

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Nizar Qabbani**  
**- poems -**

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## Nizar Qabbani(1923 - 1998)

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 his 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.

# A Brief Love Letter

My darling, I have much to say  
Where o precious one shall I begin ?  
All that is in you is princely  
O you who makes of my words through their meaning  
Cocoons of silk  
These are my songs and this is me  
This short book contains us  
Tomorrow when I return its pages  
A lamp will lament  
A bed will sing  
Its letters from longing will turn green  
Its commas be on the verge of flight  
Do not say: why did this youth  
Speak of me to the winding road and the stream  
The almond tree and the tulip  
So that the world escorts me wherever I go ?  
Why did he sing these songs ?  
Now there is no star  
That is not perfumed with my fragrance  
Tomorrow people will see me in his verse  
A mouth the taste of wine, close-cropped hair  
Ignore what people say  
You will be great only through my great love  
What would the world have been if we had not been  
If your eyes had not been, what would the world have been?

Nizar Qabbani

# A Damascene Moon

Green Tunisia, I have come to you as a lover  
On my brow, a rose and a book  
For I am the Damascene whose profession is passion  
Whose singing turns the herbs green  
A Damascene moon travels through my blood  
Nightingales . . . and grain . . . and domes  
From Damascus, jasmine begins its whiteness  
And fragrances perfume themselves with her scent  
From Damascus, water begins . . . for wherever  
You lean your head, a stream flows  
And poetry is a sparrow spreading its wings  
Over Sham . . . and a poet is a voyager  
From Damascus, love begins . . . for our ancestors  
Worshipped beauty, they dissolved it, and they melted away  
From Damascus, horses begin their journey  
And the stirrups are tightened for the great conquest  
From Damascus, eternity begins . . . and with her  
Languages remain and genealogies are preserved  
And Damascus gives Arabism its form  
And on its land, epochs materialize

Nizar Qabbani

# A Lesson In Drawing

My son places his paint box in front of me  
and asks me to draw a bird for him.  
Into the color gray I dip the brush  
and draw a square with locks and bars.  
Astonishment fills his eyes:  
'... But this is a prison, Father,  
Don't you know, how to draw a bird?'  
And I tell him: 'Son, forgive me.  
I've forgotten the shapes of birds.'

My son puts the drawing book in front of me  
and asks me to draw a wheatstalk.  
I hold the pen  
and draw a gun.  
My son mocks my ignorance,  
demanding,  
'Don't you know, Father, the difference between a  
wheatstalk and a gun?'  
I tell him, 'Son,  
once I used to know the shapes of wheatstalks  
the shape of the loaf  
the shape of the rose  
But in this hardened time  
the trees of the forest have joined  
the militia men  
and the rose wears dull fatigues  
In this time of armed wheatstalks  
armed birds  
armed culture  
and armed religion  
you can't buy a loaf  
without finding a gun inside  
you can't pluck a rose in the field  
without its raising its thorns in your face  
you can't buy a book  
that doesn't explode between your fingers.'

My son sits at the edge of my bed  
and asks me to recite a poem,

A tear falls from my eyes onto the pillow.  
My son licks it up, astonished, saying:  
'But this is a tear, father, not a poem!'  
And I tell him:  
'When you grow up, my son,  
and read the diwan of Arabic poetry  
you'll discover that the word and the tear are twins  
and the Arabic poem  
is no more than a tear wept by writing fingers.'

My son lays down his pens, his crayon box in  
front of me  
and asks me to draw a homeland for him.  
The brush trembles in my hands  
and I sink, weeping.

Nizar Qabbani

# A Letter From A Stupid Woman

(A Letter to a Man)

(1)

My dear Master,  
This is a letter from a stupid woman  
Has a stupid woman before me, written to you?  
My name? Lets put names aside  
Rania, or Zaynab  
or Hind or Hayfa  
The silliest thing we carry, my Master - are names

(2)

My Master:  
I am frightened to tell you my thoughts  
I am frightened - if I did -  
that the heavens would burn  
For your East, my dear Master,  
confiscate blue letters  
confiscate dreams from the treasure chests of women  
Practices suppression, upon the emotions of women  
It uses knives...  
and cleavers...  
to speak to women  
and butchers spring and passions  
and black plaits  
And your East, dear Master,  
Manufactures the delicate crown of the East  
from the skulls of women

(3)

Don't criticize me, Master  
If my writing is poor  
For I write and the sword is behind my door  
And beyond the room is the sound of wind and howling dogs  
My master!  
'Antar al Abys is behind my door!

He will butcher me  
If he saw my letter  
He will cut my head off  
If I spoke of my torture  
He will cut my head off  
If he saw the sheerness of my clothes  
For your East, my dear Master,  
Surrounds women with spears  
And your East, my dear Master  
elects the men to become Prophets,  
and buries the women in the dust.

(4)

Don't become annoyed!  
My dear Master, from these lines  
Don't become annoyed!  
If I smash the complaints blocked for centuries  
If I unsealed my consciousness  
If I ran away...  
From the domes of the Harem in the castles  
If I rebelled, against my death...  
against my grave, against my roots...  
and the giant slaughter house....

Don't become annoyed, my dear Master,  
If I revealed to you my feelings  
For the Eastern man  
Is not concerned with poetry or feelings  
The Eastern man - and forgive my insolence - does not understand women  
but over the sheets.

(5)

I am sorry my master -If I have insolently attacked the kingdom of Men  
for the great literature of course -  
is the literature of men  
And love has always been  
the allotment of men...  
And sex has always been  
a drug sold to men

A senile fairytale, the freedom of women in our countries  
For there is no freedom  
Other than, the freedom of men...

My Master

Say all you wish of me. It does not matter to me:  
Shallow.. Stupid.. Crazy.. Simple minded.  
It does not concern me anymore..  
For whoever writes about her concerns...  
in the logic of Men is called  
a stupid woman  
and didn't I tell you in the beginning  
that I am a stupid woman?

Nizar Qabbani

# Balqees

Balqees. . . oh princess,  
You burn, caught between tribal wars,  
What will I write about the departure of my queen?  
Indeed, words are my scandal. . . .  
Here we look through piles of victims  
For a star that fell, for a body strewn like fragments of a mirror.  
Here we ask, oh my love:  
Was this your grave  
Or the grave of Arab nationalism?  
I won't read history after today,  
My fingers are burned, my clothes bedecked with blood,  
Here we are entering the stone age. . . .  
Each day we regress a thousand years.  
What does poetry say in this era, Balqees?  
What does poetry say in the cowardly era. . . ?  
The Arab world is crushed, repressed, its tongue cut. . . .  
We are crime personified. . . .  
Balqees . . .  
I beg your forgiveness.  
Perhaps your life was the ransom of my own,  
Indeed I know well  
That the purpose of those who were entangled in murder was to kill  
my words!  
Rest in God's care, oh beautiful one,  
Poetry, after you, is impossible. . . .

Nizar Qabbani

# Barada

Barada, oh father of all rivers  
Oh, horse that races the days  
Be, in our sad history, a prophet  
Who receives inspiration from his lord  
Millions acknowledge you as an Arab  
Prince . . . so pray as an imam

Oh eyes of the gazelle in the desert of Sham  
Look down. This is the age of lavender  
They have detained you in the pavilions for a long time  
We have woven tents from tears  
God has witnessed that we have broken no promise  
Or secured protection for those we love

Nizar Qabbani

# Beirut, The Mistress Of The World

Beirut, the Mistress of the World  
We confess before the One God  
That we were envious of you  
That your beauty hurt us  
We confess now  
That we've maltreated and misunderstood you  
And we had no mercy and didn't excuse you  
And we offered you a dagger in place of flowers!  
We confess before the fair God  
That we injured you, alas; we tired you  
That we vexed you and made you cry  
And we burdened you with our insurrections

O Beirut  
The world without you won't suffice us  
We now realize your roots are deep inside us,  
We now realize what offence we've perpetrated  
Rise from under the rubble  
Like a flower of Almond in April  
Get over your sorrow  
Since revolution grows in the wounds of grief  
Rise in honor of the forests,  
Rise in honor of the rivers  
Rise in honor of humankind  
Rise, O Beirut!

Nizar Qabbani

# Between Us

Between us  
twenty years of age  
between your lips and my lips  
when they meet and stay  
the years collapse  
the glass of a whole life shatters.

The day I met you I tore up  
all my maps  
and my prophecies  
like an Arab stallion I smelled the rain  
of you  
before it wet me  
heard the pulse of your voice  
before you spoke  
undid your hair with my hands  
before you had braided it

There is nothing I can do  
nothing you can do  
what can the wound do  
with the knife on the way to it?

Your eyes are like a night of rain  
in which ships are sinking  
and all I wrote is forgotten  
In mirrors there is no memory.

God how is it that we surrender  
to love giving it the keys to our city  
carrying candles to it and incense  
falling down at its feet asking  
to be forgiven  
Why do we look for it and endure  
all that it does to us  
all that it does to us?

Woman in whose voice  
silver and wine mingle

in the rains  
From the mirrors of your knees  
the day begins its journey  
life puts out to sea

I knew when I said  
I love you  
that I was inventing a new alphabet  
for a city where no one could read  
that I was saying my poems  
in an empty theater  
and pouring my wine  
for those who could not  
taste it.

When God gave you to me  
I felt that He had loaded  
everything my way  
and unsaid all His sacred books.

Who are you  
woman entering my life like a dagger  
mild as the eyes of a rabbit  
soft as the skin of a plum  
pure as strings of jasmine  
innocent as children's bibs  
and devouring like words?

