



S T E V E N S A L A I T A

Sand Niggers, Small Shops, and Uncle Sam: Cultural Negotiation in the Fiction of Joseph Geha and Diana Abu-Jaber

“I don’t care how many *Bonanza* you watch, nothing get your brain ready for real America!”

Matussem Ramoud, from *Arabian Jazz* (89).

THIS ESSAY will examine the emergence of Arab American literature as it relates to the sudden visibility of this community in the political and cultural topography of the United States.¹ Over the past decade, a growing body of scholarship has analyzed the growth and makeup of domestic Arab life, in the process crystallizing the designation *Arab American*, if not the boundaries surrounding such a broad term. Arab Americans have been active socially and politically throughout the twentieth century,² but after 1967 emphasis on cultural preservation and political activity not simply as American citizens but as *Arab* citizens of America has led to some recognition of an Arab entity by mainstream America. Accompanying this activity has been a body of literature, examined by scholars such as Lisa Suhair Majaj, Evelyn Shakir, Joanna Kadi, Munir Akash, and Khaled Mattawa, as specifically Arab American. Where text-specific analyses exist, however, they tend to deal more with poetry than fiction, perhaps simply because up to this point the available poetry is more extensive. I seek to fill a gap in Arab American literary scholarship by focusing on two works of fiction, Joseph Geha’s *Through and Through: Toledo Stories* (1990) and Diana Abu-Jaber’s *Arabian Jazz* (1993).³

I have chosen these two texts for practical, theoretical, and aesthetic reasons. Although continuous Arab artistic expression existed in the United States throughout the twentieth century, *Through and Through* brought before the public important fictive depictions of the Arab American community that demand interrogation in relation to that community in particular and to American Studies in general. *Arabian Jazz* constituted at the time the most

sophisticated aesthetic offering by an Arab American author of fiction. It was, one might say, a landmark work in the Arab American tradition, not unlike Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* in that of Native America. More crucial are the range of themes in both books, which explore the "othering" of Arabs in American society, assimilation patterns, stereotypical attitudes by both White and Arab characters, gender relationships, and the complexities of ethnic signification (often a layered process among Arab Americans). The texts are therefore adequately multivalent to introduce Arab American fiction to a wider audience while simultaneously informing our understanding of American literature in total. And finally, the negotiation of dual Arab and American identities into productive constructions of literary fiction offers scholars a wide range of critical underpinnings with which to work. Before I enter into that analysis, however, some background is necessary.

Arab American Literature Today⁴

Arab American literature is quickly growing sophisticated in scope and ample in content.⁵ It represents the voices of its community and so far exhibits an impressive range. Moreover, it is not limited to Arab themes. Many works successfully translate Arab American characterizations into wider cultural contexts, and others deal little with Arabs at all.⁶ Given the scope and content of this work, and the establishment of Arab cultural journals such as *al-Jadid*, *JUSSOOR*, and *Mizna*, it is probable that Arab American literature will appear more prominently in American literary studies within the next twenty years. My purpose here is not to spend time defining the limits of these studies or predicting future avenues of Arab American writing. Even if desirable, an attempt of this nature is possible only upon much wider text-specific explication by both an Arab and non-Arab readership. Rather, I will present a brief overview of current Arab American literature, examine its potential foundations, and propose possibilities for usefully situating it within the broad spectrum of American letters.

The designation "Arab American," like any classificatory phrase in ethnic studies, is immediately problematic. It does not adequately represent the large contingent of Arab Canadian authors who are often joined with their peers to the south as "American." More important, a good amount of work written and received as Arab American is produced by authors with no Arab background. For instance, in the anthology *Food for Our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, editor Joanna Kadi includes selections from the Armenian writers "Zabelle" and Martha Ani Boudakian, the Iranian writer Bookda Gheisar, and the Jewish writer Lilith Finkler. Poet Jack Marshall is a Mizrahi Jew, and author and activist Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhran is a member of both Radius and Arab American Writers, Inc. [RAWI] and The New Association of Sephardi/Mizrahi Artists and Writers International [NASAWI].

Natalie Yatsukhina, a visual artist for *Mizna*, is Kazakhstani. Many non-Arab authors—including American Lisa Gizzi, editor of *Mizna*, and British poet Anna Reckin—produce work with Arab themes received in an Arab American context. The matters of blood quantum and nationality also serve to complicate any simple conception of Arab American letters. Some writers who have been counted as Arab Americans have one Arab grandparent, while others who publish in Arab American forums were born and live in the Middle East. Most write in English (in many cases from necessity) but some in Arabic, publishing in Middle Eastern journals or in the various Arabic-language newspapers in the United States.⁷ Some are immigrants from the Middle East to America, while others emigrate from America to the Middle East. Is poet and scholar Fawaz Turki a Palestinian or an Arab American author, or both? He is a Palestinian immigrant who grew up in the Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp in Lebanon and has been anthologized in both Palestinian and Arab American collections. Another interesting example is American-born Kathryn K. Abdul-Baki, whose novel *Tower of Dreams* takes place in Kuwait and could be classified as Kuwaiti just as easily as American.

The question of content, particularly when non-encomiastic, is at least as complex as that of origin. Lisa Suhair Majaj believes that “[w]hat we need is not less but more representation—for only when there is a wide array of depictions of Arab-American experience and culture will writing that is self-critical be understood for what it is: not a betrayal, but an attempt at self-transformation.”⁸ This challenge is relevant as we endeavor to construct some conceptual boundaries to provide the field much-needed definition.⁹ First of all, it would be prudent for critics of this literature to avoid squabbling over terminology and intellectual credibility, at the expense of the literature itself. As Majaj notes, self-transformation and nuanced analysis take precedence over arbitrary injunctions aimed at killing the author and that forsake rich critical inquiry. And in any case, we can’t debate definitions while stacks of books remain unexamined. I would argue that the boundaries and criteria for Arab American literature can be determined only by identifying and interrogating its tendencies within broader analytic patterns that concurrently emphasize textual features of significance to the study of literature in general—drawing from a variety of available methodologies from other areas in the process. In *Through and Through* and *Arabian Jazz*, a binding theme is the doubleness of signification, which highlights the spaces between Arab and American, and impels the authors toward a strategy of negotiation. This tendency appears in each Arab American novel published to date, though it is often absent from the poetry. We can posit reasonably, then, that Arab American fiction is bound to essentialist identity politics even as it attempts to avoid such rigidity. The alternatives to this essentialist identity politics—what can be called the negotiated landscape of the domestic Arab—constitute an ethnic positioning unique

to Arab American authors, but not unique as an actual theme. We will see below how this unfolds in the work of Geha and Abu-Jaber. The framework I employ in examining their work as Arab American is meant to remain fluid, and can be provided with more specificity only in conjunction with more thorough textual criticism.

