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An Anthology of World Poetry

Edited by Mark Van Doren

IN ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS BY
CHAUCER, SWINBURNE, DOWSON, SYMONS, ROSSETTI,
WALEY, HERRICK, POPE, FRANCIS THOMPSON
E. A. ROBINSON AND OTHERS



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PERSIAN

Zoroaster

7th century B.C.?

FROM THE SACRED BOOK

THIS I ask Thee—tell it to me truly, Lord!
Who the Sire was, Father first of Holiness?
Who the pathway for the sun and stars ordained?
Who, through whom is't moon doth wax and wane
again?
This and much else do I long, O God, to know.

THIS I ask Thee—tell it to me truly, Lord!
Who set firmly earth below, and kept the sky
Sure from falling? Who the streams and trees did make?
Who their swiftness to the winds and clouds hath yoked?
Who, O Mazda, was the Founder of Good Thought?

THIS I ask Thee—tell it to me truly, Lord!
Who, benignant, made the darkness and the light?
Who, benignant, sleep and waking did create?
Who the morning, noon, and evening did decree
As reminders to the wise, of duty's call?

(A. V. Williams Jackson)

Firdawsī

935-1025

ALAS FOR YOUTH

MUCH have I labored, much read o'er
Of Arabic and Persian lore,
Collecting tales unknown and known;
Now two and sixty years are flown.
Regret, and deeper woe of sin,

'Tis all that youth has ended in,
 And I with mournful thoughts rehearse
 Bu Táhir Khusrawáni's verse:

"I mind me of my youth and sigh,
 Alas for youth, for youth gone by!"

(R. A. Nicholson)

Omar Khayyám

d. 1123

And this, I think, especially distinguishes Omar from all other Persian poets: That, whereas with them the Poet is lost in his Song, the Man in Allegory and Abstraction; we seem to have the Man—the *Bonhomme*—Omar himself, with all his humors and passions, as frankly before us as if we were really at Table with him, after the Wine had gone round.—EDWARD FITZGERALD.

RUBAIYAT

I

WAKE! For the Sun, who scattered into flight
 The Stars before him from the Field of Night,
 Drives Night along with them from Heaven, and
 strikes
 The Sultàn's Turret with a Shaft of Light.

II

Before the phantom of False morning died,
 Methought a Voice within the Tavern cried,
 "When all the Temple is prepared within,
 Why nods the drowsy Worshiper outside?"

III

And, as the Cock crew, those who stood before
 The Tavern shouted—"Open then the Door!
 You know how little while we have to stay,
 And, once departed, may return no more."

If the sea were one great ink-pot
 And of paper all the sky,
 It were not enough for telling
 How deeply men can lie.

* * *

To love with no return
 Is a sad thing to befall;
 But a sadder, to come to die
 Before having loved at all.

2

My father was a sailor,
 My brother, a sailor was he,
 And the man who would be my lover
 A sailor he must be.

* * *

Oh, a pearl is a thing of much value,
 And a diamond yet more than this;
 But I know what to me is most precious,
 And that is a student's kiss.

* * *

Do not look at my face;
 I am brown, I am not fair;
 When you look, look below my waist,
 I am sweet altogether there.

* * *

My lover is but a small man,
 So would I have him be;
 Fewer leaves and more fruit ever
 We find on the little tree.

(Havelock Ellis)

AT THE FOUNTAIN

A young girl in her garden
 Green turf and garden walks in spring

3

Here on my breast have I bled!
 See—see! these are fighting-scars!
 Mountains tremble at my yell!
 I strike for life.

(H. H. Schoolcraft)

THREE SONGS FROM THE HAIDA

(Queen Charlotte's Island, British Columbia)

LOVE SONG

BEAUTIFUL is she, this woman,
 As the mountain flower;
 But cold, cold, is she,
 Like the snowbank
 Behind which it blooms.

THE BEAR'S SONG

*(Whoever can sing this song is admitted forever to the
 friendship of the bears)*

I HAVE taken the woman of beauty
 For my wife;
 I have taken her from her friends.
 I hope her kinsmen will not come
 And take her away from me.
 I will be kind to her.
 Berries, berries I will give her from the hill
 And roots from the ground.
 I will do everything to please her.
 For her I made this song and for her I sing it.

SONG FOR FINE WEATHER

O GOOD Sun,
 Look thou down upon us:
 Shine, shine on us, O Sun,
 Gather up the clouds, wet, black, under thy arms—

