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**Speaking About the Unspeakable:
The Other in Israeli, Palestinian and Arab Literature
on the Example of Three Novels**

The other does not exist: this is rational faith, the incurable belief of human reason. Identity=reality, as if, in the end, everything must necessarily and absolutely be one and the same. But the other refuses to disappear; it subsists, it persists; it is the hard bone on which reason breaks its teeth. Abel Martin, with a poetic faith as human as rational faith, believed in the other, 'in the essential Heterogeneity of being,' in what might be called the incurable otherness from which oneness must always suffer.

Antonio Machado

Abstract

Palestinian, Israeli and Arabic literatures have developed, for the past 60 years, in such a close geographic proximity, yet so far apart. Sixty years after the *Nakba*, and the establishment of the Israeli State, the battle of terminology continues not only bloodily on the ground, but also silently in literature. Despite many taboos, all three players are present in the others' literature, unnamed, untouched, and thus sometimes even more present. I have decided to analyze three novels. The first is by a great Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Ġabrā Ibrāhīm Ġabrā), *In Search of Walid Masoud* (Arab. *Baḥṭ 'an Walīd Mas'ūd*). The second is written by one of the most important Israeli writers of the so-called "Statehood Generation" (1960s–1980s), A.B. Yehoshua, *The Lover*. My third case is a novella story from modern Arabic literature, published only last year in Damascus *Yawmiyyāt Yahūdī min Dimašq* by Ibrāhīm al-Ġabīn. Through those authors I have tried to examine how 'the other' is portrayed. I have put the politics aside, and tried to see the Arab-Israeli conflict through a purely literary lens.

I. Introduction

Palestinian, Israeli and Arabic literatures have developed, for the past 60 years, in such a close geographic proximity; yet so apart. The Palestinian has always been present in the Israeli novel, yet almost always unnamed. He was either an “Arab” or a “Bedouin”, never a “Palestinian”. “Israel”, or “Israelis”, seldom appears in the Palestinian or even the Arabic Literature, it is usually “there”, or “them” being referred to.

Sixty years after the *Naqba*, and the establishment of the Israeli State, the battle of terminology continues not only bloodily on the ground, but also silently in literature. The fixation of terminology is widely recognized, but it seems to me that it stems from different reasoning.

Among Palestinian writers seldom the word “Israel” is mentioned, if ever. Novelists and poets avoid this word, and use euphemisms. In the case of the Palestinians it seems to be connected to a trauma, a state similar to Holocaust survivors reluctantly speaking of a whole world they have lost. The reasoning here is more psychological than it is political, in contrast with the two other cases: Israelis and Arabic literature.

In Israel, as Ilan Pappé explains in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, the word *Palestinians* “always means Palestinians living in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and in the Diaspora, so as to distinguish them from *Israeli Arabs* as though they are not part of the same Palestinian nation.”¹ Here the failure to name the other is due more to a desire to reshape reality by denying an inconvenient fact that there is a Palestinian. The reason here is a matter of identity, or rather establishing one (*Israeli Arab*) and erasing the other (*Palestinian*).

In some parts of the Arab world, like Syria, the word “Israel” is a taboo. In visa forms, available in Syria’s Embassies around the world, one of the questions the potential visitor to Syria has to answer is: “Have you ever visited the Palestinian Occupied Lands?” All three words to avoid one: “Israel”. I believe that in this case the reason behind the taboo is not psychological, or a matter of building an identity, but it is a denial of a current political situation, hence it can be classified as political.

My choice of works seemed logical for me. Ehad is the *Yahūdī* — the Jew from the title of Al-Ğabīn’s book. He is an Arab Jew from Damascus, while Na’im from Yehoshua’s *The Lover* is an “Israeli Arab” (precisely a “Palestinian-Israeli”). So we have two internal others. I thought it would be interesting to analyze them. However in the same time I could not forget Walid Masoud, from Jabra’s novel, who also disappears like Gabriel, and also in a sense is a lover. That is why I decided to talk about the three books, because the analogies were clear for me and I hoped to analyze them further.

I also thought that the three books represent Arab, Palestinian, and Israeli authors. I am aware that the term Arab here is a slippery slope. One would like to state simply: “Every Palestinian is an Arab, but not every Arab is a Palestinian”, justifying the choice of a Syrian writer as an Arab writer; unfortunately, such statements can be easily disarmed,

¹ Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oneworld, Oxford 2006, p. 249.

especially when it comes to the feeling of identity, which can be a very instable and fluid criterion. Hopefully, my analyses would defend the choices I have made.