Given this framework, situating Arab American literature within a particular tradition is difficult. Kahlil Gibran and Ameen Rihani are usually cited as the first notable Arab American writers.¹⁰ If we define literature broadly though, early immigrant autobiographies and oral accounts might be called the original Arab American literary activity. More complicated is the argument that since Arab American authors are descendants of peoples from the Arab world, the proper way to contextualize them is within the tradition of Arabic literature, which dates to the pre-Islamic era. (Obviously, the inclusion of numerous non-Arabs in the present movement muddles this possibility.) Another complication is the fact that while poetry might in certain cases be feasibly linked to the various Arabic traditions, the Arabic novel was, and in many ways continues to be, heavily influenced by Europe. Arab American fiction, therefore, is ultimately a decidedly American enterprise. I would argue that based on existing work, it is a stretch to try to rationalize Arab American letters as directly connected to Arabic literature. Arab American authors borrow frequently from both the aesthetics and intentions of Arabs outside the United States, but the two traditions have taken noticeably different courses. A more useful methodology will place Arab American writing in its American context but locate Arab themes that distinguish it from other ethnic American literary movements. Such an approach allows critics to identify salient Arab cultural and aesthetic textual elements while simultaneously analyzing Arab American writing as a distinct phenomenon and in terms of how it interacts with all aspects of American artistic production.¹¹

In a series of articles dealing with the formation and tenor of Arab American writing, Majaj has developed arguments relevant to this point. In "Arab-American Ethnicity," she writes,

The question of how to establish connections and coalitions across ethnic boundaries is of increasing importance within Arab-American discourse. Given the marginalization of Arab Americans within American culture and the on-going reality of anti-Arab discrimination and violence, the need to focus on protecting and strengthening Arab Americans as a group remains strong. However, it is also increasingly clear that ethnic identity cannot be constructed in isolation.¹²

She goes on to remark, "Contemporary Arab-American literature increasingly reflects the awareness of the need to forge connections beyond the insular boundaries of group identity. In contrast to earlier Arab-American writers,

contemporary writers increasingly seek to articulate identity not only within but also across ethnic lines, from a stance of 'reciprocal inter-communalism.'¹³ *Through and Through* and *Arabian Jazz* are clear examples of the inter-ethnic communalism about which Majaj speaks.

On the Lam with Practical Men

Joseph Geha's collection of short stories (he is Lebanese), *Through and Through*, has received little attention from either Arab or non-Arab critics. The eight selections raise many of the immigrant issues so crucial to the makeup of America's social threadwork. In addition, they are skillful short stories that merit thoughtful reading. Published individually between 1970 and 1990, they deal with the extensive Lebanese-American Yakoub family in Toledo and Detroit from the period of 1929 to 1985.

Geha did not at first set out to portray the Arab immigrant experience to readers. He began by writing what he calls "generic stories"; over time, however, he developed his style into something more personal, especially after a friend suggested he write about his background in a tightly knit immigrant community. He considers himself an American writer whose memories as a child growing up in Toledo are bound to his Arab American family. The Arab cultural themes in this writing, therefore, would appear to be a product of imaginative memory rather than of political expression. Geha's purpose is not to translate Arab culture to non-Arab readers but to create good fiction based on his thematic inspiration. He cites Richard Yates, not Kahlil Gibran or Ameen Rihani, as an important influence. Although he believes writing is in itself a political act, he "doesn't want to press home any particular political point." As he says, he simply "wants to get it right, get the subject-matter right, because writing is an expression of love." Geha, who did not begin speaking English until he started school, explains—in an interview—that the idea of recovery in Arab America is largely a second- and third-generation trait. "I spoke Arabic because I had to, cooked grape leaves and *mjudera* because it was a necessity," he recounts, chuckling. "Much of the drive to learn Arabic and cook Arabic food as personal choice happened in today's generation." He sees this as a positive development.¹⁴

When *Through and Through* was published in 1990, a curious review by Peggy Kaganoff appeared in *Publishers Weekly*. She wrote, "His characterizations and storytelling skills are often underdeveloped, but in his first book Geha nevertheless opens an intriguing window onto the Lebanese- and Syrian-Christian émigré communities of Toledo and Detroit, from the 1920s to the present." And she adds, "Cultural displacement is Geha's overriding theme."¹⁵ This assessment treats Geha's writing as a kind of ethnography and judges it as if all it did was document a culture, about which, in the event, Kaganoff

seems to know little. She reveals her ignorance when she remarks, "Geha reinforces stereotypes through women who cling to children, husbands, religion and superstitions, and Jews who are savvy in business and physically sickly."¹⁶

Since the charge of anti-Semitism is the most serious, I will begin there. The remark above refers to the story "News from Phoenix," in which we meet the only two Jewish characters in the book, the couple Erwin and Charlotte Klein, who go out of their way to make Amos Yakoub's immigrant family feel comfortable. "News from Phoenix" is the most autobiographical of the eight stories, and Charlotte and Erwin are directly based on a couple extremely generous to Geha's family when they first arrived in Toledo. In the story, Milad Yakoub tells Amos Yakoub, "[Erwin] understands business. Trust him and keep your mouth shut."¹⁷ This kind of understanding is perceived by many of the male characters in the collection as a good trait, and it is by no means confined to Erwin Klein. A number of Arab protagonists advise each other to be "smart" and "practical" men in America. A better reading, then, would show that the situation in this story is one in which the stereotypical boundaries between Arab and Jewish Americans are diminished, not reinforced. Erwin is considered a strong ally, a well-respected figure for both his practicality and generosity. Construing a touching interaction between Arab and Jew in terms of two sets of stereotypes reveals the extent of the difficulty not only of writing, but also of reading against stereotype, shows how necessary it is to do both, and, by implication, one measure of the importance of Geha's work.

