

MODERN POETRY AND PROSE OF BAHRAIN

Barbara Michalak-Pikulska

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INTRODUCTION

The main academic aim of the present book is to become acquainted with and academically evaluate the modern literary output of the poets and writers of Bahrain comprising the period starting from the 1950s up to 2004.

The subject of the present book is a continuation of my earlier research into the modern literature of the Persian Gulf, which has resulted in the publication of monographs on the subject of the literature of Kuwait, Oman and an outline of the modern short story writing of the Arabian Peninsula on the basis of selected source texts. These books are supplemented by several dozen articles published in Polish and foreign academic journals as well as a series of lectures and conference papers.

The present book is an individual study on the literature of Bahrain and at the same time the first complete historical-literary study in Europe. The literary materials gathered have been analyzed and interpreted in relation to, among other things, the means of creating the world presented therein and to take into consideration the wider cultural and historic context of Bahrain. The work is designed to equally fill a gap that exists in literary studies as in neither Polish nor foreign works devoted to contemporary Arabic literature is there any information on the subject of contemporary Bahraini literature. There have appeared in Bahrain itself many valuable works on the contemporary literature of the country but these are only in Arabic (see Bibliography).

I wish in my book to present, besides an analysis of the literary works, the Bahraini poets and writers who I got to know personally during my two stays in Bahrain in 2002 and 2004. I am most indebted to the Bahraini cultural activists for their sincerity and help: **‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Jāsīm Kānū, Maḥmūd Maḥmūd, Sheikha Mayy Āl Khalīfa, Ḥiṣṣa Bū‘aynayn, Dr Maṣṣūr Muḥammad Sarḥān, Dr ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, Dr Ibrāhīm al-Ghulūm, Dr Ḥasan Madan, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, Ya‘qūb Muḥarraqī, Yūsuf Ḥasan, Ja‘far Ḥasan, Fahd Ḥusayn, as well as all the Authors themselves.**

I conducted an interview with each of the poets and writers I met. I also gained from them the majority of the unique resource materials. I was also able to actively participate in the cultural-literary events taking place at the time. Interviews, the

comments of writers and literary critics along with the materials gathered constituted the basis of my analysis and the basis for the writing of this book. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped to bring this book about. I am acutely aware that the book is not definitive in that a part of the materials is not included. This has resulted from the fact that my two stays in Bahrain were relatively short which did not allow me to contact all the writers and to devote to them as much time as I would have liked.

It is more than possible that in my work something or someone has been excluded. This is in no way intentional but simply results from the huge volume of the present work and from the fact that to date no comprehensive work on contemporary Bahraini literature exists. I really hope that one day I will return to this beautiful country and complete my research.

As far as the translation of the texts is concerned, they have been done in such a way as to be as comprehensible to the reader as possible, so that he can grasp the intention of the poets and writers. Paramount here is the sense/meaning of the translation and not its literal mirroring. The works, both poetry and prose, were first translated into Polish and only then into English. I would also like to point out that in dealing with varied poetic and prose styles I have imposed upon them, in a way similar to the English translator, my own style as well as differences at the grammatical, lexical and syntactical levels. Cultural, social and historical differences also play their part. The texts were very difficult for me especially in conveying the melody of the poems or poetic metaphors, both in the works of prose and poetry. It appears as if a perfect translation is impossible to achieve, therefore I hope to have created semantically parallel images.

I have used the English Transliteration System in the work as a result of the book appearing in English.

Special words of thanks belong to my husband – Dr Andrzej Pikulski for his assistance and continuous support at various stages of this work.

