

Woman Through 17 Stories

In this collection of short stories, Emily Nasrallah tries to depart from the conventional atmosphere and mood that women's problems are usually treated in, to talk about women in the "absolute".

The heroines of her short stories do not all come from the same background. They are sometimes travellers in Paris (*A Parisian Night*), in Stockholm (*The Summer of Women*) or in a far away island (*The Bird of Hazard*). We find among them the Philippino woman (*A Bird from the Philippines*), the migrant woman returning to her natal village (*A Summer Wind*), the one that attends an evening party in a foreign country (*The Dinosaur*) or the Bedouin woman bound to the customs of her tribe (*The Desert, The Morning Star*).

Some of Nasrallah's short stories are merely descriptive, like the one in which she compares a woman to a "butterfly", to a "mirror" or to a "doll". Sometimes the author chooses uncommon characters like the black woman who lost her feelings and started idealizing herself (*The Light of His Eyes*), or the very popular woman who never found a husband and chose instead to transform this "failure in love" to achieve high intellectual recognition (*A Recommendation Card*).

I liked the story entitled *A Summer Breeze* which presents a woman very talented in singing and dancing and who was able — like the pipe-player of the fairy tale — to enchant a whole village

and transform herself from a dull placid woman to one full of life and happiness.

The Dinosaur story is very well written, in addition to being very sarcastic about a man who claims "liberation" when he is in fact very traditional.

The Cocoon is a good story that analyzes well the generation gap between a mother — the author herself — and her daughter. However, there are stories whose aim is not clear like *The Magnificent Borders of Illusion*. Others in which women's portraits are either not convincing or not realistic, like *The Hidden Roots*, for instance.

Some stories focus too much on women's bodies and their physical attributes, e.g. *The Butterfly* and *The Mirror*. This, at a time when these women should have concentrated their energies on building up their intellectual and critical abilities in order to achieve a new balanced personality. As for Nasrallah's style, it is characterised by precision, flowing expression and a focus on details. Her sentences have a poetic rhythm that blends harmoniously with the drawings of her daughter, Maha Nasrallah.

Rose Ghurayyib

* This is the latest book written by the Lebanese novelist Emily Nasrallah in Arabic. Its title is "Al Mar'a Fi Sabaata Ashara Quissa". Nawfal Publishing House, 1984.