The accusation that Geha stereotypes women is also misconceived. What occurs throughout the stories is that he shows how Old World values continue their existence in the United States. The assumption that these Old World values are inherently demeaning to women has been commonplace in Western views of the Arab world for centuries, but like many cross-cultural generalizations, this too is an oversimplification. Notably, the female characters in Geha's stories hold power in both subtle and explicit ways. The tales are rich in interactions among male and female characters who think and act according to values of both the Old and the New Worlds. Kaganoff's critique then, displays traces of Orientalism; though it is just an isolated review, it is representative of the reception that Arab American literature often encounters among readers whose knowledge of Arab American culture is incomplete.¹⁸ *Through and Through* is a complex work and responds well to interrogation based on its value as literary fiction, its role in American and Arab American discourse, and its invocation of cultural history as it relates to the reality of Arab America today.

The first story, "Monkey Business," deals in part with the pressures of sustaining Old World social traditions in a new environment, explored in terms of the relationship between a father and son. Narrated in the present tense, the

story unfolds in the voice of an unnamed third-person narrator. Broken English and scattered Arabic vernacular indicate Arab background, and the cultural negotiations amplifying the characters' lives are revealed in conversational exchanges. Here we get an indication of Geha's focus on doubleness of signification, generally expressed through the dialectic of assimilation and ethnic essentialism that frames each story. This dialectic is built into the structure of each story; Geha's position of enunciation dictates an approach in which overlapping themes converge into a coherent arena of Arab and American interaction—a type of cultural heteroglossia, so to speak.

Set in 1951, "Monkey Business," focuses on Lebanese immigrant Nazir (Zizi) Yakoub, a widower; his five-year-old son, Jameel; and his cousin Braheem, proprietor of Yakoub's Yankee Café and Grille. The narrative takes place five months after the death of Zizi's wife, Samira. Zizi decides that he does not want his child to grow up motherless and, under the direction of his Aunt Afifie, arranges to have a potential bride sent from Lebanon. (This sort of arrangement was commonplace among early Arab immigrants and was an important component of chain migration.) The woman Afifie sends for, however, turns out to be heavysset, 42-year-old Uhdrah, who claims to have inherited Christ's healing powers. It soon becomes apparent that the villagers in Lebanon were eager to ship off Uhdrah and that Zizi has no interest in her except as a replacement mother for Jameel. The story reaches its climax upon the death of Asfoori, a street bum whose funeral draws a crowd because he was *Ibn Arab*, and Uhdrah attempts to revive him. A brouhaha ensues, crystallizing around Uhdrah's ring: Afifie "takes the ring from Uhdrah's finger and gives it to [Braheem]. Then, suddenly, the ring is in Zizi's hand."¹⁹ Braheem argues that Zizi is acting foolishly in his attachment to old ways, and that a practical man would conduct his life more sensibly. This is where conflicting narratives intertwine. Braheem refers to the immigrant metanarrative of self-reliance and success, whereas Zizi is bound to the Old World concept of dual parenthood. Jameel, who consoles his tired father upon their return home after being soaked by rain, resolves the issue. He pulls off Zizi's shoes and brews coffee. Moments later, "The boy undoes [Zizi's] suspender straps. Then, grinning, he takes the ring from his father's finger and turns aside. When he turns back, the ring is on his thumb. It fits, and he keeps it there."²⁰ The incident, which shows the child consciously assuming the burden of the intended mother, allays Zizi's anxiety and provides a mediating space for comfortable habitation. The incident is also a commentary on male interaction, particularly between fathers and sons. The calm, sensual manner in which Jameel soothes his father counters the notion that women are the only or primary bearers of affection in family units. In stressing the sensory bond between males, in "marrying" the son to the father with the ring, Geha offers a view of gender oriented to Arab

traditions that also challenges those traditions—and the assumptions of American society. Geha's textured plot affirms such a view; his plain language renders these assumptions subtle, if not secluded. Yet his coupling of metaphor with structural realism introduces a type of slipperiness within the narrative that allows the child, operating on innocent presuppositions, to naturalize Zizi's essentialist social ethics.

Human interplay is not the only method through which duality is resolved. In *Through and Through* Geha uses the neighborhood restaurant/shop as a setting in which to pursue that narrative strain. Early Arab peddlers often saved money in order to open a general store, and these shops became, and still are, important signifiers for a neighborhood's sense of community. In "Monkey Business," for example, the characters' identities are bound to the workings of Braheem's Yankee Café and Grille, an establishment central to the family's finances and the neighborhood's cultural undercurrents. This centrality is also evidenced in "Almost Thirty," a story involving two of Braheem's grandsons, George and Haleem, both of whom worked in the restaurant as adolescents and college students. Much of "News from Phoenix" takes place in Amos and Sofia Yakoub's butcher shop, where family members spend their days playing cards and sipping *yensoun* (a strong tea made from anise). In "Holy Toledo," which takes place in Little Syria in East Detroit, the family store is a vibrant marketplace in which numerous Americans shop for Arabic wares. This type of environment is central to the lives of Arab Americans, particularly those growing up in concentrated Arab neighborhoods. Geha's use of these settings reflects not only his personal memories from Arab Toledo but also his preferences as a writer. The shops themselves function as characters, serving as mediators among Arabs and non-Arabs, Old World values and American consumer culture.

It would be useful now to examine the correspondence of *Through and Through's* historical background with that of Arab American society in general. Early Arab American community leaders, Michael Suleiman writes, "urged Arab young men in the United States to join the American armed forces to help their new country,"²¹ a course that numerous characters in the book undertake. Historically, this enlistment indicates a willingness on the part of Arab families to blend fully into the United States.²² For Geha, it serves also as a valorization of the United States as a permanent home. Ironically, it also deepens appreciation of Old World background. Upon Eddie Yakoub's return from the Navy, he repeatedly remarks, "Great to be back."²³ He later says, "The food, that's what I missed most."²⁴

Another engaging textual feature is the visible integration of the Yakoubs into mainstream American life. Although Arab cultural values are never fully sacrificed, as the timeline moves away from the first-generation arrivals in the twenties and thirties to their second- and third-generation descendants in

the seventies and eighties, numerous characters are solely anglophone and have married Americans.²⁵ This crossroads is metaphorically constructed in "Something Else." Tonia Yakoub sits at her Aunt Rosa's and Uncle Naseeb's home in Toledo watching fuzzy projector footage of her deceased father and other dead or elderly family members. She has just made a serious decision:

Tomorrow Wayne, her husband, will drive up from Tulsa to take her back, and she will have to tell him that she is not going back with him. This is something she is certain of now, decided not during these three weeks at home, but before the visit even began, immediately and without reflection, on the morning of her departure; a decision confirmed in the hugs and kisses of the relatives who had come to greet her at the airport. No, she will not leave and go back with him.²⁶