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PART ONE
MODERN POETRY OF BAHRAIN

CHAPTER 1

CLASSICAL POETRY (ASH-SHI‘R AL-‘AMŪDĪ)

Octavio Paz, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1990, said that a poem whether open or closed, requires a departure within the poet writing it and the birth of the poet who reads it. Hence interpretation is seen as encompassed into the eternal natural order of birth and death. A text is a quality which can be resurrected, reborn in the critic, in another man.¹

Contemporary Arabic poetry has been subject to continuous experiments within all poetic components – those of content, idea, language and form.² In the XIXth century Maḥmūd Sāmī al-Bārūdī (1837–1904) cleared the Arabic *qaṣīda* of stylistic ornamentation imbuing it at the same time with a current socio-political content. After the First World War the succeeding generation, inspired by nineteenth century English poetry, concentrated in the circles of the Dīwān Group and critical of the representatives of the traditional school: Aḥmad Shawqī and Ḥāfiẓ Ibrāhīm were of the opinion that this trend **has to give way to a renewal, as each new epoch requires from poetry changes both in form as well as in content.**³ The most prominent representatives of the new trend for instance: ‘Abbās Maḥmūd al-‘Aqqād, Ibrāhīm ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Māzinī and ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Shukrī, introduced a variety of rhymes in their poems. Their activity laid the way for the later generation of Egyptian Romantics of the Apollo Group (1927–1935), which was initiated by Aḥmad Zakī Abū Shādī. The Romantic trends are also prominent in a *dīwān* (volume of poetry) by Abū al-Qāsim ash-Shābbī, a Tunisian poet affiliated to this group. Such Romantic current gained popularity as it offered new aesthetic values to the poets.

This phenomenon was accompanied by a steadily growing interest in world literature. There appeared voices that called directly for the need to adapt foreign writings that might enrich indigenous literature with universalistic features.⁴ One

¹ Bogdan Zeler, *O poezji Wisławy Szymborskiej*, Katowice 1996, p. 9.

² Salmā Khaḍrā’ al-Jayyūsī, *Ash-Shi‘r al-‘arabī al-mu‘āṣr, taṭawwūruh wa mustaqbaluh*, in: “‘Ālam al-fikr”, t. 4, no. 2, Kuwait, 1973, p. 12.

³ Adnan Abbas, *Poezja arabska*, Poznań 2000, p. 33.

⁴ Cf. Muḥammad Jābir al-Anṣārī (ed.), *Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīd wa ish‘ā’ al-baḥrayn ath-thaqāfi*, Kuwait, 1996, p. 117.

ought to bear in mind that this particular period, following the Second World War, was especially important for Arabic culture. It was a time when new views were being clarified, where ideas and concepts concerning art, politics and social life competed and clashed. The new, geopolitical order in the Middle East was, in the majority of cases enforced, hence the initial mood of bitter disappointment common among the Arabs. However, this was relatively quickly replaced by an ambition to catch up with others and to manifest their own value.

An unusually important role in the development of Arabic literature was performed by émigré poets of the ar-Rābiṭa al-Qalamiyya group, which was established in New York. The founders of this group: Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān, Amīn ar-Riḥānī and Mīkhā'il Nu'ayma supported the unity of a poetic piece and the poet's right to express his own feelings. Mīkhā'il Nu'ayma believed that real literature shows, both in the process of its examination as well as in the aesthetic reception, constant universal values as far as time and man are concerned.⁵ In their works they touched on universal human, social and philosophical problems, as well as expressing their longing for their homeland.⁶ Under the influence of English and American poetry Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān, and Amīn ar-Riḥānī generated a new poetic form in Arabic poetry; *shi'r manthūr* (prose poetry), which was replaced in the sixties by poetry in prose; (*qaṣīdat an-nathr*).⁷

The fifties constituted a period of change in poetic form as well as in its understanding. The language alone is proof of the birth of a creative avant-garde. Free verse – *shi'r ḥurr*, in which the basic unit is the foot (*taf'īla*), were published by Nāzik al-Malā'ika (*Al-Kūlirā*) and Badr Shākir as-Sayyāb (*Hal kāna ḥubban?*) and attracted many supporters and followers. Nāzik al-Malā'ika, in her study *Qadāyā ash-shi'r al-mu'āṣir*, attempted to prove that *shi'r ḥurr* (free verse) derives from the prosody pattern developed by al-Farāhīdī.⁸