Your love threw me down  
in a land of wonder  
it ambushed me like the scent  
of a woman stepping into an elevator  
it surprised me  
in a coffee bar  
sitting over a poem  
I forgot the poem  
It surprised me  
reading the lines in my palm  
I forgot my palm  
It dropped on me like a blind deaf  
wildfowl  
its feathers became tangled with mine

its cries were twisted with mine

It surprised me  
as I sat on my suitcase  
waiting for the train of days  
I forgot the days  
I traveled with you  
to the land of wonder

Your image is engraved  
on the face of my watch  
It is engraved on each of the hands  
It is etched on the weeks  
months years  
My time is no longer mine  
it is you

Nizar Qabbani

# Bread, Hashish And Moon

When the moon is born in the east,  
And the white rooftops drift asleep  
Under the heaped-up light,  
People leave their shops and march forth in groups  
To meet the moon  
Carrying bread, and a radio, to the mountaintops,  
And their narcotics.  
There they buy and sell fantasies  
And images,  
And die - as the moon comes to life.  
What does that luminous disc  
Do to my homeland?  
The land of the prophets,  
The land of the simple,  
The chewers of tobacco, the dealers in drug?  
What does the moon do to us,  
That we squander our valor  
And live only to beg from Heaven?  
What has the heaven  
For the lazy and the weak?  
When the moon comes to life they are changed to  
corpses,  
And shake the tombs of the saints,  
Hoping to be granted some rice, some children...  
They spread out their fine and elegant rugs,  
And console themselves with an opium we call fate  
And destiny.  
In my land, the land of the simple  
What weakness and decay  
Lay hold of us, when the light streams forth!  
Rugs, thousands of baskets,  
Glasses of tea and children swarn over the hills.  
In my land,  
where the simple weep,  
And live in the light they cannot perceive;  
In my land,  
Where people live without eyes,  
And pray,  
And fornicate,

And live in resignation,  
As they always have,  
Calling on the crescent moon:  
' O Crescent Moon!  
O suspended God of Marble!  
O unbelievable object!  
Always you have been for the east, for us,  
A cluster of diamonds,  
For the millions whose senses are numbed'

On those eastern nights when  
The moon waxes full,  
The east divests itself of all honor  
And vigor.  
The millions who go barefoot,  
Who believe in four wives  
And the day of judgment;  
The millions who encounter bread  
Only in their dreams;  
Who spend the night in houses  
Built of coughs;  
Who have never set eyes on medicine;  
Fall down like corpses beneath the light.

In my land,  
where the stupid weep  
And die weeping  
Whenever the crescent moon appears  
And their tears increase;  
Whenever some wretched lute moves them...  
or the song to 'night'  
In my land,  
In the land of the simple,  
where we slowly chew on our unending songs-  
A form of consumption destroying the east-  
Our east chewing on its history,  
its lethargic dreams,  
Its empty legends,  
Our east that sees the sum of all heroism  
In Picaresque Abu Zayd al Hilali.



# Clarification To My Poetry-Readers

And of me say the fools:  
I entered the lodges of women  
And never left.  
And they call for my hanging,  
Because about the matters of my beloved  
I, poetry, compose.  
I never traded  
Like others  
In Hashish.  
I never stole.  
I never killed.  
I, in broad day, have loved.  
Have I sinned?

And of me say the fools:  
With my poetry  
I violated the sky's commands.  
Said who  
Love is  
The honor-ravager of the sky?  
The sky is my intimate.  
It cries if I cry,  
Laughs if I laugh  
And its stars  
Greatens their brilliance  
If  
One day I fall in love.  
What so  
If in the name of my beloved I chant,  
And like a chestnut tree  
In every capital I, her, plant.

Fondness will remain my calling,  
Like all prophets.  
And infancy, innocence  
And purity.  
I will write of my beloved's matters  
Till I melt her golden hair  
In the sky's gold.

I am,  
And I hope I change not,  
A child  
Scribbling on the stars' walls  
The way he pleases,  
Till the worth of love  
In my homeland  
Matches that of the air,  
And to love dreamers I become  
A diction-ary,  
And over their lips I become  
An A  
And a B.

Nizar Qabbani

# Damascus, What Are You Doing To Me?

1

My voice rings out, this time, from Damascus  
It rings out from the house of my mother and father  
In Sham. The geography of my body changes.  
The cells of my blood become green.  
My alphabet is green.  
In Sham. A new mouth emerges for my mouth  
A new voice emerges for my voice  
And my fingers  
Become a tribe

2

I return to Damascus  
Riding on the backs of clouds  
Riding the two most beautiful horses in the world  
The horse of passion.  
The horse of poetry.  
I return after sixty years  
To search for my umbilical cord,  
For the Damascene barber who circumcised me,  
For the midwife who tossed me in the basin under the bed  
And received a gold lira from my father,  
She left our house  
On that day in March of 1923  
Her hands stained with the blood of the poem...

3

I return to the womb in which I was formed . . .  
To the first book I read in it . . .  
To the first woman who taught me  
The geography of love . . .  
And the geography of women . . .

4

I return  
After my limbs have been strewn across all the continents  
And my cough has been scattered in all the hotels  
After my mother's sheets scented with laurel soap  
I have found no other bed to sleep on . . .

And after the "bride" of oil and thyme  
That she would roll up for me  
No longer does any other 'bride' in the world please me  
And after the quince jam she would make with her own hands  
I am no longer enthusiastic about breakfast in the morning  
And after the blackberry drink that she would make  
No other wine intoxicates me . . .

5

I enter the courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque  
And greet everyone in it  
Corner to . . . corner  
Tile to . . . tile  
Dove to . . . dove  
I wander in the gardens of Kufi script  
And pluck beautiful flowers of God's words  
And hear with my eye the voice of the mosaics  
And the music of agate prayer beads  
A state of revelation and rapture overtakes me,  
So I climb the steps of the first minaret that encounters me  
Calling:  
"Come to the jasmine"  
"Come to the jasmine"

6

Returning to you  
Stained by the rains of my longing  
Returning to fill my pockets  
With nuts, green plums, and green almonds  
Returning to my oyster shell  
Returning to my birth bed  
For the fountains of Versailles  
Are no compensation for the Fountain Café  
And Les Halles in Paris  
Is no compensation for the Friday market  
And Buckingham Palace in London  
Is no compensation for Azem Palace  
And the pigeons of San Marco in Venice  
Are no more blessed than the doves in the Umayyad Mosque  
And Napoleon's tomb in Les Invalides  
Is no more glorious than the tomb of Salah al-Din Al-Ayyubi...

7

I wander in the narrow alleys of Damascus.  
Behind the windows, honeyed eyes awake  
And greet me . . .  
The stars wear their gold bracelets  
And greet me  
And the pigeons alight from their towers  
And greet me  
And the clean Shami cats come out  
Who were born with us . . .  
Grew up with us . . .  
And married with us . . .  
To greet me . . .

8

I immerse myself in the Buzurriya Souq  
Set a sail in a cloud of spices  
Clouds of cloves  
And cinnamon . . .  
And camomile . . .  
I perform ablutions in rose water once.  
And in the water of passion many times . . .  
And I forget—while in the Souq al-'Attarine—  
All the concoctions of Nina Ricci . . .  
And Coco Chanel . . .  
What are you doing to me Damascus?  
How have you changed my culture? My aesthetic taste?  
For I have been made to forget the ringing of cups of licorice  
The piano concerto of Rachmaninoff . . .  
How do the gardens of Sham transform me?  
For I have become the first conductor in the world  
That leads an orchestra from a willow tree!!

9

I have come to you . . .  
From the history of the Damascene rose  
That condenses the history of perfume . . .  
From the memory of al-Mutanabbi  
That condenses the history of poetry . . .  
I have come to you . . .  
From the blossoms of bitter orange . . .  
And the dahlia . . .

And the narcissus . . .  
And the 'nice boy' . . .  
That first taught me drawing . . .  
I have come to you . . .  
From the laughter of Shami women  
That first taught me music . . .  
And the beginning of adolescence  
From the spouts of our alley  
That first taught me crying  
And from my mother's prayer rug  
That first taught me  
The path to God . . .

10

I open the drawers of memory  
One . . . then another  
I remember my father . . .  
Coming out of his workshop on Mu'awiya Alley  
I remember the horse-drawn carts . . .  
And the sellers of prickly pears . . .  
And the cafés of al-Rubwa  
That nearly—after five flasks of `araq—  
Fall into the river  
I remember the colored towels  
As they dance on the door of Hammam al-Khayyatin  
As if they were celebrating their national holiday.  
I remember the Damascene houses  
With their copper doorknobs  
And their ceilings decorated with glazed tiles  
And their interior courtyards  
That remind you of descriptions of heaven . . .

11

The Damascene House  
Is beyond the architectural text  
The design of our homes . . .  
Is based on an emotional foundation  
For every house leans . . . on the hip of another  
And every balcony . . .  
Extends its hand to another facing it  
Damascene houses are loving houses . . .  
They greet one another in the morning . . .

And exchange visits . . .  
Secretly—at night . . .

12

When I was a diplomat in Britain  
Thirty years ago  
My mother would send letters at the beginning of Spring  
Inside each letter . . .  
A bundle of tarragon . . .  
And when the English suspected my letters  
They took them to the laboratory  
And turned them over to Scotland Yard  
And explosives experts.  
And when they grew weary of me . . . and my tarragon  
They would ask: Tell us, by god . . .  
What is the name of this magical herb that has made us dizzy?  
Is it a talisman?  
Medicine?  
A secret code?  
What is it called in English?  
I said to them: It's difficult for me to explain...  
For tarragon is a language that only the gardens of Sham speak  
It is our sacred herb . . .  
Our perfumed eloquence  
And if your great poet Shakespeare had known of tarragon  
His plays would have been better . . .  
In brief . . .  
My mother is a wonderful woman . . . she loves me greatly . . .  
And whenever she missed me  
She would send me a bunch of tarragon . . .  
Because for her, tarragon is the emotional equivalent  
To the words: my darling . . .  
And when the English didn't understand one word of my poetic argument . . .  
They gave me back my tarragon and closed the investigation . . .

