and beyond). By Len Green. Rosebay, Green, 2012. ISBN: 9780975179192

In Len Green's own words, this book is “an abstract on The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám of Naishápúr with verse by various authors and and selected quotations”. The author summarizes and discusses what he, as a hobbyist and enthusiast, has learned about the Rubáiyát, the translators, the editions and the issues that have been subject of argument and debate since FitzGerald's translation.