# The East-West Cultural Passage of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra

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**ملخص**

غادر جبرا إبراهيم جبرا (1919-1994) بيت لحم خلال عام 1948 للعراق حيث بنى حياة جديدة كأكاديمي ومترجم، تدرب في النقد الأدبي في جامعة كامبريدج. صرّح جبرا في مؤلَّفه شارع الأميرات (33) قائلاً: "من يدرس أعمالي يجب أن يدرس كل تياراتي واتجاهاتي معًا، يجب أن يدرسها في التقدم الزمني". عمل جبرا كمعبر ثقافي شرقي /غربي من خلال الرجوع إلى نصوص المعاصرين باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية، وهي سلسلة من المراجع التي يمكن تعيينها للإشارة إلى مكان روايته بين مجموعة متنوعة من الموضوعات التي تتميز بها سنوات الخمسينيات. بالإضافة إلى سبع مسرحيات لشكسبير (منها كوريولانوس

وهاملت والملك لير والعاصفة) (طومسون: 362)، كانت ترجمته لصوت ويليام فولكنر وصوت الغضب "مؤثرة للغاية" بين الحداثيين العرب (أبو العلا: 296). يتناول هذا المقال رواية جبرا الأولى، في سياق بغداد في الخمسينيات ورواية فولكنر الأخرى.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:**

الآداب الامريكية، الآداب العربية، السينما العربية، الوجودية، العراق، النكبة، الترجمة، الجنسانية، ويليام فولكنر.

**Abstract**

Trained in literary criticism at Cambridge University, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919-1994) left Bethlehem during 1948 for Iraq—where he built a new life as academic and translator. Of his own work, Jabra stated: "whoever studies my works must study all of my currents and trends together; he should study them in chronological progression" (Jabra, *Princesses' Street* 33). Jabra's work serves as an east/west cultural passage by referencing contemporaries' texts in Arabic and English, a series

of references that can be mapped to indicate his novel's place among a variety of subjectivities characteristic of the 1950s. In addition to seven Shakespeare plays—among them, *Coriolanus, Hamlet, King Lear*, and the *Tempest* (Thompson 362), his translation of William Faulkner's *Sound and the Fury* was "highly influential" among Arab modernists (Aboul-Ela 296). This essay addresses Jabra's first novel, in the context of 1950s Baghdad and another Faulkner novel.

**Keywords**

American literature, Arab film, Arab literature, Existentialism, Iraq, *nakba*, translation, sex, William Faulkner.

## 1. Introduction

Boyish good humor (coupled with intellectuals' desire to playfully one-up a colleague) bound Jabra and fellow-translator Denys Johnson-Davies; an anecdote from the adult life of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919-1994) suggests his place in a world of East-

West cultural passages. Johnson-Davies recounted an elaborate trilingual joke that he and Jabra played on Iraqi poet Boland al-Haydari. While lacking the other two men's confidence in modern European languages, al-Haydari was curious about contemporary developments within France's existentialist movement. Jabra and Johnson-Davies "hatched a plot by pretending to Boland that [Jean Paul] Sartre had suddenly been inspired to break into verse and to compose his one and only poem, which happened to be about existentialism."

The two plotters further claimed that Johnson-Davies just happened to have a copy of the British literary magazine that had a translation of Sartre's French original. While drafting a translation into Arabic, Jabra and Johnson-Davies had encountered one or two obscurities, for which they required al-Haydari's assistance. Together, the two plotters: "composed a poem in Arabic in which we laid various traps for our unsuspecting friend; I remember that I myself contributed a reference to 'the stranger' so that Boland might later explain to us that this of course

referred to Camus' novel of that title" (Johnson-Davies 68). This anecdote serves to indicate his dual intellectual lives—that he enjoyed in contemporary European letters, as well as that he enjoyed in the vibrant intellectual life of his adopted homeland--placing Jabra between the cultural worlds of East and West.

