

Salma Khadra Jayyusi

Salma Khadra Jayyusi is a well known Palestinian poet and critic. She graduated from the American University in Beirut and received a Ph.D. degree in Arabic literature from the University of London. Her dissertation «Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry» was published in 1977. She published in 1960 a volume of Arabic poetry, *Al Aouda min an'Naba' el-Halim* — (the Return from the Dreamy Source).

She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is the director of PROTA, a project of translating Arabic literature and poetry into English.

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SALMA KHADRA JAYYUSI

Translated from the Arabic by Patricia Alanah with the author and Christopher Middleton

To Usama

I am a woman of April
December fires that burn to ash frighten me.

Hide me, my son, you who rocket to the stars
You who spread over the earth like grass.

Ominous December thunder will overwhelm
My river rippling with secrets of love.
It will stifle the music on whose echoing
Waves you were born.

Your shrug:

This woman is rooted in time.
She spans the air like a dove
In flight for a thousand years.

I know her.

She is a willow, a supple reed, I know her.
Twisted or bent, she returns to her old self.

A palm tree, I know her.
Pick her fruits and she sprouts more,
More fruits, and their honey.

A cypress tree, I know her.
Never shedding leaves, why should she care about
December winds?

Son, the winds blow stronger.
My longing to hear your voice burns low, bitten off
By the iron edge that echo in your voice has;
It is wise, cruel, innocent, selfish.

Without your presence
All times of day and night are void.

We both permeate the wind, the air, the rains,
But like different galaxies we drink
Our own heart's wine,
We are poured, each, in our own glass.
Yet you were born of my elements,
I gave you my impetuosity,
That constant flitting in the public world,
That private elusiveness,
Chronic dizziness,
Rocklike will
And the fixity of faithful stars
In the valleys of the sky.

And I gave you
That spark of conquest, the rapture of love,
The intensity
And absorption of your being, all of it,
In the presence of holy fire.

Should I blame you?

And you offered me the promise, a pledge of calm,
A love like a tide that comes ashore
Only to recede.

Should you blame me?

I am a wild gazelle; you are rock, and
The blood is on my head.