

He tried to resist the cruel feeling which that tear injected into his veins...[But] his soul's ear couldn't help responding to the good call from the wide eyes.

Thus at a much deeper level than that of «doing things» (where personal strength and social power *are* crucial), the powerful though subtle influence of the female can mock, dwarf and even reverse the realities which the male has created through the exercise of his self – assigned and society – endorsed right to have the upper hand. The hero's pulling his wife by the hand – a *physical* action with *social* implications – is mocked, and its ultimate effect is reversed, by his failure to resist her *moral* influence on him. Very few writers, perhaps, have ever used juxtaposition so effectively and so beautifully.

Similarly, in «The Land...», the women's place in the truck (sitting behind amongst the luggage) is juxtaposed by the man's (in front, beside the driver). This is an epitome of the traditional leader – follower relationship between man and woman at the phenomenal level. Evidently, the man thinks it his right to lead, and the woman thinks it her duty to follow; and all goes well. Then we read:

[The women] bought the oranges and brought them up to the back of the truck, where they had been sitting amongst the luggage. Then your father, who was sitting in front beside the driver, *came down and raised his hand to the women for an orange*. Having got one, he looked at it in silence, and then burst into tears like a *helpless, miserable child*.

Thus the hero of social reality at a *phenomenal* level – the leader in a battle «full of sound and fury» but more often than not «signifying nothing» – when confronting an experience pertaining to a more *intrinsic* level of social reality, an experience signifying everything, such as the moral experience described above, suddenly gives up his «right» to lead, to have the upper hand. And in this quotation at least, he literally has the *lower* hand, not only abandoning his front seat and raising his hand to the woman, but also forgetting that a man (according to the «male code» of the battle referred to above) ought not to cry «like a helpless, miserable child.»

In doing so, Kanafani does not exaggerate; he does not violate the rules of the game as it goes on in real life. Rather, through his skillful use of the juxtaposition technique, he highlights a fundamental, though as yet unexplored side of the game itself.

Sense of responsibility

We are fully aware of the fact that our argument concerning the female's powerful moral capacity may raise many questions that we perhaps have not answered, though we believe that the examples we have examined testify to the presence of this capacity in the works at hand, and demonstrate the mechanism whereby it exerts itself. We are equally aware, however, that a further analysis of the matter might prove too «philosophical» for a literary essay, and lead the argument into fields of inquiry that have very little to do with Kanafani and his works. Yet there is one question which we feel we cannot possibly escape: What is the source of the peculiar moral force whose presence and power we have so far examined? What is the *cause* of the curious phenomenon whose *effect* we have traced in three of Kanafani's short stories? The attempt to answer this question might also shed light on some of the points we have so far overlooked.

It has been seen that in all the stories the females demonstrate a higher degree of *responsibility* than the males. In «Till...», for example, the woman's sense of responsibility assumes heroic proportions, motivating her to cling to her land and defend it to the last drop of her blood. Her husband's subsequent flow of courage and responsibility cannot be underestimated, but let us not forget that it is *subsequent* to hers; that it is she who awakens his slumbering sense of responsibility when he intends to give up his land to the Zionist



terrorists. Similarly, the hero of «A Letter...» demonstrates a great level of responsibility; but here, too, the heroine's sacrifice, great in its own right, is also the spark that inflames his conscience.

As a major moral force, responsibility, like love, must have an object. Pupils, for example, are the object of a teacher's responsibility, and so on. What is the object of the female's responsibility in the stories we are examining?

The homeland. In «The Land...» the women's extraordinary sensitivity to the oranges is an indisputable indicator of their responsibility to their homeland, symbolized by the oranges themselves. Similarly, Nadia's «sisterless leg» in «A Letter...» is at once a great example of sacrifice and an unfailing index to her great sense of responsibility to Gaza, which is a clear epitome of Palestine:

Nadia lost her leg when she threw herself over her little brothers and sisters to protect them from the bombs and flames that were devouring their house. Nadia could have saved herself, could have spared her leg. Why didn't she?

Because, needless to say, her sense of responsibility was far greater than her care for her personal safety. Taken literally and out of context, this quotation shows that her brothers and sisters are the object of her responsibility; but, symbolically, it is the homeland. What, it will be asked, is the textual evidence on which this interpretation is based? The answer to this question lies in her uncle's dramatic decision to remain in Gaza so as to struggle for it «amidst the rubble of the ugly defeat,» rather than just to look after his dead brother's family.

As for the woman in «Till...», her sense of responsibility towards her homeland is the cornerstone of the world Kanafani creates in the story. Let us re – read what her husband reads in her tear as they are leaving their orchard:

What of your *land*? Hadn't you better pay back to the earth what you owe it, even if you have to pay from your *blood and flesh*? (emphasis added).

The «blood and flesh» in this quotation reminds us of Nadia's «sisterless leg.» Both signify the female's sacrificial attitude to her world, especially when it is in danger. This is perhaps the highest level of responsibility that a human being can attain.

In trying to account for the woman's marked readiness to sacrifice herself for her family (as is, to some extent, the case in «A Letter...»), and for her homeland (as is certainly the case in «Till...»), it is perhaps not unreasonable to attribute this readiness to the Original Responsibility and sacrifice that are almost inherent in the female condition. By highlighting these admirable aspects of the woman's moral role in life, Kanafani in effect does some justice to this often unacknowledged hero of humanity.