

RE-LIVING THE PAST

with Daisy al-Ameer



The first impression is one of a ladylike, elegantly dressed woman. Her speech has poetic tones accompanied by a firm and forceful expression. Her gray eyes and fair complexion reveal a mixed origin. Her father, an Iraqi doctor; her mother a Lebanese who studied at the American College of Beirut. In spite of his strict conservatism, her father encouraged her to seek knowledge by reading the books out of their home library. Her readings developed her taste for literature and helped her try to develop her own philosophy of life.

In her early years, she adopted the habit of recording her past in a diary which she cherished greatly. She soon realized that it was only a collection of sad memories, and gave it up in order to indulge in the bright dreams of the future. Her dreams, however, were bound to remain unfulfilled. She gradually rid herself of them and decided to live in the present, where reality was something she could touch and see. She adopted a realistic attitude which became the source that inspired her writings.

How did she start writing?

Upon completing her secondary schooling she took up carving as a hobby. Her interest in modern Arab writers like Toufiq al-Hakim, Gibran, and al-Mazini, made her decide to pursue higher studies in literature at the Teachers' Training College of Baghdad where she graduated with a B.A. degree. Her travels in England and the United States widened her horizons and strengthened her sense of independence and self-reliance. In 1962, she came to Beirut where she occupied a post at the Iraqi Embassy. Her contact with literary men awakened her literary talent. She wrote «The Little Rug», a short story which was somewhat biographical. The success with which it met induced her to take up writing as a permanent hobby. To date, she has published four collections of short stories and

a fifth collection is for publication. It seems that the short story is the literary form that is most suited to her disposition: a cross-section of the character's life, focusing on one single idea or experience.

Her stories are characterized by conciseness, irony, emphasis on one point, and concrete, suggestive details. They are faithful records of actual experience but, whether the idea behind the story is clear or not, the author is careful not to tell it outright. It is for the reader to guess.

Most of these stories deal with the condition and problems of Arab women in whom she criticizes the cowardice and submissiveness to the other sex. So completely absorbed are they in the world of men that they have no chance to develop an entity of their own. Their lives are built on illusions. Their happiness is a make-believe. Her story, «The Happy Arab Home» is an ironic description of a family whose members live in apparent harmony because the younger generation has completely surrendered its will to the older one. Confirmed in traditionalism, they still call themselves «progressive».

What personal message would she like to communicate to the young women of today?

There is a common belief that marriage is the *raison d'être* of a woman. Daisy al-Ameer is not of this opinion, because if a girl considers marriage as her only goal she will be very disappointed if she «misses the train».

In her case, she has found satisfaction in her writing, her work and her independence. She adds that the Iraqi Government, by supporting women's work and patronizing writers and intellectuals, has been to her a source of help and encouragement.

(This article was based on an interview with Daisy al-Ameer, made by Alidz Nakhoudian, from the Women's Studies Class, B.U.C June 1981).