



Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: A Critical Edition (Victorian Literature and Culture Series)

Edward FitzGerald

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Edward FitzGerald's translation of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, perhaps the most frequently read Victorian poem and certainly one of the most popular poems in the English language, poses formidable challenges to an editor. FitzGerald compulsively revised his work, alternately swayed by friends' advice, importuned by his publisher's commercial interests, and encouraged by public acclaim. In consequence, the editor is faced with four published editions as well as manuscript and proof versions of the poem. Christopher Decker's critical edition of the Rubáiyát is the first to publish all extant states of the poem and to unearth a full record of its complicated textual evolution.

Decker supplies a rich interpretive context for the Rubáiyát that reveals how its composition was so often a collaborative enterprise. His view of poetic creativity comprehends recent theories of the sociology of texts and challenges the common assumption that the desired product of a critical edition is a single unified text of a literary work. He illuminates the complex process of revision by providing a textual appendix in which a comparative printing lays down each stratum of FitzGerald's composition. Biographical and textual introductions, making imaginative use of FitzGerald's correspondence, trace the history of the poem and pay special attention to FitzGerald's motives for revising, for creating a variously beautiful work in verse.

This definitive edition of the Rubáiyát will be of special interest to scholars and students of Victorian poetry, publishing history, verse translation, literary imitation, and revision. And readers for whom the poem is an old acquaintance will here find fresh ways to appreciate its strengths and finesse.

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