The *Rubáiyát*, loosely based on the verses attributed to Omar Khayyám, is one of the most widely known poems in the world. It has been republished virtually every year from 1879 (the year of its fourth edition) to the present day, and translated into over 80 different languages. This volume of essays is based on a conference held in 2009 to honour the bicentenary of the birth of Edward FitzGerald (1809) and the 150th anniversary of the publication of the first edition of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* (1859). It was organised by the University of Cambridge (Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and Faculty of English) in collaboration with the Persian Department at the University of Leiden (who organised a complementary conference in the Netherlands). The conference was convened by Dr Christine van Ruymbeke (Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Cambridge), Professor Adrian Poole (Faculty of English, Cambridge) and Professor Charles Melville (Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Cambridge), in memoriam Peter Avery, OBE. We wish to express our warm gratitude to the following for the generosity of their support for the 2009 conference, without which the current volume would not have been possible: the Soudavar Cambridge Fund for Persian Studies; the British Institute of Persian Studies; the Iran Heritage Foundation; the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge; the Ancient India and Iran Trust; Pembroke College, Cambridge; Trinity College, Cambridge; and Cambridgeshire County Council.

The uniting theme of the current volume is indicated by its subtitle, ‘Popularity and Neglect’. In his introduction Adrian Poole reviews the history of the poem’s general popularity and particular neglect by the academic establishment, and suggests the importance to its popularity of the positive welcome it offers to an idea, a principle and ethos of ‘neglect’. The first group of essays, chapters 1–6, focus on FitzGerald’s poem itself, its position within several literary and intellectual traditions, its origins in the mid- to late-Victorian era when it was conceived, written and published, and its effect on its first readers. Dick Davis places FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* within the tradition of English verse translation as it has existed since the time of Chaucer. He...
suggests that FitzGerald was doing something relatively unprecedented when he wrote his versions of Khayyám, and that, together with the uncertain status of the original poems within the canon of Persian poetry, this was a prime factor in his work’s extraordinary success. Daniel Karlin probes the metaphysical gap between FitzGerald’s idea of ‘nothing’ and Tennyson’s, tracing the antecedents of the former in an English literary tradition that includes Shakespeare, Donne, and Rochester. Erik Gray contends that FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* originally achieved its giddy popularity because it seemed so strange and daring, yet the poem’s very familiarity has tended to obscure what is most exceptional about it, its often puzzling language and its depiction of relations between men. Clive Wilmer and Marta Simidchieva both look at the *Rubáiyát* in the context of Victorian religious and intellectual belief, suggesting that FitzGerald made it speak to his contemporaries through an increasingly confident scepticism and agnosticism towards which many were feeling their way. Anthony Briggs considers the arresting similarities and instructive differences between FitzGerald and two other retiring poets whose modest poetic output has won an exceptional popularity, Thomas Gray and A. E. Housman.

Chapters 7 and 8 form a bridge between the two main groups of essays in that they trace the contribution made by some key figures to the extraordinary history of the *Rubáiyát*’s journey from obscurity to global celebrity. John Drew focuses on Whitley Stokes, Edward Cowell and Thomas Evans Bell, and the intriguing story behind the Madras 1862 edition, Garry Garrard on the fascinating polymath Edward Heron-Allen and his close engagement with FitzGerald’s work in the 1890s.

The second main group of essays, chapters 9–14, is concerned with the afterlives of the *Rubáiyát*, the new initiatives it has sponsored and the effect they have in turn had on the appreciation of FitzGerald’s poem. John Roger Paas demonstrates the enormous role that American reprint publishers played in fostering and supporting the public’s interest in the *Rubáiyát*. Freed from any concern about copyright restrictions, the Americans reprinted at will and in the process developed marketing strategies that continue to this day. Michelle Kaiserlian follows the fortunes of the Omar Khayyám Clubs that started up in London in 1892 and later in Boston, arguing that these clubs became ritual spaces in which participants crafted and maintained a coveted identity through the vehicle of the *Rubáiyát* with its easy access to the fantasy world of the Orient. Adam Talib shows that Richard Le Gallienne’s 1897 edition of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* is an original work of literature that helps us understand the contemporary tensions surrounding academic and commercial translation and the place of the *Rubáiyát* in English literary history. Annmarie S. Drury sees in American parodies of the *Rubáiyát* a
critique of the uncomplicated celebration of cultural fusion that many of FitzGerald’s champions promulgated. Her examples include the different uses of the *Rubáiyát* made by Mark Twain, Oliver Herford, and the ‘Hoosier poet’ James Whitcomb Riley. Parvin Loloi studies the English *Rubáiyát*, from the parodies which peaked in the first decades of the twentieth century to imitations and dedicatory *Rubáiyát* in honour of Khayyám and/or FitzGerald in the second half of the century, in poems by John Heath-Stubbs, Dick Davis, Francis Warner and Mimi Khalvati. Finally, William H. Martin and Sandra Mason shed further light on how Edward FitzGerald’s short poem became one of the most widely illustrated books of all time. They consider the social and economic framework within which publication of FitzGerald’s *Rubáiyát* reached its zenith, the critical role played by technical change in creating opportunities for better quality and more cost-effective colour printing, and the contribution of illustration to the enduring popularity of the poem.

Adrian Poole
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William H. Martin
Sandra Mason