

Yaghoub YADALI

Nobody Likes War, but...

Nobody likes war, but...when I was 16 years old, I wanted to fight in the Iran-Iraq war. In school, they told us that it was a Holy war--everyone who fought and died would go to heaven. As a 16-year-old, I thought heaven sounded good. I did not ask myself why dying in a war guaranteed me passage to heaven. Nor did I wonder why the enemy's soldiers would go to hell. I didn't ask what the difference was between us and Iraqis, why if we were Muslims and they were Muslims, if we were human beings and they were also human beings, only we would get to go to heaven.

Nobody likes war, but...I loved the Iraqi planes that dropped bombs on our cities. Of course, I lived in a small town and, since we had no important targets, we were not being bombed. We went to the roof in order to watch them when they passed over town. I was 12 years old, and I loved warplanes, and I liked war because there were warplanes.

Nobody likes war, but...everyone is happy when the war is over. Except my mother. She was not happy, at least during the day. For two years after the war, my brother's job was to leave the garrison every morning, go out into the minefields, and diffuse the remaining mines. He came home in the evenings. During these two years, every morning my mother woke up in fear and prayed for my brother all day. And every evening, she phoned the garrison to find out whether he was alive or not. In the evenings and nights, my mother was happy because her son was safe until the next morning.

Nobody likes war, but...a writer might like it. War is full of unusual events and experiences, things that do not happen in everyday life. War, for the writer, is a rich source of new subjects and themes for new, original work. But is this reason enough? What value does a novel have in comparison to a human life? Still, war is unavoidable, it happens whether the writer wants it or not. So what is his duty during wartime? Participate or not? If Tolstoy had died in the Crimean War, *War and Peace* would never have been written. But if he had not fought in the war, there would have been no *War and Peace* to write.

Nobody likes war, but... people in my country, Iran, expect another war every day, every moment, even though we are still rebuilding from the previous war--destroyed houses, gardens, palm groves. People who were wounded and injured by chemical bombs are still under treatment, still in the hospital, and sometimes we read in the newspaper that one of them has died. Despite all this, war still hovers over us. It is not important why the next war starts or who starts it. All politicians shout beautiful slogans and pretend human life is important to them.

In my country, a writer is not permitted to condemn war in his writing, because politicians consider war to be Holy. I have never really understood what they meant when they said "Holy." If I am presented with a new idea, I am free to agree with it, or I am free to oppose it, but I do not understand how anyone can feel free to start a war, to kill other people, for a belief.

As a writer, as a man, I prefer not to participate in war. If I could, I would simply prevent war from happening ever again! The only justification for war is self-defense against invasion and attack. Unfortunately, it seems that politicians and warlords all over the world think that their reason to start a war is a good one. Saddam Hussein, a madman, considered himself as the leader of the Arab world, and invaded Iran ostensibly to free Iranian-Arabs who were living in south of Iran. Although this was one of his reasons to attack, his main purpose was to capture Iran's oil resources.

In the war against the United States, Saddam Hussein considered himself a religious leader and representative of Muslims, a defender of Islam. But how much can we believe a person who attacked his own people with chemical bombs, and had already invaded his two neighbor countries, Iran and Kuwait?

As a writer, the only results I see from my country's eight-year war are destruction, pain and disaster. The war began when I was 10, just a boy, and it finished when I was 18 and a man, graduating from high school. I watched young soldiers go off to war, followed by their country's enthusiastic farewells. But it was not long before we were seeing pictures of those same young people in coffins on their way to the cemetery, again followed by enthusiastic farewells. In our war, like all other wars, food was very scarce, black markets flourished, multi-kilometer long lines to receive food rations were common. Electricity, gas and oil were also in short supply.

And after eight years, what was the result? What did the Iranians win, or the Iraqis? The war had no winner. The result of the politicians' insanity was one million dead and injured people and hundreds of billions of dollars in material damage. And no one could evaluate the amount of mental and non-material devastation of this war.

The result of this war for me, as a writer, was three short stories. And of course, in my stories there is war, directly or indirectly. The two short stories I wrote about war won many awards in Iran but it was difficult for me to feel glad or proud. A war with thousands of dead and injured people on one side, and two stories with a few small awards on the other side--this is not fair at all.

In the end, I would rather there be no more war at all, and no more stories taking their theme from war.