

## **Barbara Michalak-Pikulska**

### **Contemporary Poetry in Oman**

It is difficult to talk of the existence of cultural and literary life in Oman prior to Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id's taking power in 1970. The Sultan, being a totally modern ruler, displays enormous care in his treatment of culture and the preservation of national traditions, seeing here, in the best possible way, an opportunity for the stable development of the country and the smooth realization of socio-economic changes. Over 30 years of the Sultan's rule have not only resulted in an increase in the level of social life but also caused a magnificent development of education and culture.

An important moment in the development of the country was the founding of cultural-literary clubs, such as: the Literary Club (al-Muntada al-Adabi) in Muscat; the Cultural Club (al-Nadi al-Thaqafi) in Muscat, and the Cultural Centre (al-Markaz al-Thaqafi) in Salalah, in which lively cultural and literary activities have been carried from its beginning. The National Cultural Club in Muscat (al-Nadi al-Watani ath-Thaqafi) was founded by a group of educated Omanis in 1974. During the two years of activity the Club organised many cultural events and poetry evenings. It published a monthly bulletin entitled *al-Thaqafa al-jadida* (New Culture).

At present, under the patronage of the Cultural Club (al-Nadi al-Thaqafi) functions the Women Writers' Union

(Usrat al-Katibat), uniting all women writers. This is headed by Tahira bint 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Lawati.

The Literary Club (al-Muntada al-Adabi) was founded in 1985 in Muscat with the aim of creating an appropriate literary base that could promote and help the talents of Omani writers and poets. The Club possesses a sizeable library and a large theatre where poetry evenings and literary symposia, devoted to the creative work of Omani writers, are organised regularly. Also, it systematically organises conferences that are dedicated to particular Omani towns. Hence, in 1997 a conference entitled "Sohar over the Centuries" and another one, devoted to Dhofar, entitled "Between the Past and the Present" were held there. In 1998, the discussion focused on Nizwa and its academic and historical position.

One of the most important expressions of its activity is the organisation of an annual literary competition that covers poetry, short story writing, and literary criticism. All information on the Club's activities can be found in the bulletin *Al-Muntada al-Adabi: Fi'aliyat wa manashit* (The Literary Club: Events and Activities)<sup>1</sup>.

The Cultural Centre in Salalah (al-Markaz al-Thaqafi) is run under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. It plays an important role in directing the cultural and intellectual movement in the region of Dhofar, and organises cultural events, lectures and symposia. The Centre frequently received literary figures and scholars from Oman and other Arab countries.

As everywhere in the world, the press has played a very important role in the development of contemporary Omani literature. Its blossoming was due to the return of grant holders and educated Omanis from abroad at the beginning of the 1970s, as well as the development of academic and cultural centres within Oman. Among the titles worthy of note are the

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<sup>1</sup> Based on: *Fi rihab al-Muntada al-Adabi*, Muscat, 1989.

dailies: *al-Watan*, *'Uman* and *al-Shabiba*. New literary and cultural magazines initially appeared only sporadically as, for example, *al-Ghadir* and *al-Siraj*. Worthy of note is the fact that the first Omani daily paper, entitled *Sahifât al-najah*, was published in Zanzibar already in 1911.

The *al-Watan* daily was founded just six months after the taking of power by Sultan Qaboos, that is in February 1971. It was founded by Nasir al-Ta'i and the editor-in-chief was Sulayman al-Ta'i. At present, on the pages of this daily, beside the political and social news, various pieces of information concerning the cultural life of the country can be found. Three pages daily are devoted to cultural and literary materials. The works of talented writers and poets from both Oman and other Arab countries are published in this newspaper<sup>2</sup>. A year later (18th February 1972), the *'Uman* daily was founded to be the first newspaper printed in Muscat. In 1973 the poet Hilal bin Salim al-Siyabi began to submit his works to it, and in the mid-1980s Hamad bin Muhammad al-Rashidi became the paper's editor-in-chief. They drew the attention of readers especially to cultural problems and many eminent figures from Omani literary life have written for the title<sup>3</sup>.

In November 1975, the first cultural monthly *al-Siraj* started its activities. In the same year the first "divan" of poetry by Sa'id al-Saqlawi, entitled *Tarnimat al-amal (A Hymn of Hope)*, appeared in it. A year later, this potentially important monthly ceased to exist, when its founder – the poet Salim al-Ghilani – was called to perform the function of ambassador

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<sup>2</sup> Based on information provided by Khalid 'Abd al-Latif Sati – a cultural reporter for the *al-Watan* newspaper.

<sup>3</sup> Information taken from the article *Mudakhala hawla al-tajriba al-adabiyya fi al-sahafa al-'umaniyya (Literary Attempts in Omani Newspapers)*, anonymous, the *'Uman* newspaper, 28th February, 2001.

and left the country<sup>4</sup>. Yet, the journal reappeared in the years 1992-1996.

The cultural, sporting and social monthly *al-Ghadir* was founded in November 1977. Published by the Mudayrib Club (Nadi al-Mudayrib), it was widely available all over Oman. It contained a great number of cultural and social articles, and many writers and poets made their names by publishing short stories and poems there. Women also wrote for it. The journal was the organizer of the first poetry evening (1982) held in the Sultanate, with the participation of many eminent Omani poets. Amongst the social subjects that were widely discussed was the subject of the position of women in society. Religious subjects were also dealt with. The last issue was published in June 1984<sup>5</sup>.

Another newspaper of a sporting-cultural-artistic nature is *al-Shabiba* launched in the 1980s. The idea of starting such a newspaper came about in 1983. Initially, it came out once a week, on every Saturday until 27th December 1991 when it transformed into a daily and the publication was suspended for a while. On 2nd January 1993 there appeared the first edition of the new daily which consisted of eight pages. The newspaper began to devote one page a week to cultural matters, and subsequently introduced a regular cultural supplement which came out every Monday<sup>6</sup>.

There are two dailies published in English: the *Oman Daily Observer* and the *Oman Times*. The cultural and literary quarterly *Nizwa* appeared for the first time on 18th February 1994. The editor-in-chief is a prominent Omani poet and thinker, Sayf al-Rahbi. *Nizwa* is considered to be one of the

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<sup>4</sup> Based on an unpublished article by Shubbar al-Musawi entitled *Tatawwur al-haya al-ithaqafiyya fi 'Uman mundhu 'am 1970 (The Development of Omani Cultural Life after the year 1970)*.

<sup>5</sup> Based on information provided by 'Abd Allah al-Harhi.

<sup>6</sup> Based on information provided by 'Abd al-Latif al-Balushi – a cultural reporter for the *al-Shabiba* newspaper.

best journals in the Arab world. Many young Omanis write for it. Outstanding figures from Arab literary and cultural life are often invited to contribute. There is room for literary, cultural, philosophical and artistic themes, for dialogue, criticism, photographs as well as journalistic pieces about Oman. The reader can also find there the literary attempts of young Omanis accompanied by a commentary<sup>7</sup>.

