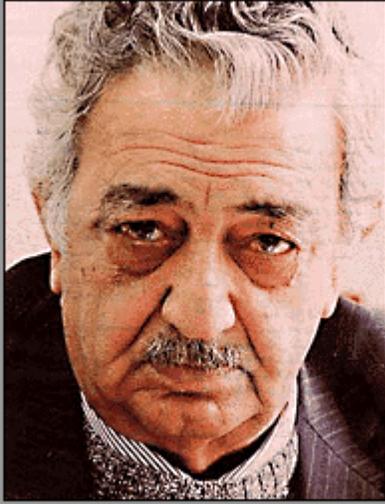


Through the Eyes of the Other



Emile Habibi

*Born in Haifa in August, 1921, where he remained until his death in May 1996.

*Joined the Communist Party in the 1940s and was member of the Israeli Knesset from 1953-1972.

* Began writing short stories in the 1960s, and was editor-in-chief of the Communist Party's Arabic newspaper, Al-Ithad, in the 1970s. Resigned from the Knesset in 1972 to write his first novel: Saeed the Pessoptimist, depicting the life and fortunes of an Arab citizen of the state of Israel. Published in 1974, it was an instant success, and remains one of the greatest of modern Arabic novels.

Jerusalem Journal; To a Novelist of Nazareth, Laurels and Loud Boos

By **JOEL GREENBERG**

Published: May 07, 1992

When Israel marks its independence day on Thursday, it will award its highest literary honor for the first time to an Israeli Arab writer, an act of cultural recognition that has set off fierce debate in Arab intellectual circles. The dispute centers on whether the writer, Emile Habibi, a 70-year-old novelist from Nazareth and chronicler of the quandaries and conflicts of Arabs in Israel, should have agreed to accept the annual Israel Prize, given for scholarly or cultural achievement.

Winners -- there are 10 this year, in several fields -- are chosen by a committee of academicians appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and they receive the award from Israel's President and Education Minister.

Mr. Habibi's writings, often fraught with bitter irony, enjoy wide popularity among Palestinians and other Arabs, and have been translated into several languages, including Hebrew. Considered one of the Arab world's leading writers, he was awarded the Jerusalem Medal for Culture, Literature and Arts by Yasir Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, in a ceremony in Cairo in 1990. Better Than Bullets?

A drawn heavenly sword

My father, that of all the movables in this world did not carry with him into the city anything but the walking stick he was leaning on, and my older brothers, so that he could lean on them, and our mother, with me still an embryo in her womb – so that he could lean on her, and the stories he used to tell us before we went to sleep was the first person to riddle me the riddle of the merciful prince, the riddle that only the youngest son of the wazir managed to solve.

Haifa: Wadi Al-Nisnass & Abbas Street

By Emile Habibi

I claim to be one of those people who cannot see the moon except for its luminous side. It is thus I justify those Jewish friends with sensitive souls who claim they do not believe it when we declare that we want a lasting peace based on a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli one. I find excuses for their mistrust, telling myself and my people that perhaps their suspicion of our intentions comes from their sense of guilt at everything they have committed against us, expressed once in Moshe Dayan's phrase: "If we were in their place..."

There is no place for "if" in actual history. However, if one wants to argue using such logic, then I would say that if we were in your place we would not have allowed our reactionary forces to do to you what your forces of reaction have done to us. Furthermore, I would add that if you combined all the "ifs" in all the languages of the world, you would be unable to justify a single harm -- not even the minutest -- that you have wreaked on what you call "the other people"...

Umm Wadie [Habibi's mother] was unable to overcome the shock of those days [1948]. By then her life was behind her, and most of her sons and grandchildren were scattered in the diaspora. Once she came down to the premises of our old political club in Wadi Al-Nisnass to participate in a joint Arab-Jewish women's meeting. Those were days of a raging general election campaign. The Jewish speaker was emphasizing our struggle for the rights of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. Umm Wadie interrupted her saying: "Will my sons and daughters return?"

Taken aback, the Jewish-Hungarian speaker replied: "They will return when peace is achieved." "Lies," shouted Umm Wadie, "my son Emile never lies to me. He

told me that their return -- if ever they return -- will take a long time. By then I won't be here to see them: I'll be in my grave."

Ever since that meeting, and without me knowing, it became her custom to go secretly to a corner of Abbas Garden near our house. She would lean against a stone shaded by an olive tree and bemoan her destiny -- lonely and separated from children, especially her youngest son Naim.

"Naim, where are you now? What has happened to you without me?"

Little did I know of her newly acquired habit until one day I overheard my two daughters playing at being Granny Umm Wadie bemoaning "O Naim".

That year Umm Wadie left us, crossing the Mandelbaum Gate on her way to her children who had taken refuge in Damascus. It was there, in Damascus, and not in Shafa Amre [her native village, now part of Israel] that her soul returned to its maker.

