

Abu al-Qasim al-Shabi

Abu al-Qasim al-Shabi was born in 1909. He received his formative schooling at Zaytouna University in Tunis, where he immersed himself in Arabic language and literature, before going on to study law. Yet what made him a lasting figure was not his biography but his poetic rebellion.

In the 1920s, when Arabic poetry was largely traditional and static, al-Shabi emerged with verses full of nature, emotion, human longing, and a romantic spirit charged with revolt. He read classical Arabic poetry but also absorbed European literature, which filled his work with fresh imagery and a new imaginative tone.

He was among the first to call for liberating Arabic poetry from imitation and stagnation. His ideas provoked conservative criticism, but they also marked him as a voice of renewal.

His most famous work is *Songs of Life*, which includes the line that later became a political slogan across the Arab world:

“If the people one day desire life, then destiny must respond.”

This single verse was enough to turn al-Shabi into a symbol of hope, willpower, and liberation, especially during the Arab Spring, where it was widely chanted. Although he died young at 25, in 1934 his short life intensified his legend: a sensitive, innovative poet who refused stagnation and sang of freedom, nature, and human possibility.

Al-Shabi endures because his poetry showed how imagination can become resistance, and how a verse can outlive its author and inspire entire generations.
