



THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

THE WINE OF ANOTHER DAWN

Abanindranath Tagore, Omar Khayyám
and the Reimagining of the Rubáiyát



A CUSTODIAN PAPER

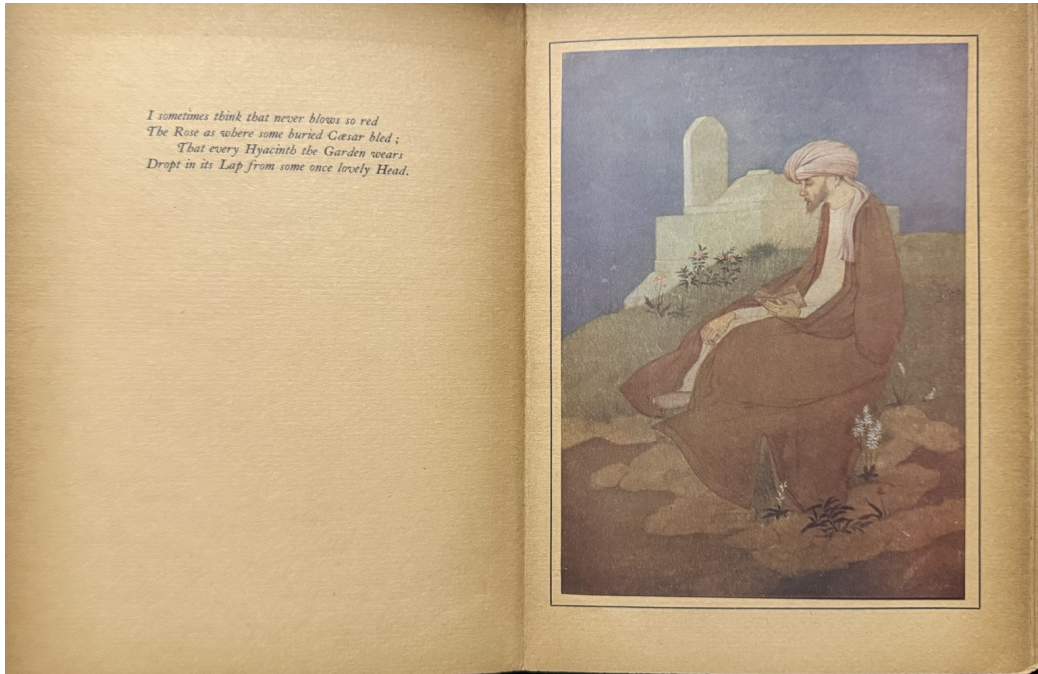


*The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

— Edward FitzGerald, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*

PREFACE

A Conversation Across Centuries



One of the seven mounted colour plates after Abanindranath Tagore, shown with its facing verse.

Some books belong naturally to the history of literature. Others belong to the history of art. A smaller and more intriguing class stands at the confluence of several civilizations, carrying within a single material object the accumulated journeys of language, image, empire and memory. This edition of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, translated by Edward FitzGerald and illustrated by Abanindranath Tagore, belongs emphatically to that last category.

Its journey begins in medieval Persia, with quatrains attributed—sometimes confidently, sometimes conjecturally—to Ghiyāth al-Dīn Abū'l-Faṭḥ 'Umar ibn Ibrāhīm al-Khayyāmī of Nishapur: mathematician, astronomer, philosopher and the elusive figure whom posterity transformed into Omar Khayyám, the poet of wine, roses and transience. It passes through nineteenth-century England, where Edward FitzGerald gathered, rearranged and freely recreated a selection of Persian

verses as one of the most haunting poems in the English language. It then travels to Calcutta at the beginning of the twentieth century, where Abanindranath Tagore encountered FitzGerald's imagined Persia and answered it through an artistic language formed from Mughal and Rajput painting, Persian manuscript traditions, Japanese wash technique and the intellectual ferment of the Bengal Renaissance.

The resulting work is not simply an illustrated poem. It is a conversation conducted across centuries.

The copy presented in these pages is the scarce Leopold B. Hill edition, published in London circa the 1910s and printed by the Riverside Press Limited in Edinburgh. It comprises 64 pages, including seven coloured plates by Abanindranath Tagore, each with its caption opposite. The volume survives complete in its original full limp pebbled-leather binding, with a gilt floral vignette on the upper cover, gilt lettering to the upper cover and spine, gilt top edge, uncut fore- and lower edges, and marbled brown endpapers. It measures 9 × 6.5 × 0.75 inches; the auction catalogue records the metric dimensions as 23.6 × 16.5 × 2 centimetres. The binding bears the marks of age and use, but its gilt decoration remains eloquent. An early ownership inscription survives on the front endpaper, and all seven plates are present.

The bibliographical distinction between this edition and the original publication is important. Abanindranath's complete series was first issued in London in 1910 by the Offices of The Studio as a large-format portfolio containing twelve illustrations. The present volume is a later, reduced-format book edition containing a selection of seven. It should not be described as the 1910 first edition or as containing the complete twelve-image sequence. Yet to define it principally by what it is not would be to misunderstand its significance. In its leather binding, intimate scale and arrangement of image beside verse, the Leopold B. Hill edition gave Abanindranath's interpretation a new life as a book—something that could be held, read, carried and privately contemplated. The portfolio presented the paintings as works of art; the later volume reunited them with the ritual of reading.

