Encounters between Arabs and Jews in Palestinian literature are found in various works covered in previous chapters. Hanna Ibrahim’s “The Infiltrators” and Emile Habibi’s “The Mandelbaum Gate” are samples of such encounters. Both authors are Palestinian citizens of Israel and the perspectives they present are perspectives *min al-dakhil*, from the inside. In what follows we will illustrate how similar encounters between Arab and Jewish characters are depicted by other Palestinian prose writers as well as poets—with some comparisons with their Israeli counterparts.

**My Enemy and My Son:**
*GHASSAN KANAFANI, Returns to Haifa*

In his novella *Aid ila Hayfā* (1969) (*Returning to Haifa, 2000*) Kanafani presents his most sustained encounter between Arab and Jewish characters. His Palestinian characters Said and his wife, Safiyya, fled Haifa during the 1948 war, and in the chaotic exodus they left behind their five-month-old baby boy, Khaldun. For years they could not locate their child. They lived in Ramallah until the 1967 war; when the border between Israel and the newly occupied Palestinian territories was opened it became possible for them to return to Haifa, in northern Israel. When they arrived in Haifa they found an Israeli woman in their old house who, it turned out, had adopted their baby and raised him as a Jew. The boy is now an officer in the Israeli army. A painful encounter takes place between the son and his biological
Palestinian parents. The son Khaldun/Dov rejects his Arab parents and chooses to remain with his adoptive Jewish mother.

Said and his wife returned to Ramallah, dejected, but with a new awareness which leads to a change in their objection to their other son (Khalid) joining the ranks of the Palestinian guerrillas.

The encounter between the Arab and Jewish characters in this novella evocatively raises several issues concerning the content as well as the novelistic technique Kanafani employs in it.

Dov/Khaldun berates the Arab couple, his biological parents: How could they leave behind their beloved baby for twenty years without making any attempt to retrieve him? They are weak and helpless people who appear to have lost their right to their own progeny (and land?). He says that he has been raised as a Jew, speaking Hebrew, going to the temple, eating kosher food, and so on. Nurture here beats nature. By virtue of having adopted this abandoned Palestinian child and having raised him, the Jewish couple, Miriam and Ephrat, refugees of the Nazi Holocaust, appear to have a stronger claim to the child, and to the house by association.

Dov categorically states that he belongs in this place—Israel—and that the Jewish Miriam, not the Palestinian Safiyya, is his real mother. Said counters with an implicit threat to Dov, saying to him that his first battle will be with a freedom fighter called Khalid, Said’s other son. He goes on to say that the reason why he named the other son Khalid and not Khaldun was because there was always hope in their hearts that one day they would locate their lost son. But now he realizes that they have not really found him. The lost son is never found because blood does not create the parent–child bond, but love and sense of belonging. This flies in the face of the Arab expression that blood is thicker than water.

The novella raises the all-important issue of the meaning of a homeland. What is homeland? asks Said. Is it the house or its furnishings, is it peacock feathers left behind twenty years earlier, or is it the gate, or the pictures, or even Khaldun, the son?

Dov represents the Israeli who repudiates any relation to the region and strongly criticizes the Palestinians for their weakness and helplessness. As Joseph Zeidan remarks, “Miriam, on the other hand, symbolizes the humanistic camp among the Israelis: she admits the historical facts (from the Palestinian point of view) and shows readiness to talk. She is an Israeli, not a Zionist, and her Israeli identity is depicted through symbolism, albeit rather flat.” As examples of such flat symbolism Zeidan cites some references to Miriam’s “blue dress with white polka dots” and the curtains with “long blue strips,” both are allusions to the Israeli flag.