THEME AND TECHNIQUE IN GHASSAN KANAFANI'S SHORT FICTION

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This dissertation is dedicated to the Palestinian stone-throwers of the long-simmering "Intifida" (uprising), who have been striving for their freedom and land, who have been defying the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip with their Molotov cocktails and slingshots since December 9, 1987. I dedicate this work to the memory of Bassam Al-Shakah, the Mayor of Nablus, who refused to leave his Palestinian home town even after suffering from an Israeli car bomb, which resulted in the mutilation of both his legs in 1981; to those Palestinians who were slaughtered at the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila by the Lebanese Phalangist Militia with the help of the Israeli forces in 1982; to those Palestinian martyrs who were massacred at the refugee camp of Tal Al-Zaatar (thyme hill) in 1976, known as both the Stalingrad of the Palestinian resistance and the "Auschwitz" in Palestinian modern history; to those forty six innocent Palestinians of the Kafr Kassim village who were massacred by the armed forces of Israel on October 29, 1956; and to those two hundred and fifty Palestinian men, women, and children at the village of Deir Yassin, West of Jerusalem, who were savagely butchered on April 10, 1948 in cold blood with their mutilated bodies thrown into a well or captured and brought in trucks to Jerusalem and paraded through the streets, where they were jeered and spat at.

Lastly, I proudly dedicate my dissertation to Ghassan Kanafani's wife, Anni, and his two children, Fayez and Laila, reminding them that the blood of Kanafani is still nurturing the Palestinian olive tree, his name has been engraved into the Palestinian "Kuffiyah" (the black and white checkered headdress), and his writing has bloomed the flower of the Palestinian existential challenge, paving away a path for the Palestinians in existence and self-discovery.

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INTRODUCTION

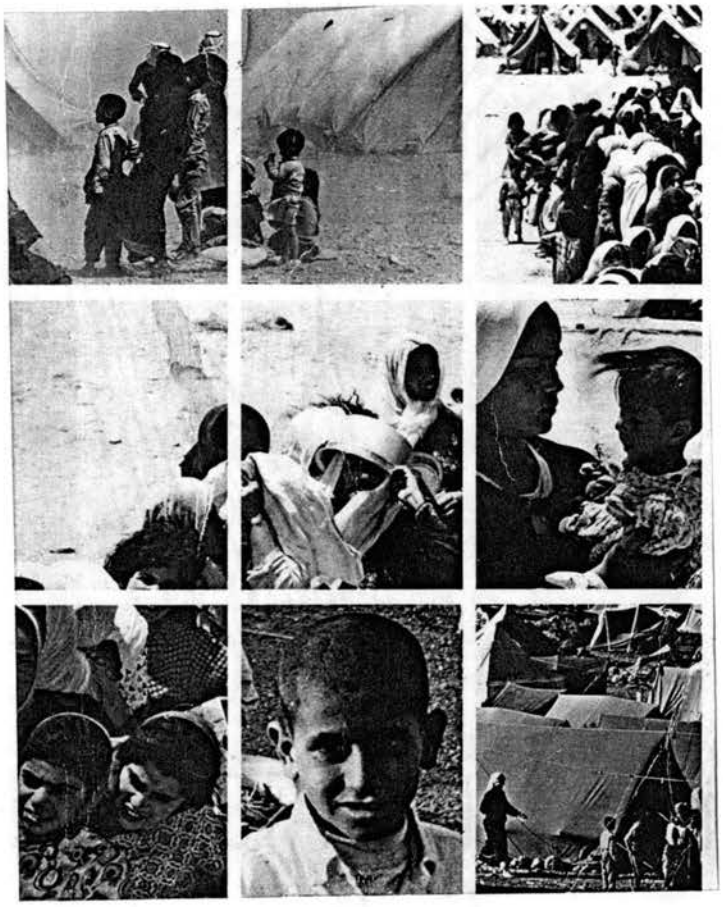

Figure 1. Unknown Photographer in Fawaz Turki, The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile (New York: Modern Library, 1972, [front cover].

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea-something you can set up, and bow down before and offer a sacrifice to... (Joseph Conrad)[1]

Ghassan Kanafani's works emerge as a significant contribution to Arabic Literature, especially in the genre of short fiction; along with Emile Habiby, Samira Azzam, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and Halim Barakat, Kanafani has brought Palestinian Literature into the modern era. Combining his experience as a journalist as well as considerable creative prowess, Kanafani has chronicled the experience of the Palestinian people from the British Mandate of 1920 to the June War of 1967.

This dissertation investigates the techniques Kanafani uses by considering specific works. Chapter one provides an overview of Palestinian socio-political history and briefly places Kanafani in this context. Chapter two examines short stories from one of his earlier collections Palestine's Children with particular attention to emerging techniques. Chapter three focuses on one story, "The Death of Bed Number 12", which is significant because it clearly demonstrates Kanafani's ability to treat the Palestinian issue in a characteristically modern context. Chapter four reviews the short fiction "Men in the Sun" as a venture into the extended short story, displaying a significant maturity of technique especially as regards symbols. Chapter five examines the posthumous collection of stories included with "Men in the Sun", as Other Palestinian Stories, which not only demonstrate the range of Kanafani's talents, but also exhibit a personal and artistic maturity. As he begins to grapple with the Palestinian issue that for him reflects the universal history of oppressed and

underprivileged people. Chapter six emphasizes the progression of Kanafani's symbolic technique.

The works examined by this dissertation are set in the time period from 1936 to 1967, a most significant period in the history of modern Palestine. In order to inform the reader about the significant political and historical issues of this period, this introduction provides a brief overview of the history of the Palestinian issue from its beginnings until 1967. The purpose of reviewing the beginnings of this conflict is that the reader may then more fully understand the multiple tensions that have contributed to the emotional climate which underlines the time and setting of these stories.

Palestine, a land bridge between the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, is the center of the Arab world, a meeting point of the Arabic East and West. The original Semitic inhabitants of this locale, the Amorites, Canaanites, Aramaeans, and Arabs, are the ancestors of the Palestinians. Semites have migrated from the Arabian Peninsula into Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine since 3500 B.C. There is historical evidence that the Canaanites settled in Palestine around 2500 B.C., and by 2000 B.C. the city states of Canaan were founded as part of a larger movement to establish states in the various lands to which the Semites had migrated. Thus the Canaanites states were the first state established in the region now known as Palestine and Israel.

Around 1200 B.C., the Hebrews, led by the law giver Moses crossed the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and settled in the area east of the Dead Sea. Under the military leader Joshua, the Hebrews invaded the land of Canaan. This information is recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible. The Old Testament also records that, in their occupation of Palestine and the area east of the Jordan River, the Hebrews carried out a series of atrocities against the original inhabitants, who themselves retaliated in kind.

The Hebrew Kingdom was founded in 1020 B.C. under King Saul. Under guidance of the original people, the Jews learned agriculture and urbanized the occupied areas. The remainder of Palestine was under the control of the Canaanites and a new group of people known in history as the Philistines. In 923 B.C. the Hebrew Kingdom, under the reign of King Solomon suffered a schism, dividing into northern and southern kingdoms. The latter part was ruled as the Kingdom of Israel, while the former became the Kingdom of Judea. In 722 B.C. Israel was invaded by the Assyrians, and then in 586 B.C. the Babylonians conquered Judea. Thus, the Hebrew reign over Palestine ended in 586 B.C. Some of the Hebrew inhabitants chose to remain in the region while others migrated to neighboring countries. Throughout the period, the original inhabitants remained in the region, more or less co-existing with the conquerors. The Hebrews and the original inhabitants as well as descendants of other conquering nations were successively conquered by the Persians (538 B.C.), the Greeks (331 B.C.), and the Romans (64 B.C.).

In the year 636 A.D. the area saw the convergence of a great Arab wave from the Arabian peninsula, reaffirming the Arab identity of Palestine. In 1099, Crusaders captured the city of Jerusalem after a series of unsuccessful campaigns. Jerusalem was proclaimed as a Crusader State which was maintained until 1187 when the Moslem leader Saladin conquered the area.

The Ottoman rule persisted until 1918 when the Arab people of Palestine and the other Arab countries who had joined ranks with the Allies in World War I were liberated. The Allies had pledged the complete independence of all Arab countries when the war ended, but the promises were not honored.

On November 2, 1917, the Balfour Declaration, named for the then British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, expressed support for a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. According to Ismail Shammout, in 1918 Jews

owning 2.5% of the land constituted 8% of the total population of Palestine.[2] After the Balfour Declaration, the area came under the British rule and the occupation period which was to last until 1948 has been known popularly as the period of the British Mandate, which was established in 1920. Throughout the 20's and 30's, the Arab people rose in a series of revolts against what they saw as Zionist colonialism. Likewise, radical Zionist groups, notably the Haganah, staged guerrilla warfare against the British.

In 1947, the U.N. General Assembly called for the division of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem and its suburbs internationalized. Arabs opposed the resolution and it was not implemented. The British withdrew from the area on May 14, 1948 and the state of Israel was declared as an independent entity on the same day. The new state was immediately engaged by the combined Arab forces of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Israel, however, held out and armistice agreements were concluded in 1949 by which the new nation gained, according to the Political Handbook of the World, nearly one-third more territory than had been assigned in the aborted U.N. resolution.[3] The United Nations then established the Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) and a series of refugee camps for the displaced Palestinians.

In 1956, a second military engagement between Israel and Egypt resulted in the Jewish occupation of the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip. These areas were evacuated after U.S. and U.N. pressure. Subsequently in June 1967, a six-day war between Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan led to more Arab Palestinian territories being seized and further evacuations.

The period since 1967 has been one of the bloodiest in the history of Palestine. Displaced Arab Palestinians who formed guerrilla groups, notably the Fedayeen, have attacked Israeli settlers who have colonized formerly Arab homes, farms, and villages. At the same time, Israel has staged a series of

bloody reprisals against the Arabs of the region, frequently incurring condemnation by U.N. bodies for atrocities committed by the Israeli Army and for refusing to reabsorb those Palestinians displaced by the war.

The question as to who is a terrorist in Palestine is a complicated one as Joseph C. Harsh observes in the November 29, 1988 Christian Science Monitor. As he relates, the Irgun, Haganah, and Stern, Jewish political organizations have been responsible for a series of atrocities. One such example, which Harsh cites, is the October 14th-15th, 1953 attack by an Israeli force on the unarmed Arab village of Kibya in the demilitarized zone. "The details of the attack were so gruesome" Harsh relates that "the U.S. joined in a U.N. condemnation of the Israeli action and, for the first and only time, suspended U.S. aid to Israel in reprisal" for the deaths of 53 men, women, and children.[4]

The Palestinians have also been accused of terrorism for sanctioning individual attacks and for kidnappings, often capturing nationals of other countries to use as hostages to attempt to force the state of Israel to release Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

Among themselves the Palestinians are divided politically into numerous groups. According to the Political Handbook of the World, the Palestine Liberation Organization presently consists of eight separate political groups who range in ideology from the Fatah, headed by Yassir Arafat, which supports commando raids to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which supports the Left.[5] At different times in his life, Kanafani belonged to both of these groups.

Ghassan Kanafani's life (1936-1972) provides a living example of a commitment to the Palestinian cause. Indeed, he died for his political beliefs when his booby-trapped car exploded in Beirut on July 8, 1972. The details of

his life are fairly well known to the students of modern Arabic Literature. He was born on April 9, 1936, in Acre, north of Palestine, the third son of a pious lawyer, Muhammad Fayez Abdulrazzaq Kanafani. At that time, Palestinian Arabs in Acre as well as in Jaffa and in Jerusalem had sufficiently organized their opposition against the British Mandatory rule and Jewish mounting foreign immigration to launch a massive strike which lasted about six months, a major setback for the British administration. In 1948, his family was driven from their homeland when Israel was established. They fled first to Lebanon, then to Damascus Syria, where they settled. There Ghassan Kanafani completed his secondary schooling and began work as a teacher in the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) schools.[6]

It was in 1936, the year of his birth, that European Jews surged into Palestine even as Hitler was preparing for World War II and the most lethal pogrom history ever witnessed. The final outcome of Hitler's pogrom was the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine on, May 14, 1948, and the first displacement of about 800,000 Palestinians. These Palestinian refugees poured into the neighboring countries of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, as well as the Gaza Strip, and among the 800,000 was the twelve-year-old Ghassan Kanafani, fleeing with his family to Lebanon.[7] As Fawaz Turki writes in The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile:

> the Western world, which had long tormented and abused the Jewish people, hastened to bless an event that saw an end to their victims' suffering. A debt was to be paid. Who was to pay it and where it was to be paid were not seen as of the essence, so long as it was not paid by Europeans in Europe. After the pogroms in Czarist Russia and the crimes in Nazi Germany, for example, Great Britain and the United States, two countries that gave whole-hearted support to unrestricted Jewish emigration to Palestine and the creation of a "Jewish Home," were concurrently providing for legislation to control "alien entry" into their green and

> pleasant lands. This was but a manifestation of the style and vocabulary of the Social Darwinism they had for many years practices in their recontre with the "unfit" of the earth.[8]

Until March of 1948, he had attended the Ecole des Freres in Haifa, a French Catholic school. This period of his life came to an abrupt end when Acre was stormed by Haganah troops. The family's subsequent flight to Lebanon was a significant event in Kanafani's boyhood. Years later, he wrote an autobiographical sketch describing their exodus:

> This night went on harsh and bitter between the silent despair of the men and the prayers of the women. You and I and the boys of our age were too young to understand the full story. But in that night things began to fall into perspective. And in the morning, when the Jews withdrew, menacing and foaming with rage, there was a big truck standing at our front door. Some blankets had been thrown into it from here and there with quick nervous movements.[9]

Clearly, he retained deep and vivid impressions of that bitter experience, for the sketch was written in 1962, sixteen years after the event.

Kanafani was in danger of being one of many Palestinian refugees who was underprivileged and doomed to live in camps, unemployed or exploited to extremes, surviving on UNRWA rations. These refugees fled to countries where unskilled labor already existed in abundance. Street peddlers and shoeshine boys had to fight for every coin they made. These Palestinian refugees' fate was prone to the vagaries of Western cigar-smoking cabinet ministers.Many of these hungry, beaten, unsmiling Palestinian children come to life in the pages of Kanafani's short stories.

Ghassan Kanafani held several different jobs. He taught at UNRWA schools in Palestinian refugee camps in Syria. He was a teacher of painting and physical education in Kuwait from 1956 to 1960. But finally, he became a journalist, writing for a number of weekly and daily newspapers in Beirut: Al-Hurriyyah (Freedom), Al-Muharir (The Editor), and Palestine, the supplement of

Al Anwar (The Lights) and Al-Hadaf (The Goal) he was editor-in-chief of both of the latter newspapers from 1969 until his untimely death [10]

In addition to being an active journalist, Kanafani produced both creative and critical writings. It is my intention in this dissertation to focus on his creative works which demonstrate his outstanding skills as a modern short story writer. Although politics played an important part in his life, I will concentrate on his mastery of the short story form, especially his use of symbols, imagery, allegory, and thematic structure. I believe his talent as both craftsman and artist is clearly evident in his creative writings, a talent that sets him apart from others writing about this region of the world for unlike other Arab writers, such as Samira Azzam and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Kanafani never intrudes into his stories rather he allows the plots to unfold through the characters. In this way he avoids imposing his own opinions and leaves conclusions to be drawn by the individual reader.

Kanafani's experience as a journalist had a profound impact on his fiction. One effect of this experience was to supply him with material for plots: the reporting he did of atrocities, for example, is reflected in the narrative of several stories in this collection, such as "Paper from Ramleh," "He Was a Child that Day," and "Return to Haifa." Furthermore, his journalistic experience had a profound effect on his technique. This influence is especially notable in his short stories like "Paper from Ramleh," for the tone is very much like that of factual reporting: the story's style is one of spare prose description without recourse to elaborate imagery and metaphors in which events that lead up to the final bombing are simply observed and not commented upon. Journalism also enters the story in terms of language which is spare and clipped, supplying only the most pertinent details, and often using journalese, thus substituting the non-word hostilities for the more emphatic war. The cumulative effect of this

journalistic style is a prose which is subtle and understated and sometimes ironic, especially when the events are powerful, but are treated as prosaic daily occurrences such as the description of the death of Fatima in "Paper from Ramleh,".

He was a prolific writer, producing in his short life five collections of short stories, five novels, two plays, three critical studies of Palestinian literature and a number of articles and reviews. Recognition of his finely-honed talent and importance as an author has come in the form of variety of awards. He received first prize from Lebanon for an Arabic short story in 1962. His novel Ma Tabbaqqa Lakum (also called both What is Left for You and All That Remains) was judged best novel of the year and was awarded first prize of the Society of Friends of the Book. A posthumous award was given him on January 31, 1975 in Manila: the Literary Lotus Prize of the Afro-Asian writers' conference. This was shared with the Egyptian politician and writer, Usuf Al-Sibai; the Turk, Aziz Munif; and the Soviet writer, Anatoli V. Sofronov.[11]

Many of Kanafani's works have been made into movies, including, "Men in the Sun," What is Left for You, and most recently, "Return to Haifa." His written works have been favorably received in the western world and many have been translated. "Men in the Sun" was translated into French by Michel Seurate under the title "Des Hommes Dans Le Soleil," and into English by Hilary Kilpatrick; the short story, "Kick on the Pavement," into German by Sam Kabbani; another story, "The Death of Bed Number 12," into English by Denys Johnson-Davies, the collection of short stories Palestine's Children into English by Barbara Harlow and What is Left For You into English by Abdel Qader Haimour. In addition, there have been translations into Spanish, Russian and Czechoslovakian. Interestingly, considering his adamant pro-Palestinian stance, Kanafani has also been translated into Hebrew: the short story "Al-

Akhdar Wal-Ahmar" ("The Green and the Red") was translated by Rioka Yealin; the longer work "Men in the Sun" was translated for the major Israeli daily newspaper Marriv by Matitjahn Peled; and the play Al-Bab ("The Door") was translated by Michel Barbot.[12]

It is natural that I have a special interest in exploring this noteworthy writer from my own homeland, but what impels me to make his works the subject of my paper goes much further. This region of the world and its inhabitants are, for the most part, still poorly known to the world at large. Kanafani's works make both these people and circumstances understandable. His writing can touch the hearts of all people. I have chosen Kanafani not only for the representative quality that his life and death hold for Palestinian refugees, but primarily because he is one of the most gifted contemporary writers writing in his native Arabic.

"There are signs," says Roger Allen, professor of Arabic at the University of Pennsylvania, "of a growing sophistication in technique which leads one to say that, had he lived, Kanafani would have made further significant contributions to the development of the tradition of the Arabic novel. Even so, what he has left us is a whole series of valuable insights in fiction into the sad, complex and often recalcitrant world of the Palestinians in their various havens of exile."[13]

Kanafani's important contributions to the development of the Arabic short story are conspicuous in most of his collections but especially in the stories of Palestine's Children, "The Death of Bed Number 12," and the collections "Men in The Sun" and Other Palestinian Stories. These works often show the individual Palestinian who, preferring his own private happiness to the destiny of the Palestinians in general, is doomed to failure. "Men in the Sun" probably is Kanafani's most impressive literary achievement and is the best example of that theme. This short fiction tells of three underprivileged Palestinians of

different generations looking for a better life. They meet in Basra in Southern Iraq. All three are trying to break away from humiliation and misery in the camps. Their last hope is to find an illegal way into Kuwait where there is oil, money, and work. A fourth Palestinian smuggles them over the border in an empty water tanker truck, but they never reach their destination. Instead, through the carelessness of the smuggler, they suffocate in the stifling and airless tank, and their corpses are dumped on a garbage heap outside Kuwait.

The story "Return to Haifa" which appears in Palestine's Children is perhaps the most poignant of Kanafani's works. In brief, it is the story of an Arab couple who have fled from their house in Haifa in 1948. In the chaos of flight, they lose their first-born son, Khaldun. After the Israeli victory of 1967, they return hoping to revisit their house and find their son. They do find him, but he has been adopted by a Jewish woman, who is a refugee from Poland. The son's name is now Dov and he serves in the Israeli Army. When Khaldun/Dov comes home, he is confronted by his two natural parents. The ensuing dialogue between the Arab father and his Israeli son is tense. Khaldun/Dov refuses to give up his identity as an Israeli, refuses to return with his parents. The last words of the father to his son and foster mother are: "Both of you may provisionally stay in our house. Because to settle this, a war is necessary. The greatest crime anybody can commit is to think that the weakness and the mistakes of others, give him the right to exist at their expense."[14] In many ways, this sentence focuses on a key issue for the Palestinian quest for Palestine. In Kanafani's view, the prosperity of the Jewish state is predicted upon the misery of the Palestinian camps.

Palestine's Children is a collection of short stories all set between the years of 1936 and 1967. These stories are focused from the period of the British Mandate in Palestine until the June War in 1967. All of the dates mark

significant moments in the recent history of the Palestinians. in 1936, a widespread popular revolt began among the Arab Palestinians in Palestine; in 1967, there was a devasting setback to Palestinian aspirations: the 6-day June War led to the occupation of the Sinai Peninsula, Syrian Golan Heights, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip by Israel and the subsequent displacement of many additional Palestinians and torture and imprisonment of others. In 1948, the state of Israel was founded, and with it came the displacement of thousands of Palestinians from their homeland and marked the beginning of their years in exile. Each of the stories in the collection involves in some way a child who is victimized by the structure of authority, built by these events, an authority that dominates the social and political world he lives in. Nonetheless, by assuming new roles, these protagonists all try to participate personally in the struggle towards a new and different kind of future.

Kanafani gives a vividly real picture of Palestinian society and does it with enormous skill. His close and sensitive analysis of this society is a major reason that impels me to choose him for my dissertation. In his writings, he shows the reader how many Palestinians live and think and how they act and react, giving a detailed and clear-cut picture of them. This is often portrayed through small details that leave a lasting impression on the reader. For instance, Arab individuals will stifle their yawns in cafes, walk out into the street at midnight, look in a bored way up to the sky and then, after exhibiting this casual and uncaring attitude, ask "Why has Arab unity still not been achieved?"

Kanafani does not have patience for this kind of thinking; he describes the embodiment of what he despises: "that educated young man, elegant with shining hair, who reads Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind and Mario Puzo's The Godfather, talks about politics, reads the newspapers, comments laughingly on the news, smiles whenever he is asked a question he cannot

answer, knows the latest jokes and a few quotations and looks upon politics as a profession founded on lies and hypocrisy." "This flippancy," Kanafani adds, "goes together with a lack of the ability to evaluate time, to assess the right moment-with a spirit of extemporizing."[15] Kanafani's writings are vehicles for depicting all the pitfalls and shortcomings inherent in Arab society, at the same time giving incentive and hope toward effecting change in the situation.

A master craftsman, Kanafani makes excellent use of all the devices available to writers. His descriptions are interwoven with the stories' forward movements so that the reader is never stopped by static description of scenery, but instead through the characters' thoughts is pulled along the pathway of the plots. Kanafani sweeps the reader into the mind and consciousness of each major important character, showing the reader what makes that character credible, what aspirations he holds, and where he is heading.

The author uses flashbacks to give background in daringly abrupt ways at times, but nonetheless very effectively. Flashbacks can jolt the reader into a character's past instead of easing him into it. One example of this is found in "Men in the Sun." The story takes place in the present, in 1971. There is conversation between two characters, when suddenly the blinding sun strikes the windshield of Abul Khaizuran's truck. "The light was shining so brightly that at first he could see nothing. But he felt a terrible pain coiled between his thighs" (MS, 37). After these two sentences, we are transported to a past time and will witness a brutal incident in Abul Khaizuran's life that has affected him ever since.

In the story Kanafani uses the bright sunlight of the present to stimulate the thoughts of the past, where a ceiling light was above Abul Khaizuran when he was castrated. A writer of less skill might have spelled it out, using many more

words, but Kanafani's economy of words and reliance on indirection makes the scene all the more horrifying by the suddenness of its portrayal.

For years, authors have used symbols to represent a thought, a situation or an event to come. In a Hemingway story, for example, the author has a figure on a cot turning toward a blank wall to indicate the hopelessness of his situation. Steinbeck uses mountain ranges in The Red Pony, one lush and green, the other forbidding, mysterious and unexplored, to represent life and death.

Kanafani also uses objects as omens to foreshadow events to come: the blazing sun of the desert and a lone black bird circling aimlessly in the sky are portents of the character's fate. These are but two examples of the many symbols he uses. But Kanafani goes a step further and makes use of specific words that serve as symbols. In writing in his native Arabic, a language in its classical form unknown to most people, he uses certain words to enhance symbolism. Unfortunately, they cannot always be translated precisely, so that some of the poetical beauty and rhythm is lost. Perhaps the best illustration appears in All That Remains. The strange word Yadduggu is used repeatedly. It has no real literal equivalent in English, but in Arabic, it has multiple meanings. In the English version, it has been translated as "beat" and stands for stride, knock, pound, tick, kick, beat, hit, with all sorts of allied meanings. In the book, we see it as denoting a step on the stairs, a tick of the clock, oars beating the waves, a fetus beating in the uterus, even a throb of silence.

Each chapter will deal with the way symbols function in shaping the themes of the works. In addition, I will try to clarify the complexity of the images, the metaphors, the heavy use of parallelisms and juxtapositions. For instance, it may help the reader of the short story "If You Were a Horse" to know that to a Palestinian a horse stands for more than just a noble animal. It embodies

deeper meanings, representing courage, honesty, freedom, beauty, intelligence.

Kanafani has a brilliant way with imagery, although the casual reader may pass over this to get on with the outcome of the plot. However, the careful eye will find many images that are strikingly suitable to the meaning the author wishes to convey. Describing the truck that is hurrying to smuggle the men across the border in the desert in "Men in the Sun," Kanafani writes: "The lorry, a small world, black as night, made its way across the desert like a heavy drop of oil on a burning sheet of tin" (MS, 46). This marvelous image foreshadows the death by overheating of the three characters.

There may be times that readers wish the ending of a story were different, for Kanafani has made us care about a particular character. Yet, readers know in their heart that the author's honesty prevents him from writing any happy endings. The destiny of his characters is as inevitable as the sun's rising in the east.

Kanafani's short stories are inexorably tied to time and settings, showing the plight of Palestinians in the course of history. They examine the circumstances that were imposed on the Palestinians who are then left helpless in the face of governmental decisions which directly affect their lives. Yet, in spite of this tie in to a particular time in history, the stories stand on their own and have a universal appeal. One need not be a Palestinian to appreciate Kanafani's works. The helplessness of people in similar situations has occurred in most parts of the world throughout history.

Bringing his great skills to his writings, Kanafani sweeps the reader into the characters' predicaments, and readers find themselves moved to compassion. As Hilary Kilpatrick says, Kanafani's skill in creating characters who live and

breathe and are real is tremendous, and he "evokes sympathy, empathy and often tears from readers of any nationality[16] (MS, vii).

Through the skillful use of rhetorical devices, Kanafani's stories deal with chronology and its pervading influence on the lives it affects. According to Hayden White: "... narration is both the way in which an historical interpretation is achieved and the work of discourse in which a successful understanding of matters historical is represented."[17] In telling these stories of the Palestinian people and their children, Kanafani is re-telling history and re-establishing its chronology.

The epic flashback, no less than the stream of consciousness, serves to strengthen the sense of temporality in these stories. The Aristotelian paradigm of beginning, middle and ending is subject to an ideological re-ordering through a narrative infringement on events. Historical dates become commemorative, so that readers may say, as Kilpatrick tells us they did with an early story of Kanafani's: "Oh, yes, it happened a month after the day of the massacre" (MS,viii).

Kanafani's works participate in the historiographic process by elucidating the Palestinian historical chronology. However, as have stated before, these events are not related exclusively to the Palestinian people but have universal appeal. Kanafani was undoubtedly caught up in the times of his own lifespan; he wrote for everyone. What Doestvesky did for Russia, Flaubert for France or Faulkner for the American South, Kanafani does for Palestine. He is a major talent and deserves more widespread recognition.

In terms of technique, Kanafani's short stories are modernist in tradition. For a clearer understanding of this classification it is necessary to probe the history of the short story and its stages of development. The literary form we call the short story did not burst upon the scene full-blown, but rather developed

over a century and a half. Throughout history there has been short narrative fiction, but as Mary Rohrberger writes in Hawthorne and the Modern Short Story: "Something happened to the short tale early in the Nineteenth Century to cause Brander Matthews later in the century to proclaim the birth of a new genre characterized by brevity, a closely wrought texture, freedom from excrescence, and a unity of effect. The origins of the new form are to be found in the writings of Irving, Gogol, Poe, and Hawthorne."[18]

As a fully developed genre the novel precedes the story. According to Mary Louise Pratt, "The novel tells a life, the short story tells a fragment of a life. The short story deals with a single thing, the novel with many things. The short story is a sample, the novel the whole bag."[19] Commenting on the way the limited scope of a short story extends to greater complexity, Mary Rohrberger adds: "The short story derives from the romantic tradition. The metaphysical view that there is more to the world than that which can be apprehended through the senses provides the rationale for the structure of the short story, which is a vehicle for the author's probing of the nature of the real."[20]

To gain a better and more precise insight into the importance of the short story, let us trace its history briefly by noting some of the prestigious names associated with its development. Washington Irving, Pushkin, deBalzac, Hawthorne, Turgenev, Maupassant, Chekhov, James, Joyce, Mansfield, Hemingway, Faulkner, Welty, Anderson. As readily seen, there have been giants in this form of fiction who made great contributions to this field. Moreover, the short story moved into this century, it became more than ever committed to delivering a single impact. It also fused the language skills of the prose writer with the poet, as exemplified in writers like Mansfield and Conrad Aiken; and, as the century moved on, the story continued to reflect the times and dilemmas with which the authors were familiar. Thus, we find Hemingway writing of bullfights

and the Spanish War, Anderson of the American Midwest, Faulkner and Welty of the American South. Kanafani, too, writes of the people he knows, the Palestinian refugees and the tragedies of their lives, displaced after Israel was formed following World War II.

Seeing the names of many literary giants who chose to write in this form, we may be surprised that the short story has had as many detractors as it has admirers. Some critics have derided it as being shallow, without fully developed character or substance. However, many also have praised it for bringing a singleness of purpose, and a special coherence to a form of fiction whose space dimensions are often dictated by magazine editors who have X amount of pages to devote to stories between the pages of advertising. This is a tall order to ask in a form which often is only one thousand words long.

Brevity is usually mentioned in any attempted definition of short story. Thomas A. Gullason defines it as:

> A prose narrative briefer than the short novel more restricted in characters and situations, and usually concerned with a single effect. Unlike longer forms of fiction, the short story does not develop character fully; generally, a single aspect of personality undergoes change or is revealed as the result of conflict. With this restricted form, there is frequently concentration on a single character involved in a single episode. The climax may occur at the very end and need not involve a denouement, though many other arrangements are possible. Because of limited length, the background against which the characters move is generally sketched lightly.[21]

Mary Rohrberger disputes this statement, saying, "The idea that a short story deals with a single character in a single action is useful but not always applicable."[22] Gullason also talks about length: "The word 'short' is deceiving since the short story can run from one page to 300 pages, with varying lengths in between" (p. 21).