There is also the weekly *al-'Aqida*, in which the poet Mubarak al-Amiri was responsible for editing the cultural supplement. The poet and literary critic Murshid bin Muhammad al-Khusaybi was the most important figure in enlivening the cultural life of the journal *al-Nahda*. *Al-Usra*, thanks to its editor-in-chief, Sadiq al-'Abdawani, devotes one page in every issue to short story writing. Special pages dedicated to poetry and prose are also to be found in the military journal *Jund 'Uman*.

The impressive development of the educational, cultural and media infrastructure in Oman over 30 years has been accompanied by an exuberant flowering of poetry. Something that has, after all, accompanied these people since the dawn of time. In fact an Omani saying has it that "behind every rock there lurks a poet" (*war'a kulli sakhra sha'ir*). These thirty years have seen, besides the very flowering of poetry as one of the areas of national culture, a great diversity in the styles and forms of poetic utterance.

The classical movement is represented in contemporary Omani poetry by 'Abd Allah al-Ta'i, 'Abd Allah al-Khalili, Abu Surur al-Jami'i, and Mahmud al-Khusaybi.

**'Abd Allah bin Muhammad bin Salih bin Amir at-Ta'i** is a poet and writer whose works have had a huge influence upon the shape of contemporary Omani literature. He was born in Muscat in 1927. He died in 1973. He started his education at the al-Sa'idiyya school. As one of the first to study abroad he went to Iraq. His autobiography, started on the

<sup>7</sup> Based on information provided by Talib al-Ma'mari.

23rd May 1949, is about his experiences and memories. The last note was rumoured to be written on 9th June 1971. Within 54 pages he described the initial stage of his family and professional life spent between Muscat and Pakistan. This starts from the period he worked as a teacher at the as-Sa'idiyya school in Muscat. The situation of the time influenced his decision to leave for Pakistan where he also worked as a teacher of Arabic. This part of his life was chronicled in the form of short stories. In his memories he describes his literary pursuits of this period, especially his novel writing. Bahrain and Kuwait were to constitute the next stages of his life. Within the subsequent 68 pages, which deal with this period, he wrote about family affairs and social relations, recalling his essays for press and radio, as well as his involvement in Literary Clubs. A part of this is written in the form of a diary. The latter stage of this autobiographical account of a pioneer of Omani literature is connected with the period of the Omani emirate. In this section, he does not write much about daily life but devotes most of his attention to his professional career when he was the minister of information. It is here that he describes his numerous journeys around Oman and the world.

In analysing 'Abd Allah al-Ta'i writings one can notice his constant creative and intellectual development. His books written in various literary genres were to appear in successive stages. He wrote poetry, short stories, novels, plays for the theatre, articles, critical literary works and memoirs. He started to compose poetry in 1947. The first of his poems was *Qalb muhattam (The Destroyed Heart)*. The last, entitled *Qasida lam tatum (The Unfinished Poem)* was written on 10th July 1973, eight days before his death. He constantly expanded his creative and critical horizons throughout entire his life. In total he wrote seventy eight poems collected in three divans *al-Fajr al-zahif (The Crawling Daybreak)*, *Wada'an ayyuha al-layl al-tawil (Farewell Long Night)*, *Hadi al-qafila (The Caravan's Blacksmith)*. One can see the characteristic revival

of the *qasida* within his poetry, both in relation to content and form.

'Abd Allah al-Ta'i is the author of two novels. The first, entitled *Mala'ikat al-Jabal al-Akhdar (The Angels of the Green Mountains)*, presents us with the author's philosophy and his relations to the matter of Arab nationality and aspirations for unity. Here, two currents can be seen at work: a national and a more general Arab one. This first novel was published in Beirut in 1963. The second novel *al-Shira' al-kabir (The Big Sail)* is a historical novel that shows the Omani struggle against Portuguese colonialism in the 16th century. It was written from 1969 to 1971, and was published posthumously in 1981 in Muscat. 'Abd Allah al-Ta'i is also the author of seven short stories: *al-Mughalghal (Penetrating)*, *Khiyanat (Betrayals)*, *Asaf (Unpleasantness)*, *Ikhtifa' imra'a (The Disappearance of the Woman)*, *Dawwar jami'at-Husayn (The Roundabout at the al-Husayn Mosque)*, *Ma'sat Subhiya (Subhiya's Tragedy)*, *'Abd al-Badi ('Abd al-Badi)*. The author himself chose the titles for the first four short stories, while the titles for the subsequent three were chosen by his sons. The dates of the first stories indicate that they were written in 1942 when he was studying in Baghdad. He is the first Omani to start writing short stories. The events described in the three remaining short stories indicate that they were written in the final period of the 1960s when he was in Kuwait.

'Abd Allah al-Ta'i is a pioneer in the field of play-writing. These were to be the first works of this type in modern Omani literature. His two plays are *Jabir 'atharat al-kiram (Saving the Dignitaries' Difficult Situation)* and *Bushra li-'Abd al-Muttalib (News for 'Abd al-Muttalib)*. This versatile and talented literary figure wrote a staggering 281 articles for the press on a range of subjects – literary, historical, social and religious. He started to write these articles during his period of study in Baghdad. The first was called *Fi al-'id (For the Holidays)* and was published on the 18th October

1940. For a long time he was a journalist which undoubtedly resulted in his abundant output. He wrote articles for 14 newspapers, working at the same time for four radio stations in the Gulf. All of his articles were published in the book *al-Adab al-mu'asir fi al-Khalij al-'Arabi (The Contemporary Literature of the Persian Gulf)*<sup>8</sup>.

In the introduction to his first divan *al-Fajr al-zahif (The Crawling Daybreak)* the author stated his position in relation to poetry in the following words: "I asked myself once whether one could add anything to this great tome. Whether one is able to create something better, or at least to equal the achievements of others. The answer was laughter. The examination of the works of eminent poets from all eras and the tutting with regards to delays in development was sufficient motivation to take up poetry and dive into the writing of prose."<sup>9</sup> The poetic muse was not to leave him for the rest of his life.

'Abd Allah al-Ta'i is equally an astute observer of literary life and a shrewd poetry critic. His remarks, comments and commentaries were published in the Sawt al-Bahrayn (The Voice of Bahrain) as well as having been published in book form, *Dirasat 'an al-khalij al-'arabi (Papers on the Persian Gulf)*, in Muscat in 1983. The poet is involved in, besides the presentation of the contemporary literature of the Persian Gulf, an analysis of history, politics, economics and society. The writer presents the poets of Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. His radio broadcasts for Radio Kuwait over the period 1960-1972 were often transmitted in special literary auditions. The invitation by the Department for Arab Studies and Research at the University of Cairo to deliver a paper entitled *al-Adab al-*

<sup>8</sup> Muhsin al-Kindi, *'Abd Allah al-Ta'i wa riyadat al-kitaba al-adabiyya al-'umaniyya al-haditha qira' tarikhyya lifununihi al-adabiyya* ('Abd Allah al-Ta'i as the leader of contemporary Omani literature a historical survey of his work), in Nizwa, Muscat, No. 9, January 1997, pp. 108-116.

<sup>9</sup> Preface to the first collection, entitled *al-Fajr al-zahif (The Crawling Daybreak)*.