"As for you, you can stay. Your life is before you, and you can afford to wait until they return."

Those were the last words of my mother, Umm Wadie, when we parted on the Israeli side of the Mandelbaum Gate.

I remained. I returned to Haifa and wrote my very first story as a citizen of the State of Israel. It was entitled "Mandelbaum Gate".

And I remained. But, until this day, and for as long as I live, I think of my mother as having remained with me, for mothers are of the roots.

In our alley, the search for those Arab women who had smuggled themselves in along with their children, never ceased. Those women of the neighborhood who were registered used to take shifts at the top of the alley staircase to alert the rest whenever there was a search campaign.

Among the residents of the neighborhood were two Jewish women, one Polish married to a Pole, the other from Tiberias, also married to a Pole. The latter spoke Arabic like a native -- indeed, she was a native. She was humorous and, when it was her shift, used to alert everyone in a mock-Polish accented Arabic. As for the Polish woman, she tried her hardest to give her Arabic the intonations of an Arab from the tribe of the Prophet Mohammed. Her name was Masha, and her husband's

name was Leon. They had a daughter, the same age as my children, whom Masha used to take along to her vigil at the top of the staircase. The child would run up the stairs, alerting the hunted women so that they would run carrying their children to the Abbas Garden. I allow myself here to divulge the names of Masha and her husband because they couldn't bear to remain in our ill-fated alley, nor could they bear to be with us and segregated from us. They left the country and immigrated to Canada. As for the woman from Tiberias and her Polish husband, I keep their names hidden in my innermost soul. She was the one who insisted at the beginning of every raid that the hunted women and her children should hide in her house. The women would reply: "No, our good neighbor. Enough what we are suffering. Why should you and your children suffer too? At least when we hide in Mount Karmel, they won't be able to harm a tree or a stone we hid behind."

One summer evening in 1995, I returned to my house in Nazareth to find a female voice recorded on my answering machine. Masha and her husband Leon were staying with a friend in a house near Tel Aviv. She was speaking in English, and she asked me to try and phone them soon before their return to Canada.

Immediately, I called the number she left on the answering machine and, giving my name, asked to speak to Masha or Leon. He came to the telephone first, and informed me, in English, that they were on their way back to Canada that same night and that they had tried to reach me several times but got no reply at my home. He insisted that I should visit them in Canada, as soon as possible, and then passed Masha on to me. Her voice sounded as if she was weeping. She pleaded with me to visit them as soon as possible in Canada, before her husband's imminent death. I didn't wish to tell her that I was in the same boat as her husband, and promised that we would meet soon.

Our neighbor from Tiberias had already died, having buried her husband. Although my children and their children had grown up together, it would seem that life made them drift apart -- I, for one, would rather not think of any other reasons for the total break of communication between our offspring.

Translated by Mona Anis and Hala Halim



Ghassan Kanafani

Born in Acre in April, 1936. Spent his childhood in Jaffa where he received his education in a French missionary school. Left Jaffa in 1948, first for Lebanon then Syria and Kuwait.

Moved to Beirut in 1961, where he wrote novels, short stories, film scripts, political articles and edited a number of political and literary publications, including Al-Hadaf, the organ of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Appointed official spokesman of the Popular Front in 1970.

Was blown up in a car explosion, which also killed his niece, on July 1972. Amid the wreckage a scrap of paper from the Israeli Embassy in Copenhagen was found, a reminder of the fate awaiting those who fought

Israel.

Jaffa: Land of oranges

By Ghassan Kanafani

When we had to leave Jaffa for Acre there was no sense of tragedy. It felt like an annual trip to spend the feast in another city. Our days in Acre did not seem unusual: perhaps, being young, I was even enjoying myself since the move exempted me from school... Whatever, on the night of the big attack on Acre the picture was becoming clearer. That was, I think, a cruel night, passed between the stern silence of the men and the invocations of the women. My peers, you and I, were too young to understand what the whole story was about. On that night, though, certain threads of that story became clearer. In the morning, and as the Jews withdrew threatening and fulminating, a big truck was standing in front of our door. Light things, mainly sleeping items, were being chucked into the truck swiftly and hysterically.

As I stood leaning against the ancient wall of the house I saw your mother getting into the truck, then your aunt, then the young ones, then your father began to chuck you and your siblings into the car and on top of the luggage. Then he snatched me from the corner, where I was standing and, lifting me on top of his head, he put me into the cage-like metal luggage compartment above the driver's cabin, where I found my brother Riad sitting quietly. The vehicle drove off before I could settle into a comfortable position. Acre was disappearing bit by bit in the folds of the up-hill roads leading to Rass El-Naqoura [Lebanon].