In Bahrain, in conjunction with the economic development brought about by the discovery of oil, there was noted a substantial revival in many fields, particularly in education and literature. The works of local writers not only reached the neighboring countries of the Arabic Peninsula, but achieved a level equal or comparable to that of literary productions of Egypt, Iraq or Lebanon. The situation of Bahraini writers was worsened by the policies of the British Protectorate, as it aimed at limiting freedom of speech and did not tolerate too intensive contact with Arabic cultural centers. That is why many poets in Bahrain directed their attention towards the universal Arabic reader. The most prominent representative being undoubtedly Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīd. The rest concentrated on problems that troubled the contemporary Bahrain society

⁵ Mīkhā'il Nu'ayma, *Al-Ghibāl*, Beirut, 1981, p. 69.

⁶ Cf. Józef Bielawski, Krystyna Skarżyńska-Bocheńska, Jolanta Jasińska, *Nowa i współczesna literatura arabska 19 i 20 w.*, Józef Bielawski (ed.), t. I, Warszawa 1978, pp. 216–292.

⁷ Adnan Abbas, *Poezja...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 164–165.

⁸ Nāzik al-Malā'ika, *Qadāyā ash-shi'r al-mu'āṣir*, Beirut, 1981, p. 7.

they lived in. A special place is held here by the works of ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida.

Contemporary Bahrain poets have written both classical verse poems (*shi‘r ‘amūdī*) as well as free verse poems (*tafīla*) and prose poems (*qaṣīdat an-nathr*). The generation of contemporary poetry pioneers accuse the youngest poets of not being sufficiently acquainted with Arabic literature, which, in their opinion, results in the low level of their poems. Although in many cases these accusations seem to be true, as many poems have been written without giving it a thought, merely for the purpose of being noticed in a society for whom poetry still plays a particularly important part. For the common reader the innovations of the contemporary world are puzzling, with harassed and overworked poets creating quickly, seizing a thought and pouring it onto the pages.

Without doubt, one of the most important characters on the Arabic Peninsula scene is **Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīd** (see Biographies). He began writing in the 1930s. However, it was not until the end of the forties that al-‘Urayyīd fully developed his artistic potential.

In the period discussed Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīd was clearly one of the representative personas of Bahrain’s literary life. He may without doubt be included as one of the pioneers of this country’s contemporary poetry. What is more, the standing he has gained outside his own country makes him one of the most important poets of the Arabian Peninsula’s first half of the twentieth century.⁹

Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīd was born in Bombay in 1908. His father descended from the well known Bahraini family al-‘Urayyīd and his mother came from the Iraqi town of Karbala. After getting married his parents lived initially in Bahrain, however within a few years they moved to India, where his father worked in the pearl trade, and where Ibrāhīm was born. Unfortunately, two months after giving birth his mother died as a result of a severe illness. In a house full of visitors, where business talks were conducted on a daily basis, it was hard to provide proper care for a little child. This is why his father decided to entrust Ibrāhīm to a Hindu woman he knew. For the first few years of his life the boy was to stay outside of the family home. When he turned four, he returned to his father’s home in Bombay, where he was looked after by a servant. This is where his education began. It should be mentioned here that because of the environment in which he was raised in he used exclusively English and Urdu, knowing hardly any Arabic. The first real contact with this language occurred during a holiday in Bahrain, where he was taken by his paternal uncle in 1922. It was his first opportunity to meet his relatives see what the life in the country looked like, as he had only known it from his father’s stories.