A paragraph later, Tonia reveals that she will separate from Wayne. She considers Toledo, not Tulsa, to be her home and does not make a reasoned decision to remain there; it is an emotional attachment to her Arab background, reinforced by the warmth of her relatives, that solidifies her choice to leave Wayne. Significantly, *Geha* never reveals any particular reason for Tonia's desire to divorce her husband. With this unspoken motivation he then presents us with a paradigm for cultural negotiation. Tonia is caught in the choice between living with a white husband in the middle of America, separated by hundreds of miles from her family, and remaining integrated within her familiar communal environment in Toledo. As with Zizi's quandary in "Monkey Business," *Geha* avoids an either-or solution. By the end of "Something Else," Tonia realizes that she will return with Wayne, thinking, "There is no other way."²⁷ This conclusion is reached only after she understands that the dynamics of memory allow culture to traverse ethnic and geographical lines. "No matter if remembered this way or that way, always made into something else. There is no other way."²⁸

A final historical reflection of Arab America exists in Old World rituals as they are performed in the United States. In these instances, readers are given examples of historically displaced cultural memory and cultural synthesis. The Yakoubs dance the *debkee* (a popular group dance throughout the Levant) in sneakers and blue jeans in American public parks. English is spoken with Arabic grammatical rules. Traditional Arabic food is cooked with modern electric ovens. Strings of Arabic curses draw no public stares. These are instances of cultural memory and synthesis drawn from the author's own experiences. As cultural and artistic markers, they allow *Geha* to create rich contexts for interaction that add a depth of historical complexity to the aesthetic groundwork of the text.²⁹

For the most part, this groundwork is that of conventional realism. For example, the most complex story in *Through and Through*, "Almost Thirty,"

deals with the difficulties of growing into adulthood. The story, set between 1938 and 1969, unfolds with Haleem Yakoub acting as first-person narrator. In an unusual move, Geha has Haleem announce the story's intentions at the outset, in what seems an attempt to sacrifice dramatic flair to substantive human interaction. Haleem and his younger cousin by five years, George Yakoub, grew up together as if they were brothers and as young adults help one another to cope with various problems. George is considered *muskeen* by his relatives, a term that loosely translates as "poor fellow." Haleem explains that "though we said it only in the kindest way, we had to say it since he was so clumsy, fat in his belly and rear, since he did not know how to comb his curly hair, and even the barber could do nothing but cut it off again and again."³⁰ George is also intimidated by the opposite sex. At one point, he woefully tells Haleem of being too shy to dance with a pretty woman who had made a request. He tells the story "the way a boy tells a priest his sins."³¹ Haleem later suggests that George "take twenty dollars and go buy it," to which George responds, "I just might do that."³²

Haleem is going through problems of a different nature. He is bound to the memory of his dead father, Rasheed, with whom he was extremely close, and has difficulty finding a purpose in life. After his father's death, he says, "George stayed by me and worried over me like a little brother. He brought me cigarettes and coffee, sat up with me in my room till all hours when neither of us had anything to say."³³ When Haleem returns from the Navy at age twenty-one in 1959, his life consists of sporadic interactions with the family and attending college courses with little interest.

At its simplest then, the story is a narrative of two men coming into their own in the world. However, the manner in which Geha frames their growth is both surprising and revealing. Neither Haleem nor George will find solace by retreating into an immersion in familial existence, and their attempt at a more conventional American reality has already failed. Ultimately, they both marry American women (much to the chagrin of their Aunt Affie) and at the story's close achieve a suspended moment of happiness in the family's *debkee* circle in Toledo's Walbridge Park. For the first time in his life, George, with his wife by his side, joins the *debkee* ring. He is no longer called *muskeen*. During the moment, Haleem thinks, "For I knew—learned almost in fear—that the time had come for flowers, that soon, this weekend or the next, people would come back to the parks to picnic, to play, to laugh at jokes and dance—especially dance."³⁴ It is characteristic of Geha's writing that a time of flowers should be apprehended "almost in fear" and yet as vital knowledge—knowledge that crosses the boundaries of tradition and change, Arab and American, *muskeen* and dancer.³⁵

The general aesthetics of the book are crucial to the articulation of such knowledge. I noted earlier that *Through and Through* is significant because its

thematic formulations and poetic sophistication signaled that Arab American letters could be validated in the larger enterprise of American literature while simultaneously developing their own internal aesthetics, politics, and linguistic motifs. We can look briefly at the book's structure to highlight some points of interest. Throughout the collection, Geha expresses Arab culture in traditionally American literary patterns. There is therefore a consistent dialogue between Arab society and the American landscape in which ideological negotiations—those of Geha and the characters he imagines—are actualized by the plainspoken language and dialogic structure Geha employs. Yet the pervasive cultural duality he explores is never fully resolved. If, Geha might argue, a resolution were actually available, it might not be desirable. Perpetual cultural interplay is the aesthetic foundation on which themes, plots, and conflicts develop. More important, this sort of interplay is the *esprit de corps* within the Arab American community that allows authors like Geha to transfigure our social realities into expressions of literary fiction.

These social realities are highlighted with a far-reaching approach. *Through and Through* contains an enormous number of characters.³⁶ Some are mentioned only in passing; others act solely in ancillary roles. Everybody in the eight stories, however, helps to create a vivid portrayal of tightly bound Arab émigré communities in Toledo and Detroit. Geha does not utilize flashback frequently. He allows events to unfold in a basic, linear fashion, in line with his desire to create realistic fiction. In the closing piece, "Through and Through," former gangster Boutros (Peter) Yakoub explains that as a young man he was always "on the lam": "(Yes, we really did say 'On the lam'—the movies got that from us, not the other way around)."³⁷ This might be seen as a metaphor for Geha's Arab Americans in general: always in transition, seeking negotiated space where they can truly belong.

