

Thorayya Malhas a Pioneer from Jordan

Thorayya Malhas is widely regarded as the first Jordanian woman writer to declare her rebellion against obsolete ideas, and to attack, through her way of life and her writings, the «cave-dwellers» who cling to tradition as a means of preserving their privileges or justifying their wrong acts.

When she was still a student preparing a master's degree at the American University of Beirut, she published, in 1949, a collection of free verse, «An-Nasheed-ut-Ta'eh» (The Meandering Song), in which she condemned both traditional forms of writing and reactionary ways of thinking. Like many Arab intellectuals who chose to live outside their countries, in a spot where they could move and speak-out freely, Thorayya decided to settle in Lebanon where she joined hands with a number of socially conscious writers, poets and journalists; she participated in their efforts to modernize Lebanon and make it a center point of cultural radiation in the Arab world. While many of her colleagues and associates quit and went each in a different direction, she remained faithful to her ideal. Her writings echoed her interest in social justice, in national freedom, in loyalty, but not enslavement to the Arab heritage.

Her keen sense of right and wrong made of her a born feminist, a strong advocate of sexual equality, and she succeeded in inculcating this attitude in her women students at B.U.C. and at the Lebanese University. When president Muammar Gadhafi of Libya delivered his speech in which he announced the «Era of Liberation» of the Arab woman», in 1982 she was so enthusiastic that she published an article in the paper in which she hailed him as the awaited hero of woman's freedom.

Her sympathy with suffering Lebanon has inspired her with a number of elegies in which she deplored in highly emotional tones the tragic fate of this country. One example is «The Seagull and the Pen», Published in *Al-Adib* magazine, (nos. 8-12, 1983).

She has written literary research, «Spiritual values in Arabic literature» and «Nu'aimy the Mystic Writer»; she also produced numerous collections of lyrical and satirical poems in free verse. In some of those works we can detect a strain of romantic or mystic longing for union with the Absolute, with nature or with man. Her literary

ambition culminated in a collection of English free verse, «Prisoners of Time», which she published in 1958. While she took teaching as a career, her love for knowledge led her to continue her study and research in ancient and modern literature. After years of investigation in Arabic linguistics, she decided to make a historical study of Kushagem, one of the lesser renowned Abbasid poets, and, for that study, she obtained in 1978 a Ph.D. degree with honors from the University of St. Joseph.

Thorayya Malhas's writing is characterized by a spontaneous expression of feeling and thought, and by little polish and embellishment. She is one of several contemporary women writers who have devoted themselves to so called «committed writing», thus she stands out by virtue of her unusual vehemence and frankness.

R. G.

Wonder

If I could reach the sky
I wonder if I
My hands will move the earth
But If I
If I could find a seed
A seed of peace
I wonder if I
My heart will weave
Garments of delight
But if I

If I could plant a seed
A seed of love
Hatred will be abolished
From eyes
But if I
A sting I felt
From tiny tiny souls
My strong strong palm
Stretched like mountains
I could not see the tiny
Tiny souls
A chorus sang
But if I.

Thorayya Malhas
From «Prisoners of Time», p. 149.