In the discussion that follows, I will assess Jabra's first novel (written in English) with a nesting series of associations. First, culinary practices that characterized Baghdad during the 1950s—eating Tigris "salmon" in the open air—will be acknowledged; then, autobiographical elements will be acknowledged in Jabra's first novel, while simultaneously addressing elements of classical Arabic literature and contemporary Arab film which inform the novel. Finally, both Baghdad meals and Jabra's biography (a Christian, Palestinian, born in Jerusalem) will inform a reading of William Faulkner, from whose works Jabra translated several.

***2. Masgouf***

A beach along the shallow Tigris south of Baghdad was a favorite spot for summer swimmers and picnickers. A series of contemporary texts in English indicated a kind of festive meal that indicated conspicuous leisure among Iraqis and their guests living during the Cold War (Air France 170). A visiting chef described his experience with broiled Tigris salmon (*shabbut,* its scientific name *Barbus esocinus*); "we drove along the road by the side of the river in the early evening until we reached some small ramshackle hut; here were fishermen to guide us across the loose sandy soil" (Howe 136). To prepare *masgouf*, the culinary master rubbed the fish with equal parts black pepper, tamarind, and turmeric (Soffer).

The "fish master" then stuck some twelve or fourteen sticks in a circle in the ground, around a fire of twigs and straw; split the fish down the middle; and pegged each onto the sticks around the fire (*Holiday* 105). A visitor described the culinary ritual:

"Immediately in front of *Abu Samak* ["the fish master," "Father of the Fish"] was an opening in the circle, and into this the 'Father of the Fish' hopped from time to time to add more of the twigs—cut from the tree of a local species of mimosa, giving out a slightly perfumed smoke—taking care the flames almost licked the fish but never quite touched it." The "fish master" used a little raffia fan to keep the fire burning brightly for approximately an hour, until the fish was half-cooked.

Then, "this fish were taken off the sticks and laid out carefully on the red-hot embers, the inside facing upwards, the skin now cooking. Swiftly the cook cut tomatoes into halves and laid them on top of the three of the fish, tightly packing them like sardines in a box." The visiting chef subsequently described straw matting spread across a few poles, under which: "a long trestle-table was surrounded with chairs and on it were some bottles of whisky and many glasses; a few flare lamps cast a bright glow over our 'restaurant'" (Howe 136). When the fish were thoroughly cooked, Abu Samak painted them with

curry sauce, brought them to the table, and laid them out on a clean white board with chopped tomatoes and pickled mango (Goodman 15). *Masgouf* fish were also served with grilled lemon rounds, and a sprinkling of parsley and lemon juice (Soffer).

As one foreigner narrated, "we finished off a mammoth meal with huge wedges of bright red water melon, and then it was time to go back once more across the dried-out river-bed, guided by the fishermen with their hurricane lamps" (Howe 137). English-language descriptions suggest sweet ends for *masgouf* meals. Grilled fish and alcohol—whether whisky (Howe 136) or '*arak* (*Air France* 170)—were consumed together. Contemporary humor placed the unruliness of foreign women's openly-expressed sexual desire, at the end of a *masgouf* meal: "'Kiss me, Jack dear, kiss me!' said the wife to her husband; 'I can't darling,' said Jack, 'I've got sand in my mouth;' 'Swallow it, boy, swallow it' exclaimed the young wife: 'if ever anybody needed it, you do!' (*Iraq Times*, 19 May 1953). Familiarity with *masgouf*, which appears

in multiple travel accounts dating from the 1950s, suggests sexual connotations attached to a meal of fish. Let us now turn our attention to some evident trends in Jabra's first novel; while recalling the novelist and translator's playfulness, before concluding by acknowledging that these trends enable a radically new reading of a Faulkner novel with which Jabra was undoubtedly familiar.