*mu'asir fi al-Khalij al-'Arabi* (Contemporary Literature in the Persian Gulf) led to the compilation and publication of his works under this self same title in Cairo in 1974. He expressed his opinions on the subject of religion, poetry and upbringing in the book entitled *Mawaqif* (Opinions) published in Muscat in 1990. Both books *al-Adab al-mu'asir fi al-Khalij al-'Arabi* (Contemporary Literature in the Persian Gulf) and *Dirasat 'an al-Khalij al-'Arabi* (Papers on the Persian Gulf) constitute the first literary-critical works to contain valuable information on the subject of those who write in the Persian Gulf. This makes their author a prominent figure within the limited ranks of pioneer researchers of this region.

'Abd Allah bin 'Ali al-Khalili was born in 1922 in Samail and died on 30th July 2000. He came from a line whose roots went back far into Oman's past. A family from which many imams had derived – eminent Islamic theologians and tribal leaders. The home atmosphere additionally influenced his poetic talents. Thanks to his background he gained a good education. He had been interested in Arabic literature, religion, philosophy and history from his earliest years. He was able to recite by heart uncountable *qasidas*. He knew classical Arabic superbly and was able to use it in a flexible way. His literary work is unusually rich, as he produced chiefly lyrical works, though his range contains equally epic pieces.

For a large part of his life he created *qasidas* based on old Arabic models: poetry traditional to the core. He called for metre to abide by "words, despite the fact that they may rhyme and maintain their metre, do not necessarily have to be called poetry or their author a poet. Genuine poetry is that which adheres to the principles of *al-'arud* prosody"<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Ahmad Darwish, Introduction entitled *Al-Khalili wa tajruba al-shi'r al-hadith. Dirasa tahliliyya lidivan (Al-Khalili and the Attempt to Write Contemporary Poetry. An Analysis of a Divan of Poetry)*, in: *'Ala rikab al-jumhur. Min al-shi'r al-hadith (With the March of the People. Form Contemporary Poetry)*, Muscat, April 1988, p. 6.

The influence exerted by his social environment on his poetry was of much significance, including both his family and a circle of people associated with it on the one hand, and the surrounding natural environment: the beautiful and fertile Samail valley. His fascination with old Arabic poetry influenced the construction of his *qasidas*, the choice of phrases and vocabulary used in them. Although he was never under the direct influence of a particular poet and had undoubtedly his own characteristic style, he greatly valued the Omani poet Abu Musallam al-Bahlani (1860-1920) Only in the last stage of his life, at the age of 70 did he undertake to write modern poetry. Something he was criticized for by the poets of his generation, though he was praised by the young. 'Abd Allah al-Khalili was a poet who continued the magnitude of Omani poetry while preserving its identity and traditions.

He undertook numerous themes, both religious, social and historical in both his lyrical and epic works. Matters that touch the Arab world in general and those confined exclusively to modern-day Oman. It is worth remembering that his poem *al-Hadara (Civilization)* was awarded first prize in a competition organized by the Ministry of Information in 1976.

He dedicated the first of his poetical divans entitled *Min nafidhat al-hayat (From the Window of Life)* to the Arab nation; to brothers who stood up to a common enemy. In the 137-poem-long divan *Wahy al-'abqariyya (The Inspiration of Genius)* published for the first time in Muscat in 1979 and reprinted in 1990, he places works that praise the Prophet and wisdom while also talking about patriotism, historical events, and brotherhood. There is room here for love lyrics and philosophical considerations.

The collection *Wahy al-nahi (The Inspiration of Prohibitions)* published in Muscat in 1980 contains divans written according to alphabetical order and full of wisdom and moralizing sermons. Two works by the poet were published in

1988: *Bayna al-fiqh wa al-adab (Between Theology and Literature)* containing works devoted to theological and language problems maintained in the form of a discussion by the author with contemporary learned and literary figures, as well as '*Ala ruqab al-jumhur (With the March of the People)*'. This second work constitutes an important literary event. One that has implications for contemporary Omani literature and that of other countries of the Gulf. For, as has been already mentioned, al-Khalili courageously entered a new area of poetry called *al-shi'r al-qisasi* which is a certain form of poetic narrative (prose poem)<sup>11</sup>. He used here varied forms of metre and various rhymes, introduced to his works many elements of poetic drama taking his example from the achievements of Ahmad Shawqi – the famous Egyptian neo-classical "prince of poets".

The divan '*Ala ruqab al-jumhur (With the March of the People)*' contains four poetic narratives: *Kayfa a'mal (How I Work)*, *Saramat al-Faruq (Resolute Faruq)*<sup>12</sup>, *La tahtakimi (Don't Govern)* as well as *Laqit wa khuyala' (The Bastard and Conceit)*. All are linked in terms of content to Arab and Islamic heritage.

The last work to be published (Muscat, 1990) in the author's lifetime was *Bayna al-haqiqa wa al-khayal (Between Reality and Fiction)*, where al-Khalili included advice written in a poetic form. He touched upon pride, conceit, rapture, brotherhood, Sufism, bravery, goodness, morality, love, and nature.

'Abd Allah al-Khalili has left behind many manuscripts that are still awaiting publication<sup>13</sup>. They have briefly

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ahmad Darwish, introduction entitled *Al-Khaili wa tajruba al-shi'r al-hadiith... Al-Khalili and the Attempt to Write Contemporary Poetry...*, pp. 5-16.

<sup>12</sup> al-Faruq is the cognomen of the second orthodox Caliph of 'Umar who ruled 634-644.

<sup>13</sup> From a cultural supplement in the Uman newspaper of the 31st July 2000, *Wa rahala Anir al-Bayan (The Prince of Knowledge has Gone)*, p. 4.

been described in a special supplement entitled *Wa rahala Amir al-Bayan (The Prince of Knowledge Has Gone)* to the journal 'Uman (Oman) of the 31st July 2000, straight after the poet's death. They were also included in a book publication entitled *Amir al-Bayan. al-Shaykh 'Abd Allah al-Khalili fi dhikrah (The Prince of Knowledge. Recollections on 'Abd Allah al-Khalili)* published in Muscat in 2001 by Sa'id al-Nu'amani.

A work of note amongst those listed is *Wahdat al-sha'b (Unity of the Nation)*, a patriotic political *qasida*, which runs to a hundred lines. Here the author calls on the inhabitants of Oman and the Gulf to unite. The collection of folk poetry, entitled *Arj al-barda (The Beautiful Valley of Poetry)*, 'Abd Allah al-Khalili compiled shows the wide range of his interests. In another manuscript, entitled *al-Khayal al-wafir (An Exuberant Imagination)*, he correlated the literary heritage of his forefathers: the twelve poems of his great grandfather Sa'id bin Khalfan al-Khalili, the twelve *qasidas* of his grandfather, 'Abd Allah bin Sa'id, and the two poems of his grandfather's brother, Ahmad bin Sa'id. Another manuscript is entitled *Sijillat al-adab (The Registers of Literature)* and consists of three parts: the first has eight *maqamas* on sheik 'Abd Allah, the second curiosities and comic narrative such as *Al-Shaykh Ya'rub wa al-jimal (Sheik Yarub and the Camels)*, *Faqir lakinnahu 'abqari (Poor but Wise)*, *Al-fa's wa al-siyat (The Hoe and the Whip)*, and the third – fantastic poetic stories.