This particular copy entered the collection of The Eye of the Beholder through StoryLTD/Saffronart's Absolute Tuesdays auction of 20 June 2023, lot 10. It was acquired not as an adjunct to a collection of paintings, nor merely as one more edition of FitzGerald's endlessly reproduced poem, but because it embodies an unusual cultural passage: a Persian poetic inheritance transformed by an English writer and then reclaimed through the imagination of one of India's most consequential artists.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *Rubáiyát* became a global publishing phenomenon. It was illustrated repeatedly in Europe and America, often in an extravagant

Orientalist idiom. Abanindranath's images belong to this international history, but they also quietly resist it. His East is not a decorative theatre arranged for Western consumption. His figures are seldom actors in an exotic spectacle. They appear instead as presences glimpsed through mist: lovers, ascetics, wanderers, kings and solitary dreamers inhabiting landscapes from which the solidity of the material world seems gradually to have withdrawn.

His paintings do not merely give visible form to FitzGerald's words. They question the direction in which cultural authority was presumed to travel. Persia had passed through England and become a Victorian classic. Abanindranath received that classic in colonial Calcutta and painted it again through an Asian visual intelligence. The East that had been translated, romanticised and possessed now looked back.

No attempt is made here to resolve the poem into a single doctrine. The wine of the Rubáiyát has been read literally and mystically; its garden as a site of earthly pleasure and as an image of divine union; its scepticism as unbelief, intellectual rebellion or spiritual impatience. FitzGerald himself made the text still more ambiguous by combining, rearranging and transforming his Persian sources. Abanindranath did not settle those ambiguities. He deepened them.

That is why this book continues to hold us. Its subject is not simply pleasure in the face of death. It is the mystery by which beauty survives translation. A Persian quatrain becomes an English poem. An English poem becomes an Indian painting. A portfolio becomes a book. A book passes from one custodian to another. Every transformation loses something; every transformation also creates something that did not exist before. The object in our hands is therefore not the terminus of a journey. It is one of its surviving witnesses.

PRINCIPAL CATALOGUE ESSAY

The Rubáiyát Returns to the East



I. A Poet Hidden Behind His Poem

Few poets have become as famous as Omar Khayyám while remaining so difficult to see. The historical Khayyám was born in Nishapur in Khorasan in 1048 and died there in 1131. In his own age he was known principally not as a poet but as a mathematician, astronomer and philosopher. His scientific works place him among the formidable intellectual figures of the medieval Persian world. His treatise on algebra investigated cubic equations with remarkable sophistication; he participated in the astronomical work associated with the reform of the Jalālī calendar under Malik-Shah; and he wrote on metaphysics, existence and necessity. The man who entered Western culture as a melancholy singer raising a cup against the silence of heaven was, in historical life, a scholar concerned with the intelligible order of the universe.

Around that scholar there gradually accumulated a second identity. Quatrains—rubāʿiyyāt, the plural of rubāʿī—were attributed to him in increasing numbers. Some may be authentic; others almost certainly belong to later poets or to a diffuse Khayyámian tradition. There is no single authorial manuscript establishing a definitive collection. What survives is partly a voice, partly a reputation and partly a literary persona assembled by generations of readers.

Yet uncertainty of authorship does not make the poetry less significant. It reveals the power of the name “Omar Khayyám.” He became a vessel into which Persian literary culture poured distrust of religious certainty, impatience with hypocrisy, wonder before the brevity of life, and attention to wine, dust, clay and returning spring. Kings and beggars alike are absorbed into the same earth. Against the universe’s silence stand companionship, bread, wine, the garden at dawn, the song of the nightingale and the beloved’s face. Their value derives precisely from their impermanence.

This is not merely hedonism, although the language of pleasure is real and should not be explained away. Nor is it necessarily atheism. The tavern in Persian poetry is never a simple place. Wine can be wine, but it can also be knowledge, illumination, divine intoxication or rebellion against orthodoxy. The beloved may be human, celestial or deliberately suspended between the two. The poem's vitality lies in refusing to remain within a single register.

II. FitzGerald's Persian Re-creation

Edward FitzGerald was an improbable agent of literary immortality. Born in 1809 into a wealthy Anglo-Irish family, he lived much of his life in relative seclusion in East Anglia. He possessed no conventional academic career and never visited Persia. His life was shaped by books, friendships, correspondence and the slowly cultivated art of withdrawal. Yet from this quiet existence emerged one of the most influential acts of translation in English literature.

The decisive intermediary was Edward Byles Cowell, a gifted Sanskrit and Persian scholar and FitzGerald's close friend. Cowell introduced him to Persian poetry and supplied transcripts of manuscripts containing quatrains attributed to Khayyám. India occupies an often-overlooked place in this genealogy even before Abanindranath enters the story: part of its Persian source material reached the English translator through a scholar working in Bengal.