Harry Mark Petrakis comments: "I think the short story exists in and for itself. I have great affection for it. I would have preferred to have written poetry, but I could not, and since I have not felt myself qualified to write poetry, I wrote the short story, which comes as close to poetry as anything can."[23] Gullason adds: "For generations, writers have gone to the short story not because it is easier to write or because they cannot cope with the length of the novel, but because they feel that the experience of a story or a cycle of stories more closely approximates the reality and truth of everyday life and every day experience" (p. 229).

Short story theorists disagree in other ways. Detractors claim that, according to A. L. Bader, "Nothing happens, the modern short story is plotless, static, fragmentary, amorphous, frequently a mere character sketch or vignette, or a mere reporting of a transient moment, or the capturing of a mood or everything, in fact, except a story."[24] On the other hand, proponents like Mary Rohrberger in "The Short Story: A Proposed Definition" insist that a plot as we ordinarily define it in terms of cause and effect is not a necessary ingredient of short fiction (p. 82). If one considers the development of the short story, Bader, within the past ten years, identifies the early short story, one middle period, and the modern more impressionistic short story. But writing at the same time, Rohrberger identifies another set of classifications: the traditional, the modern, and the post modern (p. 82). Bonaro Overstreet says: "The nineteenth century story teller was a master of plot. The twentieth century fellow, seeing that life was not made up of neatly parcelled collection of incidents, took his rebel stand.[25]

Gullason notes that often great writers are remembered for their novels while their short stories are overlooked or ignored. "Even Edgar Allan Poe, called by many the father of the American short story, is not represented by

anything that resembles a full-length study of his short fiction." He cites others too who have been given similar treatment:

> Chekhov, Maupassant, Hemingway, Stephen Crane, and D. H. Lawrence. Some great novelists like William Faulkner, readily accept the importance of the short story. Once, Faulkner explained his position, and as he did so, he gave insight into the pattern of his own literary career. 'I'm a failed poet,' he said. 'Maybe every novelist wants to write poetry first, finds he can't, and then tries the short story, which is the most demanding form after poetry. And failing at that, only then does he take up novel writing.' Frequently, short story writers and their sympathizers have had to protect against their deriders, and their low status. They have felt that their medium is unfairly treated as a 'kind of literary pimp', as a 'finger exercise." (p. 14)

As Suzanne Ferguson writes in "Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form": "the author conceals himself, presenting the entire narrative from a point of view within the story, that of the characters' subjective experience of events, their 'impressions,' by using either first-person narration or the Jamesian 'method of the central intelligence.' This emphasis on subjectivity inevitably affects the typical themes of modern fiction: alienation, isolation, solipsism, the quest for identity and integration."[26] It was an overnight, sudden change but was foreshadowed by Poe, (usually using the first person) and Hawthorne (using the third person).

Ferguson goes on to make this pertinent statement: "the best short stories give us a sense of the inevitability of each sentence and persuade us that they are as complete as possible, that any addition or deletion would destroy their aesthetic wholeness (p. 14). This comment or one similar begins with Poe's Review of twice told tales and continues in modern creative writing classes.

And so from the 14th to the 20th Century the short story changed, taking on some different shapes and meanings. While earlier stories might cover a longer period of time, the modern writer carefully selected a small period to

concentrate on, and left much to the reader's imagination - an indirect approach, putting demands on both writer and reader. As A. L. Bader states, "Basically the modern short story is not very different from that of the older and more conventional type of story, but its technique is different, and it is this difference in technique that is frequently mistaken for lack of structure by reader and critics" (p. 115). He gives examples of these two types, citing Jack London's "Love of Life," a story of a prospector in the Far North facing death by starvation, exposure and the threat of attack by wild animals, as opposed to Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron," which shows a character dominant over plot. In the latter, the conflict is internal, with the plot furnishing only the structural skeleton of the story (p. 109).

Kanafani's revolt against the traditional rules of fiction is similar to the modernist revolt. According to Eugene Current - Garcia and Walton R. Patrick, "When a literary genre becomes rigidly standardized or stereotyped, both critics and authors revolt."[27] The revolt resulted in a more open form, stories of more psychological meaning, less action, more inner dialogue, impressionistic and pointing out the absurdity of society.

Kanafani would agree with Overstreet when he writes that: "'We must recognize that it (the short story form) is dictated by psychological materials and processes, not primarily by events in the objective world .... Its logic is the complex logic of mental and emotional experience" (p. 82).

In addition, stories have direction, involving pace and movement. And, of course, symbolism is extremely important. As Mary Rohrberger says:

> In the short story symbolism is pervasive. The short-story writer makes symbols of objects, characters, events, settings, plots in an effort to move beyond surface levels and to suggest complex meanings....With symbols, an author can make up in depth what the story lacks in length. ...Symbols are of two broad types: those that evoke

> common associations and those that are created within the context of a literary work. A forest, for example, is commonly associated with darkness, anxiety, and the fear of losing one's way, and it is not surprising to find Hawthorne using the forest as symbol in just this way. On the other hand, in "The Wind Blows", Mansfield creates the wind as symbol by associating it within the story with certain images and patterns...[28]

In a similar way, Kanafani uses symbols to demonstrate his themes which are the predicament of the Palestinian; the indomitability of the human spirit inherent in those underprivileged people; escapism, futility, and alienation; the importance of being rooted to the land; the identity conflict, self-discovery and land association; and the concept of death.

It is my intention to demonstrate the importance of Ghassan Kanafani's literary achievement by demonstrating his skill as both artist and craftsman in writing the modern short story. In the next chapters, I will examine three of his important works, pointing out his mastery of the short story form, and showing that he is especially strong in using symbolism, imagery, irony, and allegory. As Roger Allen notes: "His literary career is marked by a constant concern with form, style and imagery."[29]

Kanafani's role in developing the short story in Arabic is seminal. As Mahmoud Manzaloui points out,

> ... the flowering of the short story in Arabic is later than its peak in western literature...the time lag here is only one or two or three generations. By the 'short story' is meant here the modern genre of short narrative, in which the pattern is centripetal and not linear, in which the unity of theme and action is clear, and is basically dependent upon the unfolding of the subjective psychological predicament of one or more of its characters.... From its inception, the Arabic story ... has been directed towards didactic ends; ends concerned not only with personal morality, but with the problem of social and political injustice.[30]

As the Arab Halim Barakat states, "A mood of dissatisfaction with and rejection of the dominant conditions and value orientations has manifested itself

in the works of Najib Mahfuz, Jabra I. Jabra, Ghassan Kanafani, Layla Baálbaki, Emile Habiby and Samira Azzam."[31] These Arab authors are not simply involved in a literature that reflects reality, although each has written works drawn from his own experience as an Arab. Their aim is higher: to write of a reality they wish would come to pass. In effect, they believe that there is a positive and dynamic relationship between art and politics, that art can challenge and inspire new political realities. Kanafani was such a writer. "As Barakat says, Kanafani was concerned with the changing fate of the Palestinians through writing as well as through action, and saw his fate as inseparable from that of his people. His short stories record the voice of the stateless and uprooted Palestinians, especially the deprived masses who paid most dearly for the successive defeats" (p. 136). In this way, Kanafani gives voice to the voiceless ones, to those either deprived of their right to speak or too exhausted or embittered to speak for themselves. Thus, he has become the voice of a nation in exile.

NOTES

[1]Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, ed. Robert Kimbrouch (New York: W. W. Norton Co., 1971), p. 7.

[2]Ismail Shammout, Palestine: An Illustrated Political History, trans. Abdul-Qader Daher (New York: Arab Information Center, 1972), [p. 13].

[3]The Political Handbook of the World, 1984-1986, ed. Albert Banks (New York: CSA Publications, 1986), p. 269.

[4]Joseph C. Harsch, "Preferential treatment for Israel?" Christian Science Monitor, November 29, 1988, p. 13.

[5]Banks, p.653.

[6]Stefan Wild, Ghassan Kanafani: The Life of a Palestinian (Amsterdam: Univ. of Amsterdam Press, 1975), p. 10.

[7]George Hajjar, Kanafani: Symbol of Palestine (Beirut: Dar Al-Talia, 1974), p. 36.

[8]Fawaz Turki, The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile, (New York: Modern Library, 1972), p. 11.

[9]Anni Kanafani, Ghassan Kanafani, 2nd Ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Talia, 1973), p. 3.

[10]Hajjar, p. 38.

[11]Adnan Al Qassim, Ghassan Kanafani, Arabic (Baghdad: Dar-Al Hurriyya, 1978), p. 67.

[12]Al-Qassim, p. 86.

[13]Roger Allen, The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1982), p. 69.

[14]Ghassan Kanafani, Palestine's Children, trans. Barbara Harlow (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1988), p. 136. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as PC.

[15]Wild, p. 11.

[16]Ghassan Kanafani, "Men in the Sun" and Other Palestinian Stories, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1983), p. 37. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as MS.

[17]Hayden White as quoted by Hilary Kilpatrick, p. viii.

[18]Mary Rohrberger, Hawthorne and the Modern Short Story (Paris: Mouton and Co., 1966), p. 140

[19]Mary Louise Pratt, "The Short Story: The Long and the Short of It," Poetics, 10 (1981), p. 182.

[20]Mary Rohrberger, p. 141.

[21]Thomas A. Gullason, "The Short Story: An Underrated Art," in Short Story Theories, ed. Charles E. May (Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1976), p. 21.

[22]Mary Rohrberger, "The Short Story: A Proposed Definition," May, p. 81

[23]Harry Mark Petrakis quoted in Elizabeth Janeway, p. 105.

[24]A. L. Bader, "The Structure of the Modern Short Story," May, p. 107.

[25]Bonaro Overstreet, "Little Story, What Now," ed. Eugene Current-Garcia and Walton R. Patrick (Chicago: Scott, Foresmann, and Company, 1974), p. 23.

[26]Suzanne C. Ferguson, "Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form," Modern Fiction Studies (Spring, 1982), p. 15

[27]Eugene Current-Garcia and Walton R. Patrick, p. 46.

[28]Mary Rohrberger, Story to Anti-Story, The Short Story as a Literary Form (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968), p. 29.

[29]Allen, p. 114.

[30]Mahmoud Manzaloui, Arabic Writing Today, The Short Story (Cairo: Dar Al-Maaref, 1968), pp. 20-21.

[31]Halim Barakat, "Arabic Novels and Social Transformation," Studies in Arabic Literature (London: R. D. Ostle, 1975), p. 136.

CHAPTER II

"PALESTINE'S CHILDREN"

Figure 2. Unknown Photographer in Ismail Shammout, Palestine: An Illustrated Political History (New York: Arab Information Center, 1974), [p. 24].

> An Israeli-Jew has the right to remain in his homeland. By the same token, a Palestinian has the right to return to his. (Jean-Paul Sartre)[1]

Palestine's Children is a collection of fourteen of Ghassan Kanafani's short stories set among the Palestinian Arabs between the tumultuous years of 1936 and 1967.[2] Centering on experience of a child or young man, story lines and themes reflect the Palestinian's struggles toward statehood, a struggle which has its correlative in the coming of age stories of his characters.

There are times in reading Kanafani's stories where one feels the author is saying: try to understand what it was like or is like in Palestine. He seems to be appealing to the reader however indirectly, asking the reader: put yourself in the place of this character. How would you feel if a foreign government took away your home, gave it to others, and then both groups were hostile toward you? The emotions run deep, and with that knowledge, it becomes clear that Kanafani understates, rather than overstates.

Kanafani permits these characters to speak for themselves, to let the reader feel the climate of the times he writes about, through the characters' thoughts, words, emotions, and deeds. Although his stories concentrate on Palestine, they are universal in appeal, for, although they focus on the circumstances of the people in this one area, they tell the dilemma of all oppressed and uprooted people by individualizing circumstances and making each story personal.

As we proceed through representative examples of these stories, our analysis will focus on the techniques which Kanafani uses to promote this sense of oppression. Working with symbols and imagery, interchanging the explicit and inexplicit in a conscious design, he allows technique to take shape in the context of such crucial themes as the predicament of the Palestinians, escapism and futility, and the constant threat of violent death. Yet, as we will

see, the cumulative effect of these stories is not fatalistic, but rather focuses our attention on the theme of the indomitability of the human spirit, rising ultimately out of the prison camp, the ghetto, the cell, the self, and transforming the world into a sphere of possibilities.

"The Slope"

Muhsin is a new teacher who wonders what he will teach the children: "What are we supposed to do in this class when the children have no books?"[3] Muhsin's concern is with more than just basic education; he recalls to himself that "school was the last place where a man learns about life" (p. 1). Muhsin acts as the spokesman of these displaced children. In one sense, he functions as a kind of authorial correlative, for we know from his biographical data that Kanafani was himself a teacher in the camps. When Muhsin argues for the value of books he is covertly arguing for Kanafani, arguing for the value of literary acts in a politically explosive situation.

Naturally this figure is due to come into conflict with the insensitive uncaring administrator and to do battle with this figure, in the form of the principal, on the part of the children. Thus, the principal's remarks presage the sudden emergence of a small boy dominating the first class meeting, when he (the principal) makes the nasty suggestion that one of the children could take care of the class if Muhsin could not.

With almost no transitional narrative, the setting switches abruptly from the corridor to the classroom where a small boy shouts, "I have a good story, teacher!" (p. 2) The story is about his father's (a cobbler) various misfortunes. His shop, actually a box made out of wood and sheet metal, is situated on the side of a hill--the slope--at the top of which is the palace of a rich man. The

existence of the shop is unknown to the rich man, who "sat on his balcony all day long and all night eating bananas and oranges and almonds and walnuts and throwing away the peels and shells" (p. 3). The debris is tossed onto the side of the hill, and the peels and shells so cover the father's shop that eventually the rich man's servants can not find it in order to have their shoes repaired.

Impressed by the child's insight, Muhsin takes him to the principal's office and enroute asks the child whether he thinks that as he had told the class, his father is dead. The child replies, "My father doesn't die, I only said that so the story would end (p. 3). Muhsin tells the principal that the child is a genius, that he should hear the story of the father, which the child begins to again relate. The principal interrupts and says, "This child is crazy. We had better send him to another school" (p. 4). Muhsin defends the child. The story ends with the principal retiring to his desk, leafing through his papers, "looking from time to time out of the corner of his eye at Muhsin and the child" (p.4) who refuses to leave.

The story is told from the viewpoint of Muhsin, the teacher; even the tale of the boy is filtered through the teacher's sensibility. Muhsin is himself unsettled and unsure of what he has to offer to these students, and this sense of things unsettled, of a world that is unreliable is continued in the structure of the story. On one hand, this story is an allegory, similar to the Lazarus and Dives story, archetypical in juxtaposition of classes and its use of geography to convey the antagonism between these classes. On the other hand the narrative line is surreal shifting abruptly between location and voices, constantly changing the shape of truth. Thus, we have the abrupt shifting of the scene from principal's office to classroom corridor to the classroom, unidentified as to time and place, and the sudden appearance, uninvited, of the boy who gives a highly subjective

and dreamlike account of his father. The palace at the top of the hill, the box ("shop") in which the father works and its location on the slope; the rich man filling the slope (and eventually covering over the box) with the debris of his gluttonous and luxurious lifestyle; the final confrontation between principal and protagonist which fades into fuzzy inconclusiveness, even the boy's appearance - short pants that are too large and a shirt made out of materials of the kind women wear, thick black hair hanging down to his eyebrows--all give the air of unreality, almost of illusion. This air of unreality reflects the political contradictions of Palestinians deprived of their rights in the face of a world that looks on as if all is normal, a gross unreality where human rights ideology is mouthed in the very face of a gross violation of them. The juxtaposition of this surrealism with the almost prosaic elements of the allegory seem to speak to the life of the Palestinian, to the strange reality of being displaced in the midst of one's centuries old homeland, to being homeless while at home.

Politics is not by any means confined to being suggested in structure. Character provides a ready vehicle for delineating the major political antagonists. This is the stuff of allegory as we have come to understand it, but nonetheless as we identify the symbolic nature of the characters and the allegory comes into a more startling focus we are struck by the labyrinthine nature of the allegorical structure in which the boy's story is but an allegorical tale within a larger allegorical story of the boy, the teacher, and the principal.

Even the reader who is unfamiliar with the sociopolitical motivation of Kanafani's writing will at once recognize in the boy's tale the rich man at the top of the hill--high above others and all-powerful through his wealth and servants--as representative of a powerful and successful country like Israel, if not Israel itself. The nonchalant tossing away of the peels and shells that cover the box symbolizes the smothering of Palestinian inspirations by the indifference of an

affluent and powerful Israel. The slope is both a kind of no-man's land in which the poor struggling father, or Palestine, seeks to eke out an existence and a barrier steep and difficult to surmount in any effort to reach the rich man.

The details of the boy's story clearly parallel the plight of the Palestinians, that is, of the father. The boy relates how his father, a "good man," carelessly pushed a needle through a leather sole into his eye, but he worked very hard and was good at his work, having "a lot of shoes to repair and make like new" (p. 2). He's clearly a symbol of Palestinian political persistence. In his making old things anew, we recall not only the chants of the Arabian Nights Tale "New lamps for old," but also we see the need of present day Palestinians to make over their lives repairing the damage done by recent history and redefining their existence in a modern context. The repair shop or "box" emphasizes the sense of confinement that is the lot of present-day Palestinians, who, at best, have claim to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and who, at worst, are relegated to refugee camps or who live within the narrow margins of villages controlled by martial law.

The principal very much qualifies as a symbol of the British, in particular of the British Mandate which subjugated the Palestinians long before the official founding of the State of Israel in 1948. The principal is portrayed as being contemptuous of both teachers and students, and as one who "gulped down his tea" (the typical symbol of the Empire). Someone who, thinks Muhsin to himself, "wants to give his teachers a lesson in discipline and obedience right from the start" (p. 1). This is a picture of the British bureaucrat as seen through the eyes of the Palestinian. Just as the British had abandoned Palestine in 1948 to the Israelis and retired to the safety and comfort of their homeland, so the principal at the very end "went back and sat down in his soft leather chair, and began to leaf through his papers looking from time to time out of the corner of his eye at

Muhsin and the child" (p. 4). When the principal states that "the child is crazy, we had better send him to another school," he is probably reflecting the British attitude toward the Palestinians, one which would have them removed entirely from the Middle East or at least confined in designated places that are not their own "school" [homeland].

When Muhsin takes the boy to the principal's office the two allegories converge. In this conversion, a sense of surrealism once more enters the story. Muhsin asks the boy, "Do you really think your father is dead?" and the boy answers, "My father [the Palestinians and their hopes] doesn't die. The child admits that he said so only in order to end the story [the rhetoric of the confrontation]. The boy then states that the sun will dry up all the piles of peels and shells, "so they won't be so heavy and then my father can move them away from on top of him and go back to the house [Palestinian homeland]" (p.3). Here is evidently expressed the belief that perhaps time and patience, the natural process of the sun drying out the peels, will bring about a turn of events that will allow the Palestinians to return to their old way of life in their own spot on the slope.

Muhsin refers to the boy as a "genius," evidently because of his story, a story reading sharp insight into the plight of the Palestinian people. But, the principal will not hear this story, and he cuts off the boy before he has hardly begun, saying that the boy must be crazy. The boy tries to add a little pathos to his story and tells the principal to "just go to the rich man's palace and look at his shoes and you'll find the little pieces of my father's flesh on them" (p. 4). The issue of whether his father is dead comes up again. This constant questioning seems to be a goad to the present generation urging the Palestinian survivors to still seek their rights.

Muhsin tells the principal that the boy is not crazy, but that when Muhsin last inquired, he was told of the father's death. In response to "How did he die?" Muhsin repeats what the boy said that the father was pounding the sole of an old shoe and somehow managed to nail his fingers between the shoe and the anvil.

> Just imagine! He was so strong that he could pound a nail through an anvil. But when he tried to get up, he couldn't. He was stuck right to the anvil. The passersby refused to help him and he remained there until he died. (p. 4)

The strength of the father is the strength of the Palestinians, but their ineptness causes them to get themselves stuck (nailed) into a military impasse (the anvil). The Passerby (the world) fails to help, and the Palestine dies. Thus the allegory of the father ends in surrealism. From this point, the story becomes increasingly dream-like; the children in the class are depicted as an "eddying whirlpool leading . . . into a meaningless future, a future of nothing but more noise and more nonsense" (p. 2). One can never be sure how things will turn out. One would like to escape, but perhaps even that is futile. Escape to where? How?

The child in the story symbolizes the agony of the Palestinians and their efforts to speak out to the world in vain efforts to secure help. The indomitability of the shoemaker is clearly the indomitability of the Palestinian spirit.

"Paper From Ramleh"

In contrast to the fantasy-like, surreal quality of "The Slope", "Paper From Ramleh" like most of the other stories in the collection, is starkly realistic. Told by a child who is nine years old the story recounts a series of Jewish atrocities culminating in a suicidal reprisal by a Palestinian. In fact, the story achieves most of its impact through very straight-forward descriptions, an almost

journalistic accounting of actual events that are skillfully woven into the story to create a feeling of pathos and outrage. Kanafani here reveals another side of his special ability to manipulate images to achieve his ends.

A nine-year-old boy is traveling with his family from Ramleh to Damascus, where he will sell some morning newspapers--thus starting, of the story title: "Paper From Ramleh," has a most prosaic almost declarative origin. Some Jewish soldiers stop the family. One of the soldiers sees that the boy's mother wants to put the boy in front of her to shield him from the July sun. Whereupon the soldier drags the boy roughly away from her hands and orders him to stand (in the middle of the street) on one leg with his arms crossed over his head. The boy watches the soldiers "look over the jewelry of the old women and the young girls, and then brutally snatch it from them" (p. 5). The Israelis are uniform in their cruelty, even the tanned female recruits do the same as the male soldiers. The boy notices the mother looking at him, crying silently, and wants to tell her that the sun didn't bother me" (p. 5).

The sun begins to take its toll on the women and old men, and "from here and there cries of anguish and desperation arose." On their faces is unmitigated sorrow." One of the Israeli female recruits jokingly pulls the beard of Uncle Abu Uthman, beloved by all in the Palestinian community. The female recruit asks him about his youngest daughter, Fatima, whom he was holding at his side: "small and brown, she looked with her wide black eyes at the female Jewish recruit" (p. 6). The little brown girl with still wondering eyes . . . ." A Jewish patrol moves in front of the boy, whose vision is momentarily blocked. There is the sound of three shots , and the face of Abu Uthman becomes filled with grief. The head of Fatima "was hanging forward and blood dripped from her black hair to the warm brown earth" (p. 6). Here we see that in death, as in

life, the Palestinian is strongly connected to the land: Fatima's dark hair inclines toward the dark earth, warmed by her blood.

Abu Uthman's grief is described in a quiet, controlled style which Kanafani often employs in a scene of utter despair.

> . . . He was carrying in his aged arms the small, brown body of Fatima. Rigid and silent, he looked straight ahead with a terrible quietness and hurried past without even glancing at me. I watched his stooped back as he passed silently through the rows of soldiers . . . . (p. 6)

His departure is in contrast to the groans and weeping of his wife who has lost control. A Jewish soldier orders the wife to stop her lamentation. The soldier "kicked her with his foot" and she falls on her back. The soldier thrusts the barrel of his rifle at her chest and a shot rings out. The soldier turns to the boy and orders him to raise his leg, which he has lowered. When he raises the leg again, the soldier slaps his face twice, then wipes blood from the boy's mouth with the back of his hand. The boy's mother is crying silently. The boy wants to rush to his mother and tell her that the slaps didn't hurt, and that she should not cry but behave like Abu Uthman.

Abu Uthman buries Fatima. "They had just killed his wife and how he was going to face still another grief" (p. 7). His back was "hunched and soaked with sweat, his face frozen, silent, and dotted with shiny beads of perspiration" (p. 7). The people refrain from crying, and "a painful silence settles on the women and old men," as if "the memories of Abu Uthman were eating persistently away inside the people (p. 7)." The death of his wife and Fatima are almost a logical extension of the misery of his life, a life which is almost an archetype of the Palestinian refugee's experience. The revolt in Jabal al-Nar forced him to move to Ramleh: he had lost everything, and yet "he began anew . . . just as friendly as any plant in the good earth of Ramleh" (pp. 7-8). In contrast to the Jewish

soldiers, he is portrayed as a gentle and loving patriarch, yet even he has been inextricably bound to the war's violence. He had, when the Palestine war began, sold everything to buy and distribute weapons among his relatives. Now, he asks in return only that "he be buried in the beautiful Ramleh cemetery filled with its large trees" (p. 8).

After burying Fatima, Abu Uthman goes to a nearby store and returns with a white towel in which he wraps his wife, then he heads for the cemetery with her. He returns with slow heavy steps, covered with dust and breathing hard, his arms hanging helplessly at his sides, and "on his chest were drops of blood mixed with dust." The boy relates that he could see, "under the blazing July sun" how the man's lips were bleeding, and "there were in his eyes many meanings which I didn't understand but rather felt instead."

Abu Uthman leaves the group then but as he moves away, he stops, turns toward the street, and "raised his arms in the air and crossed them" (p. 8). The factural journalistic voice does not speculate as to whether this gesture is a blessing or a curse, a gesture of farewell or defiance.

He leaves to go into a nearby government office, and the narrator explains. Again, an element of ambiguity enters the story with the sense that Abu Uthman is going to the government "to confess."

> The people could no longer bury Abu Uthman as he had wanted. When he went to the mayor's office to confess what he knew, the people heard a dreadful explosion which demolished the whole building. The remains of Abu Uthman were lost amongst the rubble" (p. 8).

The choice of the verb "confess" (Ya'tarif) is strange in that it at first seems as if this battered old man would have very little to confess, for it seems that even in the midst of this horrible war, he's conducted his life in a generally gentle and loving manner. Yet, the final sentence of the story reverberates

against this confession in a horrifying way: "They told my mother, while she was carrying me across the hills to Jordan, that when Abu Uthman went to his store before burying his wife, he did not return with only a white towel" (p. 9). Without ever directly stating it, the author conveys to the reader that Abu Uthman has blown up the building. We know that he has sacrificed his own life rather than go on living with the knowledge that the terrorists have brutally killed his family.

The events just quoted need neither elaboration nor extensive commentary. The story is told almost in stark sensual data. We hear shots and see blood. But , there is no real commentary on this information. After all, the narrator is a child and what child can interpret the meaning of these events? Indeed, the narrator's shock and naiveté are clearly meant as qualities with which the audience will identify, for which of us, child or man, confronted with such random and senseless violence would know how to understand it? Imagery is used to connect the Palestinians and their Palestine: the sun, "the warm brown earth," "the good earth of Ramleh," Abu Uthman's desire to be buried in the beautiful Ramleh cemetery "filled with its large trees," and the drops of blood "mixed with dust." The theme of rootedness in the land is clearly reflected here. The acts of atrocity need no symbolic representation. They tell their own story, a recitation of outrage and sorrow. The "cries of anguish and desperation," "eyes that flash a startling black prophecy," and hidden meanings, faces filled with grief and revealing "painful silence." In retrospect, the sacrificial death of Abu Uthman comes as no surprise. It is rather a natural consequence, a way of giving voice to the helpless "painful silence" on the faces of Palestinian victims.

"A Present for the Holiday"

The two preceding stories each are four pages in length; this one is a scant three. Any writer could have told the story in many more words, but Kanafani is so controlled in this that he zeroes in with a minimal amount of words to produce the maximum effect. This is one mark of an outstanding talent. His technique seems to be to strip the story of any extraneous material and, as a result, both to sharpen the drama, coming across with a strong impact about the circumstances he depicts, at the same time that he seems to be dryly undercutting the horror of the action by his brevity, giving us a sense that this is merely the reporting of a daily event. The reader is left almost breathless as the protagonist makes his point, all the while stating, after each paragraph of informative detail: "But all that is beside the point . . . ." This is said six times in all, and it serves as an ironic recurring refrain, a counterpoint, for all that is told is very much to the point, in spite of his disclaimer, and the reader knows this to be so.

In this story, the narrator of, "A Present for the Holiday" is never identified; all we know of this person is that he or she works as a teacher: "I had been teaching that day in one of the camps" (p. 10) and that the narrator was a resident in a refugee camp along with his or her family. Both the lack of substantial data about the narrator as well as the few pertinent details we are given combine together to establish the narrator as a kind of ghostly presence; he is, in essence, a displaced person, and it is in this sense that he becomes the Everyman of the Palestinian non-nation.

Likewise, the telephone caller who initiates the story's action is a disembodied voice, identified only as "this is a man who gets up early. Nothing troubles him at night." In an ironic reversal the narrator who sleeps very late is

present as a contrast to the caller, a man of action who "gets up early." Yet we quickly realize that what the man of action proposes is almost meaningless, whereas the narrator stays in bed because he is by implication troubled at night, preoccupied with his recent memories of the children at the camps and with his own past. Thus, beginning with the narrator, the story seems topsy-turvy and disjointed.

This sense of a world askew, of fragmentation, is present from the opening paragraph of the story, where the voice shifts from subject to subject in a series of seemingly non-referential non-sequiturs.

> I was sleeping very late. There is a Chinese writer whose name is Sun Tsi and who lived hundreds of years before Christ. I was very attracted by him. He relieved my weariness and held my attention. (However, all that is beside the point of what I am going to write about.) He wrote that war is subterfuge and that victory is in anticipating everything and making your enemy expect nothing. He wrote that war is surprise. He wrote that war is an attack on ideals. He wrote . . . But all that is beside the point . . . (p. 10)

This disjointedness has as its correlative two important symbols: the camps and the sealed packages. Both are produced by purposeless activity. The Palestinian refugee camps ironically are the links which hold the story together, for the plan to distribute holiday presents in a camp sparks the memory of the camps of the narrator's past that depict the typically hopeless and illogical situation of generations of Palestinians, an unacceptable unreality as it were, that is reflected in the narrative line by means of a disjointed, fragmented presentation. The refrain: "But that too is beside the point," emphasizes the narrator's desperate search for an answer to the unspoken question: But what is the point, if any? The structure of the story patterns itself after the emotional turmoil symbolized by the image of camps, which are themselves symbols of paralysis and inactivity:

> The camps. Those stains on the forehead of our weary morning, lucentations, brandished like flags of defeat, billowing by chance above the plains of the mud and dust and compassion. (p. 10)

The story's opening line seems almost innocently benign compared with what follows. "I was sleeping very late" which is followed by speculation on the ancient Chinese writer, Sun Tsi, and his comments on war. The telephone rings and the first person narrator answers and finds a voice "refreshed and awake, almost joyful and proud." The caller tells of an idea to collect toys for the children and send them to the refugee camps in Jordan. The narrator now describes the camps, one of which he lived in as a child. He remembers Darwish who sold cakes after school and who was very bright and "wrote the best creative compositions in the class." But this, too, the narrator concludes is "beside the point."

The telephone voice continues, discussing the plans for a new campaign that appeared in the papers and some personal trivia about a Mrs. So-and-so and her night club escapade and how Mr. So-and-so will distribute things in the camp. Of course, this too is "beside the point." The caller is filled with enthusiasm about the idea. He continues to offer details on how the cardboard boxes will be filled and trucks will be found to bring things to camp free of charge--a surprise for the refugees and children.

Although a less emotionally resonant symbol than the camps, the surprise packages are themselves symbols of purposelessness and paralysis. They are the band-aids this society is attempting to put on the great wound of the war. Even as the caller gushes over putting in an expensive gift for the children, the narrator recalls the gift of years ago and muses on the word "surprise" while listening to the caller.

