



Boston University Arts Initiative

Educational Materials:
Theatre Nohgaku at Boston University

Zahdi Dates and Poppies and "In the Summer"

From *Zahdi Dates and Poppies*:

Insurgent:

As I heard the jet diving, I thought of my wife

Chorus:

As I heard the jet diving,
standing in a breeze blowing
down from the date palms.
Veil white as cheese
beside her honey-touched hand,
brown eyes, date seeds.
Whispering a poem:

Wife:

"Had I told the sea
what I felt for you, It would
have left its shores...shells...
And followed me."
["In The Summer," Nizar Qabbani, Iraqi poet]

Insurgent:

And I knew
I could not follow,
after what I had become.

"In the Summer"

by Nizar Qabbani

In the summer
I stretch out on the shore
And think of you
Had I told the sea
What I felt for you,
It would have left its shores,
Its shells,
Its fish,
And followed me.

Translated by B. Frangieh And C. Brown



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Nizar Qabbani

Qabbani was revered by generations of Arabs for his sensual and romantic verse. His work was featured not only in his two dozen volumes of poetry and in regular contributions to the Arabic-language newspaper *Al Hayat*, but in lyrics sung by Lebanese and Syrian vocalists who helped popularize his work.

Through a lifetime of writing, Qabbani made women his main theme and inspiration. He earned a reputation for daring with the publication in 1954 of his first volume of verse, *Childhood of a Breast*, whose erotic and romantic themes broke from the conservative traditions of Arab literature. The suicide of his sister, who was unwilling to marry a man she did not love, had a profound effect on Qabbani. Thereafter, he expressed resentment of male chauvinism and often wrote from a woman's viewpoint and advocated social freedoms for women.

He had lived in London since 1967 but the Syrian capital remained a powerful presence in his poems, most notably in "The Jasmine Scent of Damascus."

After the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, he founded the Nizar Qabbani publishing house in London, and he became a powerful and eloquent voice of lament for Arab causes.

Qabbani was a committed Arab nationalist and in recent years his poetry and other writings, including essays and journalism, had become more political. His writing also often fused themes of romantic and political despair.

Qabbani's later poems included a strong strain of anti-authoritarianism. One couplet in particular—"O Sultan, my master, if my clothes are ripped and torn it is because your dogs with claws are allowed to tear me"—is sometimes quoted by Arabs as a kind of wry shorthand for their frustration with life under dictatorship.

His second wife, Balqis al-Rawi, an Iraqi teacher whom he had met at a poetry recital in Baghdad, was killed in a bomb attack by pro-Iranian guerrillas in Beirut, where she was working for the cultural section of the Iraqi Ministry.

Nizar Qabbani died in London of a heart attack at the age of 75.

<http://allpoetry.com/Nizar-Qabbani>