FitzGerald did not approach the quatrains as a modern philologist seeking lexical fidelity. He selected, combined, reordered and transformed them. Images from separate Persian verses could be brought together within one English stanza; a suggestion might become an argument; scattered reflections were arranged into something resembling a dramatic sequence. The translated poem had, in his view, to live.

The result appeared anonymously in 1859 as a modest pamphlet published by Bernard Quaritch. Two hundred and fifty copies were printed, of which FitzGerald retained forty. The publication was an almost complete commercial failure. Copies were eventually consigned to Quaritch's bargain box, where they could be purchased for a penny. Only after Whitley Stokes discovered the work did it begin to circulate among Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelite circle. From obscurity it passed into cult, and from cult into ubiquity.

Its success depended partly upon historical timing. Victorian Christianity was encountering geological deep time, evolutionary biology, historical criticism of scripture and new forms of doubt. FitzGerald's Omar seemed ancient and exotic, but he sounded uncannily modern. His questions were those of an age losing confidence in inherited certainties.

III. The Book That Became a World

By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the Rubáiyát had escaped the limits of ordinary publication. It became a ritual gift, a private scripture, a fashionable emblem of cultivated doubt and one of the supreme vehicles for the illustrated book. Omar Khayyám clubs appeared in Britain and America. Composers set the verses to music. Lines detached themselves from their sequence and became proverbial: the moving finger, the loaf and wine, the wilderness transformed into paradise, the bird of time.

Publishers recognised that the poem was especially suited to visual elaboration. Its gardens, cups, roses, celestial imagery and half-seen lovers invited illustration; its prestige justified expensive paper, elaborate bindings, hand-coloured plates and limited editions. Elihu Vedder, Edmund Dulac, Willy Pogány, René Bull and Gilbert James each gave FitzGerald's poem a distinctive visual world.

The illustrated Rubáiyát emerged at the meeting point of aestheticism, bibliophilia, luxury craft and Orientalism. It could be bound in vellum, modelled leather or jewelled metalwork. Its most extravagant manifestation was the "Great Omar" created by Sangorski & Sutcliffe, encrusted with jewels and dispatched to America aboard the Titanic in 1912. Its loss turned an already legendary book into a bibliographical ghost.

This visual tradition was magnificent, but it also established conventions. Persia was frequently rendered as a theatre of excess: tiled palaces, luxuriant gardens, peacocks, lamps, censers, translucent fabrics and sensuous women. Even when executed with brilliance, such images could imprison the poem within the decorative Orient imagined by Europe. Abanindranath's intervention is extraordinary because he entered this history from another direction.

IV. Abanindranath and the Search for an Indian Modern

Abanindranath Tagore was born in 1871 into the remarkable cultural world of Jorasanko. The Tagore household was one of the principal laboratories of the Bengal Renaissance. Literature, music, theatre, religious reform, social debate and artistic experiment converged there. Abanindranath grew up in a milieu where the inheritance of India was neither static tradition nor museum object. It was something to be questioned, translated and remade.

His early training included European academic methods. Yet his mature artistic identity developed partly in response to the institutional dominance of Western naturalism in colonial art education. Working with E. B. Havell at the Government School of Art in Calcutta, he turned toward Mughal painting and other Asian traditions. Japanese artists and thinkers associated with the pan-Asian

movement opened further possibilities. Wash, tonal atmosphere, suggestive emptiness and the expressive incompleteness of a form became central resources.

It is tempting to describe this simply as rejection: India turning away from Western art and returning to its own traditions. The reality was more fertile. Abanindranath's art was produced through encounter. European watercolour, Mughal line, Rajput lyricism, Persian manuscript painting, Japanese wash and Bengali literary imagination passed through one another. His modernity lay in transforming these inheritances without becoming captive to any one of them.

Abanindranath repeatedly turns away from the triumphant climax. He is drawn to aftermath, recollection, the departing figure, the extinguished court and the landscape after an event. Forms emerge from and dissolve into the paper. Colour is often muted not because the artist lacks chromatic imagination, but because saturation would make the world too secure. His visual language depends upon the feeling that things are present only provisionally.

V. Painting a Translation

When Abanindranath took up FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*, he entered a complex hall of mirrors. The attributed Persian verses had passed through centuries of manuscript transmission. FitzGerald selected and transformed them into an English sequence. That sequence became the foundation of an enormous Western visual culture. Abanindranath received the English poem in colonial India and rendered it through a language assembled from Indian, Persian and East Asian inheritances. The direction of translation was no longer simply East to West. It curved back upon itself.

This return should not be mistaken for restoration. Abanindranath did not recover an original Persian *Rubáiyát* supposedly corrupted by Europe. His images are not documentary reconstructions of Seljuk Nishapur. Their achievement is imaginative rather than corrective. He transforms the transformed poem once more.

In many European illustrations, the verse provides an occasion for pictorial abundance. In Abanindranath, it often produces subtraction. Architecture is reduced to a few planes; landscape is suggested rather than described; costume refuses the precision of ethnography; the human figure may occupy only a small and vulnerable portion of the composition. Space surrounds the subject not as vacancy but as silence.

Wine is no longer merely an accessory of pleasure. It becomes a point of warmth within a fading world. The garden is a temporary gathering of life beneath the pressure of time. Kingship appears in

relation to ruin, the beloved in relation to absence, and dust not as the opposite of beauty but as its eventual condition.