> A surprise. War is surprise too. That's what the Chinese writer Sun Tsi said five hundred years before Christ . . . . "War is a surprise too . . . I look at people and ask: Are these really faces? All this mud which June has vomited on them, how could we have cleaned it off so. Can we really be smiling? Quickly?" (p. 11)

It was winter but he was wearing short pants, a cotton shirt and open shoes in freezing weather. The children in camp had been told the Red Cross was bringing presents. He raced to the center with hundreds of children, all waiting for their turn. ". . . We were trembling like a field of sugar cane," the narrator remembers. He tries to recall what was in the box he had so eagerly anticipated. He can remember just one item: a can of lentil soup. It was the one item of importance--food. He kept the can of soup for a week and each day gave his mother some in a glass so she could cook it for them. "I remember nothing except the cold, and the ice which manacled my fingers, and the can of soup" (p. 12).

The story ends with the refrain: "But all of that too is beside the point." Actually it is all very much to the point and very real if one identifies with the plight of the long-suffering refugees over the decades. The so-called pointlessness claimed by the narrator refers to the hopelessness that fills his mind. Every attempt at coming to grips with the situation leads to a futile resignation, born of an unresponsive world, as if there were no reality, no justice, no recourse, no escape.

The technique used here is juxtaposition of montage patterns--what the narrator thinks is overlaid by what the voice on the telephone says, creating startling dramatic effects. Even as the telephone voice presses on to describe its pragmatic solution, to holiday in the camps, the "joyful and proud" plan is undercut by the narrator's stream of consciousness. Thus, every attempt to find some ground on which to stand is doomed to failure and, therefore, quite

"beside the point." Realism is a can of soup, not toys. Toys are for the rich man's son, not for Palestinians doomed to the camps. The reader experiencing the meandering of Kanafani's "pointless" narrative will very much "get the point" despite the narrator's consistent denial. "A Present for the Holiday" must be other than mere babbles from people (symbolized by the noise at the other end of the telephone line) who thereby placate their conscience. That is the point Kanafani hopes the reader will supply for himself.

In these first three stories of the collection, Kanafani writes in a tight style. He does not prolong or belabor the narrative, but uses an economy of words in the style of the best of modern short story writers. However, he also accomplishes this economy with no feeling that the pace is hurried. Quite the contrary, the reader senses an almost leisurely pace in the stories, which is a remarkable accomplishment. There are times when the author, as in "A Present for the Holiday" brings the reader into the scene and leaves him breathless. This demonstrates a great talent at work. As professional writers point out it is much harder to write short than long stories. This story, stripped of any extraneous material is sharpened as a result coming across with a strong message of the circumstances he limns. And, in this, he uses that recurring refrain, a kind of chorus: "But this is beside the point." Kanafani downplays, understates, and the result (which the author intends) is to make the tragedy and poignancy all the more felt.

"The Child Goes to the Camp"

Like all the stories in Palestine's Children, this story, to be fully understood, requires a familiarity with Kanafani's themes and settings; this familiarity is especially important in "The Child Goes to the Camp," for the "camp" referred to

in this story's title is a Palestinian refugee camp, a fact that is nowhere directly stated in the story. Thus, the story's setting is purposely clouded, and likewise time is uncertain, for the only identification of the period is that this is not a time of war, but rather an ambiguous period of "hostility" (p. 12). The narrator-protagonist of the story is ten years old, one of eight brothers. He lives in a house in which eighteen people must reside--ten from his own family and eight from another, "our aunt and her husband and five children who also lived with us. And our old grandfather" (p. 62). Although never explained in the story, such an arrangement is not by choice, but rather an imposed circumstance imposed on those victims of the Palestinian conflict who had to live in the camps for some time after being forced to abandon their homes in Palestine in 1948. Sharing the deliberately ambiguous technique employed in "A Present for the Holiday," this story is much more of a traditional narrative, yet the cumulative result of the need to - read-between-the-lines style is to cause the reader to ask questions and, based on "guidance" from the story, to come up with the answers.

The June War of 1967 resulted in the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by Israel, leading to another generation of Palestinian refugees. The child of the story is but one of the "children of the camps," the so-called awlad al-mukhayyamat, a term properly referring to all of the camp refugees, not just those of tender years. The story depicts the inevitable hostilities that would emerge between any people living under the crowded conditions of the camps. Because he lived in the camps at the age of twelve, Kanafani relies on considerable speculation and philosophical asides by the narrator, evidently a resident or former resident of the camps, to unfold the manner of hostility, both internal to the camps and external. The camps are officially not at war, yet war is there, in many shapes and forms. Kanafani is seeking to show the historical

significance of the camps in the lives of millions of Palestinians since 1948. In terms of Kanafani's themes, the story may be said to focus on the predicament of the Palestinian refugees, the indomitability of the human spirit, and the aura of futility that pervades the camps.

The narrator begins by stating "It was wartime, not war really, but hostilities, to be precise . . . a continued struggle with the enemy" (p. 62). Some speculations on the difference between peace and war follow, a difference that is not too clear--and which forces a return to emphasize the deliberately ambiguous term "hostilities": "That's what it was just as I was telling you, a time of hostilities" (p. 62). "Hostilities" is a term grown out of the double-talk of the military and journalists. The nature of the hostilities is made clear with the subsequent description of living conditions: the crowded families, the grandfather who could not read, how none had managed to find work, the "hunger--which some of you may have heard of--was our daily worry" (p. 62). Seventeen people crowded together, fighting for food, fighting each other, fighting over how to divide it among them, never a moment of silence, piasters (pennies) pilfered from pockets, the noise, all this combining to make each hostile and suspicious of the other.

The child and his cousin Isam, who also ten years old, are sent out on a food-hunting expedition in the vegetable market, to find food anywhere, "even from the tops of the tables if the owner happened to be taking a nap or was inside his store" (p. 63). Isam will try to snatch a head of lettuce or perhaps some apples or a bunch of onions and then the child will hold off "the friends--the rest of the children." In this world of "continual hostilities" alliances are best temporary, thus when not fighting with these other children, the child fights with Isam. The child reminds the reader of these hostilities because "you don't know" as the reader doesn't really know what it is like in the camps.

> The world at that time had turned upside down. No one expected any virtue. This would have seemed too ridiculous. This itself was virtue's triumph. Find. When a man dies, so too does virtue. No? Well then, let's suppose that, in a time of hostilities, it was your job to safeguard the first and foremost virtue, which is to keep yourself alive. Everything else is secondary. But in a time of continuous hostilities, nothing is secondary. Everything comes first. (pp. 63-64)

That is, the continuous tension and hostility in the camps turn into a primary event involving bare necessities, the struggle to live on a moment-by moment, day-by-day basis.

The remainder of the story centers on how the child finds a five-pound bill under a policeman's foot, how the child seizes it and runs, and how the child fights the household members in his effort to hold on to it rather than to spend it on something, almost as if the bill has become a symbol of something precious than any of the necessities it can buy. Isam lies and tells the family that he himself found the bill and that the child had taken it from him. The narrator says: "Didn't I tell you it was a time of hostilities" (p. 66). They begin to hit him, but the grandfather intervenes and suggests that on the "first sunny day" the child can take all the children in the house somewhere and spend the money in any way they choose. The child here expresses a suspicion of the grandfather; he feels that the grandfather merely wants him to be silent.

The child finds it necessary to guard the five pounds "every instant, night and day," especially against the grandfather who one night tries to steal the money after he learns that the child refuses to buy his daily newspaper. Ten days pass and all believe that the five pounds have been spent but the child constantly keeps his hand in his pocket, clutching the bill. The narrator explains himself in what has now become a refrain: "I told you, it was a time of hostilities" (p. 67). The child continues on the daily trips for vegetable hunting. After five

weeks, he is waiting for the right moment "when the time of hostilities would be over" to use it. "But whenever this was about to happen, it seemed as if we were getting deeper into the hostilities rather than out of them . . . How can you possibly understand that?" (p. 68). Here, the narrator seems to echo Kanafani's question to the readers.

One day in the marketplace the child is almost run over by a truck and winds up in a hospital. When he regains consciousness, the first thing he does is look for the bill, but it is gone. He thinks that Isam took it, "but he didn't say and I didn't ask" (p. 68). The child says he is not angry or upset about his mishap with the truck; the possibility of death being so near has not disturbed him, but he is sad he has lost the money. He concludes this bizarre logic with the justification "You won't understand, it was a time of hostilities" (p. 68).

This constant reference to "hostilities" and to a fact that the reader will not understand is a perpetual reminder that the reader must make special effort to understand. The five-pound bill is not a symbol but, instead, a sign to illustrate the conflict of generations produced by the conditions in the camps as in the final analysis, the five pounds vanish: It has served its purpose to illustrate Kanafani's constant warning to those outside the camps: "You won't understand."

In this story in particular, Kanafani addresses the rest of the world, especially the Western world who he truly understands the situation of the Palestinians? Who knows of their uprootedness, homelessness, their day-to-day problems of simply sustaining bodies and keeping alive? All other aims must be put aside.

This story is told in the first person from the viewpoint of a loquacious ten-year-old boy. In choosing this form, Kanafani allows himself a bit more lee-way than in the "Paper From Ramleh" story, a slight latitude to ramble a bit, to repeat,

as he has done in "A Present for the Holiday" especially with the refrain "it was a time of hostilities." In effect, we see here that he has combined technical experiments from earlier stories in order to work with a more traditional short story form. In opting for this style, he makes it believable to the reader that the story is indeed told by a young boy who at ten would not concentrate or zero in on a subject quite as clearly as an adult might. The technique is effective in this tale and the reader from a more affluent culture may shudder at the circumstances of the life of this child who must scrounge and steal for scraps of food, and fight his own relatives to sustain life.

"The Child Discovers That the Key Looks Like an Axe"

The story is also told in the first person, through the thoughts of a child. Revolving around one major symbol, a key which happens also to look like an axe to the child, this story builds on some of the symbols we have seen earlier, combining the realistic effect of the five-pound note as a symbol with the allegorical symbols of the slope and the box from "The Slope." In "A Present for the Holiday" Kanafani constantly tells the reader that everything discussed is "beside the point" whereas the very opposite is true. In "Paper From Ramleh" the delivery of the paper is quite incidental; it is what happens in the process of delivery that counts. In "The Child Goes to the Camp" the five-pound bill is again quite incidental; it is what happens to the people involved in its pursuit that matters. In contrast in the present story, the key is the center of the story: the key functions as a symbol of Palestine and at the same time the story line builds around the key: it initiates the action that leads to the story's climax.

Kanafani is attempting in most of his stories not to preach directly a political agenda, but to make the reader aware of the suffering of the children of

Palestine, children of all ages, of deep humanity and tradition. The world seemingly would not for a moment tolerate a direct appeal to the obvious or identify with a dispossessed people in some far distant land. The effect is like the opening miasma-like strains of a Ravel impressionist composition about a Waltz theme, which eventually crystallizes into clarity, one that the reader must find, but which is there upon some thought and reflection. In this story the key is used as a major symbol, and the story line builds around it.

The story opens with the child musing that the key that looks "just like a small axe" (p. 69). The child reflects on his past experience in which he could clearly distinguish between the clouds and a lion that they seemingly formed, trying to convince his brother that "the clouds would soon break up and become something else" (p. 69). But this does not happen to the key. Perhaps this dissipation does not occur because seeing the key as an axe is by now a tradition. The father had once likened the house key to an axe, "a bulky key, dark reddish-brown, except that its head was shiny and took the shape of an axe blade, broad at the end and narrow at the head which was connected to the handle" (p. 70). The father said he didn't know who made it, that his own father had seen it as if it were a small axe which "could be transformed into a key" (p. 70).

Thus, Kanafani, through the narrator, associates "a whole collection of virtues" with the key, its sharpness makes it useable for many things. It is a singular object, this key to the Jabr house, and if lost, anyone would return it there.

The boy leaves to study in Jerusalem, "away from all the things of the village: and forgets about the key. He feels that he is discovering a "world without keys, a new exciting world without limits" (p. 71). He is soon greeted by Yahya, who asks him "Where's the key?" (p. 72, emphasis added). As the

narrator explains, there is a "warmth of this which had now been returned to the key to our house." However, this feeling soon proves "only a delusion," as Yahya from the village appears with the key, informs the boy that his father "died honorably and courageously . . . If it weren't for him, they would have been occupied . . ." (p. 71). The mother had taken the children to Acre, with instructions to give the boy the key and tell him that he would "find oil and tahini in the back room."

The emphasis on the definite article here is very important, for it is an emphasis on identity. When the key was in the boy's sister's home in the city, it was referred to by those would could not understand its significance as "a" key, as if it were just an ordinary object, which to a stranger it is. Indeed, the key is simply hung on a nail over the blaring radio in the city house. The key seems in the city to be forgotten and demoted. But, as the protagonist enters the village with the key as his sole possession, his inheritance, it once again assumes the prominence of being <u>the</u> key.

The village had become a target for frequent raids. As the child makes his way home, he disposes of his coat and his suitcase, so that he enters his home village "carrying nothing but the key" (p. 71). The perfect calm he knew "concealed a potential ambush" and he was met by Yahya carrying a gun, who asked him for the key, then took it from the child and motioned with his head for the child to follow. The world is suddenly spinning around the child, and he feels the warmth he missed over the three years in Jerusalem. Yahya put the key into his hand and the two went down the hill together in silence, "he carrying his gun and me with the axe inside my head" (p. 73). Thus, in the child's mind, the key, associated with the Palestinian life, now has become an axe.

What is the key wonders the child? A piece of iron? "The winds of twenty years" passed over it, evidently the twenty Mays since 1948, and even in its most ignominious position in the city when his sister took the key down to clean, the room seemed incomplete without it. Musing on the key's identity leads the narrator to wonder and to question whether this object is a key or an axe. "What is it that I want" (p. 73). He notes that the passage of time doesn't mean much, that "the key is something else, it's something special and for me it can never be simply a key" (p. 73).

The child suddenly decides to come to the point and tell what happened to "both the key and middle of May together" (p. 74), what caused him to first see the key as an axe. His sister had one morning turned on the radio and did not adjust the volume, causing a loud sound "like thunder" to fill the room, causing the key to "dangle back and forth from the nail which was still in its ring" (p. 74). Both he and his sister felt a trepidation. The key continues to swing, making a rustling sound. Hassan shouts, points at the key: "look, it looks like an axe!" All the while the news on the radio recounts the date of May 15, 1948 which is related to the armed march of the Arab forces to Jerusalem. This event was the second Palestinian consciousness, the spirit of which persists in each generation of Palestinian exiles. In this recognition, there is also an implicit acknowledgement of the Palestinian's generational struggle, the axe of war is as much a legacy for this family as the key. The sound coming out of the radio is a report about the Arab forces which entered Palestine on the fifteenth of May, 1948.

The child's indecision about the key reflects a gradually maturing political awareness, that the key can be associated with home and village life, the Palestinian state, or, on the other hand, with warfare, an axe. As the story ends, the child is now a grown man with a son of his own. Hassan, his son, looks at

the key as it swings back and forth and suddenly exclaims that it looks like an axe. There is a continuity indicated here, a continuity of family from one generation to another, for in the beginning of the story, the protagonist's own father had waited for this identical interpretation from his son.

The key symbolizes the security of home, a homeland of locked doors. During a period of exile, the key is rusty and hanging on the wall. When they listen to the news of the latest attempt to liberate the homeland, the key swings like a pendulum, symbolizing the reawakening of the commitment to the country. The pendulum can equally represent the bipolar emotional states of the refugee as portrayed in many of Kanafani's stories: on one hand paralyzed by shock and feelings of being overwhelmed on the other hand angry and militant. The swinging key also suggests a Palestine in limbo, dangling indefinitely between war and peace, between existence and destruction. Thus we return to the story's beginnings, reaffirming that the key, unlike the clouds, will not break up, despite the destruction of villages in Palestine, despite exile, the family keeps the key against the day they will return home.

"Guns in the Camp"

"Guns in the Camp" was written in 1969, but this time the Palestinian spirit had undergone considerable militant transformation as is evident from the action in the story. The guns of the title refer to the training in the use of guns by children, both boys and girls. More importantly, the appearance of guns signals Kanafani's recognition of militancy and organized military tactics. This appearance is the logical outcome of restiveness with the passivity and abuse we have seen in earlier stories.

The first words of the story reinforce our sense of this story's material being a departure from the earlier stories we have seen: "Things change suddenly..." (p. 89). Certainly in the worlds of the refugee camps, or the Palestinian living under martial law as we have seen it portrayed in the stories to this point, where people are pushed to the limits of their endurance, it is only a matter of time before sudden eruptions of revolt. This sense of things "suddenly change" echoes with incremental repetition throughout the story. The protagonist Abu Saad is a man who has suddenly changed. Formerly, he was out of work, gruff, demanding, unbearable and snoring, his big rough hands covered with dust and cement. One day Um Saad could even smell wine on his breath. "But now all that had suddenly changed" (p. 89). He now went to the camp where an amplifier was blaring out a speech, "the likes of which he had never heard before." "He watched his son, Said, proudly giving instructions on attack and defense. He watched while the children in the camp, and the girls and the men too, were all either leaping through the rifle fire or crawling underneath the wires and brandishing their weapons" (p. 89).

Abu and Um Saad stand looking out over the square on a roof, looking for Said. His eyes meet hers and he proudly says to her: "Did you see him? That's Said!" (p. 90). An old man nearby looks at Abu Saad and says: "If only it had been like this from the beginning, nothing would have happened to us" (p. 90). Abu Saad notes that the older brother is with the Fedayeen (Self-Sacrificers) up in the caves. It is quite important for the reader to know that the Palestinian Fedayeen are, according to Moshe Menuhim, able-bodied, angry youth, exiled from their homes and homeland in Palestine, condemned to unbearable, frustrated existence, watching their homes, business places, gardens, cows and goats, and the fruits of their field and orchard enjoyed by the Israeli invaders. They are ready to die for the sake of liberating their usurped

Palestine."[4] He points out to his wife: "This woman has borne two sons who have grown up to become Fedayeen. She provides the children for Palestine" (p. 91). Said hurries to catch up with a long line of children dressed in Khaki. Um Saad says that a young man told her how "life would taste good from now on." The old man says that a rifle is like the measles: "The peasants say that when a child gets measles, this means that he has begun to live, and that his life is guaranteed" (p. 91).

Um Saad recalls how Abu Saad changed in an afternoon, recalling that Abu Saad had been crushed "by the victors, crushed by the ration card, crushed under a tin roof, crushed under the domination of the country" (p. 92). What could he do? For years, the life of a refugee forced him to ask the question without answer. But with the new militancy comes new answers and new attitudes. "If you could see him now strutting like a rooster. He can't see a gun on a young man's shoulder without moving aside and caressing it, as if it were his own old gun that had been stolen and he had just now found it again" (p. 92).

Um Saad says to the narrator "The grapevine is blooming, cousin. The grapevine is blooming!" The narrator steps toward the door where Um Saad is working on something that is growing: "A green head sprouting through the dirt with vigor that had a voice of its own" (p. 92). Thus the new Palestinian militant spirit is depicted through an appropriate symbolism of renewal and growth found in the vines and flowers of Palestine itself.

This is one of the shortest stories in the collection, but it contains some of the most wonderful passages, which create a kind of synesthesia in which all the readers' senses are brought into reading. One such passage begins:

> He spun around and with his small arm raised the gun high, under the fluttering flag which gave off a sound like the

> clapping of hands. And Um Saad clapped her hands. They sounded to me almost like two pieces of wood being struck together (p. 91).

The last paragraph of the story switches abruptly into the first person, and we realize that with the blooming of the grapevine, the narrator has stepped into the story as an active presence. Thus, he speaks with "a voice of (his) own" (p. 92).

> "I stepped towards the door where Um Saad was bent over the dirt, where there grew, since a time which at that moment seemed to me infinitely remote, the strong firm stems which she had brought to me one morning. A green head sprouting through the dirt with a vigor that had a voice of its own." (p. 92)

These are positive images. This story, starting on a negative, quickly moves toward positive thoughts, a renewal of hope, and the ending, the blooming of the vine, reinforces this anticipation of better days to come, this blooming of a world with "a voice of its own." This renewal of hope is deftly handled by the author who again draws the reader into the spirit of the characters, the people of Palestine.

"He Was a Child That Day"

There are lines in this collection of short stories when the reader may be tempted to think of each as a gem in a necklace--perhaps a silver chain composed of many individual links. Each one has merit and is linked together with other precious ones. But even such a necklace may contain one particular outstanding feature, a ruby or emerald. Such is the emotion one may feel reading "He Was a Child That Day."

That is not to say that it is so different from the others in the collection, rather to call attention to the superb writing employed by Kanafani. The author

seems to have honed this one and polished it to such a fine degree as to reach heights of perfection.

"He Was a Child That Day" is dated: Beirut, 1961, and is, like the other stories, tied to the historical events of the times. Like others of this collection, it is short (four pages) and concerns a Palestinian child who witnesses violence. What then makes this story different? Unlike the other stories, which are generally ruled by a journalistic voice or a dispassionate third-person narrator, this story is governed by a narrator who overwhelms us with lush impressionistic description, similes, and metaphors.

From the beginning, when the reader is drawn into the lives of a busload of Palestinians returning home to search for various answers to questions, the imagery is superb. In the opening sentence, the author sets the time of the day and scene: "The blazing redness of the morning sun anointed the sands of the silver cost" (p. 93). The next sentence begins a line of striking imagery that forms the basis of a technique that is continued throughout the story. "The twisted date trees shook last night's sleep from their languid idle frond and stretched their thorny arms skyward to where the walls of Acre towered above the dark blueness" (p. 93).

In the first paragraph, we are introduced to Ahmad, the child of the story's title, and main character. "Ahmad took a reed flute from the basket and leaning back in the corner of the car began to blow into it an injured air of rebuke, of an eternal lover" (p. 93). Here we see that metaphor has also become an element in the writing. The reader is quickly caught up into the story by this romantic opening. In fact, the story opens in song: "They [the passengers] expected the song to burst forth from out of everything around them. The surprise was in actually finding it missing" (p. 93). This romanticism becomes overt in the third

paragraph of the story, where the men are linked to the natural world and to each other.

> The field wandered off to the left, undulating with blood-stained green, the waves continuing their eternal efforts to mount the silver sand. In all that small enduring mineral world, the service taxi was a kind of unseen ... link ... joining men who had never in their lives, until that morning's greeting ... exchanged a word with each other (p. 93).

I would direct attention to the expression "mineral world." In this case, the combination of two nouns is so effective in briefly describing the little world of a vehicle in which these strangers find themselves almost lost among the overpowering effect of nature. In addition, twice before the author has used silver: silver coast and the silver sand. Repetition of this shiny mineral casts a kind of glow over the early part of the story.

Next we are given the passengers diverse and personal and mundane reasons for undertaking the journey. One is going to see if his father is still alive; another, a lawyer, needs to investigate a legal matter of land rights; a woman is trying to match a girl for her son, and there is the child whose school had been closed the day before, and, at last, the driver "who knew the road like he knew his own wife" (p. 94).

A spirit of love and kindness flows among these strangers. An old woman cradles the child when he falls asleep. Another waits for him to wake so she can share the bread and eggs she has brought along. A man covers the child, still another offers an orange to his neighbor.

There is some conversation and a woman tells how the Jews blew up an orphanage the year before and the bodies of children were strewn about the crater, mixed with seeds of burnt oranges from a truckload of oranges at the steps of the orphanage. Here, the romanticism of the earlier passage, the linking of men and nature has turned dark for the orange seeds are linked with

the dead children. The two passages are also connected by their foreshadowing of events to come. Thus, the water-like fields are a "blood-stained green" while the story of the orphanage atrocity foreshadows the coming violence. We see in this romanticism that nature is violated, the oranges have become burnt, when random and senseless violence enters the scene.

A turbaned passenger curses the violence: "The hand of Allah would smite all those who killed orphans. Allah would take his vengeance now" (p. 95). The immediate reaction to this statement about justice is ironic; a band of Jewish soldiers enters the scene, ordering everyone out of the taxi. The baskets the passengers carry are searched and are found to have no weapons. Yet, an officer in charge calls the child to his side, then counts the others. There are fifteen. He calls to the passengers declaring: "This is war, you Arabs," then tells the female soldier, "this is your quota for today" (p. 96).

The passengers are all gunned down and sink in a bloody heap in the ditch. The officer takes the child by the ear and tells him to remember this well. Then he cuffs the boy and tells him to run as fast as he can while the soldier counts to ten. "I'm going to count to ten and if you aren't out of here by then, I'm going to shoot" (p. 96). The boy freezes. "The terrified child couldn't believe any of it and remained fixed on the spot like one of the trees planted around him" (p. 96). He is cuffed again and knows there is nothing to do but "throw his legs to the wind and take off down the road" (p. 96). As he does, he hears their loud laughter and not really understanding why, he stops. "Putting his hands in his trouser pockets, and without looking back, he walked with quiet deliberate steps down the middle of the road. He began to count to himself: one, two, three . . . " (p. 97).

Thus, the story ends. The reader is never told if the child is shot, but instead is shown the gathering of human dignity even in a child too young to understand his own reaction. Kanafani tells it in straight narrative style, although the child is central to the story. Symbolically in the end, the child represents the innocent victims, who in spite of facing terrorists and death, manage to retain their dignity. In fact, throughout the story, Kanafani portrays the dignity of these innocent victims regardless of their stations in life. In their spontaneous camaraderie, from lowly peasant to educated lawyer, and finally the youngster, there is an inborn quality of pride and respect for one another.

The use of contrast is perhaps obvious here where again the author has contrasted kind people with cruel ones. It is effective in deepening the tragedy of the violent death of these people whom we have come to admire and like. We see vividly the senselessness of the slaughter of people who are on innocent missions. Even the search of their belongings is pointless since, after finding no weapons, the officer orders them all killed anyway. The soldiers are ruthless, their cruelty contrasting with the sweetness of the Arabs, and the irony of their belief in Allah's justice. The story ends in stark, sparse description, which is especially ironic after the descriptions of the beautiful setting. Thus, understatement is again one of Kanafani's strongest techniques. As in so many other stories, he does not comment on the senselessness of this violence, but rather leaves us to draw our own conclusions and comments about this child who walks on, counting out the last seconds of his life.

"Return to Haifa"

A departure from most of the stories we have encountered to this point "Return to Haifa" is a lengthy short fiction, running many pages. This length is

necessitated by the complexity of the story, for Kanafani covers a gamut of philosophical thinking, events, and characters' initial reactions to circumstances as well as later changes of mind.

Simplified in extreme, "Return to Haifa" is the story of a Palestinian couple returning to their former home in Haifa to look for the son left behind twenty years earlier during the war. They have made inquiries about him but have no answers as to whether he is even alive. They find there is a Jewish couple living in their old house who, as it turns out, raised their son. When the son finally appears, his natural parents find he is dressed in the uniform of the enemy. Said S the Palestinian father is the protagonist, but Kanafani uses a third-person omniscient viewpoint, going into the minds of Said S and his wife Safiya, and also the Jewish couple, Evrat and Miriam. In doing so, the reader can follow the trains of thought of each of the four characters.

The story focuses on Said S, who is presented as a Palestinian who had been uprooted from his home in Haifa twenty years before. Said S intends to return to his house alone. His motive for returning is purposefully veiled; the reader is left to guess at this point in the story but realizes that the return is important to Said S and his wife. Said S's wife, Safiya, also wants to return to the house and is adamant about doing so. She will not allow Said S to go without her.

The story opens with Said S and his wife, Safiya, driving to Haifa. Just as he feels sorrow mounting within him, he realizes his wife has begun to cry, feeling the same thing he does. As in so many of the stories, the sun quickly comes into it.

> The heat was unbearable and he could feel his forehead practically catching fire just like the asphalt underneath the car's tires. Up above was the sun, the terrible June sun pouring out the pitch of its anger onto the land (p. 99).

We are ever reminded that this land is desert. Next the reader learns that they have talked endlessly throughout the trip, talked of war and defeat and the Mandelbaum Gate, which was destroyed by violent passions. They have talked about the cease-fire and the radio and the soldiers' plundering of household belongings, the curfew--in other words, they have talked ceaselessly. Now, as they enter the city, they both fall silent, and the reader understands that this is a moment of a special meaning for both; all their conversation thus far has avoided what is uppermost in their thoughts-their son.

Entering his home city after twenty years, Said S feels tense, "The steering wheel felt heavy in his hands which had begun to perspire even more than before." The thoughts running through his mind remind him that he has become a stranger to his homeland: "I know it, this is Haifa, but it doesn't know me." (P. 100). Thus, the place begins to exist as a person, a relative or friend perhaps, who is recognizable to the protagonist but who does not recognize him. Here, we have a clear foreshadowing of what is to come as Said S meets his son.

Breaking the tension, Said S finally says to his wife, "Do you know? For twenty years I've been imagining that one day the Mandelbaum Gate would open . . . but I never imagine that it would open from the other side . . . So when they did open it, the whole thing seemed to me horrible and absurd and even, in a way, despicable . . . " (p. 100). Again, we realize he has come to the city as a stranger; he sees the gate as an outsider does and this perspective unsettles him for he is used to seeing it open from inside. This outsider's perspective brings with it another foreshadowing of the emotional disaster to come. " . . . every door should be opened only from one side and that if it opened from the other side you have to keep on seeing it as closed. It's true." (p. 101)

At first, his wife doesn't reply but when she does, she asks what he's been going on about. "Gates and dreams and other things. What's happened to

you?" (p. 101). He talks about the opening of the borders and how those in power said they'd improve their lot, but nothing has changed.

"The past came suddenly, cutting like a knife" (p. 102). With this sentence Kanafani thrusts the protagonist into a flashback of twenty years before, "exactly as if he were living it again" (p. 102). The reader is transported back to April 21, 1948.

Although there was tension in Haifa, the people are unprepared for anything when suddenly mortar shells begin to fly across the center of town, landing in the quarters of the Arabs. Pandemonium sweeps the town and Said S is caught in the heart of town, shots and explosions all around him. He is trying to drive home, yet after some time he realizes this is impossible. He had married and rented a house in a section he thought would be safe. Now, he cannot reach there, and he thinks of his young wife from the country and wonders what will happen to her.

With deft, swift strokes, the author depicts the confusion. "The roar intensified . . . British soldiers blocking passages, opening others . . . alleys closed . . . if he tried a run for it, they would use force, either with the butts of guns or bayonets . . . the sky was afire and exploding with the sound of bullets, bombs, and thunder . . . people pouring out . . . crowds swelling . . . He was adrift in the plunging waves of humanity and had lost all power to control his steps" (p. 105). He is being swept toward the sea, and he is suddenly thinking of not only Safiya, his wife, but their son Khaldun who is five months old on this very day.

There are "heaps of humanity piling into small boats." He thinks of joining them when "suddenly--like someone on the verge of madness, or like someone whose reason has all at once returned" (p. 105), he tries to force his way back through the surging crowds, "like someone swimming against a raging flood just

as it is abating from the height of its force" (p. 105). He begins to push with shoulders, arms, legs, head. The current of humanity drags his step back, he is trapped and caught up in a human tidal bore from which there is no escape. The protagonist makes the unthinkable, the desertions of one's child, perfectly believable when he describes the terror-stricken mob pushing their way to the sea.

