

Excerpts from the Poetry and Prose of Lebanese Women

Selected, translated and introduced by
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Andree Chedid has been widely recognized as one of the best francophone writers of Lebanese origin in the world. In addition to writing several collections of poetry, Chedid is also the author of two novels set in war-torn Lebanon. The poems translated below illustrate both compassion and a consummate art achieved through a great economy of means, an arresting imagery and powerful contrasts. Chedid's poetry presents compelling images of the war's impact on Beirut and its citizens.

Black Winds

In prolific language
men lay waste the land

Tear it up with gunfire.
crash it with terror
bury it under the dead

In the spiral of ages
in the black winds of hatred
love is too light.

Ceremonial of Violence (1976),
A collection of poems in French

Of the Same Bed

He shot down the child

Nobody held back his arm
Nobody checked his gun
No arm held tight his waist
No signal checked him

He shot down the child

In spite of eyes white with terror
In spite of a mouth tattered by fear

Ceremonial of Violence

Born in 1935 in the mountainous Shouf district of Lebanon, **Nadia Tueni** died prematurely in 1983, leaving behind her several important collections of poetry in French. She is currently read in several universities throughout the world, particularly in francophone countries. Highly stylized and dramatic, her poems have often been adapted for the stage.

Women of My Country

Women of my Country
The same light hardens your bodies,
The same shade softens them,
Gently elegiac your lips and
A goldsmith has chiseled your eyes.

You,
Who pacify the mountain,

Who make man believe in his virility,
And the ashes in their fertility,
The landscape in its permanence.
Women of my Country
You retrieve the eternal
Out of sheer chaos.

Lebanon: Twenty Poems for One Love (1979)
A collection of poems in French

The next poem speaks of Tueni's deep love for her homeland, indeed, of her total identification with it. Here, we find an ironic revelation: Lebanon's cultural differences are its richness, but also its curse. Only great poetry can render this tragic irony with such simplicity.

I soften my voice and listen
to the roars of my country,
to speak of the pain
for having planted neither love nor hatred,
for having mixed up roots
and confused mountain with sea.
I soften my voice to sharpen
the thunder's blades,
to draw strength from the tribe
and sleep between the rock's shoulders.
I inhabit the silence
to listen to my people's pulse,
and say,
"If one should die, it would be for one drop of
blood,
single and
different."

Sentimental Archives of a War in Lebanon (1982)
A collection of poems in French

In this last selection from Tueni's poetry, we find an echo of Christ's washing of his disciples' feet, a gesture of tenderness, generosity and humility which acquires a weary ironic tone in the context of war-time Lebanon:

Land of too many people,
Land of nobody,
I offer you the dead cities of your thoughts,
The tattered dusks of unknown metals
And I
Shall sponge off
Time's own sweat.

Sentimental Archives of a War in Lebanon (1982)



The following excerpt by Renee Hayek illustrates today's *avant-garde* writing in Lebanon. An increasing number of women are writing in the post-war period, in a variety of genres, such as autobiography, the short story, novels, and poetry. Renee Hayek received First Prize for short fiction at the Annual Exhibition of the Arabic Book in Beirut in 1994. Her short stories convey a typical urban sensibility imbued with boredom, loneliness and a mechanical way of life .

What will she do but wake up, as she does every morning? She dresses up. She goes to work, where she does not drink coffee with her colleagues. She does not like the bitter taste of coffee. She does not smoke. She works all day, then goes back home. She eats, changes her clothes and watches TV. Later, she goes to sleep and dreams of him, laughing and joking. He suddenly invaded her life, her world. He came in and made her happy by not asking for her permission. He goes far away, then comes back every day and asks her whether he bores her. He makes her laugh so much that her tears run down her face. She tells him: "You're mad!"

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