

“Only Palestine Is Real”: Virtual Counterpoints in Yasmine Zahran’s *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*

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The epigraph to Palestinian writer Yasmine Zahran’s first novel in English, *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* (1995), reads, “All characters in this book are fictitious [*sic*], only Palestine is real” (vii).¹ As Zahran’s novel unfolds, we begin to realize that this apparently straightforward epigraph is more ambiguous than it seems. The epigraph suggests that Palestine will be a character among others in the novel, the only one singled out as “real.” If this is so, however, is it not inevitable that parts of Palestine will be imagined, conjured up in words, like the other characters? The epigraph implicitly asserts this even as it attempts to claim an exception for Palestine. Zahran’s epigraph might have read: “This is a work of fiction; only Palestine is real.” That it does not do so suggests that the opposition between fiction and reality may be precisely what Zahran’s text will attempt to unravel.²

The hidden ambiguity of the epigraph extends to the novel as a whole. In fact, I argue that the epigraph invites readers to develop a possible technique of reading both the text and Palestine itself as a figure in and beyond contemporary discourse. My objective in this essay is to explore some of the implications and consequences of this ambiguity for the ways in which Zahran’s novel is classified and read, as is its Palestine. There are elements in *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* that lend themselves to an allegorical reading, making the novel a “national allegory” of the type Fredric Jameson has identified in his well-known and contested essay on Third World literature (“Third-World” 69). However, if we take seriously Edward Said’s injunction to read the *form* of Palestinian fiction rather than focusing primarily on its *content* (*After* 38), then something other than national allegory begins to emerge. Zahran’s formal techniques—including her use of multiple voices; the fugue-like, temporally and spatially variable arrangement of her narrative; and the prevalence

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of fragments—embody and express Said's sense of the "contrapuntal."³ Zahran's contrapuntal form pushes us to ask not only "What does it mean?"—a conventional question bound to allegorical readings of content—but rather, or in addition, "What can it do?"—a question that opens up more inventive and experimental lines of investigation (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 49).

One of the things Zahran's novel does is to trace the contours of a "virtual" Palestine, a Palestine not yet (or not completely) "actual" but nonetheless as undeniably real as the epigraph insists. Throughout this essay, I use the terms "virtual," "actual," and "real" in Gilles Deleuze's sense (*Bergsonism* 96–103). The virtual and the actual are not opposites; the former is understood as a tendency, the latter as a present state of affairs. Deleuze considers both to be real parts of the process of "becoming."⁴ Virtualities are always an inherent part of every actualization, though they may not always become actualized in the present order (whether social, political, economic, cultural, somatic, or environmental). Although virtualities may not become actualized in the present, this does not mean that they are not real or that they are irrelevant to the present. Unactualized virtualities maintain the capacity to provide ways out of all kinds of reified or blocked formations—familial, social, economic, political, cultural, conceptual, perceptive, and affective, among others (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 53–62). Virtualities are not always easy to perceive, but their potential effects should not be underestimated. In *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*, Zahran's virtual Palestine disrupts codified generic oppositions, including place/character and reality/fiction. This disruption encourages an often neglected or imperceptible contrapuntal perspective that can push beyond the treacherous logic that presently divides not only Palestine and Israel but the entire global order into East/West, terrorism/democracy, evil/good, among other familiars, toward a more humane (and for now mostly virtual) future for all.⁵

What Does It Mean?

Two decades ago, Fredric Jameson declared that "all third-world texts are necessarily [...] allegorical" ("Third-World" 69). More specifically, he argued that such texts "are to be read as [...] *national allegories*" (69; original emphasis). By "national allegory" Jameson means that "*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (69; original emphasis). Leaving aside the exhaustively critiqued and debated problems inherent in the admittedly hyperbolic sweep of Jameson's categorization of *all* Third World texts as national allegories, I would like to focus on *the effects* of reading such texts in this way.⁶ Conventionally, allegory as a form involves at

least two levels of meaning. As Quintilian defines it, allegory "presents one thing by its words and either (1) a different or (2) sometimes even a contrary thing by its sense" (451). Allegories solicit interpretations beyond the literal. They represent subjects other than those they appear to express explicitly. Allegories are riddles to be solved, secrets to be disclosed to and by the attentive reader. Jameson notes, however, that allegory is not simply "an elaborate set of figures and personifications to be read against some one-to-one table of equivalences" ("Third-World" 73). This older understanding ignores to its detriment the "alarming notion that such equivalences are themselves in constant change and transformation at each perpetual present of the text" (73). Despite Jameson's more recent and nuanced sense of allegory's instability, however, the outcome of his categorization remains the same. Both the conventional, rigid sense of allegory and Jameson's more contemporary, flexible understanding beg the question, *What does it mean?* For Jameson, the allegorical text always signifies something political and collective, that is, in his context, something national. Since the form—allegory—is already given or presumed, Jameson's focus is primarily on content.

Zahran's novel appears to set itself up in precisely the terms Jameson outlines in his theory of Third World literature. In this section, I argue that *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* can be read as a national allegory in exactly the way Jameson says all Third World texts should be. In the following section, however, I will argue that the novel's obvious, perhaps too obvious, performance as national allegory is, if not parodic, then at least intentionally ambiguous. The third section outlines how the disruption of content occurs at the level of form, while the fourth section explores some virtual traces or effects of this formal disruption.⁷ Said's remarks about Palestinian culture in general should be kept in mind all the way through:

Since our [Palestinian] history is forbidden, narratives are rare; the story of origins, of home, of nation is underground. When it appears it is broken, often wayward and meandering in the extreme, always coded, usually in outrageous forms—mock-epics, satires, sardonic parables, absurd rituals—that make little sense to an outsider. Thus Palestinian life is scattered, discontinuous, marked by the artificial and imposed arrangements of interrupted or confined space, by the dislocations and unsynchronized rhythms of disturbed time. (*After* 20)

It is, I contend, Said's terms more than Jameson's that characterize Zahran's text and enable it to supplement its own performance as national allegory toward a more unpredictable end.

Nineteen ninety-five, the year Zahran's novel was published, was not a good one for the advancement of a just and equitable peace in

the Middle East. It was the year Oslo II was signed—an agreement that, as Said, among others, has convincingly argued, betrayed the popular *intifada* and gave the Palestinian National Authority little more than “a kingdom of illusions, with Israel firmly in command” (Said, *Peace* 148).⁸ It was also the year of Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination. But the novel itself is set before that inauspicious year. It is important to note that time does not stand still in Zahran’s text, nor does it move along a strictly chronological path. The first section of the novel, “Overture,” begins by marking the place and date, like a diary entry: “Petra. January 1980” (*Beggar* 3). The narrator is Mr. Foster, an American professor of archeology at the American University of Beirut, born and raised in Lebanon, whose first language is Arabic and whose name—itsself a micro-allegory of sorts—we do not learn until the fourth and final section of the novel. He accidentally finds a stash of notebooks and papers hidden in the damp closet of his frigid room at the Rest House in Petra, Jordan, where he is visiting. As he begins to read, he discovers that most of the notebooks and papers were written in Arabic by a young Palestinian woman named Rayya. They contain “dated entries, poetry and extracts of letters or the letters themselves attached here and there, and quotations from what seemed to be earlier works” (15). Some pages include “crude sketches of sailing boats almost mingling with the script. Still other pages had rectangular figures with numbers and words that looked like magic formulas” (8). The entry he turns to first at random is marked “Petra, 3 January 1977” (9). Mr. Foster remarks on the coincidence of place and date between his own visit and the writer’s three years earlier. In addition to Rayya’s jumble of notebooks and papers, Mr. Foster also discovers an “elegantly bound leather journal” written in a “neat, precise” English script featuring “no scribbles and no sketches” (16). It is “part diary, with dates here and there—the first entry marked London, May 1972—and part narrative” (16). He learns that this journal belongs to an English architect called Alexander (Alex), Rayya’s lover and possibly a spy (though it is never clarified where or for whom).

The second section of the novel, “The Two Faces of Love,” and the third, “The Hidden Face of the Moon,” cover the period between 1969, when Rayya and Alex first meet, and 1977, when Alex plummets to his death from a ridge in Petra, either by accident or by assassination. But the narrative in these two sections, made up mainly of Rayya’s and Alex’s written words, with a few interruptions and some guidance from Mr. Foster, does not proceed in clear chronological order. Their relationship, full of mystery, secrecy, movement, instability, voyages all over the world, separations, reunions, and betrayals, is not easy to follow. Together these two sections form more of a collage than a narrative.

Like the first section, the fourth and final section, titled "Epilogue," again begins by marking place and date—"London 1989"—and, again like the first section, is narrated by Mr. Foster (133). Almost immediately, Mr. Foster takes us back in time to retrace the nine years since he found the notebooks on that fateful night in Petra. He has been consumed with mapping the story of Rayya and Alex, stitching it together, and preparing for publication a manuscript based on their writing. This manuscript is, of course, the very novel we hold in our hands. In those nine years, Mr. Foster has tried hard to locate Rayya. The epilogue recounts how he finally tracks her down and meets her in Jerusalem. It is with Rayya that the novel concludes, in Jerusalem in 1989, two years into the *intifada*. Under the title of each of the novel's four sections is a short definition, description, or statement. In the epilogue, the following definition is given: "Intifada: A wet, wounded bird who shook his wings" (131). As we shall see, the implications of this definition to the conception of the text as national allegory are significant.

