

Arab Apocalypse

As the twentieth century comes to a close, the voice of Etel Adnan continues to speak the prophetic visions of legendary women shut out by men at history's dawn. In the tradition of Zarqa' al-Yamama of pre-Islamic Arabia, and of Cassandra in Greek mythology, Adnan's poetic premonitions and indignant outcries against injustice seem to be doomed to fall short of reaching the ears of the Arabs she most pointedly addresses in her poetry.

Adnan writes in both English and French, and is rarely read in the language of her native land. She is the "internal exile" par excellence. Born in Beirut, she had mourned her country's descent into hell long before news dispatches began to relate the brutal details of Lebanon's national calamity. *The Arab Apocalypse* (Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1989) represents the 59-stanza concluding sequel to a trilogy of long poems. *Jebu* and *Beirut Hell-Express* both appeared in 1973; *Apocalypse* first appeared in French in 1980. In this trilogy, the power of Adnan's language and imagery reminds us that she is indeed one of the most significant post-modern poets in contemporary Arab culture. Perhaps, just as Allen Ginsburg's *Howl* had once been the lightning rod that captured the collective fire of an entire generation of Americans, Adnan's *Arab Apocalypse* may well stand as the poetic mirror of the sensibilities of a generation of Arab exiles.

The following stanzas (XXXI, XXXII, XXXIII), reproduced here by kind permission of the poet, give us a flashing glimpse of Adnan's vision.

—*Kamal Boullata*

Pontiac Faysal Pontiac Faysal Pontiac Faysal Pontiac Faysal Pontiac
 the sun drank the victory pissed it out in the Mississippi
 warm seas are full of rotten algae and woolly birds

red is the sun at sunset as at sunrise and bitter
a yellow lemon between its teeth and its phallus exposed
the young king of Arabia is bathing in oil
his mouth is shiny and black his teeth sink in petroleum
his eyes are becoming blind inch by inch like distorted suns
the sea is a belly dilated to receive the stillborn
Indians and Arabs give battle backwards backwards
Gold powder covers the fighters betrayed by their own
There is in every tribe a gold-thirsty traitor
There is in every Arab a traitor thirsting for the West
Pontiac and Faysal hand in hand sleep in the sunset
the last king of the humiliated races remains lain on the horizon

The Arabs' sun is a perennial atom bomb drinking milk sadistic tubercular
with its fingers sewn the sun caresses the Euphrates
It runs and multiplies from the Atlantic to the Gulf to smash a blade of
grass

a tattooed sun eats the hand that helps it to rise
It hurries from Baghdad to Beirut to rip up 8,000 horses
on the pine forests a sickly sun drops pesticides
it hunts the gazelle from a motorcycle
a rachitic sun marries the Bedu woman to beget a deformed child
It goes to sea to only decimate blue sharks
a sun ball of smoke puts harbor after harbor on fire STOP black smoke
It eats up wheat silos in front of hungry mouths
a cholera-stricken sun moves in the Camp's labyrinth
it tortured the Palestinian fighters already gunned down on a bed of dirt
a sun filled with glory drinks the shantytowns' sewers STOP FULLSTOP
it pretends to be king and whips improbable slaves
...a faltering sun implores the Mountain
a venomous sun buys jewelry in the Great Capitals

It escorts a herd of beggars to the Friday prayers, dismembers Syria
a sun gone insane chases its tail on the Market Place
The sun dips into an eclipse and crepuscular gloom

Oh no! the amorous storm sets in the West
the sun sings by candlelight the sad victory laid out on the slabs

a man has died in Beirut a woman too
it's their first night of rest in a long time
Tecumtha Indian warrior climbs on Mount Arafat
6,000 men 100 tanks decimate the Companions of the Resistance
Oh how cold is the ground in full summer when it is watered with blood!
Jisr al-Basha got ready for the Revelation Tell Zaatar perfumed with
flowers
a young man and his beloved die hand in hand
the bride is welcomed by the sun the moon covers the adolescent with
praise
they sleep together on their bed riddled with bullets for ever! for ever!