

Study on a Woman Pioneer Writer: May Ziadeh

Rose Ghurayyib*



Since May Ziadeh's works, twelve or more in number, have been reedited by Naufal Publishing House in Beirut, Rose Ghurayyib has prepared a study analyzing the personality and works of this famous Lebanese author who spent most of her life (1886-1941) in Egypt and who distinguished herself as an orator, essayist, critic and stylist. Her wide culture, reflected in her mastery of five foreign languages, besides Arabic, allowed her to write in various languages and her first published work was a collection of poems in French: "Fleurs de rêve" (Flowers of Dream), after which she devoted herself to writing in Arabic. She shared a contribution to the emancipation and modernization of Arabic literature and thought with the Lebanese Emigrant writers who were mainly established in the Americas. She also cooperated with early Arab feminist groups in their pioneering efforts toward the emancipation of the Arab woman.

Her works consisted mainly of essays which had been published in leading Egyptian magazines dealing with travel, literature, art criticism, linguistics

and social reform. Some of these works took the form of lyrics or prose-poems about romantic and metaphysical topics. All her writings bear the mark of an original style, characterized by her finesse and sense of humor.

* Rose Ghurayyib, a graduate of the American Junior College, (now Beirut University College), received her B.A., then took an M.A. in Arabic literature from the American University of Beirut. She has recently retired from a long teaching career at various institutions, including Sidon Girls' School; Mosul Secondary School, Iraq; French Protestant College, Beirut; and Beirut University College. She taught Arabic at BUC for about 20 years. Along with her academic work, she took up writing as a hobby and, since 1948, has published a large number of books for children and young people, including songs, poems, stories and plays. In 1952, she published her M.A. thesis on "Aesthetic Criticism in Arabic Literature", followed by several books on Arabic composition, rhetoric, an introduction to modern literary criticism, and a study of Gibran's works. In magazines she published a number of articles dealing with literary criticism and with the Lebanese woman's status and similar problems.