

of an age-old religious war. (Ramallah, of course, was the site of the lynching of two Israeli reserve soldiers last October; young Palestinian men dipped their hands in the blood of the Israelis and waved them in triumph.) The vehemence of Ramallah is one of the consistently surprising aspects of this uprising. Situated immediately to the north of Jerusalem, it is a cosmopolitan city, and many of its residents hold American citizenship. It has fine restaurants and sophisticated hotels. Ramallah is not Gaza.

The funerals were for two men killed by the Israeli Army in al-Birah, a Ramallah suburb. The Army said that the Palestinians were firing weapons at the nearby Jewish settlement of Psagot. The Palestinians say that the two men were merely helping to move people away from a firefight.

Thousands of people attended the funerals. The procession was claustrophobic—too many men for the narrow streets, too much bumping—and the crowd was sullen; a number of the marchers were armed. The bodies were borne on trucks well in front of where I walked. I was stuck behind a Mitsubishi pickup, on which sat a Fatah activist with a megaphone. He shouted, “Give us weapons, O Abu Ammar, and we will set the West Bank on fire!” (Abu Ammar is Arafat’s nom de guerre.) The crowd chanted with him. “O Saddam, send your missiles to Tel Aviv!” Then I heard, from behind me, another slogan taken up by the crowd: “*Khaybar, Khaybar, ya Yahud, jaysh Muhammad sawf ya’ud!*” (“O Jews of Khaybar, the army of Muhammad is returning!”)

I had not heard this particular slogan since 1991, during the first Intifada, but that was in Gaza, and it was the fundamentalists of the militant Islamic group Hamas who had chanted it. This crowd was beardless—a mostly secular crowd. Khaybar is the name of an oasis near Medina that, in the time of Muhammad, was populated mainly by Jews. In the year 628, Muhammad led the Muslims against it, defeating the Jews in battle and subjugating the survivors, who would later be expelled from Arabia. The intent of the slogan, then, is clear: what the army of Muhammad did to the Jews fourteen hundred years ago in Arabia it would soon do again in Palestine.

At the cemetery, which sits across a

narrow valley from the Psagot settlement, the uprising leader, Marwan Barghouti, arrived to deliver a eulogy. Barghouti, a short, compact man who, in the spirit of Oslo, once told me that he had more than thirty friends in the Israeli Knesset, now looked hollowed out; there were bags under his eyes, and he was accompanied by armed bodyguards. A week before, another Fatah leader, Hussein Abayat, had been assassinated outside Bethlehem by missiles fired from an Israeli helicopter. Two Palestinian bystanders, both women, were killed as well.

Barghouti’s eulogy was more a war cry than a remembrance of the dead: he seemed to tear apart his vocal cords as he spoke. “Heaven is opening its doors to receive these martyrs of al-Aqsa!” he said. “The Israelis are sending our people to Heaven every day. They are killing us every day with helicopters, but they will never be able to destroy us. Look at that settlement!” He pointed in the direction of Psagot. “Those settlers will learn, I promise.”

“*Allahu akbar!*” the mourners shouted.

In the distance we heard sirens. “Those ambulances are going to collect the blood of our people,” Barghouti said.

Then Barghouti said something surprising. “Let us close the bypass roads!” He meant the roads, some built recently by the Barak government, that connect the settlements to each other and to Israel proper. These are roads that avoid Arab-populated areas, allowing Jews to drive safely through the West Bank. (The roads, which are patrolled by the Israeli Army, make it difficult for Palestinians to travel between their own cities; they not infrequently must endure the inexplicable delays and petty harassments of multiple Israeli checkpoints.) Many settlers commute to work in Jerusalem or Greater Tel Aviv. When the roads are closed, the settlers are trapped. When they find themselves trapped, the theory holds, many of them will pick up and leave, go back to Tel Aviv. Attacks on roads travelled by Jews have become commonplace—in one of the more notorious, the son and daughter-in-law of the late Arab-hating extremist Meir Kahane were killed in an ambush near Ofra.

Barghouti closed with a message to the gunmen scattered through the crowd. “We are asking everyone not to shoot in the air,” he said. “Don’t shoot in

SHOWCASE BY DUDLEY REED

MAN-CHILD

As a kid, Macaulay Culkin was Hollywood’s intrepid Little Man, who won world renown in “Home Alone” for his resourceful ability to keep the predatory world out. Now, at twenty, in Richard Nelson’s deft play “Madame Melville,” at London’s Vaudeville Theatre, Culkin is home alone again, but this time he’s a hesitant man-child, desperately working to let the predatory world—in the form of a perky French high-school teacher (Irène Jacob)—in. With his doe-eyes and beestung lips, Culkin stands before us as Carl, a churnin’ urn of burnin’ fifteen-year-old funk, to whom Mme. Melville gives a crash course in desire.

At once poised and perplexed, Culkin is a fetching package. A shock of preppy blond hair falls over his face, and his tapered fingers telegraph his sensitivity. His voice is still callow, and his diction isn’t great, but this ordinariness works for his character. Despite Culkin’s years in the public eye, there is something virginal and modest about him, something emergent. Culkin’s skill—and he is very skillful—is to articulate roiling adolescent thrill and anxiety as the new continent of lust looms into view. There is nothing leering or laddish about his excitement. Mme. Melville insists that “The Kama Sutra” is an art book, and as Carl reads a passage to the audience his eyes lower and his pale skin reddens in what seems to be actual embarrassment. And when the affair ends—with a farewell scene that Nelson brilliantly stages twice—Culkin’s controlled sobs are deeply affecting. They remind us of the ache of first love, but also of something else—the almost forgotten knowledge, which Culkin’s very public childhood has borne out, that a kid, long before he discovers the joys and pains of sex, can know all about the broken heart.

—John Lahr

