

## Classic Poetry Series

# Antar

- poems -

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## **The Ode of Antara (Alternate Translation)**

HOW many singers before me! Are there yet songs unsung?  
Dost thou, my sad soul, remember where was her dwelling place?  
Tents in Jiwá, the fair wadi, speak ye to me of her.  
Fair house of 'Abla my true love, blessing and joy to thee!  
Doubting I paused in the pastures, seeking her camel-tracks,  
high on my swift-trotting nága tall as a citadel,  
Weaving a dream of the past days, days when she dwelt in them,  
'Abla, my true love, in Házzen, Sammán, Mutathéllemi.  
There on the sand lay the hearth-stones, black in their emptiness,  
desolate more for the loved ones fled with Om Héythami,  
Fled to the land of the lions, roarers importunate.  
Daily my quest of thee darkens, daughter of Mákhrami.

### II

Truly at first sight I loved her, I who had slain her kin.  
ay, by the life of thy father, not in inconstancy.  
Love, thou hast taken possession. Deem it not otherwise.  
Thou in my heart art the first one, first in nobility.  
How shall I win to her people? Far in Anéyzateyn  
feed they their flocks in the Spring-time, we in the Gháïlem.  
Yet it was thou, my beloved, willed we should sunder thus,  
bridled thyself the swift striders, black night encompassing.  
Fear in my heart lay a captive, seeing their camel-herds  
herded as waiting a burden, close to the tents of them,  
Browsing on berries of khímkhim, forty-two milch-camels,  
black as the underwing feathers set in the raven's wing.  
Then was it 'Abla enslaved thee showing her tenderness,

white teeth with lips for the kissing. Sweet was the taste of them,  
Sweet as the vials of odours sold by the musk sellers,  
fragrant the white teeth she showed thee, fragrant the mouth of her.  
So is a garden new planted fresh in its greenery,  
watered by soft-falling raindrops, treadless, untenanted.  
Lo, on it rain-clouds have lighted, soft showers, no hail in them,  
leaving each furrow a lakelet bright as a silverling.  
Pattering, plashing they fell there, rains at the sunseting,  
wide-spreading runlets of water, streams of fertility,  
Mixed with the humming of bees' wings droning the daylight long,  
never a pause in their chaunting, gay drinking-choruses.  
Blithe iteration of bees' wings, wings struck in harmony, bees'  
sharply as steel on the flint-stone, light handed smithy strokes.  
Sweet, thou shalt rest till the morning all the night lightly there,  
while I my red horse bestriding ride with the forayers.  
Resting-place more than the saddle none have I, none than he  
war-horse of might in the rib-bones-deep is the girth of him.

### III

Say, shall a swift Shadaníeh bear me to her I love,  
one under ban for the drinker, weaned of the foal of her  
One with the tail carried archwise, long though the march hath been  
one with the firm foot atrample, threading the labyrinths?  
Lo, how she spurneth the sand-dunes, like to the ear-less one  
him with the feet set together; round him young ostriches  
Troop like the cohorts of Yémen, herded by 'Ajemis,  
she-camel cohorts of Yémen, herded by stammerers.

Watching a beacon they follow, led by the crown of him  
carried aloft as a howdah, howdah where damsels sit,  
Him the small-headed, returning, fur-furnished Ethiop,  
black slave, to Thu-el-Ashíra;—there lie his eggs in it.  
Lo, how my nága hath drunken deeply in Dóhradeyn;  
how hath she shrunk back in Déylam, pools of the enemy,  
Shrunk from its perilous cisterns, scared by the hunting one,  
great-headed shrieker of evening, clutched to the flank of her.  
Still to her off-side she shrinketh, deemeth the led-cat there  
Clawing the more that she turneth;—thus is her fear of them.  
Lo, she hath knelt in Ridá-a, pleased there and murmuring  
soft as the sweet-fluting rushes crushed by the weight of her.  
Thickly as pitch from the boiling oozeth the sweat of her,  
pitch from the cauldron new-lighted, fire at the sides of it,  
Oozeth in drops from the ear-roots. Wrathful and bold is she,  
proud in her gait as a stallion hearing the battle-cry.