VI. The Rose and the Buried Cæsar

*“I sometimes think that never blows so red / The Rose as where some buried Cæsar
bled...”*



Mounted colour plate after Abanindranath Tagore: a solitary figure, tomb and landscape transformed into a meditation on mortality.

The plate accompanying FitzGerald's meditation on the rose and the buried Cæsar reveals Abanindranath's method with special clarity. A Western illustrator might have emphasised the scarlet rose, the sensuality of the "lovely Head," or the dramatic memory of Caesar. Abanindranath instead creates an atmosphere of inwardness. A solitary seated figure occupies the vicinity of a tomb or funerary structure. Monument, body and earth appear to share the same fragile substance.

The image does not narrate Caesar's death. It meditates upon what remains when the specific identities of the dead have been lost. The buried emperor and the anonymous beloved return alike through colour and growth. History becomes botany; blood becomes rose; human beauty returns as hyacinth. The transformation is at once material and metaphysical.

Such an image belongs intimately to Abanindranath's broader art. His Mughal subjects often contemplate the extinction of courtly worlds. His wash technique makes matter appear permeable. Here, FitzGerald's recycling of human grandeur through nature becomes an Indian meditation on anitya—impermanence—without being reduced to a doctrinal Buddhist or Hindu illustration.

VII. The Studio, 1910, and the Intimate Book

The first major publication of Abanindranath's sequence appeared in London in 1910 through the Offices of The Studio as a large portfolio with twelve mounted illustrations. The format allowed each image to be encountered as an autonomous work. The mounted reproductions approached the status of collectible prints while remaining conceptually bound to the poem.

The choice of The Studio placed Abanindranath within an international network of art, design and artistic craft. Yet the process was not neutral. Indian art often had to pass through institutions and critical vocabularies controlled by Europe in order to become internationally visible. FitzGerald's poem acted as a cultural passport.

The Leopold B. Hill edition represented a second life for the paintings. Reduced from twelve illustrations to seven and bound as a conventional volume, it altered the relationship among object, image and reader. The Studio issue invited the collector to contemplate a portfolio of artworks. The Hill edition invited the reader into a private chamber of verse and image. Its leather binding and gilt ornament preserved the atmosphere of luxury while its smaller scale made the experience intimate.

The present copy is particularly expressive of that intention. Its brown leather has darkened and softened with age. The gilt lettering and floral medallion retain their glow against the worn surface. It is not a pristine object sealed away from life. It bears the history of touch.

VIII. Abanindranath's Rubáiyáts: The Published Constellation

Abanindranath's contribution to the Rubáiyát does not survive as one uniform publication. It is better understood as a small bibliographical constellation formed around a single cycle of twelve paintings. The images moved between languages, formats and audiences: from large mounted plates intended for the connoisseur's portfolio to a compact leather-bound book made for private reading. The principal manifestations should therefore be distinguished with care.

The original painted cycle, circa 1909–1910. Abanindranath created twelve images in response to FitzGerald's poem. They constitute one coherent visual meditation rather than a series of independent commissions. Their pale washes, Persianate architecture and withdrawn figures translate the poem into the atmospheric language of the Bengal School.

The English Studio portfolio, London, 1910. The complete suite first entered print through the Offices of The Studio, with twelve colour plates mounted on substantial boards and accompanied by FitzGerald's seventy-five-quatrain first-version text. Printed in London by Eyre & Spottiswoode, this large-format portfolio presented the images as works of art to be contemplated separately, while naming Abanindranath as the artist. It remains the primary and most complete publication of the cycle.

The French Delpeuch portfolio, Paris and London, 1910. A French-language counterpart appeared as Rubaiyat Poème d'Omar Khayyam, translated by M. Robert Delpeuch and issued by Studio Edition with Librairie P. Ollendorff. It retained the complete twelve-plate format and placed the same images beside a French textual tradition. The recorded Saffronart example was numbered 36 of 250. Although that issue did not print Tagore's name, the plates reproduce Abanindranath's unmistakable suite.

The Leopold B. Hill book, London, undated [circa the 1910s–1920]. The later Hill publication selected seven images from the twelve and bound them into a sixty-four-page reading volume. Its smaller scale, captioned plates and limp leather binding changed the work's rhythm: what had been a portfolio of pictures became an intimate encounter between poem and image. Copies are recorded in more than one binding colour and treatment, but no publisher's evidence

presently establishes a hierarchy of ordinary and deluxe issues. The present brown pebbled-leather copy belongs to this family.

These publications are not competing claims to an unrelated set of “Abanindranath Rubáiyáts.” They are successive material lives of the same artistic intervention. The English portfolio established the complete cycle; the French issue carried it across another language; the Hill volume reduced and reorganised it for the hand. Together they reveal how an Indian artist’s response to a Persian poem, already remade by an English translator, became a genuinely international work of book art.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ANCHORS · The Studio, London, 1910 · M. Robert Delpuech, Rubaiyat Poème d’Omar Khayyam, Paris/London, 1910 · Leopold B. Hill, London, undated [circa the 1910s–1920].