13

From Khan Asad Basha  
Abu Khalil al-Qabbani emerges . . .  
In his damask robe . . .  
And his brocaded turban . . .  
And his eyes haunted with questions . . .  
Like Hamlet's

He attempts to present an avant-garde play  
But they demand Karagoz's tent . . .  
He tries to present a text from Shakespeare  
They ask him about the news of al-Zir . . .  
He tries to find a single female voice  
To sing with him . . .  
"Oh That of Sham"  
They load up their Ottoman rifles,  
And fire into every rose tree  
That sings professionally . . .  
He tries to find a single woman  
To repeat after him:  
"Oh bird of birds, oh dove"  
They unsheathe their knives  
And slaughter all the descendents of doves . . .  
And all the descendents of women . . .  
After a hundred years . . .  
Damascus apologized to Abu Khalil al-Qabbani  
And they erected a magnificent theater in his name.

14

I put on the jubbah of Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-Arabi  
I descend from the peak of Mt. Qassiun  
Carrying for the children of the city . . .  
Peaches  
Pomegranates  
And sesame halawa . . .  
And for its women . . .  
Necklaces of turquoise . . .  
And poems of love . . .  
I enter . . .  
A long tunnel of sparrows  
Gillyflowers . . .  
Hibiscus . . .  
Clustered jasmine . . .  
And I enter the questions of perfume . . .  
And my schoolbag is lost from me  
And the copper lunch case . . .  
In which I used to carry my food . . .  
And the blue beads  
That my mother used to hang on my chest  
So People of Sham

He among you who finds me . . .  
let him return me to Umm Mu'ataz  
And God's reward will be his  
I am your green sparrow . . . People of Sham  
So he among you who finds me . . .  
let him feed me a grain of wheat . . .  
I am your Damascene rose . . . People of Sham  
So he among you who finds me . . .  
let him place me in the first vase . . .  
I am your mad poet . . . People of Sham  
So he among you who sees me . . .  
let him take a souvenir photograph of me  
Before I recover from my enchanting insanity . . .  
I am your fugitive moon . . . People of Sham  
So he among you who sees me . . .  
Let him donate to me a bed . . . and a wool blanket . . .  
Because I haven't slept for centuries

Nizar Qabbani

# Damascus, What Are You Doing To Me?

Lovers Card

My voice rings out, this time, from Damascus  
It rings out from the house of my mother and father  
In Sham. The geography of my body changes.  
The cells of my blood become green.  
My alphabet is green.  
In Sham. A new mouth emerges for my mouth  
A new voice emerges for my voice  
And my fingers  
Become a tribe

return to Damascus  
Riding on the backs of clouds  
Riding the two most beautiful horses in the world  
The horse of passion.  
The horse of poetry.  
I return after sixty years  
To search for my umbilical cord,  
For the Damascene barber who circumcised me,  
For the midwife who tossed me in the basin under the bed  
And received a gold lira from my father,  
She left our house  
On that day in March of 1923  
Her hands stained with the blood of the poem...

I return to the womb in which I was formed . . .  
To the first book I read in it . . .  
To the first woman who taught me  
The geography of love . . .  
And the geography of women . . .

I return  
After my limbs have been strewn across all the continents  
And my cough has been scattered in all the hotels  
After my mother's sheets scented with laurel soap  
I have found no other bed to sleep on . . .  
And after the "bride" of oil and thyme  
That she would roll up for me

No longer does any other 'bride' in the world please me  
And after the quince jam she would make with her own hands  
I am no longer enthusiastic about breakfast in the morning  
And after the blackberry drink that she would make  
No other wine intoxicates me . . .

I enter the courtyard of the Umayyad Mosque  
And greet everyone in it  
Corner to . . . corner  
Tile to . . . tile  
Dove to . . . dove  
I wander in the gardens of Kufi script  
And pluck beautiful flowers of God's words  
And hear with my eye the voice of the mosaics  
And the music of agate prayer beads  
A state of revelation and rapture overtakes me,  
So I climb the steps of the first minaret that encounters me  
Calling:  
&quot;Come to the jasmine&quot;  
&quot;Come to the jasmine&quot;

Returning to you  
Stained by the rains of my longing  
Returning to fill my pockets  
With nuts, green plums, and green almonds  
Returning to my oyster shell  
Returning to my birth bed  
For the fountains of Versailles  
Are no compensation for the Fountain Café  
And Les Halles in Paris  
Is no compensation for the Friday market  
And Buckingham Palace in London  
Is no compensation for Azem Palace  
And the pigeons of San Marco in Venice  
Are no more blessed than the doves in the Umayyad Mosque  
And Napoleon's tomb in Les Invalides  
Is no more glorious than the tomb of Salah al-Din Al-Ayyubi...

I wander in the narrow alleys of Damascus.  
Behind the windows, honeyed eyes awake  
And greet me . . .  
The stars wear their gold bracelets

And greet me  
And the pigeons alight from their towers  
And greet me  
And the clean Shami cats come out  
Who were born with us . . .  
Grew up with us . . .  
And married with us . . .  
To greet me . . .

I immerse myself in the Buzurriya Souq  
Set a sail in a cloud of spices  
Clouds of cloves  
And cinnamon . . .  
And camomile . . .  
I perform ablutions in rose water once.  
And in the water of passion many times . . .  
And I forget—while in the Souq al-'Attarine—  
All the concoctions of Nina Ricci . . .  
And Coco Chanel . . .  
What are you doing to me Damascus?  
How have you changed my culture? My aesthetic taste?  
For I have been made to forget the ringing of cups of licorice  
The piano concerto of Rachmaninoff . . .  
How do the gardens of Sham transform me?  
For I have become the first conductor in the world  
That leads an orchestra from a willow tree!!

I have come to you . . .  
From the history of the Damascene rose  
That condenses the history of perfume . . .  
From the memory of al-Mutanabbi  
That condenses the history of poetry . . .  
I have come to you . . .  
From the blossoms of bitter orange . . .  
And the dahlia . . .  
And the narcissus . . .  
And the 'nice boy' . . .  
That first taught me drawing . . .  
I have come to you . . .  
From the laughter of Shami women  
That first taught me music . . .  
And the beginning of adolescence

From the spouts of our alley  
That first taught me crying  
And from my mother's prayer rug  
That first taught me  
The path to God . . .

I open the drawers of memory  
One . . . then another  
I remember my father . . .  
Coming out of his workshop on Mu'awiya Alley  
I remember the horse-drawn carts . . .  
And the sellers of prickly pears . . .  
And the cafés of al-Rubwa  
That nearly—after five flasks of `araq—  
Fall into the river  
I remember the colored towels  
As they dance on the door of Hammam al-Khayyatin  
As if they were celebrating their national holiday.  
I remember the Damascene houses  
With their copper doorknobs  
And their ceilings decorated with glazed tiles  
And their interior courtyards  
That remind you of descriptions of heaven . . .

The Damascene House  
Is beyond the architectural text  
The design of our homes . . .  
Is based on an emotional foundation  
For every house leans . . . on the hip of another  
And every balcony . . .  
Extends its hand to another facing it  
Damascene houses are loving houses . . .  
They greet one another in the morning . . .  
And exchange visits . . .  
Secretly—at night . . .

When I was a diplomat in Britain  
Thirty years ago  
My mother would send letters at the beginning of Spring  
Inside each letter . . .  
A bundle of tarragon . . .  
And when the English suspected my letters

They took them to the laboratory  
And turned them over to Scotland Yard  
And explosives experts.  
And when they grew weary of me . . . and my tarragon  
They would ask: Tell us, by god . . .  
What is the name of this magical herb that has made us dizzy?  
Is it a talisman?  
Medicine?  
A secret code?  
What is it called in English?  
I said to them: It's difficult for me to explain...  
For tarragon is a language that only the gardens of Sham speak  
It is our sacred herb . . .  
Our perfumed eloquence  
And if your great poet Shakespeare had known of tarragon  
His plays would have been better . . .  
In brief . . .  
My mother is a wonderful woman . . . she loves me greatly . . .  
And whenever she missed me  
She would send me a bunch of tarragon . . .  
Because for her, tarragon is the emotional equivalent  
To the words: my darling . . .  
And when the English didn't understand one word of my poetic argument . . .  
They gave me back my tarragon and closed the investigation . . .

Nizar Qabbani

# Dialogue

Do not say my love was  
A ring or a bracelet.  
My love is a siege,  
Is the daring and headstrong.  
Who, searching sail out to their death.

Do not say my love was  
A moon.  
My love is a burst of sparks.

Nizar Qabbani

# Every Time I Kiss You

Every time I kiss you  
After a long separation  
I feel  
I am putting a hurried love letter  
In a red mailbox.

Translated by B. Frangieh And C. Brown

Submitted by Noele Aabye

Nizar Qabbani

# Five Letters To My Mother

Good morning sweetheart.  
Good morning my Saint of a sweetheart.  
It has been two year mother  
since the boy has sailed  
on his mythical journey.  
Since he hid within his luggage  
the green morning of his homeland  
and her stars, and her streams,  
and all of her red poppy.  
Since he hid in his cloths  
bunches of mint and thyme,  
and a Damascene Lilac.

\*

I am alone.  
The smoke of my cigarette is bored,  
and even my seat of me is bored  
My sorrows are like flocking birds looking for a grain field in season.  
I became acquainted with the women of Europe,  
I became acquainted with their tired civilization.  
I toured India, and I toured China,  
I toured the entire oriental world,  
and nowhere I found,  
a Lady to comb my golden hair.  
A Lady that hides for me in her purse a sugar candy.  
A lady that dresses me when I am naked,  
and lifts me up when I fall.  
Mother: I am that boy who sailed,  
and still longes to that sugar candy.  
So how come or how can I, Mother,  
become a father and never grow up.

\*

Good morning from Madrid.  
How is the 'Fullah'?  
I beg you to take care of her,  
That baby of a baby.  
She was the dearest love to Father.  
He spoiled her like his daughter.

He used to invite her to his morning coffee.  
He used to feed her and water her,  
and cover her with his mercy.  
And when he died,  
She always dreamt about his return.  
She looked for him in the corners of his room.  
She asked about his robe,  
and asked about his newspaper,  
and asked, when the summer came,  
about the blue color of his eyes,  
so that she can throw within his palms,  
her golden coins.