The core novel here will be mostly *The Lover*, as sometimes there are similarities between this book and one of the two others. Besides, *The Lover* is an Israeli novel, where *In Search of Walid Masoud* is a Palestinian and an Arabic novel in the same time. *Yawmiyyāt Yahūdī min Dimašq* is also an Arabic novella.

For simplicity, I will refer to *In Search of Walid Masoud*, as *Walid Masoud* (Italicized letters), if I will be speaking about the character Walid Masoud the letters will appear in regular font. The same will apply to *Yawmiyyāt Yahūdī min Dimašq*, as I will refer to it as *Yahūdī*, whose fragments I translated from Arabic.

II. Comparison

The Places

The three novels are city novels; the city is an important component of each. The novel in which the city is most present is *Walid Masoud*, then *Yahūdī*, and last *The Lover*. The urban landscape in each case is described in a different way.

In *Walid Masoud* most of the plot takes place in Baghdad. Although Beirut and Bethlehem are mentioned too, it is Baghdad that Walid describes in an almost worshipful manner, “Only those who’ve become addicted to this city can possibly know how wonderful it is. Each time I’m impatient to leave it and equally impatient to return.”²

Walid also believes that “Baghdad should be a fresh start for him and for every Palestinian – in fact, for every Arab. It was the beginning of the second half of the century the first real Arab revolution; and for the revolution to begin, there had to be a fresh vision of everything, from economics to poetry, one based on genuine knowledge.”³

Reading this fragment about Baghdad today, is almost painful.

As in *Walid Masoud*, as in *Yahūdī* the past is presented in the book. In both books we find a reference to the great history of Baghdad and in the *Yahūdī*, Damascus. I would say that Damascus is almost a character in the *Yahūdī*. The novella presents a great part of Damascus’ history. It mentions the Roman temple on which Umayyad Mosque was built, it talks about all the neighborhoods of the Old City, all its quarters, and also about the devastation that are happening there today of the old heritage, due to a modernization plan.

Both *Yahūdī* and *Walid Massoud*, devotes a lot of space to the cities in which the narratives take place. Both compositions, as opposed to *The Lover*, are past-oriented. However, there is a difference in the tone; J a b r a’s novel is almost a manifesto, “new visions, Arab revolution...” it is energetic, while the *Yahūdī* is more pessimistic, as if saying there is no hope, especially for the Old City of Damascus.

² Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud*, Syracuse University Press, New York 2002. p. 243.

³ Ibid., pp. 236–237.

But the *Yahūdī* novella is unique because it is one of the few that talks about Damascene Jewry. It describes how the Arab Jews were present not only in the history of the city, through the description of *Ḥārrat al-Yahūd* (*Jewish Quarter*), but also in its architecture. “The nineteenth century witnessed an urban revival of the Jewish houses in Damascus, the most famous one was the Palace of Yūsuf Afandī ‘Anbar... It was the second residency in terms of a surface and elegance after The ‘Azm Palace”⁴ (p. 27). And later on, the author presents the history of this house.

In *The Lover* we find a mention of the house of the other, “The Arab House”, which the old lady Veducha owns. However, we do not know anything about its past or the first owners, as if the past is inconvenient to talk about. Haifa is only used as a landscape. Mount Karmel’s hills appear in the narration, but I find no symbolism in contrast to *Yahūdī* and *Walid*. The hills are Dafi’s asylum where she goes during her numerous taxi voyages.

Jerusalem is mentioned towards the end of the novel. “So that when with the first light of dawn I entered the city, dirty and deserted though it was, with sandbags piled around the houses (...). I was startled, overwhelmed, by the stark beauty.”⁵ Jerusalem, according to Gabriel is thus a dirty city, yet a beauty. Jerusalem is also mentioned in *Walid Masoud*: “The enchanting city. (...). That wide road between the green and violet hills studded with white houses built of stone – God, how easy it was to reach the Paradise, (...). [Walid] spoke of this land he knew, inch by inch, as he’d never known any other land, or any woman’s body.”

In the Arab and Palestinian Literature the love and devotion to *Al-Quds* is unconditional. It is probably due to the often impossibility to visit the place, not to mention to prayer in the Al-Aqā Mosque. This makes Jerusalem even more important in the Arab and Palestinian imagination.