Leaving aside for the moment the temporal zigzagging of the narrative, the novel covers the two decades from 1969 to 1989. To read this text as a national allegory, we need to consider first why Zahran would situate the personal relationship between Rayya and Alex during this particular period and then why she would choose 1989 as the year the story ends. The June 1967 war was, in many ways, a turning point for Palestinian nationalism, prompting a sharper sense of identity independent from other Arab governments as well as a more vigorous Palestinian armed struggle against the Israeli occupation (Bickerton and Klausner 153, 163–8). The same year marked the second mass displacement and dispossession of the Palestinians after the 1948 *nakba* or "catastrophe." Known as the *naksa* or "setback," the events of 1967 are alluded to in the novel as the cause of Rayya's exile from Palestine (*Beggar* 82). Her close friend, the *fida'i* (freedom fighter) "Z," in whose assassination (we later learn) Alex has played a role, says that 1948—the year his exile began—and 1967—the first year of Rayya's—"marked the two stages of captivity" (82).⁹ For "Z," Rayya, and others forced to leave the homeland as a result of the *nakba* and the *naksa* and to reside in foreign countries or refugee camps, diaspora is undeniably experienced as a form of captivity.¹⁰

Rayya's passionate nationalism is fired by this experience of captivity and diaspora; the call for action, including violent action, presses urgently. It is an urgency her lover Alex, perhaps not unlike many Europeans and Americans generally, cannot understand. On their first trip together to Tunis, he is both skeptical about and unimpressed with what he calls the "professional Arabism" of both Rayya and the Arab intellectuals with whom she fraternizes (37). Rayya writes in one of her notebooks,

It was an accusation that I considered derogatory since it turned a passionate feeling into a trade, touching a sensitive cord, and I asked myself whether this attachment to Arab nationalism, which we Palestinians carried *like a banner*, was excessive or seemed so only to Western eyes. (37; emphasis added)

Because the word “banner” in Arabic is *raya*, phonetically close to Rayya, it would not be a stretch to read Rayya allegorically as a banner for or representative of the anger, urgency, radicalism, and growing nationalism of Palestinians during this period of resistance.¹¹

In 1969, Yasir Arafat was appointed chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) by the Palestine National Council, the Palestinian parliament in exile, and the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution reaffirming the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine. But 1969 was also the year Golda Meir denied the existence of Palestinians as a people (R. Khalidi 147). After the bleakness of the two decades following 1948, culminating in the debacle of 1967—humiliating not only to Palestinians but to all Arabs—the late 1960s and early 1970s brought a sense of enthusiasm and determination to Palestinians, who were beginning to reorganize themselves more effectively both politically and militarily (Bickerton and Klausner 163–9; Pappé, *History* 189–94; Said, *Politics* 78). This period signaled a growing awareness for Palestinians of their national identity as a people with an irrepressible history and an indomitable culture, and, perhaps most importantly, as a community with a future. In 1974, the Arab League recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. About two weeks later, Arafat addressed the UN General Assembly for the first time. But this period of potential also saw Black September (1970), the resulting expulsion of the PLO from Jordan, and its relocation to Beirut in 1971. It saw the October War of 1973 and the signing of the Camp David peace accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978. It saw the start of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, in which the PLO was involved; the invasion of Lebanon by Israel in June 1982; and the withdrawal of the PLO from Beirut that same year. September 1982 saw the massacres of Sabra and Shatila and, in some ways, the end of this particular phase of Palestinian nationalism (Pappé, *History* 221).

It is during these turbulent and exhilarating years that Rayya, newly *exiled*, meets and eventually has a turbulent and exhilarating relationship with Alex.¹² The text is explicit about the allegorical significance of this relationship between a Palestinian woman and a British man. Alex’s conquering of Rayya’s emotions alludes to the early-twentieth-century British presence on Palestinian land and interference with Palestinian destiny, as well as to the ongoing

Israeli occupation of Palestinian land. The dynamic of their relationship—full of heated arguments, misunderstandings, betrayals, and rigid stereotypes—can be read to represent the adversarial dynamic between colonizer (Britain) and colonized (Palestine). Alex cannot empathize with Rayya's "excessive Arabism" (55), and Rayya cannot overcome her suspicion that Alex is a spy. On the one hand, Rayya's intense nationalism does, in fact, exclude Alex; as he puts it, "I was always the outsider in this incestuous pain for Palestine" (84). On the other hand, Rayya's suspicions of Alex are confirmed when she discovers that he has been hiding from her his ability to read, write, and speak Arabic (66); his surreptitious reading of her notebooks (66); his training in Shemlan, Lebanon, at some vague "school for spies" (68); and his photographs of prohibited sites and targets taken during their travels together (121). A poem written in English by Rayya, addressed "To Alex," makes explicit the allegorical dimension of the relationship between the lovers as a confrontation between two opposing national, political, even religious sides (72). It concludes with a question:

Does this explain the moments
Of estrangement that creep between us
Could this be the void that stands
Between oppressor and oppressed? (72)

In fact, the chasm between the lovers is never effectively overcome. Rayya and Alex understand that they remain stuck in an oppositional logic from which they cannot escape, despite their love. As Alex explains,

In a way we are alike, Rayya and I. She sees things in terms of light and darkness, and I see things in ice and fire. We are rigid and simplistic in our approach to things and unable to see the half-tones, the shades between the two poles of love. In love, so much in love, but separately beating our heads against a wall. (58)

It is this inability to traverse the void that leads to the ruin of Rayya and Alex's relationship. Politically, over the last sixty years, a similar inability to "see the half-tones" has perpetuated and intensified hostilities on both sides of the divide. Alex's assassination in Petra in January 1977 by members of the PLO, made to look like an accident with Rayya's uneasy facilitation, exposes the potential dead end in store for all sides.

The novel ends in Jerusalem in 1989, two years after the beginning of the *intifada*, the popular and spontaneous uprising of Palestinian youth. After searching for nine years, Mr. Foster finally locates Rayya in Jerusalem. He finds her at Bab El-Amud,

or Damascus Gate, dressed as a beggar but, as he soon realizes, actually communicating in disguise with an unlikely mix of individuals—young people, Israeli soldiers, and Orthodox Jews, among others. He explains,

A file of young men and women dropped coins into Rayya's hand, and it was obvious that these people were not stopping for charity; they were either exchanging information or receiving instructions as they bent down to drop the coin. I also noticed a definite pattern in her call for alms, which I hadn't noticed the day before. It was achieved through a change in her tone of voice. (146)

Mr. Foster himself manages to communicate furtively with Rayya by writing three notes in red pencil on three \$1 bills that he drops in her outstretched hand. He tells her that he found her papers in Petra, that he wants her to have them back, and that he has prepared a manuscript for publication, which he would like her to approve. Through a number of covert machinations, Rayya arranges for them to meet. In their brief conversation, Rayya grants Mr. Foster permission to publish the manuscript. She asks him why he has persisted on her trail for so long. He responds that he at first believed it was for the Palestinian cause but then realized that it was more because he "had hopelessly fallen under a magic spell" (156). Finally, Mr. Foster asks Rayya this last question: "I was running after an illusion, but in reality, who are you, Rayya?" (156). Rayya responds, "I am [...] the olive tree on the hills of Palestine. I am the spring of water in the valleys. I am the smell of its parched, naked soil" (157). Here, Rayya identifies herself completely with, and even as, Palestine. She is the land itself—its olive trees, its water, its soil.¹³ In many ways, Mr. Foster's question and Rayya's response bring us back to the epigraph: "All characters in this book are fictitious [*sic*], only Palestine is real" (vii). Now the epigraph's ambiguity becomes more apparent. Rayya is a character in the novel who identifies herself as Palestine. Only Palestine is real. Rayya as Palestine—and not just as a character in Zahran's novel—must be, in some way, real. Allegorically, Zahran's sleight of hand implies that elements of fiction—character, setting, plot, point of view, theme—can escape their generic restrictions and trespass on the reality, not just the narrative, of a nation. The possibility that Rayya could be real is the image of futurity, of hope, of multi-ethnic community offered by the text. It suggests an alternative path of cooperation and community—inclusive rather than separatist—that, in fact, by 1995, the year of the novel's publication, had clearly not been taken. As a story of the nation, Zahran's novel evokes a future that may seem already too late (given the many setbacks faced by Palestinians—from illegal settlements and concrete walls to internal divisions and violent

conflicts—as well as the apparent impossibility of devising acceptable terms of negotiation). Nonetheless, the potential for a new *intifada*, a shaking off of the old ways, remains, regardless of the current state of affairs. The story takes us back to 1989, the early, promising days of the uprising, to Jerusalem, to the prospect of Palestinians and Israelis cooperating, because it is precisely within these coordinates—rather than through a secretly negotiated, unfairly brokered process—that a peaceful future will likely emerge. No matter how many times the *intifada* is betrayed or goes astray, the possibility of beginning again and getting it right remains. Or that is what Zahran's novel as national allegory can be read to suggest.

What Can It Do?

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson quotes from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* regarding the question of interpretation:

The unconscious poses no problem of meaning, solely problems of use. The question posed by desire is not, "What does it mean?" but rather "*How does it work?*" [...] [The unconscious] represents nothing, but it produces. It means nothing, but it works." (109, qtd. in Jameson, *Political* 22; original emphasis)

Deleuze and Guattari insist that "meaning [can] be nothing other than use" (109, qtd. in Jameson, *Political* 22). However, Jameson argues that their method of determining "legitimate uses" and "illegitimate ones"—by means of "*immanent criteria*" (109, qtd. in Jameson, *Political* 22)—remains a "*hermeneutic model*," even if it is an "antitranscendent" one (Jameson, *Political* 23; emphasis added). Jameson's conclusion, however, fails to register sufficiently Deleuze and Guattari's sense of writing as a "machine"—that is, of writing as functioning rather than meaning (*Kafka* 47–9). Understood as a function, as a force of production, writing has less to do with meaning and interpretation than with producing effects and combining with other forces of production—literary, social, political, economic, and so on—to become or produce something new (Deleuze, *Proust* 146–7). While reading within the terms of allegory implies a hidden truth that must be uncovered, reading within the terms of a "literary machine" implies that truths are not uncovered, discovered, or observed but, rather, produced, created, or invented (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 18; Deleuze, *Proust* 146–7). This latter sense suggests that meanings are less rigid and restricted than is generally presumed. Although Jameson makes use of Deleuze and Guattari in his discussion of allegory and interpretation, in fact their theories diverge significantly on this point.

In their short study on Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari describe their conception of a “minor literature.” What they identify as a minor literature is not necessarily a literature written by a minority group, although this certainly may be the case. Minor has less to do with quantity or number than with function.¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari outline three characteristics of a minor literature. First, in a minor literature, “language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization” (*Kafka* 16). In this context, “deterritorialization” has to do with the disarticulation of language, or the tearing of language from habituated or common sense (*Kafka* 86, 21).¹⁵ Deterritorialized language detaches words from their habituated signification and reminds readers that other forms of expression can emerge. Words can do things other than what they are conventionally assigned to do; these alternative functions can have subversive, challenging, unpredictable effects. Zahran’s use of English, the erstwhile colonizer’s language, can be understood as minor or deterritorializing from this perspective.¹⁶

The second characteristic of a minor literature is that everything in it is political (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 17). Deleuze and Guattari explain that a minor literature’s “cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics” (17).¹⁷ This idea seems to bring the notion of a minor literature very close to Jameson’s conception of national allegory. The difference between the two, however, is that the political component of a minor literature is not hidden beneath the personal or subjective component (Jameson, “Third-World” 69, 79). Rather, the personal or individual is magnified, such that it becomes impossible to ignore its *connections* to the political in all its aspects (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 17). A minor literature shows how such connections are always part of a network of power relations that traverse the personal and political together. Furthermore, the political is not relegated to content or meaning, as it is for Jameson, but, rather, is made visible and is acted upon by way of form and style (that is, through the deterritorializing use of language; Jameson, “Third-World” 66, 80). As we shall see, Zahran’s complex stylistics express the political component of her text more effectively than the simple allegory of Rayya and Alex does.