\*

I send my best regards  
to a house that taught us love and mercy.  
To your white flowers,  
the best in the neighborhood.  
To my bed, to my books,  
to all of the kids in the alley.  
To all of these walls we covered  
with noise from our writings.  
To the lazy cat sleeping on the balcony.  
To the lilac climbing bush the neighbor's window.  
It has been two long years, Mother,  
with the face of Damascus being like a bird,  
digging within my conscience,  
biting at my curtains,  
and picking, with a gentle beak, at my fingers.  
It has been two years Mother,  
since the nights of Damascus,  
the odors of Damascus,  
the houses of Damascus,  
have been inhabiting our imagination.  
The pillar lights of her mosques,  
have been guiding our sails.  
As if the pillars of the Amawi,  
have been planted in our hearts.  
As if the orchards are still perfuming our conscience.  
As if the lights and the rocks,  
have all traveled with us.

\*

This is September, Mother,  
and here is sorrow bringing me his wrapped gifts.  
Leaving at my window his tears and his concerns.  
This is September, where is Damascus?  
Where is Father and his eyes.  
Where is the silk of his glances,  
and where is the aroma of his coffee.  
May God bless his grave.  
And where is the vastness of our large house,  
and where is its comfort.  
And where is the stairwell laughing at the tickles of blooms,  
and where is my childhood.  
Dragging the tail of the cat,  
and eating from the grape vine,  
and snipping from the lilac.

\*\*

Damascus, Damascus,  
what a poem we wrote within our eyes.  
What a pretty child that we crucified.  
We kneeled at her feet,  
and we melted in her passion,  
until, we killed her with love.

Nizar Qabbani

# Fragments From Notes On The Book Of Defeat

If an audience could be arranged  
and also my safe return  
this is what I'd tell the Sultan  
This is what he'd learn:  
O Sultan, my master, if my clothes  
are ripped and torn  
it is because your dogs with claws  
are allowed to tear me.  
And your informers every day are those  
who dog my heels, each step  
unavoidable as fate.  
They interrogate my wife, at length,  
and list each friend's name.  
Your soldiers kick and beat me,  
force me to eat from my shoes,  
because I dare approach these walls  
for an audience with you.  
You have lost two wars  
and no one tells you why.  
Half your people have no tongues.  
What good their unheard sigh?  
The other half, within these walls,  
run like rabbits and ants,  
silently inside.  
If I were given safety  
from the Sultan's armed guards  
I would say, O Sultan,  
the reason you've lost wars twice  
was because you've been walled in from  
mankind's cause and voice.

Nizar Qabbani

# I Am With Terrorism

We are accused of terrorism:  
if we defended rose and woman  
and the mighty verse ...  
and the blueness of sky ...  
A dominion .. nothing left therein...  
No water, no air ..  
No tent, no camel,  
and not even dark Arabica coffee!!

We are accused of terrorism:  
if we defended with guts  
the hair of Balqis  
and the lips of Maysun  
if we defended Hind, and Da`d  
Lubna and Rabab ..  
and the stream of Kohl  
coming down from their lashes like the verses of revelation.  
You will not find with me  
a secret poem  
or a secret logos  
or books I put behind doors.  
I do not even have one poem  
walking down the street, wearing veil.

We are accused of terrorism:  
if we wrote about the ruins of a homeland  
torn, weak ...  
a homeland with no address  
and an nation with no names

I seek the remnants of a homeland  
none of its grand poems is left  
except the bemoans of Khansa.

I seek a dominion in whose horizons  
no freedom can be found  
red .. blue or yellow.

A homeland forbidding us from bying a newspaper

or listening to the news.

A dominion wherein birds are forbidden  
from chirping.

A homeland wherein, out of terror [ru`b],  
its writers got accustomed to write about  
nothing.

A homeland, in the likeness of poetry in our lands:

It is vain talk,  
no rhythm,  
imported

Ajam, with a crooked face and tongue:

No beginning

No end

No relation with people's worry

mother earth

and the crisis of man.

A dominion ...

going to peace talks

with no honor

no shoe.

A homeland,

men peed in their pans ..

women are those left to defend honor.

Salt in our eyes

Salt in our lips

Salt in our words

Can the self carry such dryness?

An inheritance we got from the barren Qahtan?

In our nation, no Mu`awiya, and no Abu Sufiyan

No one is left to say 'NO'

and face the quitters

they gave up our houses, our bread and our [olive] oil.

They transformed our bright history into a mediocre store.

In our lives, no poem is left,

since we lost our chastity in the bed of the Sultan.

They got accustomed to us, the humbled.

What is left to man

when all that remains  
is disgrace.

I seek in the books of history  
Ussamah ibn al-Munqith  
Uqba ibn Nafi`  
Omar, and Hamzah  
and Khalid, driving his flocks conquering the Shem.  
I seek a Mu`tasim Billah  
Saving women from the cruelty of rape  
and the fire.

I seek latter days men  
All I can see is frightened cats  
Scared for their own souls, from  
the sultanship of mice.

Is this an overwhelming national blindness?  
Are we blind to colors?

We are accused of terrorism  
If we refuse to die  
with Israel's bulldozers  
tearing our land  
tearing our history  
tearing our Evangelium  
tearing our Koran  
tearing the graves of our prophets  
If this was our sin,  
then, lo, how beautiful terrorism is?

We are accused of terrorism  
if we refused to be effaced  
by the hands of the Mogul, Jews and Barbarians  
if we throw a stone  
at the glass of the the Security Council  
after the Ceasar of Ceasars got a hold of it.

We are accused of terrorism  
if we refuse to negotiate with the wolf  
and shake the hand with a whore  
America

Against the cultures of the peoples  
with no culture  
Against the civilizations of the civilized  
with no civilization  
America  
a mighty edifice  
with no walls!

We are accused of terrorism:  
if we refused an era  
America became  
the foolish, the rich, the mighty  
translated, sworn  
in Hebrew.

We are accused of terrorism:  
if we throw a rose  
to Jerusalem  
to al-Khalil  
to Ghazza  
to an-Nasirah  
if we took bread and water  
to beleaguered Troy.

We are accused of terrorism:  
if we raised our voices against  
the regionalists of our leaders.  
All changed their rides:  
from Unionists  
to Brokers.

If we committed the heinous crime of culture  
if we revolted against the orders of the grand caliph  
and the seat of the caliphate  
If we read jurisprudence or politics  
If we recalled God  
and read verse al-Fat-h  
[that Chapter of Conquest].  
If we listened to the Friday sermon  
then we are well-established in the art of terrorism

We are accused of terrorism

if we defended land  
and the honor of dust  
if we revolted against the rape of people  
and our rape  
if we defended the last palm trees in our desert  
the last stars in our sky  
the last syllabi of our names  
the last milk in our mothers' bosoms  
if this was our sin  
how beautiful is terrorism.

I am with terrorism  
if it is able to save me  
from the immigrants from Russia  
Romania, Hungaria, and Poland

They settled in Palestine  
set foot on our shoulders  
to steal the minarets of al-Quds  
and the door of Aqsa  
to steal the arabesques  
and the domes.

I am with terrorism  
if it will free the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth,  
and the virgin, Meriam Betula  
and the holy city  
from the ambassadors of death and desolation

Yesteryear  
The nationalist street was fervent  
like a wild horse.  
The rivers were abundant with the spirit of youth.

But after Olso,  
we no longer had teeth:  
we are now a blind and lost people.

We are accused of terrorism:  
if we defended with full-force  
our poetic heritage  
our national wall

our rosy civilization  
the culture of flutes in our mountains  
and the mirrors displaying blackened eyes.

We are accused of terrorism:  
if we defended what we wrote  
El azure of our sea  
and the aroma of ink  
if we defended the freedom of the word  
and the holiness of books

I am with terrorism  
if it is able to free a people  
from tyrants and tyranny  
if it is able to save man from the cruelty of man  
to return lemon, olive tree, and bird to the South of Lebanon  
and the smile back to Golan

I am with terrorism  
if it will save me  
from the Caesar of Yehuda  
and the Caesar of Rome

I am with terrorism  
as long as this new world order  
is shared  
between America and Israel  
half-half

I am with terrorism  
with all my poetry  
with all my words  
and all my teeth  
as long as this new world  
is in the hands of a butcher.

I am with terrorism  
if the U.S. Senate  
enacts judgment  
decrees reward and punishment

I am with Irhab [terrorism]

as long this new world order  
hates the smell of A`rab.

I am with terrorism  
as long as the new world order  
wants to slaughter my off-spring.  
and send them to dogs.

For all this  
I raise my voice high:  
I am with terrorism  
I am with terrorism  
I am with terrorism ...

Nizar Qabbani

# I Conquer The World With Words

I conquer the world with words,  
conquer the mother tongue,  
verbs, nouns, syntax.

I sweep away the beginning of things  
and with a new language  
that has the music of water the message of fire  
I light the coming age  
and stop time in your eyes  
and wipe away the line  
that separates  
time from this single moment.

Nizar Qabbani

# I Have No Power

'I have no power to change you  
or explain your ways  
Never believe a man can change a woman  
Those men are pretenders  
who think  
that they created woman  
from one of their ribs  
Woman does not emerge from a man's rib's, not ever,  
it's he who emerges from her womb  
like a fish rising from depths of water  
and like streams that branch away from a river  
It's he who circles the sun of her eyes  
and imagines he is fixed in place

I have no power to tame you  
or domesticate you  
or mitigate your first instincts  
This task is impossible  
I've tested my intelligence on you  
also my dumbness  
Nothing worked with you, neither guidance  
nor temptation  
Stay primitive as you are

I have no power to break your habits  
for thirty years you have been like this  
for three hundred years  
a storm trapping in a bottle  
a body by nature sensing the scent of a man  
assaults it by nature  
triumphs over it by nature

Never believe what a man says about himself  
that he is the one who makes the poems  
and makes the children  
It is the woman who writes the poems  
and the man who signs his name to them  
It is the woman who bears the children  
and the man who signs at the maternity hospital

that he is the father

I have no power to change your nature  
my books are of no use to you  
and my convictions do not convince you  
nor does my fatherly council do you any good  
you are the queen of anarchy, of madness, of belonging  
to no one  
Stay that way  
You are the tree of femininity that grows in the dark  
needs no sun or water  
you the sea princess who has loved all men  
and loved no one  
slept with all men... and slept with no one  
you are the Bedouin woman who went with all the tribes  
and returned a virgin  
Stay that way.'