### 3. *Hunters in a Narrow Street*

Jabra's first novel, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (1960) was written in English, addressing the 1950s in his new home Baghdad. Little distinguished Jabra's own biography from his fictional titles; critic Issa Boullata noted that: "Jabra's ideas and personality are evident throughout [*Hunters*], and Jameel Farran as a protagonist is Jabra's projection of his own idea of what a Palestinian is; he enters Baghdad almost penniless but not vanquished …: he teaches, he educates, he incites change, he penetrates high society and dissident sectors; he senses corruption and encourages rebellion" (Boullata 217). In short, *Hunters*

serves as Jabra's autobiographical *roman à clef.*

His protagonist, a Palestinian Christian like him, the novelist left Jerusalem during 1948 for academic employment in Iraq. In a strictly autobiographical text, Jabra recalled: "I was appointed a lecturer in English literature at the Preparatory College, which had just been established and which was described as the nucleus of the University of Baghdad that was to be established at that time" (Jabra, *Princesses' Street* 33). With the impecuniousness of youth, *Hunters'* protagonist Jameel Farran "had exactly sixteen dinars when I arrived in Baghdad, and it was to last for two weeks" (4). The young academic protagonist of *Hunters* found a new home via an academic job and shabby lodgings; the sixteen dinars in his pocket would not afford him the posh air-conditioned Shahrazade Hotel, "where I could envisage a garden looking out on the river, sparkling with clean waiters and pretty girls in sleeveless dresses" (4).

In this novel, Jabra credited the development of academic institutions in Iraq's capital, with the dual

homes (both academic and personal) the protagonist found in it. According to Boullata, "Jabra's arrival in Baghdad [during] 1948 coincided with a mood for radical change in all walks of life [among Iraqi intellectuals], especially among the younger generation, in the wake of the Palestine debacle and the establishment of Israel, which shook all Arabs to the core. This mood suited him perfectly, and he soon made friends with Iraqi poets, painters, sculptors, ceramicists, architects, writers, and other intellectuals craving change, his presence among them acting like a leaven, much as theirs in his life propelled him further into creative modernism" (215).

Jabra's narration and others create a network of texts regarding young men's coming-into-being in a petroleum capital of the Arab world. In *Assignment in Iraq,* Allan MacKinnon's protagonist "took a job as tutor to the sixteen-year-old daughter of a Kurdish chieftain in Baghdad." In *Jadoo,* John Keel's cheap hotel was located on "a narrow dingy alley at the edge of the great labyrinth of the Baghdad bazaar," his

room "smelled of cheap perfume and incense, and contained a bed, a chair, and a sink; the plumbing was next door—a hole in the floor" (49). Even among the academic class, such lodgings were familiar: in a memoir, Johnson-Davies recounted that he had moved into the cheapest hotel he could find, in this way alerting the Baghdad police (67). In *Hunters* as well, the protagonist Jameel is hired to teach a powerful man's daughter; he lives modestly, finding satisfaction in a rewarding personal life.

*Hunters* intertwines discussions of heteronormative desires of an expatriate Arab, both in terms of and distinct from, the homosociability of overseas Englishmen. In this novel, Jameel ["handsome," in Arabic]--with the activist poet Adnan—attempted to satisfy his desire for cleanliness with a visit to the public baths. As the two men undressed and rolled their clothes into bundles, as many others "were drying themselves, or sitting, after their ablutions, wrapped up in towels and sipping their tea with conspicuous luxury," Jameel noticed a

fair-haired, blue-eyed foreigner, "saying something in English to a naked pot-bellied servant with a red cloth round his middle." Employed at a Baghdad bank, Brian Flint was an Englishman; in the baths, over loofas and cakes of soap, the three men became acquainted.

Sexuality has a place in a discussion of East-West cultural passages, and "pleasure" is a recurrent theme in the work of anthropologist Charles Hirschkind. Pleasures vary from that of "of auditory suspicion" (Hirschkind 24), the "cathartic experience" of listening to diva Umm Kulthum (54), a "listening pleasure" found in the effective and stirring performance of a known account (86), the "momentary experience of catharsis and pleasure" that serves as entertainment (92), as well as the "nonethical senses of pleasure, fear, or well-being produced by… popular media" in addition to cassette recordings of Islamic sermons (95). While "pleasure" is a recurrent theme within the novel, the gratifications of the novel are both material and

immaterial in nature, drawing on a wide range of texts in both Arabic and English.