For a brief moment, we are brought back to the present, where they are in the car returning to Haifa and their house. Said S looks over at his wife, her face pale, eyes filled with tears, and thinks she is going over her own steps on that day twenty years ago. With this device, Kanafani now shifts the viewpoint, and the reader is taken into the thoughts of Safiya on that fateful day.

She is alone, waiting for Said S, and growing terrified when he remains absent. She runs into the street at one point while their child is having a nap, and is caught in the surge of people. She uses a strength she didn't know she had to try to push against them and return home, but is pushed and pulled "as if she were a tree which had suddenly sprung up in that dreadful torrent of water" (p. 106). She screams her son's name, over and over, and finally meets up with Said S. At last, after their strength is gone in a useless attempt to go against the flowing crowd, they board a boat. Khaldun is left behind.

Clearly, flashbacks are an important technique in this story, not only to move the narrative line in time, but to reinforce for us the identity of these characters. Through these flashbacks, we see Said S as integrally connected to place, thus his descriptions of Haifa are full of place names and street names. The theme of the Palestinians' connected uses to their land, which Kanafani has treated in some way in almost every story, is underscored in the flashbacks as Said S's memories are inextricably bound to place. It is through flashbacks that we learn the motive for this trip, that they are returning to their house to see

if Khaldun is still alive. Although they have had two other children, a boy called Khalid, a girl called Khalida, who know nothing of their older brother, they have never forgotten this first born. In the past, the parents have made inquiries through the Red Cross and others, but have had no word in twenty years. Said S tells his wife they are having illusions, thinking they will find Khaldun now. He says, "No, I don't want to go to Haifa. It is humiliating . . . Why should we punish ourselves?" (p. 109). But, even as he was trying to talk Safiya out of going, he knows they will go. "When he went to bed he knew, deep down inside, that there was no fleeing it. The idea which had been there for twenty years was born and there was no way to bury it again" (p. 109). The use of language connecting birth and death, "born" and "bury," to explain the persistence of the idea to seek the child is startling but effective, for here we see not only the past hopelessness of this couple who have consoled themselves with presuming their son dead, but also the indomitability of their spirit as they renew their search and their hope in their continuity in the person of this son.

And so they go. And when they reach finally the house in Haifa and he turns off the engine, "It seemed so very natural, just as if the twenty intervening years had been put together between two giant presses and crushed until there was nothing left but a transparent sheet which you could barely see" (p. 111). They step up to the house and Said S tries to give himself the chance to look at all the small things he knows would frighten him or make him lose his balance: the door knocker, the pencil scribbling on the wall, the four steps broken in the middle, the fine curved railing, the latticed grating, all things that he remembers with clarity, things which he knew so familiarly. He rings, and says, "They've changed the bell" (p. 111) as though he cannot silence his tongue about this one small point. And, it is with this acknowledgement of change that we realize that this will not be simply a sentimental journey, that there is no possibility of

clearly recapturing the past, for in the span of years change has wrought its work as past becomes present.

An old woman Miriam answers and lets them into the sitting room. Every detail is etched into his memory, and, as his eyes rove over the objects, Said S mentally notes the differences, as well as the sameness. There is still the table decorated with shells, but now faded in colour. There are two of the original five chairs; a vase with peacock's feathers, but now there are five and there had been seven. The woman is smiling at them and says, "I've been expecting you for a long time" (p. 113). She has an accent, speaks English slowly. Said S asks her if she knows them. She admits she knows they are the owners of the house. When they ask how she knows, she answers, from the pictures they left behind, from the way they stood at the door. Said S and Safiya gaze where the woman is looking, and he thinks it strange that three pairs of eyes are looking at the same objects but seeing them differently. The details of the house, the room, the objects in the room, make the intervening years evaporate. In this mingling of time, the characters and we, as the readers, feel hope for the recovery of the son. The feeling is commensurate with the hope of Palestinians that justice will prevail and they can be restored to their homeland. This surge of hope gives the ending a tremendous impact.

Miriam reveals that she came from Poland in March of 1948. "A heavy silence fell while they all began to look wherever there seemed to be nothing important to look at" (p. 114). Thus, Kanafani describes a moment of terrible awkwardness among them. Said S breaks the silence and says, " . . . we didn't come to tell you to leave this place. For that you need a war . . . " (p 114). His wife squeezes his hand to stop him from going any further with this line of conversation. Said S says they only came to look at the things of theirs. He adds, "Maybe you can understand that" (p. 114).

She answers softly, "I do understand, but . . . " (p. 114). His nerve breaks, and he thinks, "always this awful, fatal, eternal 'but'" (p. 114). We see here in the confrontation between Miriam and Said S and Safiya, representing, respectively, the Jews and the Palestinians, both sides of the Palestinian conflict, and we realize the horrible similarity of their condition: both have suffered deprivations and exile. The irony of this conjunction between the sameness and differences of these two peoples is finally reduced to the simplest of protests; but.

Said S's wife's gaze silences him. It seems, however, that even simple conversation is impossibly absurd when things are so powerfully entangled. For a moment, he wants to leave, thinking nothing seems to matter, even whether Khaldun is dead or alive. "What difference could it make when things reach this point and there is nothing left to be said?" (p. 114). The confrontation has left him emotionally devastated, a devastation that Kanafani expresses in terms of war, of explosion: "A helpless bitter anger filled him and he felt as if he were about to explode inside" (p. 115). Suddenly, he points to the feathers, asking what happened to the two that are missing. Miriam answers that she doesn't know but perhaps Dov played with them when he was small and they were lost. "Dov? They said it together, Said S and Safiya, standing as if the ground had fallen on them from above" (p. 115). And, it is with this image of things turned upside down, of the ground falling from above, that the reader learns that Khaldun is alive: "Yes, of course. Dov. I didn't know what his name was, if that's what's worrying you. He looks a lot like you . . . " Thus, the world is upside down. Khaldun, a name meaning eternal, has become Dov, the name of one of Israel's most charismatic Kings, David.

Kanafani divides this story into parts, resembling chapters. Part I begins, as we've mentioned, with Said S and Safiya approaching Haifa. Part II starts

the story again but shows them earlier on in the journey as the "hard pounding" of Said S's heart dissolves "The twenty years of absence into almost nothing" (p. 107). Part III picks up two hours after the conversation where we learn the child has survived. Again, we are transported effortlessly back twenty years into the past. We are taken back once again to April, 1948, this time the date is the 29th when Said S and Safiya were deposited on the shore of Acre from a British ship. Once again, Kanafani does a beautiful transition to the house in Haifa where the Polish refugees were admitted to the house by a man "with a face like a chicken" (p. 115).

This is a clever way of distinguishing a minor character. Another name added to the list of characters might be confusing; and when the character enters the scene again later, the reader would probably be asking himself, now who is that? By using the expression "a face like a chicken," the character slides into the story again and the reader remembers immediately. Kanafani's skills are ever present for the discerning reader to admire.

The story now delves into the background of Evrat Kushen, Miriam's husband, who had left Warsaw for temporary quarters in Milan, then was brought to Haifa where he was lodged in a small room crowded with other inhabitants. They called it an "immigrant camp" and he had not understood why until he realized that all were new immigrants expected to be moved elsewhere. There was daily anxiety and the sounds of bullets were in the back ground.

The author's purpose in going into the mind of Evrat Kushen and his wife Miriam is to show the reader that these people have suffered hardships and are equally to be sympathized with as the main characters, Said S and Safiya. In this story in particular, Kanafani does not show just one side of the situation, but demonstrates that there are two sides. In doing so, the displaced Palestinians and the immigrant Jews are all empathic, and well-rounded characters.

Evrat notices "the remains of destruction" when they leave the immigrant camp and being in Israel "took on a new form and another meaning" (p. 118). Evrat, for at least a moment is confronted by the fact that he has left behind a war only to come into another battleground. But, he quickly suppresses this thought: "But within himself he refused to make of this anything serious requiring worry or even reflection" (p. 118). For his wife, a change comes later when she sees two young men from the Haganah, a Jewish terrorist political organization, carrying something which they put in a truck. She perceives what it is and is upset and tells her husband to look. He sees nothing, and she says, "That was a dead Arab child. I saw him. Covered with blood" (p. 119). Evrat is skeptical and asks how she can know that. She answers: "Didn't you see how they threw him in the truck as if he were a piece of wood? If he were Jewish, they wouldn't have done that" (p. 119). Her husband doesn't reply. Miriam remembers how her own ten-year-old brother was shot and killed by the Germans without provocation. To her, there is no difference in this insensitivity. Race doesn't matter. A child killed is exactly that: a child killed.

Evrat makes frequent trips to the Jewish Agency, and one day is informed he is going to be given a house, and along with it, a five-month-old child.

A short scene follows where we are returned to April 22, 1948, and the sound of crying is heard by the neighbor above who finds the baby alone in Said S's abandoned home. She cares for him for awhile, then brings him to the office of the Jewish Agency in Haifa to see if they can find a solution for his care. They decide to give Evrat and Miriam the home, provided they adopt the baby.

> "This offer was something of a surprise to Evrat who had been longing to adopt a child ever since he had learned for certain that Miriam was unable to bear children. He even considered the entire matter as if it were a gift from God. It was almost impossible to believe that so many blessings were coming all at once. No doubt to give a child to Miriam

> now might change her completely and she would stop all this strange behavior which had continued to affect her thoughts ever since she had seen the murdered Arab child thrown into the truck, dead, like a cheap piece of wood." (p. 120).

Said S and Safiya are told the story and Said S finds his confused state increasing. Once when Miriam goes to another room and slams the door, Safiya says: "As if it were her house! She acts as if it were her house! (p. 121). The tension deepens in the room where they wait and Said S finally asks "When will he be here" (p. 121), hesitating to call his son by an name. And Miriam responds in kind: "He should be back now, but he's a little late. "He's never been very good about coming home on time. He's just like his father . . . He . . . " (p. 121).

She stops, biting her lip, and Said S feels his body tremble "as if an electric current had passed through it" (p. 121). But then he asks himself, "What is paternity after all?, It was like someone opening a window in the face of an unexpected hurricane" (p. 121). Questions are whirling about his head--questions he hasn't faced for twenty years.

Miriam now reveals that she believes they should let Khaldun, the son, choose for himself which family he will live with. Safiya agrees, saying, "It's impossible to deny the appeal of flesh and blood . . . " (p. 122).

Said S bursts out passionately and a bit hysterically. " . . . What Khaldun? What flesh and blood are you talking about? You're saying it's a fair choice! For twenty years they've been telling him how it is, day by day, hour by hour, with food and drink and room . . . Then you come and say: it's a fair choice! Khaldun, or Dov, or whatever the devil wants, doesn't know us! Do you want my opinion? We should leave here and go back to the past. The whole thing is finished. They've stolen him" (p. 123).

This outburst is a typical of Said S and all the more touching because it is also a departure for Kanafani. Until now, the reader has generally found that the author understates dramatic moments. The words seem to explode further and the atmosphere in the little room of the scene is charged. Miriam leaves the room which "had suddenly filled with a palatable tension. Said S feels that all "the walls inside which he had been living for twenty years had been dashed to pieces and that he was coming to be able to see things more clearly" (p. 123).

The intensity of this scene is relieved now by a flashback which tells of Said S's neighbor who had likewise returned to visit the home he's left behind. His brother's picture was hanging on a wall with a black ribbon of mourning attached. He learns that his brother was found with "his rifle broken to pieces, along with his body, when he was struck by a shell" (p. 125). He was buried as a martyr for the struggle of the liberation. And since then, the neighbor has also carried a gun in the struggle.

The neighbor takes the picture down and finds the space behind it "pale with a meaningless whiteness, like some disturbing vacuum" (p. 127). The space symbolizes not only the meaningless loss of lives during the conflict, but also the strange vacuum of Said S and Safiya's situation. Said S remembers this neighbor journey not simply because it was also the story of a homecoming, but because the story symbolizes the disturbing vacuum in which the displaced Palestinian lives.

We are transported back to the present where a car is heard outside. Khaldun/Dov has returned. They hear his key, his steps on the stairs: "The minutes stretched out to such a length that the silence began to echo crazily, intolerably" (p. 128). Here Kanafani uses sound to build the suspense in the room, with three people who have long awaited the young man's return each deep in his or her private thoughts. The son calls "Mama" to Miriam, wondering

why she is up so late. She tells him there are some guests who want to see him. The young man enters at last. He is dressed in an Israeli military uniform. Seeing him in this garb, Said S leaps from his chair and Safiya turns toward the window, hiding her face and sobbing. Said S demands of Miriam if this is the surprise she wanted them to wait for. The young man is bewildered. Miriam says calmly that she wants to present to him his parents, " . . . your original parents" (p. 129).

The young man's color changes and he seems to lose some self-confidence as he looks down at his uniform. But when he answers he says that Miriam is the only mother he knows, and his father was killed in the Sinai eleven years before. Said S is surprised that he recovers his composure quickly. He takes Safiya's hand but is thinking: "Five minutes ago if anyone had told him that he would be sitting there so calmly, he wouldn't have believed it. But now everything had changed" (p. 129).

Kanafani uses the uniform as a catalyst to change Said S's thinking. Said S's thoughts are never the same after he sees his son in the uniform of the enemy. His ideas undergo an evolution from this point until the end of the story, and the reader is privy to the rethinking of the positions. The main alteration concerns his younger son, Khalid.

Once again, the author's artistic skills are present in full measure, for the process of this restructuring is almost painfully slow. That is not to say that the story bogs down. Not at all. The tension is maintained all the while. The reader is carried forward inexorably, almost as Said S and Safiya were carried through the surging crowds earlier.

When the young man asks why they have come and says: "Don't tell me that they want to take me back!" (p. 130), Miriam tells him to ask them. He does, and Said S maintains his composure "which by then seemed to him nothing but

a fragile shell concealing a secret flame. Softly he said: 'Nothing . . . nothing . . . it's just curiosity, you know'" (p. 130). This is obviously an answer he never would have given a few hours before. And again, with composure, Said S asks who he is fighting with and what for. Now, it is the young man's turn to become excited, and he answers that Said S has no right to ask these questions. He says: "You're from the other side" (p. 130).

Said S laughs out loud, and, with this burst of laughter we have another reference to a world turned inside out, upside down, as Said S feels that he is "giving vent to all the grief and tension and fear and anguish which he had repressed inside himself. He wanted suddenly to go on laughing and laughing until the whole world turned upside down" (p. 130). The young man is angered and sees no reason for laughter. After a silence, Safiya is the one to ask: "Don't you feel that we are your parents" (p. 131). Her question never answered.

At last the young man speaks, as "if he had been preparing the sentences for a long time" (p. 131). And indeed Kanafani makes his words sound precisely like a little prepared speech, as he states: "Ever since I was a child, I've been Jewish. I went to synagogue and to the Jewish school. I ate kosher food and studied Hebrew" (p. 131) Only a few years before had he been told that Miriam and Evrat were not his parents and that his parents were Arab. But by that time, this information was practically meaningless, and at the end of this speech, he says: "In the end, it's man who is the issue" (p. 131).

Said S responds that phrase is precisely what was going through his mind: that it's man who is the issue. Now Said S rises to the occasion with his new thoughts firmly taking hold. He says"

> "There is no need for you to describe your feelings to me, even afterwards. Your first battle could be with a Fidai[5]

> whose name is Khalid. Khalid is my son. I hope that you will keep in mind that I have not told him that he is your brother. Man, as you said, is the issue. Last week Khalid joined the fedayeen . . . Do you know why we named him Khalid and not Khaldun? Because we were expecting to find you again. Even after twenty years. But it didn't happen. We didn't find you. I don't think we will ever find you." (p. 132)

The shock of this information is undercut in the next paragraph where we learn that Said S is lying. In fact, Said S has told Khalid that he would deny his paternity if he joined the fedayeen. The world is turned upside down again as Said S thinks:

> "How strange and incredible the world is. And now he could come up with nothing with which to withstand this tall young man's denial of his own filiation except to boast that he was Khalid's father. It was Khalid himself who had changed without him and without joining the fedayeen, all on account of this petty scourge called fatherhood. Maybe Khalid would take advantage of his being in Haifa and run away . . . and if he did! . . . How disappointed he would be in the world of this existence if he returned home and found Khalid waiting for him!" (p. 133)

With this, the reader knows Said S has done a complete volte-face. His thinking since coming back to his former home in Haifa has turned 180 degrees. Here, we see not only the tragedy of the destruction of Said S's hopes, but we see how each side of the war and each generation is victimized. Ultimately, the Palestinian-Jewish conflict devolves into fratricide, Kanafani seems to be telling us. This is the tragic absurdity of this war: that Palestinians and Jews--both Semites, racially brothers, both groups with an incredible love for the land of Palestine, both of whom have suffered from systematic attempts at extinction and exile, and both of whom are the rightful heirs of this land--are reduced to killing each other.

Eventually Said S addresses the young man once more. He says:

> "Man ultimately is the issue. That's what you said and it's true . . . . When we talk about a man, it has nothing to do

> with flesh or blood or an identity card or passport . . . . let's try to imagine that you greeted us just as we dreamed it for twenty years--with embraces and kisses and tears . . . wasn't that it? If you had kissed us, or if we had kissed you? If your name is Khaldun or Dov or Ismail, or anything else . . . what difference does it make? Even so, I don't feel any scorn . . . The crime is not your crime alone. Perhaps the crime will begin, from this moment, to become your fate, but before that, what? Isn't it really the man who suppresses it, hour after hour, day after day, year after year? I'm truly sorry for this, because for twenty years I believed just the opposite" (pp. 133-134).

Said S then paces the room, once again--as they had when they entered it, noticing the objects--the shell-covered table and the peacock feathers, but now they look altogether different to him than they had looked when he entered the room hours ago. He asks himself: "What is the homeland?" (p. 134). He notices his wife looking at him with apprehension and he brings her into the question and asks her:

> What is the homeland? She is startled by the question and he repeats it. He tells her that he has asked that of himself moments ago and has asked: "Is it these two chairs which have been in this room for over twenty years? The table? The peacock feathers? The picture of Jerusalem on the wall? The copper door bolt? The oak tree? The balcony? What is the homeland? Khaldun? Our dreams about him? Parents? Children? What is the homeland? Is it his brother's picture hanging on the wall? I'm only asking" (p. 134).

Thus, in this world turned inside out, the center has begun also not to hold; the house is no longer "home," the place begins to devolve into meaningless parts rather than to exist as an entity. When son is no longer connected to father, how can objects such as the peacock feathers or chairs have any meaning. He looks at Dov and thinks it is impossible that this young man could be the child of this woman. He tries, too, to see a resemblance between him and Khalid, but finds they are opposite. "He found it strange that he could have lost all feeling whatsoever now that he was face to face with him, and imagined

that all his memories of Khaldun were just a handful of snow melted by the burning sun as it rose" (p. 135). With this image of things burning away, of memories like snow melting, we are transported back into the desert which is Palestine but which is also the great empty vacuum of the heart of men and women like Said S and Safiya.

The young man, Dov, suddenly rises and confronts Said S:

> "'Twenty years have passed! Twenty years! What did you do during all that time to recover your son? If I had been in your place, I would have carried a gun for his sake! Is there any stronger reason. You're weak! Weak! Shackled by the heavy chains of backwardness and paralysis! Don't tell me that you've spent twenty years crying! Tears won't recover the lost and the perished and they won't work miracles. All the tears in the world couldn't carry a little boat just big enough for two parents looking for their lost child . . . You've spent twenty years crying . . . Is that what you have to say to me now? Is that your pathetic broken-down weapon?'" (p 135)

Said S turns to Safiya and says he didn't want to argue with Dov. Then Said S speaks at length about people's mistakes and that two wrongs don't make a right. If this were so, then Auschwitz was right. He accuses the young man of using one logic to exonerate his own existence and another logic to avoid punishment.

> "You're trying to turn our weakness into a great fine hunting stallion for you to ride . . . No, I'm not talking to you to insist on your being an Arab . . . . Man is the issue . . . One day . . . you will understand that the greatest crime any man, whoever he is, can commit is to think, even for a moment, that the weakness of others and their mistakes gives him the right to exist at their expense and that this absolves him of all his own mistakes and crimes . . . " (p. 136).

Said S turns to his wife to share the most important insight this experience has given to him. "Do you know what the nation is, Safiya? It's so that all of this won't happen" (p. 137). For the homeless exile, a nation is roots, it is family, it is protection against the sundering of familial ties that Said S, Safiya,

Khaldun/Dov, Miriam, and Evrat have experienced. And with this insight into the meaning of a nation comes Said S's new understanding of Palestine itself: "I was searching for the true Palestine. Palestine which is more than a memory, more than a peacock feather more than a child . . . " (p. 137).

This question forces him to confront what indeed is Palestine for the generation who has never lived there, for the generation born into exile.

> "What is Palestine for Khalid? He doesn't know about the vase, or the picture, or the stairs, of al-Halisa, or Khaldun. And yet for him Palestine is worth a man carrying a gun and dying for her. For us, for you and me, she's nothing but the search for something under the dust of memories. Look at what we found under all that dust . . . more dust! . . . For Khalid the nation is the future. Tens of thousands like Khalid will not be stopped by the broken tears of men looking in the depths of their defeat for the rubble of tears and the spittle of flowers. They are looking to the future and they will correct our mistakes and the mistakes of the whole world . . . . Dov is our flaw, but Khalid, he is the honor that is left to us." (p. 137)

Miriam tries to prevent them from leaving because she thinks they haven't discussed the subject. But Said S tells her there's nothing to say. "Do you know something, madam? It seems to me that every Palestinian will pay a price. I know many who have paid with their sons. But I paid with him at a cost . . . This was my first lesson and it is a very difficult one to explain" (p. 138). As he exits the house, the details he had noticed so vividly when they'd arrived arouse no feeling in him. He turns his back on the house and leaves, driving "towards King Faisal Street" (p. 138). Thus, turns his back on the past and moves toward the Arab nation in the form of "King Faisal Street." And as he drives towards his future, he utters the story's last line. "I hope that Khalid has gone . . . while we were away" (p. 138).

The symbols of a past life are vivid. They speak of a calm daily routine, of small things remembered well: scribblings on the wall, a vase, the exact

number of peacock feathers in it. In the end, everything has changed just as the country and rulers have changed, and now for Said S these small items from his past life mean nothing. It is the future as represented by Khalid that counts. Said S symbolizes a man of Palestine who finally comes to realize that fighting back is noble and right even at the possible expense of a second son. He has lost the first son to the war, to its most horrible consequences. Now Said S is ready to sacrifice a second if he must, for he sees the cause as one for which the Palestinians fight.

During the course of the story, Said S changes his thinking dramatically--never more so than when he hopes his younger son has joined the Fedayeen to fight for Palestinian rights. This ending coming after we know Said S had forbidden the son to take up a gun, is tremendously touching and poignant. Said S has had a complete turn about in his opinion and it strikes like a hammer blow, almost leaving the reader breathless. "Return to Haifa" is a masterpiece of story writing reaching into the depths of man's heart, showing us the true tragedy of the Palestinian war for everyone involved, whether Arab or Jew.

"Six Eagles and a Child"

This last story of the collection returns to the form of the first story. It is a first person allegory. Like the protagonist of "The Slope," the protagonist of "Six Eagles and a Child" is a school teacher, whose name and past is never known to us; thus, he seems to be another of the Everyman-type characters we have seen in so many of these stories. He teaches music but makes it clear it is not necessary to understand music. All he has to do is sing songs for the children and keep the rhythm.

He must travel to three villages and he dislikes the trip in the ancient car which serves as a taxi. He looks down on the peasants who also travel in the taxi and tries not to have conversations with them. In fact, he puts up with the routine of moving between teaching assignments grudgingly "because of the position the schoolteacher holds in the villages . . . The schoolteacher there is something holy . . . and it would have been too bad for any of us to break down that special holiness of ours with some momentary grumbling or a crude word" (p. 139).

In spite of his reluctance to have any talk with the passengers, several over a period of time insist on talking to him. Specifically, they tell him the story of the eagle who perches on a particular rock. The first says that the eagle came to the rock because it is where his mother died. He adds: "The eagle is a faithful animal" (p. 141).

The teacher knows that everything in the villages has a story but he is surprised that this rock, out on the desolate road has one too.

On the return trip, a young peasant sits next to him, and as they approach the rock, the teacher senses the story of the eagle is coming, so he speaks of it first, saying, "God have mercy on the eagle. You know this story, of course . . . He was faithful" (p. 141).

The seatmate says, "Love does that to everyone."

When the teacher questions the introduction of love, the peasant tells the story of a female eagle whom two males fought over. The victor was not the bird she loved, so she fought the victor and killed him. Then, she went to the rock and cried until she died.

A week goes by and a middle-aged woman tells him a different story--a story of two eagles on a rock and later only one. The woman thinks the male flew off for another and the female died of grief. When the teacher is alone in

the taxi, the driver tells a still different version. The road became busy and noisy, and the eagle fled to the mountains and never returned to the rock.

On the return trip, the teacher asks another traveling companion if he knows anything about the rock. When he does, the teacher asks him which story he believes to be the truest. He answers. "There is no mystery about it. Why does a butterfly light on one flower and not on another?" (p. 144). And he says that a policeman shot the bird because the eagle's shrieking and crying annoyed him.

When winter comes, the taxi travels by a different road so it is not until spring that the eagle comes up in conversation again. When warmer weather comes, the teacher sees an enormous eagle on top of the rocks, standing like something stuffed, unmoving. He says to his companion who was a child, "The eagle is back" (p. 144). The eagle's return represents the return of hope. As bleak winter gives way to spring, the season of renewal of life, there is a renewal of hope. Peasants begin to build legends.

The child's answer when asked about the eagle is surprising. "What eagle?" he asks.

> This is not an eagle . . . look again . . . every spring a mulberry bush grows behind the rock and then in summer it dies or else the rabbits come and devour it before it dies (p. 145).

The teacher looks more closely and knows the child is telling the truth. There is no eagle. Still he asks the child if he is sure. His answer comes swiftly:

> He smiled again, quite enjoying the sight of such an ignorant teacher, and assured me with his small hands: "When the mulberries are ripe, I came with my friend to steal them . . . They're really delicious . . . " (p. 145).

This is the last paragraph of the story. Kanafani begins the story with a teacher who feels superior to the people around him. He is haughty,

contemptuous of the peasants, and feels he is wasting his time teaching these students in small villages. He is not a likeable character, for he is too supercilious for the reader to genuinely like. He finds the trip unbearable: " . . . I had begun to feel that the work I was doing was nothing but the slow burial of all the aspirations I had carried with me the day I graduated from secondary school" (p. 139).

During the course of the story he even tries to top the passengers, showing off that he knows the story of the eagle. Each time he does this, the person comes up with a different version of the story and surprises him, as well as putting him in place. At the end, he is really defeated by the child, and the teacher is at last humbled.

In terms of basic plots, this story is clearly an allegory similar in some ways to the boy's tale in "The Slope." Both stories share a gnostic quality that is particular to the allegory or fable. But, because the fable is the part of the narrative proper, rather than an embedded element as it is in "The Slope," the allegory and gnostic sense in "Six Eagles and a Child" is much more immediate. On the surface, this appears to be a simple story, without need of interpretation. However, it is more complex than it appears at first glance or on casual reading because of the symbolic content. The writer uses the eagle and the rock, both natural objects, as major representations in developing his essential subject of the Palestinian struggles. The rock stands for the Palestinian spirit which cannot be subdued or vanquished. It is a symbol of stolidness.

The tales of the eagle are symbolic of the reconstruction of human experience in the aftermath of difficulties The eagle's persistent return in one version of the tale expresses the Palestinian's hope that they will return to their homes. The version that tells of two males struggling over the female

represents Palestine and Israel struggling over the fertile land, a struggle in which no one will benefit. The stranded eagle is a projection of the possible Palestinian fate.

Yet the child, the new generation of Palestine, explodes all these quasi-noble myths. He identifies the mulberry bush that grows in renewal year after year from the rock. The bush survives summer sun, rabbits, and thieving boys, and returns each year to offer the new generation its fruit. Here is the symbol of Palestine for the future: the stalwart mulberry that persists in growing out of the rock, that resists the ravages of nature and man, and that humbly returns to feed each succeeding generation.

Thus, with humor and wryness, Kanafani ends this collection. His final symbol, the mulberry bush seems an appropriate last symbol for this collection of generally short, short understated, journalistic-like tales that carry the message of the Palestinian struggle in a frank, simple, and poignant manner.

No matter how diversified they may be, the stories in Palestine's Children are linked together by the time, settings, and the historical effects on the displaced Palestinians. Consequently, much of the symbolism is connected with the oppressors, the British and the Israelis, and the oppressed, the uprooted Palestinians. Likewise, the characters are linked from story to story. They.are generally nameless, many of them seem to be almost without a past to be living in the eternal present of the displaced person. Others, who do have a past, like Uncle Abu Uthman or Said S and Safiya, are as much Everymen as the more obscure protagonists, for these characters with a past seem to be archetypical symbols of the Palestinian experience: the atrocities, the fighting, the exile, the camps, and thus even characters with names eventually become a type of generic character also. These stories are also linked together by theme. Oppression and change are two of his major themes.

Similarly, Kanafani seems obsessed with the results of abrupt change, with presenting the circumstances of a world turned upside down. Thus, in "The Child Discovers that the Key Looks like an Axe" and "Return to Haifa," and "Six Eagles and a Child" we see this theme treated in different but equally effective ways. In each case, the world is turned inside out and upside down; the center will not hold, and things fall apart. But, likewise in each case, the protagonists grow and mature in their vision as a result of being thrust into totally new circumstances. Unfortunately, but truly, it is an age-old story: individuals trying to make a living and a life who are cast into circumstances where they are forced to give up all they've gained, all they've worked for and dreamed of. The oppressed are shown to undergo metamorphosis, passing through various stages of change: depression, acceptance of the hopeless situation, a growing hope of better times, anger, finally fighting back. In the most dire situations there remains a human spirit that will not die. Thus, in "Paper from Ramleh," "A Present for the Holiday," "The Child Goes to the Camp," and "He was a Child that Day," we see oppression treated directly and the strategies of various characters who fight this oppression. In "The Slope," we see a less direct treatment of this theme, which is no less powerful for not being explicit.

Lastly, Kanafani uses symbolism to cause the reader to think more deeply and to make the stories universal in appeal. For instance, in "The Child Discovers the Key Looks like an Axe." A key can be a symbol of security, a locked home against intruders, as well as the homeland. When it resembles an axe, it becomes a weapon, a possible threat to intruders. As we have seen with the theme of change, Kanafani is expert at juxtaposition, turning things around so that the appearance of an object may take on a diametrically opposite meaning later.

Even violence becomes a symbol in these stories, perhaps one of the major symbols in the collection, Violence is often present in these stories as it must be, for Kanafani is an honest story teller and will not gloss over the facts for the sake of a happy ending. The violence symbolizes the daily threat of a man without a country, it is the essence of life in the Palestinian's circumstances. Yet even violence undergoes a subtle juxtaposition, for these characters retain tremendous strength in the face of violence, even maintaining human dignity when guns are pointed directly at them and used. Here, we cannot fail to recall Fatima and Uncle Abu Uthman or the child of "He Was a Child That Day." There is a vitality in the people that cannot be killed.

The land itself is a symbol, for in this collection, men, aspirations, and land are inextricably bound together. This is especially ironic given the fact that at present, the nation of Palestine is a landless nation.