Nizar Qabbani

# In The Summer

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

Submitted by Noele Aabye

Nizar Qabbani

# Jerusalem

I wept until my tears were dry  
I prayed until the candles flickered  
I knelt until the floor creaked  
I asked about Mohammed and Christ  
Oh Jerusalem, the fragrance of prophets  
The shortest path between earth and sky  
Oh Jerusalem, the citadel of laws  
A beautiful child with fingers charred  
and downcast eyes  
You are the shady oasis passed by the Prophet  
Your streets are melancholy  
Your minarets are mourning  
You, the young maiden dressed in black  
Who rings the bells in the Nativity  
On Saturday morning?  
Who brings toys for the children  
On Christmas eve?  
Oh Jerusalem, the city of sorrow  
A big tear wandering in the eye  
Who will halt the aggression  
On you, the pearl of religions?  
Who will wash your bloody walls?  
Who will safeguard the Bible?  
Who will rescue the Quran?  
Who will save Christ?  
Who will save man?  
Oh Jerusalem my town  
Oh Jerusalem my love  
Tomorrow the lemon trees will blossom  
And the olive trees will rejoice  
Your eyes will dance  
The migrant pigeons will return  
To your sacred roofs  
And your children will play again  
And fathers and sons will meet  
On your rosy hills  
My town  
The town of peace and olives.



# Jogging

We stood in columns  
like sheep before slaughter  
we ran, breathless  
We scrambled to kiss  
the shoes of the killers. . . .  
They stole Jesus the son of Mary  
while he was an infant still.  
They stole from us the memory of the orange trees  
and the apricots and the mint  
and the candles in the mosques.  
In our hands they left  
a sardine can called Gaza  
and a dry bone called Jericho.  
They left us a body with no bones  
A hand with no fingers.  
After this secret romance in Oslo  
we came out barren.  
They gave us a homeland  
smaller than a single grain of wheat  
a homeland to swallow without water  
like aspirin pills.  
Oh, we dreamed of a green peace  
and a white crescent  
and a blue sea.  
Now we find ourselves  
on a dung-heap.

Nizar Qabbani

# Language

When a man is in love  
how can he use old words?  
Should a woman  
desiring her lover  
lie down with  
grammarians and linguists?

I said nothing  
to the woman I loved  
but gathered  
love's adjectives into a suitcase  
and fled from all languages.

Nizar Qabbani

# Letter From Under The Sea

If you are my friend...  
Help me...to leave you  
Or if you are my lover...  
Help me...so I can be healed of you...  
If I knew....  
that the ocean is very deep...I would not have swam...  
If I knew...how I would end,  
I would not have began

I desire you...so teach me not to desire  
teach me...  
how to cut the roots of your love from the depths  
teach me...  
how tears may die in the eyes  
and love may commit suicide

If you are prophet,  
Cleanse me from this spell  
Deliver me from this atheism...  
Your love is like atheism...so purify me from this atheism

If you are strong...  
Rescue me from this ocean  
For I don't know how to swim  
The blue waves...in your eyes  
drag me...to the depths  
blue...  
blue...  
nothing but the color blue  
and I have no experience  
in love...and no boat...

If I am dear to you  
then take my hand  
For I am filled with desire...from my  
head to my feet

I am breathing under water!  
I am drowning...

drowning...  
drowning...

Nizar Qabbani

# Light Is More Important Than The Lantern

Light is more important than the lantern,  
The poem more important than the notebook,  
And the kiss more important than the lips.  
My letters to you  
Are greater and more important than both of us.  
They are the only documents  
Where people will discover  
Your beauty  
And my madness.

Translated by B. Frangieh And C. Brown

Submitted by Noele Aabye

Nizar Qabbani

# Love Compared

I do not resemble your other lovers, my lady  
should another give you a cloud  
I give you rain  
Should he give you a lantern, I  
will give you the moon  
Should he give you a branch  
I will give you the trees  
And if another gives you a ship  
I shall give you the journey.

Nizar Qabbani

# Maritime Poem

In the blue harbor of your eyes  
Blow rains of melodious lights,  
Dizzy suns and sails  
Painting their voyage to endlessness.

In the blue harbor of your eyes  
Is an open sea window,  
And birds appear in the distance  
Searching for islands still unborn.

In the blue harbor of your eyes  
Snow falls in July.  
Ships laden with turquoise  
Spill over the sea and are not drowned.

In the blue harbor of your eyes  
I run on the scattered rocks like a child  
Breathing the fragrance of the sea  
And return an exhausted bird.

In the blue harbor of your eyes  
Stones sing in the night.  
Who has hidden a thousand poems  
In the closed book of your eyes?

If only, if only I were a sailor,  
If only somebody'd give me a boat,  
I would furl my sails each evening  
In the blue harbor of your eyes.

Nizar Qabbani

# My Angry Cat

You're repeating yourself  
for the twentieth time.  
Is there another man in my life?  
Yes. Yes. What did you think?  
Even graveyards have visitors.  
There are, my dear sir,  
a lot of men out there,  
and no garden is ever devoid of birds.  
You're just an experience I had,  
and here I am,  
tired and bored from this experience,  
out from under your spell.  
I'm cured of all  
my weakness and gullibility.  
Niceties do, after all, always end.  
You love me!  
There you go again,  
dredging up all that ancient history.  
And since when did you ever show  
the slightest interest in me  
outside the contour of my hips?  
Where does this sudden gush of love come from?  
I was never anything more  
than a forsaken chair  
among your expensive furniture,  
a garden you chose to raze  
without shame or repentance.  
Why are you staring at my breasts  
as if you owned them?  
And why do you weep as if you  
stood before a lost kingdom?  
Your glorious kingdom, dear sir,  
has just crumbled.  
There. I've settled my score  
in an instant.  
You tell me now  
who's losing the game.  
I opened myself to you  
like the Garden of Eden,

gave you all the sweet fruit  
and green grass you desired.  
Today I offer you  
neither heaven nor hell.  
This is what you get  
for acting the ungrateful.  
You faithless. If you'd only treated me  
like a human being - just once -  
this other man wouldn't exist.

Nizar Qabbani

# My Lady

You were the most important woman in my history  
before the leaving of this year  
you're most important woman  
after the birth of this year  
you're a woman i can't count it with hours and days  
you're a woman made of the poetry nectar  
and from the Dreams' Gold  
you're a woman were living in my body  
before a million years

## My Lady

the one who was made of Cotton and Clouds  
the one who i can call her a Rain of Jewel  
and the River of Nahound  
and a Row forest  
the one who siwmmes in the water of my heart like a fish  
the one who lives in the eyes like a folk of pigeons  
nothing will change in my emotion  
nor my feelings  
not even in my heart or my faith  
because i'll stay in the islamic religion

## My Lady

do not care about the harmony of time  
nor about the name of the years  
you're a woman and you'll still as woman  
and in everytime  
i will still Love you  
when the 21 century enter  
and when the 25 century enter  
and when the 29 century enter  
and I will Love you  
when the seas dries  
and the forst burns

Nizar Qabbani

## My Love (Do Not Ask Me)

Do not ask me, the name of my love  
I fear for you, from the fragrance of perfume  
contained in a bottle, if you smashed it,  
drowning you, in spilled scent

By God, if you even croaked a letter,  
Lilacs would pile up on the paths

Do not look for it here in my chest  
I have left it to run with the sunset

You can see it in the laughter of doves  
In the flutter of butterflies  
In the ocean, in the breathing of dales  
and in the song of every nightingale  
in the tears of winter, when winter cries  
in the giving of a generous cloud

Do not ask about his lips...as elegant as the sunset  
And his eyes, a shore of purity  
And his waist, the sway of a branch  
Charms...which no book has contained  
Nor described by a literate's feather  
And his chest, his throat, enough for you

I won't breath his name, my lover...

Nizar Qabbani

# My Lover Asks Me

My lover asks me:

"What is the difference between me and the sky?"

The difference, my love,

Is that when you laugh,

I forget about the sky.

Translated by B. Frangieh And C. Brown

Submitted by Noele Aabye

Nizar Qabbani

# Oh, My Love

Oh, my love  
If you were at the level of my madness,  
You would cast away your jewelry,  
Sell all your bracelets,  
And sleep in my eyes.

Translated by B. Frangieh And C. Brown

Submitted by Noele Aabye

Nizar Qabbani

# On Entering The Sea

Love happened at last,  
And we entered God's paradise,  
Sliding  
Under the skin of the water  
Like fish.  
We saw the precious pearls of the sea  
And were amazed.  
Love happened at last  
Without intimidation...with symmetry of wish.  
So I gave...and you gave  
And we were fair.  
It happened with marvelous ease  
Like writing with jasmine water,  
Like a spring flowing from the ground.