Jabra's *Hunters* uses the built environment of Baghdad to represent the self in search of love, as well as food to represent the consummation of that self in ideal intimacy (82). In meeting Flint, *Hunters*' protagonist Jameel Farran encountered his complement. The Palestinian academic had studied at Cambridge; Brian Flint, at Oxford. Flint, not an Arab, was not heterosexual. Just as the protagonist approximates an autobiographical sketch, "Brian" may have been modeled on any of several contemporaries, whether Johnson-Davies himself, Wilfred Thesiger (at the UK Embassy), or Desmond Stewart (at Radio Baghdad).

Scholar of classical Arabic literature, Jabra may well have been familiar with the poetry of Ali ibn al-Abbas ibn Jurayj, (born in Baghdad during 836 C.E.; died 896). Also known as Ibn al-Rumi, this poet's *qasida* "L191" contains a series of images redolent of youth: women's murderous glances, their carelessness,

and their stinginess in love. According to literary critic Beatrice Gruendler, the "L191" text employed a series of images to project human emotion onto natural scenes: pliant twigs, a languid afternoon sun, a crystal clear pond, a scented breeze, flashes of lightening, cooing doves, and the calling of a mother-camel (47-60)" (158).

As a "damp cool breeze" on his face indicated, the Baghdad Jabra described was in the process of being transformed by the petroleum industry, and its servitors' desire for air conditioning and clean bathrooms; a set of values which the academic refugee from Palestine came to share. In *Hunters,* "cruel hoaxes" were at the expense of the protagonist. Having been frustrated in attaining his desires of accommodation in an air-conditioned hotel, Jameel returned to the taxi and his suitcases, putting himself in the hands of the taxi driver (as al-Haydari had, trusting the "translation" of Jabra and Johnson-Davies). The driver's next stop was an unswept doorway, where-- in a final gesture—he dropped the

recently-arrived man's bags on the curb, next to the entrance of slummy hostel.

In *Hunters*, the experience of the protagonist strained an idealistic binary between "east" and "west," between "men" and "women." In east-west cultural passages, men and women risk their freedom, as indicated by Jameel's sudden arrival at the slummy hostel. As Jabra described the built environment of his new home, Baghdad, which was a city with: "side-streets, badly illuminated in the oncoming darkness and conspicuously dirty at the corners, were like narrow ravines which seemed to suck in or disgorge the anonymous figures." His voyage ending at a slummy hostel compares with the voyages of others, both sex workers and trafficked humans. Contemporary news accounts stated that, "Prostitutes have been soliciting in the streets or opening houses under the protection of hoodlums; the police are active to protect this" ("Brothel Area Closure Gives Rise to New Problem; Police Vigilant," *Iraq Times*, 25 March 1954). The invasiveness of these figures

exceeded the bathhouse's bifurcation between "Arab" and "English," between "heterosexual" and "homosexual."

In *Hunters*, while the sight of men had drawn Brian into Baghdad's bathhouses and bars, the sight of women drew protagonist Jameel into the capital's streets. His first walk led him into an unfamiliar urban environment; the sight of the capital's crowds shocked Jameel from his lethargy, and his disgust at the dirt in the *Queen of Sheba* hotel. In the street, he noticed local women, differentiated by both dress and wealth: "in black *abas*; they walked through the commotion with the elegance of mannequins and the dignity of nuns [while] in the cars could be seen bare feminine elbows resting on their doors" (*Hunters*, 19). Jameel's foreign friend opines, "love here must be very exciting, very exciting" (46).

In the capital, heterosexual love was both exciting and dangerous. An article in a local English-language newspaper suggests that Jabra's Baghdad neighbors experienced guilt over actual violence

toward women and children, when circumstances had prevented their timely intervention. Police in Baghdad's Karradat Maryam neighborhood opened the two reed baskets they had found in the Tigris, to find that human remains filled them. In the first was the body of a seven-month-old baby girl, wearing a dress with pink checks and white dots, and gold-colored glass bracelets on her wrists; in the second was an adult leg, a part of a hip, and a left hand. Later in the day, more remains were found in a khaki suitcase behind the backyard of a railway worker's house. From these, police concluded that the 27-year old woman had been wearing a white dress with green stripes when she died (*Iraq Times*, 31 July 1953).

