



# Translating Al-Fuzai's *Requital* into English

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## Abstract

*Requital* is one of Al-Fuzai's short stories. It depicts the relationship between a mother and his child during a time of war. This mother makes her decision not to tell attackers anything about her son and his friends. The story presents how war influences the life of an ordinary family. It also highlights that violence and injustice should have an end.

## Subject Areas

Linguistics, Literature

## Keywords

Story, Saudi, Al-Fuzai, *Requital*, War

## 1. Introduction

Khalil I. Al-Fuzai (1940-) is a writer from Saudi Arabia who wrote and published a good number of stories. In his works, Khalil wrote about his Arabian society in a clear and simple way [1]. *Requital*<sup>1</sup> is one of the stories where he presents a side of how war affects people's lives [2]. I chose to translate this story because it represents a model of what Al-Fuzai has written [3] [4]. In addition, it deals with the sufferings of normal people who find themselves in a wrong place and time; they have to face the consequences of a war.

From a cultural point of view, it is expected among relatives to have a strong relationship. In Arabian societies, males are the ones who should protect their families, yet in this story, we find the mother who exposes her life for danger because of her son. At certain times, females play the role of males and share males their roles [5]. In this story, the mother "regains consciousness ... in the arms of her son ... to see [the] bodies on the ground, unsure and concerned, and

<sup>1</sup>The Arabic source of this story is: Al-Fuzai, K. I. (1998). *Torture That Does Not Die*. العذاب الذي لا يموت Dammam: Eastern Province Literary Club, pp. 7-16.

her son explains what happened: “We have surprised them and killed them ... come on, we must leave right away”.

## 2. Translation: *Requital*

While the officer continues to interview Ahmed’s mother, some of his guys in torn military clothes sneak into the kitchen. Their appearance betrays their agony; traces of reluctance, worry, and anxiety may be seen on their faces. They are worn, their shoulders hang down, and their youthful features have vanished; they appear to be carrying the burdens of the cosmos. Some of them have brought food ... they begin to gorge themselves while standing ... the officer takes food from a soldier, begins to speak with his mouth full of food, and saliva spurts from his mouth. “Your intransigence will not benefit you ...<sup>2</sup> and will not shield your son from revenge”, he says to Ahmed’s mother.

(The Avenger is Allah, o Allah’s foe.)<sup>3</sup>

He tosses the plate of food aside and utters a harsh word. Her cheeks flushes with embarrassment ... she remains silent ...

(What type of folly is it that is destroying your minds? And what kind of ugliness do you have in your hearts?)

“If you do not show us the path to your son and his companions, we will blow up this house and everyone inside it,” he threatens.

(And who will detonate your terrible body?)

“I told you that my baby traveled to Saudi Arabia ... save for myself and the maid, there is no one inside the house,” she says. “Don’t you search the house? What do you want more?”

Despite her bravery, she is terrified ... fires of hatred rage in her breast ... she tries to be calm ... this is how she seems to the bunch of transgressors who have stormed her house in quest of resistance fighters. Ahmed, her son, and three of his friends are sheltering in the roof’s water tank ... Allah’s never-sleeping eye watches over them.

The maid transforms into a deafeningly-mute person. They’ve addressed her several times, and she responds by making a sign with her hands that she doesn’t know what’s going on ... that she has no idea what’s going on. She has no idea why they arrived ... has no idea who is in the resistance organization ... has no idea where Ahmed and his colleagues have gone; she is subjected to the officer’s slaps in an attempt to force her to speak. She does not, however, make a sound until they are satisfied that she is truly dumb.

(From the Mighty Avenger, woe to you.)

Kuwait’s sky darkens after being blanketed with black clouds ... its streets are desolate ... vacant except for a few burned cars and cars whose tires have been taken and discarded on both sides of the street. Some attackers gather around an inquisition center with military cars and equipment; heavy artillery is mounted

<sup>2</sup>... There are a few dots in the original text now and then, and I attempt to keep them to give the reader a sense of the taste of this foreign material.

<sup>3</sup>(...): What is put between brackets is a soliloquy.

over bridges and on the rooftops of buildings. As fortifications, the attackers use the facades of buildings on the main streets. Residents are confined to their homes, only venturing out when absolutely necessary or when it is time for prayer. Following the explosion of a military command center and the deaths of a number of troops and commanders, the region of Al-Rumeitha is flooded with officers and soldiers hunting for the resistance organization ... as well as the martyrdom of one of the resistance groups due to the explosion of his booby-trapped automobile, which smashed into the command center after being laden with explosives.

