

The Miniaturist

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set in the court of the emperor akbar in 16th century india this is a richly detailed and sensuous tale of art sex and political intrigue bihzad is the son of the emperor s chief artist and as such he is groomed to follow in his father s footsteps a child prodigy bihzad is shielded from life as he grows up in the stunning fortress town of agra but soon word of his talent his wild imaginative drawings free from the normal restrictions of court painting spreads when the emperor decides to move the court to fatehpur sikri bihzad is favoured among the other artists and musicians in his spare time he paints a series of richly erotic scenes but as his fame increases he begins to make enemies who are jealous of his success and who will use his hidden drawings to destroy him

in the miniaturists barbara browning explores her attraction to tininess and the stories of those who share it interweaving autobiography with research on unexpected topics and letting her voracious curiosity guide her browning offers a series of charming short essays that plumb what it means to ponder the minuscule she is as entranced by early twentieth century entomologist william morton wheeler who imagined corresponding with termites as she is by frances glessner lee the mother of forensic science who built intricate dollhouses to solve crimes whether examining honey i shrunk the kids the schoenhut toy piano dynasty portrait miniatures diminutive handwriting or jonathan swift s and lewis carroll s preoccupation with tiny people browning shows how a preoccupation with all things tiny can belie an attempt to grasp vast even cosmic realities

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book while the temples and the tombs of ancient times tell us of the pomp and splendour and ambition of kings and the stories of their conquests and tyrannies the illuminated mss of the middle ages show us as well as these the more intimate life of the people their sports and their jests their whim and fancy their work and their play no less than the mystic and religious and ceremonial side of that life which was indeed an inseparable part of it the whole worked in as with a kind of embroidery of the pen and brush with the most exquisite sense of decorative beauty temples and tombs have been man's biggest books but with the development of individual life as well as religious ritual and the necessity of records he felt the need of something more familiar companionable and portable and having in the course of time invented the stylus and the pen and tried his hand upon papyrus palm leaf and parchment he wrote his records or his thoughts and pictured or symbolized them at first upon scrolls and rolls and tablets or later enshrined them in bound books with all the beauty that the art of writing could command enriched and emphasized with the pictorial and ornamental commentary in colours and gold the illuminator makes his borders and initial letters branch and bud and put forth leaves and flowers spreading luxuriantly up and down the margin of his vellum pages beautiful even as the scribe left them like a living growth while the miniaturist makes the letter itself the shrine of some delicate saint or a vision of some act of mercy or martyrdom while the careless world plays hide and seek through the labyrinthine borders as the seasons follow each other through the kalendar and the peasant ploughs and sows and reaps and threshes out the corn while gay knights tourney in the lists or with ladies in their quaint attire follow the spotted deer through the greenwood about walter crane the author in his early lady of shalott the artist had shown his preoccupation with unity of design in book illustration by printing in the words of the poem himself in the view that this union of the calligrapher's and the decorator's art was one secret of the beauty of the old illuminated books crane was elected a member of the institute of painters in water colours in 1882 resigning in 1886 two years later he became an associate of the water colour society 1888 he was an examiner for the science and art department at the south kensington museum now the victoria albert museum director of design at the manchester municipal school 1894 art director of reading college 1896 and in 1898 for a short time principal of the royal college of art

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