



# **The rubaiyat of omar khayyam: An irreverent reinterpretation of nineteenth-century English translations**

*David Ramsey*

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Is not a new rendition of the RUBAIYAT long over due? Although I have long loved this book, my reinterpretation of the English version began with my displeasure with perhaps its most famous verse, quatrain XI: Here with a loaf of Bread Beneath the Bough, A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse and Thou Beside me singing in the Wilderness And Wilderness is Paradise enow. I thought this sounded more Victorian than Persian which is not surprising, since these 12th-Century verses by Omar Khayyam were translated into English in the 19th Century by Edward Fitzgerald, decidedly a Victorian. I think Omar meant something more like this: With a book of verse beneath the bough, A repast of bread and wine, and thou; Whilst ensnared by the tendrils of the vine, Thy virtue I did proceed to deflow'r. For my amusement, often with a glass of wine in hand at happy hour, I proceeded to deflower other of Fitzgerald's translations of Omar. I never thought of doing anything with them until I wrote a book about Mexican wine, and it occurred to me that I could twist even more of the verses into something about wine and insert them between the sections of this wine guide. My modernized verses in this book are on the left-hand pages and Fitzgerald's original translations are on the right-hand pages. I think anyone well-versed in English could improve on Fitzgerald's more obscure and mediocre translations. The challenge was to make suitable alternatives to those famous verses that have made the RUBAIYAT one of the best-known works of poetry in the English language. One might say that I plagiarized the author, or his principal translator, or both. I consider it a collaboration between the three of us over the centuries. I hope my two unwitting collaborators would not be displeased with my reinterpretation of their efforts. David Ramsey

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