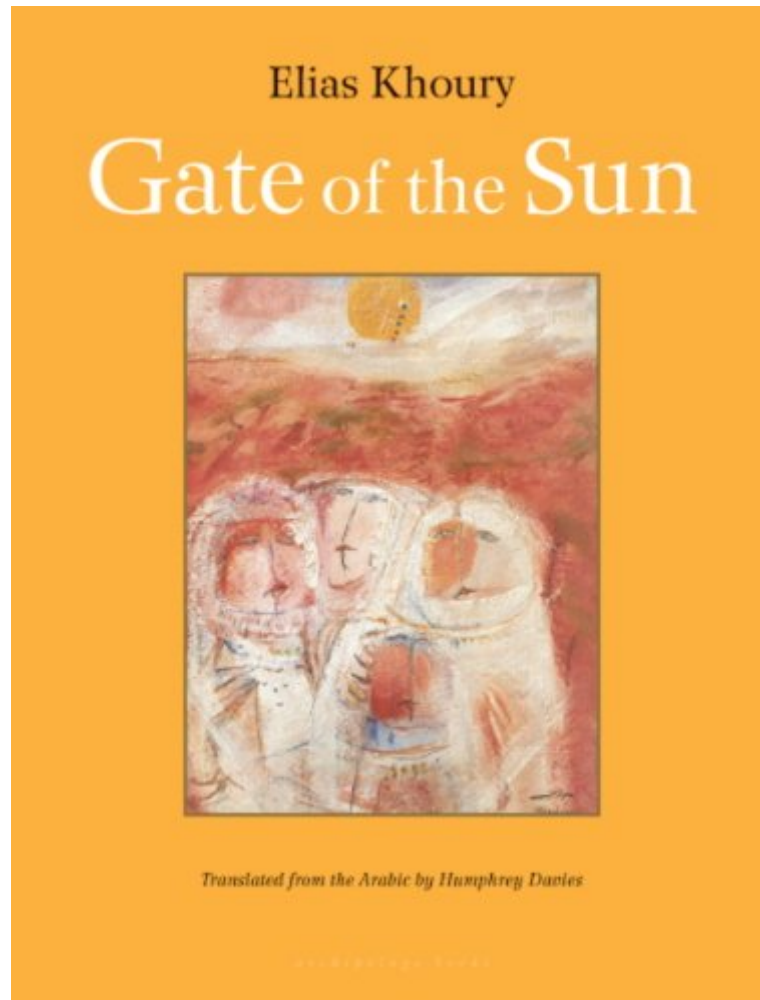


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Gate Of The Sun



Synopsis

Gate of the Sun is the first magnum opus of the Palestinian saga. After their country is torn apart in 1948, two men remain alone in a deserted makeshift hospital in the Shatila camp on the outskirts of Beirut. We enter a vast world of displacement, fear, and tenuous hope. Khalil holds vigil at the bedside of his patient and spiritual father, a storied leader of the Palestinian resistance who has slipped into a coma. As Khalil attempts to revive Yunes, he begins a story, which branches into many. Stories of the people expelled from their villages in Galilee, of the massacres that followed, of the extraordinary inner strength of those who survived, and of love. Khalilâ "like Elias Khouryâ "is a truth collector, trying to make sense of the fragments and various versions of stories that have been told to him. His voice is intimate and direct, his memories are vivid, his humanity radiates from every page. Khalil lets his mind wander through time, from village to village, from one astonishing soul to another, and takes us with him. Gate of the Sun is a Palestinian Odyssey. Beautifully weaving together haunting stories of survival and loss, love and devastation, memory and dream, Khoury humanizes the complex Palestinian struggle as he brings to life the story of an entire people.