Time

Walid Masoud and *The Lover* were published almost in the same time, the first book in 1978, while the second in 1977. But the time of their narrative differs, J a b r a’s novel presents the world of the 50s and 60s, *The Lover*, shows Israel during the October War (1973). Ibrāhīm a l - Ğ a b ī n’s novella takes place in the 2005. The author mentions 9/11, the Arab-Jewish Intellectuals from the present: Š. Hārūn, one of the leaders of Egyptian Left, or Arab-Jewish Intellectuals from the past: Mūsā Ibn Maymūn, a philosopher from the twelfth century. In the novella other names are also mentioned, less intellectual: Hayfā’ Wahbī, and the Arab Star Academy Idol Aḥmad ‘Aṭiya, among others. Mentioning those names, from the high and low cultures, gives the impression of literary collage, which can be appealing to some readers, while not necessarily for the others.

⁴ Ibrāhīm a l - Ğ a b ī n, *Yawmiyyāt Yahūdī min Dimašq*, Dār al-Ḥaṭawāt, Dimašq 2007, p. 27.

⁵ A.B. Yehoshua, *The Lover*, Doubleday & Company, New York 1978, p. 311.

Narration

Among the three novels, there is one common denominator – multiple narration. In *Walid Masoud* we have eight narrators: Dr Jawad Husni, Issa Nasser, Walid Masoud, Dr Tariq Raouf, Maryam al-Saffar, Wisal Raouf, Marwan Walid, Ibrahim al-Hajj. The center point of the story is the disappearance of Walid Masoud, which is the starting point for eight narrators (among them Walid Masoud himself, talking about his life) to tell different stories, however all are connected to Walid's figure.

In *The Lover*, we have five narrators: Adam, Dafi, Asya, Na'im, Veducha, Gabriel. There is a problem with Asya's narration; we read only about her dreams, we do not see her perspective of events.⁶

In *Yahūdī* we also have multiple narrations. There are three narrators: Aḥād, the other, the Damascene Jew; Ibrāhīm, the writer (probably not a coincidence that the author's name is the same), Dr Abū Miḥḡan, the extremists, "the post-modern terrorists" – as he is called.

Usually multiple narration enables the reader to see the same event from different perspectives. This happens in *The Lover*; the best example is Dafi's and Na'im narration of their last meeting. However, in *Walid Masoud* and *Yahūdī* each narrator tells different story, so despite many voices we are not able to juxtapose the stories they are telling.

With *Walid Masoud* and *The Lover* there is an analogy not only in terms of multiple narration but also in terms of a missing character; searching for him becomes a center point to the whole novel. In Jabra's novel it is Walid who is missing and Dr Jawad Husni is searching for him, collecting letters, facts, and people's testimonies. In Yehoshua's novel, Gabriel disappears and Adam, the husband of Gabriel's lover, starts the search. Gabriel is Asya's lover, but also Walid is Wisal's and Maryam's lover; and Ibrahim is Linda's and Nur's lover. So there is also the "lover" analogy between all of the three books.

However, despite all those similarities between *The Lover* and *Walid Masoud*, the main difference lies in symbolism. Walid Masoud can be interpreted as Palestine, he was present but then he disappeared. His life also is the life that many Palestinians share – the exile. In *The Lover*, the characters are complicated individuals; they usually do not represent other categories. *Walid Masoud* can and should be read as a symbolic novel, while *The Lover* not necessarily. Of course, it can be read as a description of a generation. You have Zionist parents, while their child, Dafi, is an almost post-Zionist character. Thus, the generational reading can apply in this novel.

Religion and God

What is interesting to notice is that the three analyzed novels share a certain degree of disappointment with God and religion. In Yehoshua's novel God is maybe not dead, but "he had lost consciousness", as Veducha repeats on many occasions.

⁶ This might be associated with the general simplification of women's characters in Israeli's novel of the Statehood Generation writers.

In *Yahudi* it is the world of spirituality, Sufism and Kabala rather than a presence of an Almighty God. We read that this is a place without gods. "In Damascus a god passes and no one feels his presence."⁷

In *Walid Masoud*, we also find a disillusion with religion. The protagonist was sent to Italy to become a priest. He "discovered the thing they'd sent me to study had been turned into a means of maintaining the world as it is, not changing it."⁸

The world after the holocaust in European literature was a world without God, and so is the world after *Shoah* in Israeli literature. It seems that Arabic literature after *Nakba* is also deprived of God.