It is worth returning to some of the *maqamas* contained in this manuscript, which constitute in their own way moralizing treatises where the author preaches his view of contemporary reality. In the *Nizawiyya maqama (The Maqama from Nizwa)* 'Abd Allah al-Khalili compares the pitiful situation of the Arabs of the pre-Islamic period (*jahiliyya*) to the strength, resistance, and goodness of the first Muslims, calling his contemporaries to take an example from the authorities of Islam. *Maqama al-tasa'uliyya (A Reflecting Maqama)* ex-

presses the author's views on the subject of poetry, literature, youth and religion. He examines, among other things, the problem of polygamy, and encourages young people to exert themselves at work and to reject laziness. In the *al-Ja'laniyya maqama* (*Maqama of Jaalan*) he expresses his views on the subject of philosophy, government and the apperception of the rules of Islam and law. The *al-Sama'iliyya maqama* (*Maqama of Samail*) displays the author's views on women, and in particular the right to choose a husband. He also emphasizes the beauty of the Arabic language which in a sense constitutes a sequel to the *al-Lughawiyya maqama* (*The Language Maqama*) which deals with the values of flexibility within Arabic.

The last work in the manuscript is the poetic collection *Faris al-dad* (*The Champion of the Arabic Language*) which contains 178 *qasidas*, varied in form: counsels, sermons, lyrics, poetical stories, and also religious songs.

'Abd Allah al-Khalili in his work undertook the subject of religion and the eternal struggle between good and evil, called for solidarity between peoples, and expressed his own reflections upon this subject. The perfection in language found in his works is both due to the beauty of the pieces and to their exquisite composition. His is not easy poetry. The reader needs to sharpen his wits in order to appreciate fully the poet's message. Something Sa'id bin Sulayman al-'Isa'i captured perfectly by saying "His poetry is like a garden of song shaded by a parasol of flowers and the song of birds"<sup>14</sup>. His work is in its own way the transfer of the valuable national heritage to younger generations which is why it has been collected and elaborated upon by the sons of the "prince of knowledge".

**Abu Surur Hamid bin 'Abd Allah bin Hamid al-Jami'i** was born in Samail. When asked his age he replied that

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<sup>14</sup> Sa'id bin Sulayman al-'Isa'i, *Al-Shaykh 'Abd Allah al-Khalili* (Sheikh 'Abd Allah al-Khalili) In: *Amir al-Bayan. Al-Shaykh 'Abd Allah al-Khalili fi dhikrah* (*The Prince of Knowledge. Recollections about 'Abd Allah Al-Khalili*) edited by Sa'id An-Nu'amani, op. cit., p. 25.

“they had told him that he was sixty”. He grew up in Samail and studied at a Koran school. His teachers were eminent representatives of this region. A region rich in literary talent. He started writing poetry when he was 15, in 1967 he became a teacher of Islamic law and Arabic grammar in Mudayrib, later he was to return to Samail. Since 1973 he has worked as a judge in the Ministry of Justice. He has travelled widely in Arab countries either independently or as a member of an official state delegation. His literary output is very impressive. It is, however, difficult to ascertain a chronology for individual pieces as a result of a lack of dating. According to the list contained in *Divan Abi Surur (A selection of Abu Surur's Verse)* as well as an interview I conducted with him I have been able to establish that he is the author of ten works or which several were published in multiple volumes. They are: the one-volume work *Baqat al-adab (Literary Bouquets)* 1975, the one-volume *Ila aykat al-multaqa (The Nest of Meeting)*, 1982, *Divan Abi Surur (A Selection of Abu Surur's Verse)*, Samail 1998, in four volumes of which volume I is devoted to nationalistic-patriotic (*al-wataniyyat*) and historical subject matter along with works written to commemorate various national occasions, volume II contains poems connected with the subject matter of the Arab world (the so-called *al-qawmiyyat*) and brotherhood in the Arab world (*al-ikhwaniyyat*). Nor are love poems (as e.g. *al-ghazaliyyat*) absent from his works, which also include opinions and pieces of wisdom called *ara'*. As has been mentioned, the third volume is devoted to brotherhood (*al-ikhwaniyyat*), while the fourth contains works social in subject matter (*al-ijtima'iiyyat*). The poet also published the collection *Riyad fi al-islam (The Gardens of Islam)*, Muscat, 2000) comprised of four poems. The first deals with the prophet's escape from Mecca to Medina, the second – with the beginnings of Islam and the rule of the four orthodox caliphs, the third deals with the meeting with God, and the fourth with the regulations and principles of pil-

grimage. Besides this, Abu Surur is the author of a one-volume work on Islamic law *Bughyat al-tullab (The Students' Aim)*, 1997, a one-volume grammar *Nahwiyat Abi Surur (Abu Surur's Grammar)*, and a two-volume work *Ibhaj al-sudur. Sharh nahwiya Abi Surur (The Raising Hearts. An Explanation of Abu Surur's Grammar)*. This is a poem that consists of 1447 lines of commentary written in rhyme. The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage published a four-volume work entitled *al-Fiqh fi itar al-adab (Islamic Law in the Frameworks of Literature)*. Each poem, written in a single rhyme, was devoted to one theme. At present he is working upon the book *al-Wahda al-islamiyya (Islamic Unity)*.

Abu Surur's works are characterized by a masterly handling of poetic tools. He pays enormous attention to the form and construction of a poem, to its metre and rhyme. His poetry is connected to previous generations for the subject matter is linked to national and religious matters.

A common feature linking the poets of the new school is their partial or complete breakaway from the form of the traditional Arabic mono-rhythmical and mono-rhyming *qasida*, the introduction of blank verse based upon a sense of harmony and musical rhythm, and in relation to subject matter the move towards personal experience and feelings extolled in personal lyrics<sup>15</sup>. "The *al-tafila* poem is, in many ways, a new form which maintains some traditional structures and it can be identified most clearly in comparison with the older traditional form of *al-qasida al-'amudiyya*, which originated some time towards the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. Bielawski, K. Skarzyńska-Bocheńska, J. Jasińska, *Nowa i współczesna literatura arabska 19 i 20 w. (New and Contemporary Arabic Literature of the 19th and 20th Centuries)* vol. 1, Warszawa 1978, pp. 335-336.

<sup>16</sup> Sharifa al-Yahya'i, an unpublished doctoral thesis *The Early Beginnings of al-qasida al-hurra free verse in the Gulf States 1970s-1980s*, The University of Leeds, December 2000, p. 14.

Many poets started to create *shi'r al-taf'ila* based on a single foot (*al-taf'ila*) instead of the introduction of the entire metre. For this reason, the creation of classical poetry (*al-qasida al-'amudiyya*), based on metre, was rejected and its place taken by poems based on rhythm (*iqa'*) and feet (*al-taf'ila*) as well as on internal sounds which do not require repetition in the rhymes"<sup>17</sup>. *Al-taf'ila* poetry has been written in Oman by Sa'id al-Saqlawi, Hilal al-'Amiri, Salih al-Fahdi, Dhiyab al-'Amiri, 'Abd Allah al-Harhi, and Hasan Matrushi.