IX. Reclaiming the Imagined Orient

The deepest importance of Abanindranath’s Rubáiyát lies in what it does to the idea of the Orient. Nineteenth-century Orientalism produced vast quantities of knowledge about Asia, and it also produced fantasies. The East became an object of scholarship and a stage upon which Europe projected sensuality, despotism, mysticism, antiquity and escape.

FitzGerald’s poem cannot be detached entirely from that history. His Omar belongs partly to Persia and partly to Victorian England’s need for a voice that could speak sceptically from outside Christianity. Yet its beauty exceeded the conditions of its making. This excess made further transformations possible.

Abanindranath did not reject the hybrid poem because it had passed through England. He accepted its hybridity and altered the balance of power within it. He took a Western representation of an Eastern poet and subjected it to an Eastern act of imagination. The process resembles neither simple recovery nor revenge. It is cultural repossession through beauty.

His images declare, quietly, that Asia is not merely the object represented. It is also the intelligence that represents. Their imagination moves among Bengal, Mughal India, Persia and Japan. They propose an Asian modernity formed not by retreat into isolation but by renewal of civilizational conversations.

X. The Custodian and the Book

What, finally, does it mean to collect such a volume? Its auction value can be estimated. Its binding can be graded, its plates counted and its edition distinguished from the earlier portfolio. These are

necessary disciplines. Without them, connoisseurship becomes sentiment and attribution becomes mythology. But price alone cannot reveal why the book matters.

Within its leather covers reside medieval Persian philosophy, Victorian literary doubt, the global cult of the fine press, the Bengal Renaissance, Swadeshi-era cultural self-definition and the emergence of Indian modern art. It is simultaneously a translation, an artist's book, a colonial-era publication and a record of Asia's attempt to reclaim the authority to imagine itself.

Its wear contributes to that meaning. The rubbed leather reminds us that books survive by passing through human hands. The inscription records a custodian whose identity is not yet fully recovered. Its acquisition through StoryLTD/Saffronart in June 2023 marks another stage in the object's return: a Persian-English-Indian work published in London and Edinburgh entering The Eye of the Beholder collection during the renewed appraisal of India's printed and artistic heritage.

The book should not be valued as though it were the 1910 portfolio. The portfolio is earlier, larger, more complete and substantially rarer. But neither should the Hill edition be dismissed as a derivative reprint. Its completeness, original gilt-leather binding and seven mounted colour plates make it a significant and evocative witness to the wider circulation of Abanindranath's suite.

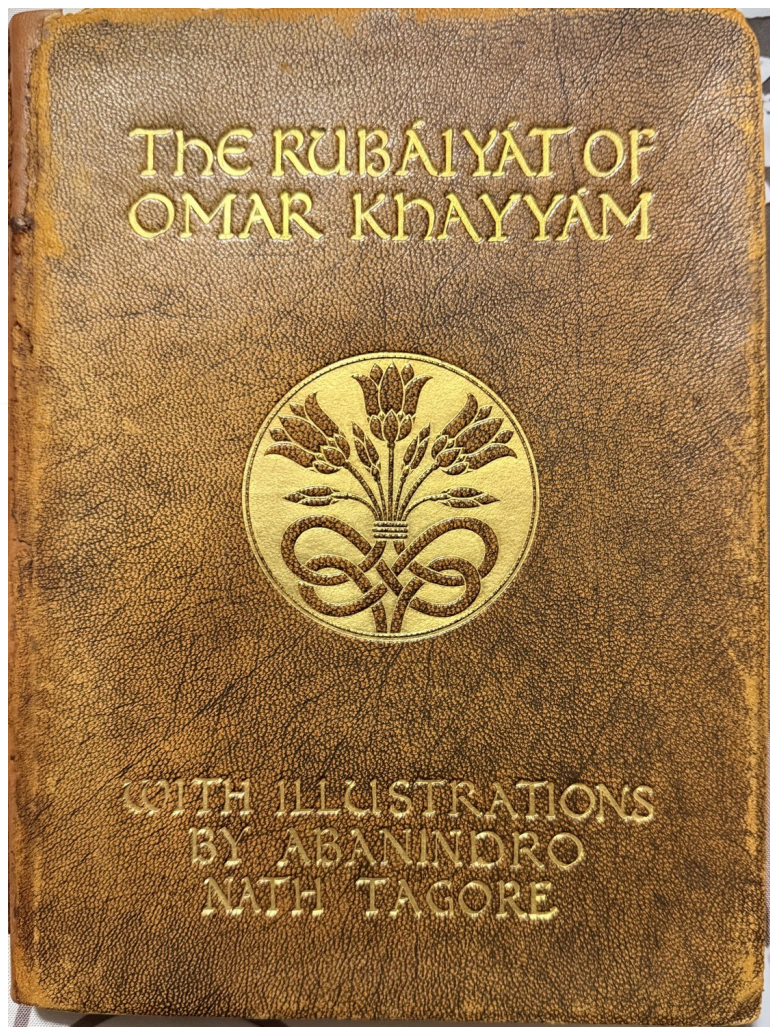
The Rubáiyát has always been concerned with what time takes away. Empires vanish. Beauty passes. The cup is emptied. Yet this book also tells us what time unexpectedly preserves. A mathematician's uncertain verses outlive his theorems in popular memory. An obscure English pamphlet rescued from a bargain box becomes a world poem. An Indian artist receives that poem and gives it another dawn. A leather-bound volume passes through a succession of readers until it reaches a custodian prepared to see within it not merely an old book, but a civilization in motion.

