

"WOMEN OF THE FERTILE CRESCENT :
MODERN POETRY BY ARAB WOMEN" (1)

This anthology of modern poetry by Arab women compiles translated selections from the poetry of 13 contemporary women poets, representing 7 Arab countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Syria. The choice of the poets was probably dictated by the availability of their works. The editor, Kamal Bullata, who lives in the United States and who translated into English most of the Arabic poems of the collection and some of the French, made use of other translations already made by writers, critics and poets residing in America as citizens or as immigrants of Arab descent. Since he worked as contributor to the Arabic magazines, "Shi'r" and "Mawaqef", which appeared in Beirut and published modern Arabic poetry between 1956 and 1975, it was natural for him to depend on these two magazines both as a source of information about a number of the women poets included in the anthology and as a means of access to their works.

Though most of the poems are "modern" in the sense that the authors use the prose-poem or the free-verse as a medium of expression, they present a good deal of variety in content and in style. The Palestinian tragedy forms a central topic in poems chosen from the works of the Palestinian poets: Salma al-Jayyousi, Hanan Mikhail and Fadwa Tuqan. The same topic dominates the poems of Etel Adnan, a Lebanese poet. It is evoked in some selections by Nadia Tuéni, another Lebanese poet. Nazik al-Malaika, the Iraqi poet whose voluminous work revolves mostly around personal emotions and metaphysical meditations, devotes a few of her poems in the collection to promote national consciousness, as in the poem entitled "Jamila", or to attack social injustice perpetrated against women, as in "Insignificant Woman" and "Washing off Disgrace."

The problems of the Arab woman — her grievances, her enslavement to tradition, the harsh and possessive attitude of men toward her — are all vehemently attacked by nearly all of these women, especially those of the younger generation. Others like Nadia

Tuéni, Mona Saudi and Thérèse Awwad, whose poems do not carry a direct social message except in very rare cases, impart through poetry their intimate thoughts and dreams, their loneliness, their nostalgia for love or their pursuit of the unknown.

Andrée Chédid, on the other hand, insists on conveying a message in her poetry; a message of love, rebirth, fortitude, belief in man's unlimited powers and possibilities:

Man retains the bygone
Man detains the to-come
The fire which gave birth to language
Consumes him
Edifies him
Man breaks and traps himself
Man assaults the universe
Man is this man
Man is all man
Man — to-day.

(p. 5 in the anthology)

Though their ideas may be similar, these women express them in different ways, ranging from the clear and rational to the obscure and eccentric. Some of them, influenced by surrealism of "modernism", like Nadia Tuéni, give special emphasis to form, wording and fantastic expression. Others like Salma al-Jayyousi, Tukan, al-Malaika, Adnan, speak out their ideas clearly and emphasize content. The poetic images are in some cases inspired from local color as in the Saudian F. Abu-Khalid's ironical poems; or drawn forth from Eastern heritage, as in Etel Adnan's biblical tirades. Aisha Arna'out uses stories and tales borrowed from nature; Mona Saudi, in her vision of the future, resorts to universal archetypes; Hanan Mikhail, in a concise, picturesque style, describes actual scenes and recollections.

The value of the book is enhanced by the list of references and bibliography of Arab women poets and fiction writers, published at the end of the collection. It provides a helpful, though incomplete, bibliography.

This short review gives no room for evaluating the authenticity of the translations. Generally they succeed in bringing out the ideas, though at times they may not give a literal reproduction of the originals.

Profiles of Racinian Heroines

Profils des Héroïnes Raciniennes
(French) 260 pp.

by Emy Batache-Watt
Librairie C. Klincksiek,
Paris 1976

A well-documented study of Racinian heroines, consisting of a detailed analysis of their characters, their backgrounds and how they influence their behavior; their psychological troubles, their major and secondary complexes; the important roles they play in Racine's theater.

The author quotes Lanson's statement in his History of French Literature: "From Racine dates the empire of woman in Literature." Racine prepared the way for the Romanticists who in the 19th century highlighted the influence of woman as the symbol and inspirer of romantic love. But while the Romanticists depicted the sufferings endured by lovers with the aim of liberating them and asserting the freedom of love, Racine described the tragic consequences of passions with the aim of warning people against them. To him there is no love without agony, no passion that does not bring psychic trouble, worry and crushing anxiety. According to him, passion should be repressed as the main source of evil.

In concluding her remarkable analysis, the author points out the modernity of Racinian heroines by saying: "In the latent or evident violence of their temperaments, the majority of Racinian heroines belong to our time. Agressivity, subconscious or calculated, cruelty, subtle or intentional, which characterize a Hermione, an Agrippine, a Roxane or an Athalie, are currently prevailing traits in our world to-day."

(1) A writer of Lebanese origin residing in Australia. A BUC alumna, B.A. 1952.

"Handbook of International Data on Women"

by **Elise Boulding, Shirley A. Nuss, Dorothy Lee Carson and Michael A. Greenstein**
Sage Publications
John Wiley & Sons, 1976

This handbook tries to fill a need felt by all those concerned about adequate census-taking and evaluation of the breeding population and the labor force in each country.

"The failure of the First United Nations Development Decade to increase productivity and improve the standard of living of the third world was partly due to the failure to recognize that women are half the labor force, one hundred per cent of the reproducing force and one hundred percent of the food preparation force."

This book gives data on the following topics in 159 countries of the world:

- Economic activity of women
- Literacy and Education
- Migration and marital status
- Life, death and reproduction
- Political and civic participation

"A world overview is included, incorporating some information from other than United Nations sources that may be useful for analysis in connection with data on the position of women presented therein."

"Women's Work is..."

Resources on Working Women
 Edited by **Bobbi Wells Hargleroad**
Institute on the Church in Urban-Industrial Society
5700 South Wouldlawn Ave.
Chicago, Illinois 60637, 1978.

Women Studies Abstracts

— Issued quarterly—
 Winter '78 vol. 6, no 4.
 C 1978 by Rush Publishing Co., Inc.

Greenwillow News

Greenwillow books — Recently published books for children.
 A division of **William Morrow & Company, Inc.**
105 Madison Ave. N.Y. New York 10016.

"Of Costliest Emblem"

Paradise Lost & the Emblem Tradition by **Shahla Anand**
 "A thesis exploring spiritual and temporal images and ideologies in "Paradise Lost" in relation to the English emblem books".
University Press of America
U.S.A. 1978

Quest:

a feminist quarterly, vol. IV, no 2
 Winter 1978
 — International Feminism —
P.O.Box 8843, Washington D.C. 20003

Message from the village

by **Perdita Huston**
The Epoch B Foundation
New York, 1978

Announcement

The first six numbers of **Al-Raida** which, as a result of the painful circumstances in Lebanon, were issued irregularly between 1976 and 1978, may be considered as vol. I.

Beginning 1979, we start vol. II and hope to have a regular quarterly publication. Missing numbers may be obtained from the Institute.

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