**Sa'id bin Muhammad bin Salim al-Saqlawi** was born on 17th October 1956 in Sur, studied at the al-Azhar University in Egypt where he gained his BSc in Civil Engineering, and subsequently was to continue his master's degree in Civil Design in Liverpool, UK. He has played a significant role in the creation of literary and cultural life in Oman. Since 1983 he has actively participated in the creation and development of the Cultural Club (an-Nadi ath-Thaqafi) in Muscat. In 1991-92 he was the editor in chief of the *as-Siraj*, cultural and literary monthly. Sa'id bin Muhammad bin Salim al-Saqlawi cooperates with the Omani media in creating cultural programmes and has published three collections of poetry. The first, entitled *Tarnimat al-amal (The Hymn of Hope)*, was published in 1975 when the poet was a first-year student. It contains works focused on questions of nationality and love, and constitutes the first attempt at writing poetry in *al-taf'ila*<sup>18</sup>. The second collection, published in 1985, is *Anti li qadar (You are my fate)*. The author claims that it contains poems on the subject of love, describing woman as a dream, as a symbol, as the motherland, as freedom. There is no talk here of woman

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem, p. 243.

<sup>18</sup> Poetry that originated at the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s is in many aspects a new poetical form, which despite maintaining many traditional structures can be easily differentiated from the older traditional forms *qasida al-'amudiyya*; from an unpublished PhD by Sharifa Khalfan Nasir al-Yahya'i, *The Early Beginnings of qasida al-hurra free verse in the Gulf States: 1970s-1980s*, The University of Leeds, December 2000.

and her love for man, this is spiritual love for the motherland<sup>19</sup>. Abu Himam 'Abd al-Latif 'Abd al-Halim wrote in the article entitled *Fi al-shi'r al-'umani al-mu'asir (On Contemporary Omani Poetry)* that in the divan *Anti li qadar (You are my fate)* as-Saqlawi shows himself as a poet who loves a woman, and who knows her mysteries. He ponders why men love women and why they are with them. He adds that studying in Cairo made it possible for as-Saqlawi to attend the literary clubs there and to become acquainted with the greatest works of literature. The author himself advocates the traditional values of Arab poetry. He is able to reconcile superbly poetic prose with free poetry (*al-taf'ila*). He possesses his own independent style and undertakes in his poetry contemporary themes"<sup>20</sup>. The third collection was published in 1999 under the title *Ajnihat al-nahar (The Wings of Day)*.

In 1995, a collection of poetry by Sa'id al-Saqlawi appeared in English under the title *An Awakening of the Moon. A Selection of Poems* translated by Abdullah al-Shahham and V. McDonald. This collection encompasses poems that deal with the question of the crisis of civilization taking place in the Arab world.

Sa'id's al-Saqlawi's poetry gives an image of a man with experience of the mystery of existence and within a moment sentenced to solitude. He iterates in his poems the need and necessity for the incessant pursuit of freedom.

Carlos Aganzo has described Sa'id al-Saqlawi in the following way: "Man is central to Sa'id al-Saqlawi poetry. Modern man surrounded by very old landscapes. A man who contemplates nature and the history of his country and who lives the passion of love, solitude or dreams. In his poems, Oman experiences that duality between the recovery of the

<sup>19</sup> Based on an interview by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Sa'id as-Saqlawi in Muscat, 22nd February 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Abu Himam 'Abd al-Latif 'Abd al-Halim, *Fi ash-shi'r al-'umani...*, p. 100.

past and the urgency of the present, which as the skein of the 20th century unravels, is almost already the future."<sup>21</sup>

**Hilal bin Muhammad bin Hilal al-'Amiri** was born on 1st October 1953 in Sama'il. He obtained a degree in management and economics from Denver University (USA), together with a diploma in planning from Tunisia. He also studied television management at Manchester University (UK) and university management at Duke University (USA). He has held many important and key positions including that of the director of Omani television, vice rector of the Sultan Qaboos University, and Director General for Culture. Currently, he works as Director General in charge of socio-cultural activities for al-Hay'a al-'Ammā li-Anshitat al-Shabab al-Thaqafiya wa al-Riyadiyya (The General Organ for Youth Cultural and Sporting Events) and is a member of many cultural and literary organizations.

He has published the following collections of poetry: *Hawdaj al-ghurba (The saddling of Strangeness)* 1983, *Qatra fi zaman al-'atah (A Drop at a Time of Thirst)* 1987, *al-Kitaba 'ala jidar al-samt (Writing on the Wall of Silence)* 1989, *Istiraha fi zaman al-qalaq (A Break in the Time of Unrest)* 1991, *Riyah lil-musafir ba'd al-qasida (The Winds of a Traveller in the Poem)* 1993, *Al-alaq al-wafid (Approaching Glory)* 1995, *Lil-shams asbabuha likay taghrub (The Sun has its Reasons to Set)* 1997, *Alif, ba' kas lilhubb damm lil-'adhra'* (A, B of Goblets of Love, the Blood of a Virgin), without a date of publication. He writes and publishes in local newspapers and magazines in Oman and other Arab countries.

**Dhiyab bin Sakhr al-'Amiri** was born on 25th January 1947 in Matrah. In 1962 he studied at the Teacher Training Institute in Yemen. Following his return he worked as a teacher at the al-Sa'idiyya school in Muscat. He worked for Omani television and radio from 1970 to 1992. He has pro-

<sup>21</sup> C. Aganzo, *A Land of Navigators and Poets*, YA, 14th April 1996.

duced volumes of poetry as well as volumes of essays and artistic prose. His first collection, published in Muscat in 1981, was entitled *Qasa'id min 'uz-zaman ba'id* (*Poems from Distant Times*) and touched upon the subject of love. The second one, entitled *Marfa' al-hubb* (*The Port of Love*) was published in 1989 in Muscat. Besides continuing the theme of love, Dhiyab bin Sakhr al-'Amiri wrote about brotherhood examining also social subjects, writing his poems in both a classical and free verse style, which possibly is more in keeping with the contemporary themes of the works. He wrote *Street of Sorrow – an elegy for Princess Diana* an elegy in poetic prose for the deceased Princess Diana. The book publication of the work contains translations of the poem into 24 languages including French, Spanish, Italian, German, Polish, Turkish, and Chinese.

To commemorate the poet's 50th birthday in 1997 a book entitled *Wamadat min durub al-ayyam* (*Glimmers from the Roads of Day*) was issued. Written in prose, it contains his articles and essays that had earlier been printed in Arab press in Oman and London.

Dhiyab bin Sakhr al-'Amiri also writes patriotic and national poetry, as e.g. *Ila ghaziya al-umma* (*To the Tribe of the Nation*) addressed to the Arab world and calling for unity. The poem *Wadi Darbat* (*Darbat Valley*) published by the Emirate magazine as-Sada describes the beauty and greenery of the Darbat valley. In the poem entitled *Nahwa bidayat al-alfiyya* (*At the Turn of the New Millennium*) he calls upon Arab countries to avoid arguments and to unite<sup>22</sup>.

His work is noted for its spontaneity and rich association that are colourful trips into the land of the imagination. The poet moves freely within the magnitude of poetic forms and structures:

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<sup>22</sup> Based on an interview by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Dhiyab bin Sakhr al-'Amiri in Muscat 15th March 2001.