Danger marked both the territory of desire, and that of the English language. Two weeks later, the same newspaper reported that Hannah Sulaiwah (from Alqosh in Kurdistan) was arrested while trying to obtain a government job with the Ministry of Health. A male nurse, Sulaiwah confessed to the double murder of his wife and baby daughter, "due to

his wife's continual misconduct," her openly-expressed sexual desire. He stated he had killed them in a house in the Ammar Quarter, "behind the Snow White Laundry." The name of the business recalls "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves," a 1937 American animated musical fantasy film, in which the Huntsman cannot bring himself to kill the pre-adolescent girl and urges her to flee into the woods. While numerous letters to the newspaper editor expressed communal regret over this act of violence, the 3-year-old 7-month-old daughter of Hannah Sulaiwah met her end "behind the Snow White Laundry" (*Iraq Times*, 12 August 1953).

A segment of the novel describes the protagonist's visit to the "brothel quarter" of Baghdad, which the police closed during 1954. Jameel narrated: "I went … past one café after another, all over-flowing with men." In the brothel quarter of Baghdad's built environment, these individuals yielded up their virile masculinity, displaying forms of the bodies elsewhere associated with menopausal women: "in a doorway

stood a man with a naked torso, whose fast breasts sagged like those of flabby-skinned negresses one sees in pictures; over him a sign said it was a public bath" (*Hunters*, 23). Carrying printed materials in one hand, drawn by curiosity, Jameel joined the "eager mass," a "great flux of men."

In *Hunters*, the stream of men were pulled through an opening "that ended abruptly with a wall in which there was a narrow door" At a that narrow door, he paid a nominal fee (10 *fils*) and endured a policeman's pat-down, before being "shoved into a passage which opened on to an alley, the strangest alley a city could invent." While in the larger spaces of the city, men were gathering to ogle women's elegance, dignity, and bare elbows--in this particular narrow alley, women consumed men: "I had no time to think before I found a woman, heavily painted in red and white, pulling my arm" (*Hunters*, 23). In this part of the city, Jameel—the hunter—became prey. He encountered: "another [woman], her blouse revealing a stray breast, got hold of the lower end of my jacket

and tugged at it." The voices of these creatures screaming with their uncontrollable desires assailed Jameel's ear: "a woman—I could only see a smudge of cosmetics for a face—cried: 'for no money, my love, for no money;' another jostled her off and said, 'no, with me;' 'with me,' 'with me,' 'me,' 'me,'—that was all the articulation one could hear." The surfaces and orifices of the built environment were thronged. These "gaudy bedraggled females," thronged the surfaces and orifices of the built environment, who "covered the cobbled floor, [and] filled the entrances and the windows" (*Hunters*, 23).

Surrounded by linguistic ejaculations, one voice queried the foreign periodical in the protagonist's hand: "let me see that magazine!" Flipping through its pages, this one woman noted its strange alphabet. "English, hmm…Can you make love in English?" Referring to a market value on her skills, in a buyers' economy which dominated by the petroleum workers industry's servitors and RAF airmen predominated, she insisted, "I bet you can teach me a few things."

Taking back his newssheet, his tone establishing control over his aural orifice, the protagonist refuses coyly: "perhaps, but not tonight" (*Hunters*, 23).

Brought to Iraq to teach at the University, Jameel was approached with regard to a request for private lessons. To his further inquiry, he learned that he was to teach, "in English; not too elementary: poetry, drama, Shelley, Keats, the moderns, you know, the sort of thing you might do at college with a fairly advanced group" (*Hunters*, 66). An "advanced group" of readings set off his student's precocious intellectual interests; such may have included a series of didactic novels in the languages of 19th-century imperialism, among them Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) which explores an instructor's private consciousness; George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), in which Maggie's readings permitted her to explore a wider world vicariously; and Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), in which Colonel Creighton represented a self-consciously heroic figure, a man of action who was simultaneously a gentleman.

