

## **In Tribute to the Kuwaiti Poet Ali Al-Sabti**

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Ali Hussein Al-Sabti (1935-2021) helped originate the Writers Association in 1964. He was a poet, writer, and critic, and is considered one of the prominent Kuwaiti poets who established the modern poetry movement. He held the position of general manager of a private institution and worked as editor-in-chief of *Kuwaiti Al-Yaqatha* magazine for many years. Al-Sabti was a member of the Kuwait Journalists Association contributing poetry since the beginning of the modern poetic movement in Kuwait. He also wrote literary and social stories and articles published in Kuwaiti and Arab periodicals (Yacoub, 2009, p. 828).

The poetry of Al-Sabti is unique in his expressive simplicity that is close to the popular spirit. It contains an honest spontaneity in his dealing with life. In his poetry there is a rather sad lyricism, at times appearing quarrelsome. His work revolves around the paradoxes in Kuwaiti society, and he, therefore, condemns some of the manifestations produced by the development of social life, aiming at correcting some of these situations. His poetic experience continued for nearly half a century, during which time he witnessed many political and social fluctuations and the emergence of new poetic patterns, forms and visions, which accompanied the intellectual and social transformations and profound changes that afflicted the nation. Ali Al-Sabti was a living witness to Gulf society in the so-called "before and after oil" eras, and his testimony represents an angle that displayed these dimensions.

The poetry of Al-Sabti contains images of alienation and a call for change, yet it preserves for him part of his originality and privacy. At the same time, it pushes him to suffer his part in this development, which made his poetic experience, even when it adopts a local character, rise to occupy a prominent place among the poetic experiences that featured a modern path throughout the Arab countries. His style is characterized by smoothness, clarity, and a chosen vocabulary that indicates the ability to manage the secrets of linguistic structures. Most of his poems also indicate a recording of social and national problems and social traditions, and their relationship to man, land, self, and estrangement. The relationship is strong between the poet Ali Al-Sabti and the poetic vocabulary, Kuwait, the self, and others.

Among his literary works are four poetry collections: *A House of Summer Stars* (1969), *Outdoor Poems* (1974), *Poetry Returned* (1997), and *I Saw What He Saw* (2011).

Many critical studies of Al-Sabti's poems have been written. These include texts by Dr. Muhammad Hassan Abdullah, who wrote about him in his research and in his book, *Poetry and Poets in Kuwait* (1987). Dr. Salem Abbas Khadada's book, *The Current Renewal in Kuwaiti Poetry* (1989), was a study in content and from Dr. Suleiman Al-Shatti's book, *Poetry in Kuwait*, also included Al-Sabti's writings.

Regarding Al-Sabti's dealings with social problems in his poems, Dr. Ibrahim Abdel Rahman Muhammad states in his book (1987): "The poet has entered the circle of social commitment with his poems, and his art has focused on humanitarian issues and local problems."

Dr. Nouriya Al-Roumi stated: "The confrontation that preoccupied him was a social confrontation; it made him feel injustice in his homeland, and in other countries that he saw, and made him see his homeland in two contradictory visions. In his poetry you find those multiple signs, which the current poets began to repeat in their poems and take them as symbols of those issues that were bothering them, and the feelings of alienation and injustice that were haunting them" (Al-Roumi, Nouriya Salih, 1980).

Concerning the city in the poetry of Ali Al-Sabti, Dr. Su'ād Abdul-Wahhab Al-Abd Al-Rahman said, "The city that appears in the poetry of Ali Al-Sabti, is the city of Kuwait, even if it is not stipulated. It is the city of the owners of palaces and Cadillacs, and therefore it should be changed to create the future; otherwise there is no hope" (Abd Al-Rahman, S.A., 1994).

Dr. Abdullah Al-Otaibi also describes Al-Sabti's poetry, saying:

*Ali Al-Sabti experienced social change in Kuwait, consciously realizing its results on daily living. He is from a generation of Kuwaiti veterans who lived the old life of Kuwait with the strictness of the social reality and its traditionality represented in the stability of the values of its cultural climate. He lived between the conservative generation whose mentality rested on the convictions of the past life, culture and art, and the younger generation that is naturally in tune with the renewal movement. Therefore, the poem "Rabab" came in the year 1955 to record the leadership and primacy of Al-Sabti as the first Kuwaiti poet to write a poem in a style in which he departed from the ancient poetic traditions, and embedded in it a new poetic form that took its way in the movement of modern poetry in Kuwait" (Al-Rai, A Kuwaiti newspaper Sept. 15, (2014.*

رباب  
شعر: علي السبتي  
ترجمة ندى السيد يوسف الرفاعي

لا تعجبي ...  
إمّا سالنك يا رباب  
ولقد تجرع خاطري مرّ الشراب  
وتكاد تأكلني الوسوس والعذاب  
يمتص أيامي يشك بي الحراب

بمن انشغلت رباب يا أمل المعنى  
يا من خلقتك من هواي البكر لحناً  
لحناً كما شاء الغرام وشتت أنت  
يبقى على الأيام أقوى من تصارييف الليالي

من مال قارون يجر على الدنا زهواً ذبوله  
قارون عاد بوجهه العربي أقسى من أخيه  
المال يغدقه فيجري كالجدول كالبحور

