

Arabic Literature (in English)

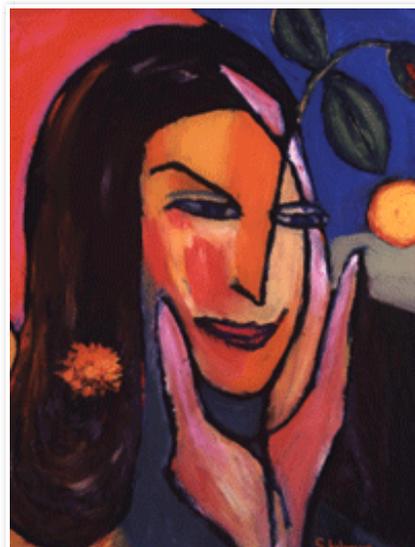
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Remembering Jabra Ibrahim Jabra

BY [MLYNXQUALEY](#) on [MAY 24, 2010](#) · (2)

I have known Jabra Ibrahim Jabra—whose relatives and Baghdad home were lost to a car bomb last month—as a novelist and memoirist. However, the great Palestinian writer, who died in 1994, was also a music-lover, an art critic, a poet.

According to the site [Resistance Art](#) (from whom I've borrowed this image), Jabra founded the Baghdad Group for Contemporary Art and held the post of editor in chief of the *Arab Art Magazine*. He also was past president of the Association of Art Critics in Iraq.



The poem I have stolen below is from the bilingual collection *An Anthology of Modern Arabic Poetry*, selected, edited and translated by Mounah Khouri and Hamid Algar. My apologies to Khouri and Algar for the theft.

In the Deserts of Exile

Spring after spring,
In the deserts of exile,
What are we doing with our love,
When our eyes are full of frost and dust?

Our Palestine, green land of ours;
Its flowers as if embroidered of women's gowns;

March adorns its hills
With the jewel-like peony and narcissus;
April bursts open in its plains
With flowers and bride-like blossoms;
May is our rustic song
Which we sing at noon,
In the blue shadows,
Among the olive trees of our valley
And in the ripeness of the fields
We wait for the promise of July
And the joyous dance amidst the harvest.

O land of ours where our childhood passed
Like dreams in the shade of the orange-grove,
Among the almond-trees in the valleys—
Remember us now wandering
Among the thorns of the desert,
Wandering in rocky mountains;
Remember us now
In the tumult of cities beyond deserts and seas;
Remember us
With our eyes full of dust
That never clears in our ceaseless wandering.
They crushed the flowers on the hills around us,
Destroyed the houses over our heads,
Scattered our torn remains,
Then unfolded the desert before us,
With valleys writhing in hunger
And blue shadows shattered into red thorns
Bent over corpses left as prey for falcon and crow.

Is it from your hills that the angels sang to the shepherds
Of peace on earth and goodwill among men?
Only death laughed when it saw
Among the entrails of beasts
The ribs of men,
And through the guffaw of bullets
It went dancing a joyous dance
On the heads of weeping women.

Our land is an emerald,
But in the deserts of exile,
Spring after spring,

Only the dust hisses in our face.

What then, what are we doing with our love?

When our eyes and our mouth are full of frost and dust?

There is a touching blog about how one reader is grieving for Jabra, a writer he never knew, [here](#). You can also read a tiny excerpt from [In Search of Walid Masoud](#).

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