*qasida* 'amudiya – classically rhymed, free verse (*al-tafila*), and prose.

'Abd Allah al-Harhi was born in 1959 in Mudayrib. He studied in the Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman. His legal studies took him to Cairo. At present he is writing an MA thesis on law at the Arab Institute for Study and Research in Cairo. He was a member of the editorial board for the *al-Ghadir*, a magazine where he published both his articles and poems. The dominant themes in his poetry are social and patriotic questions. In 1990, he published a book, entitled *Sidq al-masha'ir fi risalat al-shi'r (The Sincerity of Feelings in the Poet's Message)* with the poems of the most eminent of Omani poets and ones written outside the sultanate but devoted to Oman and the most important events from its recent history. In 1993, he wrote seven poems (*qasida*) and was awarded a prize for his poetry at the poetry festival in Nizwa. In 2000 he took part in the Festival of Omani Poetry. In 2001 a collection of poetry he edited, entitled *Muhammad al-Durra. Mukhtarat al-shi'riyya (Muhammad ad-Durra. A Selection of Poetry)*, was published in Muscat. It was a collection of verse selected from works by poets from Oman, countries of the Gulf, and other Arab countries, and devoted to the tragic death of Muhammad al-Durra, a Palestinian child.

Without doubt the most represented and dominant poetic movement within contemporary Omani poetry is that of poetic prose (*qasidat al-nathr*). As has already been mentioned earlier, this is characterized by an absence of feet and rhythms, which are replaced by a connection of words and cohesion in the construction of images.

The poets of this movement discussed in this work are 'Isa at-Ta'i, Sayf ar-Rahbi, Zahir al-Ghafiri, Muhammad al-Harhi, Talib al-Ma'mari, Nasir al-'Alawi, 'Ali Hardan, Isma'il as-Salimi, 'Abd Allah al-Balushi, 'Ali al-Makhmari, and 'Amir al-Rahbi.

'Isa al-Ta'i who adopted the literary pen-name Sama' 'Isa is one of the foremost contemporary Omani poets. He was

born in 1953 in Muscat, in 1975 he graduated from the Trade Faculty of the 'Ayn Shams University in Cairo. Following his return to Oman he worked as a teacher and administrator in the department of education: a position he retained until his retirement in 1999. He is an eminent poet, publicist and dramatist who made his first attempts at poetry in the early 1970s when he was still a student. As Sama' 'Isa himself admits, he started to write under the influence of modern Arabic poetry he read. Here, he recalls the names of the most eminent representatives of the genre: Nazik al-Mala'ika, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, Sa'di Yusuf, Qasim Haddad, and Salah 'Abd al-Sabur. He rejected the poetic past being of the view that contemporary poets should not be hampered by the hold of tradition but should move with progress in order to grasp better the features of this new world.

As the creator and propagator of a new poetic form for Omani literature – poetry in prose – he is conscious of the innovative nature of his poetry both in relation to form as content: “When man decides to write, he should be open to the new reality around as well as the subject about which he wants to write. One cannot be an innovator in poetry while preserving a traditional way of thinking. Therefore, when I write about an emancipated woman I have to write in a modern way in my expressions, visions and views.”<sup>23</sup>

Sama' 'Isa is the author of the following collections of poetry: *Ma' li-jasad al-khurafa (Water for the Forgotten Short Story)* 1985, *Nadhir bi-faji'a ma (Warning in the Face of Misfortune)* 1987, *Manaha 'ala arwah 'ayidat al-farfara (Lament for Souls)* 1990, *La shay' yuqif al-karitha (Nothing Will Stop the Tragedy)* 1991, *Manfa sulalat al-layl (The Exile of the Dynasty of Night)* 1996, *Dam al-'ashiq (The Lover's Blood)* 1999, together with the poetic drama *Hiwariyyat maskan al-mawt (Dialogues of the Place of Death)* 1982.

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<sup>23</sup> Based on an interview by Barbara Michaiak-Pikulska with Sama' 'Isa on 26th March 2001.

He considers his work to be free of rigid rules of form and to be rich in content. He looks for the subject matter for his work everywhere and in everything. Of importance, however, is the fact that everything in his work appears in a flux, not constituting at the end what it appeared to be at the beginning. The surrealist elements that appear in his works are the subsequent factor that differentiates his poetry. "There are no certain, constant, rigid forms or things in life. The role of the poet is to use these forms and figures in a skilful way. The tree is life. It could be a woman, or one's country, or friend. The rose could smile, could cry, it could also wilt or talk."<sup>24</sup> The reader, in being aware of the enormous freedom in the perception of poetry, enters into a world of limitless interpretational possibilities.

Sama' 'Isa is called by contemporary Omani poets 'the spiritual father' who was the first to present a new poetical form in Oman's poetry in prose (*qasidat al-nathr*). The nickname is an expression of the deeply rooted recognition for his work, particularly as he himself is an exceptionally modest man who "works quietly, as if he did not want to be identified by anyone, or written about by anyone besides his circle of close acquaintances"<sup>25</sup>.

**Sayf al-Rahbi** was born in 1956 in Surur and became a citizen of the world. He studied Arab literature and journalism in Cairo. He travelled extensively around the world (Damascus, Algiers, Beirut, Sofia, London, Paris, and the Hague) working for various literary journals. At present he is the editor-in-chief of the leading Omani cultural journal *Nizwa*, and his poetry has been translated into many languages including: English, Polish, Dutch, Turkish and German. He has been considered a master of his generation.

The poet can take pride in his huge literary output. His first serious poetic attempt, which was at the same time an at-

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<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> S. Khalfan al-Yahya'i, *The Early Beginnings...*, p. 48.

tempt to free himself from metre and rhyme, was the poem entitled *Nawrasat al-junun (The Seagull of Madness)* published in 1980 in Damascus. A year later, also in Damascus, he published the book entitled *al-Jabal al-akhdar (The Green Mountain)* comprised of short stories and poetry. Here, he undertook the subjects of human life, man's dreams, his existence and defeats, describing the history of humanity and looking into the future. Subsequent collections are: *Ajras al-qati'a (The Bells of Parting)*, Paris 1984, *Ra's al-musafir (The Traveller's Head)*, Casablanca 1986, *Mudya wahida la takfi li-dhabh 'usfur (One Knife is not Enough to Kill a Sparrow)*, Oman 1988, *Rajul min al-Rub' al-Khali (The Man from the al-Rub' al-Khali Desert)* Beirut 1994. In this divan, Sayf raises the subject of the desert. Here the desert symbolizes the human being and his life. In 1993, he published in Beirut the divan *Jibal (Mountains)* where he continues the subject of Omani nature. Mountains constitute the border between the visual and the non-visual world, symbolizing a deeper truth about man.

In Sayf al-Rahbi's poetry history and tradition are entirely linked with the present, weaving together mutually regardless of circumstances, place or time. This is criticism directed against the order ruling the contemporary world and through this against the historical process in its entirety; against tyranny and injustice, against evil and human venality, against crimes and wars which bring in their wake only blood letting, the rivers of which flow through almost every line written by Sayf. His poetry has at times a very personal character; the lyrical subject talks then in the first person singular. At other times the poet hiding behind an almost invisible mask hurls anonymous accusations, which we can compare to the unstoppable eruption of a volcano gushing forth floods of molten lava of his burning, heated words.