The third characteristic of a minor literature “is that in it everything takes on a *collective* value” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 17; emphasis added). It is this collective aspect of a minor literature that takes us back to the concept of the literary machine. A minor literature—because it does not belong to the dominant order, the dominant or major language, conventional or habituated sense; because, indeed, it is in the process of breaking down or deterritorializing that very order, language, or sense—functions as a “collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation” (17). Paradoxically, it is

not an enunciation of the current majoritarian collectivity but, rather, an enunciation of a potential, future, collective-to-come (18). As Deleuze and Guattari put it,

The literary machine thus becomes the relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come, not at all for ideological reasons but because the literary machine alone is determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation that is lacking elsewhere in this milieu: *literature is the people's concern.* (17-8)

Zahran's text functions in exactly this way. *It pushes toward or invents a future that might never come and is unknowable in advance.* It speaks as, rather than for, a community that does not yet exist; in so doing, it functions as a real, if not yet actual, part of that collective-to-come.

To approach a text from the perspective of function rather than meaning, as Deleuze and Guattari do, expands our sense of what literature and culture might be capable of actively achieving. Within the context of Palestine and Israel (and, indeed, of the Middle East and Euro-America more broadly), where meaning has become reified into stagnant and violence-producing polar oppositions, the function of culture as a disruptive and productive force cannot be ignored.¹⁸ As a minor literature, Zahran's novel is a performance in counterpoint. Through its formal experiments, it manages to undermine the univocal logic of opposites upon which so many of today's perilous political and economic policies rely. The following section explores the stylistics of Zahran's contrapuntal construction.

A Contrapuntal Performance

Jameson's discussion of Third World literature assumes that such novels will be "popular or socially realistic" in form ("Third-World" 66). Indeed, Jameson states that the "third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce" and will tend "to remind us [First World readers] of outmoded stages of our own first-world cultural development" (65). Such texts will not surprise First World readers at the level of *form*; they will probably strike such readers "as conventional or naive" (66). Nonetheless, Jameson argues, it behooves First World readers to overcome their resistance to "these often unmodern third-world texts" in order to expand their sense of the world and defeat narrow parochialisms (66). Jameson's method of interpreting Third World novels as national allegories is advanced as an effective means to access these otherwise alienating texts.

As we have seen, Zahran's novel appears to be a most convincing example of Jameson's argument. *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* is, in many ways, an allegory of Palestine—its colonial struggles with the

West, Britain in particular; the dispersion of its people and their emergence as a diaspora; the birth of its national identity; its ongoing anticolonial struggles against Israeli occupation; its potential as a mixed, secular community for Muslim and Christian Arabs and Jews.¹⁹ Yet the novel's performance as national allegory seems almost too obvious and renders a reading more closed and final than the formal elements of the novel would otherwise indicate. Zahran's techniques are closer to Western modernist stylistics than to social realism. Specifically, I would like to examine three of the novel's formal techniques—its use of multiple voices, its temporal and spatial jumps, and its proliferation of fragments—in order to suggest that its performance is more contrapuntal—that is to say, “hybrid,” “heterogeneous,” “differentiated,” and “unmonolithic” (Said, *Culture* xxv)—than allegorical. Shifting emphasis from allegory to counterpoint opens up new paths of disruption and connection—in short, of becoming—for and through Zahran's text as a literary machine.²⁰

One of the most striking features of *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* is its use of multiple voices. The proliferation and intersection of voices in the novel—the voices of Rayya, Alex, Mr. Foster, Rayya's friends, her acquaintances, her family, the discourses of nationalism, pan-Arabism, secularism, Palestine, and so on—disrupt the conventional coherence of character associated with the novel as a genre. This multiplicity expresses, instead, a contrapuntal performance that destabilizes the habituated univocity of identity and opens up the possibility of an alternative, less restricted conceptualization of character, identity, place, and so on. Furthermore, because Zahran chooses to do all this in English, her multiplication of voices constitutes a deterritorialization of the “major language” itself—that is to say, the previous colonizer's language, the language of the dominant global order, one of the languages of oppression for Palestinians (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16). Zahran constructs a “minor language” in English (16). She puts English to “strange and minor uses,” which wrest it out of its standard utilization (17). To construct a minor language, Deleuze and Guattari instruct the writer, “Go always farther in the direction of deterritorialization, to the point of sobriety [...] Oppose a purely intensive usage of language to all symbolic or even significant or simply signifying usages of it” (*Kafka* 19). Zahran's proliferation of voices disrupts or deterritorializes English, and the literary codes to which it is conventionally linked, by pushing it to perform in such intensive, unperformed, and unpredictable ways.

I would like to focus specifically on the complexity of Rayya's voice and its inextricable link to exile, since it is most emblematic of the intricate formal construction of voice(s) in the novel. In the epilogue, Mr. Foster declares that, for him, Rayya “symbolized [...] the uprooted, the exiled, the oppressed” (Zahran, *Beggar* 133).²¹ Rayya is the figure

of exile *par excellence* in this novel. She chooses to hold on to the marks of exile as a way of holding on to her lost homeland and as an assertion of her national identity. Alex notes, "I found out later that it was abhorrent to her to speak English or French like a native. She deliberately kept her accent so as to mark her foreignness, her rootlessness and her exile" (29–30). Loss, the capacity for sorrow, bitterness, and the inability to return home are a few of the devastating effects of Rayya's exile from Palestine. Almost anything can become a placeholder for her loss: Alex, her dead mother, her friend "Z," even Paris, her adopted home, which Mr. Foster describes as her "Palestine-sur-Seine" (140). But Rayya is not simply a symbol or representative of exile. Her formal construction in the novel performs an enactment of exile (and/or, I would suggest, of Palestinian diaspora—though neither Rayya nor Zahran calls it that). This occurs in at least three ways: first, by splintering her voice into a multitude of voices; second, by making it impossible to fix her identity or her location definitively; and third, by turning Palestine into a placeholder for Rayya (rather than the other way around).

Rayya's voice is a cacophony. She ventriloquizes pan-Arabists, Palestinian nationalists, secularists, cosmopolitan artists, and superstitious magicians alike. She articulates the theories and beliefs of all those to whom she feels herself affiliated. But beyond her connection to such major and minor groups, Rayya links herself to others through love. Her voice becomes the medium through which the singularity of those she loves is expressed. This is true of Alex's voice as articulated through Rayya's. It is equally true of the voice of her friend, the assassinated Palestinian poet known only as "Z" (81–5). Rayya's voice brings back to life—or, more precisely, gives new life to—such voices, such worlds, otherwise lost forever.

The splintering of voices in the novel generally and the splintering of Rayya-the-exile's voice more specifically convey the movement characteristic of diaspora.²² The multiplicity of voices corresponds to the many places the rootless exile traverses (by force, for the exiled refugee, or by choice, for the more affluent, but no less displaced, exile). While Rayya has adopted Paris as her base, she is nonetheless constantly on the move. Her relationship with Alex is characterized above all by the plethora of places they visit together (31). They do not share a home base. Rayya states, "In reality, our life together took shape and form only in our frequent travels, for we lived in different cities, moved in different circles, belonged to different worlds. It was only on a plane, a train or a ship that we had a life together" (37). Movement and homelessness define Rayya, and she can comprehend no other mode of existence. Incredulously, she asks Alex, "How can I get you out of this mentality of an earth cocoon [...] You are so insular, so earthbound" (47). Since he does not share her exilic, diasporic condition, he lacks her nomadic extremes.²³

Rayya's movement and instability make it difficult, even impossible, for Alex to fix her identity, as he openly admits to himself:

In the last analysis, Rayya was beyond certain limits of my comprehension. I would sit in the evenings, writing puzzles about her that went like this: "—esoteric—mystic—militant—rebel—melomane—superstitious and magician—Rayya. Is this the prototype of a modern Arab girl?" (48)

Like Alex, Mr. Foster is caught in a web of incomprehension. As he tries to trace Rayya in the early 1980s, he finds it impossible to pin her down. From each person he meets who knew her, he hears conflicting details: "I went around in a circle; every line of investigation I followed had several contradictory replies. No two people I questioned agreed [...] The picture I had of her did not meet with any confirmation" (136). Mr. Foster seeks coherence, with respect to both Rayya and her relationship with Alex, but this proves impossible to obtain. Rayya is open, her identity "unbounded" (Schulz 11). Her openness suggests a lack of finality or closure. Alex, Mr. Foster, and her friends and acquaintances cannot define Rayya definitively because she remains ever open to becoming something different. Alex notes that Rayya lacks "any sense of orientation, [which] made her very vulnerable and increased her dependence on others" (Zahran, *Beggar* 48). He adds, "So often I had to take her hand and guide her like a blind woman down a familiar road" (48). Yet this lack of direction, this inability to recognize the familiar, suggests that Rayya is never constrained by habituated conclusions or automatic responses. Difficult and bewildering as this constant sense of displacement can be, it allows her to see the world with unadjusted eyes, enabling new, unconventional interpretations and modes of living. Said argues that the "*exilic* intellectual does not respond to the logic of the conventional but to the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on, not standing still" (*Representations* 64). Stuart Hall asserts that such diasporic identities "are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (402). Rayya fits both Said's and Hall's descriptions precisely.²⁴

Tangled up in the clamor of Rayya's voices and her constant movement and openness is Palestine. However, the novel does not present Rayya as an allegory of or placeholder for Palestine; rather, Palestine is a placeholder for Rayya. The former articulation assumes that Palestine is already known and decided in advance. It assumes a one-to-one correspondence between Rayya and Palestine, a teleological logic to be followed by the reader leading from Rayya, a character in the novel, to Palestine, the only real thing, according to the

epigraph. From this Jamesonian perspective, the story of Rayya is read allegorically as the story of Palestine. The novel, however, constructs the possibility of an alternative interpretation. Palestine is immediately declared to be the only thing real about the novel. But the novel then proceeds to disrupt the opposition between reality and fiction upon which the meaning of the epigraph's claim depends. Neither Alex nor Mr. Foster can figure out what is "real" about Rayya. Her notebooks are a composite of fact and fiction, and the truth about her identity remains undetermined. She frustrates them both; both feel betrayed by her (Zahran, *Beggar* 49, 77, 136). But their sense of frustration and betrayal have more to do with their conventional, dogmatic, patriarchal expectations and values than with Rayya. Rayya does not betray Alex or Mr. Foster; instead, *she betrays the oppositional logic upon which their sense of the real depends*. For Rayya, truth and fiction, self and other, reality and magic do not occupy separate territories, as they do for the men. The multiplicity of her voice and her constant movement as an exile make it impossible for her to follow their exclusionary logic. Almost despite himself, Mr. Foster comes close to recognizing the implication of Rayya's seemingly contradictory textual self-construction. Frustrated by the fictional aspect of her notebooks, which have been leading him "from one fool's errand to another," Mr. Foster declares, "The only real thing in them that I could clutch at was Palestine. Was Palestine real? Did it not vanish before her very eyes—to take on a false name and turn to strange gods?" (135–6). What is real about Palestine is its constructedness, its mutability, its capacity to be everything to everyone. Its characteristics match Rayya's—multiple, shifting, unstable. As a placeholder for Rayya, then, Palestine reveals that what is real cannot be separated from what is imagined, that what is out there, beyond the territory of the novel, is already in here, undergoing a process of deterritorialization. If Palestine is real, Rayya is too. As we shall discover, both constitute a reality that is virtually, if not actually, extant.