Kanafani is always in control of his material and has created an outstanding work here. In spite of the continuous themes that run through each and every piece, he has also provided tremendous variety. Using different viewpoints, he shows that people are individuals, even when linked by circumstances. And, often thinking is affected by age. Where the older generation is clinging to ideas it has grown up with, the younger generation is branching into other ideas and setting goals for themselves. This is clear in stories as different as "Guns in the Camp," "Return to Haifa," and "Six Eagles and a Child." Kanafani is not afraid to have his characters change their minds and come to realize their thoughts may need to be revised and adjusted in the times they are living in.

Kanafani uses first person, third person, author omniscient, and straight narrative in this series of stories. He appears to be perfectly at home with

whatever viewpoint he chooses, staying steadily in the mind and thoughts of the protagonist.

Indeed, this collection seems at times as coordinated as a symphony with a rhythm that runs through the stories, driving home the points the author wishes to make. And, like a symphony, it has various movements, with some stories like "Paper from Ramleh" and "A Present for the Holiday" told at a faster pace than others like "Return to Haifa," some seeming more introspective than others such as; "He Was a Child That Day," are deeply involved with tragedy, such as "The Slope" and, at least one, "Six Eagles and a Child" a lighter touch that is more humorous than the others. There seems to exist no story type or area that Kanafani turns away from. We read this collection and realize that the author meets challenges head-on, never avoiding the difficult, or sticky issues, but rather, becoming the maestro who conducts and orchestrates his notes with perfection.

NOTES

[1]Jean Paul Sartre, The Writings of Jean Paul Sartre, A Bibliographical Life, Vol. I, Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, Eds., 2 Vols. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1947), p. 540.

[2]Ghassan Kanafani, Palestine's Children, Barbara Harlow, translator and editor (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984), p. 2. Hereafter cited Parenthetically in the text.

[3]Kanafani, p. 4.

[4]Moshe Menuhim, The Decadence of Judaism in Our Time (New York: Exposition Press, 1965), p. 166.

[5]Fidai (Arabic for self-sacrificer)

CHAPTER III

"THE DEATH OF BED NUMBER 12"

Figure 3. Bison Sygma in Jill Smolowe
"Assignment: Murder",
Time Magazine, May 2, 1988, p. 37.

I went to my death
transformed my body into
a massacre and exile.
(Ahmad Dahbur)[1]

In briefest form, a summary of the action of "The Death in Bed Number 12" might read as follows: The story is told in the first person in epistolary form, presenting a series of letters from an unnamed narrator to his friend Ahmed, who functions as an adversarius throughout the story pushing the narrator to speculate on the meaning of an individual's life in the larger context of life itself. The narrator is a patient in a hospital who has witnessed a young man's death, a stranger in the land of whom nothing is known except the most basic facts. The narrator, disturbed by the young man's death and the apparent blackness of his life, creates a background for him, later learning that none of the imaginary story is close to the truth.

Actually the story is much more complex than this capsule summary would indicate. Filled with subtleties and complexities this unique story is different from most of Kanafani's and, I believe, requires further analysis for, after only a first reading, the reader may feel, if anything, disappointment. After being engrossed in the romantic narrator's sad speculations about the young man, which occupies eight of the fourteen pages, a reader is then told the story is all false, a figment of the narrator's imagination. Given this situation, the reader may feel he has been duped, has had his bubble burst, so to speak. He is jolted back to the narrator whom he scarcely remembers and may react with anger, asking: Whose story is this anyway?

Therein lies the crux of the problem: whose story indeed? The question may never be answered entirely and certainly not simply. To attempt an answer, we must go back to the story and give it a much more careful examination in order to understand its full meaning.

The narrator, whose name, like so many of the narrators in "Palestine's Children, we never learn, is a patient recovering from ulcers and has observed the last agonized days and finally the death of a fellow patient, a young man of twenty-five years. Not only the death disturbs him, but the fact that the young man's life is such a blank that the nurses identify him only as "bed number 12". The narrator cannot accept this kind of anonymity for a fellow creature, and in compensation he creates an elaborate and charming story of the young man's life which explains some of the few facts known about the young man, Mohamed Ali Akbar.

The narrator is concerned not only with death but also with the meaning of life. There are unanswered questions in his head which bother him. He says:

> "I have been suffering from a stomach ulcer, but no sooner had the surgeon plugged up the hole in my stomach than a new one appeared in my head, about which the surgeon could do nothing. . . . I find myself quite unable to make good those holes that have begun to open up in my head, quite incapable of stopping the flow of questions that mercilessly demand and answer of me"[2]

The reader learns that before the young man's death, the narrator has unlawfully left his own room several times to visit Mohamed Ali Akbar, and in fact has been roundly berated when discovered by the doctor and nurse. He has observed the man's frightened eyes, the face, and, using a striking simile "lips that trembled like a ripple of purple water" (p. 29). Such an image foreshadows his imminent death. When those eyes come to rest on his face, it seems to him like an appeal for help. In the meeting of their two eyes, in this brief exchange of understanding, the man in bed number 12 becomes a *doppleganger* for the narrator.

He has read the patient's basic statistics: name, age, nationality, diagnosis. The man is from Oman and was suffering from leukemia. There is

always a securely tied box alongside his pillow. It is an old wooden box "with his name carved on it in semi-Persian style writing" (p. 30). At first, the box seems a kind of casket or coffin image to which the mysterious man is securely connected, but in a reversal of this expected representation the box becomes a sign of hope.

The narrator asks a nurse what is in the box. She laughs, saying "No one knows . . . he refuses to be parted from the box for a single instant." Then she whispers, "These patients who look so poor are generally hiding some treasure . . . " (p. 30). Later the nurse remarks that if there had been some treasure in the box, he "would surely have given it away or willed it to someone, seeing that he was heading for death at such speed" (p. 31). The narrator laughs, but it is a sardonic laugh. Kanafani does not state this directly, but the reader knows it to be so when he reads that the narrator thinks: " . . . the stupidity of this nurse scarcely knew any bounds, for how did she expect Mohamed Ali Akbar to persuade himself that he was inevitably dying, that there was no a hope of his pulling through? His insistence on keeping the box was tantamount to hanging on to his hope of pulling through and being reunited with his box" (p. 31).

Thus, as we will see ultimately the box represents life. The narrator feels strongly that this box ought to be buried with Mohamed Ali Akbar at his death, unopened.

The narrator gleans one other fact, and that is that Mohamed Ali Akbar insists he be called by all three names. He refuses to answer anyone who calls him by only the first two.

A discerning reader learns through the story that the narrator is a sensitive person, seemingly the only person who cares about this youth's identity. The narrator's concern contrasts with the callousness and lack of sympathy shown in the professionals' attitudes. Their attitude is exemplified by a nurse who calls

out after the young man dies, "Bed number 12 has died!" (p. 30). This depersonalization is especially destructive in view of the patient's insistence earlier that he always be addressed by his full name. Deprived of a name, the patient in bed number 12 becomes a mere hospital statistic, and the narrator rages against this loss of dignity and identity.

Kanafani uses the color white throughout the story to symbolize a blankness or vacuum in life. This symbolism is directly related to the situation of displaced Palestinians, of course. White also stands for the sort of spiritual sterility shown on the part of the nurses and doctors. In the beginning, Mohamed Ali Akbar lies in a white bed. When he dies, his body goes to the autopsy room "wrapped in white covering" (p. 31). Later, he is surrounded "by a crowd of men in white clothes" (p. 39). And, of course, the reader pictures the probable white uniforms and white walls of the hospital. Kanafani does not spell out these details, but, it seems characteristic of his method in the story, one in which he relies heavily on a reader's bringing his own intelligence to the interpretation. The reader must draw what seems to be reasonable inferences from hints in the story.

At any rate, the significance of the color white is important to the whole structure of the story. The color seems to symbolize the blank fear of the unknown associated with death in its fullest concept. White is ubiquitous in the story, most strikingly in the disease which the young man dies of. Leukemia is a disease characterized by an abnormal increase in the number of leukocytes (white blood cells) in the human body. Leukemia is often idiopathic in origin, and in this way it is related to the young man, for we know nothing of his origins and thus he dies without identity. Furthermore, leukemia is also an obsessively wasting disease: the white blood cells multiply without reason. Similarly the narrator, confronted by the blank of the young man's identity, obsessively

begins to fabricate an identity based not on reason but rather on some deeper emotional need.

When the nurse announces the death as a mere bed number, the narrator is disturbed, as much by the lack of identity as by the death itself. He cannot accept the young man's isolation and seeming anonymity. His letter says: "the hospital has done little more than transfer the ulcer from stomach to my head . . . it can never find the answers required to plug up holes in one's thinking" (p. 29). The narrator emphasizes with the youth who serves as a catalyst for the imagination. The man lived for twenty-five years. The narrator thinks, they had to have done something. In this way the narrator creates a past life from the bits and pieces he knows about the young man. The facts are sketchy, but from the fragmentary facts he is compelled to imagine a life, for he cannot abide and accept the idea that this life is a blank to all those present at his death.

The narrator stays awake all night and by morning he has created a background for the young man, compatible with the facts, sad but wholly satisfactory. He answers all the questions anyone interested might ask: What were his aspirations? Why did he insist on everyone using his full name? What was in the precious box? When the narrator's mental picture is complete, he tells it to the recipient of his letter with enthusiasm, for he has constructed the image of a whole person, or, as he hopes, has re-constructed that life.

I am deliberately reminding the reader of the narrator's presence for clarity's sake, but Kanafani does not. He simply spins this yarn of the young man's supposed background and it is here that the reader may well become sidetracked, caught up in the life of a man to the point where he forgets the narrator.

As the narrator sees it, Mohamed Ali Akbar was a poor man from a poor village, but "what does poverty matter to a man if he has never known anything

else? The whole of Abkha suffered from being poor . . . it was a contented poverty, a poverty that was deep-seated and devoid of anything that prompted one to feel that it was wrong and that there was something called 'riches' (p. 31). He sees the young man as a seller of water, carrying two water-skins across his shoulders and knocking on doors. "Mohamed Ali Akbar was aware of a certain dizziness when he laid down the water-skins [this action is a portent of the disease] but when taking them up again the next morning he would feel that his existence was progressing tranquilly and that he had ensured for himself a balanced, undeviating journey through life" (p. 31). The reference to vertigo here is the first time in the story that an obvious reference from things out of balance, circles, are used as symbols. Many more follow and will be discussed later.

Kanafani now introduces the hostile environment, typifying most of his stories. "It happened on a scorchingly hot morning. Though the sun was not yet at the meridian, the surface of the road was hot and the desert blew gusts of dust-laden wind into this face" (p. 32). What follows is that a strikingly beautiful girl opens the door he knocks on and the young man is struck dumb. He is shy even with his own family but cannot utter a word now. However, he knows immediately that he wants to marry her. He appeals to his sister to ask for her in marriage. His mother is dead and his father bed-ridden, so his sister is the only family member he can ask. His sister agrees and eagerly goes, while Mohamed Ali Akbar spends a nervous night waiting for her return and the answer.

Using his story-telling skills, Kanafani keeps the reader in suspense, not telling the answer immediately. Instead, the sister tells the narrator that the girl's mother agrees, but the father will not give his answer for five days. Thus, the author creates further suspense with the device of a waiting period. The young

man waits anxiously, not knowing how to pass the time. "He kept looking at his shadow and beseeching God to make it [time] into a circle round his feet so that he might hurry back home" (p. 33) Here, we now have the second use of a circle, and because it is associated with betrothal, we are compelled to think of wedding bands.

During this wait, his sister is completely composed, feeling her brother's name is without blemish and he will surely be successful. The young man, too, begins to feel optimistic about being accepted, so much so that he starts to imagine what his future life with this beautiful girl will be like.

On the appointed fifth day, his sister returns with a disconsolate face that indicates failure, and she tells her brother he must forget the girl. Her father has died two days ago and his dying wish was that the family not give her in marriage to this young man. "But why?" was all he could ask (p. 33).

Now we learn that the sister used only his first two names: Mohamed Ali, and that there is a scoundrel by that name who is stealing sheep, and the father thought that's who he was. There is complete frustration here, a circle of frustration, as it were. This mistaken identity cannot be explained because the father is dead. Mohamed Ali Akbar is stricken. He wanders near the girl's house, not able to forget her easily, and finally, in reaction to this mistaken identity and loss of his love he refuses to be called anything but his full name.

Here, we see the issue of identity is once more very important to this story. Because of the confusion over his identity, the young man has lost out on this possibility of marriage, and also by implication on the possibility of family, which, of course, ensures the continuity of one's identity.

Now the young man becomes angry and changed. He is no longer content. Abkha (the town) becomes for him "a forbidding graveyard" (p. 34). In addition, he begins to covet wealth. When he asks himself where he can find

wealth, he decides to sail to Kuwait. He believes that after a while he will be able to return and strut about wearing a snow white aba (cloak) trimmed with gold.

Here, again we see the color white is important to the story. And, once again, it represents ultimately a certain emptiness, for even this white coat can not adequately assuage the young man's grief over the loss of his love: "it appeared to him that his long dreams of wealth were merely a solace for his sudden failure and that they were quite irrational" (p. 35). Clearly the desire for wealth is frankly compensatory and is not adequate compensation at that.

The journey to Kuwait is a difficult one; with the boat exposed to a variety of dangers. But Mohamed Ali Akbar holds fast to his dreams! " . . . embullient souls accustomed to life's hardships paid no heed to such matters" (p. 35). Yet when he is finally in sight of Kuwait, he "experienced a strange feeling: the dream had now fallen from the coloured world of fantasy into reality and he had to search around for a starting point, for a beginning to his dream" (p. 35). This need to ground fantasy in reality has its corollory in the narrator's thinking when he is creating an imaginary life for Mohamed Ali Akbar. Although the story he invents is sad, still it contains more than a little wishful thinking.

As the boat reaches Kuwait harbor, Mohamed Ali Akbar experiences a strange feeling. The packed streets, crammed with cars, the massive buildings, serious faces all appear as barriers to his dreams. He feels a severe sense of loss, and once again, vertigo. Here, it was "not as simple as in Abkha. Here it was without beginning, without end, without landmark" (p. 35). Again there is a connotation of circular motion. Even the roads seem to him circuitous.

When he finally finds a road that leads to the sea, he stares at the horizon thinking of Abkha, the town he has left, enveloped in tranquility, where everything has a beginning and end and carried its own particular lineaments.

"He felt lost in a rush of scalding water and for the first time he had no sense of shame as he lifted his hand to wipe salty tears from his cheeks" (p. 36). He is overcome with a yearning to "have his water-skins over his shoulders," in other words, he yearns for the familiar routine and objects of his life in the town of Abkha.

He sleeps this night on the beach while "the sea rumbled heavily under the light of the moon" (p. 34). Dawn brings hope and in this strange land, he finds a job as an errand boy and is provided a bicycle for the performance of his duties. The turning bicycle wheels which take him on his appointed rounds again echo the circular theme - the monotony of round and round motion.

In the narrator's mind Mohamed Ali Akbar saves his earnings and makes a sturdy box in which to keep his tiny fortune. The narrator imagines the young man taking this money to buy a white aba trimmed with gold, a splendid cloak, and "every evening, alone with his box, he would take out the carefully folded aba," "on it he would spill out his modest dreams, tracing along its border all the streets of his village, the low latticed windows from behind which peeped the eyes of the young girls. There, in a corner of the aba, reposed the past which he could not bring himself to return to but whose existence was necessary in order to give the aba its true value" (p. 37).

This emphasis on the past and its value is especially inescapable for we are forced to remember that what we are reading is a fabrication that is being substituted for lack of something better. The young man's painful past is not real at all; it is the story the narrator is supplying to make up for the utter lack of past of the man in bed number 12.

One day Mohamed Ali Akbar is suddenly overcome by weakness, which continues and worsens, causing him to sleep through whole days. "Time as usually understood came to an end for Mohamed Ali Akbar, the narrator says,

"from now on everything happened as though he were raised above the ground, as though his legs were dangling in mid-air; like a man on a gallows" (p. 37). This passage not only serves as a foreshadowing of the young man's death, it also speaks to the way that Kanafani deals with time. Time stops and becomes meaningless for the young man; it is equally meaningless for the narrator who merely fabricates events and time, in order to give the young man an identity. We have seen Kanafani play liberally with time in other works; here we are reminded especially of "Return to Haifa" in which time becomes so flexible that characters move very easily through past and present.

As the disease takes hold of the young man's body, Kanafani gives us his feelings with water imagery, also showing he has a deep understanding of sickness and how it can distort perception. The young man falls into a trance in which he dreams of his box and of the sea. His box is rocked on the waves in the same way that his body is rocked with pain. Reality and dream fuse, and he is back at the sea where he spent his first night in Kuwait. A feeling of peace overcomes him even as an army of white men descend upon him. We realize that the character is expiring and the water imagery returns with special force. "Suddenly he felt that the tide had risen right up to this waist and the water was unbearably cold" (p. 39). Death's coldness has seized the man, and this process is clearly expressed in the water metaphor. The news that '"Bed number 12 has died"' (p. 39) is proceeded by a final and masterful use of the water motif. Death in the guise of water occludes the young man's sight, so that he is unable at last to see the nurse who announces his death: ' . . . the water continued to rise higher and higher until it had screened off that fair, clean-shaven face from his gaze" (p. 39). Thus, we are given experience of death from the point of view of the one dying, and through Kanafani's use of water imagery we are presented with an almost unbelievable vicarious experience as

we share the death process with the young man. Thus, the sea, like the box is a recurring image in the story. Across that sea is home, where the young man always intends to return. In the hospital as we have seen the sea becomes his constant companion.

The narrator is unable to escape from the memory Mohamed Ali Akbar's eyes that seemed to be staring at him before he died. He thinks that Mohamed Ali Akbar, might not mind having his name mutilated, and would be satisfied at being merely 'Bed number 12' if only he could be relieved about the fate of his box.

At this point in the story, the reader is made to understand that the narrator's letter has been mailed and answered. The narrator responds with a pithy statement about death and its meaning: "we must transfer our thinking [about death] from the starting point to the end" (p. 40). He is reminded of a statement of Mahatma Ghandi's on the subject where he wrote: "Life and death are but phases of the same thing. The reverse and obverse of the same coin . . . I want you all to treasure death and suffering more than life and to appreciate their cleansing and purifying character. Death which is an eternal verity is revolution, as birth and after is slow and steady evolution. Death is as necessary for man's growth as life itself."[3]

In Kanafani's story, we already know that the narrator is troubled by the death of this young man, troubled by his aloneness in death, the seeming nothingness of his life, and the fact that no one cares. The narrator <u>does</u> care, possibly because he is also a patient and having faced surgery, has faced his own mortality.

His friend Ahmed has written about the death of a man who fell down on a street and whose own pistol ripped open his neck and of another who died of a heart attack one week after he was married. The narrator, in response, writes:

"Yes, that's all true . . . but the problem doesn't lie here at all, the problem of death is in no way that of the dead man, it is the problem of those who remain, those who bitterly await their turn so that they too may serve as a humble lesson to the eyes of the living. Thus, the narrator summarizes his own position vis-a-vis "The man in bed number 12," for this man, who with his lack of identity was a lost soul even before he died, has been giving the living narrator the problem of dealing with the issues of identity and death. In his aloneness and lack of past, the dying man has served as a foil to the narrator who received gifts and letters from friends, who has a past and a future. In this way, "the man in bed number 12" serves, as we mentioned earlier, as a *doppleganger*, a dark double for the narrator, and thus the dying man represents all those dark forces which the narrator most fears and most desires to resist.

This is the crux of the story, and as such makes conflict in the story the narrator's, not the young man's. Wrestling with death is the narrator's problem, as is the question of what life has meant before death. What is it all about? He cannot abide a person's dying as this young man has, alone, anonymous, callously referred to--not even by name!--without friends or family, without a history of his days on earth. The narrator empathizes so much with the young man that he creates a story of life for him, however false it proves to be.

Focus in the story is now on the narrator who is not yet discharged from the hospital. He finds the doctor writing a report about Mohamed Ali Akbar and on the point of opening the box. As the narrator muses on death, he realizes the narrowness of human existence, confined to our immediate minds and bodies. He realizes too that the only way we can perceive others it through the "narrow fissure" of our own perceptions (p. 40).

This is an apt description of humans and strikes home with truth, for it seems universal for one human being to see himself in another, or to seek

similar traits to his own. A common expression makes the point: it takes one to know one. This observation is especially important for the narrator will soon learn the true identity of the dying man from the doctor's report, and on learning the facts of identity, the narrator realizes how much of himself, of his own experience of hospitalization's isolation and confinement have led him to produce the details in the story he fabricated for the man in bed number 12. Thus, discovery of the dead man's identity leads eventually to the narrator discovering more of his own identity.

The narrator, however, cannot rid himself of Mohamed Ali Akbar, and the narrator relates to his friend with whom he corresponds that the life he had imagined for Mohamed Ali Akbar is absolutely wrong. From the doctor's report, the narrator learns that this young man of twenty-five was father of three boys and two girls and was a sailor before settling in Kuwait four years earlier. He had opened a shop there, perhaps sending money home to support the family left behind. From the medical report, the narrator learns that six hours before death, he lost his sight. Thus, the eyes that have haunted him could not have been staring at him at all.

The doctor unconsciously reads the report aloud and starts to untie the string on the box. That narrator considers leaving the room, for "it was none of my business; the Mohamed Ali Akbar I knew had died and this person they had written about was someone else" (p. 41). However, he cannot bring himself to move.

He peers into the box fearfully. It reveals invoices owed by the shop, a photo of a bearded man, a watch strap, some string, a candle, and several rupees. He is sadly disappointed, but just then the nurse pushes aside the bills and finds a china earring. The narrator bursts out: "He bought this earring for his sister Sabika--I happen to know that" (p. 41).

One item he had imagined to be part of the box's contents could actually be there! The narrator accepts it as fact. It is a moment of excitement for him, of exaltation, of triumph! However, the nurse stares, then laughs uproariously and the doctor joins in laughing at the "joke". Although the professionals view it as a joke, the narrator is ecstatic that one personal object that he visualized is actual. In this actualization, the narrator experiences not only the satisfaction of dream becoming reality, but also the sense that somehow he has been able to reach outside the narrow confines of the self and to connect with the larger reality shared by others.

Kanafani has packed this story with imagery and symbols, as well as insights into the nature of human beings. This is an almost acrobatic feat in a story of fourteen pages. Here, we feel the depth of this understanding of humans: their strengths, their weaknesses, their foibles, the compassion of some as opposed to the callousness of others.

In the story the color white indicates an absence of life, the ultimate absence of life being death. There is a void, a blankness as though the young man's life experiences were written in chalk on a slate that has been washed clean and is empty. The doctor reports the man's family's address is unknown. The burial will be attended only by the grave diggers. This sad fact is often true of people away from family in a strange land, and applies to many displaced Palestinians forced from their homes by political force. To Mohamed Ali Akbar, the people and environment of the city he emigrates to are his enemies and he is uncomfortable there.

As stated earlier, the sea is also a symbol, a link to his homeland, a pathway leading back to the place he knows and misses as soon as he leaves it, the familiar. Water itself is a symbol, for it is essential to all life and so the narrator imagines him as a seller of water. But, when the man is dying, water

seems to turn into an enemy. He suddenly "felt that the tide had risen right up to his waist and that the water was unbearably cold" (p. 39). It rises higher and higher and he dies.

The all important box which he refuses to be parted from plays variations on a role in life. It represents the bits and pieces of his life to indicate that he did indeed live, and comes to mean life itself as he clings to it in his dying hours. It also appears to symbolize Mohamed Ali Akbar's solitary confinement. His life is confined and closed, just as closed as the box. His clinging to the box indicates how the horizon of his life is limited. However, he seems to pin his future hopes on the box, too. The box appears to create a specific frame for this life in his mind. His life ends vaguely and mysteriously like the box. Nobody knows what is in the box; it is a mystery much like the man's unknown identity.

As is known, people are given names in certain cultures signifying their expected activities in the future or past action. To this effect, people are called "cats", for example, because their backs never touch the earth when wrestling. In the criminal world, there are names such as the "underworld", "High marauders", "Black hands" that signify the actions of people who have essentially become inseparable from their names. In "The Death of Bed Number 12", the ailing man has become so ill that the attendants perceptibly or imperceptibly associate his being with the medical record number indicating his place of residence, the bed. This man suffering from leukemia has become inseparable from his sickness. His entire being has become infused with leukemia and has given him a place of permanency in the form of bed number 12. In essence, he <u>is</u> bed number 12 and bed number 12 is he, inseparably one and the same. This unhappy, desolate and unfortunate union has given rise to the man's being referred to by that number. Leukemia is a disease that is

not common in that land, and once mentioned, whoever is associated with it, is immediately recognized as dying. The man's only escape, in fact, is death.

Recurring images of circles suggest that there is not straight path to goals. Rather, circles only go around and around, going nowhere. These circles occur repeatedly in different forms as we have seen: the man's vertigo is mentioned in more than one scene. Dizziness causes confusion and precludes determined actions. In one scene, he asks God to circle him in his own shadow. Later in the story, there are circuitous roads in the alien place which confuse him. Still later, he rides a bicycle to do his errands, his own legs causing the wheels to go around. Finally, the story itself comes full circle. It begins with the narrator writing to his friend and calling attention to the frequency with which he uses the word "die" to express any extreme. Near the end, the narrator writes: "This, my dear Ahmed, is the story of Mohamed Ali Akbar, bed number 12, who died yesterday evening and is now lying wrapped round in a white cloth in the autopsy room, the thin brown face that shifted an ulcer from my intestines to my brain and who caused me to write to you, so you don't again repeat your famous phrase 'I almost died laughing' in my presence" (p. 39). By returning to the narrator's dislike of expressions that use the word "die," which was the way the story began, the story has come full circle.

Let us, too, come full circle to ask again the question: whose story is it?

There are several reasons for the uncertainty. The first is that we never learn the narrator's name, although over and over we read the name Mohamed Ali Akbar. Secondly, the story's basic structure is known as a frame. It begins in the present with the narrator. For instance, writers, for example Saki in "The Open Window," often use a frame to write a surprise ending that is possible to tell only through a narrator, or there may be a twist in the plot, or a bizarre

situation that becomes more credible through the line of the first person. However none of these circumstances is true in this story.

Last, but the most salient reason for questioning, is the fact that the reader becomes totally absorbed in the long story of Mohamed Ali Akbar. When the narrator returns to the scene, the reader is startled to be forced abruptly to acknowledge that he has lost track of the narrator and has been riveted to an imaginary narrative. The narrator is the culprit who has led a reader on and he has the feeling that he must hold the narrator culpable.

It is human nature to recall sights more easily than smells, sounds, touches, or tastes. So it is the nature of readers to remember the vivid images depicted by a skilled author and forget philosophical musings. After a first reading of this story, the reader recalls the supposed life of the young man, for Kanafani has written it in scenes of clear imagery that remain in the mind. Also, the narrator himself writes to his friend saying that this is the story of Mohamed Ali Akbar. The author draws the reader so completely into that life, which we later learn is a fabrication, that the casual reader loses the gist of the story or its raison d'être. Rapt in the depiction of the young man and his unrequited love, the reader is lured away from the narrator.

Kanafani uses all of his skills in this story and it was undoubtedly a difficult one to write. I believe he meant it to be a difficult one to interpret as well, a story requiring thought. The imagined narrative about Mohamed Ali Akbar is entertaining, but this story was never intended simply for entertainment. In the end it is the narrator who is the central figure. His thoughts, feelings, and philosophy finally come through. He is wrestling with the deepest questions a man can ask: the meaning of death, and the life that preceded it.

Although we never learn the name of the narrator, we learn a great deal more. As we follow his acts, his emotions, and his thoughts, we learn that he is

kind: (he greets Mohamed Ali Akbar every day and shares his sweets with him), he is understanding: "As his eyes turned and came to rest on my face it seemed that he was appealing to me for help. Why? Because I used to give to him a casual greeting every morning? Or was it that he saw in my face some understanding of the terror that he was undergoing?" (p. 29). We learn that the narrator is disturbed by callousness and is distressed by the death of a young man whose life seems to have had a kind of non-existence. This impels him to invent a life which fills in the gaps in the known information. He forfeits a night's sleep to do so, for he attaches that much importance to it.

Incidentally, Kanafani does not paint him as a saint but makes him human! "As he knew no one I used to send him some of the sweets with which my visitors inundated me. He accepted everything without enthusiasm. He was not good at expressing gratitude and his behavior over this caused a certain fleeting resentment in me" (p. 30). Resentment is a very human quality indeed.

The very story he invents indicates the narrator's concern for life. While caring about others, he still is concerned with his own limited time on earth. He writes to his friend: "The problem of death is in no way that of the dead men, it is the problem of those who remain, those who bitterly await their turn so that they too may serve as a humble lesson to the eyes of the living" (p. 40). He goes on to add: "We must transfer our thinking from the starting-point to the end. All thinking must set forth from the point of death . . . " (p. 40).

It is in the thinking of the narrator which is thoughtful, philosophical, and most of all subtle that we must find the whole point of the story.

Although the narrator's illness is at present not a life threatening condition, he does sense his own mortality and writes: " . . . propped up by a pillow, I can observe both the continuous flow of patients passing the door as well as the birds which fly pass the window incessantly. Amidst this hubbub of people who

come here to die in the serene shadow of the scalpel, and whom I see, having arrived on their own two feet, leaving after days or hours on the death trolley, wrapped round in a covering of white" (p. 28).

He is a compassionate person, sensing the enormity of the young man's situation: his solitude, his fatal illness, his pain, the fact that his young life is now reduced to a mere numbered hospital bed, whose only release is death. He is tender and affectionate and cannot abide that a young man can die without something to show for having lived. And now, he wonders what comes after death. What is next?

We learn nothing definite about the narrator's own past, but there are hints that are so subtly woven in they may be missed. He himself may have had disappointment in love. He may have been shy; may have known loneliness. "We are always endowing others with our own attributes . . . we want to squeeze them into our skins, to give them our eyes to see with, to clothe them in our past and our own way of facing up to life. We place them within a framework outlined by our present understanding of time and place" (p. 40). Thus, he strongly suggests that those qualities he gave to the young man may have been his own.

There is a further question to consider in analyzing the relation of the narrator's fiction to the fiction as a whole. Kanafani has chosen, in a sense, to give us a fiction about fiction, about how the imagination constructs a world for itself; and through this choice, Kanafani aligns himself in this story with an important trend in fiction as a whole and especially in modern fiction. Other writers have treated metafictionality in their novels, including Thomas Pynchon, John Fowles, Vladimir Nabakov and John Barth.

In all these writers' works, a metafiction works on two levels. On the most overt level, we are given a protagonist's narrative; simply put, a good story. But,

on the more covert level, these writers are examining the writing process; they are questioning what it is that makes one a writer; what choices one makes; what price one pays; what is the place of the writer in the larger world? Thus, in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49, we see Oedipa Maas trying to put together a story from odd bits and pieces of the California lifestyle; similarly, the narrator in "The Death of Bed Number 12" puts together a story from the existence of the brown box and from bits and pieces that float up from his own Arab subconscious. Along these same lines, in Fowles' French Lieutenant's Woman, the writer's narrator complains about his characters getting out of control; about the story taking its own course, rather than the course he planned for it. This situation is an explication of the writing process, in which the writer may come to a story with some definite ideas that he or she wants to write about, but then soon enough the writer finds that the story begins to find a shape from within, an organic shape of its own, rather than the outside blueprint the writer first envisioned. Ultimately the organic process is questioned in The French Lieutenant's Woman by the presentation of two endings, as if we must acknowledge that, despite claims of naturalness and organicity, the writer aims to manipulate the audience with whatever technique (or ending in this case) he or she can. Kanafani considers this same question in "The Death in Bed number 12." The narrator makes up a story that is pleasing both to himself and to his correspondent Ahmed. But, by the end of the story, we see that the fictional life the narrator has constructed for the dying man neither saves this man from death nor provides the narrator with any real satisfaction-especially when the box is opened. Indeed, the opening of the box and the finding of the earring suggests that successful fiction may be a matter of lucky coincidence!

