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New York: Syracuse University Press. 336 p. 9 7808 1563 6380. \$35. 2019

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ces/1298>

DOI: 10.4000/ces.1298

ISSN: 2534-6695

Publisher

SEPC (Société d'études des pays du Commonwealth)

Electronic reference

Mejdulene B. Shomali, "Michelle Hartman. *Breaking Broken English: Black-Arab Literary Solidarities and the Politics of Language.*", *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* [Online], 42.1 | 2019, Online since 20 December 2019, connection on 24 September 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ces/1298> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ces.1298>

This text was automatically generated on 24 September 2021.

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- 1 While Arab American literary production began as soon as Arab immigrants arrived in the U.S., Arab American literary criticism has only recently begun to take shape as a distinct discursive field. Within the last two decades full monographs have been devoted to the topic, including Wail S. Hassan's *Immigrant Narratives* (2014) and Carol Fadda's *Contemporary Arab American Literature* (2014). Steven Salaita's *Modern Arab American Fiction: A Reader's Guide* (2011) is one of the earliest books of criticism devoted to Arab American Literature. In *Modern Arab American Fiction*, Salaita articulates some of the difficulties that prevent Arab American criticism from flourishing (4-5), for example, the lack of clarity about the category Arab American itself. At the same time, he urges critics to take up Arab American literature as fertile ground for discussions of race, identity, and nation in the U.S. (10). Michele Hartman's *Breaking Broken English* takes up Salaita's call and interrogates how Arab American literature is informed and shaped by Black literary production, with an emphasis on linguistic and aesthetic similarities. Hartman's work is preceded and grounded by one other text on Black and Arab literary conversations, Therí A. Pickens' *New Body Politics: Narrating Arab and Black Identity in the Contemporary United States* (2014).
- 2 *Breaking Broken English* establishes a history of Black-Arab solidarity in the U.S. through examination of Arab American literature. Hartman explicitly chooses to look toward positive and productive relationships between Black and Arab writers over racist or

troubling accounts, which she suggests have been explicated in other works (17). In *Breaking Broken English*, Hartman finds points of productive contact between Arab and Black literary positions in the rhetorical process of “breaking language.” Breaking language, a counter to “broken” language, is a means of radical disruption and reclamation of English by those that have often been othered through it. Hartman looks to “breaking language and creative soundscapes [to be] used as a framing device for the study of literature” (53). Her study focuses on close reading of language to help readers “think more about English, the multiple englishes that exist and can exist, and American writing more generally” (51). Hartman identifies Arab American poetry and fiction that share breaking properties with African American literary and spoken traditions. Some of these shared features that break language include: *taqasim* (musical improvisations performed within a composition), call and response traditions (a line that seeks a response, or that comments on one prior to it), uses of languages other than English, and more.

- 3 In chapter one, Hartman establishes the concept of breaking, the overarching conceptual apparatus of the book, through recourse to Black intellectual traditions, perhaps most indebtedly, via reference to Fred Moten’s *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (2011). Moten’s work, which reads Black literature that is perceived as grammatically insufficient as instead a site of lyrical surplus, inspires Hartman’s use of breaking, where “to break” invites capacity and potential rather than fracture or failure. She refines her articulation of the concept of breaking through close reading of Suheir Hammad’s 2008 *breaking poems*. Through Hammad, Hartman theorizes the break as a space through which Arab writers “embrace solidarity and shared political purpose” with Black writers.
- 4 Chapter two studies poems by Arab American writers that pay homage to Black Americans. Hartman’s analysis of the poems of D.H. Melhem, Saladin Ahmed, and Naomi Shihab Nye pays close attention to enjambment, line breaks, and white space as ways for writers to break English at the level of the line. With the exception of Ahmed, who is better known for his work in fantasy and science fiction, Hartman has chosen canonical poets, which lends credibility to her position that Black Arab literary solidarity is not an anomaly in the literature. Chapter two also begins by detailing the concept of soundscapes – the auditory rather than written shape of work – as a site for breaking.
- 5 Chapter three continues to analyze soundscapes in a sustained reading of Susan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin* (2010). Here Hartman delineates the author’s recuperation of “broken english” to “break” through typical, negative representations of Palestine. Abulhawa’s work, unlike that of some writers featured in this work, enjoys a certain cross-over, book club popularity, which Hartman identifies as educational (122). Hartman is most successful in this chapter in instances where her focus is close reading the language and sounds of the text. In the absence of attention to gendered and sexual dynamics in the work, it would have been useful, here and elsewhere, to have a clearer understanding of why and how Hartman uses the label “feminist.”
- 6 Chapter four studies Randa Jarrar’s use of Arabic vernacular and popular culture references as forms of “breaking.” Hartman discusses how Jarrar’s use of Arabic in her work parallels the literary disruptions enabled through Black writers’ manipulation of English and creation of other englishes. Here, Jarrar’s awareness of racializing tropes and her direct acknowledgement of appropriation as a potential pitfall in Black-Arab

relations helps Hartman argue more convincingly that Jarrar's work performs solidarity. In general, Hartman could have devoted more attention to the topic of appropriation in early chapters. Given the propensity of writers, even other minority writers, to appropriate Black culture, as well as the much debated line between appropriation and appreciation, the book is somewhat haunted by its threat, and thus, a more robust refutation or exploration of the topic would have been useful.

- 7 Chapter five offers a case study of translation as a breaking process, wherein Hartman details her translation of Radwa Ashour's autobiography. This chapter offers historical grounding for the project of Black-Arab literary solidarity and thinks about how breaking languages is part of developing a language of liberation. It is a fitting close to *Breaking Broken English* because it stresses one of Hartman's central theses: that Black-Arab literary solidarity is rich and complex, with a longer history than is usually attributed to it.

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