Old World, New Land: *Arabian Jazz*

Like Geha, Abu-Jaber (Jordanian-Palestinian) recoils at the idea that Arab American writing should be limited to the political arena or immigrant testimony: "I've always had the sense that both poetry and belles lettres are somehow more accessible to Arab-American writers because of their 'testimonial' quality. It's as if we're somehow still at the stage where it's ok to write from lived experience but there's a perceived audaciousness about crafting or constructing a 'story.'" Although *Through and Through* and *Arabian Jazz* move beyond the testimonial current in traditional Arab American letters, their styles differ greatly. Beyond the fact that *Arabian Jazz* is a novel, it is also wider in scope and less autobiographical than Geha's offering. Abu-Jaber explains,

[W]hile I do start with a kernel of "real life" (i.e. characters who initially have similarities to people I've known) the stories always take

on a life apart as I write. I knew I wanted to write about growing up in a very Arab-centric household in New York and I wanted to deal with the inevitable cultural collisions that will take place with that sort of displacement. Issues around politics, gender roles, and more domestic or artistic concerns like food and music, all become the sorts of signifiers or nexus points that then flag the internal struggles.³⁸

Arabian Jazz is replete with humorous instances of recontextualized cultural inheritance, cultural teases, and trickster-like irony. And, like Geha's collection, it reaches beyond Arab contexts to dramatize socio-ethnic undercurrents in America today.

The novel, set in 1990, focuses on the Ramoud family in Euclid, New York, thirty miles outside of Syracuse. The main characters are Matussem Ramoud, his daughters Melvina (Melvie) and Jemorah (Jem), and his older sister Fatima Mawadi. Their personalities are a study in contrasts. Free-spirited Matussem is an easy-going jazz drummer when he is not occupied by his maintenance job at the hospital. Twenty-two year old Melvina, eight years younger than Jemorah, is remarkably serious, driven fanatically by her duties as the hospital's head nurse. Jemorah is Melvina's opposite, meandering along her days, without focus, as a hospital filing clerk. And Fatima, whose goal is to marry off her nieces at any cost, is ceaselessly overbearing, more concerned with social appearance than emotional reality. Jemorah and Melvina's mother, Nora, an Irish American, died of tuberculosis during a visit to Jordan when Jemorah was nine. As a remembered figure, she acts both as a stabilizing force and a source of conflict. Nora's parents blamed Matussem for her death, barely disguising their belief that his being Arab had much to do with it; on the other hand, Matussem's relatives never fully accepted Nora into the familial unit. It is in large part because of her memory, however, that the Ramouds slowly grow closer. These characters stumble through the narrative, at times in burlesque fashion, toward a better understanding of themselves and their world.

In a profile of Abu-Jaber, Alice Evans points out that *Arabian Jazz* "is thought to be the first novel published about the Arab-American experience."³⁹ Although the first novel about the Arab American experience might be difficult to identify—especially given the myriad criteria for a novel's composition—it is inaccurate to bestow this accolade on *Arabian Jazz*. As previously noted, the ethnic continuity between the Arab world and Arab America clouds attempts at compartmentalizing this literature into specific periods. Even more to the point, Gibran and Rihani wrote novels while in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century,⁴⁰ Etel Adnan published *Sitt Marie Rose* in 1977, and Elmaz Abinader's *Children of the Roojme*, defined at times as a novel and others as autobiography, appeared in 1991.

Nonetheless, Abu-Jaber is a seminal figure in the Arab American literary tradition. The publication of *Arabian Jazz* signaled a much broader way of approaching and constructing fictional accounts of the Arab American world and, as a result, set much higher stakes for those who would write after it.

The most striking attribute of the novel may be its humor. Humor, Abu-Jaber believes, can improve a story's reception: "I thought it would be a fairly serious book at first, actually, but humor seemed to present itself as a natural medium—I suppose because when you're not sure what sort of reception your story will have, humor seems to offer more accessibility or intimacy." "Take for example Uncle Fouad," Evans writes, "who, while visiting from Jordan, parades around in various stages of undress, finally wearing only a facecloth to cup his genitals."⁴¹ In another scene at a church-sponsored dinner for a visiting Jordanian archbishop, a brawl ensues in which "[e]veryone was shouting in Arabic, shrieking about mothers, Arabs, Americans, and patriotism in general. From what Jem could tell, the men—though all drunk—swiftly factionalized, Saudis with Saudis, Lebanese with Lebanese, and so on. There was civil war at the back of the St. Yusef Syrian Orthodox Church."⁴² Earlier at the dinner, Aunt Fatima tried to set Jem up with "an old-looking young man named Salaam Alaikum [an Islamic greeting meaning 'peace be upon you']. His face was so thick with sorrow it seemed to hang in the folds of the skin. His eyes appeared to be liquid, about to leak into the seams of his cheeks."⁴³ Toward the end of the book, Matussem, whose family is Syrian-Orthodox, climbs onto his roof early one Saturday morning to conduct Muslim prayers, yelling "Melvina, you're a heartpicker, you heartpicker" at his daughter.⁴⁴

Numerous theorists have suggested that in fiction humor can operate in both meditative and reflexive fashion. This is clearly the case with *Arabian Jazz*. The technique of humor lessens the strain on Abu-Jaber to translate cultural difference into commonplace, stereotypical terms. She employs it to suggest how cultural duality and human conflict are negotiated, resolved, and renegotiated in everyday life.

In *Arabian Jazz*, Abu-Jaber deliberately crosses cultural boundaries in order to situate the concerns of Arab Americans into a more generally comprehensible framework. "I was searching for a long time for a metaphor for Palestinians that Americans could grasp in a visceral way," she explained to Evans. "This country can tend to be so isolated and so muffled from what's happening outside of its borders."⁴⁵ She gradually realized that "the experiences of Native Americans were so similar to what was happening to Palestinians, the way they were slowly phased out or pushed back, how there were moments of violence, but that native peoples were always constituted as savages or barbarians."⁴⁶ This recognition becomes integral to *Arabian Jazz* when Jemorah and Ricky Ellis, a half-Onondagan gas station attendant, become lovers. Both have been made marginal by their community and first found solace in one another as

children, without conversation. Although they never solidify a relationship, their intercourse symbolizes the entrance of one ethnic movement into the fold of another. The intercommunication provides comfort amid surroundings where Arab and Indian are often represented as being subhuman; their relationship thus provides a sentimental counterpoint to the humorous negotiations in the novel.