These questions about the fictional process open up other and unavoidable questions, such as "what is the purpose of fiction?" and "is fiction-

making a moral act?" On some level, Kanafani is certainly struggling with these questions. The narrator works feverishly to construct a fiction for the unknown man, as if this fiction would protect the man from dying without an identity and mourners. Is Kanafani here suggesting that fiction has some power in regards to death; is this another pseudoromantic declaration of the eternal nature of art? Apparently not, for the narrator's fiction abruptly fails when the truth of the man's life is revealed. More properly, Kanafani seems to be suggesting that we confront the fictions that we and the larger world use to shape our lives. For example, perhaps the western world ought to confront its fictions about the Palestinian situation and sees in place of these palliatives construct the truth of exile, sickness, lives led separated from family and loved ones in order to provide a living for those left behind: Kanafani uses his narrator's failed fiction to suggest that a certain sort of fiction, like the one the larger world constructs about the Palestinian situation, is merely palliative, and thus is ultimately an immoral act in that it blinds us to reality.

In considering these issues, Kanafani definitely puts himself within the context of modern fiction. Indeed, by considering these issues in an epistolary form-the form which the earliest novels took-Kanafani seems to be consciously announcing his kinship to other contemporary writers of fiction and to a larger tradition. Thus, even as Kanafani's work is unquestionably tied to the Arab world, he brings that work and the long tradition of Arabic fiction into contact with the larger history of fiction.

NOTES

[1]Ahmad Dahbur, Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry, trans. and ed. Khalid A. Sulaiman (London: The Pitman Press, 1984), p. 1.

[2]Ghassan Kanafani, "The Death of Bed Number 12," trans. Denys Johnson-Davies, Modern Arabic Short Stories, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 28-29. Hereafter noted parenthetically in the text.

[3]George Selder, The Great Thoughts, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), p. 155.

CHAPTER IV

"MEN IN THE SUN"

Figure 4. Unknown Photographer, ed. The Permanent Committee for Palestinian Deportees, Enforced Exile, (Washington, D.C.: Free Palestine Press, [nd], [front cover].

Why do we die in exile
unmourned by anybody?
Why don't we cry as normal humans do?
We walked on fire, on thorns,
and so did all my people.
O God! Why are we left with no home
with no love?
Why do we die terrified?
(Abd Al-Wahhab Al-Bayati)[1]

Between the covers of this work is a fifty-six page short fiction followed by six short stories. The short fiction, which I will consider into first, delivers a tremendous impact. It is a powerful work in which Kanafani shows his Herculean skills in abundance. It is a work one doesn't forget after reading it, for it seems to leave an indelible impression of hopes turned into tragedy for the trio of main characters.

"Men in the Sun" is divided into seven parts, each with a title. The first three titles are the names of the three main characters: Abu Qais (the old man), Assad (the young man), and Marwan (the youth). The remainder are self-explanatory: The Deal, The Road, Sun and Shade, and The Grave.

The men are three Palestinians who decide to attempt the uncertain and difficulty journey to Kuwait where they hope to improve their lives, in fact, hope to find paradise. After we learn about each man's background, we find their lives intersecting, as they arrange to be smuggled across the border between Kuwait and Iraq where they are in exile hidden in an empty tank. This means of their escape becomes the instrument of their deaths due to the desert heat and an ironic delay at the custom post. They die of suffocation in the over-heated tank, and the driver throws the corpses into a garbage dump where he hopes they will be discovered in the morning and buried properly.

The connection between the Palestinian and the land is brought out early in the story. Abu Qais rested his chest on the damp ground, and the earth

began to throb under him, with tired heartbeats, which trembled through the grains of sand and penetrated the cells of his body.[2]

As we have seen, Kanafani is aware that setting a story's mood early is important, and he does so with agility here. He creates from the beginning a feeling that this is a tragedy and there is impending disaster ahead for the three desperate men trying to escape their present unacceptable situation to find a better life. On the very first page Abu Qais stares at the sky. It was blazing white, and there was one black bird circling high up, alone and aimless. He did not know why, but he was suddenly filled with a bitter feeling of being a stranger, and for a moment he thought he was on the point of weeping (p. 10).

The dark bird is ominous, as is the white sky, especially as we recall Kanafani's use of white in "The Death of Bed Number 12." In the present story, the white sky is a sign of both the emptiness of these men's present lives as well as the futility of trying to escape their lives. Both the scorching sky and the scavenger bird are used as symbols of death and desolation. The destructive bird, also a symbol of psychological alienation as it continues its meaningless, solitary circling is introduced again near the end of the story. After crossing the hostile desert, Abul Khaizuran (the driver) has found the men dead inside the over-heated tank.

> He didn't like to think that his companions' bodies should be lost in the desert, at the mercy of birds and beasts of prey, and that there would be nothing left of them after a few days except white bones lying on the sand (p. 54).

We see again the coupling of the black bird with white, and in the image of the bones on the sand we realize the final and horrible implications of this symbolism.

Kanafani does not depict the driver as totally evil or bad. In fact, when the delay occurs at the final checkpoint, the driver is concerned, deeply so, with the

fate of these men now trapped in the water tank. These greys, as opposed to black and white only, say a great deal about the author. His desire to show this character fairly shows his regard and respect for life, all life, even while loving his own heritage. We have seen this regard before in "Return to Haifa" where he depicted the Jewish couple who moved into the protagonist's house and raised his son. Even as he carefully constructs Said S as representative of the Palestinian heritage, he shows us that Miriam and Evrat have suffered also. Now we see it once more. The driver has had his own dreadful problems and, although he is vacuous at times and shallow, he is not totally without concern. He is, in fact, an erring human being.

In this work, Kanafani employs an authorial, third person omniscient viewpoint, going into each of the men's minds, plus the mind of the driver of the tanker-truck. He concentrates on the mind of each of the three men in the parts named after them. In these first three parts, there are many flashbacks so that the reader is given the backgrounds of each and consequently their motivations for the projected trip.

Here are Abu Qais' thoughts:

> If you had lived, if you had been drowned by poverty as I have, I wonder if you would have done what I am doing now? Would you have been willing to carry all your years on your shoulders and flee across the desert to Kuwait to find a crust of bread? (p. 11)

A great feeling of emptiness overcomes Abu Qais; in a sense he is losing even what he knows. More than at any time in the past he feels alienated and insignificant. Ten years have elapsed since his family was uprooted from their Palestinian homeland and everything was lost. They have done nothing but wait and are controlled by forces they have no power over. The author uses the image of a squatting dog to describe their state of limbo and inertia.

> You have needed ten hungry years to be convinced that you have lost your trees, your house, your youth, and your whole village. People have been making their own way during those long years, while you have been squatting like an old dog in a miserable hut. (p. 13)

Kanafani employs the meditation throughout the story. In these singular and isolated monologues, we see not only the character's plans and desires but also their isolation and fear as they struggle towards life. Rebelling against this image of an old dog representing obedience and submission, Abu Qais decides he must take some action in order to find his own existence. Having been rooted out by war, he cannot reconcile himself with the past. He is not even existing in the present because as a refugee, a non-significant poor alien, he has no legal status. In effect, his only thread of hope lies in the uncertain future. Once again his thoughts take the form of a monologue. "If you get to the Shatt Al-Arab you can easily reach Kuwait. Basra is full of guides who will undertake to smuggle you there across the desert. Why don't you go?" (p. 13). He thinks of the Shatt Al-Arab as the only obstacle between him and his salvation from fear, shame, humiliation, and wretchedness. Once in Kuwait he believes that all his economic, social, and political problems will be solved.

As he looks towards the future, he is also drawn back into the past. He reminisces about the olive trees in the land he left behind and about his daughter's birth, which is representative of the helplessness of people uprooted by war and stricken with insurmountable difficulties, for he can not save the child, although he wishes he could: " . . . he shut the door behind him he heard the cry of the new-born child, so he turned back and put his ear to the wood of the door" (p. 13).

Kanafani uses flashbacks to show how this man instinctively lives and relives his unreconciled past, just as the driver will relive his own past pain later in the story. As the story progresses, the author uses flashbacks very effectively

with each of the four characters whose minds he goes into. With Abu Qais, the present is far less than faith and hope; the future holds no promise and is as uncertain as a fake vision revolving around escapism in self-deceptive fantasy. In fact, in each character's personality, the consciousness of the ugly, unhappy past is always overshadowing the adversive present.

As we have seen in earlier works, such as "Return to Haifa" in Palestine's Children, Kanafani is masterful at using flashbacks. This cinematic technique provides him not only with easy movement between past and present but also supplies an objective correlative in terms of technique for the sense of displacement that has become time and history for modern day Palestinians. "Men in the Sun" starts with Abu Qais reliving his past "as the damp earth he thought, was no doubt the remains of rain yesterday" (p. 9). Once again we see the strong connections between man and land as he reminds himself of what it used to be in his native town with life renewed by seasonal rain. In this condition, his mind flashes back to the general scene of his homeland, to the school where his son was taught.

> So he stood on a stone and began to eavesdrop through the window. . . . 'When the two great rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, meet . . .' The child was trembling with anxiety, while the laughter of the other children in the class could be heard. Abu Qais stretched out his arm and tapped a child on the head. The child raised his eyes to him as he was eavesdropping by the window. (p. 10)

This child laughed and calls him an '"Idiot!"' (p. 10). Now, after ten thin years, Abu Qais finally has an answer to his question, he is actually looking at the great river Shatt Al-Arab [River of the Arabs] with feelings of humiliation, and indeed feeling like an idiot. There has been no rain yesterday. Yet, the ground is damp because of the confluence of rivers. The two rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, which meet here and once watered the biblical garden of Eden[3],

symbol of paradise and happiness, now are a lingering disappointment to Abu Qais.

Throughout this work, Kanafani jumps into flashbacks in the daring way he sometimes employs, often with minimal transition, yet he accomplishes this without confusing the reader. We always know when we are moving from present to past and back again. After the long flashback that ends with the birth of Abu Qais' daughter who dies, he hears the sound of the river and sees "the sky blazing and the black bird still circling aimlessly" (p. 13). The repetition of sky and bird immediately gives us the clue that we are back in the present in the setting where the rivers meet.

The story remains in the present as Abu Qais goes to the "fat man whose job was smuggling people from Basra to Kuwait" (p. 15). The fat man who is depicted as totally obnoxious, demands fifteen dinars, which is all the money Abu Qais possesses. Abu Qais reacts to this disagreeable character:

> He felt that his whole head had filled with tears, welling up from inside, so he turned and went out into the street. There human beings began to swim behind a mist of tears, the horizon of the river and the sky came together and everything around him became simply an endless white glow. (p. 15)

Thus, Abu Qais' sense of homelessness is embodied in the "endless white glow" of his poverty and fear. Realizing he can't afford what the fat man proposes, his life seems about to be overcome by the vacuum, the endless white glow of his situation. We realize in this imagery that Kanafani is working with a reversal of conventional symbolic equivalents, for light is generally regarded as a symbol of hope, of new possibilities. We have seen this usage in the dawn scene when the man in bed number 12 first reached Kuwait. However, in "Man in the Sun," we see very early that the relentless white light of the desert is a symbol of the relentless deprivation of these men's lives.

On the following page we meet Assad who is standing in front of the fat man, "the proprietor of the office which undertook to smuggle people from Basra to Kuwait" (p. 16). Assad argues about the price. The fat man says he is not forcing him. Kanafani begins the second section of the story with this smooth transition, again using repetition to slide into the second characterization.

> 'I mean that if you don't like our conditions you can turn round, take three steps, and find yourself in the road.'
> The road! were there still roads in this world? Hadn't he wiped them with his forehead and washed them with his sweat for days and days? (p. 16)

From this, we know he has already experienced a harsh journey, and we learn more: that he was told he had to walk around H4, a pumping station in the desert, so that he would not fall into the hands of the frontier guards. He walks in the terrible heat for hours, damning the uncle who had given him the money for this trip. He considers his uncle's insistence on Assad's marrying his daughter a direct affront to his personal desires. The uncle has bought him off, giving him the money with the condition he marry the daughter.

> To marry him off to Nada! Who told him that he wanted to marry Nada? . . . just because his father had recited the Fatiah with his uncle when he and Nada were born on the same day? His uncle considered that was fate. Indeed he had refused a hundred suitors who had asked for his daughter's hand and told them she was engaged. O God of devils! Who told him that he, Assad, wanted to marry her? Who told him that he never wanted to get married? Here he was now reminding him again. He wanted to buy him for his daughter as you buy a sack of manure for a field. (pp. 19-20)

Again, we see how Kanafani uses the meditation not only to provide us with this character's background but also to show us, as he has done with Abu Qais, the feelings of fear, resentment, and frustration which goad him to the journey.

We see in Assad's bargaining and in his monologue that man and money are issues here. Promises are conceived and traded in terms of customary agreements and expectations. When the third man, Marwan, meets the fat man, Marwan comes into verbal confrontation with him and tries to "be more than a good man, and show more than courage" so that "they would not laugh at him, cheat him, and take advantage of his sixteen years" (p. 22). The argument escalates and grows into physical combat.

> 'You'll take five dinars from me and be satisfied, Or else.'
> 'Or else?'
> 'Or else I'll denounce you to the police.'
> Getting up, the fat man came around his desk, till he stood, panting and dripping with sweat, in front of Marwan. He stared at him for a second, looking him up and down, and then raised his heavy hand in the air. 'You want to complain to the police about me, son of a . . . ?' The heavy hand crashed down onto his cheek, and the word was lost in a fearful roar, which began reverberating between his ears. (pp. 22-23)

There are three basic types of conflict in story writing: man versus man, man versus nature, and man versus himself. In this scene, the conflict between men is obvious, but throughout the story, conflict is woven into the scenes, some times quite subtly. Kanafani makes use of all three basic types of conflict in "Men in the Sun." In the parts so far considered, we have seen conflict in the backgrounds of each character. Abu Qais had conflict with his wife, who was prodding him to do something, and simultaneously, he had conflict within himself, trying to make himself rise from his state of inertia and take action. Assad had conflict with his uncle, and now we learn of family conflict in Marwan's background that allows him to describe his father as nothing but a "depraved beast" while writing to his mother from Basra. His father has left the family after an older brother stopped sending money to support them and married a one-legged woman who will support him. The father represents

those who consistently commit crimes against humanity, neglecting human responsibilities, letting the children die in cold, fear, ignorance, and silence, while they seek personal gain.

> But could his father forgive himself for such a crime? To leave four children, to divorce you for no reason, then to marry that deformed woman. It is something for which he won't forgive himself, when he wakes up one day and realizes what he's done. (p. 25)

When Marwan comes from the fat man's shop, another man approaches him. All the thoughts of his family and his reasons for trying to cross the border run through his head after this man, Abul Khaizuran, has asked why he wants to go to Kuwait. It is ironic that the impotent Abul Khaizuran seizes the initiation here, forcing himself on Marwan. We return to the present when he asks another question: "Do you want to stand here forever?" (p. 26).

The name Khaizuran means cane or bamboo. Marwan notices that "he really did remind one of a cane" (p. 24). Bamboo is hard-walled and hollow, which we later learn is an apt image of this man who is a eunuch and therefore impotent.

This Abul Khaizuran claims he can smuggle him to Kuwait. Here is a ray of hope. But when asked how, he hedges, saying that is his affair. He pumps Marwan for information and although Marwan says little, this man guesses that the brother has stopped sending money because he has married. Marwan feels disappointed that this stranger can so easily guess a secret only he knew. "He had guarded it from his mother and father for months and months, and here it was now, seeming on the tongue of Abul Khaizuran like a well-known, self-evident principle" (p. 28).

Abul Khaizuran laughs and says he is glad Marwan is going to Kuwait where he will learn many things: "'The first thing you will learn is: money

comes first, and then morals'" (p. 28). This is a reversal of values as Marwan has learned them, but his innocence is easy prey to the temptations Abul Khaizuran offers. With Khaizuran's cynical statement, Marwan seems to leave his innocence behind. His thoughts turn bitter and he thinks of the letter his brother had written telling him that his turn had come to leave the stupid school which taught nothing "and plunge into the frying-pan with everyone else" (p. 28). He hates his brother. We learn now that they never got along. In another unexpected reversal, we find that he still loves his father whom he labelled a beast, because his father still loves them all. The brother, on the other hand, has abandoned them, he believes.

> All right! All right! In a few days he would reach Kuwait . . . and send every penny he earned to his mother, and overwhelm her and his brothers and sister with gifts till he made the mud hut into a paradise on earth and his father bit his nails with regret. (p. 29)

With this fantasy in mind, he makes the decision to go.

Abul Khaizuran requires that the others go on the trip too. The three Palestinian men come together to meet with him, in the section called "The Deal." They argue over the price and then the method, and so we have direct conflict in the immediate present, where before (except in the fat man's shop) we saw conflict within men's souls and in their past life.

They question the method Abul Khaizuran plans, which is to put them inside the empty water tank that he will drive past the guarded posts. Marwan speaks for them all. "'I don't like the sound of this game. Can you imagine it? In heat like this, who could sit in a closed water tank?'" (p. 33).

This is another portent of doom, but the driver makes light of it and tells them not to make a mountain out of a molehill. He promises that they will spend only five minutes in the tank at two checkpoints. They are nervous, frightened.

Abu Qais asks if there is water in the tank. Again, the driver answers in a light, almost facetious way. "'Of course not. What are you thinking of? Am I a smuggler or a swimming teacher?'" (p. 34). He even begins to chuckle, saying the tank hasn't seen water for six months. This information contradicts an earlier story, and when Assad confronts him with his lie, he shrugs it off, saying, "'I mean for six days. One exaggerates sometimes'" (p. 36). Building on the earlier scene with Marwan, the author sets the reader's distrust of this fellow, and he or she is gripped with fear for the three men attempting the hazardous trip. The driver claims he is better at the game of smuggling than the so-called known smugglers who leave the passengers in the middle of the road, and these passengers, he says "'melt away like a lump of salt. And you, in turn, will melt away in the August heat without anyone knowing'" (p. 34).

There is no doubt about the crookedness of such dealers and their disregard for human lives. But, these desperate men appear to have no choice. If they are to follow their dream of "paradise," this driver appears to be their way. Only five minutes inside the inferno of the tank, five minutes, just twice, to reach their goal. There is conflict within each man. They know now that they mistrust smugglers, and yet what else can they do? Each decides to try for this great mutual goal of entering Kuwait, where they believe paradise awaits.

They make this commitment, but Abul Khaizuran, who seems to emerge as a leader in smuggling operations, thinks:

> Just imagine. In my own mind I compare these hundred and fifty kilometers to the path which God in the Quran promised his creatures they must cross before being directed either to Paradise or to Hell. If anyone falls he goes to Hell, and if anyone crosses safely he reaches Paradise. Here the angels are the frontier guards. (p. 36)

The driver is a strong characterization of a weak person who plays a major role in the story, taking the lives of the three men into his hands. They start on

the treacherous journey and: "The sun was pouring its inferno down on them without any respite . . . . They had drawn lots, and it was Assad's turn to sit beside the driver for the first part of the journey" (p. 36). The image of the inferno is especially apt, for, as sure as we come to see, in his craven carelessness Abu Khaizuran represents the empty evil of those who place no value on human life; he is indeed a Satanic figure, a demon who tempts the Palestinians with promises and then leads them to their doom. Later, we read: "The lorry, a small world, black as night, made its way across the desert like a heavy drop of oil on a burning sheet of tin" (p. 46). Here the two similes "black as night" and "like a heavy drop of oil on a burning sheet of tin" seem to be drawn from opposite sources; the night connotes coolness, blackness, while the second simile speaks of heat and scorching light reflected off the tin, yet the cumulative effect is synergistic rather than antagonistic. We can almost hear the sound of sizzling. Kanafani never lets us forget the sun, which is the single most important symbol used, as the title suggests. Kanafani uses such symbolism and imagery to indicate the harshness and bitterness of the situation and to impress this adversity on the readers' minds. The little world of the lorry is a vivid reflection of the free world allowing the small world to dissolve into the desert. As Salih J. Altoma says, "Kanafani's technique is full of symbolism which alludes too both the predicament of the Palestinians and the complicity of different parties in their continued suffering."[4] Who in the free world really pays attention to this small part of the planet? Yet this is a conflict that must be resolved in order to make the world whole again.

The three men commit to the arduous trek across the desolate desert to Kuwait. They are more knowledgeable than before of the risks and have misgivings interfering with their dreams, yet they make the commitment despite

the doubts that temper their hopes of paradise. Their commitment is firm as they embark on the risky journey.

Commitment to a goal or a cause appears frequently in Kanafani's works and is one of his major themes. We have seen this commitment exemplified in the political sense in "Guns in the Camp" and in Said's desire to let Khalid join the Fedayeen in "Return to Haifa." We have seen commitment in another form in "The Death of Bed Number 12" as the narrator commits himself to not letting the dying man become merely a bed number. In "Men in the Sun," Kanafani gives the reader ample signals and omens throughout that foretell of disaster to come, not spelling them out and thus detracting from suspense, but foreshadowing everything to come with imagery that hints of a failed outcome. In the section called "The Road," he adds to these omens. All of these omens forecast the death of the Palestinians. Some foreshadowing is extremely explicit; thus, we are given the images of "a skeleton lying on the sand" (p. 40) and the tank is described "as though it were splattered with blood" (p. 44). Other images are more ghostly: "the lorry began to trace a misty line across the desert, which rose and then dissolved in the heat." Here, the death truck is not simply an apparition, but also serves to warn us of the mirage that the hapless travelers are chasing, thinking they will find paradise in Kuwait. At least one of the images is a double of an earlier image of submission and helplessness: the speedometer leaps "forward like a white dog tied to a tent peg" (p. 44, emphasis added). Finally, the frequent reference to the sun as an inferno warns us that these men are all undertaking a journey to hell. However, it can never be said that Kanafani overuses symbols. Instead, he is very selective in giving readers just enough guidance to pique their interests and keep them following the progress of the men, asking: will they succeed or won't they?

Fear and uncertainty plague the enterprise. The driver says, "'You know, I am afraid the goods will perish'" (p. 37). Abul Khaizuran is comparing human lives with merchandise, indicating his belief in the insignificance of life. Comparing the goal of the trip to either paradise and hell points to the seriousness of the seemingly insurmountable difficulties one encounters when moving from pain to pleasure. It also indicates the conflict between reality and the fantasy paradise they seek. These men have become aware of the uncertainties and yet still undertake the journey, seeming to have no other choice, indicating the indomitability of the human spirit under adverse circumstances.

This indomitability is another one of the major themes that run through all of Kanafani's works. No matter how oppressed the people have been, no matter how much they have become dominated by an outside force or forces, no matter what terrible acts have been committed against them, they retain a strong spirit of hope for improving their condition. The theme is woven throughout, in this story and, as we have seen, other works of the author. He places humans on a high plane, acknowledging their tremendous resilience, their ability to bounce back and make new beginnings, or at least to attempt to start again, always hoping this is possible.

Abul Khaizuran, who appears and presents himself as the problem solver for Abu Qais, Assad, and Marwan, has great ambition, but cannot accomplish the task he has undertaken. He seems to have all the answers in the beginning even before there exists any sort of tangible agreement between him and the three men. Though he tries to assume responsibility, he has an early disagreement with the men he is undertaking to smuggle and loses his temper: He is caught in another lie, for he has gone into a lengthy description of a hunting expedition. He is just a smuggler, not a hunter and not involved in any

hunting expedition as he claimed. '"The story of the hunt is cooked up for the frontier guards, not for us'" (p. 35). But Abul Khaizuran sees no harm in telling it. He is a shallow person, careless and inept. Once again we are reminded of the demonic, the easy liar who will use any ruse to take the men's souls.

Assad asks Abul Khaizuran if he has ever been married. Kanafani's skillful transition introduces an important element of Khaizuran's past through a flashback. " . . . he narrowed his eyes to meet the sunlight which had suddenly struck the windscreen. The light was shining so brightly that at first he could see nothing. But he felt a terrible pain coiled between his thighs" (p. 37). The light falling on him from overhead recalls the surgery lamp that blinded him when he was made a eunuch. Earlier, he has been with a number of armed men when "all hell exploded in front of him" (p. 37). The bomb injures him, and Abul Khaizuran finds himself on the surgeon's table. The surgeons tell him castration is better than dying, but Abul Khaizuran does not agree. He can never sleep with a woman. "And what good did patriotism do you? You spend your life in an adventure, and now you are incapable of sleeping with a woman! And what good did you do? Let the dead bury their dead. I only want more money now, more money" (p. 47). Thus, we learn still more of this character and his motivation, and as the narrator takes over in the third person omniscient voice, our sympathies are aroused. "Now . . . ten years had passed since that horrible scene. Ten years had passed since they took his manhood from him, and he lived that humiliation day after day and hour after hour" (pp. 37-38).

Abul Khaizuran's castration literally makes him less than a man, but clearly it has a figurative effect for in his bitterness he has become less than human. His sense of values have become terribly skewed: because he has no future in terms of progeny, he looks to objects that will provide him with immediate

gratification, thus he values money above human life and even above his honor. Thus, he has convinced the Palestinians to join his risky plan.

They near the first checkpoint and the driver switches off the motor and jumps down. '"Now the serious part is beginning. Come on! I'll open the cover of the tank for you. Ha! The climate will be like the next world inside there. The cover opened with a sound like an explosion'" (p. 40). Here we see again how the author's language foreshadows the tragedy to come: the water tank will indeed lead to "the next world" for the hapless travelers. Entering it will ultimately lead to "an explosion" of their dreams. The diction here rings especially ironic, for the term explosion generally is associated with war, and yet we realize that although not engaged in military combat, these Palestinians are at war: theirs is a war for survival, and by the end of the fiction we realize this is their last campaign. The chances of surviving in the tank are as hopeless as their chance of surviving an explosion. Inside, the tank is red with rust , and we are forced here to think of the color of dried blood. Abul Khaizuran wipes sweat and is panting from the exertion in the heat. He advises the Palestinians to take their shirts off, stating that the heat is stifling, and they'll sweat as though they're in an oven. But then in that off-hand way he has, he says: '"But it's only for five or seven minutes, and I'll drive as fast as I can. Inside there are iron girders, one in each corner, and I would rather you held on to them tightly, or else you'll roll around like balls'" (p. 41). The men remain motionless, and we feel the intensity of their fear. Abul Khaizuran prods them, advising them to hurry while it is still morning for the tank will soon be a real oven. Assad and Marwan finally climb up and Assad puts his head in for a moment and says, '"This is hell. It's on fire'" (p. 41). He receives a casual answer: '"I told you that before'" (p. 41). Marwan pokes his head in and his face has a look of disgust and fear. They are warned not to sneeze to which Assad says, '"I don't think

any of us will sneeze in this oven. Don't be worried on that score'" (p. 41). They finally climb in and their voices resound like echoes, and one voice shouts: '"What are you waiting for? Hurry up! We're almost suffocating'" (p. 42). Again, we see how precisely Kanafani uses diction to foreshadow events to come for, indeed, the travelers do overheat in the oven of the tank and suffocate.

The driver closes the cover and drives as fast as possible. The author gives a vivid description. "The rutted road, like an extended flight of steps, was shaking and jolting the lorry ceaselessly and mercilessly. This shaking was enough to turn eggs into omelettes more quickly than an electric whisk could" (p. 42). He thinks about his three passengers, feeling the youth will manage as will Assad, who is strongly built, but he wonders about the older man. The reader feels that the driver truly does not want the merchandise to perish. Abul Khaizuran also thinks if he could increase his speed, he might eliminate some of the shaking. However, on such a road as this the lorry might overturn, and what if it came to rest on the roof? So we see that he is thinking of his passengers and various possibilities of dangers we haven't even thought of before.

The guards ask what he has with him, and he jokes, saying: '"Arms. Tanks. Armored cars. And six planes and two guns'" (p. 43). They share a laugh, but the papers go through quickly and the lorry "sped away like an arrow, leaving a trail of dust behind it" (p. 43).

As quickly as he possibly can, he heads for a hill where once beyond it, they will be out of sight. Kanafani keeps us in suspense, as Abul Khaizuran thinks:

> The top of the hill still seemed as far away as eternity. O almighty, omnipotent God! How could the top of a hill arouse all these feelings which surged through his veins and poured their fire on to his dust stained skin as salt sweat. O almighty God, you who have never been with me,

> who have never looked in my direction, whom I have never believed in, can you possibly be here this time? Just this time? (p. 44)

Abul Khaizuran's prayer is somewhat reminiscent of the earlier meditations. In his meditation, one side of his character to which we have not been previously privy is revealed to us. Here, Kanafani allows us to see that no man is simply good or evil; by allowing Abul Khaizuran to become a more rounded character, Kanafani seems to be pushing us to realize the great complexity of the human. In his efforts to show us two sides of a story we are reminded of "Return to Haifa" in which Kanafani makes an heroic effort to show us both sides of the Jewish-Palestinian question and thus to deepen our sympathy for the whole issue. Kanafani keeps reminding us of the sun and the heat. "The sun blazed brightly and the wind was hot, and carried a fine dust like flour" (p. 43). We constantly see the driver sweating, which redoubles our concern for those inside the tank.

At last he stops and opens the tank, and the men emerge. Abu Qais lies in the shadow of the lorry, face down. Assad speaks the first words after the ordeal and they are one of the author's contrasts: '"Oh! It's so cold here"' (p. 44). We can only imagine from this statement, said in the terrible desert heat, how much hotter it was inside the tank. They emerge exhausted with reddened eyes, marks from the rust looking like blood. When Abul Khaizuran asks if the waiting was terrible, no one answers. '"His gaze wandered over their faces, which seemed to him yellow and mummified. If Marwan's chest had not been rising and falling and Abu Qais's breathing an audible whistle, he would have thought they were dead"' (p. 45). Here, again Kanafani's diction is deliberate and horrifying, for soon enough the passengers will be dead. We know from their reactions or lack of reactions that they are not in good shape. Abul Khaizuran tries to defend the operation saying it took only six minutes. Over and over, he repeats this information, and when again they do not respond, he

tells them to look at the watch. We see here again Kanafani's fine and precise ability to deal with time, whether it be through flashback, stop action, meditation, or the precise timing of action into a six minute interval. They are more interested in resting than in looking at the time, but they must head for the second checkpoint. Marwan says if the tank door is left open it might cool down.

> The huge lorry was carrying them along the road, together with their dreams, their families, their hopes and ambitions, their misery and despair, their strength and weakness, their past and future, as if it were pushing against the immense door to a new, unknown destiny, and all eyes were fixed on the door's surface as though bound to it by invisible threads. (p. 46)

Inherent in the symbol of the enclosed world of the water tank is also a ritualistic purification. The tank may represent a shrine which is visited and where spiritual and physical purgation must be experienced to go from misfortune to future and pleasure. In this effect, they must suffer in the flesh in order to enrich the spirit. In reality, they are purged of this life; the purgation ritual leads to their deaths.

