



Ghassan Kanafani

Thought-Provoking Short Stories

Ghassan Kanafani was born in Acre, northern Palestine, in 1936. In 1972, he was assassinated by Zionist intelligence agents who booby-trapped his car. In the 36 intervening years, he made an immeasurable political and cultural contribution to his people and to the world. At eighteen he joined the Arab Nationalist Movement and was later a member of the PFLP's Politbureau and founding editor of its weekly magazine «Al Hadaf». In addition to his work as a revolutionary journalist and militant, he painted and wrote plays, novels and short stories.

Ghassan's literary works cannot ultimately be separated from his prolific political writings and revolutionary activities. All were motivated and bound by the idea of «All facts to the masses» which became the slogan of *Al Hadaf*. All are the result of commitment to the Palestinian cause and more broadly to truth, justice and humanity. On the other hand, Ghassan's literary works are not mere reflections of political points. His stories are not obviously propagandistic, but they are deeply revolutionary in that

they provoke the reader to think, question and criticize.

The short stories of Ghassan examine the human feelings and behaviour of the characters involved in a sensitive, probing style. He describes reality in meticulous detail. He juxtaposes the past and the present, or the experiences of different characters, to create powerful impressions and subtle messages. In this way Kanafani conveys the basic reality of the Palestinian experience - its tragedy, its complexity,

its potential for creating new people who learn to think, to discover what they want, and how to change their situation.

There are many examples: In «Um Saad» a middle aged woman in a refugee camp tells about her life and thoughts, chiefly through her fears and hopes for the son who has become a freedom fighter. In «Men in the Sun» we follow the journey, and learn the fate, of three Palestinian men who set out across the desert with their humble means, to seek a better fortune in the Gulf countries. In «All That is Left for You» one reads of Hamid who leaves the occupied Gaza Strip in shame after having married off his sister Miriam, already pregnant, to an already married man who has moreover shown readiness to cooperate with the occupiers. Hamid intends to cross South Palestine to Jordan, to find his mother from whom the children were separated in the turmoil fleeing the Zionist assault on Jaffa. In the desert, he meets instead the enemy - an Israeli soldier who has wandered away from his post. Some symbolism is employed but even greater questions are posed. Is Palestine like Miriam, whom Hamid also cared for but could not protect? Or is Palestine the mother whom Hamid counts on to resolve all their problems, but whom he has not reached when the story ends?

Rather than giving any pat answers in the ending of the stories, Kanafani's style of writing subtly raises questions concerning how people react to their situation. He gives a wealth of facts and impressions and implicitly challenges the reader to think, to seek new means for understanding reality in order to change it, in order to struggle for justice.

«Return to Haifa»

One of Kanafani's stories that best exemplifies these qualities, but unfortunately has not been translated to English, is «Return to Haifa». It centers on Sayed and his wife Safiya who return to see their home in Haifa after the 1967 war when the Israelis began to allow