When three soldiers with orders from their officer take the maid to a room in one of the Al-Rumeitha villas, the officer and six of his men interrogate and beat Ahmed's mother, who is fighting back despite her wounds, defiant despite her adversaries' savagery ... as if they wished to humiliate her in the most heinous way possible. The maid returns crying ... her garments have been shredded, panic has been drawn on her face, and shame has torn her feelings. Ahmed's mother tries to cover her chest with her ripped dress, but she faints quickly, and when Ahmed's mother attempts to help her, a soldier kicks her away. She challenges him ... he pushes her against the wall with the end of his rifle ... he adds, "Tell us the names of your son's friends," in an ironic tone.

"I don't know them, and I don't know their parents," she continues, attempting to appear self-assured.

"We won't leave you alone until you tell us about your kid and his group," the officer says, becoming enraged.

"As I already said, my kid travelled to Saudi Arabia, and I don't know his friends."

"We will teach you obedience if you are stubborn."

He slaps her hard enough that she nearly falls to the ground, but she catches herself on the wall and declares, "What knightly conduct, o man!" You display your strength in front of a woman ... your mother's age.

Her words don't jolt them out of their funk. He slaps her once more. Her tears aren't running and she isn't crying.

(If you were true men, you would not have done what you did.)

If her son and his pals are apprehended by these barbarians, the soldiers will rip their bodies apart, just like they did with his cousin's body when they kidnapped him after dawn prayer to see if he was a member of the resistance group. They brought him to the front of his family's house at sunrise the same day ... they bombarded him with bullets ... his body turned into a sieve, blood and fragments of his corpse flew and adhered to the house's fence. They claimed he refused to comply with them ... the very prospect of Ahmed suffering the same fate terrifies her, yet facing this officer and his soldiers she appears calm ... determined ... strong-willed ... she disregards his threat and intimidation ... she knows that these people will try to make her have a nervous breakdown in order to compel her to confess where her kid is, or she may accidentally say something that will allow them to continue punishing her brutally. Her face is adorned with

dignity and bravery, and her features exude gravity and strength ... her terror is concealed by undeniable bravery. Her heart breaks for the maid's anguish and humiliation, which her chest can no longer withstand. The poor maid remains adamant and has not revealed Ahmed's and his buddies' secret ... she plays dumb expertly, even when she is in excruciating pain.

"It appears that striking a deal with you is impossible," the officer shouts in her face.

(What sin is left to commit, O damned?)

With the butt of his gun, he hits her in the head. Her world becomes hazy ... she feels herself collapsing ... images from her childhood flash through her memory ... the period when people differed and did not vary ... fathers cultivate cooperation, so they receive the benefits of love ... sons dispute, yet friendship returns quickly ... Women squabble, but neither sleeps that night until the other is assured of her rest and comfort ... Dreams stay warm in their hearts ... beautiful in their feelings ... gleaming in their imaginations ... girls and boys build their dreams and palaces from the sand of the sea, and they destroy the sand palaces ... dreams stay warm in their hearts ... beautiful in their feelings ... gleaming in their imaginations ... They preserve dreams and promise to make them come true ... processions of women and girls line the shore ... in the lovely evenings, they await ... the return of travelers from the unknown ... and when their ships appear on the horizon ... their lights penetrate the darkness ... their noise assassinates the calm of the sea ... at that time, trilling cries of joy erupt ... and all exchange congratulations.

When she regains consciousness, she finds herself in the arms of her son. She turns to see their bodies on the ground, unsure and concerned, and her son explains what happened: "We have surprised them and killed them ... come on, we must leave right away."

May 4, 1993<sup>4</sup>.

### 3. Conclusion

In this story, Al-Fuzai addresses the way in which a family should cooperate during the time of war. As mentioned and presented in the story, females play an important role; the mother refuses to disclose the secret of her son's hiding. Generally speaking, the story presents how war influences the life of an ordinary family. It also highlights that violence and injustice should have an end. This story is written two years after the invasion of Iraq into Kuwait; Al-Fuzai here depicts the effect of this invasion on the lives of ordinary people. Hence appears the importance of this story; besides being a literary act, it has a historical side that should not be ignored.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Khalil I. Al-Fuzai for giving me permission to translate his stories.

<sup>4</sup>May 4, 1993: This date indicates either the time of drafting or publishing the story.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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