In addition to the use of multiple voices, and closely related to it, the novel jumps around contrapuntally both temporally and spatially, making it difficult to locate in the narrative structure the kind of coherence Mr. Foster seeks. While the text covers two politically significant decades in the Middle East, from 1969 to 1989, the novel's temporal unfolding is not chronological, as discussed earlier. Furthermore, because of Rayya and Alex's shared interest in archaeology, history, and architecture, movement occurs across centuries, not just decades. The text opens in Petra, home of the ancient Nabateans, and the novel is full of reminders and remnants of a global history that extends back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. But Alex does not slip through time as effortlessly as Rayya does. He writes,

I was constantly in the process of trying to capture her in her oscillation between the past and the future, and I often told her bitterly, "It is only the present you miss!"—a reproach to which she was not sensitive and to which she simply replied: "The present is you!" (47)

Mr. Foster, similarly, has some difficulty negotiating the temporal shifts that define Rayya's and Alex's writing: "I had to invent a temporal sequence for their actions, for neither of them had made a clear-cut notation of the order of events; they wrote of past, present and future in the same tense" (25–6). Mr. Foster admits that his attempt at temporal and narrative cohesion is at least partly arbitrary (26).

The text's spatial movements are as variable as its temporal shifts. Petra, London, Paris, Tunis, Cairo, Pergamon, Delos, Beirut, Fatipur, Venice, Damascus, Jerusalem—these are just a few of the places the text traverses. The effect of this temporal and spatial zig-zagging is the creation of a form that registers and enacts the instabilities and fluctuations of exile and diaspora. But this expression is not simply representational. It creates a model or figure of counterpoint that is performative. In the same way that the multiplication of voices disrupts the coherence of identity and, by extension, the authority of a univocal reality, the novel's temporal and spatial variations disrupt the reliability of foundations conventionally taken for granted. Instead of the linear trajectory of time and the solidity of location or place, the novel creates a mesh-like network of points that can connect in an infinite set of patterns, a tactic more appropriate to the movement and instability of diaspora.²⁵ For example, when Rayya visits Venice with Alex in the 1970s, she links this location to the Middle East by jumping effortlessly back to the Middle Ages, when Arab cultural and commercial contact with Venice was ubiquitous. Rayya's leap backwards dips briefly into the eighteenth century, the century when the "wonders of Tiepolo," which initially prompt her musings, were created (55). Rayya's movement presents one potential constellation based on the temporal and spatial points mentioned: from the 1970s—a decade of rapid and far-reaching changes in the Middle East—to the eighteenth century—not the best period for Venice, but nonetheless a century of extensive colonial expansion for much of Europe—back to the Middle Ages—the pinnacle of Islamic culture and influence. Alex, however, lacks Rayya's contrapuntal capacities and is, in fact, deeply aggravated by her tendency to read whatever she sees from a "stereoscopic" perspective:

"Fascinating," he would say sarcastically, "to see Venice from the Arabic point of view—an undreamed-of Venice!" This was in response to my [Rayya's] pointing out to him, one hot August

afternoon in the cool chapel containing the wonders of Tiepolo, the Arab historical and cultural connection with Venice. (55)²⁶

In contrast to Alex's rigid inability to read intersecting narratives across time and place, the flux of the novel's form invite readers to forge their own constellations, while at the same time demonstrating that whatever assemblages of details are linked, such connections are always contingent and never exclusive. In this sense, Zahran's novel becomes a literary machine, capable of connecting with readers, with other texts, other ideas, other times and places, in order to do or to become something besides a story demanding a definitive interpretation. It articulates the second characteristic of Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature, which is that everything in it is political (*Kafka* 17). Its fugue-like development of multiple lines or movements opens up the possibility of connecting the personal with the political, the fictional with the real, the individual with the social, and so on, not allegorically but, rather, by expressing the contiguity that always already exists between such ostensibly opposed categories. The novel's allusions to musical form—through its opening chapter titled "Overture," its division into four separate movements, and its coda-like "Epilogue"—reinforce the relevance of considering its relationship to other techniques of musical composition, including the fugal and the contrapuntal.²⁷ The virtual effects of Zahran's contrapuntal temporal and spatial performance are discussed in the final section of this essay.

The novel's proliferation and unusual juxtaposition of fragments is yet another formal technique closer to counterpoint than to allegory. Again, like Zahran's use of multiple voices and her experiments with temporal and spatial disjunction, fragmentation follows the stylistics of Western modernism rather than of social realism. For the surrealists, poetic language at its best slows down or interrupts automatic perception and comprehension, enabling an alternative sense of both words and objects. Juxtapositions, according to the Russian formalists, make it possible to perceive life assembled in ways other than those currently dominating, thereby defamiliarizing our sense of the world and activating responses other than the most habituated or most recent. The modernist writer and poet T.E. Hulme evocatively declared that the effect of such juxtapositions is like "fire struck between stones" (13). From the Russian formalists to the Imagists and surrealists, this disruptive, defamiliarizing effect of precise images or fragments and their juxtaposition is believed to be the special function of literature.

In a discussion of Walt Whitman, Deleuze declares that "the fragment is innately American [...] because America itself is made up of federated states and various immigrant peoples (minorities)—everywhere a collection of fragments, haunted by the menace of secession, that is to say, by war" (*Essays* 56–7). A similar point could be

made about Palestine. Its history of war, occupation, multiple religions, exile, displacement, dislocation, diaspora, and loss makes it as innately connected to the fragment as Deleuze finds "America" (i.e., the United States) to be. A fragmentary existence may produce a fragmentary perception of the world, as Deleuze explains, a perception of

the world as a collection of heterogeneous parts: an infinite patchwork, or an endless wall of dry stones (a cemented wall, or the pieces of a puzzle, would reconstitute a totality). The world as a *sampling*: the samples ("specimens") are singularities, remarkable and nontotalizable parts extracted from a series of ordinary parts. (*Essays* 57)

Such fragments or samplings may be of days, of cases, of scenes, of views, separated by intervals of time or intervals of space (Deleuze, *Essays* 57). In any case, "selecting singular cases and minor scenes is more important than any consideration of the whole. It is in the fragments that the hidden background appears, be it celestial or demonic" (57). Furthermore, it is through the act of writing that the fragment is, as Deleuze puts it, "extracted" (57). Fragments matter because, unlike conventional narrative forms, they are, according to Deleuze, non-totalizable. *Fragments underscore the possibility of variable and continuously invented relations rather than fixed and final conclusions.* Fragments express spontaneity and unpredictability, so that "progress" and "evolution" become open processes rather than termini predicted in advance (Deleuze, *Essays* 58). Relations or juxtapositions between fragments are described by Deleuze as "counterpoints" (59). As we shall see, it is through the proliferation of fragments that contrapuntal relations are invented in Zahran's writing, as in Whitman's poetry. These relations are indispensable because they create images of the future—for Palestine, for Israel, indeed for the world—ignored in the current summation of the global totality.

Said's sense of the fragment and its connection to relations of counterpoint closely echoes Deleuze's understanding of both notions. Said explains,

In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work. (*Culture* 51)

Said transposes this understanding of counterpoint in music to critical analysis. A contrapuntal analysis or perspective involves the

ability "to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them coexisting and interacting with others" (*Culture* 32). He continues, "In juxtaposing experiences with each other, in letting them play off each other, it is my interpretative political aim [...] to make concurrent those views and experiences that are ideologically and culturally closed to each other and that attempt to distance or suppress other views and experiences" (*Culture* 32–3; emphasis added). Like Deleuze, Said believes that fragments and unexpected juxtapositions disrupt conventional narratives and ordered explanations so that alternative understandings and previously unconsidered interpretations or hidden perspectives can emerge.

Said's conception of contrapuntal criticism is equally applicable to literary writing or form. While he argues that a fragmentary form is particularly appropriate to express the experience of exile, and specifically Palestinian exile, he also suggests that this fragmentation is not simply reflective of the status quo (*After* 150). Fragments and the contrapuntal juxtaposition of fragments, like contrapuntal critique, are suggestive expressions without ultimate conclusions. They are tentative, open, inventive. As such, they do not foreclose the future in the name of the present or the past. Fragments proliferate, and in the web of that proliferation a better constellation may one day be traced. Said declares, "A part of something is for the foreseeable future going to be better than all of it. Fragments over wholes. Restless nomadic activity over the settlements of held territory" (*After* 150). It is precisely this contrapuntal, nomadic (or diasporic), deterritorializing mode of expression Zahran that uses in her novel as a minor literary machine.²⁸

As discussed above, the novel's clamor of voices and its temporal and spatial jumps produce a discontinuous, open, *fragmented* form. In addition, the novel's proliferation of images—scraps and shards that often seem more precariously tacked on than comfortably embedded in the text—contribute substantially to its discontinuous shape. When Mr. Foster finds Rayya's notebooks, Alex's journal, and the rest of their "bundles of old papers" in Petra, they are described as a "heap" (7). They are "rotting and yellowing," almost in ruins, like Petra itself (7). He flips through the notebooks and reads bits and pieces. In the "Overture," readers are presented with fragments of Rayya and Alex's texts, of their relationship, and of the events that the novel will slowly relay. Mr. Foster is immediately captivated and decides to take the notebooks, journal, and papers away with him. The story that emerges, the text we have before us, is his attempt to piece everything together. He admits that the coherence the fragments have now acquired is his doing, for the purpose of publication

and as a way to rein in what would otherwise have remained a wayward, unwieldy, contradictory "heap" (7, 25). While Mr. Foster's "intrusion upon the narrative" brings a degree of coherence, his management of the narrative line remains tenuous, as he recognizes (26). Zahran's text, as distinct from Mr. Foster's narrative, follows the pattern of Rayya's notebooks and papers, which is to say, no pattern at all. Whereas Mr. Foster sees "a pattern emerging for the publication of their story in their own words," his task being "to join the two versions" (25), Zahran's text offers a whirlwind of potential versions, relations, constellations, counterpoints. Where Mr. Foster sees "two sides of one reality" (25), the textual fragments present heterogeneity and realities not yet established.