Nizar Qabbani

## Raise Me More Love...

raise me more love... raise me  
my prettiest fits of madness  
O' dagger's journey... in my flesh  
and knife's plunge...  
sink me further my lady...  
the sea calls me  
add to me more death ...  
perhaps as death slays me... I'm revived  
your body is my map...  
the world's map no longer concerns me...  
I am the oldest capital of sadness...  
and my wound a Pharaonic engraving  
my pain... extends like an oil patch  
from Beirut... to China...  
my pain... a caravan...dispatched  
by the Caliphs of 'A'Chaam'... to China...  
in the seventh century of the 'Birth'...  
and lost in a dragon's mouth...  
bird of my heart... 'naysani'  
O' sand of the sea, and forests of olives  
O' taste of snow, and taste of fire...  
my heathen flavor, and insight  
I feel scared of the unknown... shelter me  
I feel scared of the darkness... embrace me  
I feel cold... cover me up  
tell me children stories...  
rest beside me...  
Chant to me...  
since from the start of creation  
I've been searching for a homeland to my forehead...  
for a woman's hair...  
that writes me on the walls... then erases me...  
for a woman's love... to take me  
to the borders of the sun... and throws me...  
from a woman's lip... as she makes me  
like dust of powdered gold...  
shine of my life. my fan  
my lantern. declaration of my orchards  
stretch me a bridge with the scent of oranges...

and place me like an ivory comb...  
in the darkness of your hair... then forget me  
I am a drop of water... ambivalent  
remaining in the notebook of October  
your love crushes me...  
like a mad horse from the Caucasus throwing me under its hoofs...  
and gargles with the water of my eyes...  
add to me more fury... add to me  
O' prettiest fits of my madness  
for your sake I set free my women  
and effaced my birth certificate  
and cut all my arteries...

Nizar Qabbani

# School Of Love

Your love taught me how to grieve,  
And for centuries I needed a woman to make me grieve,  
I needed a woman  
To make me cry on her shoulders like a bird,  
I needed a woman to collect my pieces like broken glass.  
Oh my lady, your love taught me the worst of my habits,  
It taught me how to drink coffee a thousand times every night,  
It taught me how to visit doctors and ask soothsayers,  
It taught me to go out to scan the streets,  
To seek your face in the rain and in the lights,  
To chase your shadow in the faces of strangers,  
To hunt your aura even in the newspapers!  
Your love showed me the sadness city,  
Which I have never entered ere you,  
I have never known that the tear is humane,

And the human without tears is just a memory!  
Your love taught me  
How to draw your face on the walls with chalk like kids,  
It taught me how love can change the map of times,  
It taught me that when I love,  
The earth stands still!  
Your love showed me what hallucination is,  
It taught me how to love you in every little thing,  
In the bare, autumn trees,  
In the falling, yellow leaves,  
In the rain,  
In every cafeteria in which we drank our black coffee,  
My lady, your love taught me to sleep in nameless hotels,  
And to sit by nameless shores,  
It taught me to weep without tears,  
Your love taught me how to grieve,  
And for centuries I needed a woman to make me grieve,  
I needed a woman  
To make me cry on her shoulders like a bird,  
I needed a woman to collect my pieces like broken glass,

Nizar Qabbani

# Sultan

If I were promised safety,  
if I could meet the Sultan  
I would say to him: O my lord the Sultan!  
my cloak has been torn by your ravenous dogs,  
your spies are following me all the time.  
Their eyes  
their noses  
their feet are chasing me  
like destiny, like fate  
They interrogate my wife  
and write down all the names of my friends.  
O Sultan!  
Because I dare to approach your deaf walls,  
because I tried to reveal my sadness and  
tribulation,  
I was beaten with my shoes.  
O my lord the Sultan!  
you have lost the war twice  
because half our people  
has no tongue.

Nizar Qabbani

# The Child Scribbles

My fault, my greatest fault,  
O sea-eyed princess,  
was to love you  
as a child loves.

The greatest lovers,  
after all, are children  
My first mistake  
and not my last  
was to live  
in the taste of wonder  
ready to be amazed  
by the simple span  
of night and day,

and ready for every woman  
I loved to break me  
into a thousand pieces to make  
me an open city,  
and to leave me behind her  
as dust.

My weakness was to see  
the world with the logic of a child.

And my mistake was dragging  
love out of its cave into the open air,  
making my breast  
an open church for all lovers.

Nizar Qabbani

# The Epic Of Sadness

Your love taught me to grieve  
and I have been in need, for centuries  
a woman to make me grieve  
for a woman, to cry upon her arms  
like a sparrow  
for a woman to gather my pieces  
like shards of broken crystal

Your love has taught me, my lady, the worst habits  
it has taught me to read my coffee cups  
thousands of times a night  
to experiment with alchemy,  
to visit fortune tellers

It has taught me to leave my house  
to comb the sidewalks  
and search your face in raindrops  
and in car lights  
and to peruse your clothes  
in the clothes of unknowns  
and to search for your image  
even.....even.....  
even in the posters of advertisements  
your love has taught me  
to wander around, for hours  
searching for a gypsies hair  
that all gypsies women will envy  
searching for a face, for a voice  
which is all the faces and all the voices...

Your love entered me...my lady  
into the cities of sadness  
and I before you, never entered  
the cities of sadness  
I did not know...  
that tears are the person  
that a person without sadness  
is only a shadow of a person...

Your love taught me  
to behave like a boy  
to draw your face with chalk  
upon the wall  
upon the sails of fishermen's boats  
on the Church bells, on the crucifixes,  
your love taught me, how love,  
changes the map of time...  
Your love taught me, that when I love  
the earth stops revolving,  
Your love taught me things  
that were never accounted for  
So I read children's fairytales  
I entered the castles of Jennies  
and I dreamt that she would marry me  
the Sultan's daughter  
those eyes..  
clearer than the water of a lagoon  
those lips...  
more desirable than the flower of pomegranates  
and I dreamt that I would kidnap her like a knight and I dreamt that I would give  
her necklaces of pearl and coral  
Your love taught me, my lady,  
what is insanity  
it taught me...how life may pass  
without the Sultan's daughter arriving

Your love taught me  
How to love you in all things  
in a bare winter tree,  
in dry yellow leaves  
in the rain, in a tempest,  
in the smallest cafe, we drank in,  
in the evenings...our black coffee

Your love taught me...to seek refuge  
to seek refuge in hotels without names  
in churches without names...  
in cafes without names...

Your love taught me...how the night  
swells the sadness of strangers

It taught me...how to see Beirut  
as a woman...a tyrant of temptation  
as a woman, wearing every evening  
the most beautiful clothing she possesses  
and sprinkling upon her breasts perfume  
for the fisherman, and the princes  
Your love taught me how to cry without crying  
It taught me how sadness sleeps  
Like a boy with his feet cut off  
in the streets of the Rouche and the Hamra

Your love taught me to grieve  
and I have been needing, for centuries  
a woman to make me grieve  
for a woman, to cry upon her arms  
like a sparrow  
for a woman to gather my pieces  
like shards of broken crystal

Nizar Qabbani

# The Face Of Qana

The face of Qana  
Pale, like that of Jesus  
and the sea breeze of April...  
Rains of blood.. and tears..  
2

They entered Qana stepping on our charred bodies  
Raising a Nazi flag  
in the lands of the South  
and rehearsing its stormy chapters  
Hitler cremated them in the gas chambers  
and they came after him to burn us  
Hitler kicked them out of Eastern Europe  
and they kicked us out of our lands  
3

They entered Qana  
Like hungry wolves  
Putting to fire the house of the Messiah  
Stepping on the dress of Hussain  
and the dear land of the South  
4

Blasted Wheat, Olive-trees and Tobacco  
and the melodies of the nightingale  
Blasted Cadmus in his bark  
Blasted sea and the gulls  
Blasted even hospitals  
even nursing moms  
and schoolboys  
Blasted the beauty of the Southern women  
and murdered the gardens of the honeyed eyes  
5

We saw the tears in Ali's eyes  
We heard his voice as he prayed  
under the rain of bloody skies  
6

Who ever will write about the history of Qana  
Will inscribe in his parchments  
This was the second Karbala  
7

Qana unveiled what was hidden  
We saw America  
Wearing the old coat of a Jewish Rabbi  
Leading the slaughter  
Blasting our children for no reason  
Blasting our wives for no reason  
Blasting our trees for no reason  
Blasting our thoughts for no reason  
Has it been decreed in her constitution,  
She, America, mistress of the world,  
In Hebrew .. that she should humble us al-Arab?  
8

Has it been decreed that each time a ruler in America  
wants to win the presidency that he should kill us ..  
We al Arab?  
9

We waited for one Arab to come  
pull this thorny prick from our necks  
We waited for single Qureishite  
A single Hashemite  
A single Don Quixote  
A single local hero, for whom they did not shave the moustache  
We waited for a Khalid .. Tariq .. or Antara  
We were eaten chatter (while engaged in vain talk)  
They sent a fax  
We read its text  
after paying tribute  
and the end of the slaughter  
10

What does Israel fear from our cries?  
What does she fear from our faxes?  
The Jihad of the fax is the weakest of Jihads  
It is a single text we write  
for all the martyrs who left

and all the martyrs those who will come

11

What does Israel fear from Ibn al-Muqaffa'?

Jarir and .. Farazdaq?

And Khansa throwing her poems at the gates of the cemetery

What does she fear if we burn tires

Sign communiqués

And destroy shops

And she knows that we have never been kings of war

But were kings of chatters

12

What does Israel fear

from the beating of the drums

the tearing of clothes

and the scratching of cheeks

What does she fear

when she hears

the stories of `Ad and Thamud?

13

We are in national comma

We did not receive

Since the times of conquest

a single mail

14

We are a people of made of dough

The more Israel increases in her killing and terrorism

the more we increase in idleness and coldness

15

A Smothering Dominion

A regional dialect that increases in ugliness

and a green union that grows in isolation

Summer trees, growing barren

And borders .. whenever the whim strikes

erase other borders

16

Israel should slaughter us, and why not?

She should erase Hisham, Ziyad and ar-Rashid, and why not?  
[Why not?] and the Banu Taghlab lusting after their women  
[Why not?] and Banu Mazen lusting after their slave boys  
[Why not?] and Banu Adnan dropping their trousers to their knees  
debating .. necking and .. the lips!  
17

What should Israel fear from some of al-Arab  
When they became Yehuda???