#### IV

Though thou thy fair face concealest still in thy veil from me,  
yet am I he that the captured horse-riders how many!  
Give me the praise of my fair deeds. Lady, thou knowest it,  
kindly am I and forbearing, save when wrong presseth me.  
Only when evil assaileth, deal I with bitterness;  
then am I cruel in vengeance, bitter as colocynth.  
Sometime in wine was my solace. Good wine, I drank of it,  
suaging the heat of the evening, paying in white money,  
Quaffing in goblets of saffron, pale-streaked with ivory,

hard at my hand their companion, the flask to the left of me.  
Truly thus bibbing I squandered half my inheritance;  
yet was my honour a wide word. No man had wounded it.  
Since that when sober my dew-fall rained no less generous:  
thou too, who knowest my nature, thou too be bountiful!  
How many loved of the fair ones have I not buffeted  
youths overthrown! Ha, the blood-streams shrill from the veins of them.  
Swift-stroke two-handed I smote him, thrust through the ribs of him;  
forth flowed the stream of his life-blood red as anemone.  
Ask of the horsemen of Málek, O thou his progeny,  
all they have seen of my high deeds. Then shalt thou learn of them  
How that I singly among them, clad in war's panoply, 90  
stout on my war-horse the swift one charged at their chivalry.  
Lo, how he rusheth, the fierce one, singly in midst of them,  
waiting anon for the archers closing in front of us.  
They that were nearest in battle, they be my proof to thee  
how they have quailed at my war-cry, felt my urbanity.  
Many and proud are their heroes, fear-striking warriors,  
men who nor flee nor surrender, yielding not easily.  
Yet hath my right arm o'erborne them, thrust them aside from me,  
laid in their proud backs the long spear,—slender the shaft of it.  
See, how it splitteth asunder mail-coat and armouring;  
not the most valiant a refuge hath from the point of it.  
Slain on the ground have I left him, prey to the lion's brood,  
feast of the wrists and the fingers. Ha, for the sacrifice!  
Heavy his mail-coat, its sutures, lo, I divided them

piercing the joints of the champion; brave was the badge of him.  
Quick-handed he with the arrows, cast in the winter-time,  
raider of wine-sellers' sign-boards, blamed as a prodigal.  
He, when he saw me down riding, making my point at him,  
showed me his white teeth in terror, nay, but not smilingly.  
All the day long did we joust it. Then were his finger tips  
stained as though dipped in the íthlem, dyed with the dragon's blood,  
Till with a spear-thrust I pierced him, once and again with it,  
last, with a blade of the Indies, fine steel its tempering,  
Smote him, the hero of stature, tall as a tamarisk,  
kinglike, in sandals of dun hide, noblest of all of them.  
Oh, thou, my lamb, the forbidden! prize of competitors,  
why did they bid me not love thee? why art thou veiled from me?  
Sent I my hand-maiden spy-like: Go thou, I said to her,  
bring me the news of my true love, news in veracity.  
Go. And she went, and returning: These in unguardedness  
sit, and thy fair lamb among them, waiting thy archery.  
Then was it turned she towards me, fawn-necked in gentleness,  
noble in bearing, gazelle-like, milk-white the lip of it.  
Woe for the baseness of 'Amru, lord of ingratitude!  
Verily thanklessness turneth souls from humanity.  
Close have I kept to the war-words thy father once spoke to me,  
how I should deal in the death-play, when lips part and teeth glitter,  
When in the thick of the combat heroes unflinchingly  
cry in men's ears their defiance, danger forgot by them.  
Close have I kept them and stood forth their shield from the enemy,

