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Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

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The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is the title that Edward FitzGerald gave to his translation of a selection of poems, originally written in Persian and numbering about a thousand, attributed to Omar Khayyám (1048–1131), a Persian poet, mathematician, and astronomer. A ruba'i is a two-line stanza with two parts (or hemistichs) per line, hence the word rubaiyat (derived from the Arabic language root for "four"), meaning "quatrains". The nature of a translation very much depends on what interpretation one places on Khayyam's philosophy. The fact that the rubaiyat is a collection of quatrains—and may be selected and rearranged subjectively to support one interpretation or another—has led to widely differing versions. Nicolas took the view that Khayyam himself clearly was a Sufi. Others have seen signs of mysticism, even atheism, or conversely devout and orthodox Islam. FitzGerald gave the Rubaiyat a distinct fatalistic spin, although it has been claimed that he softened the impact of Khayyam's nihilism and his preoccupation with the mortality and transience of all things. Even such a question as to whether Khayyam was pro- or anti-alcohol gives rise to more discussion than might at first glance have seemed plausible.

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