Abanindranath's figures remain suspended within their pale landscapes. They do not conquer time. They do something subtler: they inhabit transience without surrendering beauty. That may be the deepest meaning of the Rubáiyát, and the deepest purpose of collecting it.

THE OBJECT

Collation, Condition and Provenance

The Leopold B. Hill edition, circa the 1910s



Original brown leather binding, lettered and decorated in gilt with a central Persianate floral medallion.

Formal Bibliographical Description

OMAR KHAYYÁM. *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: The Astronomer-Poet of Persia.* Rendered into English verse by Edward FitzGerald, reproducing the text of his first edition of 1859. With coloured plates from drawings by Abanindranath Tagore. London: Leopold B. Hill; printed by the Riverside Press Limited, Edinburgh, [circa the 1910s].

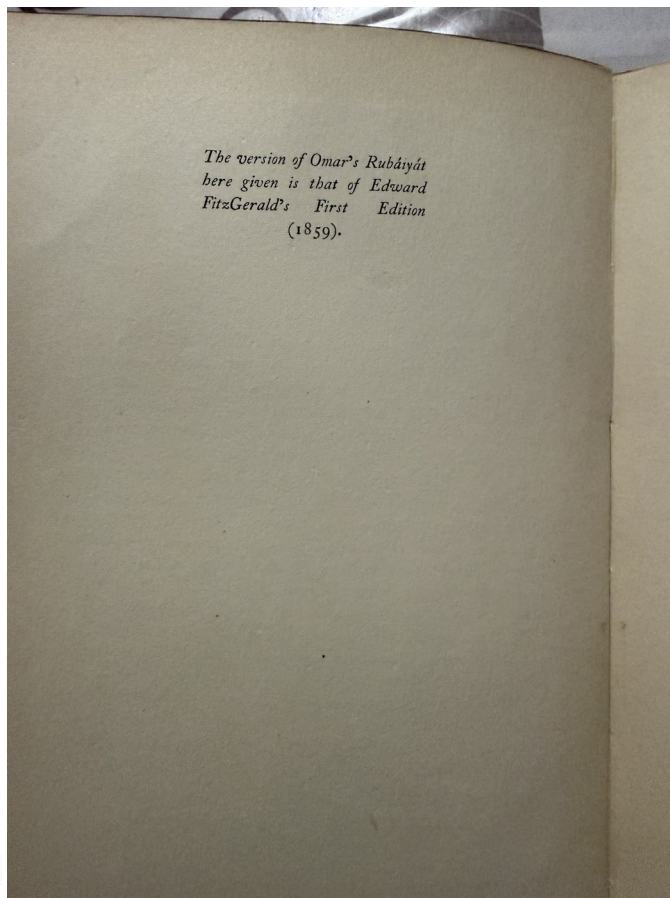
Octavo; 64 pages, including seven coloured plates after drawings by Abanindranath Tagore, each with its caption opposite. Original full limp pebbled leather; upper cover with floral vignette design and gilt lettering; spine lettered in gilt; top edge gilt, remaining edges uncut; marbled brown endpapers. Early ownership inscription to front endpaper. 9 × 6.5 × 0.75 in (auction catalogue: 23.6 × 16.5 × 2 cm). Complete.

Collation

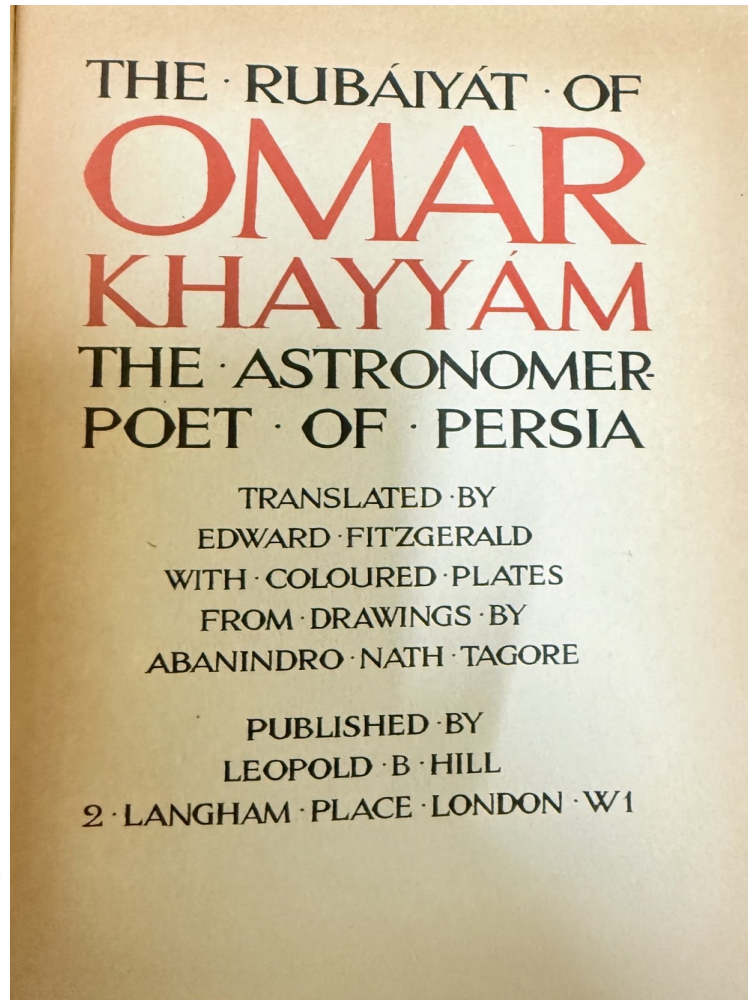
Format	Octavo.
Pagination	64 pages, including seven coloured plates, each with caption opposite.
Signatures	Gathering structure not yet recorded.
Illustration	Seven mounted colour plates after Abanindranath Tagore, all present.
Text	Edward FitzGerald's first version of the Rubáiyát, originally published in 1859.
Printer	The Riverside Press Limited, Edinburgh.
Publisher	Leopold B. Hill, London.
Date	Circa the 1910s (StoryLTD/Saffronart); the volume itself is undated.
Dimensions	9 × 6.5 × 0.75 in; auction catalogue records 23.6 × 16.5 × 2 cm (its online unit “m” is an evident typographical error).