It was somewhat cloudy and a sense of coldness was seeping into my body. Riad, with his back propped against the luggage and his legs on the edge of the metal compartment, was sitting very quietly, gazing into the distance. I was sitting silently with my chin between my knees and my arms folded over them. One after the other, orange orchards streamed past, and the vehicle was panting upward on a wet earth... In the distance the sound of gun-shots sounded like a farewell salute.

Rass El-Naqoura loomed on the horizon, wrapped in a blue haze, and the vehicle suddenly stopped. The women emerged from amid the luggage, stepped down and went over to an orange vendor sitting by the wayside. As the women walked back with the oranges, the sound of their sobs reached us. Only then did oranges seem to me something dear, that each of these big, clean fruits was something to be cherished. Your father alighted from beside the driver, took an orange, gazed at it silently, then began to weep like a helpless child.

In Rass El-Naqoura our vehicle stood beside many similar vehicles. The men began to hand in their weapons to the policemen who were there for that purpose. Then it was our turn. I saw pistols and machine guns thrown onto a big table, saw the long line of big vehicles coming into Lebanon, leaving the winding roads of the land of oranges far behind, and then I too cried bitterly. Your mother was still silently gazing at the oranges, and all the orange trees your father had left behind to the Jews glowed in his eyes... As if all those clean trees which he had bought one by one were mirrored in his face. And in his eyes tears, which he could not help hiding in front of the officer at the police station, were shining.

When in the afternoon we reached Sidon we had become refugees.

Translated by **Mona Anis** and **Hala Halim**

Salman Massalha

ON ARTISTIC FREEDOM IN THE NATIONAL ERA

Because I am not a state, I have no
Secure borders, or an army guarding
Its soldiers' lives night and day. And
There is no colored line drawn by a dusty
General in the margins of his victory .
As I am not a legislative council ,
a dubious parliament, wrongly called
a house of representatives. As I am not
a son of the chosen people, nor am I
an Arab mukhtar. No one will falsely
accuse me of being, supposedly,
a fatherless anarchist who spits into the
well around which the people feast
on their holidays. Rejoicing at their
patriarchs' tombs. Because I am not
a fatalist, or a member of an underground
that builds churches, mosques and synagogues
in the hearts of children. Who will no doubt die
for the sake of the Holy Name in Heaven.
Because I am no excavation contractor or earth
merchant, not a sculptor of tombstones polishing
memorials for the greater glory of the dead.
Because I have no government, with or
without a head, and there is no chairman
sitting on my head. I can, under such
extenuating circumstances, sometimes
allow myself to be human,
A bit free.



Revenge Taha Muchamad Ali

At times ... I wish
I could meet in a duel
the man who killed my father
and razed our home,
expelling me
into
a narrow country.
And if he killed me,
I'd rest at last,
and if I were ready—
I would take my revenge!

*

But if it came to light,
when my rival appeared,
that he had a mother
waiting for him,
or a father who'd put
his right hand over
the heart's place in his chest
whenever his son was late
even by just a quarter-hour
for a meeting they'd set—
then I would not kill him,
even if I could.

Likewise ... I
would not murder him
if it were soon made clear
that he had a brother or sisters

who loved him and constantly longed to
see him.

Or if he had a wife to greet him
and children who
couldn't bear his absence
and whom his gifts would thrill.
Or if he had
friends or companions,
neighbors he knew
or allies from prison
or a hospital room,
or classmates from his school ...
asking about him
and sending him regards.

*

But if he turned
out to be on his own—
cut off like a branch from a tree—
without a mother or father,
with neither a brother nor sister,
wifeless, without a child,
and without kin or neighbours or
friends,
colleagues or companions,
then I'd add not a thing to his pain
within that aloneness—
not the torment of death,
and not the sorrow of passing away.
Instead I'd be content
to ignore him when I passed him by
on the street—as I
convinced myself
that paying him no attention
in itself was a kind of revenge.

נקמה

לפעמים
מתחשק לי להזמין לדו-קרב
את האיש
שרצח את אבי
והרס את ביתי
ושלח אותי עירם ועריה
לכל הרוחות של עולם
הבריות הצר.
שאם יהרגני
ומצאתי מנוחה נכונה
ואם אחסלהו
מצאתי נקמה.
אבל...
אם יתגלה לי
במהלך הדו-קרב
שייש ליריבי
אמא
שממתינה לו
או אבא
שמניח את כף ימינו
על כפרת הלב בְּחֶזֶהוּ
בכל פעם שהבן שלו מאחר
אפלו רבע שעה
מעבר למועד שובו—
או אז
לא אהרנהו
אם הכנעתי אותו.
זאת ועוד...
לא אחסלהו
אם יתברר לי
שייש לו אחים ואחיות
שנוטים לו אהבה
ומתגעגעים עליו בלי הרף;
או שייש לו
אשה הששה לקראתו
וילדים
שאינם אוהבים פשהוא נעדר
ושמחים במתנות שלו
או שייש לו
ידידים וקרובים

