

Tribute to Nadia Tueni



Nadia Tueni, a great woman poet of Lebanon was snatched away by death on the 20th of June 1983, after a long battle with illness. Those who knew her, and those who didn't, mourned her; for she knew how to perfectly express the often forgotten ties existing between people and their land, beauty and destruction, love and hatred, life and death.

Reading her poems was like discovering forgotten pictures locked away in the drawers of our hearts. Nadia Tueni transported us towards new horizons where dreams have a different savor. She uncovered the past without threatening the present, and constantly startled us with her choice of words. For no one knew how to place a word in a sentence or isolate it from its habitual context like she did.

Nadia Tueni was described by writers, poets, journalists and politicians alike as "the chanting bird of Lebanon", the "white pearl", "the woman of light", the "sister of love" and the "lady of the Orient".

Last goodbyes are painful. Among the many written for her was one entitled: "Eyewitnesses Said". It says: "She wrote her last poem, hid it for Him under the pillow, put on her white dress and went away with dawn. Eyewitnesses said: she passed over the mountains and sprinkled them with 20 love-poems. On her shoulders a bag full of poems and love and her long black hair". (1)

Great poets never die, but what words can fill the big black void left by a beloved one?

SHE

Was born in Beirut in 1935.

Studied at the Girl's College of Beirut, at the French Academy in Athens, then in St. Joseph University, Lebanon.

Married on the 31st of December 1954, the well known journalist Ghasan Tueni.

Has two sons: Gibran and Makram.

Wrote her first collection of poems in 1963, it was entitled "Les Textes Blonds".

Wrote "L'Age d'Ecume" in 1965, for which she obtained the "Said Akl Prize of Literature".

Wrote in 1963, "Juin et les Mecreantes", in 1970 a play called the "Faramane" for the International Festival of Baalbeck.

Published another book of poems, in 1972 and called it: "Poemes pour une Histoire", for which she obtained the French Academy Prize in 1973.

Wrote "Le Rêveur de la Terre" (1975) with drawings by Laure Kerbage, then "Liban, 20 Poemes Pour Un Amour" (1979) with drawings by Amine el Bacha.

Her last collection of poems was published last year and entitled; "Archives d'une Guerre Sentimentale du Liban"

Died on the 20th of June 1983, after an 18 years long battle with cancer.

Wafa' Stephan

Nadia Tueni: INVENTORY

From all which is earth I accept the message.
From that which is garden I accept the force. A
smell of the future settles down upsetting a child
on his way.

We will make suns behind the wall, within your
eyes of painted moons and in your cool-running
hands.

If death is perfect beauty, each life inherits a
morning of birds, gentle and cruel.

From that which is day I will conceive the
night (say nothing it is done). In your steps a white
foreboding love.

This evening, between me and the first arrival,
a word arches on the sky. Because from a cry I will
build my life.

Translator

Elaine Gardiner

(Poem and photo by courtesy of **Al-Nahar**)

(1) Antoine Sebalani — **Al Nahar**, June 23, 1983