The StoryLTD/Saffronart lot description records 64 pages, including all seven coloured plates, each with its caption opposite. This establishes the published pagination and illustrative completeness of

the present copy. A leaf-by-leaf gathering formula remains to be recorded from direct examination; that technical refinement does not alter the copy's completeness as catalogued.



Printed notice identifying FitzGerald's first-edition text—the reference is to the version of the translation, not the date of this volume.



Title page identifying Edward FitzGerald's translation and the coloured plates after drawings by Abanindranath Tagore.

Edition and Issue

This is the scarce Leopold B. Hill book edition of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* illustrated by Abanindranath Tagore. It is distinct from the first publication of Abanindranath's series, issued by the Offices of The Studio in 1910 as a large-format portfolio containing twelve mounted illustrations.

The present edition reduces the suite from twelve images to seven and places the selected illustrations within a compact, leather-bound reading volume. It should therefore not be described

as the 1910 first edition, nor as containing the complete original twelve-image cycle. It is more accurately understood as a later and materially distinct book edition through which Abanindranath's paintings entered the intimate culture of private reading.

The wording connecting the text with FitzGerald's "first edition of 1859" refers to the version of FitzGerald's translation reproduced in the volume. It does not indicate that the present book was published in 1859.

Binding

Contemporary publisher's full brown limp pebbled leather; upper cover decorated with a gilt floral vignette and lettered in gilt, spine lettered in gilt; top page edges gilt, remaining edges uncut; marbled brown endpapers.

The restrained brown leather and gold ornament create an intentionally intimate object, poised between a fine illustrated book and a private devotional volume. The leather has acquired a pronounced patina through age and handling. This patina is aesthetically sympathetic, although it must be distinguished in the condition statement from actual wear.

Condition

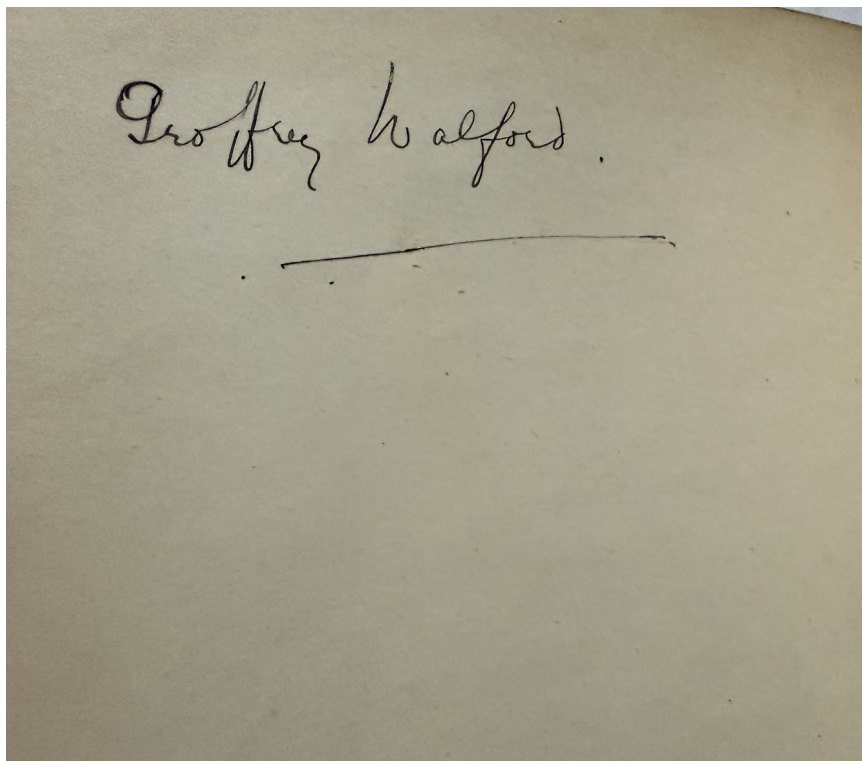
A complete copy in its original gilt leather binding. Binding rubbed and worn, most noticeably along the spine, edges, joints and extremities; corners softened and abraded. The leather shows surface scuffing, variation in tone and the accumulated patina of handling. The gilt lettering and large ornamental device remain clear and visually effective.