Kanafani expertly deepens our feelings of trepidation. '"The sun in the middle of the sky traced a broad dome of white flame over the desert, and the trail of dust reflected an almost blinding glare'" (p. 48). Once again whiteness and brightness are combined to suggest a malignancy. These symbols are tied to blindness, the folly of the Palestinians and their driver, and to dust, a symbol of death. The paragraph continues to tell of people who died on this road, killed by sunstroke. "Who called it 'sunstroke?' Wasn't he a genius?" (p. 48).

The driver stops and suggests they rest before beginning the performance again. Abu Qais asks why they didn't set out in evening in the cool of night. But the driver says there are patrols at night, whereas during the day '"no patrol can run the risk of making a reconnaissance in heat like this'" (p. 48).

We have an ironic comment almost immediately followed by yet another. The driver takes a drink of water and pours the last of it over his head, cooling his body. If there were moments here and there where Kanafani creates a twinge of sympathy for him, here he creates disgust. The three men who have suffered inside the prison of the tank are not even offered water to drink, yet the driver in their full sight empties the contents of the water-skin over his body. Then, in an annoyingly cheerful voice, he says, '"Come on, you've learnt the art well"' (p. 49). He promises that in seven minutes they'll be free again and says this is the easy part. He even promises he'll fix them a fine lunch in Kuwait. Like sheep being led to slaughter, they climb in again.

For a short time, Kanafani raises our hopes when Abul Khaizuran makes the post in only a minute and a half. He hurries inside where the author brings in another horrific contrast. The room is silent except for "the hum of the air-conditioners" (p. 49).

Instead of signing the papers quickly, the custom officers are in a playful mood. They invite him to sit and have tea and cool off. He keeps saying he's in a hurry and pushes the papers toward them, but one official keeps pushing them away. They start to tease him about why he lingered in Basra. He claims the lorry was in a garage for repairs. They laugh at him and say they know the story: '"You make out to us that you are a decent, well-behaved fellow, and then you go to Basra and commit mortal sin with that dancer . . . '" (p. 51). The irony of their statement is that indeed he has committed a mortal sin, but not the one they suggest. He has tempted his fellow men to a kind of suicide. They want to know details of his adventures. Abul Khaizuran is becoming frantic, but he realizes the only way to get through is to pretend what they are accusing him of is true.

There are ironies throughout this story, but the scene at the checkpoint is the greatest one of all. The custom officer asks Abul Khaizuran the secret of his success with women point blank "Is it your virility?" (p. 51). We have learned more than once of his bitterness at having been castrated, and now when time is of essence, he is accused of making love in Basra to a desirable woman. His only response is to laugh hysterically and shove the paper at the officer.

When he finally leaves, he looks at his watch again and realizes that this inane conversation has cost fifteen precious minutes. He races to the lorry and drives at top speed to a bend in the road where he can stop. He is terrified. And once again Kanafani reminds the reader of the heat: "The wheel was hot and he felt it scorch his hard hands, but he didn't slacken his hold on it. The leather seat burned under him and the glass wind-screen was dusty and blazed with the sun's glare" (p. 52). We know from this description that it is hardly possible that the travelers have survived. In showing us the damage to inanimate objects, "dusty and blazed by the sun's glare," we are forced to imagine the even more horrid possibilities for the human flesh inside the tank. When he climbs onto the tank, the metal roof burns his hands and he finds that heat has cracked the glass of his watch. This is no ordinary heat; it has intensity most of use have never known, nor do we wish to experience such temperatures.

Leaving, the driver curses the men who delayed him. '"The curse of almighty God be upon you. The curse of almighty God, who doesn't exist anywhere, be visited upon you'" (p. 52). The curse here stands in direct contrast to his earlier prayers, and we know that he has all but given up hope for the Palestinians' survival.

He opens the tank and calls, '"Assad!'" "The sound reverberates in the tank and almost pierces his eardrums as it comes back to him. Before the echo

of the rumble which his first cry had set up has died away, he shouts again: 'Hey there!'" (p. 53). The echo is a carefully chosen, apt and terrible image, for as we well know echos return from lonely, empty places. The echo is not a human voice, but rather the imitation of a human voice. We, along with Abul Khaizuran are hoping for human voices to return his call, and for each of us, the echo is a horrible answer. Although we have seen him worrying, seen him trying to rush through the post, Kanafani has characterized Abul Khaizuran so vividly that the words '"Hey there!" sound to the reader a bit like a cheerful greeting, as this man has so often sounded before. But in this context, '"Hey there!" sounds hollow and dreadful, the hollowness calling the symbolic meaning of his name. He lowers himself and finds a body that is cold and still. Another body was "still holding on to the metal support" (p. 53). We note here that the passengers have ceased to be men but have become in death generic bodies. When he touches a face, the mouth falls open. There is no doubt now that all three are dead.

It is a final irony that this tank which has become the men's coffin is ordinarily used for water, an essential of life. Kanafani's vision is terribly black. In the death of these men, killed by their own desert environment, by the greed and cupidity of one of their own countrymen, and by their own hopeless ambitions for a better life, Kanafani seems to be saying that the present life of these refugees is doomed. That their wandering will be their death.

He reacts with choking, and sweating, the sweat running at such a rate that "he felt he was coated in thick oil" (p. 53). We are reminded here of the earlier image of "a heavy drop of oil on a burning sheet of tin" (p. 46), and we see in the repetition of the image of hot oil that the foreshadowing of the earlier passage has come to fruition. The image of oil is transformed to the image of the oil paint of the fresco of Marwan's face. Marwan's face takes possession of

him, "like a fresco shimmering on a wall" (p. 53). Abul Khaizuran experiences vertigo and isn't sure if his face is wet with salty tears or sweat. This seemingly vacuous character appears at last to realize his own ineptitude in completing the task he undertook, and now is face to face with the results.

The final section of the story, "The Grave," is, like all great endings, brief, occupying only two pages, but in that short span of those pages, Abul Khaizuran goes through many stages of thought and decision. First, he is determined to bury the men. However, consumed with exhaustion by stress, he decides he has no strength to wield a shovel. He thinks he will throw them in the desert but is not pleased with the idea of them becoming prey. As he drives, he keeps thinking of possibilities, but "he wasn't thinking in the strict sense of the term, but a series of disconnected scenes was passing ceaselessly through his brain, incoherent and inexplicable" (p. 55). When a breeze springs up he smells putrefaction, and he realizes he is near the municipal dump. He reasons that if he leaves the Palestinians at the dump they will be discovered and buried. The larger political symbolism of this gesture is inescapable. The Palestinians are treated by the world as garbage. They have become society's refuse, Kanafani seems to be saying: when the Palestinians die, the world does not care enough even to see that they are properly mourned. Abul Khaizuran rationalizes his actions as he proceeds with them, dragging the bodies by their feet. He is also cautious not to be seen. Thus, we see him again, as ever protective of self, a totally selfish and self-serving person. He even drives in reverse, to confuse the races of his tires. He is out to make his own world, even seeming to thrive on chaos. And now he thinks of the deal that he made at the outset of the journey. "But a thought occurred to him when he had covered some distance, and he switched off the engine again, walked back to where he had left the bodies, and took the money from their pockets. He also

removed Marwan's watch" (p. 56). Even in death the three men pay off their debts, in this case they pay a great deal more than they owe since they have paid with their lives.

Kanafani gives us one final irony when this by now completely despicable character wonders: "'Why didn't you knock on the sides of the tank? Why didn't you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?'" (p. 56). It is, of course, ridiculous to think that these men, suffocating in the boiling tank, could have mustered the strength to do as he suggests. But, Abul Khaizuran is illogical to the end, and we are left with the impression that his question solves whatever atom of conscience he may have; for by asking this question, he has turned the responsibilities of their demise back upon the men, thus absolving himself.

"Men in the Sun" is a gripping story of powerful impact, delivered with force. Within its pages, every device that strengthens a story has been brought into play, and has been done so with consummate skill. The story teems with symbols, the overwhelming one being the sun of the title. The story is also sharpened by strong and very individual characterizations, as we have seen. Abul Khaizuran is a complex characterization of a weak man who, taking on far more than he can handle, fails. His failure takes three lives hoping for a better world with it. He shows his vascillation in thought and action. He is capable of justifying the most stupid of his decisions. The three hopeful men of different generations, representing the whole range of Palestinian manhood, are at his mercy, and mercy is a quality he lacks. He is not aware of this, however, nor of his fatuousness. All three kinds of literary conflict appear in the story. In fact, it is present on every page, both internal and external.

The theme, tied to almost every work we have perused, stresses the desperate situation of Palestinians in exile. In some of the stories we have

already seen, such as "The Child Goes to the Camp," "Guns in the Camp," "Return to Haifa," and "Six Eagles and a Child," different generations react individually. Here, the three men of various ages all share the same dream of how to make their lives better, and in so doing their fates become entwined, and ironically all die without realizing their dream.

Somewhere in the Arab world, there are riches to be had, and the author subtlety reminds us of this by using the word "oil" in several ways during the course of the story. Assad must walk in the desert to avoid the pumping station of the oil pipeline. There is the image of the lorry crossing the desert like "a heavy drop of oil on a burning sheet of tin" (p. 46), and by the conclusion Abul Khaizuran feels like " . . . he was coated in thick oil" (p. 53).

Kanafani constantly repeats the image of the sun, using a variety of words and phrases to express its intensity. He also finds creative ways to state that the lorry is moving across the burning desert. "The lorry, a small world black as night, made its way across the desert . . . " (p. 46); "the huge lorry was carrying them along the road, together with their dreams" (p. 46); "the lorry travelled on over the burning earth, its engine roaring with an intolerable noise" (p. 47); "the lorry travelled on over the burning earth, its roaring engine a gigantic mouth devouring the road;" "the engine responded to the first touch, and he instantly closed the door" (p. 52). As we see in the progression of this imagery, the lorry becomes increasingly menacing as we move toward the climax.

Kanafani has truly pulled out all the stops, so to speak, in writing this unforgettable tragedy. He is his own best editor, with a finely tuned sense of when to repeat images, and when to minimalize. In the end, he does not require the reader to go through the ordeal inside the tank, but depicts the men's condition only afterwards.

In foreshadowing their death through omens and portents, symbols, imagery, and diction and then in connecting this foreshadowing to the burning of inanimate objects, to the reduction of the individual men to bodies, to their final ignominious disposition on the dump, Kanafani seems to be showing us that the hopeless condition of the man without a country, the refugee, is inevitable, that to acquiesce to living without a homeland is to accept a living death just as the three Palestinians in the story accept being buried alive in the coffin of the tank.

The final irony of this story focuses on the delusion of those who accept the refugee condition. These Palestinians think that in Kuwait they will live the paradisiacal life of "Men in the Sun," but in chosing to extend their exile in a country not their own, they chose death. In turning their back on their homeland and accepting the fate of refugees, these men have abandoned their claims to the land; thus, the environment becomes hostile to them; the sun becomes their enemy. Finally, they die not in the sun but in the dark stifling coffin of the tank; they end not as men but as refuse on the city dump. In abandoning their homeland, they set the conditions for their end where they are buried as nameless ones by strangers. This, says Kanafani, is the terrible fate of a man, who turns his back on his country, who accepts exile as his lot, who refuses to fight to regain his homeland.

NOTES

[1]Abd al-Wahhab Al-Bayati, "Why are we in Exile," Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry, trans. and ed. Khalid Sulaiman (London: The Pitman Press, 1984), p. 118.

[2]Ghassan Kanafani, "Men in the Sun" from "Men in the Son" and Other Palestinian Stories, trans. and ed. Hilary Kilpatrick, (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1978) p. 9. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[3]GN. 2: 10-14, The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1965), p. 2.

[4]Salih J. Altoma, "Sociopolitical Themes in the Contemporary Arabic Novel," The Cry of Home, Cultural Nationalism, and The Modern Writer, ed. H. Earnest Lenald (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1972), p. 362.

CHAPTER V

"OTHER PALESTINIAN STORIES"

Figure 5. Unknown Photographer in Ismail Shammout, Palestine: An Illustrated Political History (New York: Arab Information Center, 1974), [p. 30].

To Palestine, the land and the people
leaves fall from time to time
but the trunk of the oak trees . . .
(Samih al-Qassim)[1]

The collection "Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories" was first compiled in 1977 by the translator Hilary Kilpatrick for simultaneous publication the following year by Heinemann Education Books in London and Three Continents Press in Washington, D.C. It is a posthumorous collection, and there appears to be little which holds this particular grouping together other than the translator's influence. The volume includes the work Kilpatrick terms a "short fiction," "Men in the Sun," and six short-stories. The short fiction is told from a third-person omniscient perspective, whereas all the other stories in the collection are presented from the first-person limited point of view. Furthermore, "Men in the Sun" deals directly with the issue of the Palestinian refugee and with the writer's growing awareness of class inequity (the Kuwaiti prosperity versus the Palestinian poverty) among the Arab nation, and while some of the other stories notably "Umm Sa'ad" and "Letter from Gaza" treat these themes, the collection as a whole does not hold together around them. In fact, there is no real line that holds the longer work and the six shorter pieces together other than the loose term "Palestinian Stories." In the six stories that account for a little less than half of the collection's pages, genre, characters, and plotting, are extremely varied. "The Land of Sad Oranges" is a semi-autobiographical short story, similar in theme and content to the exodus stories of Palestine's Children. "If you were a Horse" is a mystery. "A Hand in The Grave" is a black-humor setpiece. "The Falcon" returns to the themes of exile but relies heavily on allegory. "Letter from Gaza" is an epistolary-form short story.

Although there are not ostensibly strong ties between the longer work and the six short stories, there are significant reasons for treating the six stories as a

unit; for despite the wide range of style exhibited in these works, they share some important characteristics. First, and most obviously the group is set within a definite frame, for "The Land of Sad Oranges" opens the grouping with a story of loss and exile and "Letter from Gaza" concludes with themes of return and repair. From a slightly different perspective, "The Land of Sad Oranges" is a story heavily influenced by the past (loss) and present (exile), whereas "Letter from Gaza" asks the exile to face the present and make the future.

Furthermore, the last six stories in this collection deserve separate treatment, for they are straining towards a universality that has only been hinted at in Kanafani's earlier work. These later stories concentrate on universal themes, such as human weakness, superstition, conflict between reality and illusion, generational conflict, and self discovery. In these six stories, the individual is dissected psychologically and socially, based on daily life rather than political theory or history. These stories, in comparison to those in Palestine's Children, look beyond Palestine and the camps to the pitfalls and foils inherent in Arab society. And, because Arab society shares many of the problems of countries emerging into the twentieth century, these stories proclaim a message to the larger world about the price man pays to move past war, exile, and poverty into the future.

"The Land of Sad Oranges"

A story of five pages, "The Land of Sad Oranges" is written in the first person from the viewpoint of a child who tells the story to a friend. Basically, it is the tale of the loss of childish innocence. It is also the heart-wrenching story of two families who are banished from their homeland. "The Land of Sad Oranges" is one of the most autobiographical of Ghassan Kanafani's stories

and certainly the most autobiographical of the stories I discuss here. Based on the writer's childhood flight from Palestine, the sense of dislocation, fear, and confusion that the protagonist suffers is mirrored in Kanafani's early sketch which we have partially seen earlier in Chapter One. From the time that there was a big truck standing at his door, and "some blankets had been thrown into it from here and there with quick nervous movements . . . " to the end of the event, when, after the withdrawal of the Arab forces in Palestine, Kanafani ran frightened into the night, stating "and while I was running away from the house I ran away at the same time from my childhood,"[2] Kanafani reproduces not only the course of actual events but the attendant atmosphere and emotions. This matter-of-fact rendering of scenes from the author's own family life produces a nonetheless genuine tragedy, which is not lessened by our knowledge of the degree to which it mirrors reality. While concentrating on the day-to-day, hour-to-hour tragedy of one family, Kanafani avoids larger theorizing about the historical issues. Although we know that the story has its basis in personal testimony, by refusing to allow his own personal analysis of the causes of the flight of his family from its country, by refusing any specific accusations, Kanafani lifts the story from the hazards of autobiographical and political isolation and gives his characters a universal appeal, reinforcing this quality through the symbol of their exile. This is a story, therefore, that can be read on several levels: as a memoir, as a portrait of the Palestinian condition, and as a rendering of the experience of all who suffer the pain of exile. Thus the story rises from the personal and historical to the symbolic.

The story begins on a deceptively happy note as the family moves from Jaffa to Acre. "There was nothing tragic about our departure. We were just like anybody who goes to spend the festival season every year in another city" (p. 57). The tale proceeds with an almost gay feeling as the youth tells of enjoying

his days in Acre because they keep him from going to school. Then comes the great attack on Acre which completely changes the picture. Kanafani contrasts the opening happy note with the tragic tone of the latter part of the story..

The families and their belongings are piled into a lorry, and they move past groves of oranges hearing shots in the distance. They stop and buy some oranges, an act which the child associates with the sound of weeping. Thus, in the association of the oranges with weeping, the oranges become an important symbol to the child narrator: "I thought then that the oranges were something dear and these big, clean fruits were beloved objects in our eyes" (p. 58). Yet, what the child perceives shortly comes to be true for the Palestine that is being left behind is called "The land of the oranges," (p. 58) and as they move further away the narrator correlates Palestine and grief in the person of a father:

> And all the orange trees which your father abandoned to the Jews shone in his eyes, all the well-tended orange trees which he had bought one by one were printed on his face and reflected in the trees which he could not control in front of the officer at the police post. (p. 58)

So, they enter Lebanon leaving the orange trees behind, and everyone is now weeping.

The narrator is infected by the adults' grief and begins to doubt God's love for man.

> The colored pictures which were handed out to us in the school chapel showing the Lord having compassion on children and smiling in their faces seemed like another of the lies made up by people who open strict schools in order to get higher fees. (p. 58)

This is cuttingly cynical thinking for a young boy; he is only driven to it because of dire circumstances. In this quasi-meditative passage, which stands in direct contrast to the boy's earlier jubilation about missing school, we see here the distinct beginnings of his loss of innocence.

They have no place to spend the night, but the father's uncle helps. He goes to a Jewish house, flings open the door and the Jewish family tells them to "go to Palestine" (p. 59). His desperation frightens the homeowners, and the Jews gather in another room. For three nights, the Palestinian family huddles together on the floor.

They then go to Sidon, where on the 15th of May Arab forces enter Palestine. They have high hopes of victory "which will enable them to return home" (0. 60). They even run after the soldiers and throw cigarettes to them. But, soon their hopes are dashed. "The communiques deceived us, and then the truth in all its bitterness cheated us. Despondency found its way back to people's faces" (p. 60). The father becomes edgy and makes the children climb the mountain nearly every morning. The youthful narrator finally understands the reason: it is to keep them from asking for breakfast.

One day the father suddenly pounces on a trunk and starts to scatter the contents. He is frantic because he is shuddering, trembling "as though he had received an electric shock" (p. 61), and his eyes are glittering. His wife realizes what he is looking for and sends the children back to the mountain. The reader does not know immediately what object he is searching, although we have been told that "a diabolical thought had implanted itself in his brain" (p. 61). Later, the narrator overhears him say he wants to kill them all and himself. He is so desperate that he feels death is the only release. In realizing the nearness of his death, in an almost Blakian movement, the narrator falls from innocence into experience. "As I left the house behind, I left my childhood behind too. . . . Things had reached the point where the only solution was a bullet in the head of each one of us" (p. 61). The father becomes ill and is in bed when the narrator finally returns and peeks into the room. When he glances at the father's furious face, he also sees two objects on the table: the revolver and the

orange bought long before. "The orange was dried up and shrivelled" (p. 62). Thus ends this poignant story.

The orange symbolizes a fruitful life. Oranges are the fruit of labor, and this life was a labor of love. Round, whole, and perfect, they nourish the people, and are delicious as well. When the people must leave, they must leave behind the world of oranges. Thus, the shrivelled orange in the last sentence is significant, symbolizing the lost pleasant life they are now banished from, as well as their lack of food, their daily hunger. It also recalls the burnt orange seeds at the end of "He Was a Child That Day." In the latter story, the burnt seeds came to symbolize the wholesale destruction of Palestine's hopes by a dishonorable enemy who will massacre even children. In "The Land of Sad Oranges," the dried and shrivelled orange once again represents the state of the Palestinian hopes at this point in their history.

Guns are also prominent in the story, appearing several times and symbolizing the end or death of their former contentment. The father's plans to kill all show his desperation and anger at having been forced into a position he sees as hopeless, with no solution but death. Kanafani's choice of telling this story from a child's viewpoint is extremely effective in making the story a chilling tale rather than a political commentary, which it might have been from the viewpoint of one of the adults involved. The sense of dislocation and horror is furthered by the contrast between the boy's innocent lack of experience and the grim events unfolding in his family's life and the larger life of the Palestinian nationals. The ironic distance between what the boy understands and what the reader comes to know is an extremely effective technique for creating the chilling sense of this story. In this technique, we recall Henry James' similar use of the child's vision in "The Turn of the Screw." In both stories, the innocent vision of the child adds a dimension of pathos that deepens the horror

'Horse' by Ghassan Kanafani.

Figure 6. Unknown Photographer in Anni Kanafani, Ghassan Kanafani, 2nd Ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Talia, 1973), p. 20.

"If You Were A Horse"

This, story too, is told in the first person and is essentially that of a grown man finally coming to an understanding about his father, whom he has been searching for all his life. The father had always told the son that if he were a horse, he'd shoot him. All of his life this declaration puzzled the narrator. Now, the son, who is a surgeon learns information about his father from another doctor. The other doctor operates on the father's appendix when the father refuses to allow his son to do the surgery. The narrator learns why the father used the expression about the horse to him, and only to him, over the years, and why his father refused to have his own son perform the necessary surgery: superstition has governed his father's love for him. The selection of first person narration in this story keeps the reader in suspense. We are as puzzled as the son himself, since we know only what the son knows at any given time.

The story covers an unusually long time span for a short story, but it is unconventional in some other aspects as well. The overall effect is unusual and not as representative of Kanafani's work in general. This particular story follows the pattern of a mystery, with the information withheld until the end.

The opening line of the story is "'If you were a horse, I would put a bullet through your brain'" (p. 63). This is surely an unconventional beginning, but we learn that the son has heard this odd statement even as a young boy. He had thought then that his father hated horses. As he grows, he believes his father hates him, but the father denies this when questioned. He is, instead, afraid of his son. This is indeed strange, a father afraid of his young son. The son has sympathy for his father but is confounded by his father's actions and attitudes. They bewilder him.

When the father is out one day, the son pries open his father's drawer with a knife and discovers a notebook, which he hopes will unlock secrets that explain his father. He is greatly disappointed. There is nothing helpful in the book, only numbers, prices, and pedigrees. Prices of horses which have been bought and sold, and pedigrees stretching back hundreds of years. (p. 64) There is one entry that says he has been told to sell one horse or kill him. This is followed by another entry which states that this particular horse is his most treasured possession and he won't part with him lightly. On the final page there is an entry written in a trembling hand: "He threw her savagely, by the river bank, crushed her skull with his hooves, and pushed her with his forelegs till she fell in the river. Abu Muhammad shot him in the head" (p. 65).

Moving directly from the journal entries, Kanafani introduces the character Abu Muhammad. At first, it is unclear from reading whether or not we are still reading journal entries. This confusion is deliberate, however, for Abu Muhammad is a figure who, like the journal, steps out of the past. And, like the journal, Abu Muhammad holds some of the keys to the narrator's mystery. Abu Muhammad tells the narrator that when the horse was born it had a blood red birthmark; it should have been killed at the instant it dropped on the straw. The father had argued saying the horse was beautiful, a thoroughbred. Abu Muhammad had issued other warnings to the narrator's father, such as to sell it, or at least not to ride it. The father does not heed these superstitions and Abu Muhammad calls him an obstinate man, and asks God to forgive him for not listening.

Abu Muhammad reveals that the father was madly in love with the mother who was a beautiful and intelligent woman, and we know it was her the horse killed. After providing the information Abu Muhammad enigmatically repeats what the father has said, that the father does not hate his son but is afraid of

him. Ths son is more perplexed than ever. Why would his father fear him? He is trusted by his patients; he is a peace lover who never even kills an insect. He does not understand.

Now Kanafani introduces a dramatic moment which brings about the denouement. The son hears his father cry out in pain during the night. He rushes to the room, quickly diagnoses acute appendicitis and calls for an ambulance. As the orderlies hurry the trolley to the operating room, the son hears the father ask who will operate. "The best surgeon in the city--your son" (p. 66). The father, despite pain, sits up and shouts that he wants any one else. '"Any other butcher,'" but not his son. When they try to calm him, he shouts: '"He'll kill me'" (p. 66), and adds he doesn't even want him in the operating theater.

A short period of time passes, indicated by extra spacing, and now Kanafani gives us statements from the surgeon who has completed the operation. He tells the son that it was the most difficult operation he ever performed and thinks the anesthetic made his father chatter. He reveals that the father ran on about his beautiful wife and also about a fellow named Abu Muhammad whom he calls an "unfeeling neutral, which was why he could kill a horse, when the horse's owner couldn't" (p. 66). He adds that the father talked at length about a horse, probably "affected by the spirit fumes from the theater" (p. 67), a lonely horse born on a stormy night. When it stood, everyone saw a reddish brown patch on its side. Abu Muhammad had declared it should be killed at once which made the father angry, and he'd asked why. Abu Muhammad replied it was a patch of blood, and it meant it would cause the death of someone dear. "It's carrying the blood of its victim with it from birth" (p. 67).

The father had wanted to kill, not the horse, but the superstition. He hated these superstitious beliefs. As far as the horse, he had proved to be obedient, intelligent, and easy to ride. At this point, the reader finds positively that the horse eventually killed the mother who was so loved. And now, we learn that the son has a birthmark, brown tinged with red which zigzags across one side on his back. The author does not state this directly but weaves it into the story through dialogue spoken by the son's girlfriend who is running her fingers over it. "It's the biggest mole I've ever seen. But why is it reddish like a patch of blood?" (p. 68).

Following immediately on the heels of this statement, Kanafani quickens the pace with the conclusions of the son.

> That was it then. His poor father was afraid of him because he carried the mark of his victim's blood on his side from birth, as Barq had borne his mother's blood for years before he met her, crushed her skull, and pushed her into the river. (p. 68)

The son now knows what has tortured his father through the years. But, it is an idiotic superstition that destroyed the father-son relationship. And all because Abu Muhammad has not known the medical explanation for the birthmark.

The irony is that the father has tried to challenge the myth, has labelled it a superstition, yet it appears that Abu Muhammad was the winner and his father pays a heavy price. The father comes across as a strong person, defying and refuting superstition until the tragedy.

This story like many others has no background of soldiers or guns, but it does connect clearly with the theme of the differences between generations, as expressed in, for example, "The Land of Sad Oranges" and "Return to Haifa."

Eventually the father gives in to the old ways, believes the old wives' tale, and consequently creates a barrier between himself and his son.

When the son realizes the reasons for his father's feelings, he does not love him less, but loves him more, and understands. In the end, he runs back to the hospital where he is afraid the other surgeon has possibly ineptly killed the father. He calls himself a fool for having allowed it, even a partner in murder if his father dies. The final line of the story is: "The sun had begun to rise, and as his big feet struck the damp paving stones the echo resounded like a horse's galloping." (p. 68) One can not read this story--framed by the images of horses, --without re-examining the special meaning that horses have for the Arab culture. Anni Kanafani, the author's wife illuminates the meaning that the Arabic horse had for the author:

> Besides writing, he [Kanafani] was painting a lot, mostly horses. The horse played an important role in some of his stories and novels. The horse to us Arabs, he said, symbolizes beauty, courage, honesty, intelligence, truth, and freedom.[3]

In this story we are given a direct and explicit parallel between the human and animal worlds. With this parallel, Kanafani seems to be speaking out against superstition, suggesting that superstition puts men on a level equal to the animals. Certainly, this is pertinent to the Palestinian issue, for in order for the Palestinians to take their place in the modern world they must leave behind destructive thinking, like superstition, and strive to face reality squarely and to change it.

"A Hand In The Grave"

After the serious stories that preceded this one, "A Hand in the Grave" treats the reader to a complete change of pace for, despite its title, this is a

humorous story. This comedy comes as a surprise and give the reader of the collection a sort of breathing space.

"A Hand in the Grave" is told in the first person by a young medical student who wants to own a skeleton. When his father questions why he is up so early looking so pale, he answers in technical terms he has learned at school beginning "facial pallor has a number of causes . . . " (p. 69). Thus, the comic tone is set from the start of the story as the two generations struggle to communicate. His father looks admiring, and the protagonist thinks his knowledge has brought joy to his father, who has supported him in order to help him enter the medical world.

The protagonist then reveals with much ado he has risen early to rob a grave. He says he needs a skeleton for school and to buy one costs seventy-five lire. Horror-stricken, the father calls his son '"a Godless sinner"' (p. 71). The narrator answers, '"I've read all God's Word, but God isn't against the medical faculty. They require me to provide a skeleton just as the sheikh used to require you to know the section 'Ain Mim.'"[4] (p. 71) The father shows his disapproval of this bit of levity and asks if all the students must rob graves this morning, wondering if there will be any corpses left in the graveyard at the end of the day.

The son goes out to meet a fellow student at a local cemetery, and we learn that they are both terrified at the prospect of committing so heinous an act. They never intended to rob a grave, but each has said so in hopes of being given the seventy-five lire. Neither succeeded, so they now find themselves in a graveyard with shovel and pick, and they are frightened. Instead of admitting this, each ridicules the other's fears, and through goading each other, they begin to dig. As the hole grows, it becomes a question of who will put his arm into it. Again, they argue. One has a longer arm; the other, however is thinner.

Finally the friend, with his arm reaching down, swears he has just stuck his fingers in the eyes! The narrator calls him an idiot, reminding that this grave is fifty years old. The friend is adamant, insisting he stuck his fingers in eyes.

They return to the university without a skeleton, and the shocked friend tells his story to everyone, continually, and is expelled, being suspected of insanity. The narrator transfers to law school after discovering he could not tolerate the sight of a skeleton.

In an additional, hilarious irony the narrator's father decides that the grave must be that of a saint because the eyes had not putrefied over fifty years "and took to visiting it every dawn to receive blessing from its earth and sand and pray beside it" (p. 76).

Kanafani now adds a little epilogue. The graveyard was never truly that, but rather a wasteland that belonged to a Turk. During famine, he had taken care to construct "graves" to store wheat and flour to protect his property from confiscation or robbery. This factual evidence is reported in the newspaper after the Turk's death. Thus, the story reverses yet one last time: so much for the saintliness of this miserable old miser.

The story is truly humorous and exhibits a facet of Kanafani's skill we have not seen before. However, its placement in a volume with the powerful title story may be questionable, and it might be better appreciated and enjoyed if read by itself.

The dialogue between father and son where conflict is present on the first pages is delightful, beginning with the questioning on the father's part, followed by his pride in his son's technical answer:

> Facial pallor has a number of causes. It may be due to worms in the stomach, or a heavy meal the night before, or excessive smoking. And there are more serious causes, anemia for instance, TB, or the onset of hemiplegia. (p. 70)

The father swells with pride at this answer to his question about why his son looked pale. But, his pride quickly changes when his son reveals his intention to rob a grave! Here, the dialogue is almost farcical, an effect is repeated in the graveyard argument.