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Customer Reviews

The following review in the NY Times is a good review of the novel. I strongly recommend. Whether

you are Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Arab or American, a must read. New York Times Review by LORRAINE ADAMS Published: January 15, 2006

TO Americans, the novel in Arabic remains on the margins. Nonfiction devoted to the Arab world may be in demand, but interest in Arab literature, even after Naguib Mahfouz's Nobel Prize in 1988, hasn't moved too far past Aladdin and Sinbad. Skip to next paragraph

Maria SÄnderberg Elias Khoury

GATE OF THE SUN

Elias Khoury is one of a handful of contemporary Arab novelists to have gained a measure of Western attention. He is also one of the few to write about the Palestinian experience, albeit from the perspective of an outsider. As a Christian born in Beirut in 1948, at the moment of Israel's inception, Khoury was too young to know firsthand the events that "Gate of the Sun" encompasses. Unlike the Palestinian novelists Emile Habibi and Ghassan Kanafani, who were born earlier in the century, Khoury could not rely on his own memory. To write this novel, he spent considerable time in the camps - more accurately, concrete exurban slums - throughout the Middle East, interviewing Palestinian refugees. Narrated by a peasant doctor talking to a comatose, aging fighter, "Gate of the Sun" relates a swirl of stories: of grandmothers and grandfathers, midwives and children, wives and lovers - the lucky and the hapless, the mad and the hopeful. Employing a strategy that's an inversion of "A Thousand and One Nights" (whose narrator, Scheherazade, tells stories to save herself), Khalil half believes that these stories are keeping his dying friend Yunes alive.

If was there one epic, one literary saga and masterpiece deserving of the tragedy, brutality, betrayal, strength and also beauty that is the Palestinian cause, it is this book. Every page is filled with humanity, regret, passion and the myth that ordinary people fashion for their cause, the myth they need to fashion in order to survive in a world that doesn't care. It is a story of men and women, of love that exists only unfulfilled, of death and self betrayal and the answers that will never be told, that can not be told. There is cruelty and injustice, yet among all the people who have lost their masks, victims and perpetrators, there is no true evil. There is love, yet no one enjoying its bliss without being eluded by its fragility. It is a world of massacres, of lime stained nameless corpses, of heroes turned mad and hair turned white early, but also of beauty, strength and hope that can not die, even in the filth and sorrow stained alleys of a refugee camp. In other words, it is our world. Yunes, an unflinching hero of the Palestinian resistance, man of countless sacrifices and mentor to forty year old Dr. Khalil, a warm thoughtful man who was among the fedayeen in Lebanon and refused to leave Beirut in 1982, has fallen into a coma. In the almost empty corridors of the neglected Galilee Hospital of the Shatila camp, it is up Khalil to care for him when everyone else has in one way or the other surrendered. They can not understand why Khalil would care so tenderly for

what they call a corpse. In a world turned up side down by endless war, they have learned to leave it to God. Not so Dr. Khalil. His refusal to let Yunes be taken home in order to die is his way of paying back his debts and showing his respect and devotion to the man.

This is an extraordinary story, essentially a personalized account of the history of the Palestinians of Galilee since the Zionist immigrations -- certainly, after the genocide of the Jews in the 1940s, the cruelest assault on a people in the 20th century (though the Armenian genocide too is right up there if one is counting), and it continues today in all its horror. The story is hung on an initially irritating conceit, one man's monologue as he cares for a mentor who has suffered a stroke and is brain dead. The protagonist imagines that his charge can hear and comprehend him. But as the story progresses, the immediacy of the reality of the intertwining biographies and the awful -- and often beautiful -- story they tell is so engaging that the irritation passes. But what also makes this novel extraordinary is that it is told without rancor -- not that hatred wasn't swirling around and everpresent. The people are real, that world is real, the suffering and death are real. It is this, and the opening of a window on that world heretofore glimpsed only on the news, that is the beauty of this book. There were occasional and brief what seemed to me trite pop-philosophical digressions, but they did not seriously affect the power of the reading. Some episodes seem to be present to emphasize that the author is not anti-Jewish, but they feel contrived. In this feverish situation it is no doubt a good thing to emphasize an author's rejection of anti-Semitic prejudice, but one would hope the author could find a way that feels as real as the rest of the book. Well, truth to tell, there was one subplot that stretched credulity in the interest of creating an artful story. Nonetheless, this is a truly powerful book, and the reality of that world comes through despite the occasional novelistic artifice.

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