يا أنت يا غولاً يخيف إذا ادلهم الليل أو طلع النهار  
يا باعثاً في الأرض آلاف البغايا  
بغد تنور الأرض ثورتها، فتقتلع الجذور  
وتعود للدنيا الشموس وضيفة الدم والإهاب

Rabab

By: Ali Hussein Al-Sabti

Translated by: Nada Y. Al-Rifai

Do not wonder  
if I ask you, o Rabab,  
as my thoughts gulped the bitterness of the drink  
scruples almost eat me, and agony  
absorbs my days, pricking me with spears

By whom have you become occupied, Rabab? O hope of the tormented  
You whom I created as a melody, out of my virgin love ,  
A melody as love willed and you willed,  
That would last over the days, stronger than the nights' vicissitudes.

From the money of Korah, he haughtily drags his trails over the world,  
Korah returned with his Arab face tougher than his brother  
Lavishing money so that it flows like streams, like the sea.  
Turning on the hearts of the maids

Oh you frightening ghoul, when the night falls or the day rises  
O you who send into the earth thousands of prostitutes  
Tomorrow the earth will revolt, pulling out the roots  
And the suns will return to the world clean of blood and skin

بمن انشغلت رباب قلبي لا تحابي  
أبشاعر حلو القوافي ذي أغاريد عذاب  
إما تغني ، تطرب الدنيا وتهتز الرحاب ..  
غناك أروع ما لديه فأنت فينوس الجميلة..  
أبهى من القمر المشع يطل من خلف السحاب..  
أم بالغني المترف الرحب الجناب؟  
رب القصور تطاولت حتى السحاب  
والكاديلاك تجوب أنحاء المدينة  
تحكي على الدنيا حكايات حزينة  
تروي حكايا الظلم والعرق المذاب  
قصص امتصاص المال من تعب الشباب  
رب الكاديلاك الجميلة يا رباب  
نشر الدمار بأمتي ... نشر الخراب  
من دمع هذا الشعب راح يعب كاسات الشراب

لا تعتبي ،  
يا بهجة الدنيا، اذا برز السؤال

حيران يبحث عن حقيقة ما يقال  
فالحى يروي قصة القصر العتيق  
قصص الهدايا الغاليات وقصة العقد النضيد  
أغراك رب الكاديلاك بها فيا هول المصاب  
ان صح ما زعموا و يا طول العذاب.

By whom have you become occupied, Rabab? Say it, don't be partial  
By a poet whose lovely rhymes and sweet lyrics  
When sung, the world rejoices, and the spaciousness shake?  
He sang you his most wonderful, hence you are beautiful Venus,  
More gorgeous than the shining moon rising from behind the clouds.  
Or by the rich, luxuriant, wide-sided?  
Lord of palaces stretched to the clouds.  
The Cadillac roams around the town  
Telling the world sad tales  
Stories of injustice and melted sweat  
Stories of absorbing money from the youth's fatigue.  
O Rabab, the Lord of the beautiful Cadillac ,  
Spread destruction in my nation, spread damage  
From the tears of this nation, he filled drinking glasses.

Do not admonish,  
Oh you joy of the world, if the question arises,  
Puzzled, searching for the truth of what is being said  
As the neighborhood narrates the story of the well-prepared palace  
The stories of precious gifts and the story of the well-arranged necklace  
Has the Lord of the Cadillac tempted you with it, hence what a terrible disaster  
If what they claimed is true, what a long agony .

أنسيت شاعرك المتيم يا رباب  
أنسيت أشعاري وحبى والعذاب  
أنسيت أيام الطفولة  
أنسيت حتى الذكريات  
أنسيت أياما قضيناها كأحلى ما تكون  
أيام نفترش الرمال وأنت نائمة العيون  
فأقص قصة سندباد يعود من عالي البحار  
قد جاء للتجار يحمل كل أنواع البهار  
يا حاملاً عطر الربيع لشهرزاد  
كل النساء بفرحة مستبشرات بالإياب

أترى الذي قد كان وهماً أو خيال؟  
تعجب السؤال  
قولي وعينك ما حقيقة ما يقال  
أنا لا أصدق يا حبيبة ما يقال

وأنتى الجواب  
همسات شاعرة تهوّم في الخيال  
لا لا تصدق ما يقال  
انا لم أبع قلبي . وهل قلب يباع

صيف 1955

Have you forgotten your enamored poet, oh, Rabab?  
Have you forgotten my poems, my love and the agony?  
Have you forgotten our childhood days?  
Have you even forgotten the memories?  
Have you forgotten the days we spent, as the best as days could be?  
The days when we spread out the sand while your eyes were asleep  
Then I would tell the story of Sindbad, who came back from the high seas  
He came to the merchants carrying all kinds of spices  
Carrying the spring fragrance of Scheherazade  
All women happily rejoicing for the return

I wonder if what had happened was an illusion or a fantasy?  
The question got tired  
Say it, I plead your eyes, what is the truth of what is being said?  
I can't believe, darling, what is being said.

Then came the answer,  
A poet's whispers wandering in fantasy  
No, do not believe what is being said,  
I have not sold my heart. Is there a heart for sale?  
All the talk is a rumor... No... Do not believe what is being rumored.

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