It also offers critics a more compelling engagement with the broad American literary landscape than does *Through and Through*. Majaj's desire for interethnic communalism is developed with some thoroughness in this section of the novel. Abu-Jaber's strategy here is not unlike those often used in the literature and criticism of other ethnic groups. Robert Warrior, for instance, stresses a similar desire in looking at the discourse of Native America: "[Natives] can further humanize ourselves and our works by engaging our particular question in the context of other Others around the world who face similar situations. Whether such engagement is fruitful is not so important as is opening ourselves, from the standpoint of intellectual sovereignty, to a wide range of perspectives."⁴⁷ In *Arabian Jazz*, contextualizing the Arab within a broader rubric of minority discourse produces a textual paradox worth our attention: Abu-Jaber creates an essentialized Other—the Arab American—who interacts with other marginalized characters so that the essentialist tendencies of the dominant society can be mitigated and ultimately restructured. This is more than simple strategic essentialism, however. Rather, it expands on strategic essentialism to underscore a doubling of identity—Arab/American—that is ultimately negotiated into a modern ethnic community—Arab America—through aesthetic markers such as humor, irony, and pastiche, and through dialogue with non-Arab double Others.

A contrasting example to Jemorah and Ricky involves Jemorah's supervisor, Portia Porshman. Throughout the novel, the hospital acts metaphorically as an imprisoning social environment for Jemorah. She has tried numerous times to quit but has hopelessly bent to the intimidation of Portia, noting each time that the entire clerical staff seems eternally bound to the machinery of the office, under Portia's thumb. Recalling that she had recently decided to quit for good, Jemorah considers her constant hesitation: "Wednesday morning pressed down on Jem. She felt the eternal recurrence of work that was continually undoing itself; she could hardly bear another day, losing her life hour by hour. The team leader had talked her into staying on until they could find her replacement. Two weeks' notice turned into a summer, and perhaps longer: they hadn't even advertised the opening yet. She went to work thinking, This is absolutely my last week."⁴⁸

Yet in the end it is Portia who drives Jemorah from the hospital. In the novel's gravest scene, Portia calls Jemorah into her office and embarks on a

diatribe naively intended to keep Jemorah under her command. It is worth quoting in full:

Your mother used to be such a good, good girl. She was so beautifully white, pale as a flower. And then, I don't know. What happened? The silly girl wanted attention. She met your father in her second year [of college] and she just wanted attention. We just weren't enough for her. I'll tell you, we couldn't believe it. This *man*, he couldn't speak a word of our language, didn't have a real job. And Nora was so—like a flower, a real flower, I'm telling you. It seemed like three days after she met that man they were getting married. A split second later she was pregnant. I know for a fact her poor mother—your grandmother—had to ask for a picture of the man for her parish priest to show around to prove he wasn't a Negro. Though he might as well have been, really, who could tell the difference, the one lives about the same as the other. . . .⁴⁹

The scene culminates with the hospital office transformed from a metaphor of totalitarian control into a white mold that reflects the traditional American metanarrative of forced assimilation:

She never did finish college after that, never got to be the woman she could've been. A husband and baby at twenty. Look at what *I've* done with my life. You know, it's not too late for you. Oh, sure, you're tainted, your skin that color. A damn shame. But I've noticed that in certain lights it's worse than in others. Your mother could have made such beautiful children—they could have been so lovely, like she was, like a white rose. Still, it could definitely have been worse for you, what with *his* skin. Now, if you were to change your name, make it Italian maybe, or even Greek, that might help some. I'm telling you this for love of your mother. I'll feel forever I might have saved her when that Arab man took her and you kids back to that horrible country of his over there [Jordan]. It's a wonder any of you survived that place, so evil, primitive, filled with disease! I should've spoken up twenty years ago, but I didn't. I thought, the Lord will provide, blah, blah. . . . I'm telling you, Jemorah Ramoud, your father and all his kind aren't any better than Negroes, that's why he hasn't got any ambition and why he'll be stuck in that same job in the basement for the rest of his life. . . . We'll try putting some pink lipstick on you, maybe lightening your hair, make you *American*.⁵⁰

The statements in this speech are direct and candid. It seems that when contemplating this aspect of America, Abu-Jaber has no use for subtlety. It is a situation that has precedents in her own childhood: "Abu-Jaber explains, even

though Syracuse had a large Arab-American community, even though she and her two sisters were surrounded by uncles, aunts, and cousins who lived in or visited the community, even though they were encouraged to identify with their Arab heritage, they were told by their Jordanian-American relatives to stay out of the sun to protect their milky white complexions so they could pass as white Americans."⁵¹

The deep contradictions in American stances toward difference—which on one hand justified dragging Native Americans into boarding schools against their will, and on the other, slavery and segregation, or the internment of Japanese-Americans, and which still allows figures like Pat Buchanan to blame America's woes on Mexican immigration—is expressed in Portia's speech. She is convinced that true Americans—and by implication, overarching American culture—must be white, and uses the "Negro" as a symbol against which she can posit the superiority of whites; in her mind, the diatribe is an attempt to help. This is evident in the familiar comparison of white women with flowers, symbols of purity whose petals protect their wombs from barbaric penetration. The commonalities among Arabs and other minorities are powerfully represented here and serve to counter the commonplaces of tolerance in the dominant culture. Abu-Jaber portrays this culture from the perspective of its subjected citizens; in her analysis its underpinnings contradict the descriptions offered by the popular media and by "common sense." A similar approach can be seen in the work of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Oyeronke Oyewumi, all of whom in various ways recapitulate the language of oppression in order to frame counter-claims to the histories generally issued in other parts of the culture. Abu-Jaber's aesthetic markers help develop these sociopolitical elements. She employs explicit language that exposes and ultimately explicates the layered identities of the Arab characters. I would argue that whatever interpersonal resolution is shown in the book can be largely attributed to Abu-Jaber's emphasis on the inevitable doubleness of Arab identity and social behavior in the United States.

Abu-Jaber adds another twist to the already complex identity plot when she has Jemorah pushing Portia away and storming out of the building after revealing that her father's mother was, in fact, black. Yet the pull of the office, an emblem of America, later draws her back. This time, however, the forceful Melvina confronts Portia and silences her. This affirmation is a complicated instance of negotiation, but at base not unlike those seen in *Through and Through*. Rather than trying to escape the office permanently, Jemorah, with the aid of Melvina, stands tall and raises her voice. One of Jemorah's options is to marry her cousin Nassir and move to Jordan, in her mind the only viable way to leave the office for good. Yet even when she accepts the prospect, it turns out that Nassir is in the United States to stay. Neither Arabism nor Americanness is ultimately relinquished, and the text becomes particularly slippery.

Rather than imposing a simple binaristic solution for Jemorah's quandary, Abu-Jaber complicates expected definitions of ethnic and national affinity. With layered language, she creates a setting in which Arab and American social mores form coherent, yet non-linear patterns of interplay.