Homeland

In *Walid Masoud* and *Yahūdī* there is nostalgia for the past. In Jabra's novel there is additionally the notion of a lost paradise, in description of Bethlehem we read: "Surely, God should have given the earth a much of heavenly paradise on that day – for our women, dressed in blue and red; for those who sold grapes and tomatoes with pride and grace of princes and kings!"⁹ And then came the destruction, "Instead, terror was rampant, and what I'd always supposed to be the love of nature had turned into an inexplicable anger."¹⁰

In *Yahūdī*, in the last pages, we sense nostalgia for a world that is coming to an end. The author describes the Old City and Sūq Sarūḡa that was partly destroyed during Damascus modernization All Ibrāhīm can do is to write about, it.

In *The Lover* we do not have a notion of paradise or nostalgia. There is only a curiosity about the homeland, for example when Gabriel says that he would like to "see the new territories".

However in the three books we don't find only uncritical love and devotion for the homeland, there are also a harsh words of critique. Walid says, "As, for example, when I saw countries I consider my own, for which I'd been prepared to go through the tortures of hell, themselves applying these selfsame tortures to anyone who fell into the hands of those with influence."¹¹

In *Yahūdī* Ibrāhīm says that while visiting Lebanon, he still felt as if he was "under the foolish banner"¹² (*taḥt ar-rāya al-ḥamqā'*) referring to Syria. Probably, the author would have a bigger dose of criticism if he was writing from outside of Syria. Self-censorship, is what the Syrian writers and journalists have mastered best in the past four decades.

In *The Lover*, Dafi questions the Zionists myth during history class when she says "I don't understand why you say that they were right, I mean the people of the Second

⁷ Al-Ğabīn, op. cit., p. 7.

⁸ Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, op. cit., p.139.

⁹ Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, op. cit., p. 188.

¹² Al-Ğabīn, op. cit., p. 3.

Aliya, thinking that was the only choice, after so many suffering how can you say there wasn't another choice and that was the only choice?"¹³ This fragment in Yehoshua's novel represents the Statehood Generation's self-questioning and moral dimensions of their writings. Gila Ramras-Rauch writes about it in her book, *The Arab in Israeli Literature*, "to be Israeli, however, does carry moral implications with it – and that is reflected in the literature of the Statehood Generation."¹⁴ What is interesting though, is that those "moral questions" were only rhetorical ones, there has been no actual answers to them.

No matter how those homelands look, what interests us is that within the countries there is the enigmatic "Other" whom I would like to analyze.

The Other

He can be a Palestinian living in Israel, a Jew in Israel, or a Jew from Damascus and an Arab from Damascus. All the four options have one thing in common: the smell or dirt. "(...), the smell of the market in the Old City. Smell of Arabs, smell of tomatoes, green onions and eggplants"¹⁵ [Veducha], "No smells of a Jew"¹⁶ [Na'im], or "the dirt of Jews" (*wasah al-Yahūd*) [Ibrahim], "The Arab rats" (*ġirdān al-'Arab*) [Aḥād].

Most of the countries have their internal others. Usually the others represent ethnic or religious minorities (or can be both). Arab is the Israeli other, which we can examine in *The Lover*. A Jew was one of the Arab others, before most of the Jewish Community left the Arabic countries. Both Yehoshua and Al-Ġabīn's novels are unique. *The Lover* is one of the first Israeli novels with an Arab as a main character. Gila Ramras-Rauch describes it as following "the book is significant not only for being Yehoshua's first novel, but also for being the first major novel in modern Israeli literature wherein an Arab is portrayed in fully rounded and realistic fashion."¹⁷

The uniqueness of Al-Ġabīn's novel is connected to two facts: the protagonist is a Damascene Jew and the novella is taking place in 2005. The Syrian Jewish community prior to 1948 was estimated as 30.000, in 1948 Syria's population was 3 millions, so the Jews represented a 10% minority of Syria's population. Nowadays, there are only 70 Jews left in Damascus; Aḥād the protagonist of Al-Ġabīn's novel represents what used to be an ancient, thriving community. He is attached to the place where he was born, Damascus, and also like Na'im in *The Lover* he is a realistic character.

This happens in both novels, Aḥād, like Na'im, is a pretext to talk about all the stereotypes and misperception of his community in the Syrian mind. There are many analogies between Aḥād and Na'im. They both fit in their respective societies. "I don't see one difference between him or anyone else. But in the same time, I watch his Jewishness.

¹³ Yehoshua, op. cit., p. 250.

¹⁴ Gila Ramras-Rauch, *The Arab in Israeli Literature*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, I.B. Tauris, London 1989, p. 122.