**Muhammad al-Harhi** was born in 1962 in Mudayrib. He studied geology and marine studies at the University in Qatar. He leads a risky lifestyle searching for adventures from which he gains inspiration for his poetry. On the basis of these experiences,

he has written a book about his journeys to Vietnam, the USA, Europe and Zanzibar. Initially, he wrote classical poetry (*'amudiya*). When he became better acquainted with the work of the leading figures of contemporary Arab poetry such as: Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, Mahmud Darwish, and Nizar Qabbani he started to write free verse (*al-qasida al-hurra*). The first collection was published in Casablanca in 1992 and is called *'Uyun tawal al-nahar (Eyes through the Whole Day)*. The second one, entitled *Kull layla wa duhaha (Every Night and its Dawn)*, was published in Cologne (Germany) in 1994. The third collection *Ab'ad min Zanjibar (Further than Zanzibar)* – in Cairo in 1997.

The poet does not concentrate upon a concrete subject in his work. His interests are numerous. As a consequence, each of his poems can be thematically closer or more distant from the rest. They are dominated by an atmosphere full of dynamism, something close to the troubled soul of the author<sup>26</sup>. Muhammad al-Harhi describes the people he has met on his travels around the world. There is no simple adjectival drafting of the character images within these works; here we behold an attempt at a deeper penetration into the unknown depths of thought and feeling. His poetry is often by nature a report on the events which he has seen or experienced in his travels. Muhammad al-Harhi is interested in history and often his poetry displays the happenings and facts of Oman's rich history.

Muhammad al-Harhi's poetry distinguishes itself by the variety of the subjects examined and the care for detail in the work. At times his poems bear the stamp of classicism although they are characterized by greater freedom in the application of metre. The poet has huge creative potential in the use of various forms of poetry. With his works, al-Harhi postulates the freedom of imagination, treating them like a confession from the depths of the soul. They are an attempt to reflect the mechanism of man's

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<sup>26</sup> Based on an interview by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Muhammad al-Harhi, 24th February 2001.

thoughts which jump from one vision to another. He often tries to show his own state of spirit, his own anxieties and passions.

**Talib Hilal al-Ma'mari** was born in 1962 in Hait, and studied in Oman and the United Arab Emirates. He finished studying Journalism at the School of Journalism in Morocco. In 1987, he started to work on the paper 'Uman where he headed the cultural supplement. Since 1994 he has worked for the leading cultural and literary quarterly *Nizwa* as edition coordinator. In 1996 he published his first collection of poetry entitled *Man ya'man al-yabisa (Who Can Feel Safe Ashore)*. This collection is also his first experience in the writing of poetry in prose. He talks in his works about his life, experiences, travels, life abroad in Morocco, travels around Arab countries and the whole world<sup>27</sup>.

Reading this collection, one notices the poet's fascination with poetic language. The poet's personal experience is not a repetition of daily monotony but a fresh creation of a new vision. The word *yawm* (day) often returns in most of his poems. This frequent use results in the creation of a collective poem. The sanction of life in his poems connects with praise of contemporariness in which the new cultural processes and the creation of new towns crystallizes. This understanding of civilizing and cultural processes is essential for the formulation of appropriate relations towards oneself and one's fellow men.

The beginnings of modern literary activity among women in Oman can be traced back to the 1980s. That is, within the period of the great development of literary culture. The nineties are a time of eruption in literary activity both in the field of poetry and prose.

The names of many poets, including Sa'ida bint Khatir al-Farisi, Turkiyya al-Busa'idi, Hashimiyya al-Musawi, Nura al-Badi, Samira al-Kharusi, Nisrin al-Busa'idi and Badriyya al-Wahaybi have become well known. Their works seem to be un-

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<sup>27</sup> Based on an interview by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Talib al-Ma'mari, 20th March 2001.

derstood by readers both from the East and from the West, as their leading universal themes of love or patriotism are an inspiration for most cultures. Their poetry is dominated by modern compositions in terms of form as well as content, however some of the poets attempt to be faithful to the Arabic poetic tradition (Sa'ida bint Khatir al-Farisi, Hashimiyya al-Musawi).

**Sa'ida bint Khatir al-Farisi**, born in 1956, deserves to be particularly singled out amongst women poets. She graduated in Arabic at the University of Kuwait, gaining a diploma in Arabic and teaching. At present, she is working on her PhD on women's poetry in the Persian Gulf. She travels extensively in Arab countries.

Sa'ida bint Khatir writes extensively and publishes widely in newspapers and journals at the same time actively participating in cultural festivals and symposia. She often represents Oman at international events. This is how she herself comments upon her intellectual development: "We Omanis lived for a long time abroad. We started to return home only when Sultan Qaboos ascended to power. Earlier, the difficult conditions of life, together with the absence of educational possibilities, forced our family to leave for Kuwait. When we left under the previous regime we were unable to return as the law of the time forbade women and girls to leave the country. When Sultan Qaboos opened the borders for us we returned. The first works I started to write were panegyrics devoted to the beloved homeland. We have all helped to build it. I became the editor-in-chief of the women's journal *'Umaniyya* [Omani Woman], vice dean for student affairs and the chairwoman of the cultural commission in an-Nadi al-Thaqafi. I have organised six cultural festivals. Besides children's poetry, which I love, I write national anthems, articles about the folklore of the regions of Salalah, Nizwa, Sur and Muscat"<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Based on an interview by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Sa'ida bint Khatir on 13th March 2001.

She has published two volumes of poetry: the first in 1986 in Egypt was entitled *Maddun fi bahri al-a'maq (The Tide in the Heart of the Sea)*, the second, *Ughniyatun lil-tufulati wa al-khudra (Songs for Childhood and Greenery)* was published in 1988 in Muscat. The latter contains verse for children. It is divided into three parts to correlate with the age of the recipients. Part one for children aged 6 to 8, part two – 9 to 12, and part three – 13 to 16. The poems vary depending on the age group addressed. Her first volume of poetry, devoted to national and Arab subject matter, deals with a range of social problems and matters of custom.

The motif of love runs through the whole of Sa'ida bint Khatir's poetry – not only passionate love, but also the powerful love felt for the fatherland.

In her poetry, Sa'ida bint Khatir attempts to address the widest possible circle of readers. She emphasizes the strong link between poetry and life. She considers that thanks to poetry the sense in human matters can be returned and that harmonious order can be restored to the world. It seems that the poet's character and creativity is well defined by the words drawn from the poem *Hadith imra'a (The Woman's Conversation)*: "I feed on two opposites: the water of ice and fire"<sup>29</sup>. Here is hidden the whole truth about Sa'ida bint Khatir al-Farisi as a poet and a person. These two opposites clashing within her, two elements committed to paper in order to be given the shape of poetry; full of passion, hot and indestructible as fire; and delicate, soothing, quietly murmuring and cold as water.