calling on all with my war-cries, circling and challenging.  
There where the horsemen rode strongest I rode out in front of them,  
hurled forth my war-shout and charged them;—no man thought blame of me.  
Antar! they cried; and their lances, well-cords in slenderness,  
pressed to the breast of my war-horse still as I pressed on them.  
Doggedly strove we and rode we. Ha, the brave stallion!  
now is his breast dyed with blood-drops, his star-front with fear of them!  
Swerved he, as pierced by the spear-points. Then in his beautiful  
eyes stood the tears of appealing, words inarticulate.  
If he had learned our man's language, then had he called to me:  
if he had known our tongue's secret, then had he cried to me  
Thus to my soul came consoling; grief passed away from it  
hearing the heroes applauding, shouting: Ho, Ántar, ho!  
Deep through the sand-drifts the horsemen charged with teeth grimly set,  
urging their war-steeds, the strong-limbed, weight bearers all of them.  
Swift the delúls too I urged them, spurred by my eagerness  
forward to high deeds of daring, deeds of audacity.  
Only I feared lest untimely drear death should shorten me  
ere on the dark sons of Démdem vengeance was filled for me.  
These are the men that reviled me, struck though I struck them not,  
vowed me to bloodshed and evil or e'er I troubled them.  
Nay, let their hatred o'erbear me! I care not. The sire of them  
slain lies for wild beasts and vultures. Ha! for the sacrifice!  
Antar

## The Poem of Antar

Have the poets left in the garment a place for a patch to be patched by me; and did you know the abode of your beloved after reflection?<sup>2</sup>

The vestige of the house, which did not speak, confounded thee, until it spoke by means of signs, like one deaf and dumb.

Verily, I kept my she-camel there long grumbling, with a yearning at the blackened stones, keeping and standing firm in their own places.

It is the abode of a friend, languishing in her glance, submissive in the embrace, pleasant of smile.

Oh house of 'Ablah situated at Jiwaa, talk with me about those who resided in you. Good morning to you, O house of 'Ablah, and be safe from ruin.

I halted my she-camel in that place; and it was as though she were a high palace; in order that I might perform the wont of the lingerer.

And 'Ablah takes up her abode at Jiwaa; while our people went to Hazan, then to Mutathallam.

She took up her abode in the land of my enemies; so it became difficult for me to seek you, O daughter of Mahzam.

I was enamored of her unawares, at a time when I was killing her people, desiring her in marriage; but by your father's life I swear, this was not the time for desiring.<sup>3</sup>

And verily you have occupied in my heart the place of the honored loved one, so do not think otherwise than this, that you are my beloved.

And how may be the visiting of her; while her people have taken up their residence in the spring at 'Unaizatain and our people at Ghailam?

I knew that you had intended departing, for, verily, your camels were bridled on a dark night.

Nothing caused me fear of her departure, except that the baggage camels of her people were eating the seeds of the Khimkhim tree throughout the country.<sup>4</sup>

Amongst them were two and forty milk-giving camels, black as the wing-feathers of black crows.

When she captivates you with a mouth possessing sharp, and white teeth, sweet as to its place of kissing, delicious of taste.

As if she sees with the two eyes of a young, grown up gazelle from the deer.

It was as though the musk bag of a merchant in his case of perfumes preceded her teeth toward you from her mouth.

Or as if it is an old wine-skin, from Azri'at, preserved long, such as the kings of Rome preserve;

Or her mouth is as an ungrazed meadow, whose herbage the rain has guaranteed, in which there is but little dung; and which is not marked with the feet of animals.

The first pure showers of every rain-cloud rained upon it, and left every puddle in it bright and round like a dirham;

Sprinkling and pouring; so that the water flows upon it every evening, and is not cut off from it.

The fly enjoyed yet alone, and so it did not cease humming, as is the act of the singing drunkard;

Humming, while he rubs one foreleg against the other, as the striking on the flint of one, bent on the flint, and cut off as to his palm.

