

## Is there a Renewal in Tunisian Feminine Literature?

Jean Fontaine, one of the founders of IBLA, the Institute of Arab Literature (Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes), has often written about Tunisian literature. In his latest critique, he questions whether there has been a renewal of literary efforts by Tunisian women between the years 1971 and 1981.

First of all, Fontaine mentions a number of authors and categorizes their work into various trends: 1) the «reformists» with Najia Thameur and Hind Azouz, presenting the world as it should be; 2) the «realists» with Khadija Chitouï and Beya Nouri on the one hand and Fatma Slim and Jalila Mehri on the other, describing the world as it is; 3) the «feminists» with Zoubeida Bechir and Leïla Mami looking at the world as it should be and; 4) the «explorers» with Fadhila Chabbi and Zohra Jlassi, going into a world of fantasy.

Fontaine then reviews the works published by

women during this period which amount to 14 books and 100 texts representing only 10% of the male production during the same lapse of time. He concludes that the literature written by Tunisian women during those ten years is disappointing, not only as to the quantity but also qualitatively. His analysis leads him to define two additional categories of literary trends: a) the «marginalist» with Nefla Dahab and Noutayla Tbianiyya where women, unable to have an impact on the outside world, prefer to take refuge in their private sphere and, b) the «transformist» trend exemplified by Aroussia Nalouti and her book «The Fifth Dimension».

Comparing this decade with previous ones, Fontaine decides that any renewal that has happened has been a negative one and that feminine literature in Tunisia is the reflection of a tragic destiny.

**Jean Fontaine**