Abu-Jaber's illustration of Arab culture can be as deliberately heavy-handed as Portia's speech. The primary example is Fatima, compulsively driven to arrange marriages for her two nieces. At the same time, Abu-Jaber decries what she perceives to be excessively "American" behavior on the part of Matussem and his kids. Fatima's conduct highlights Arab cultural values in the extreme, which provides a balance to the portrayal of Portia. This is not just an artistic strategy on the part of Abu-Jaber, however; Fatima has reasons for her overbearing behavior. The youngest of seven daughters, she participated in infanticide in Jordan when she was a young girl. Her parents, Palestinian refugees, had no means to support more children, and asked Fatima to help bury four dead babies next to the River Jordan near the Dead Sea. These memories have been transferred to America, as has the recollection of being detained without cause in an Israeli prison at age sixteen. Fatima, therefore, seeks closure and peace, neither of which has been offered in diaspora.

Melvina offers another contrast to Fatima. Her sharp ambition is reminiscent of romantic American success stories, and it is responsible for the strict, no-nonsense discourse with which she criticizes her family's demeanor. Her clashes with Fatima, including a physical fight, are the strongest conflicts in the novel. As with Fatima, though, readers learn that there is more to Melvina than initially revealed. She is sexually involved with heroin addict Larry Fasco, a man she openly derides and yet provides with methadone from the hospital so that his addiction may be eased. Her unshakeable disposition, then, is shattered and reconfirmed in the same relationship; and so in this aspect of the novel we have a tragic counterpoint to the sentimental and humorous cultural negotiations of its characters.

These conflicts all come to a head at the end of the novel when Matussem visits Jordan and Fatima describes imprisonment and infanticide to Melvie and Jem. It is through listening and recounting stories that the past is made bare and closure via familial closeness is achieved. Fatima's older sister Rima calls to say, "We laid the babies to rest. . . . You must tell Fatima. It's over. There's no one left to protect, nothing to do now but to mourn and reflect. We want her to come back, to visit and see her home and family again. To know that it's over."⁵² Adding to this sense of closure, Matussem learns that his family conducted a formal funeral for Nora and placed a gravestone in her honor where the babies rest (her corpse was taken to the United States). Cultural discord has been resolved by the power of speech and the settling of people into their land. These explicit instances of simultaneous unity and disunity allow

Abu-Jaber to examine relationships in both a more universal sense and in the context of ethnic particularities.

The title of the novel is indicative of this sort of covenant. Throughout the narrative, music acts as a stabilizing force for Matussem. To him, it is much more than relaxation:

Though the family had struggled with poverty, their father was generous to visitors with food and shelter, respected by all the village for his insight and sense of justice. His powerful voice evoked his blood ties to royalty, mathematicians, and ancient poets. It was the voice that Matussem would later draw from his drums; in their undercurrents, he heard his father speaking again. He had known—even as he had listened to his father speak of history, of continuity—that he would be leaving someday, to a place where he could create himself.

Two years later, his father was dead and Matussem left for the New World. His drums were now the only way back to his father's voice.⁵³

This is akin to the situation in *Through and Through* in which the *debkee* provides for Haleem a human chain to his father's memory. Matussem's music transcends national boundaries. If language is the core of ethnic unity, then Matussem's music allows ethnic particularity to reach beyond its own boundaries. As mediating symbol, it keeps memory alive in language, and as another language it allows stories to be told across the Atlantic and thus forges resolution without sacrificing cultural difference. The title *Arabian Jazz* encapsulates this resolution.

In Conclusion: Arabs in the American Landscape

At present, there is no formal Arab American Studies to speak of in the United States. When Arab America is studied in the academy, it is usually as a background to Arabic literature, which is itself in small demand. Given the increase in numbers of American writers of Arab background, however, Arab America must soon be taken seriously as both a permanent ethnic grouping and a valuable contributor to the diverse project of American literature in total. I have tried to illustrate how Arab American fiction interacts with the American landscape by inscribing that landscape into thematic paradigms; thus it counters the commonplaces of the dominant culture by conjuring Arabism as a strategic trope and a source of creative energy; conversely, by infusing Arab themes into that same landscape it challenges the essentialist metanarratives of Arabism and Americana alike. *Through and Through* and *Arabian Jazz* provide good examples of these relational complexities and, at times, relational conflicts. As more texts positioned in an Arab American framework receive critical attention by both Arab and non-Arab scholars, crucial questions arise that demand layered development. What constitutes Arab American

literature? *Who* constitutes it? Is the phrase viable as a descriptive marker? What criteria do we apply in making such determinations? What is its relationship to the Arab American community? Other minority communities? The American literary community? What consistent themes engage inter-ethnic communalism? What themes render it discrete? How does its emergence affect the overarching patterns of American letters and the enterprise of modern literary criticism?

I have been able to provide only circumscribed answers to these questions based on the reading of two texts with both shared and incongruent aesthetics, themes, and structures. Of course, there is much more to say. Across the country, Americans of Arab origin are raising their voices in powerful and creative ways. Arab American literature is past the point of being a novelty or even a trend. Perhaps the ever-confident Melvina Ramoud best expresses our purpose and prospects: “Just stick with me. And remember the bedouin saying: ‘In the book of life, every page has two sides.’”⁵⁴ In America we can take this adage further and say that it is finally time for each page to be read.

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Notes

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1. The attention placed on Arab Americans became especially resonant after the September 11 attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. It can be described in broad terms as an outpouring of violence, curiosity, and kindness.
2. Lawrence Davidson has shown that, contrary to common belief, Arab Americans of the early twentieth century such as Fuad Shatara, Ameen Rihani, Habib Katibah, Elias Joseph, and Andria Mansour actively participated in anti-Zionist activism by holding rallies, lobbying politicians, and presenting speeches. See “Debating Palestine: Arab-American Challenges to Zionism 1917–1932,” in Michael Suleiman, ed. *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999.
3. Michael W. Suleiman writes, “Much of the available literature on Arabs in America has not found its way into the main body of scholarship and has instead been restricted to a limited audience, primarily the educated and active members of the Arab-American community. Such a situation is clearly a disservice to the Arab-American community and to the host countries—the United States and Canada. Recent academic studies have been more widely disseminated and have started to change this unhealthy neglect and marginalization of a vibrant community” (Preface).
4. Prominent contemporary authors include Elmaz Abinader, Joseph Geha, Diana Abu-Jaber, Mohja Kahf, David Williams, Joanna Kadi, Kathryn Haddad, Etel Adnan, Lawrence Joseph, Khaled Mattawa, Adele NeJame, Munir Akash, Sharif S. Elmusa, Kathryn K. Abdul-Baki, Evelyn Shakir, Gregory Orfalea, Paula Haydar, Adnan Haydar, Sarah Rogers, Barbara Nimri Aziz, Eileen Kaady, Pauline Kaldas,