She passes her evenings and her mornings on the surface of a well-stuffed couch, while I pass my nights on the back of a bridled black horse.

And my couch is a saddle upon a horse big-boned in the leg, big in his flanks, great of girth.

Would a Shadanian she-camel cause me to arrive at her abode, who is cursed with an udder scanty of milk and cut off?<sup>5</sup>

After traveling all night, she is lashing her sides with her tail, and is strutting proudly, and she breaks up the mounds of earth she passes over with her foot with its sole, treading hard.

As if I in the evening am breaking the mounds of earth by means of an ostrich, very small as to the distance between its two feet, and earless.<sup>6</sup>

The young ostriches flock toward him, as the herds of Yamanian camels flock to a barbarous, unintelligible speaker.

They follow the crest of his head, as though it was a howdah on a large litter, tented for them.

He is small headed, who returns constantly to look after his eggs at Zil-'Ushairah; he is like a slave, with a long fur cloak and without ears.

She drank of the water of Duhruzain and then turned away, being disgusted, from the pools of stagnant water.<sup>7</sup>

And she swerves away with her right side from the fear of one, whistling in the evening, a big, ugly-headed one;<sup>8</sup>

From the fear of a cat, led at her side, every time she turned toward him, in anger, he met her with both claws and mouth.

She knelt down at the edge of the pool of Rada', and groaned as though she had knelt on a reed, broken, and emitting a cracking noise.

And the sweat on the back was as though it were oil or thick pitch, with which fire is lighted round the sides of a retort.

Her places of flexure were wetted with it and she lavishly poured of it, on a spreading forelock, short and well-bred.

The length of the journey left her a strong, well-built body, like a high palace, built with cement, and rising high; and feet like the supports of a firmly pitched tent.

And surely I recollected you, even when the lances were drinking my blood, and bright swords of Indian make were dripping with my blood.

I wished to kiss the swords, for verily they shone as bright as the flash of the foretooth of your smiling mouth.

If you lower your veil over yourself in front of me, of what use will it be? for, verily, I am expert in capturing the mailed horseman.

Praise me for the qualities which you know I possess, for, verily, when I am not ill-treated, I am gentle to associate with.

And if I am ill-treated, then, verily, my tyranny is severe, very bitter is the taste of it, as the taste of the colocynth.

And, verily, I have drunk wine after the midday heats have subsided, buying it with the bright stamped coin.

From a glass, yellow with the lines of the glass-cutter on it, which was accompanied by a white-stoppered bottle on the left-hand side.

And when I have drunk, verily, I am the squanderer of my property, and my honor is great, and is not sullied.<sup>9</sup>

And when I have become sober, I do not diminish in my generosity, and as you know, so are my qualities and my liberality.

And many a husband of a beautiful woman, I have left prostrate on the ground, with his shoulders hissing like the side of the mouth of one with a split lip.<sup>10</sup>

My two hands preceded him with a hasty blow, striking him before he could strike me; and with the drops of blood from a penetrating stroke, red like the color of Brazil wood.

Why did you not ask the horsemen, O daughter Malik! if you were ignorant, concerning what you did not know about my condition,

At a time when I never ceased to be in the saddle of a long striding, wounded, sturdy horse, against whom the warriors came in succession.

At one time he is detached to charge the enemy with the lance, and at another he joins the large host with their bows tightly strung.

He who was present in the battle will inform you that verily I rush into battle, but I abstain at the time of taking the booty.

I see spoils, which, if I want I would win; but my bashfulness and my magnanimity hold me back from them.

And many a fully armed one, whom the warriors shunned fighting with, neither a hastener in flight, nor a surrenderer;

My hands were generous to him by a quick point with a straightened spear, strong in the joints;

Inflicting a wound wide of its two sides, the sound of the flow of blood from it leads at night the prowling wolves, burning with hunger.

I rent his vesture with a rigid spear, for the noble one is not forbidden to the spears.