Spine rubbed, with wear at head and foot. The available photographs suggest some weakening or separation at points along the internal gutters, although the binding remains intact. Endpapers and text leaves are generally age-toned, with occasional handling marks, marginal wear and scattered spotting.

All seven mounted colour plates are present. Their subdued tonal character should not automatically be interpreted as fading; Abanindranath's wash-based visual language deliberately depends upon muted colour, atmospheric recession and areas of near-transparency. The mounts and adjacent leaves show general toning and occasional surface marks. No major tear, extensive image loss or severe widespread foxing is evident in the photographs examined.

Overall, a sound, complete and aesthetically compelling copy showing honest evidence of age and use. Its material wear is balanced by the survival of the original decorative binding, the strength of the gilt ornament and—most importantly—the presence of all seven mounted plates.

Provenance



Early ownership inscription on the front endpaper; the name remains to be securely deciphered.

Early private ownership, with an ink inscription to the front endpaper, apparently giving a personal name. The inscription has not yet been securely deciphered. No bookplate or institutional ownership mark has been identified in the photographs supplied.

The Eye of the Beholder Collection, present custodian.

Export Status and International Scarcity

StoryLTD/Saffronart expressly catalogued this book as “NON-EXPORTABLE.” Any future transfer, movement or delivery must therefore respect the applicable Indian cultural-property,

antiquities and customs requirements; the volume should not be represented as available for export from India.

The restriction has a genuine market consequence. India-resident copies cannot ordinarily flow into international sale channels, so examples already lawfully situated outside India are particularly difficult to source. This constrained international availability helps justify a considered specialist presentation premium over domestic auction results. It is, however, one component of value alongside completeness, binding, condition, provenance and the distinction between this seven-plate book and the earlier twelve-plate Studio portfolio.

Catalogue Assessment

A scarce, complete example of the Leopold B. Hill edition, preserving all seven mounted colour plates in its handsome original gilt-decorated leather binding. The binding exhibits appreciable wear, but remains visually effective and substantially unrestored in appearance. Its gilt decoration continues to give the volume considerable presence. The binding may represent a less commonly encountered variant, but no contemporary publisher's evidence has yet been located to establish it as a formally designated deluxe issue.

The importance of the object lies in the convergence of three traditions: Omar Khayyám's Persian poetic inheritance, Edward FitzGerald's Victorian recreation of the *Rubáiyát*, and Abanindranath Tagore's transformation of the poem through the emerging visual language of Indian modernism.

The volume is neither the first appearance of Abanindranath's illustrations nor the complete twelve-plate portfolio. Its significance is different. It records the moment when a selection of those paintings was transformed from a portfolio intended for art connoisseurs into an intimate illustrated book intended to be held and read.

Insurance replacement value: USD 2,500–3,000.

These figures recognise the completeness of the seven coloured plates, the original gilt-decorated limp pebbled-leather binding, the documented 2023 Saffronart provenance and the scarcity created in international channels by the non-exportable designation, while allowing for rubbing, softened extremities and general age-toning.

MARKET REFERENCES · StoryLTD/Saffronart, lot 10, 20 June 2023 (this copy) · StoryLTD, lot 79, 18 January 2022 · Bonhams, lot 32, 10 September 2025.

Concise Catalogue Entry

KHAYYÁM, OMAR — TAGORE, ABANINDRANATH. *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám: The Astronomer-Poet of Persia.* Rendered into English verse by Edward FitzGerald, using the text of his first edition of 1859. London: Leopold B. Hill; printed by the Riverside Press Limited, Edinburgh, [circa the 1910s]. Octavo; 64 pages, including seven coloured plates after drawings by Abanindranath Tagore, each with caption opposite. Original full limp pebbled leather, the upper cover with gilt floral vignette and gilt lettering, spine lettered in gilt; top edge gilt, remaining edges uncut; marbled brown endpapers. 9 × 6.5 × 0.75 in (auction catalogue: 23.6 × 16.5 × 2 cm). Early ownership inscription. Binding rubbed at spine, edges and extremities; text and mounts age-toned, with occasional marks and minor wear. Complete with all seven plates. StoryLTD/Saffronart, Absolute Tuesdays, 20 June 2023, lot 10; acquired there by the present custodian. Catalogued by the auction house as NON-EXPORTABLE. The Eye of the Beholder Collection.



THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER



THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

A Persian mathematician's uncertain quatrains become a Victorian masterpiece; an English poem returns East through the imagination of Abanindranath Tagore. This illustrated monograph follows that extraordinary passage across language, empire and image, and examines a scarce Leopold B. Hill edition in which seven mounted colour plates transform the Rubáiyát into an intimate work of Indian modernism.

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