

## *Palestine Imagined: Fiction and Poetry*

### *Suggested Titles*

Habibi, Emile. **The Secret Life of Saeed: the Pessoptimist**. Northhampton, MA: Interlink World Fiction Series, 1974. (“With everyone paying more attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the wake of recent events, Habibi's novel about a Palestinian man, Saeed, who remains in Israel after its creation and becomes an informer for the state, is sure to attract attention. Written in 1974 but appearing for the first time in the U.S., the tale is told in the form of letters written to an unnamed correspondent after Saeed has escaped to outer space with the help of an extraterrestrial friend. Saeed's experiences are both comic and tragic, triumphant and defeated. He tries to gain favor by being the best informant, but his bad luck and dim wit guarantee his failure; his life is lived in constant fear, yet he is never without hope. Habibi's blending of fantasy and reality intentionally obscures our sense of what is real and what is not, but it heightens our awareness of the complexity of the political conflict in the Middle East. As an Arab in Israel (and one-time member of the Israeli Parliament), Habibi has strong views on the conflict, but even readers who disagree with him will find this strange novel to be thought-provoking on a number of levels. Helpful translators' notes serve as a primer on Middle Eastern history and culture.” --Beth Warrell)

Jayyusi, Salma Khadra. ed. **Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature** (East European Monographs; 345). New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. (“This anthology offers samples from the works of over 70 Palestinian writers and poets living in Israel, such as Emile Habibi, a laureate of the 1992 Israel Prize; in the occupied territories; and in the diaspora. Foremost among the themes are nostalgia and loss of homeland, which the editor considers the essence of the Palestinian experience. Other subjects, such as love and honor, are more universal. The introductory sections should provide the reader with enough background information, in terms of historic events and literary analysis of current Arabic literature, to allow the easy assimilation of subsequent sections. In view of the variety of themes and the number of writers and poets represented, the anthology represents a genuine source of contemporary Palestinian literature. Recommended for academic and most public libraries.” --Ali Houissa, Cornell Univ., Ithaca, N.Y.)

Kanafani, Ghassan. **Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories**. Denver: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999. (“Ghassan Kanafani’s short stories *Men in the Sun & Other Palestinian Stories* is based on many autobiographical events in Kanafani’s life. He was born in 1936 in Acre, Palestine. In 1948, he and his family fled to Damascus where he began work as a journalist. He was also a major spokesman for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. He has written five novels, two plays, and two studies of Palestinian literature. The ironic part is that he died in 1972 with his niece in the explosion of his booby-trapped car, but his written work is still as powerful now as it was in his lifetime. The stories in this collection share the common elements of isolation, disorientation and tragedy. When the Jewish community moved into Israel and Palestine after WWII, it was the Palestinians that became displaced and geographically orphaned. These stories emphasize their desire to be home and their struggles, and ultimate failure, to survive. The longest of the stories is *Men in the Sun*. I read that story for my Middle Eastern Studies class and I remember crying for a good half hour after putting the book down. It follows the tale of four men trying to escape into Kuwait with the help of a military man, hiding them in his lorry. Kanafani gives us four individual lives, stories and strengths brought together, united to escape the terror in Palestine and build a new life for themselves. —*Novel World*)

Rabinyan, Dorit. **All the Rivers**. Translated by Jessica Cohen. New York: Random House, 2017. Original title: *Gader Chaya*, 2014. (““Rabinyan’s book is a sort of *Romeo and Juliet*, a forbidden love affair between a Jewish girl from Tel Aviv and a Palestinian boy from Hebron. . . . [A] beautiful novel.” —The Guardian “A fine, subtle, and disturbing study of the ways in which public events encroach upon the private lives of those who attempt to live and love in peace with each other, and, impossibly, with a riven and irreconcilable world.” —John Banville, Man Booker Prize-winning author of *The Sea* “I’m with Dorit Rabinyan. Love, not hate, will save us. Hatred sows hatred, but love can break down barriers.”—Svetlana Alexievich, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature “Astonishing . . . Even the (asymmetrical) tragedy of the two peoples does not overwhelm this precise and elegant love story, drawn with the finest of lines.”—Amos Oz “Rabinyan is a generous writer who puts her characters first. . . . Rabinyan’s writing reflects the honesty and modesty of a true artisan.” —*Haaretz* “Rabinyan juggles cultures, languages, art forms, places, times, and seasons. . . . Because the novel strikes the right balance between the personal and the political, and because of her ability to tell a suspenseful and satisfying story, we decided to award Dorit Rabinyan’s [*All the Rivers*] the 2015 Bernstein Prize.” —From the 2015 Bernstein Prize judges’ decision)

### ***Related Titles***

Abulhawa, Susan. **Mornings in Jenin**. Bloomsbury, 2010. ("In this richly detailed, beautiful and resonant novel examining the Palestinian and Jewish conflicts from the mid-20th century to 2002, (originally published as *The Scar of David* in 2006, and now republished after a new edit), Abulhawa gives the terrible conflict a human face. The tale opens with Amal staring down the barrel of a soldier's gun—and moves backward to present the history that preceded that moment. In 1941 Palestine, Amal's grandparents are living on an olive farm in the village of Ein Hod. Their oldest son, Hasan, is best friends with a refugee Jewish boy, Ari Perlstein as WWII rages elsewhere. But in May 1948, the Jewish state of Israel is proclaimed, and Ein Hod, founded in 1189 C.E., was cleared of its Palestinian children... and the residents moved to Jenin refugee camp, where Amal is born. Through her eyes we experience the indignities and sufferings of the Palestinian refugees and also friendship and love. Abulhawa makes a great effort to empathize with all sides and tells an affecting and important story that succeeds as both literature and social commentary." —*Publishers Weekly*)