שכנים ומכרים
חברים לתא-המעצר
שתפים לחדר בבית-החולים
רעים לספסל-הלמודים—
שמתעניינים במעשיו
ומקפידים לומר לו שלום.
אבל אם יהיה עירי
כרות עץ-משפחה
שאין לו לא אמא ולא אבא
לא אחים ולא אחיות
לא אשה ולא ילדים
בלי חברים וקרובים ושכנים
בלי מכרים
בלי רע או עמית, בלי ידיד
לרפואה...
לא אוסיף
למצוקת ערירותו
לא יסורי גויעה
ולא עצב כליון.
רק בזאת אסתפק:
אעלים עין ממנו
כשאתקל בו ברחוב
ואשכנע את עצמי
שהתעלמות,
בפני עצמה, גם היא
סוג של נקמה.
מערבית: אנטון שמאס

Qasim, Taha Muchamad Ali

I wonder now
where you are....
I haven't forgotten you
after all these years,
long as the graveyard
wall is long. I always
ask the grass of the field
about you, and the dirt paths.

Are you alive,
with your poise,
your cane, and memories?
Did you marry?
Do you have a tent of your own,
and children?
Did you make it to Mecca?
Or did they kill you
at the foot of the Hill of Tin?

Or maybe you never grew up,
Qasim, and managed to hide,
behind your mere ten years,
and you're still the same old Qasim,
the boy who runs around
and laughs
and jumps over fences,
who likes green almonds
and searches for birds' nests.

But even if they did it,
Qasim,

if, shamelessly,
they killed you,
I'm certain
you fooled your killers,
just as you managed
to fool the years.
For they never discovered
your body at the edge of the road,
and didn't find it
where the rivers spill,
or on the shelves
at the morgue,
and not on the way to Mecca,
and not beneath the rubble.

As no one saw you
concealing your corpse,
so no one will ever set eyes on you,
and no earthly breeze
encounter a bone of your body,
a finger of your hand,
or even a single shoe
that might fit you.
Qasim, you fooled them.

*

I always envied you, Qasim,
your skill at hiding
in the games of hide-and-seek we played—
barefoot at dusk—forty years ago—
when we were little boys.

Ayat Abou Shmeiss

I don't want to write about homeland
And about land
I don't want to write about an identity that has been stolen
And about a girl who was killed
I don't want to write
About humiliation oppression or anger
I don't want to write about discrimination
I don't want to write about love
Of an Arab man and a Jewish woman
Or a Jewish man and an Arab woman
I don't want to talk about a wonderful friendship
And not just friendship
I don't want to write about a dream to have peace
I don't want to write about any warrior
And any hero
I want to write about the birds
That are not in the sky
Whose wings have been clipped

לא רוצה לכתב על מולדת
ולא על אדמה
לא רוצה לכתב על זהות שנגנבה
ולא על ילדה שנהרגה
לא רוצה לכתב
על השפלה דכוי או כעס
לא רוצה לכתב על אפליה
לא רוצה לכתב על אהבה
של ערבי ויהודי
או יהודי וערבי
לא רוצה לכתב על ידידות מפלאה
ולא סתם ידידות
לא רוצה לכתב על חלום של שלום
לא רוצה לכתב על אף לוחם
ואף גבור
רוצה לכתב על הצפרים
שלא בשמים
שגזרו להם את הכנפים

Sex

I won't write about sex
Because I'm embarrassed

Religion

I won't write about religion
Because it's banned

Power

I won't write about power
Because it weakens the soul

Murder

It revives my pain

Politics

It's a bit messy

Identity

I already know what I am

Love

Is boring

I'll write about

Me

Ayat –

Verses from the Quran.

סָקַס

אָנִי לֹא אֶכְתֵּב עַל סָקַס

כִּי אָנִי מִתְבַּיֶּשֶׁת

דָּת

אָנִי לֹא אֶכְתֵּב עַל דָּת

כִּי הִיא אֲסוּרָה

כֹּחַ

אָנִי לֹא אֶכְתֵּב עַל כֹּחַ

כִּי אֵת הַנְּשִׂמָה נֶה מְחַלֵּשׁ

רְצוּחַ

נֶה מְחַיֶּה לִי אֵת הַפְּאֵב

פּוֹלִיטִיקָה

נֶה קָצֵת מְלַכְלָךְ

נְהוּת

אָנִי כֹכֵר יוֹדַעַת מָה אָנִי

אֶהְיֶה

נֶה כֹכֵר מְשַׁעֲמֵם

אָנִי אֶכְתֵּב

עָלַי

אֵי-אֵת-

פְּסוּקִים מֵהַקּוּרְאָן