

My Happiness Bears No Relation to Happiness – A Poet's Life in the Palestinian Century  
by Adina Hoffman.  
Yale University Press 2009.

To paraphrase Ecclesiastes, 'Of the making of many books about the Middle East there is no end and studying most of them wearies the flesh'; yet every so often a new book is published which not only shows up the inadequacies of so many others but which makes a thinking person sit up, pay attention, and assimilate material that leaves them changed.

This latter certainly applies to Adina Hoffman's brilliant biography of the Palestinian poet Taha Muhammad Ali, born in 1931, whose adult life tells in microcosm the story of the Palestinian people in its collision with the State of Israel. What makes *My Happiness* an even more extraordinary biography is that its Israeli Jewish author reflects on events that bring her distress, even shame, and certainly sadness, and yet confronts them unflinchingly.

Taha Muhammad Ali emerges from the pages of the book as a quietly inspirational figure, a man of great courage and determination, haunted by the loss and destruction of the village in which he spent a happy childhood and yet not embittered by the experience that has befallen his family and his people. His poetry, and his poet's eye, stand out from the story, and my immediate response to finishing the book was to order the edition of Ali's poetry in Arabic and English, the translation done by Hoffman's husband Peter Cole, together with Yahya Hijazi and Gabriel Levin.

*My Happiness* is eloquent testimony to the power of the human will to overcome whatever is thrown at it, and also gives a shrivening insight into the way events all too familiar from one point of view to Jews the world over impacted the Palestinian natives of the land both when the State of Israel was established and later. It should be essential reading for anyone who wishes to have a balanced view of the world's most distressing and intractable problem.

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