Nizar Qabbani

# The Fortune Teller

She sat with fear in her eyes  
Contemplating the upturned cup  
She said 'Do not be sad, my son  
You are destined to fall in love'  
My son, Who sacrifices himself for his beloved,  
Is a martyr

\*

For long have I studied fortune-telling  
But never have I read a cup similar to yours  
For long have I studied fortune-telling  
But never have I seen sorrows similar to yours  
You are predestined to sail forever  
Sail-less, on the sea of love  
Your life is forever destined  
To be a book of tears  
And be imprisoned  
Between water and fire

\*

But despite all its pains,  
Despite the sadness  
That is with us day and night  
Despite the wind  
The rainy weather  
And the cyclone  
It is love, my son  
That will be forever the best of fates

\*

There is a woman in your life, my son  
Her eyes are so beautiful  
Glory to God  
Her mouth and her laughter  
Are full of roses and melodies  
And her gypsy and crazy love of life  
Travels the world  
The woman you love  
May be your whole world

But your sky will be rain-filled  
Your road blocked, blocked, my son  
Your beloved, my son, is sleeping  
In a guarded palace  
He who approaches her garden wall  
Who enters her room  
And who proposes to her  
Or tries to unite her plaits  
Will cause her to be lost, my son...lost

\*

You will seek her everywhere, my son  
You will ask the waves of the sea about her  
You will ask the shores of the seas  
You will travel the oceans  
And your tears will flow like a river  
And at the close of your life  
You will find that since your beloved  
Has no land, no home, no address  
You have been pursuing only a trace of smoke  
How difficult it is, my son  
To love a woman  
Who has neither land, nor home

Nizar Qabbani

# The Hasteners

The last walls of shame fell,  
And we rejoiced...  
And we danced...  
And we were blessed with the signing of the peace of the cowards...  
Nothing terrifies us any more.  
And nothing shames us.  
For the veins of pride have dried within us.

Fell...  
-For the fiftieth time-our virginity...  
Without being shaken...or crying...  
Or being terrified with the sight of blood...  
We entered the age of haste...  
And stood in lines, like sheep before the guillotine  
We ran...and panted..  
And raced to kiss the boots of the murderers..

For fifty years they starved our children  
And at the end of the fast, they threw to us...  
An onion..

Grenada fell  
-For the fiftieth time-  
From the Arabs' hands.  
History fell from the Arabs' hands.  
The pillars of the spirit fell...and the branches of the tribe...  
All the songs of heroism fell...  
Seville fell...  
Antioch fell...  
`Ammoriah fell.  
Hittin fell without a fight.  
Mary fell in the hands of the militias  
And there is no man to rescue the heavenly symbol  
And there is no manliness...

The last of our favorites fell  
In the hands of the Romans, then what are we defending?  
Not a single concubine remains in our palace...  
Who makes coffee... and sex...  
Then what are we defending??

No more remains in our hands...  
A single Andulus that we possess.  
They stole the doors,  
And the walls,  
And the wives, and the children,  
And the olives, and the oil,  
And the streets' cobbles.  
They stole Jesus, son of Mary,  
While he was still a suckling.  
They stole from us the memory of the lemons...  
And the apricots... and the mint.  
And the lanterns of the mosques...

They left in our hands a can of sardines  
Named (Gaza)...  
A dried bone called (Jericho)  
An inn called Palestine,  
Without a roof and without pillars...  
They left us a body without bones  
And a hand without fingers...

There remain no ruins over which we cry  
How can a nation cry...  
From whom they took away the tears??

After this secret flirtation, in Oslo  
We came out barren...  
They granted us a homeland smaller than a grain of wheat...  
A homeland we swallow without water  
Like pills of aspirin!!...

After fifty years...  
We sit now, on the destroyed land.  
We have no shelter... like thousands of dogs!!...

After fifty years...  
We do not find a homeland to dwell in  
Except the mirage.  
It is not a reconciliation...  
That reconciliation which, like a dagger, was thrust into us...  
It is an act of rape!!..

What use is the haste?  
What use is the haste?  
When the conscience of the people remains alive  
Like the fuse of a bomb...  
All the signatures of Oslo will not equal  
A mustard seed!!...

How we dreamed of a green peace.  
And a white crescent.  
And a blue sea.  
And spread sails...  
And all of a sudden we found ourselves  
In a dung heap!!..

Who will ask them  
About the peace of the cowards??  
Not the peace of the strong and able.  
Who will ask them??  
About the peace of selling by installments,  
And renting by installments...  
And the deals...  
And the merchants... and the exploiters?  
Who will ask them?  
About the peace of the dead...  
They silenced the street...  
And assassinated all questions...  
And all the questioners...

And we were married without love...  
To the female who one day ate our children...  
And chewed our livers...  
We took her on a honeymoon.  
And we drank... and we danced...  
And we remembered all that we retain of the love poetry.  
Then we begot-unfortunately-retarded children  
They have the form of frogs...  
And we were expelled to the sidewalks of sorrow,  
without a country to embrace...  
Or a child!!

There was no Arab dancing at the wedding  
Or Arab food.  
Or Arab singing.  
Or Arab shame  
The sons of the country were absent from the wedding parade.

Half of the dowry was in dollars...  
The diamond ring was in dollars...  
The court clerk's fee was in dollars...  
The wedding cake was a gift from America...  
And the wedding spread, and the flowers, and the candles,  
And the Marines' music...  
All were made in America.

The wedding was finished... and Palestine was not present at the  
rejoicing.  
But she saw her picture broadcasted over all channels...  
And saw her tear traversing the ocean's waves...  
Towards Chicago... and Jersey... and Miami  
While like a slaughtered bird she cried  
This wedding is not my wedding...  
This dress is not my dress...  
This shame is not my shame...  
Never... America...  
Never... America...

Never... America...

Nizar Qabbani

# The Trial

The East receives my songs, some praise, some curse  
To each of them my gratitude I bear  
For I've avenged the blood of each slain woman  
and haven offered her who is in fear.

Woman's rebellious heart I have supported  
ready to pay the prize - content to die  
if love should slay me, for I am love's champion  
and if I ceased, then I would not be I.

Nizar Qabbani

# The Wrathful

O pupils of Gaza . .  
Teach us . . .  
A little of what you have  
For we have forgotten . . .  
Teach us . .  
To be men  
For we have men . .  
dough they become . . .  
Teach us . .  
How the rocks become  
in the children's hands,  
precious diamond . .  
How it becomes  
The child's bicycle, a mine  
And the silk ribbon . .  
An ambush . .  
How the feeding bottle nipple . .  
If detained not  
Turns into a knife . . . .  
O pupils of Gaza  
Care not . .  
about our broadcasts . .  
And hear us not . .  
Strike . .  
Strike . . .  
With all your powers  
And firmly in your hands take matters  
And ask us not . .  
We the people of arithmetic . .  
And of addition . .  
And of subtraction . .  
Your wars do carry on  
And abstain from us . .  
We're the deserters  
from the service,  
Your ropes do bring  
And hang us . . .  
We're mortals . .  
Who possess not tombs

And orphans . .  
who possess not masters  
We kept already to our rooms . .  
And we asked you  
To fight the dragon . .  
We've diminished, before you  
A thousand century . .  
And you've grown  
-Within a month-Centuries . .  
O pupils of Gaza . .  
Return not . .  
To our writings . .  
And read us not..  
We're your fathers . .  
Do resemble us not . .  
We're your idols . .  
Do worship us not . .  
We engage in  
Political lies . .  
And repression . .  
And we build graves . .  
And jails . .  
Liberate us . .  
From the fear problem in us . .  
And expel  
The opium from our heads . .  
Teach us . .  
The art of adherence to the Land,  
And leave not . .  
The Messiah saddened . .  
O our beloved children  
Salam . .  
May Allah render your day  
Jasmine . . .  
From the cracks of ruined earth  
You emerged forth  
And planted in our wound  
Musk rose . .  
This is the revolution of notebooks . .  
And ink . .  
Do become on the lips  
melodies . .

Shower us . .  
Heroism, and pride  
And from our ugliness wash us  
Wash us . .  
Fear neither Moses. .  
Nor Moses' spell . .  
And ready yourself  
To harvest the olives  
Verily this Jewish age  
is an illusion . .  
That shall collapse . .  
Albeit sureness we possess . . .  
O madmen of Gaza . .  
A thousand welcome . . .  
in madmen,  
If they liberate us  
Verily the age of political reason  
has long bygone . . .  
Do teach us madness . . .

Nizar Qabbani

## Two African Breasts

Let me find time  
to welcome in this love  
that comes unbid.  
Let me find time  
to memorize  
this face that rises  
out of the trees  
of forgetfulness.  
Give me the time  
to escape this love  
that stops my blood.  
Let me find time  
to recognize your name,  
my name,  
and the place  
where I was born.  
Let me find time  
to know where I shall die  
and how I will revive, as  
a bird inside your eyes.  
Let me find time  
to study the state of winds  
and waves, to learn the maps  
of bays. . .

Woman, who lodges  
inside the future  
pepper and pomegranate-seeds,  
give me a country  
to make me forget all countries,  
and give me time  
to avoid this Andalusian face,  
this Andalusian voice,  
this Andalusian death  
coming from all directions.  
Let me find time to prophesy  
the coming of the flood.

Woman, who was inscribed

in books of magic,  
before you came  
the world was prose.  
Now poetry is born.  
Give me the time to catch  
the colt that runs toward me,  
your breast.  
The dot over a line.  
A bedouin breast, sweet  
as cardamom seeds  
as coffee brewing over embers,  
its form ancient as Damascene brass  
as Egyptian temples.

Let me find luck  
to pick the fish that swim  
under the waters.

Your feet on the carpet  
are the shape and stance  
of poetry.

Let me find the luck  
to know the dividing line  
between the certainty  
of love and heresy.  
Give me the opportunity  
to be convinced I have seen  
the star, and have been spoken to  
by saints.

Woman, whose thighs are like  
the desert palm where golden  
dates fall from,  
your breasts speak seven tongues  
and I was made to listen  
to them all.  
Give me the chance  
to avoid this storm,  
this sweeping love,  
this wintry air, and to be convinced,  
to blaspheme, and to enter

the flesh of things.  
Give me the chance  
to be the one  
to walk on water.

Nizar Qabbani

# Verse

Friends

The old word is dead.