A tutor did not arrive at his new employer's Baghdad address unannounced; standard texts of English literature read at college among "a fairly advanced group" set the circumstances for the instructor's encounter with a pupil. In nineteenth - century English literature, education was a cold and painful process; to this, Jabra introduced a contemporary development from modern Arab letters, where emotional attachment develops in classrooms. In *Hunters*, the classroom encounter also emerges in a context from modern Arab film and letters, familiar among "a fairly advanced group." In an Egyptian film "*Ghazal el-Banat*" [*"Cotton Candy,"* 1949] screened across the Arab world during Jabra's first year in Iraq. In this film, realist actor Naguib al-Rihani played a downtrodden, disheveled and impecunious Arabic teacher who coaches, and falls in love with, the pampered daughter of his country's ruling classes (Dönmez-ColinDickenson 14).

In *Hunters*—unlike the raucous alleyway, where women sought to exchange coitus for English

language lessons-- palm and eucalyptus trees, and a "well-trimmed garden with a lawn and tiled path edged with flowers," separated the pupil's large two-story house from Jafar Street (73). Greeted in a library, conducted upstairs, Jameel's first view of his pupil was of a young woman, silhouetted against a view of the Tigris, against the lights of a setting sun. The protagonist recognized his pupil's natural beauty immediately; "Sulafa's eyes were inescapable;" he could "hear her breathing [and] smell her faint perfume". No sooner did he walk downstairs and into the chauffeured automobile, than he wished to return to be by her side (her name, "*Sulafa*," meaning means "strong wine" in Arabic) may gesture toward that of Palestinian poet Sulafa Hijjawi (*Hunters* 73).

Jameel imagines his love interest to be the youthful victim of all Abrahamic faith; learning that she has traveled to the family's farm in the city's suburbs, he "imagined Sulafa being taken by old Imad to Baquba's orange groves where, under one of those slender-branched sweet-smelling trees, he would make

her lie on her back, saying: 'I am sorry, my love, but I had promised to slay you for the glory of the God of my forefathers'" (*Hunters*, 156). Jabra, a Palestinian Christian, inverted the gender of Genesis 22:2, "Then God said, 'take your son, you only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah; sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you" (Bible, New International Version).

A scholar of Arabic literature, Jabra references as well the Holy Qur'an in which Abraham said to his child, "O my son, indeed I have seen in a dream that I [must] sacrifice you, so see what you think;" and the child replied, "O my father, do as you are commanded; you will find me, if Allah wills, of the steadfast" (37.102). By every external indication (her home's location on Jafar Street, named after the sixth Imam; her father's library in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian; the servant named "Abdullah") the object of his increasing affections was a Muslim woman. Such are not permitted intimacy with any men who believed in a Holy Trinity (Holy Qur'an, 2:21: "do not marry

polytheistic men [to your women] until they believe;" 60:10 "if you know them to be believers, then do not return them to the disbelievers; they are not lawful [wives] for them, nor are they lawful [husbands] for them"). For *Hunters*' protagonist Jameel, this attraction was dangerous: "each time I trod on that tiled path that led from the gate to the house I knew that I was treading on explosive ground" (*Hunters*, 72). Under such a prohibition, *Hunters*' protagonist's thoughts turn from salvation to disaster; he tells himself, "There would be no ram in the trees, no angel to divert the knife from her virgin throat" (*Hunters*, 156).

*Light in August* (1939)

Jabra translated the prose of U.S. author William Faulkner into Arabic. Like Jabra's *Hunters*, Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932) catalogs forms of heterosexual intimacy, in cultural passage from East and West—since a series of symbolic references to Jesus Christ punctuate Faulkner's third novel. Literary critic

Michel Delville responded to one sentence, among the fifty-nine monologues of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying,* in which Vardaman stated "My mother is a fish." According to Delville, "the 'real' absence of the desired object—the departed mother—can be metonymically replaced by another signifier" (1996, 87). That "another signifier," a fish, is suggestive of Christ's miracle of the loaves and the fishes, and of Christ's message to the Apostles "I will make you fishers of men."