Rayya's notebooks—given titles of colors, landscapes, and sacrifice—are as much fragments of Palestine as of Rayya. The novel abounds with glimpses of this magical place that means everything to Rayya. One of the first of these fragments describes Jerusalem: "To be possessed by the light of the Jerusalem hills is to be in a frenzy, for chemically it does something to your nerve cells. Someday they will find the secret and export vials of Jerusalem light" (17). Throughout, Palestine is presented in pieces, in no significant order. Among others, such fragments include Rayya's description of her "secret haunt, *Batin El-Hawa*, the Belly of the Wind," the valley at the edge of her village (54); her grandmother's story about the "troop of *Banat-Al-Hur* (the band of the maidens of Paradise)" (56–7); her memory of the gold coins of her dead mother's headdress (59); her obsession with spies and Zionism (69); her love of Sufi writers and poets (78–9); her description of the poet "Z" and other *fidayeen*²⁹ (freedom fighters; 81–5); her account of a young Jewish lawyer fighting for the rights of Arabs in Israeli prisons (86–7); her encounter with an Arab sweeper in Paris (91); and her dreams of Jerusalem, "the celestial city," bathed in an "unearthly" moonlight, "deserted," "silent," "sinister" (99). I would suggest that, together, these and other images are like scenes from the "magic box" (*sandouk al-ajab*) of Rayya's childhood, to which, Mr. Foster notes, she often alludes in her notebooks (17). For Mr. Foster, the experience of reading Rayya's notebooks is like "peering into the 'magic box' of her universe" (17). Similarly, for the reader, the fragments of Palestine offer images of a wondrous world that either no longer exists or has not yet come into existence. Rayya and/or Zahran use(s) writing to "extract" these otherwise hidden, forgotten, or ignored "samplings" that constitute a world—at times "celestial" (Zahran, *Beggar* 99; Deleuze, *Essays* 57), at other times "sinister" (Zahran, *Beggar* 99) or "demonic" (Deleuze, *Essays* 57).

But these samplings of Palestine are not privileged over the profusion of other fragments that flood the text: samplings of voices, times, places, opinions, ideologies, values, images, poems, artworks,

Zahran's A Beggar at Damascus Gate

music, relationships, love, humor, and so on. They are stacked, one fragment atop another, like a deck of cards, with the ever-present possibility that Mr. Foster's deck, or even Zahran's, may be reshuffled by the reader. Alex expresses the difficulty he faces in trying to put together a fixed portrait of the other lovers he reads about in his furtive glimpses of Rayya's notebooks:

I tried hard to form their portraits from the notebooks, but I found only a medley of raw materials. It was like entering a painter's studio where different sketches of the same landscape lay strewn about side by side, with different color combinations that do not exist in reality, waiting for the day that the painting would emerge. (45)

Mr. Foster shares Alex's difficulty. Although the latter is less frustrated than intrigued by Rayya's method, he, like Alex, attempts to give the fragments or "sketches" form. But the text's non-hierarchical organization of fragments suggests that any formal unity will remain arbitrary. Even Palestine, the only "real" thing, according to Zahran, is contingent, as much a "collage" of fragments—and not just fragments having to do with nationalism or liberation—as Rayya's lovers are (73).

I stated at the beginning of this essay that the epigraph's seemingly straightforward declaration masks a hidden ambiguity that extends to the novel as a whole. The novel's obvious and predictable performance as a Third World national allegory masks its fragmented, contrapuntal construction. When Deleuze states that "in the fragments [...] the hidden background appears," he is not suggesting, as Jameson's allegorical method does, that hidden meaning or content lies behind the literal fragments or form (*Essays* 57). Paradoxically, what is hidden for Deleuze (or "suppressed" for Said) is always already virtually present and visible in the text, in the fragments themselves, though such perspectives or constellations have never been traced before, for reasons political, cultural, social, economic, and so on (Said, *Culture* 33). One of the first fragments Mr. Foster records from Rayya's notebooks is this one: "Duplicity is an art raised even to the state of philosophy [...] the artist raises a screen and then takes pleasure in playing games with his [*sic*] audience" (Zahran, *Beggar* 13). One of the games Zahran's duplicitous text plays is to offer itself as an allegory only to mislead its audience, to show how such conventional interpretations are locked into a logic of rigidity and univocity, complicit with a form of oppression all too familiar to Palestinians and members of some other diasporas. Reading along allegorical lines runs the risk of forcing any text into a straitjacket of signification and obscures the possibility that texts are capable of functioning in other ways. Allegory constructs oppositions between words and meanings, the literal and the figurative,

form and content. This oppositional logic implicit in allegory echoes the logic of binary divisions (such as democracy/terrorism, Israel/Palestine) used to legitimate both hierarchical classifications and violent actions. As a literary machine, however, Zahran's text traces a "line of flight" out of this logic of the past and present into a future not yet actual but nonetheless real.³⁰

Virtual Becomings

The contrapuntal performance of *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*—through its multiplication of voices, zigzagging of time and space, and proliferation of fragments—complicates any easy classification of it as national allegory. To read this novel solely as an allegory of relations between West and East (or between Britain/Israel and Palestine more specifically) is to neglect the obstacles, indeed the resistance, to such a reading introduced by its form. The text's diasporic movement, instability, and excess resist static interpretations directed teleologically toward a fixed meaning. In fact, the question solicited by its form is not so much "What does it mean?" as "What can it do?" The latter is an experimental question, or, rather, *it is a question that can unblock the restrictions placed upon formal experimentation by conventions of interpretation*. Zahran's text becomes a literary machine, producing effects characteristic of a minor literature, as conceived by Deleuze and Guattari. Its splintering of voice and character deterritorializes habituated usages of English and disrupts the will to meaning or signification associated with the interpretive modes of this major language, while at the same time destabilizing the conventions of established literary genres such as allegory. The text's temporal and spatial shifts reveal the entire network of structures—social, political, cultural, economic—that resonates within any given individual, relationship, or experience. Zahran's text does not signify or point to the political; rather, it reveals the ways in which everything is always already implicated in the political. Finally, the text's proliferation and juxtaposition of fragmented voices and of fragments of time and place express a collective statement. As we shall see, this collective enunciation can be traced "virtually" in bits and pieces of the text's construction.

Unlike the possible and the real, the virtual and the actual are not opposites. The problem with the possible/real opposition, according to Deleuze, is that it forecloses the future in advance: the real is understood as already having been "preformed" in the possible before its realization (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 98). Furthermore, the possible itself is never real, since the moment it passes into reality it ceases to be a possibility. In contrast, it cannot be foretold in advance how the virtual will actualize (99). There is no limit to the forms

actualization can take (98–103). Although not all aspects of the virtual are actualized in a specific becoming, such aspects are always real. A certain perspective may close off or make imperceptible the virtual that continues to exist as part of each actualization. Nonetheless, these persistent virtualities imply that every actualization, regardless of how permanent and irrevocable it may appear, can always become something other than what it happens to be at the present moment (101). It is in this sense that the virtual, unlike the possible, remains real. Hall articulates a similar conception of the real, with equally nuanced temporal and spatial components, in his discussion of diasporic identities

Cultural identity [...] is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being externally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power. (394)

Hall's sense of identity as a “production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (392) is close to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the literary machine and its inherent virtualities. In addition, Hall's argument that “meaning continues to unfold, so to speak, beyond the arbitrary closure which makes it, at any moment, possible” (397) strongly echoes Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between the virtual (which continues to unfold) and the possible.

A minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari argue, has the capacity to create or invent alternative lines of actualization or becoming. In fact, a minor literature can itself be understood as the virtual becoming actualized. A minor literature is an actualization that creates virtual images that audiences can experience in ways other than the ways in which they experience everyday life. Deleuze writes,

One's always writing to bring something to life, to free life from where it's trapped, to trace lines of flight. The language for doing that can't be a homogeneous system, it's something unstable, always heterogeneous, in which style carves differences of potential between which things can pass, come to pass, a spark can flash and break out of language itself, to make us see and think what was lying in the shadow around the words, things we were hardly aware existed. (*Negotiations* 141)

Style can be understood as the becoming minor of language. It creates, as Deleuze puts it, a “spark” or, to repeat Hulme's description,

“fire struck between stones” (13). This fire or spark reminds us that language and, by extension, life are composed of a multiplicity of imperceptible virtualities “lying in the shadow,” which may (or may not) at any moment become actualized. While we may not be aware of the existence of these virtualities, this is not to say that they do not exist.

Zahran’s proliferation of fragments corresponds to this multiplicity characteristic of the virtual. To read this text as a contrapuntal performance in order to underscore its use of multiple voices, its temporal and spatial shifts, and its proliferation and juxtaposition of fragments is to unblock the limits placed upon it by generic categorizations such as “national allegory” or even “fiction.” The text’s contrapuntal performance refutes the insistence, implicit in such classifications, that meaning can be fixed. Instead, it acknowledges that any text is a vortex of virtualities. National allegory is perhaps one actualization of Zahran’s text, but the formal fragmentation of the text suggests that national allegory is not its sole and only actualization. The various proliferations and the corresponding splintering of the form itself—from Rayya’s scattered notebooks to Zahran’s fragmented textual construction—offer endless opportunities to perceive conjunctions and disjunctions hitherto unactualized, as we shall see. The kaleidoscope-like fragments conjoin and break apart continually, and any single constellation or assemblage will always be provisional and will always include the potential to become something else.