The old books are dead.

Our speech with holes like worn-out shoes is dead.

Dead is the mind that led to defeat.

2

Our poetry has gone sour.

Women's hair, nights, curtains and sofas

Have gone sour.

Everything has gone sour.

3

My grieved country,

In a flash

You changed me from a poet who wrote love poems

To a poet who writes with a knife

4

What we feel is beyond words:

We should be ashamed of our poems.

5

Stirred by Oriental bombast,

By boastful swaggering that never killed a fly,

By the fiddle and the drum,

We went to war,

And lost.

6

Our shouting is louder than our actions,

Our swords are taller than us,

This is our tragedy.

7

In short

We wear the cape of civilisation

But our souls live in the stone age

8

You dont win a war  
With a reed and a flute.

9

Our impatience  
Cost us fifty thousand new tents.

10

Dont curse heaven  
If it abandons you,  
Dont curse circumstances,  
God gives victory to whom He wishes  
God is not a blacksmith to beat swords.

11

It's painful to listen to the news in the morning  
It's painful to listen to the barking of dogs.

12

Our enemies did not cross our borders  
They crept through our weaknesses like ants.

13

Five thousand years  
Growing beards  
In our caves.  
Our currency is unknown,  
Our eyes are a haven for flies.  
Friends,  
Smash the doors,  
Wash your brains,  
Wash your clothes.  
Friends,  
Read a book,  
Write a book,  
Grow words, pomegranates and grapes,  
Sail to the country of fog and snow.  
Nobody knows you exist in caves.  
People take you for a breed of mongrels.

14

We are a thick-skinned people  
With empty souls.  
We spend our days practicing witchcraft,  
Playing chess and sleeping.  
Are we the 'Nation by which God blessed mankind'?

15

Our desert oil could have become  
Daggers of flame and fire.  
We're a disgrace to our noble ancestors:  
We let our oil flow through the toes of whores.

16

We run wildly through the streets  
Dragging people with ropes,  
Smashing windows and locks.  
We praise like frogs,  
Turn midgets into heroes,  
And heroes into scum:  
We never stop and think.  
In mosques  
We crouch idly,  
Write poems,  
Proverbs,  
Beg God for victory  
Over our enemy

17

If i knew I'd come to no harm,  
And could see the Sultan,  
This is what i would say:  
'Sultan,  
Your wild dogs have torn my clothes  
Your spies hound me  
Their eyes hound me  
Their noses hound me  
Their feet hound me  
They hound me like Fate  
Interrogate my wife  
And take down the name of my friends.  
Sultan,  
When I came close to your walls

and talked about my pains,  
Your soldiers beat me with their boots,  
Forced me to eat my shoes.  
Sultan,  
You lost two wars,  
Sultan,  
Half of our people are without tongues,  
What's the use of a people without tongues?  
Half of our people  
Are trapped like ants and rats  
Between walls.'  
If i knew I'd come to no harm  
I'd tell him:  
'You lost two wars  
You lost touch with children.'

18

If we hadn't buried our unity  
If we hadn't ripped its young body with bayonets  
If it had stayed in our eyes  
The dogs wouldn't have savaged our flesh.

19

We do not want an angry generation  
To plough the sky  
To blow up history  
To blow up our thoughts.  
We want a new generation  
That does not forgive mistakes  
That does not bend.  
We want a generation of giants.

20

Arab children,  
Corn ears of the future,  
You will break our chains,  
Kill the opium in our heads,  
Kill the illusions.  
Arab children,  
Don't read about our suffocated generation,  
We are a hopeless case.  
We are as worthless as a water-melon rind.

Dont read about us,  
Dont ape us,  
Dont accept us,  
Dont accept our ideas,  
We are a nation of crooks and jugglers.  
Arab children,  
Spring rain,  
Corn ears of the future,  
You are the generation  
That will overcome defeat.

Nizar Qabbani

# We Are Accused Of Terrorism

We are accused of terrorism  
If we dare to write about the remains of a homeland  
That is scattered in pieces and in decay  
In decadence and disarray  
About a homeland that is searching for a place  
And about a nation that no longer has a face

About a homeland that has nothing left of its great ancient verse  
But that of wailing and eulogy

About a homeland that has nothing in its horizons  
Of freedoms of different types and ideology

About a homeland that forbids us from buying a newspaper  
Or listen to anything  
About a homeland where all birds are always not allowed to sing  
About a homeland that out of horror, its writers are using invisible ink

About a homeland that resembles poetry in our country  
Improvised, imported, loose and of no boundaries  
Of foreign tongue and soul  
Detached from Man and Land, ignoring their plight as a whole

About a homeland to the negotiating table moves  
Without a dignity or shoes

About a homeland  
That no more has steadfast men  
With only women therein

Bitterness is in our mouths□ our talk□ our eyes  
Will draught also plague our souls as a legacy passed to us  
from ancient times?

Our nation has nobody left, even the less glorified  
No one to say 'NO' in the face of those who gave up our  
home□ bread and butter  
Turning our colorful history into a circus

We have not a single honest poem  
That has not lost its virginity in a ruler's Harem

We grew accustomed to humiliation  
Then what is left of Man  
If he is comfortable with that?

I search the books of history  
For men of greatness to deliver us from darkness  
To save our women from fires' brutality

I search for men of yesterday  
But all I find is frightened cats  
Fearing for their souls  
From the authority of rats

Are we hit by national blindness  
Or are we suffering from color blindness

We are accused of terrorism  
If we refuse to perish  
Under Israeli tyranny  
That is hampering our unity  
Our history  
Our Bible and our Quran  
Our prophets' land  
If that is our sin and crime  
Then terrorism is fine

We are accused of terrorism  
If we refuse to be wiped out  
By barbarians, the Mongols or the Jews  
If we choose to stone the fragile security council  
Which was sacked by the king of caesuras

We are accused of terrorism  
If we refuse to negotiate the wolf  
And reach out for a whore

America is fighting the cultures of Man  
Because it lacks one  
And against the civilizations because it needs one

It is a gigantic structure but without a wall

We are accused of terrorism

If we refuse current times

Where America the arrogant the mighty the rich

Became a sworn interpreter of Hebrew.

Nizar Qabbani

# When I Love

When I love  
I feel that I am the king of time  
I possess the earth and everything on it  
and ride into the sun upon my horse.

When I love  
I become liquid light  
invisible to the eye  
and the poems in my notebooks  
become fields of mimosa and poppy.

When I love  
the water gushes from my fingers  
grass grows on my tongue  
when I love  
I become time outside all time.

When I love a woman  
all the trees  
run barefoot toward me...

Nizar Qabbani

# When I Love You

When I love you  
A new language springs up,  
New cities, new countries discovered.  
The hours breathe like puppies,  
Wheat grows between the pages of books,  
Birds fly from your eyes with tiding of honey,  
Caravans ride from your breasts carrying Indian herbs,  
The mangoes fall all around, the forests catch fire  
And Nubian drums beat.

When I love you your breasts shake off their shame,  
Turn into lightning and thunder, a sword, a sandy storm.  
When I love you the Arab cities leap up and demonstrate  
Against the ages of repression  
And the ages  
Of revenge against the laws of the tribe.  
And I, when I love you,  
March against ugliness,  
Against the kings of salt,  
Against the institutionalization of the desert.  
And I shall continue to love you until the world flood arrives;  
I shall continue to love you until the world flood arrives.

Nizar Qabbani

# Words

He lets me listen, when he moves me,  
Words are not like other words  
He takes me, from under my arms  
He plants me, in a distant cloud  
And the black rain in my eyes  
Falls in torrents, torrents  
He carries me with him, he carries me  
To an evening of perfumed balconies

And I am like a child in his hands  
Like a feather carried by the wind  
He carries for me seven moons in his hands  
and a bundle of songs  
He gives me sun, he gives me summer  
and flocks of swallows  
He tells me that I am his treasure  
And that I am equal to thousands of stars  
And that I am treasure, and that I am  
more beautiful than he has seen of paintings  
He tells me things that make me dizzy  
that make me forget the dance and the steps

Words...which overturn my history  
which make me a woman...in seconds  
He builds castles of fantasies  
which I live in...for seconds...  
And I return...I return to my table  
Nothing with me...  
Nothing with me...except words

Nizar Qabbani

# Your Body Is My Map

Raise me more love... raise me  
my prettiest fits of madness  
O' dagger's journey... in my flesh  
and knife's plunge...  
sink me further my lady...  
the sea calls me  
add to me more death ...  
perhaps as death slays me... I'm revived  
your body is my map...  
the world's map no longer concerns me...  
I am the oldest capital of sadness...  
and my wound a Pharaonic engraving  
my pain... extends like an oil patch  
from Beirut... to China...  
my pain... a caravan...dispatched  
by the Caliphs of 'A'Chaam'... to China...  
in the seventh century of the 'Birth'...  
and lost in a dragon's mouth...  
bird of my heart... 'naysani'  
O' sand of the sea, and forests of olives  
O' taste of snow, and taste of fire...  
my heathen flavor, and insight  
I feel scared of the unknown... shelter me  
I feel scared of the darkness... embrace me  
I feel cold... cover me up  
tell me children stories...  
rest beside me...  
Chant to me...  
since from the start of creation  
I've been searching for a homeland to my forehead...  
for a woman's hair...  
that writes me on the walls... then erases me...  
for a woman's love... to take me  
to the borders of the sun... and throws me...  
from a woman's lip... as she makes me  
like dust of powdered gold...  
shine of my life. my fan  
my lantern. declaration of my orchards  
stretch me a bridge with the scent of oranges...

and place me like an ivory comb...  
in the darkness of your hair... then forget me  
I am a drop of water... ambivalent  
remaining in the notebook of October  
your love crushes me...  
like a mad horse from the Caucasus throwing me under its hoofs...  
and gargles with the water of my eyes...  
add to me more fury... add to me  
O' prettiest fits of my madness  
for your sake I set free my women  
and effaced my birth certificate  
and cut all my arteries...

Nizar Qabbani