Soon after finishing secondary school in 1925, Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīd moved to Bahrain. Initially he worked as an English teacher. Then he was appointed the

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

headmaster in one of the state schools. He resigned from this job in 1931 and opened a private school in the same year. It is worth mentioning that his students were given an opportunity to actively participate in theatrical performances, which he himself prepared. Unfortunately, he was forced to close his school after three years, for financial reasons. In 1937 he became the head of translation for an oil company. This position he kept for most of his life. He was also delegated by the oil company to Delhi for a short period, and from the perspective of a few decades we may see that this period has left a remarkable mark on his lyrical poetry.

In analyzing Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ’s writings one should bear in mind the great role that was played by India in the shaping of his personality. He had spent the first twenty years of his life in this particularly culturally rich country. It was there he gained an education and there where his views were clarified. So in his vision of reality two worlds meet –the Arabic and the Indian, each of which representing a slightly different mentality, aesthetics and values. On the other hand Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ’s “**multiculturalism**” allows him to see many important questions from a wide perspective. He often transcends the boundaries set by one concrete culture and treats his subject from a multi-faceted point of view. The youthful years spent in India allowed him to learn English fluently, which facilitated his acquaintance with the literature written in that language. Besides, as mentioned before, he also knew well Urdu and Hindu literature. All of these literary influences moulded Ibrāhīm as a youth, and have given his poetry a specific character that is different from that of traditional Arabic style.¹⁰

The first time the poet met with Arabic literary circles in Bahrain occurred in the mid 1920s. This was also a period of a very intensive cultural revival in this country. Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ did not remain passive towards the slogans of the then contemporary Bahraini elite and joined the informal movement himself acting in support of education. However, even then, the poet had his own vision concerning the upbringing of the new generation. It was for the needs of his private school that he started to write theatrical plays in Arabic which were later performed by his students. At the same time these constituted his first attempts at writing in Arabic, helping to perfect his sense of dramatic language.

A great influence on the way of understanding Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ’s poetry was played by the aforementioned Syrian-American Poetry School, which at the time was gaining many adherents. Quite a numerous group of Arab writers in emigration, mainly in the United States, were connected with the school. They were abandoning the traditional, classical models in Arabic literature. They criticized both the conservative forms of artistic expression as well as the then-current contents of the poems. As a replacement they proposed widely understood honesty and freedom of language use.

Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ remained faithful to the ideals of the school and always treated poetry as a kind of confessional of his own feelings and life philosophy. From

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

among those writers who belonged to the above mentioned group he particularly valued Ilyā Abū Māḍī, who enraptured him with his simplicity, and at the same time the depth, of his poems. However, he did not cease to be interested in English, Indian and Persian literature, with which he had come into contact in his youth, hence the allusions to Indian myths and legends in his writings.¹¹

In his first volume of poems *Adh-Dhikrā (Recollections)*, 1931) he assembled poems which constitute extremely intimate confessions relating to his childhood and early youth. Although the poet tries not to talk directly about his feelings, his yearning for the places where he spent the first years of his childhood is prominent and it reveals itself in many places in the collection. The critics point out many imperfections in the volume, referring both to the construction of the poems as well as to their content. Surely *Adh-Dhikrā (Recollections)* was, for al-‘Urayyiḍ himself, a kind of test and an attempt at a confrontation of his own views on poetry with the others’ opinions. A long time afterwards, in one of his interviews, he said:

When I came to Bahrain the poetry of this country was like the Arabic poetry of the nineteenth century or like... nineteenth century poetry in general. Elegies were the most up to date forms at the time, and I, knowing what was happening in world literature, was not personally convinced that this was really poetry. I presented my view on that matter, but I am aware that its background was different than that of Arabic culture. (...).¹²

Despite the formal comments directed to the collection *Adh-Dhikrā (Recollections)* he was considered in literary circles to be extremely innovative and original. He shocked primarily through his departure from the then traditional model of Arabic poetry, together with his compositions containing many elements that had clearly been inspired by English romantic writing. This first volume of poetry al-‘Urayyiḍ was not to become popular amongst a readership used to a somewhat different form of aesthetics and form though it was to herald subsequent volumes. Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyiḍ gradually enriched his writing and diligently studied Arabic literature. He started to work upon the translation of the works of the Persian poet ‘Umar al-Khayyām.