Rayya’s interest in magic and superstition, her use of formulas and spells, her visits to fortune-tellers, and her belief in astrology can be conceived as an expression of the workings of the virtual. This side of Rayya’s personality is inexplicable both to Alex, who cannot “reconcile the sharpness of her intellect with this charlatanism,” and to Mr. Foster, who is “outraged by her interest in magic” (Zahran, *Beggar* 43, 133). Magic makes no sense to Alex and Mr. Foster because it does not fit into their orthodox conception of reality—a conception, incidentally, that would not include the virtual as real. The fact that they do not understand Rayya’s magic, however, does not render them immune to its effects. Rayya uses spells to summon Alex back to her after what seems like a breakup, and he comes (105–6); Mr. Foster openly admits that he has fallen under Rayya’s “magic spell” (156). To the reader, the appearance of magic in the context of the narrative might seem as strange as it does to Alex and Mr. Foster in relation to Rayya’s character: it doesn’t seem to fit, especially since Rayya herself pokes fun at the Orientalist expectations her interest in magic might fulfill for Alex (133). However, the presence of magic in the text appears less odd if it is considered as a thread of virtuality that runs through every narrated event, every character, every fragment. Like the virtual,

magic is excess; it is outside the bounds of order and predictability. As such, it creates a space for the not yet actual, for the seemingly fantastic, for relations of counterpoint that remain to be invented. Rayya's inexplicable attraction to magic expresses her virtual capacity to envision images of a future Palestine that, by the end of the text, she is working toward actualizing. Similarly, the text resonates with virtual counterpoints that may actualize as new perceptions, new thoughts, or new images for the reader, who may be affected in the same way that Alex and Mr. Foster are affected by Rayya's spells. In short, these virtual counterpoints may actualize new modes of life.

It would be impossible to trace every virtual counterpoint of fragments in the text. Virtualities are unlimited; they proliferate continually, and to suggest that all the virtual elements of a text, along with the counterpoints between such elements, might be mapped is to block the text's capacity to produce effects. I restrict myself here to tracing three suggestive virtual counterpoints that resonate between textual fragments. While the story of Rayya and Alex is a story of love betrayed and, read as a national allegory, the story of the impossibility of peaceful relations between East/Palestine and West/Israel, the virtual component of this actualization embodies a different outcome, in which love can become a productive force. The title of the first chapter, "Overture," includes beneath it the following descriptive statement: "Love is a constantly changing landscape" (1). Rayya and Alex's relationship is constantly in "flux" (35). Rayya describes Alex's effect on her: "He carried me with him to a region from which he managed to escape before things took final shape [...] One is never on solid grounds with him; one is always aware of the shifting sands underneath" (35). It is precisely the unfinished, unstable, elusive quality of their love that keeps open the potential for it to connect with other things—other people, other places, other times. It is, virtually speaking, a non-personal love—that is to say, love purely as the capacity to connect, to forge multiple relations, endless counterpoints—rather than love as the function of one specific binary unit (i.e., Rayya and Alex). Thus understood, the love between Rayya and Alex expands to conjoin a proliferation of initially unrelated fragments, including Rayya and an Israeli lawyer and, by extension, the Israeli lawyer and the Palestinian prisoners she defends; Rayya and Mr. Foster and, by extension, Mr. Foster and Palestine; Palestine and Paris and, by extension, East and West.

Another example of a virtual conjunction of fragments is the correlation between the *fida'i* "Z" and Alex. In the narrative, the two are as far apart as possible. Rayya brings this unlikely pair together in her "*Kitab-El-Fida*" ["Book of Sacrifice"], but only to sharpen the contrast. Alex quotes from her notebook in his journal, which Mr. Foster, in turn, includes in his manuscript:

When I look into Alex's smooth face unravaged by stress, and see his indolent hands, his pampered appearance, his egocentricity and his undisturbed universe, I can't help comparing him to "Z" who had the same blondness, but upon whom life had not smiled. (81)

A connection between "Z" and Alex is never actualized in the narrative. In fact, reading about "Z" in Rayya's notebook makes Alex feel that he will never be a part of her world (82). After Alex's assassination in Petra, the organizer of the operation, Colonel Abu Ayyash of the Palestine Liberation Army, asks Rayya whether she knew of Alex's role in "Z"'s assassination. Rayya says she had her suspicions (126). This strange and sudden commingling of Alex and "Z" in the closing pages of the third chapter—both mentioned in the same conversation, both loved by Rayya, each dead because of the other—suggests an unexpected connection that is never actualized in this narrative but nonetheless exists in it virtually. It allows us to perceive in two historically opposed and clashing sides the potential for, if not reconciliation, at least some correspondences, some points at which to begin a new, experimental relationship, with an outcome other than death.

The contrapuntal connections suggested by Rayya's role as beggar at Damascus Gate are perhaps the most dramatic virtual becomings in the text. Israeli soldiers, Orthodox Jews, Arab Christians and Muslims, all held together by the voice of a woman who calls to them for alms: Rayya has created a network of contacts, an imperceptible, contrapuntal assembly in the process of constructing a community not yet actual but, in its present, virtual manifestation, indisputably real. At first Mr. Foster is baffled, unable to discern friend from foe, not realizing that these are the very oppositions disrupted by Rayya's constellation of fragments. He declares, "The whole scene was hallucinating, unreal. Beggars were not beggars; soldiers were not soldiers; waiters were not waiters. I walked quickly, running away from the gate and such thoughts" (148). But he does not run for long. Through her network of "beggars, vendors, waiters, diplomats, soldiers, and rabbis," Rayya makes contact with him, and he begins to perceive the potentialities of this community-in-the-becoming (154). There is no blueprint for this virtual community, but, given the mix of those involved, one imagines it will be secular, open, progressive, democratic. On the other hand, this virtual community may only ever be actualized textually.

These and other virtual counterpoints traceable in the text express a collective enunciation—an image of a future community-to-come—not just for Palestine and Israel, but for the world. The third component of a minor literature, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is that everything in it "takes on a collective value" (*Kafka* 17). As a minor

literature or a literary machine, Zahran's text is "positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation" (*Kafka* 17). This does not mean that Zahran is speaking for the Palestinian people, since that would imply representing a preformed, static group. With a collective enunciation in the context of a minor literature, however, the collectivity in question "is no longer or not yet given" (*Kafka* 18). When Rayya chronicles the singular lives of the *fidayeen* or constructs a relay of connections in Jerusalem, she articulates an enunciation that does not stand in for the people but, rather, produces the revolutionary people-to-come. Likewise, the text itself, Zahran's writing, functions as a "relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come" (*Kafka* 18). A minor literature constructs a line of flight or escape from our rigidly adversative milieu by unblocking virtualities that always already traverse the social field but remain generally imperceptible (48). In other words, it can unleash "the diabolical powers of the future that for the moment are only brushing against the door" (48).

The function of writing in the text, like that of magic, is to convey a sense of this collective virtuality. Rayya's identity is defined as that of a writer as much as a Palestinian. Her notebooks present to Mr. Foster and to us "altered pictures of the universe" (Zahran, *Beggar* 18). In the "Overture," Mr. Foster quotes what he imagines would be Rayya's response to his finished manuscript, a warning Alex once issued to her, which she records in her notebooks: "He asked me to be careful of the written word, for words can invoke unknown forces. He implored me to be sparing, for he knew the magic power of the word" (25). Later, we learn that Alex also warned her against invoking hidden forces generally, magical, written, or otherwise:

I tried to warn her indirectly against invoking hidden forces, against the abuse of her power over people and things, but she paid no heed. She seemed reluctant to talk about this power, as if, in verbalizing it, she would make it disappear. (43-4)

Rayya is as reluctant to talk about this power as she is to talk about her writing, and, I would suggest, for similar reasons. Alex writes,

I had been aware that she was a writer from the first time I had met her, but she never showed any willingness to talk about her writing, and whenever I asked her about the notebooks that she always carried with her, she dismissed my question with a shrug and said "ancient history" or "lost periods of time" or just "dreams," and when I annoyed her with persistent questions she was very evasive and said "My writing? It's only an exercise!" (44)

The power of both magic and writing, or, perhaps more accurately, of *writing as magic*, is to function as the force of a collectivity-to-come, an invoked and textually enacted future that Alex, in his static dogmatism, cannot perceive. He reads Rayya's notebooks obsessively, searching fruitlessly for the hidden meaning beneath the surface. He comes up with various explanations for her style: privacy, secrecy, inhibitions, taboos (45). He refuses, however, to take Rayya at her word and to read her texts as "ancient history," "lost periods of time," "dreams," or "exercise[s]"—that is to say, as the enunciation of a collectivity that "is no longer or not yet given" (Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka 18). As "ancient history" or "lost periods of time," her notebooks do not simply record or represent the past; rather, they extract those virtual elements of the past that can create "dreams" or images of a future that remains as yet undifferentiated. It is not a representational atavism but, rather, a process or "exercise" of inventing images of the future in the present.

In Rayya's notebooks, Alex finds what he perceives as

only a medley of raw materials. It was like entering a painter's studio where different sketches of the same landscape lay strewn about side by side, with different color combinations that do not exist in reality, waiting for the day that the painting would emerge. (Zahran, Beggan 45; emphasis added)

Henri Bergson makes a similar analogy between the process of painting and his notion of "duration":

We possess the elements of the problem; we know in an abstract way, how it will be solved, for the portrait will surely resemble the model and will surely resemble also the artist; but the concrete solution brings with it *that unforeseeable nothing* which is everything in a work of art. And it is this nothing that takes time. Nought as matter, it creates itself as form. The sprouting and flowering of this form are stretched out on an unshrinkable duration, which is one with their essence. (341; emphasis added)

Duration in a work of art is an inextricable part of the work itself. In other words, the "time taken up by the invention, is one with the invention itself" (Bergson 340). This means that duration and creation are the same thing. It also implies that the outcome—of painting, of writing, of life—cannot be predicted in advance. For Alex, Rayya's medley is insufficient because it does not present a one-to-one correspondence with a reality he observes and comprehends, a reality that, as a displaced Palestinian, Rayya cannot afford to share. Contrary to Alex's presumption, however, Rayya's virtual medley—her mix of magic and writing—already does exist, though

its potentialities have not yet been actualized. Her virtual medley is Bergson's duration. The painting Alex believes is yet to emerge has, at one level, already emerged in the form of Rayya's (and Zahran's) writing. But Alex cannot perceive this textual actualization as an emergence. He is as alienated by Rayya's writing as he is by her magic and by her association with the *fidayeen*. He cannot make sense of "the myriad possibilities and alternatives before the artist" (Zahran, *Beggar* 46). His inability to comprehend these alternatives leaves Alex outside the bounds of the text's collective enunciation. Rayya writes that, "unlike lovers, we did not envisage a future, for in the world we inhabited everything was in flux" (35). They lack a future not because their world is in flux (in Bergson's sense, pure duration) but, rather, because Alex cannot withstand the implications of this flux, its disruption of all foundations, its capacity to become something other than it is at present. Since he has the most to lose, Alex's dogmatism is understandable, though certainly not justifiable.