Then I left him a prey for the wild beasts, who seize him, and gnaw the beauty of his fingers and wrist.

And many a long, closely woven coat of mail, I have split open the links of it, with a sword, off one defending his rights, and renowned for bravery.

Whose hands are ready with gambling arrows when it is winter, a tearer-down of the signs of the wine-sellers, and one reproached for his extravagance.<sup>11</sup>

When he saw that I had descended from my horse and was intending killing him, he showed his teeth, but without smiling.<sup>12</sup>

My meeting with him was when the day spread out, and he was as if his fingers and his head were dyed with indigo.<sup>13</sup>

I pierced him with my spear, and then I set upon him with my Indian sword pure of steel, and keen.

A warrior, so stately in size as if his clothes were on a high tree: soft leather shoes are worn by him and he is not twinned.

Oh, how wonderful is the beauty of the doe of the hunt, to whom is she lawful? To me she is unlawful; would to God that she was not unlawful.<sup>14</sup>

So, I sent my female slave, and said to her, "Go, find out news of her and inform me."

She said, "I saw carelessness on the part of the enemies, and that the doe is possible to him who is shooting."

And it was as though she looked toward me with the neck of a doe, a fawn of the gazelles, pure and with a white upper lip.

I am informed that 'Amru is unthankful for my kindness while ingratitude is a cause of evil to the soul of the giver.<sup>15</sup>

And, verily, I remember the advice of my uncle, in the battle, when the two lips quiver from off the white teeth of the mouth,

In the thick of the battle, of which the warriors do not complain of the rigors, except with an unintelligible noise.

When they (i.e., my people) defended themselves with me against the spears of the enemy, I did not refrain from them (i.e., the spears) through cowardice, but the place of my advance had become too strait.

When I heard the cry of Murrah rise, and saw the two sons of Rabi'ah in the thick dust,

While the tribe of Muhallam were struggling under their banners, and death was under the banners of the tribe of Mulhallam {sic.},

I made sure that at the time of their encounter there would be a blow, which would make the heads fly from the bodies, as the bird flies from off her young ones sitting close.

When I saw the people, while their mass advanced, excite one another to fight, I turned against them without being reproached for any want of bravery.

They were calling 'Antarah, while the spears were as though they were well-ropes in the breast of Adham.

They were calling 'Antarah, while the swords were as though they were the flash of lightnings in a dark cloud.

They were calling 'Antarah, while the arrows were flying, as though they were a flight of locusts, hovering above watering places.

They were calling " O 'Antarah," while the coats of mail shone with close rings, shining as though they were the eyeballs of frogs floating in a wavy pond.

I did not cease charging them, (the enemy,) with the prominent part of his (horse's) throat and breast, until he became covered with a shirt of blood.

Then he turned on account of the falling of the spears on his breast, and complained to me with tears and whinnings.

If he had known what conversation was, he would have complained with words, and verily he would have, had he known speech, talked with me.

And verily the speech of the horsemen, "Woe to you, 'Antarah, advance, and attack the enemy," cured my soul and removed its sickness.

While the horses sternly frowning were charging over the soft soil, being partly the long-bodied mares, and partly the long-bodied, well-bred horses.

My riding-camels are tractable, they go wherever I wish; while my intellect is my

helper, and I drive it forward with a firm order.<sup>16</sup>

Verily, it lay beyond my power that I should visit you; so, know what you have known, and some of what you have not known.

The lances of the tribe of Bagheez intercepted you and the perpetrators of the war set aside those who did not perpetrate it.

And, verily, I turned the horse for the attack, while his neck was bleeding, until the horses began to shun me.

And verily I feared that I should die, while there has not yet been a turn for war against the two sons of Zamzam;<sup>17</sup>

The two revilers of my honor, while I did not revile them, and the threateners of my blood, when I did not see them.

There is no wonder should they do so, for I left their father a prey for the wild beasts and every large old vulture.

Antar