Alareer, Refaat, ed. **Gaza Writes Back: Short Stories from Young Writers in Gaza**. Just World Books, 2014. ("Gaza Writes Back is a compelling anthology of short stories from fifteen young writers in Gaza, members of a generation that has suffered immensely under Israel's siege and blockade. Their experiences, especially during and following Israel's 2008-2009 offensive known as "Operation Cast Lead", have fundamentally impacted their lives and their writing. Their words take us into the homes and hearts of moms, dads, students, children, and elders striving to live lives of dignity, compassion, and meaning in one of the world's most embattled communities. Readers will be moved by the struggles big and small that emerge from the well-crafted writing by these young people, and by the hope and courage that radiate from the authors' biographies." —Amazon)

Bell, Henry. ed. **A Bird is Not a Stone: An Anthology of Contemporary Palestinian Poetry**. Freight Books: 2014. ("*A Bird is Not a Stone* is a fabulous, landmark collection, an example of poetry's ability to transcend borders, cultures and languages in order to celebrate our shared humanity." — Carol Ann Duffy, British Poet Laureate "It is no surprise that great art is born out of its suffering . . . Therefore, this exquisite book of poems must be all the more welcomed—by all those who love art, who would denounce oppression, and who want to read the songs of those living behind the wall." — Emma Thompson, Oscar-winning actor "Angry, celebratory, bawdy and moving, these are poems by fine poets, translated by fine poets. They feel like the first offerings of the Cafavys, Nerudas and Lorcas of today, brought fresh to the modern reader." — Andrew Marr, journalist and political commentator)

Foyle, Naomi, ed. **A Blade of Grass: New Palestinian Poetry**. Smokestack Books: 2018. (“Brings together, in English and in Arabic, new work by poets from the Occupied West Bank and Gaza, from the Palestinian diaspora and from within the disputed borders of Israel. Featuring work by Fady Joudah, Mahmoud Darwish, Maya Abu Al-Hayyat, Deema K. Shehabi, Ashraf Fayadh, Mustafa Abu Sneineh, Naomi Shihab Nye, Marwan Makhoul, Farid Bitar, Fatena Al Ghorra, Dareen Tatour, and Sara Saleh, it celebrates the flourishing cultural resistance of the Palestinian people to decades of displacement, occupation, exile and bombardment. Written in free verse and innovative forms, hip-hop rhythms and the Arabic lyric tradition, these poems bear witness both to catastrophe and to the powerful determination to survive it. Ashraf Fayadh and Dareen Tatour are both currently imprisoned, respectively in Saudi Arabia and Israel, on charges relating to their poetry. Smokestack Books will donate a percentage of the receipts of this book to support their legal fees.” -Amazon)

Karmi, Ghada. **In Search of Fatima**. New York: Verso, 2002. (““This is an important memoir, beautifully written by an intelligent, sensitive woman ... It should help those of us who do not understand why growing numbers of Muslims and not a few Christians have lost faith with Western pretensions of fairness.”—*Financial Times* “Keenly observed, fierce, honest and yet light of touch.”—*Economist* “Karmi’s great achievement is to humanise the Palestinian predicament. Violent uprooting and exile have permanent psychological effects, which, as the Jewish people discovered, are not necessarily assuaged by the passage of time. We need counter-narratives like this, because we have recently learnt that it is not only parochial but also dangerous to ignore the pain and rights of others.”—*Independent* “A very timely book in the current political situation ... This should serve to remind people just what the big fuss in the Middle East is all about.”—Ahdaf Soueif, *Times Literary Supplement*)

Khalifeh, Sahar. **Wild Thorns**. Vancouver, WA: Olive Branch Press, 1976, 2005. in English. (“An earnest Arabic novel, first published in 1976, that dramatizes the reactions of Palestinian nationalists to Israeli occupation of the West Bank, an action that has turned many of their countrymen into nomads dutifully commuting to alien territory to work (. . . the people had become soft, been brainwashed with lies and Israeli cash). Khalifeh’s initial focus on Usama, a young Palestinian returned home to find his relatives compromised in this way, yields to more diffused depictions of several other characters with whom he finds himself conspiring to blow up buses transporting day-workers. The conspiracy raises havoc with the story’s formal unity but does enable it to portray credibly a troubling spectrum of understandably extreme responses to disenfranchisement and oppression.” —*Kirkus Reviews*)

Oz, Amos. **The Black Box**. New York: Vintage, 1989. (Seven years after their divorce, Ilana breaks the bitter silence with a letter to Alex, a world-renowned authority on fanaticism, begging for help with their rebellious adolescent son, Boaz. One letter leads to another, and so evolves a correspondence between Ilana and Alex, Alex and Michel (Ilana's Moroccan husband), Alex and his Mephistophelian Jerusalem lawyer a correspondence between mother and father, stepfather and stepson, father and son, each pleading his or her own case. The grasping, lyrical, manipulative, loving Ilana has stirred things up. Now, her former husband and her present husband have become rivals not only for her loyalty but for her son's as well. *Black Box* is a record of passion, an ingenious, witty, feeling novel of contemporary life. Amos Oz at his novelistic, human, and poetic best." – Vintage)