In 1932 he published in Cairo a play entitled *Wā Mu‘taṣimāh (Oh, Mutasim!)*¹³ which as the author himself said was written for educational purposes. Al-‘Urayyiḍ treated the theatre as an extremely useful instrument in the service of the artist enabling the appraisal of all that is bad and dangerous in society and politics.¹⁴ Hence the interest in this literary form. His play unmasks the dark sides of life at the court of Abbasids from the times of the reign of Mu‘taṣim. He shows the mechanisms which led eventually to the fall of the caliph and the handing over of power to the Turkish invaders. None the less the main message of the text is extremely positive and proves

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

¹² Cf. Makkī Muḥammad Sarḥān, *Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyiḍ*, Beirut, 1998, p. 22.

¹³ Cf. Manṣūr Muḥammad Sarḥān, *Raṣd al-ḥaraka al-fikriyya fī al-Baḥrayn*, Bahrain, 2000, p. 516.

¹⁴ Cf. Muḥammad Jābir al-Anṣārī (ed.), *Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyiḍ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 352.

how the unity of the Arab world can lead to success. The events of the play take place in the year 838. During this period the then Byzantine emperor constantly invaded the lands lying on the borders of the Islamic empire devastating them and taking numerous prisoners. The accusations of Muslims who were subject to repression in the emperor's prisons finally reached the caliph. Moved by the lot of his subjects, he turns his back on court splendour and entertainment in order to face up to the invaders. This results in conflict with the Byzantine forces, culminating in a Muslim victory and the capture of the city of 'Amuriyya. The next of Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīd's plays was a drama, entitled *Bayna daulatayn (Between Two Countries)*, which he finished in 1934.

At that time the poet started also to write short love poems which comprise the small volume *Fī haykal al-ḥubb (In the Temple of Love)*. Unfortunately for a whole host of reasons this collection was never to be published and is preserved only in the form of a manuscript. The author was to make use of many works from this collection at a later period. Critics are in agreement that the experience gained by al-'Urayyīd while writing *Fī haykal al-ḥubb (In the Temple of Love)* was of immense importance and even fundamental in relation to his entire literary output.

It is worth recalling that during the period 1944–1945 the poet resided in Delhi where he became acquainted with an Indian singer. There quickly developed a deep friendship between the two, which Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīd described as “brotherly love”.¹⁵ Despite the fact that the poet with time spoke little of the acquaintance it was to be the source of many beautiful love poems. A part of which can be found in the collection *Al-'Arā'is (Brides)*, published in 1946. This volume, as opposed to the previous one, quickly gained popularity. It constituted a mature, poetical expression of the artist's feelings. Besides which it presented in a rich lyrical form the reflections of the poet on the subject of love, art and nature. Of especial note is the piece, entitled *Mayy (Mayy)*, of which the following is a fragment:

When we found ourselves under the cover of the trees
Their shadows fell on us like pearls
I told her of love and she listened
With the hope that our lips would meet
The flowers I had brought her set off her beauty
She uttered flirtatiously 'enough of this madness

Do you expect me to be able to believe in love
When I cannot glimpse it?
[...].¹⁶

This poem is considered to be in its own way a model that expresses the change in the understanding of lyricism by the young generation of Bahraini poets. As opposed to traditional Arab poetry the frankness and simplicity strikes one. Ibrāhīm al-

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

¹⁶ Makkī Muḥammad Sarḥān, *Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīd...*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

-‘Urayyid decisively rejects the accepted classical conventions. He expresses his thoughts freely though in a poetic way and builds the plot upon his own experience and intimate reflections. It is first and foremost the openness which wins over the reader. It forces one to reflect on love and its meaning.

