

Aesthetics of Self-Representational Practices in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's Autobiographical Writings

Nedal Mousa Al-Mousa

Arab Open University / Jordan branch

Abstract

This paper examines the nature of distinct aesthetics of self-representational practices in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's two autobiographical works: *The First Well: A Bethlehem Boyhood, and Princesses' Street: Baghdad Memories*. The former, I would argue, can be read as 'a portrait of the artist as a young man'. While it mainly sets out to capture the historical atmosphere which played a major role in shaping Jabra's personality, *The First Well* also provides insights into the young boy who would later become an artist. This is well manifested in the remarkable sensibility of the child. Fantasy, throughout the narrative, colors and shapes his portrayal of characters and his perception of reality. This aesthetic feature of self-representation practice in *The First Well* develops into a more sophisticated tendency to blur the boundaries between poetry and truth (to borrow the title of Goethe's autobiography) in *Princesses' Street*. The cross-fertilization between fantasy and truth in this second volume of Jabra's autobiography enables him to present with great scrutiny his psychological motivations, and flights of imagination. This aesthetic quality of Jabra's style can be interpreted in terms of Leigh Gilmore's theory of 'authorizing complex'. Jabra's aesthetic strategy to weave the texture of his text from disparate discourses is very well reflected in the titles of sections of this volume of his autobiography, including 'Hamlet, Ophelia, and I', and 'The Lady of the Lakes'. Just as Jabra's autobiographical writings tend to blend fact and fiction, so a reverse movement is simultaneously at play in his fictional writings in which he draws heavily on his personal experiences in his portrayal of the fortunes of fictional characters. Interestingly, in an interview, Jabra makes it clear that autobiography as a theme or motif is scattered throughout his fictional works.

Keywords: aesthetics, disparate discourses, fictional autobiography, self-representation

Cite as: Al-Mousa, N. M. (2015). Aesthetics of Self-Representational Practices in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's Autobiographical Writings. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (1).

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol6no1.2>