Rayya states that at some point, "the artist becomes alienated from his [*sic*] work as the product finally detaches itself and takes on a life of its own" (46). This non-personal power of the text opens up the potential for the becoming or emergence of new modes of life, new worlds. In the case of Zahran's novel, the character Rayya—in non-personal terms—is movement, flexibility, openness, contradiction, hybridity, and creativity. It is precisely the impersonality of these affects that makes it feasible to connect Zahran's text to the world we conventionally understand to be "outside" the text (but which is, in fact, already assembled with it). When Rayya gives Mr. Foster permission to publish his manuscript, she declares that "whatever you write belongs to a period of exile so long past, and if you have used my words, these words have detached themselves and are no longer mine" (156). Here, Rayya explicitly severs herself from her words, allowing for the possibility that they will have a virtual life of their own. Whereas Jameson discusses national allegory as, at least in part, "a call to the future" ("Third-World" 77), the collective enunciation of the literary machine is itself a future in the becoming at the present moment. Like Bergson's duration, the actualization of these virtual futures cannot be predicted. They may continue to actualize along the same dead-end path that results in the deaths of "Z" and of Alex; or, as the final movement of Zahran's text suggests, they may actualize along more positive lines. In Rayya's statement to Mr. Foster, quoted above, she claims that her period of exile is over now that she has returned to Palestine. But the Palestine she returns to remains a contested territory, far from the idealized homeland imagined by members of the diaspora. Rayya's exile is over not because Palestine has been regained or liberated, in any conventional sense, but because Rayya is now a part of a virtual Palestine

that is as real as the olive trees, spring waters, and soil with which she identifies in her final statement to Mr. Foster. While Rayya may continue to hold these conventional symbols dear, her unconventional actions (cooperation and communication with the "enemy," rather than endless conflict and confrontation) offer an optimistic configuration of a future that is always already here, though more often than not ignored or deemed irrelevant. Zahran's text is, similarly, an actualization of such a future.³¹

To overlook the virtual component of *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* is to ignore a Palestine that exists regardless of all on-the-ground attempts at annihilation. Today, actual Palestine is under siege, enclosed by walls, divided forcibly into unlivable cantons—in short, occupied. Actual Palestine and actual Palestinians are, to put it mildly, under erasure (Dugard; Pappé, *Ethnic*). The conflict between Palestine and Israel swells to include conflicts between all Arab states and Israel, between Arab states and Euro-America, between Muslims and non-Muslims, between East and West. Divisions are painted with increasingly broad strokes, making it progressively more difficult to trace conjunctions, correspondences, counterpoints that are small, subtle, close to imperceptible. It is at this historical juncture that the imperative to consider a virtual Palestine becomes indispensable. The virtual components of Zahran's text, those that exceed the contours of national allegory, construct images of a collectivity-to-come unrestricted by the stranglehold of oppositional categories such as reality or fiction, us or them, kill or be killed. To do so in relation to Palestine is to do so in relation to the world entire. Perhaps it may seem a luxury—in the brutally real context of bombardments and death, security and defense—to trace virtualities in texts, to consider soberly the alternative modes of existence that such virtualities may suggest. I would argue, however, that not to attempt to actualize the already real virtual lines traced by Zahran's text is, in fact, the luxury we cannot—indeed, never could—afford.

Notes

1. Yasmine Zahran was born in Ramallah and currently resides in Paris. She studied at Columbia University, the University of London, and the Sorbonne, where she received a doctoral degree in archaeology. Most of her books excavate lost or overlooked figures or moments in Middle Eastern and North African history. Most recently, she has published a study of the Ghassanids, the early Arab Christian dynasty, titled *Ghassan Resurrected*. Previous studies in English include *Zenobia between Reality and Legend*; *Philip the Arab*; and *Septimius Severus*. Zahran's first novel, *Al-Lahan al-Awal: Min Ayyam Filastin* [*The First Melody: From Palestinian Days*], and her third novel, *Batin al-Hawa: Min Ayyam Filastin* [*The Belly of the Wind: From Palestinian Days*], were written in Arabic and have not been translated into English. *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* is her second novel and the first written in English. To date, it has not been translated into Arabic. Rayya, the protagonist of *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*, also appears in Zahran's other two novels.

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2. In their introduction to the anthology *Theorizing Diaspora*, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur discuss the ambiguity inherent in the term "diaspora"—the negative connotations linked to its definition as the historical dislocation of communities, and the more positive connotations etymologically associated with dissemination (4). They suggest that it is this ambiguity that has allowed the term to "[emerge] as an internal critique of the binarisms (colonizer/colonized; white/black; West/East) that circulated and found currency within colonial discourse and that persist even within some spheres of postcolonial studies" (4). The ambiguity of *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* makes it similarly critical of binarisms (starting with character/place and fiction/reality) and their implicit hierarchies, and is one of the characteristics that mark Zahran's novel as a diasporic text (and not simply a text written by a member of the Palestinian diaspora about the diasporic experience).

3. Said's notion of "contrapuntal" criticism (which also extends to historiography and cultural production, among other things) derives from the counterpoint in Western classical music (*Culture* 51). In contrapuntal criticism, as in contrapuntal music, emphasis is never restricted to any single, privileged element or component. Instead, counterpoints (whether in music, literature, or criticism) can reveal how assumptions about purity, separation, and monolithic forms or identities—which often result in one-sided perspectives, exclusionary policies, and destructive actions—are precarious and generally untenable. Said concludes *Culture and Imperialism* by suggesting that "it is more rewarding—and more difficult—to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about 'us'" (336). As we shall see, Zahran's novel pushes readers to adopt a more contrapuntal perspective toward Palestine. Said's conception of the contrapuntal is discussed further in the third section of this essay.

4. For Deleuze, life is becoming and change rather than being and identity. Following Friedrich Nietzsche, Deleuze sees becoming (or life in general) as the eternal return or production of difference (*Nietzsche* 27–9, 68–72). Becoming, it should be noted, is not a linear or teleological process beginning with virtuality and ending with actualization (Parr 297). Every becoming-actual (or actualization) always continues to include unactualized, generally imperceptible virtual tendencies. Such virtualities have the ongoing capacity to prompt new actualizations, though this does not always happen.

5. For obvious reasons, neither Palestine nor Israel has mutually acknowledged final borders at present. By focusing here on a virtual Palestine, I am not suggesting that such borders are unnecessary or undesirable but simply acknowledging that Zahran's text does not exclude alternatives to the "solutions" most frequently rehearsed today.

6. While Jameson admits his hypothesis is "sweeping," this does not prevent him from proceeding toward equally sweeping conclusions ("Third-World" 69). The best-known critique of Jameson's essay is Aijaz Ahmad's "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory.'" Among other things, Ahmad points out that the term "third world" is "polemical" and not merely descriptive or even materially substantive, something Jameson's argument does not register (96). Ahmad argues that this enables Jameson to make problematic generalizations about "all third-world texts" and to come to equally problematic conclusions about such texts (106–7). I contend that a contrapuntal perspective, such as the one presented in Zahran's text, can unhide the implicitly polemical oppositions upon which Jameson's argument regarding allegory relies.

7. In Deleuze's sense, as noted above, virtual traces and effects (cultural, conceptual, social, political, etc.) remain unactualized or generally imperceptible but always retain the capacity to shift our sense of the present (or the past, or the future) in ways we cannot predict, with outcomes we may not expect.

8. As the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé similarly explains, "Around 1996, reality overtook the images the political leaders had created of the Oslo process. After that, the question was no longer whether Oslo had brought peace to the torn land of Israel and Palestine, but rather what price its people had paid for illusions sold to them by shortsighted politicians" (*History* 245).

9. It is telling that "Z" chooses to describe the two stages of Palestinian diaspora as a "captivity." This term establishes a parallel between the two stages of Palestinian diaspora (the *nakba* of 1948 and the *naksa* of 1967) and the two stages of Jewish diaspora (the Babylonian captivity of 586 BCE and the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE). Linking the Jewish and

Palestinian diasporas can help to foreground overlooked parallels and paradoxes in the relationship between these two peoples.

10. Non-refugee residents of the West Bank and Gaza are as captive as Palestinians outside the territories and as refugees in camps within and outside the territories. Surrounded by concrete walls, checkpoints, and illegal settlements, and under constant threat of Israeli attack and, more recently, factional fighting, the Palestinian territories remain, unhappily, places of severe confinement. Palestinian citizens of Israel—internally displaced, a second-class minority in the homeland—live a bitter form of captivity as well. As Helena Lindholm Schulz explains, while Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel may not exactly “live in the diaspora [...] their lives are defined by a diasporic condition” (22). For an analysis of identity issues pertaining to Palestinian citizens of Israel, see Smoocha.

11. Since *A Beggar at Damascus Gate* was written in English (and not translated from Arabic), this phonic echo of *raya* (banner) in *Rayya* is inaudible except to readers who happen to know Arabic.

12. Zahran uses the term “exile” to describe Rayya’s state as well as the state of all dispossessed Palestinians. The term “diaspora” does not appear in the novel. In Arabic, the word *manfa* means exile, expulsion, or banishment; *al-shatat*, meaning dispersion, scattering, or separation, is closer in sense to diaspora (Schulz 20). Schulz explains that “the term ‘diaspora’ might to many Palestinians indicate a potential acceptance of the Palestinian dispersal, making the term dubious” (20–1), which may explain why Zahran avoids using it. In *After the Last Sky*, Said declares that he does not like to call Palestinian *manfa* (exile) or *ghurba* (estrangement) “diaspora” because “there is only an apparent symmetry between our exile and theirs [the Jewish Diaspora]” (115). Said argues that since most exiled Palestinians remain concentrated in the Arab world, their “demographic ties to Palestine today are more substantial than Judaism’s in the period before 1948,” thus weakening the classification of Palestinian *manfa* as diaspora (115). This is not the place to discuss whether Palestinian displacement after the establishment of Israel in 1948 constitutes exile or diaspora. I would like to claim, however, that even though Zahran does not use the word “diaspora,” her form nonetheless expresses a diasporic condition or experience through its use of ambiguity, counterpoint, fragments, movement, and so on, as we shall see in the third section of this essay. For two studies, among many, that do describe Palestinian dispossession and displacement as diaspora, see Schulz and W. Khalidi.

13. Identification with the land of Palestine, and especially with its olive trees, is a recurrent trope in Palestinian literature, symbolizing, among other things, loss, exile, resistance, steadfastness (*sumud*), and an idealized future return (Boullata 160–2; Schulz 99–107). Rayya’s identification with the land, I argue, not only embodies the conventional longing for an ideal future return but is also an expression of a virtual present not widely perceived, though nonetheless as real and as important to Palestinian life as the more allegorical symbols mentioned.

14. In Deleuze and Guattari’s usage, “major” and “minor” do not indicate quantity, nor are they opposites (*Thousand* 105–6). Rather, major or majoritarian categories or modes of understanding and being are those that organize thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and actions in ways that perpetuate and facilitate the interests of the dominant order, whereas minor or minoritarian modalities disrupt, rupture, transform—in short, “deterritorialize”—the major (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 26).