The author has built realistic scenes here, beginning with the father and son in the home, then later at the cemetery when the two young students are frightened beyond belief at what they are doing. They are actually digging up a grave. Or so, they believe, when all they'd meant to do was get the price of a skeleton. Neither can quite believe his own actions.

This piece stands alone, so different from the other stories that there is no relation to the thematic design of others. It is startling in its difference. Read by itself, it is a joy. However, because of its inclusion here, I believe it loses some of its effectiveness. It is difficult for the reader to come from the terrible tragic lives of "The Land of Sad Oranges" and "If You Were A Horse" to such a light-hearted story, and to proceed from this story into the pathos of "Umm Sa'ad." Still, it is a fine story, though of a different genre; we must imagine that its inclusion has been planned to demonstrate Kanafani's range and to show a side of the author which we can only admire.

Umm Sa'ad feeds baby Laila while Ghassan reads in the background.

The cover of Umm Sa'ad, designed by Ghassan himself.

Figure 7. Unknown Photographer in Anni Kanafani, Ghassan Kanafani, 2nd Ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Talia, 1973), p. 22.

"Umm Sa'ad"

"Umm Sa'ad" is not a true short story but rather an excerpt the translator has taken from a novel. With one scene and but three pages, it is told in the first person by a cousin whom Umm Sa'ad visits. Umm Sa'ad is a woman with three children who live in the camps. She reveals that her oldest son has left to join the Fedayeen.

In this scant number of pages, Kanafani gives us a vivid portrait of a woman "with a strength greater than rock and a patience more than endurance itself" (p. 77). Whenever she arrives, her cousin is enveloped in the smell of the camps, "in their misery and deep-rooted steadfastness, their poverty and hopes" (p. 77). We see her hands, cracked like aged tree bark, "furrowed with years hard work had traced in them" (p. 77), hands that had nourished and cared tenderly for her son, Sa'ad, who is now flown from the nest.

The narrator believes at first that Umm Sa'ad is sad that her son has joined the combatants. She is a woman of great strength. She loves her son and will miss him but adds that he is a "true son of his mother" (p. 78). She then asks if the fedayeen will give him a machine gun. Here, we see the strength and fierceness of this old peasant woman, who, rather than worrying and grieving over the loss of her son, rejoices at his desire to fight for the homeland. She expresses a wish that she could follow him, live in a tent at the guerilla camp, and cook for him; but she can not, because she has younger children to care for. "Children are slavery", she says (p. 79). Trying to address her desire to visit the guerilla camp, the narrator says that a man who joins the resistance has no need for his mother following him.

> Deep in her eyes I glimpsed something like disappointment, that terrifying moment when a mother feels that she can be

> dispensed with and thrown into a corner like an object worn out with use. (p. 79)

In this short passage, the mother shows both sides of her nature: she is frustrated and tired and also she is fiercely devoted. This poignancy makes Umm Sa'ad more human, not quite so strong every single moment.

Her strength prevails at the end of the scene, and she says her cousin should tell her son's commander he is a good lad but when he wants something and it does not materialize, he gets miserable. "'If he wants to go to war, then why doesn't his commander send him?'" (p. 79).

In these few pages, the strength of this woman's character leaps forward. She cares deeply for her children but understands her son's desire to serve the Palestinian cause. She emerges as a real person: a mother and a patriot figure. Stefan Wild states in his biographical book of criticism that Umm Sa'ad represents Kanafani's belief that a growing class consciousness among the camp refugees would pave the way to victory.[5] Anni Kanafani seconds this opinion, stating Umm Sa'ad "was a symbol to him [Kanafani] of the Palestinian woman in the camp and of the worker class."[6]

In his desire to portray the soul of the Palestinian peasantry as an old woman, in his desire to allow the silenced and forgotten working class of the camp to speak, he gives voice to the voiceless ones, and we feel in some way that, through Umm Sa'ad as well as the other peasant characters who suffer and persevere, Kanafani is giving voice to the deepest part of the Palestinian soul. As Hilary Kilpatrick says in introducing this story:

> Umm Sa'ad is the most memorable in a gallery of peasant characters . . . ; however cruel the blows life deals her, in the end she will recover, in her fundamental goodness, generosity, and willingness to stand out against the system, she is a cousin to Solzhenitsyn's Matriona.[7]

In "Umm Sa'ad," we see the extreme economy of construction which Kanafani has at his disposal, for in three pages of spare, to-the-point dialogue, using a modicum of extremely selective imagery, he has created a memorable character.

"The Falcon"

This story also has a first person narrator but is told almost entirely in dialogue and as such, as like "If You Were a Horse," another atypical example of Kanafani's works.

The story concerns a strange Bedouin guard in a new building where the narrator lives. This guard calls all the residents Abdallah, not bothering to learn their names, saying '" . . . and may God release the believers from the bother of remembering foreigners 'names'" (p. 80). This statement hints at both a laziness and a biased attitude toward strangers or people of another race on the part of the guard who can not conceive that those who do not look like him can be recognized as individuals.

This Bedouin is the night watchman and there is enmity between him and the day guard, who intends to file a complaint when Jadaan, the night guard, because he refuses to clean the toilets. Jadaan's answer is startling, for he says he hasn't come here to work, which is naturally why we assume he is at the job. But no, "He said he merely sits here as a man may do anywhere in the world . . . he said too that he wants to die here peacefully and doesn't wish to return to his people" (p. 82). Some of the townspeople think the man is mad: they say he divorced his wife to marry a woman with red hair, and she spurned him.

The narrator, a nameless resident of the town, talks with Jadaan about hunting gazelles. Jadaan denounces the modern method of hunting them in cars until they drop of exhaustion. He proceeds to tell a tale of his own days of hunting gazelles when he used his pet falcon, called Nar, which means fire. Its great wings blotted out the sun when it was flying, and then it would draw his prey to its body and "drop like a stone. People would say 'Jadaan's Nar has burnt the gazelles'" (p. 84). Here, Jadaan gives a vivid picture of the falcon.

Likewise the falcon's flight is vividly portrayed on a day when it behaves atypically. On a certain day, it circles high over a lone gazelle, drops, then circles again and again. Strangely, the falcon returns to its perch and the gazelle follows, and stays close, as though devoted to him. The falcon refuses to eat for days, and one night it dies.

When Jadaan finds it in the morning, the gazelle is gone. The narrator wonders where the animal went. Jadaan answers and his face is "thin, harsh, cold" (p. 85). "It went to die among its people. Gazelles like to die among their people. Falcons don't care where they die" (p. 85). That is the final line of this strange little story, which likens people to the animal world. Jadaan is a bitter man, a loner, who earlier has said that he would die in the new town and not return to his people. Jadaan is a falcon. Others are softer, needing their own kind to be with like the gazelles. There is little sympathy built into this character but the reader may leave the story asking himself: Which am I? A falcon or a gazelle?

Once again, like "If You Were a Horse" and "Six Eagles and a Child," we are given a parallel between the human and animal worlds. In "The Falcon," Kanafani does not set one type of existence higher than another. This allegory does not work in the same way as "Six Eagles and a Child," in which it is clear that the truth about the mulberry bush is preferable to the fictions about the

eagle(s). Rather, in "The Falcon," Kanafani seems to simply be presenting two different alternatives. The death of the falcon seems to be symbolic of the choice of those revolutionaries, like the Fedayeen, who accept death alone and away from home. In contrast, the death of the gazelle seems to be symbolic of those who wish to die among their countrymen in their traditional homeland. Neither choice is superior to the other: they are both choices open to the Palestinian today.

"Letter From Gaza"

The last story in the collection returns to the theme of exile. As the title suggests, this work is presented in epistalory form, with the narrator writing to a close friend, Ahmed. The two had made an earlier solemn promise to each other to go to California where they could have a bright life and make money. In the letter, the narrator has changed his mind and is staying in Gaza. The bulk of the letter explains why.

The protagonist fully realizes that in California he could easily send money home to his mother and brother's widow and children. His meager salary teaching in Kuwait had never been adequate for their support. Early in the story, the reader senses deeply felt passions and in the writer of the letter. As it continues, these emotions build and the reader may find himself reading faster to discover the reason for his volte-face regarding California for in the first paragraph the narrator has said: "I have never seen things so clearly as I do now," and adds: "I'll stay here, and I won't ever leave" (p. 86).

Yet, clearly his present life is unsatisfactory. He writes that in Kuwait his life has "a gluey, vacuous quality as though I were a small oyster, lost in oppressive loneliness, slowly struggling with a future as dark as the beginning

of night . . . " (p. 87). He calls his life there rotten and routine, a fight with time. This water and darkness imagery is in direct contrast to the water and light imagery associated with the supposed paradise of California which is portrayed as "the land where there is greenery, water, and lovely faces" (p. 87).

He recalls that in mid-year the Jews bombarded Sabha and attacked Gaza--"our Gaza"--with bombs and flame-throwers. However, he says there was not much for him to bother noticing since he was going to leave for California, to get away to live for himself, a self that has suffered long. His feeling for his family is not enough to justify his staying. "It mustn't drag me any farther down than it already had. I must flee!" (p. 87).

With such strong thoughts of leaving, such determination to go to green California, the reader wonders how the narrator could be turned completely about. He even speaks next of assembling this possessions, "longing for the sweet departure" (p. 88). Still thinking of the bright future in California the narrator goes to say farewell to his family and finds Gaza as he had known it, although more cramped with its "narrow streets which had their peculiar smell, the smell of defeat and poverty . . . " (p. 88). He is drawn to family "as a spring draws a small flock of mountain goats" (p. 88). His brother's widow meets him, weeping, and asks that he visit her daughter, Nadia, who is in a hospital after being wounded, though she does not tell him the type or extent of the wound.

He goes cheerfully to visit and perhaps lift the young niece's morale, taking apples to her. '"I loved Nadia from habit, the same habit that made me love all that generation which had been so brought up on defeat and displacement that it had come to think that a happy life was a kind of social deviation'" (p. 88). This statement, especially to an American reader, is a chilling revelation into the facts of their lives, a contrast to those of American children who are often raised to believe that happiness is a birthright. The

sentence is packed with a powerful commentary on the lives of youth, not only in Gaza during this period in history, but all the children who are casualties of war.

The narrator greets his niece with a kind of gaiety, telling her he has presents for her including the red trousers she had expressed a desire for. Nadia trembles in reaction and is silent. He is startled and asks her if she doesn't want them. "She stretched out her hand, lifted the white coverlet with her fingers and pointed to her leg, amputated from the top of the thigh" (p. 89).

He leaves in a state of profound shock.

'"You and I never saw it [Gaza] like this . . . the streets filled with the color of blood . . . This Gaza in which we had lived and with whose good people we had spent seven years of defeat was something new'" (p. 89).

He tells his friend that Nadia could have saved her leg, but lost it by throwing herself on top of her younger brother and sister to protect them from the bombs and flames that fastened onto the house like claws. He is so moved by this tragedy in a young life that it will affect his life, his future; and no, he will not now go to Sacramento, to join his friend. He will not fulfill the promise made in what he calls now "childhood."

The irony is plain here. The dreams of California were the dreams of a perhaps foolish young man. Certainly, they were the result of a great desire to escape the reality of being a Palestinian. Through the child Nadia's self-sacrifice, the adult narrator comes face to face with his own childishness..

Early in the letter, he had referred to an obscure feeling he had that his friend was not totally happy with his flight. He now refers to that feeling: "This obscure feeling that you had as you left Gaza, this small feeling must grow deep within you. It must expand, you must seek it in order to find yourself, here among the ugly debris of defeat" (p. 90). He urges his friend to come back,

return to them. "Come back to learn from Nadia's leg . . . what life is and what existence is worth" (p. 90).

The conflict in this story is an inner one, taking place in the mind and soul of the narrator, whose views are changed by a tragic result of violence of war that does not spare civilians.

California represents paradise and an easy life. As in "Men in the Sun" Kuwait symbolizes an ideal. Part of the irony that these two stories share is that the narrator in "Letter from Gaza" is in Kuwait, and life there has "a gluey raucous quality" (p. 87). Kanafani seems to be warning those who would deny their homeland in search of paradise. Clearly, from the tragedy of "Men in the Sun" and from the information in "Letter from Gaza," we are informed that paradise is not to be found in Kuwait nor in California. The lesson here is that for the exile, paradise can only be the return home. In this story, we become acquainted with a character of strength, an educated man, who turns down the easy way to choose the more difficult path. "Come back my friend! We are all waiting for you" (p. 90) is the final line of the story.

The epistalory form is not the easiest choice when telling a dramatic story, but Kanafani makes it work beautifully here. The narrator grows from one pole of thinking to another in these few pages, from youth with its selfishness and ideas of a life of ease, to maturity. Experiencing the crippling of the future by war and exile, he becomes an adult dedicated to the cause of rights for the Palestinians. The adult chooses the more difficult course.

This tremendous change in outlook occurs in a brief four pages. In lesser hands, this story might have broken down to a state of bathos or sentimentality; but in Kanafani's it is a fitting finale to this collection, once again expanding on the theme of exile and responsibility, and widening our knowledge and

understanding of the Palestinians as we see them through an intimate view of a participant.

Figure 8. Jodi Cobb in Joseph Judge,
"This Year in Jerusalem",
National Geographic, Vol. 163, No. 4, April 1983, p. 493.

"Fidai" (self-sacrificer)

He holds the discus of the sun in his hands,
plants his feet firmly on the ground
and straightens his naked body like a palm-tree
breaking through the clouds.

He steps backwards,
the sun-discus shakes in his hand,
the hand grasps it,
then, with all his anger,
he throws it into the sky.
The discus goes higher and higher
and touches God's door.

All things become uncovered:
glittering are the refugee camps
under the open sky,
glittering are the tins of cheese
in the hands of children,
glittering are the children's tears,
glittering are our bones on the sand,
glittering are the guns of the rebels
on the mountains and in the fields,
glittering are the rebels' eyes
lighting up the face of earth and sky.

The sun-discus falls
beyond the limits of time and space,
crosses the wounds of yesterday
and comes again to rest in his hand.
He, with all his anger,
throws it again.

What astonished me was
not the eyes of the sun,
but his feet,
his nervous tension and the contraction
of his muscles,
his fear of falling
and losing control of himself,
his power in holding together,
his power of bearing the pain. (Yusri Khamis)[8]

NOTES

[1]Samih al-Qassim as quoted in Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry, Khalid A. Sulaiman, Ed., (London: The Pitman Press, 1984), p. ix.

[2]Ghazzan Kanafani, Men in the Sun and other Stories, trans and ed. Hilary Kilpatrick (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1978), p. 57. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

[3]Anni Kanafani, Ghassan Kanafani, 2nd Ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Talia, 1973), [p. 13].

[4]The Quran is divided into thirty sections for purposes of recitation, and each section is identified by the first Arabic word in the text.

[5]Stefan Wild, Ghassan Kanafani: The Life of a Palestinian (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1975), p. 22.

[6]Anni Kanafani, [p. 5].

[7]Hilary Kilpatrick, p.4.

[8]Yusri Khamis as quoted in Palestine and Modern Arab Poetry, Khalid A. Sulaiman, Ed., (London: The Pitman Press, 1984), pp. 143-144.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Figure 9. Ghassan Kanafani, The Complete Works, Vol. 3, Al-Athar Al-Kamilah, Al-Mujallad Althalth [Beirut: Dar Al-Altalia, 1978], [front cover].

> Ghassan [Kanafani] was the commando who never fired a gun. His weapon was a ballpoint pen and his area newspaper pages. And he hurt the enemy more than a column of commandos.[1]

Ghassan Kanafani wrote about a world he knew intimately. When he was twelve, he became a refugee and ever after lived as an exile in various Arab countries. He knew the hardships of camp life, of the exile. Suffering these hardships, he developed political theory as well as literary aesthetics. His inspiration was the Palestinian-Arab struggle, and he fought for the development of the Arab resistance movement, believing there was no isolated solution for the Palestinian problem but only a solution in conjunction with the Arab world. His stories are set against historical reality. He accurately describes events such as fleeing, atrocities and harassment, dispossession, entering the camps, military recruitment, etc., but he makes no overt attempt to sway the reader to make a political stand or to take sides; he asks only for understanding. He gives us a Palestinian perspective, a microcosm of society there. Decades of conflict, dispossession and struggle form the background of stories that impress a reader with brutal intensity.

Yet, in his fiction, he also presents the future as rich with possibilities. Stories may have beginnings, middles, and ends, but in real life the ending has not yet been written. Indeed, today there are daily newspaper reports of the struggle which still goes on. In a New York Times Magazine article of 16, October, 1988, Meron Benvenisti describes Jerusalem today, where the Arab and Israeli factions have become polarized. The Arabs daily close their shops at noon, observing a strike that is economically hurtful to them, yet showing a solidarity among them: "a collective will, the willingness to share hardships." Benvenisti states that the Arabs, who constitute one third of the Palestinian population "will never be able to acquiesce to the regime imposed on them."

He goes on to tell that when he was a boy, the Jews were the oppressed minority. Now, the dominance has switched.[2] As U.S. Representative Gary Ackerman observes,

> "the spectacle of Israeli soldiers flailing away at Palestinian civilians was a troubling one for Israel's friends; it projects a 'David and Goliath image. This time, David--the boy with the slingshot--was a Palestinian, and Israel resentfully found itself playing the role of Goliath."[3]

In this "City of Peace," there are collections of isolated people. Life for the Palestinian here is harsh, exclusionary and intolerant, and everyone is smoldering, with frustration and rage.

Coming out of this situation, many Palestinian writers, such as Samira Azzam and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, have begun consistently to sound the same note: calling for the overthrow of the Israelis. Kanafani, however, refuses to impose a specific political ideology on his fiction; in his works politics are suggested in the most general terms, and he makes some attempt in stories like "Return to Haifa" to portray the situation on all sides of the Palestinians and Jews.

When reading this representative body of Kanafani's works, even though all but a few of the stories are related in theme to the political and historical situation in Palestine, the reader does not find them monotonous. Quite the contrary, they are richly varied in terms of narrative line, and technique, though the area of the globe they focus on is basically the same. One gains all the more appreciation for the author's skills when he brings so much inventiveness to a single thematic structure.

This structure is rooted in that period of time before and after Israel became a state, as surely as a great olive tree is rooted in the earth, taking nourishment from the ground it is anchored in. The ground is its home territory and the food

rises upward into each branch and twig (which might be likened to the individual plots), and then to each leaf (which could be compared with the characters in the stories). Just as a tree grows leaves which, on close examination, are found to be not uniform but quite varied and individual, so the characters depicted by the author are also individual. Each brings his own ideas to the situation, his hopes, dreams, longings, memories, determination, anger, love - and stamps the story with his own views.

One of Ghassan Kanafani's many strengths is his skill in characterization. He gives us stories with a wide range of narrative points of view: children, older youths, young fathers and mothers, older people, teachers, students, doctors, rich, poor. It is a fair sampling of an entire population. With each characterization, Kanafani demonstrates an ability unmistakably to find the words, thoughts, and sounds that are exactly fitting for that particular character. His ear for dialogue and his comprehension of each character's thoughts are unerringly accurate. He captivates the reader who feels each character is absolutely right for that story's struggle. Thus, Umm Sa'ad worries about what her son will eat at the same time that she fiercely supports his decision to join the freedom fighters; Uncle Abu Uthman plots his revenge without boasting or fanfare, the child in "The Child Goes to the Camp" clutching the five pound note in his hand as he sleeps. We know these characters are fictional, a creation of the author's active imagination, yet they come alive on the pages, virtually leaping into our own consciences. Kanafani makes them real and vibrant. He transports us to the land he writes of so vividly that the world he creates seems the real world with an interior logic and universal validity.

It is inevitable that sadness and tragedy course through the stories, yet we are drawn to the characters, not turned away by the negatives. For example, although one can not fail to be sickened and horrified by the violence in "He

Was a Child that Day," one's lasting impression is of the courage and dignity with which the child meets his fate. In this way, by creating a character who is memorable for his spiritual strength rather than for his political rhetoric or physical characteristics, Kanafani causes us to feel a strong empathy for these people we meet in print.

As the critic Edward Said notes, Kanafani sketches a complete picture of the Palestinian identity in a way that no purely political tract can. He records "a Kafkasque alternation between being and not being there for Palestinians, whether inside Israel or in the Arab world."[4]

Perhaps, Kanafani's greatest strength in characterization is choosing protagonists who represent, not the articulate young resistance fighters, but the voiceless ones, who despite their inability to speak their concerns in a public forum, nonetheless suffer and long for liberation. Thus, many of the narrator's are nameless children; likewise, Umm Sa'ad and Abu Sa'ad, Said S and Safiya, Abu Uthman are major characters who represent the last generation of Palestinians to live in their native land. Though old and infirmed, these elderly characters, all of whom are peasants, still cling to the hope that their descendants will live out their days in the homeland. Those most familiar with Kanafani's work, including his wife, his translators, Barbara Harlow and Hilary Kilpatrick, and his biographer Stefan Wild have pointed out that, in representing the voiceless and disenfranchized peasant, Kanafani portrays his belief that these characters are the source for a class revolt in the Arab world. This reading is certainly valid, however, it seems to be equally true that in portraying the peasantry, Kanafani is struggling to provide his readers with a glimpse into the essence of the Palestinian nature.

Stefan Wild articulates this position, saying,

> Ghassan Kanafani and his death remind us that there must be injustice, especially for the weak. Any solution to be found, whether national, binational, or supra-national, must guarantee that happiness, well being, aid life for one do not mean unhappiness, misery, and death for the other.[5]

Unfortunately throughout history there have been people ejected from their homes in many places on our planet. In fact, an early record of such appears in Genesis with Adam and Eve. Kanafani shows us another such people, his own, and the particular circumstances that have brought about their plight, using his masterful techniques to bring us to understand. We sense the author's great love, respect and concern for the characters he creates, such as Umm Sa'ad, Said S, and Safiya, and the reader comes to admire these characters' courage and undying spirit, their clinging to hope for a brighter future, even as the author does.

Kanafani was active politically and one might surmise that this activity was his motivation for the writings. However, in an interview in the Kuwaiti magazine Al-Siyasa, Kanafani denied this and turned it about saying

> "My political position springs from my being a novelist. Insofar as I am concerned, politics and the novel are an indivisible case and I can categorically state that I became politically committed because I am a novelist, not the opposite. I started writing the story of my Palestinian life before I found a clear political position or joined any organization."[6]

Kanafani brings Palestine alive for the reader, as much as Joyce brings Dublin to life, or Faulkner, the South of the United States. In the case of Palestine, once familiar areas and villages have not only changed, but many have been destroyed, only to be later rebuilt and renamed by the Israelis. Kanafani weaves both the history and topography into these stories while keeping them personal accounts of individuals and their reactions to the calamities of their lives. Thus, in "Letter From Gaza," we see the city in

excruciatingly accurate detail and the devastation of the place has its corollary in the loss of Nadia's leg. He also makes distinctions between different generations and the ways in which each is affected. Older people such as Abu Sa'ad, long for a past they fondly remember in "Guns in the Camp" a past of contentment with which they were comfortable. The memories cannot be removed from their minds, like an amputated leg. The older people are more willing to cooperate, work through legal channels for rights. The young are more often angry and impatient, wanting to fight and gain immediately what they believe is right. They join the resistance, the Fedayeen, and take up arms. They are not willing to wait and deal through snail-paced and fraudulent channels.

The political changes have also caused social changes. Where once a father was in charge of his family, highly respected, his word unquestioned law, now the exiled father has lost his way, is confused, and the result is that he no longer commands the authority and reverence that were formerly his. Family members go their own ways, think their own thoughts, which may be quite contrary to their beliefs. One son may join the resistance, following an idealistic course, while another may seek material wealth and consort with Jews, as in the Mansur stories. Through fiction, Kanafani addresses the political, social, and human situations faced by the Palestinians, focusing on the critical period in their history when their lives are disrupted, the order and structure deeply altered.

Kanafani makes full use of contrasts, wealth/poverty, youth/old age, kindness/cruelty, love/hate, life/death, with complete understanding of their effectiveness. Black makes white all the paler; white makes black darker. A positive set against a negative makes the opposite sharper, more poignant in the context of story-telling. Thus, the stories of Palestinian Children alternate

between styles in which the narrative is told in an allegorical, metaphoric manner, such as "The Slope," and an explicit matter-of-fact manner, such as "Letter From Ramleh." Furthermore, this matter-of-fact style is often employed in stories, such as "Letter From Ramleh " and "He was a Child that Day," as a counterpoint to extremely dramatic material.

At the same time, Kanafani sets scenes beautifully, using remarkable imagery that gives the reader a visual picture as clear as some photograph. For example, in "The Falcon," Kanafani provides a precise description of the night watchman Jadaan's sleeping arrangements:

> ... he had made himself an extraordinary bed out of three wooden planks which he had pulled from a big box and set up on six legs, covering it with a piece of black goatskin. At the end of the night we would see him fold up his rough Abaya, put it under his head as a pillow, and dose off without a covering.[7]

This description tells us about this strong, stoical character whom we later learn, like the falcon does not care where he will die. Bringing such distinct portrayals of an unknown person, such as this bedouin or unfamiliar area, like the town on the edge of the desert that he inhabits, is a feat of some magnitude, but doing this while simultaneously moving the story forward with flowing language is the mark of a writer of note.

Kanafani's use of symbols presupposes the kind of faith that the situation of the Palestinians will be rectified; they expose the turmoil and uncertainty of the Palestinian's past, and additionally indicate the possibilities for growth in the present and future. His symbols illuminate the problems faced by his characters. The individual characters themselves represent a nation through their feelings toward their beloved homeland, a nationalism which binds them together as one.

In addition, he uses many symbols which are of vital importance to the stories. Many of these recur, but far from seeming repetitious, they too seem exactly right in each instance. The most notable of these is the sun, which is literally associated with the scorched, arid desert, the unrelenting hell of the Palestinian's life. Given the geography of these stories, the sun is an especially apt symbol, indicating the harshness of the land and, likewise, the harshness of the people's lives and daily struggles. In effect, the symbol of the sun comes to represent the "trial by fire" which the Palestinian has had to pass through in the days of exile and refugee camps. Again, Kanafani is excellent in his ability to choose the most appropriate object to represent both the circumstances of the people and the landscape where they are scraping their lives together.

In many of the stories, there is a background timpani of guns, always recalling physical conflict. Against the world of men and his fighting machines is the natural world, a constant reminder that the Palestinian is not simply a revolutionary or a professional soldier. Rather, his and her ties are to something deeper, to the land and its richness. So, the most stridently and overtly militaristic of the stories that we have analyzed, "Guns in the Camp" ends with the image of the grapevine blooming. Both flora and fauna are motifs in some of the tales. And, as the analyses showed, many objects are used symbolically, for example: shapes (a key in "The Child Discovers the Key Looks Like an Axe"), colors (white in "Death of Bed Number 12" and "Men in the Sun"), and closed spaces (a keepsake box in the water tank).

Thus, Kanafani, who has been primarily recognized as an Arab novelist by the critics, proves himself a successful short story writer in the modern and occasionally post-modern modes. In his use of anonymous everyman narrators who function as anti-heros and whose tragedies are not lessened by our consideration that they are caused by cowardice, paralysis, international ennui,

and Arabic complicity, Kanafani joins the ranks of his international literary contemporaries. Likewise, in his consideration of certain themes, such as men alienated from time, place and family in stories like "Men in the Sun", "Return to Haifa", and "The Land of Sad Oranges" and the nature of reality in "The Death of Bed Number 12" and "A Hand in the Grave", Kanafani reveals how his characters participate in the universal dilemmas of existential man. His use of time is at once indigenous to the Arabic scene and particularly post-modern, especially as in some of the stories time collapses into space. Edward Said explains Kanafani's method:

> ... the scene is itself the very problem of Arabic literature and writing after the disaster of 1948: the scene does not merely reflect the crisis, or historical duration, or the paradox of the present. Rather, the scene is contempor aneity in its most problematic and even rarified form. In no place can one see this more effectively than in prose directly concerned with events in Palestine.[8]

Kanafani makes time into a palatable element in his writing. Time becomes as important to the narrative line as the development as character. Like the most experimental of modernist and post-modernist writers, such as Faulkner, Joyce, and Nabakov or Pynchon, Kanafani mixes time in an almost Einsteinian sense. Thus, not only does this difference between time and space, between scene and present for example, become transparent; but also, past, present, and future exist contemporaneously. We see this co-existence of time exemplified in the story "Return to Haifa," where in the living room of his old house, Said S. lives at once in the present, through flashback in the past, and through foreshadowing in the future. Thus, Kanafani suggests in a world as existentially uncertain as that of the Palestinians, time begins to lose meaning. Similarly, when one is driven from one's homeland, when space is meaningless, the difference between time and space begins to also lose its relevance. Said

points out that for Kanafani, this approach to time takes on a special urgency. "He must make the present; unlike the Stendhalian or Dickensian cases, the present is not an imaginative luxury but a literal existential necessity."[9] In a world in which time does not allow the exile to connect past and present, where disaster prevents continuity, the present is no longer a "given", it can not be taken for granted.

Surely Kanafani's sense of the immediacy and urgency of the present arises out of his involvement with modernist tradition, but it is also an artifact from his life as a journalist. The journalist learns to put the five W"s into the first paragraph: who, what, where, when, and why. He knows the editor wants immediate information, and furthermore, the story will most likely be cut at the end, so the most vital information needs to appear at the front. This training is evident in the immediacy of short stories like "Paper from Ramleh."

The interplay between journalistic style and fiction is itself an important element emerging in modern literature. Works like Norman Mailer in The Armies of the Night and Truman Capote's In Cold Blood strain the boundaries between news and fiction. Kanafani seems to be working in a similar vein in stories like"Paper from Ramleh" and "He Was a Child That Day."

There is no doubt that Ghassan Kanafani looms large on the landscape of contemporary Arabic literature. As more of his work -- novels, short stories, plays, criticism, and journalistic prose -- is translated, he will no doubt emerge to take his place as one of the Arab representatives in modern literary world.

NOTES

[1]The Daily Star quoted in Anni Kanafani, Ghassan Kanafani, 2nd Ed. (Beirut, Dar Al-Talia, 1973), [p. 11].

[2]Meron Benvenisti, "Growing in Jerusalem," New York Times Magazine, October 16, 1988, p. 36.

[3]Gary Ackerman, "Israel's War at Home", quoted in Newsweek Magazine, January 25, 1988, p. 30.

[4]Edward Said, The Question of Palestine (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 153.

[5]Stefan Wild, Ghassan Kanafani: The Life of a Palestinian (Amsterdam: Univ. of Amsterdam Press, 1975), p. 23.

[6]The Kuwaiti Magazine (Al-Siyssa) quoted in Ghassan Kanafani, Palestine's Children, trans. and ed. Barbara Harlow (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1978), p. 8.

[7]Ghassan Kanafani, "The Falcon," in "Men in the Sun" and Other Palestinian Stories, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984), p. 81.

[8]Edward Said, "Introduction" Halim Barakat, Days of Dust, trans. Trevor Le Gassik (Wilmette, Indiana: The Medina University Press International, 1974), p. xxi.

[9]Edward Said in Days of Dust, p. xxiv.

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