Recall that Jabra and Denys Johnson-Davies claimed to own copy of the British literary magazine that had an English translation of Jean Paul Sartre's French original, as an elaborate joke on poet Boland al-Haydari; Faulkner's *Sound and the Fury* reached a global audience when Jean-Paul Sartre's Sartre's 1947 essay, "Time in Faulkner: *The Sound and the Fury*" appeared in French. In Sartre's analysis of Faulkner's manipulations of the novel's timeframe, the French existentialist laid blame on Faulker's metaphysics, lacking any anticipation of a future. As critic John

McCormick observed: "all is historical, all in the past; Quentin Compson's suicide itself is in the past when, through Faulkner, he re-lives his last day of life; there is a hint of political attack in the interpretation and an echo of the fatuous political interpretations of Faulkner by Americans in the Depression years" (101). In this, Faulkner's fiction is clearly marked from Jabra's *Bildungsroman* (with Jameel's clear progression from "outsider" to "insider").

In Jabra's life experience and fiction, Palestine signifies "home." In *Hunters*, Jerusalem was the home Jameel left twice: once, peacefully, to study literature at Cambridge University; once, in war, fleeing during the 1948 *nakba* to the promised refuge of a Baghdad academic appointment. For Faulkner, the Galilee's world-renowned philosopher was a signifier. Similarly, the American author endowed the protagonist of *Light in August*, Lena Grove, with an ambiguous signification in cultural passage between East and West. She is alternately a fertility goddess, alternately the Virgin Mary.

Iraqi law granted full citizenship to Palestinians—like Jabra—who arrived after May 1948 (*Iraq Times* 1954). In Faulkner's *Light in August*, while Lena Grove pronounces "sardines" like other characters ("she calls them *sour-deens*… [and the clerk] also calls them *sour-deens*" (14), signifiers relating to food distinguish her from those living around her. Since the driver refuses her offer of a shared meal, she enjoys the canned fish alone. For literary critic Lothar Hönnighausen, Lena's lunch characterizes her simplicity (Hönnighausen 1997, 199). Lena's lunch was a sensual meal; while Faulkner offered few hints of the sexual experience that gave rise to her pregnancy, she sucks "the rich sardine oil from her fingers with slow and complete relish;" absorbed in solidary gustatory pleasure, "her face lowered a little and her eyes, blank, as if she were listening to something very far away or so near as to be inside." Familiarity with Faulkner's works suggests that Jabra may have drawn on Lena's suggestive experience, as a strategy to overcome "the inequitable distribution of rights, freedom, protection, and

justice… those boundaries [that, like citizenship have the ability to] differentiate humans from one another" (2).

**Conclusion**

Sociologist Sabry Hafez noted that culinary semiology "with its taste and olfactory signs," serves as "a revealing literary strategy capable of generating multiplicity of meaning within the text, expanding its hermeneutic possibilities and enhancing its relevance to other social sciences." Writing on food, Hafez identifies: "the secularization of the older sacred codes, the systematic dissolution of the remaining traces of the hierarchical structures of life and practices" (257). While in *Hunters*, a character explains to the protagonist the conflict between Arabic letters and life in an Iraqi city: "what lover in the Moslem world can get away with love? Our literature is full of it, I agree; people cry over love stories like idiots, too. But when you come to reality, it is an entirely different affair—what in stories is so clean and pathetic is in real life simply a dirty thing—which

has a way of inflaming the imagination—and you know what human imagination is" (182). Jabra's novel's structure of signs, derived from one of "the moderns" of English literature.

*Hunters* can be read to extend overlapping metaphors of food to indicate a *global* politics of heterosex; in such a way, expression of forbidden love derived from one of "the moderns" of English literature. As Mimi Shell has observed, "racial, class, and gender boundaries continue to delineate the inequitable distribution of rights, freedom, protection, and justice, both within cities (whether Philadelphia, Port-au-Prince, Kingston, or London) and across nations, and these inequities and injustices reiterate and reinforce those boundaries that differentiate humans from one another" (2).

In *Hunters*, a young man's search for space developed into a metaphor for the search for self, the overlapping subjectivities of protagonist and author. In the novel, the built environment houses Jameel's Arab, heterosexual self ("I am keeping a frank

autobiographical journal and I want to have the whole of the city in it" (125), "the whole city throbbed with a sinister grimness, as if the very buildings, the very shops and deserted cafés, had lain in ambush marking time" (130); "… a city, groping in the dark, stumbling upon sharp edges") (131). Of transmission of affect, Teresa Brennan recently observed: "whether it is grief, anxiety, or anger, is social or psychological in origin" (1); to these categories, I add a third: "political."