15. In the second edition of the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, deterritorialization is defined as “the severance of social, political, and cultural practices from their native places and populations.” In the social sciences, deterritorialization is often understood to occur in conjunction with globalization, transnationalism, and a general weakening of the nation-state (Appadurai 19). In this context, deterritorialization is sometimes linked to diaspora, since forced migration, immigration, or exile produces traveling cultures and societies no longer organically linked to the home territory (Appadurai 37–8; Cohen 173–5). Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of deterritorialization is broader than the above. For them, deterritorialization is a process of destabilization, unhooking, subversion, change, or becoming that can apply to almost anything. Territoriality relates not just to nation-states but to anything fixed, enclosed, or restricted, including bodies, identities, languages, genres, concepts, traditions, and laws. Deterritorialization “inheres in [can be a virtual component of] a territory as its transformative vector” (Parr 67). The diasporic, “exilic”

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(Said, *Representations* 64), or "nomadic" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 380–5; Said, *After* 150) condition can deterritorialize—in Deleuze and Guattari's sense—fixed or habituated sensibilities, perceptions, feelings, ideas, beliefs, languages, cultures, and so on, because of the contrapuntal perspective forced displacement can produce.

16. In her comparative analysis of two of Zahran's novels, *Al-Lahan al-Awal* and *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*, Tahiyah 'Abd al-Nasir examines some of the techniques Zahran uses in the latter to transpose the spirit of Arabic into English. Zahran includes poems translated from Arabic into English; songs, tales, and traditions from Palestinian village life; transliterated Arabic words; features of Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic tradition and culture; references to Babylonian and Egyptian magic; and so on ('Abd al-Nasir 112–4). 'Abd al-Nasir does not use the terms "deterritorializing" or "minor" to discuss Zahran's techniques, though she does proclaim their anticolonial effects (114–5). However, from Deleuze and Guattari's perspective of a minor literature, these techniques can be understood to deterritorialize English, pushing it to perform in minor, non-standard ways, with politically subversive effects. Incidentally, apart from a short book review in English by Marilyn Booth, 'Abd al-Nasir's is the only article on Zahran catalogued in the MLA International Bibliography Database to date. For an analysis of texts by Palestinian writers who use Hebrew as examples of a minor literature, see Potok.

17. In Deleuze and Guattari's specific conceptualization of space, a *cramped space* is one that is highly "striated"—that is to say, a site divided, demarcated, appropriated, and codified according to highly organized and conventional social, economic, and political modes and histories (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 474–500). In contrast, "smooth space" is open and unbounded, conceived in terms of continuous flows, movements, and potentials rather than of fixed properties (478). In the world, striated space and smooth space are not always opposed, nor are they mutually excluding; in fact, they only ever exist in mixture (474–5). In the cramped, striated space of a minor literature, habituated social, political, and economic codes automatically traverse all characters, events, contexts, and plots, undermining interpretations determined to locate hidden meanings *behind* such figures. By presenting all such connections up front and in exaggerated abundance—to the point of absurdity—a minor literature exhausts conventional meanings and interpretations (always striated) and opens up the possibility of moving toward smooth space—that is, space open to new sensations, perceptions, and understandings. For a succinct explanation of smooth and striated space, see Parr (253–4, 257–9).

18. Despite the intensification of unbearable conditions in the Palestinian territories for various reasons—including but not limited to the construction of the wall; the ongoing establishment of illegal settlements; the incursions into and shelling of Gaza; the destruction of homes, agricultural land, and infrastructure; the increase in the number of checkpoints; the withholding of funds owed to the Palestinian Authority by Israel; and recent fighting between Hamas and Fatah—Palestinian cultural production, ranging from novels and memoirs to award-winning films, is currently thriving and capturing the international attention and acclaim it deserves.

19. For an elaboration of the distinction between dispersion and diaspora, see Tölölyan, "Contemporary Discourse."

20. According to Deleuze, becoming is a process with no pre-existent form to imitate or represent and no predetermined state or ultimate identity with which to end. As Deleuze explains,

To become is not to attain a form (identification, imitation, Mimesis) but to find the zone of proximity, indiscernibility, or indifferentiation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal, or a molecule—neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and non-preexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form. (*Essays* 1)

Writing, in particular, is a process of becoming that not only alerts us to the process of becoming in life but, more importantly, can sometimes trigger such processes. On the link between becoming, literature, and life see Deleuze, *Essays* (1–6).

21. Mr. Foster's voice—the novel's narrative voice—is constantly interrupted by and, thus, mixed in with Rayya's and Alex's voices (through their written words, which he quotes and upon which

his narrative relies). Alex's and Rayya's voices, in turn, are also interrupted—by each other's words (written or spoken) or by Mr. Foster's—and mixed together. The complex layering of these multiple voices is conveyed in part through Zahran's dizzying use of quotes within quotes within, at times, further quotes. (In order to avoid confusing the reader, I have not always included all of these marks in my quotations from the novel.) Ultimately, there is no guaranteeing the veracity of the words attributed to Rayya or to Alex, especially since Rayya uses her notebooks to mislead Alex, who she knows is secretly reading them for information. Mr. Foster understands all this and acknowledges that he "might be guilty of faulty judgment in not recognizing the dividing line that indicates where and when fiction takes over from reality" (Zahran, *Beggar* 25). The multiplicity of voices in Zahran's text demonstrates that such a line never really exists and that the kind of coherence conventionally expected of novels (and, perhaps, of nation-states) is not always possible.

22. Movement is implicit in diaspora, understood in part as a mass migration from the homeland to somewhere else, often, but not always, forced after some kind of collective trauma (Cohen ix, 23–5; Schulz 10–1). Diaspora is instigated by forced movement, and its members often cling to the belief or hope that the future will bring a movement of return back to the homeland. The diasporic or exilic condition does not necessarily signify *constant* movement for all—in fact, in the case of the majority of Palestinian refugees, among others, it is their distinct lack of movement, their captivity within an enclosure, that is its most prominent feature. Nonetheless, movement remains an important actual and metaphorical characteristic of diaspora, and Zahran's novel reflects this. On the significance of movement to the Palestinian diaspora in particular, see Schulz (86–7, 168–204). On the role of non-movement alongside mobility in diasporas, see Töslöyan, "Restoring."

23. It should be mentioned that Alex is more peripatetic than most, which affords him the potential to possess at least some of the insights of the exile. Like the exiled Rayya, he professes to have "double vision" (Zahran, *Beggar* 43). However, this special capacity he claims is never used to understand the history, experiences, or sense of loss of the diasporic Palestinians. Ultimately, Alex's loyalties to his own cause do not deviate, and his claim to double vision falls flat.

24. Schulz emphasizes that while this "unbounded," open identity of the exile must never be "romanticized," its more positive features—including "different and inventive conceptualisations of home"—should not be overlooked either (11, 183). Unlike Schulz and Said, Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (whom Schulz mentions) argue that a "strategic essentialism" (Gayatri Spivak's concept), rather than a claim to open or hybrid identities, is more urgent politically "when the group or culture is threatened with radical effacement" (Lavie and Swedenburg 12; Schulz 168). They state that "hybridity therefore does not appear to be a viable strategy in the struggle for Palestine—a case of an exilic identity demanding to return to its historic territory" (12). However, my argument, closer to Said's and Schulz's, suggests that unboundedness, openness, hybridity, flexibility, and so on are characteristics that the Palestinian diaspora (and those concerned or involved with it) cannot afford to set aside, even strategically. For a discussion of such conceptions of identity and home within the context of Palestinian diaspora, see Schulz (183–204).

25. Diasporic movement and instability have to do not only with space or territory (easy enough to comprehend) but also with time (Schulz 110). The loss of the homeland is inevitability tied up with the loss of a time before the catastrophe or trauma; it is also connected to the sense of a future time when the homeland will be regained (111). For the Palestinian, as for members of other diasporas, past and future are persistently experienced in the present through memory; oral and written histories; literature (above all, poetry), art, and film; nationalist discourse; food (olives and *zaatar*, or thyme, especially); traditional clothing (embroidery); the news; political negotiations; and so on.

26. "Stereoscopic vision" is Salman Rushdie's term for the double perspective of the Indian writer in England, the African American writer in the United States, or any writer who occupies the liminal position between inside and outside—the major and minor, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms (Rushdie 19). Both Rayya and Zahran qualify as writers with stereoscopic vision; and as someone both inside and outside the Arab world, Mr. Foster's is also fairly developed. Although Alex claims to have it, he in fact does not.

27. For example, the titles of the novel's second and third chapters—"The Two Faces of Love" and "The Hidden Face of the Moon" respectively—convey a fugal sense of doubleness. The epigraph to the third chapter is the following statement: "If you want to look for the truth, examine the lie" (63).

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The proliferation of these and other doubles throughout the text reinforces its contrapuntal effects.

28. Deleuze and Guattari connect the process of deterritorialization with the figure of the nomad because the traversals of the nomad have nothing to do with final destinations or arrivals but, rather, are endless relays between points (*Thousand* 380–1). The nomad or nomadism troubles the imperative of the state to regulate borders and delimit its national territory (385). As a nomadic form of writing, Zahran's text similarly troubles or deterritorializes delimited and limiting assumptions about Palestine and Palestinians.

29. The Arabic *fida'i* (pl. *fida'iyyun* or *fidayeen*) literally means "one who risks or sacrifices his or her life for a cause." In the context of *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*, the term refers specifically to the freedom fighters who initially emerged out of various Palestinian refugee camps in the 1950s. For a brief account of this emergence see Pappé (*History* 146–8); on the role of the mythology of the *fida'i* in a Palestinian identity of resistance see Schulz (118–28).

30. Processes of deterritorialization can produce "lines of flight" or escape out of "major" or rigid orders of perception, affection, or conception, according to Deleuze and Guattari. Lines of flight can be creative and productive because they can dislodge common-sense notions and push us in alternative, less habituated directions, toward unconsidered modes of thought and life (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 204–5, 422–3). At the same time, there is always the danger that a line of flight may end in destruction or death (if disconnections or escapes are too absolute) or in a reterritorialization into the dominant order (*Thousand* 510).

31. For an equally positive image of a future Palestine, see the collection of essays edited by Kamal Abdel-Malek and David C. Jacobson, drawn from a conference they co-directed at Brown University in April 1997, *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History, Literature, and the Arts*. Their comparative approach aims to demonstrate how unexpected, often ignored connections between two seemingly intractable sides not only exist but may enable mutual understanding and "recognition of their common humanity" (Introduction xxiii). See also Carey and Shainin.

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