**Turkiya al-Busa'idi** was born on 30th December 1964 in Muscat. She started studying in Muscat and progressed to the Law Faculty of Beirut University. Unfortunately she had to stop studying in the third year for health-related reasons. Initially, she published her work in the journals al-'Aqida and al-Watan. She

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<sup>29</sup> Sa'ida bint Khatir, *Hadith imra'a (The Woman's Conversation)*, in: *Maddun fi bahri al-a'maq*, Egypt 1986, p. 87.

described there former times as well as the positive changes introduced by Sultan Qaboos, including those connected with science and culture. For five years she had her own column in the *al-'Umaniyya* entitled '*Itr imra'a* (*A Woman's Perfumes*). *Mara'ya min al-waqi'* (*Reflections of Reality*) is her subsequent, regular spot in the '*Uman* daily. In total she has published over three hundred articles on socio-cultural subjects. Her poems are sometimes published in the *al-Watan* and *al-Zaman* newspapers. The poet takes part in numerous poetry evenings throughout the Sultanate. She also organized a poetry evening to support the Palestinian uprising – Intifadat al-Aqsa at the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, in 2000, and collected money for the victims. She represented the Sultanate at the Cultural Forum devoted to women and their role in literature which was held in Shariqa in the Arab Emirates in 1998.

In the book entitled *Liman aqulu kalimati? (To Whom Do These Words Speak?)*, published in Muscat in 2000, Turkiya gathered her essays on the subjects of love, history and freedom, reality and dreams, love for the fatherland, as well as national identification<sup>30</sup>. She considers Oman to be a part of the great Arab nation 'al-qawmiyya al-'arabiyya'<sup>31</sup>. She emphasizes the Arab origins of Omanis and solidarity with other Arab countries considering Arabs to be at one in terms of thought, language and history which she expresses in the work *Baqaya min zamanin damin (The Remains of a Bloody Time)*<sup>32</sup>. In February 2001 she was awarded a prize by the International Centre for Information and Publications in Cairo. She works in the City Hall as the director of the department of general matters.

She is the author of a volume of poetry entitled *Ana imra'a istithna'iyya (I Am an Exceptional Woman)* published in

<sup>30</sup> T. al-Busa'idi, *Tatwafun fi biladi (Journey Around the Country)*, in: *Liman aqulu kalimati? (To Whom Do These Words Speak?)*, Muscat, 2000, pp. 125-127.

<sup>31</sup> T. al-Busa'idi, *Rihlat musafira (A Traveller's Journey)*..., pp. 131-136.

<sup>32</sup> T. al-Busa'idi, *Baqaya min zamanin damin (The Remains of a Bloody Time)*..., pp. 13-16.

Muscat at the turn of 1996. In the introduction to the volume, Dr 'Abd Allah al-Shaham wrote, "Recently there has appeared amongst us poetry which Turkiya has hidden for many years. Here we have twenty works. Each presents a scene, and each of these scenes is life. These works are pieces of poetry even though a part of them is close to prose. [...] Is there any other question raised by the author besides that of women and their world? No. Was this woman not once part of a symphony which presented the issues of women and their world? Yes. For she was one of the Omani girls who wrote about women, defended their existence and rights to a normal, honourable life"<sup>33</sup>.

**Nura bint 'Abd Allah al-Badi** was born on 1st May 1969 in al-Buraymi. She graduated from the Department of Foreign Languages and Information. At present she works for the Local Education Authority in Buraymi. Since 1992 she has actively participated in various national festivals, reciting poems for various special occasions (Muscat, Salalah, the United Arab Emirates 1997, 2000, Bahrain 1997, Jordan 1998). She is the author of a text for the stage entitled *Ja'izat al-ihsan (A Prize for a Good Deed)*, a play for children *al-Wahsh al-maz'um (A Seeming Beast)*, a series for Abu Dhabi radio entitled *Kalimat haqq (The Right Word)* and *'Uyun al-zaman (The Eyes of Time)*. She is also the author of operettas: *Sawt al-ard (The Voice of Earth)*, *'Uman al-amal al-wa'id Oman (The Promising Hopes)*, *Ishraqt al-majd (The Coming of Glory and al-Fawz Victory)*.

Her first collection of poetry was published in Cairo, in 1999, and is entitled *Lishahin janah hurr Shahin (Has a Free Wing)*. Shahin is the name of a falcon used for hunting. The poet Harun Hashim Rashid wrote in the preface to the volume "Here is a poet, a delicate woman, who has been calmed down by love, love, the omnipresent potion. The song of joy, the inspiration of

<sup>33</sup> 'Abd Allah al-Shaham (A Rose Above the Walls) in: *Ana imra'a istithna'iyya (I Am an Exceptional Woman)*, Muscat, 1995/1996, pp. 11-13.

geniuses and the secret conversation of the mystics. There is no poetry without love and no love without poetry. There is no world without love"<sup>34</sup>.

The volume contains forty poems, which can be classified as patriotic and nationalistic on the one hand, and those dominated by the poet's personal experiences on the other. In as many as 31 poems, starting with *I'lan halat hubb* (*The Proclamation of the State of Love*) to *Taqul You Say*, the poet expresses her feelings and personal experiences, which are enchanting in their honesty and freshness. She loves, is in love, she refers to her loved one, in the person of father, friend, husband and hurricane, which has banished the routine from her life.

**Hashimiyya al-Musawi**, who was born on 6th August 1969 in Batina belongs to the young generation of female Omani poets. She is a graduate of the Department of Arabic Philology at the Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat. Even as a student she actively participated in poetry evenings. She has received many awards and distinctions, having also represented Oman in competitions: in Ajman (1987) and Abu Dhabi (2000).

She published her first poetry collection entitled *Ilayka anta (For You)* in 1993 in Beirut. The word *anta* (You) in the title signifies Oman – the poet's beloved homeland. All the poems contained in this volume are saturated with patriotic motifs. Most of the poems were written in rhyming verse (*al-'amudiyya al-muqaffa'*).

The second volume, entitled *Wa lil-ruh hawiyya (The Soul Has an Identity Too)* was published in Muscat in the year 2000. The volume consists of two thematic parts. The first one seems to be very reflective, philosophical at times and is therefore, surely very personal. The second is a panegyric of sorts directed at the beloved homeland.

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<sup>34</sup> H. Hashim Rashid, *Hadha al-divan, hadhihi al-sha'ira (This divan, this Poet)*, in: *Lishahin janah hurr Shahin (Has a Free Wing)*, Cairo, 1999, p. 5.

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One cannot sum up modern Omani poetry because this period is as yet unfinished, and is developing intensively. Without doubt 'Abd Allah al-Ta'i, 'Abd Allah al-Khalili, Abu Surur al-Jami'i, Sa'id al-Saqlawi, Hilal al-'Amiri, Sama' 'Isa, Sayf al-Rahbi, Muhammad al-Harhi, and Sa'ida bint Khatir al-Farisi belong to that poets whose creativity has had an enormous influence on the shape of contemporary Omani poetry. They introduced a new means of viewing the world and new ways of expression. The entire contemporary Omani literature turns out to be strongly rooted in the indigenous tradition. However, an unusually dynamic development of traditional forms of expression, from classical verse (*al-shi'r al-'amudi*), through verse based on metric foot (*al-taf'ila*), right up to prose poetry (*qasidat al-nathr*) has occurred in poetry. This poetry could be called "poetry of life". And in the same way that life is full of contrasts, varied feelings and experiences, so is poetry.