¹⁵ Yehoshua, op. cit., p. 174.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁷ Ramras-Rauch, op. cit., p. 140.

I wanted to capture one moment in which he would be unaware or not careful, but I also failed”, said Ibrāhīm about Aḥād.¹⁸

The same with Na'im, after spending some time in Haifa he looks like a Jew. Adam says about him that Shwartzky “shakes Na'im's hand as well, ruffles his hair, and gives him a little hug, as if he's one of his pupils. He doesn't seem to realize he's an Arab.”¹⁹ Also Na'im, on another occasion, notice that, “They didn't realize I was an Arab, nobody does these days, not Jews anyway. Only the Arabs are still not quite sure about me.”²⁰

Na'im feels he belongs to Haifa and Israel. When Dafi asks, “Do you hate us very much?” he convinces himself that he does not understand, when she explains “Us, the Israelis” he replies, “We are Israelis too”.

Aḥād also feels he belong to Damascus. “I don't want to leave because I don't know why should I leave. You might think I am more extreme than my parents, Ibrāhīm. They say, “there is the sacred land”, but is this land is not sacred as well?”²¹ For Aḥād it is.

Yet despite all these resemblances and attachments, both protagonists are made to leave. We don't know exactly what happens with Aḥād, he only says “It's not me who is leaving her [Damascus], they are taking me away from her.”²² He also says, “I don't want this. But I have to go. There is something waiting for me there. I don't know what I'm suppose to do there.”²³ He seems to be lost. Na'im, is sent away, back to his village, as if no matter how they would try, no matter how many Bialik's poems Na'im would recite, no matter how many secrets of Damascus Aḥād would know, they both will always remain “the others”.

When Aḥād, actually now Hārūn, meets Ibrāhīm in New York he tells him “Say hi to there.” Ibrāhīm replies, “‘There’ do you remember this word, in the Jewish quarter, in our quarter? You were refusing to go ‘there’ insisting on staying in Damascus. Now you are calling her ‘there’?! ”²⁴ His reply is “Everything changes.”²⁵

Although Aḥād challenges the stereotypes of Jews, he – as Na'im – is the victim of those stereotypes in everyday interactions. Aḥād says, “Ibrāhīm did not expect that I am one of these that usually Arabs imagines with a hooked nose and a humpback behind my neck, I also don't hiss when I speak. I am natural, even more, few of them guess that I am a Jew.” This being said, however, his sisters are portrayed by the author with a hooked nose, and with a strong Jewish accent.

Aḥād does not look like any “other”, but people somehow sense that otherness and he becomes “the untouchable”: “Unfortunately, some of them guess it quickly. I don't know how. They immediately start looking at me as if behind the glass, as if I am a weapon

¹⁸ A l - Ğ a b ī n, op. cit., p. 43.

¹⁹ Y e h o s h u a, op. cit., p. 269.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 242.

²¹ A l - Ğ a b ī n, op. cit., p. 2.

²² Ibid., p. 46.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

²⁵ Ibid.

ready to explode in any minute. They watch their words and use carefully selected ones, as if they agreed on them.”²⁶

In *Yahūdī*, besides the two sisters and Aḥād there is a one more Jewish character; it is Linda, Ibrahim’s lover who emigrates to ‘there’ but come back psychologically broken. “She has changed. (...). Her face was of strength and hopelessness in the same time. As if she was fighting the desert,”²⁷ Ibrahim would say about her after meeting her back in Damascus. We find out that Linda lived in Kiryat Shmoneh, where she married an Ashkenazi Jew. “He dislikes women. I don’t know why he married me in the first place. Besides, he hates Arab Jews, he thinks we are terrorists.”²⁸ She describes her marriage and the feeling of being “the other” in Israel.

Despite all those analogies between Na’im and Aḥād we must mention however, the main difference; Aḥād is an adult, with clear political and social views who can defend his community with arguments taken from history, like when he says “The Jewish world is a numerous and differentiated. They are fighting sects.”²⁹ Na’im cannot support his ideas with such an argument; he is a fifteen year-old boy, who was just made to leave school in order to work and to provide for his family, his personality is not even fully built.