While, in intimacy, *Hunters*' lovers invoke the natural world, "alive and real and supple as a green branch" (185), "pale and hot, marble and flesh" (187), Jabra finds intimacy within the built environment of 20th-century Baghdad. *Hunters* also represented a sort of theoretical intervention, appropriate to a postcolonial society in the process of reinventing itself as an oppositional regional identity (Lopez). In cultural passage from East to West in that it built from classical Arabic texts and 19th-century English novels, Jabra's *Hunters* uses the neutral space that the English language offered twentieth- century

Arabs, to investigate a series of illicit loves.

In his cultural passage between East and West, the romance that dominated the life of the novelist, Jabra, was such a romance. Lami'a Barqi was his colleague at the Teachers' Training College in Baghdad. Her name tied her identity to that of her paternal uncle, prominent political figure Bakr Sidqi. Contemporaries considered any possibility of a Palestinian Christian man's intimacy with Lami'a to have been simply unspeakable. When she asked her maternal uncle for permission to marry Jabra, he replied: "Lami'a, it is better for you to ask for the moon" (al-Ali 105).

The realm of "English" only offered Jabra and Lamia temporary security. In Anglophone literary criticism, the a recent "affective turn" toward ecocritical perspectives coincided with the invasion and destruction of public security in Iraq with the US-led coalition forces' invasion during April 2003. Modernist prose's tasks are iterated within *Hunters*' text, when one character states: "our poets have sung

about blood and fire in their works to the point of sickness; it is time now they saw blood and fire in the flesh" (126). Of Jabra, Boullata observed: "his aim as a modernist was to renew it [modernism] by adding creative things to it inspired by individual originality, things that are, at the same time, genuinely consonant with Arab historic authenticity and with what he considered to be living aspects of its nourishing legacy" (2001, 214); as literary critic Hosam Aboul-Ela has since pointed out, "both ideas and literary texts are part of cultural production, and both grow out of contexts."[1]

Reconciling East and West, Jameel and Brian Flint reconcile on the last pages of *Hunters*. Like the sardines (*sour-deens*) Faulkner's protagonist Lena Grove consumed with such joy, Jameel and Brian both found unspeakable erotic connections in the gardens and streets of Cold War Baghdad. Flint was becoming more comfortable in his sonic environment, attaining

[1] Aboul-Ela, Hosam. "Faulkner as/and the postcolonial writer," in John Matthews, ed., *William Faulkner in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

proficiency in Arabic and learning to play a musical instrument (the "*mutbidge*," compared suggestively with a Highlander's bagpipe), providing Jabra the opportunity to observe, "It was a comic and sometimes rather uncanny sight to see the fair-haired, blue-eyed Oxford graduate bulge his cheeks lustily and blow away at the silly thing like a Bedouin at a wedding" (226). With friends, the two drank beer and ate *masgouf*, while Brian played music.

Eduardo Mendieta noted the transformation of total war into urbicide, that "logic of total war that makes the home front the battle front, where there are no innocent bystanders, and where civilians are *de facto* implicated in the war policies of tyrannical governments, converted cities into military targets."[2] To its original meaning of ""violence against a city," Martin Coward added a second meaning, "violence which seeks to annihilate difference through the destruction of the material foundation of that

[2] Mendieta, Eduardo. "The Literature of Urbicide: Friedrich, Nossack, Sebald, and Vonnegut," *Theory and Event*, 10, 2 (2007).

difference."[3] During 2010, Jabra's Baghdad home was destroyed when a car bomb detonated near the Egyptian embassy, killing 17 people. "Significant" material damage included the personal possessions of the critic, novelist, painter, poet, and translator who had died in 1994. Among the books, musical recordings, photographs of graduating classes, and jewelry destroyed in the house's ruins was a stone, brought from Jabra's Bethlehem birthplace.[4]

[3] Coward, Martin. *Urbicide: The Politics of Urban Destruction*. London: Routledge, 2008.

[4] Shadid, Anthony. "In Baghdad Ruins, Remains of a Cultural Bridge," *New York Times* (21 May 2010).

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