- Therese Salibe, Elie Chalala, Naomi Shihab Nye, Suheir Hammad, Mona Fayad, Miriam Cooke, Samuel Hazo, Ray Hanania, Frances Khirallah Noble, and D. H. Melhem.
5. In the last three issues of *Mizna*, for example, thirteen national backgrounds are represented—a total of 31 contributors.
 6. Naomi Shihab Nye, for instance, perhaps the best-known Arab American author, has written numerous poems containing no Arabic words or Arab protagonists. Her collection of creative nonfiction, *Never in a Hurry*, deals with numerous regions of the world.
 7. The prevailing work is composed in English. *Al-Jadid* recently switched to an English-only format, and *Mizna*, *The News Circle Magazine*, *The RAWI Newsletter*, and *The Arab Star* are English-only, as well. There are many reasons for this. The first is practical: a large number of Arab Americans do not speak Arabic, or speak it only marginally. More crucially, however, English can be used as a mediating language to include a number of non-Arab nationals, including Iranians, Armenians, Turks, and Central Asians. Finally, English makes it possible to traverse ethnic lines in the United States, a pertinent intention of this movement. Concerning the common argument that literature is devalued when conducted in a colonial tongue, as a literature derived from immigration and sustained largely by American-born authors, nothing is sacrificed by English-language expression. If anything, literature produced in one's native tongue, in this case English, renders its content more realistic. Language controversy carries considerably more weight when situated in the Maghrib/Mashriq.
 8. Lisa Suhair Majaj, "New Directions: Arab American Writing at Century's End," in *Post Gibrán: Anthology of New Arab American Writing*, ed. Khaled Mattawa and Munir Akash (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 74.
 9. I have written about this elsewhere. See Steven Salaita, "Split Vision: Arab American Literary Criticism," *al-Jadid* 6.32 (2000): 14, 17.
 10. Gibrán is also one of the most successful American authors to date. His best-known work, *The Prophet*, has over eleven million copies in print.
 11. I draw from Majaj's argument that "[m]emory grounds both identity and interest: invocation of a communal past and projected communal future provides the basis for an emotionally resonant politically coherent 'imagined community.'" See "Arab American Literature and the Politics of Memory," in *Memory and Cultural Politics*, ed. Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, and Robert E. Hogan (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 266–90.
 12. Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab-American Ethnicity: Locations, Coalitions, and Cultural Negotiations," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael W. Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 325.
 13. *Ibid.*, 326.
 14. This information is drawn from personal conversation between Mr. Geha and myself.
 15. Peggy Kaganoff, review of *Through and Through: Toledo Stories*, by Joseph Geha, *Publishers Weekly*, 14 September 1990, 120.
 16. *Idem.*
 17. Joseph Geha, *Through and Through: Toledo Stories* (St. Paul: Graywolf, 1990), 72.
 18. It is telling that Michael Suleiman gave *Through and Through* a stellar review, noting that its realistic depictions of Arab American life comprise one of its strongest qualities.

19. Geha, 16.
20. *Ibid.*, 18.
21. Michael W. Suleiman, "Introduction: The Arab Immigrant Experience," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael W. Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 5. Many of the essays in *Arabs in America* provide a solid socio-political apparatus for studying Arab America. The contributors to the collection deal with issues ranging from small-time capitalism to chain migration to assimilation patterns. See also Ernest McCarus, ed., *The Development of Arab-American Identity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); and Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).
22. This is not unique to Arab Americans. Numerous immigrant groups have stories of first-generation children enlisting for service. The reasons range from an eagerness on the part of new arrivals to show their patriotism, and thus ease xenophobia, to assisting in missions in their countries of origin in which they still have a political stake. In addition, Native Americans in the twentieth century have had an extremely large record of service.
23. Geha, 86.
24. *Ibid.*, 87.
25. This sort of transition was generally met with resistance by the original immigrants, as evidenced by the characters in *Through and Through*, who often decry the symbolic cultural loss that intermarriage induces.
26. Geha, 49.
27. *Ibid.*, 63.
28. *Ibid.*, 29.
29. It can be said that these negotiations are at least partially autobiographical. In a creative nonfiction piece, Geha explores the multi-ethnic tenor of his childhood, and the difficulties of being perceived as American by others as an adult. Although Geha was born in Lebanon, here he explains that where he is from—the United States—is not in question at all. See Joseph Geha, "Where I'm From—Originally." *Townships*. Ed. Michael Martone (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 56–66.
30. Geha, 35–36.
31. *Ibid.*, 36.
32. *Ibid.*, 43.
33. *Ibid.*, 39.
34. *Ibid.*, 47.
35. I purposely avoid the word "ambidextrous" in place of "negotiated." Whereas ambidexterity generally describes the ability to move back and forth between separate cultural norms, negotiation requires critics to analyze how cultural interplay might induce ethnogenesis. In the context of *Through and Through*, and throughout much of Arab America in general, this theoretical approach is often the most productive.
36. The Yakoub family is not limited to this collection. Geha continues to publish short fiction about more members of this extensive clan.
37. Geha, 114.
38. This information is drawn from e-mail correspondence between Ms. Abu-Jaber and myself.
39. Alice Evans, "Half and Half: A Profile of Diana Abu-Jaber," *Poets and Writers Magazine* 24 (1996): 42.

40. Gibran's most notable novel is *The Broken Wings*. Rihani's lone published novel was *The Book of Khalid* (1911), about the Syrian immigrant experience. It is currently out of print.
41. Evans, 43.
42. Diana Abu-Jaber, *Arabian Jazz* (New York: Harvest, 1993), 67.
43. *Ibid.*, 63.
44. *Ibid.*, 355.
45. Evans, 47–48.
46. *Ibid.*, 48.
47. Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xvi.
48. Abu-Jaber, 289.
49. *Ibid.*, 293–94.
50. *Ibid.*, 294.
51. Evans, 41.
52. Abu-Jaber, 354.
53. *Ibid.*, 263.