The Lover is a great example of how the Arab is perceived in the Israeli society, which is full of stereotypes. Adam, for example, believes that the Arabs are respectful toward a beard.³⁰ Although he employs 30 Arab workers in his garage, he admits that he does not know much about them.³¹ Na’im describes the contacts between the Arabs and Israelis in a very vivid way, “We’re beyond hatred, for them we’re like shadows. Take, fetch, hold, clean, lift, sweep, unload, move. That’s the way they think of us, (...)”³² There is a big dose of mistrust; when Na’im tells Adam that he was made to leave school, Adam does not believe, he thinks of him “little liar.”³³ In the garage, when the workers listen to an Arabic music, the cashier, Erlich shouts, “Turn that music off, bloody murderers”³⁴

The worlds of Jews and Arabs are alienated from each other in Israel; Dafi, a girl from a prosperous Israeli family from Haifa, is talking to an Arab for the first time in her life at the age of 15.

In *Walid Masoud* the other is rarely mentioned. It is referred to as “the Zionist”, “they” or “faceless invaders”. There is not much space given to ‘them’. “Who are these faceless invaders? I know them and I don’t. I’ve seen them in the histories that weigh down my

²⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Al-Ğabīn, op. cit., p. 28.

³⁰ Yehoshua, op. cit., p. 73.

³¹ Ibid., p. 124.

³² Ibid., p. 121.

³³ Ibid., p. 127.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

mind. They come, they destroy, they kill, and then they fall down and collapse.”³⁵ This is one of the few direct fragments about Israel in Jabra’s novel.

However, this un-naming fits with the other two novels. In *The Lover*, the other is “an Arab”, never a Palestinian, and in *Yahūdī*, Israel State is never mentioned, only “there”, “My father said we have to leave immediately, as the president finally is allowing us, but there is one condition, that we never come back here. What shall I do? I don’t want to leave (...). My father is pursuing his old dream of going there.”³⁶ In another place in the novella, ‘there’ is described as ‘The land of God, war and destruction’³⁷

III. Conclusions

In Journalism school at New York University, we constantly hear, “There is no creature without agenda. Don’t let them fool you. Some will want to use you as a mouthpiece. Be aware.” It gives you a sense of consciousness and distrust to whatever you read or hear.

The same with A l - Ğ a b ī n, I was trying to read his message between the lines of his novella, and I believe his message is important. He is saying that a big part of the Jewish heritage is written in Arabic, that we have some common roots that shall not be ignored. He has also another message, which destroys the popular idea of co-inhabitation (*ta’āyūš*) promoted by Syrian government for many years; it is the ‘crossing’ (*tağāwuz*). Those ideas are example of the ways in which societies deal with the Other. Co-inhabitation is an idea of passivity, of living along side each other but not truly with each other, and it is not really working in the societies in which it is promoted. This is why A l - Ğ a b ī n is suggesting “crossing”, understood as crossing the borders between me and the Other, finding out about him, looking at him without stereotypes, with a fresh eye of the inquirer.

Despite all the problems in *The Lover* and *Yahūdī* with depicting the Other some can interpret both books as a success. After all in Yehoshua’s novel, we have a full rounded, realistic Arab character after decades of the Arab presence in Israeli reality. Also A l - Ğ a b ī n’s book is a success, if we consider reading about an extinct world of the Arab Jewry that was not mentioned for decades. *Yahūdī* is a great success if we think that this is a first novella with a positive Jew character in a country that had Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* in its school textbook just because of the negative Jew character – Shylock.

Unfortunately the success is not complete. While *Yahūdī* is banned in Syria, Yehoshua in one of his interviews said that such a character, as Na’im would never appear in his novel again. *Yahūdī* although it was allowed to be published in Syria, it was banned from distribution as if the censor was confused with the novel that touches

³⁵ Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, op. cit., p. 188.

³⁶ A l - Ğ a b ī n, op. cit., p. 1.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

so many taboos: Jews, migration to Israel, Israel, Syrian-Lebanese relationships, the destruction of the Old Damascus, the relationships between sects. So what is the advantage of a book that can be published but cannot be read? None, Unless you are one of the 5% of Syria's society that have an access to Internet and care enough to find the book, downloaded it and read it.³⁸ The author of *The Lover*, during a literary symposium in Israel said that it is unlikely that he would include another Arab in his fiction in the foreseeable future.³⁹

It seems that not only Yehoshua did as he said but a whole generation of Israeli modern, post-Zionist writers. The Arab is gone from the Israeli literature, the other does not exists in current Israeli novels; however he “refuses to disappear; it subsists, it persists; it is the hard bone on which reason breaks its teeth” — as Antonio Machado wrote.

³⁸ According to Jordan-based, Arab Advisors Group.

³⁹ Ramras-Rauch, op. cit., p. 147.