The poet paints before us a seemingly ordinary scene. Two acquaintances meet in a park. They walk around, and talk of love. We can assume that they are in love with each other. However each of them experiences this feeling in their own way. For the man love is something lofty. He talks about it with confidence, with excitement, with involvement. It appears that it is going to change his perception of the world that surrounds him. Everything in his eyes appears to be imbued with poetry, delicacy, mystery, something he desires to tell his beloved. The woman perceives love totally differently. For her words, even the most beautiful remain but just that – words. She expects from the man concrete acts rather than passionate declarations of love: acts that will confirm his feelings. For this wholly prosaic little scene from the lives of these two people becomes in this poem a point of departure for undertaking solutions on the subject of love. It turns out that each of us has his or her own perception of the matter and that simultaneously each of us desires to express this concept in a different way. Love becomes therefore for those in love a difficult task, exertion in the direction of understanding another person and expressing one’s own feelings in a way that is understandable for another.

The work also shows how noticeably we differ from each other and how difficult it is for us to build relations with others. In fact a meeting with another person is a discovery for us of a new perception of the world, a new means of expressing our own feelings and emotions.

The lyrical “I” in the poem talks in the first person, recalling for us events from his past. We are not totally sure however whether these are based on facts that derive from the life of the poet or ones simply inspired by his experience. The author uses stylistic means within the work sparingly. *Mayy* possesses many epic features. We can in fact say that it is a poetic short story which is lyrically presented in verse.

The next poem from the volume *Al-‘Arā’is (Brides)* is *Fī sukūn al-layl (In the Still of the Night)*:

Life is steeped in dream...
 Only his desire and yearning do not sleep
 If you move the drowsy flowers...
 Mayy..., check that they are tangible purity
 On every branch of the trees.
 The night has taken away their breath
 Pervaded them with moist cold
 Their smell is all around
 It diffuses, drowning my thoughts.
 [...].¹⁷

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

The author, who we are able to identify with the lyrical “I”, gives expression to his unrequited love for the woman in an extremely ardent manner. His declarations are accompanied by the scenery of a damp and cold night. Dream penetrates reality creating in this way a mysterious atmosphere, one of intimacy and a certain form of equivocality. It seems that the internal dilemma of the poet means that the whole of his reality becomes drowned in dreams. “Life is steeped in dream” does not bring relief however. Quite the reverse. For it is then that the figure of the beloved appears. It is she who moves the drowsy flowers which are the symbol of unrequited love. At the same time they become for the lyrical “I” material purity. They become almost holy. Their smell diffuses the atmosphere, penetrating even the poet’s thoughts. But this odour is nothing more than internal pain brought about by the sleepy dreams of his beloved.

Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ emphasized many times that he held great respect for romantic poets and undoubtedly this poem is inspired by lyricism written in this vein. This is shown not only by the setting surrounding the lyrical “I” but also by the stylistic means employed by the author.

The volume *Shumū‘* (*Candles*, 1956) is written in a similar vein to *Al-‘Arā’is* (*Brides*). Also the subject matter of both volumes has a lot in common. The author devotes the most space in it to art, nature and women.

For Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ art is the mirror of existence, the personification of eternity and the creative spirit.¹⁸ Here poetry fulfils a special place in his reflections upon artistic creativity. It is poetry alone which is able to unite within itself all the other forms of artistic expression. The poet devoted to this topic not only many poems but also theoretical works. One of which is the book *ash-Shi‘r wa-l-funūn al-jamaliyya* (*Poetry and the Fine Arts*, 1952). Here the author expresses his aesthetic views on lyricism.

Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ treats women as though the “*mystery of life, its essence and the aim of art*”.¹⁹ In one of the works from the collection *Shumū‘* (*Candles*) entitled *al-Hawwā’* (*Eve*) he writes about her:

The form of this creature has no comparisons
And the most wonderful work of art is what the image of Eve gives off²⁰

The poem inspires one to deep philosophical contemplation not simply with regard to aesthetics but equally the purpose and aim of art. In analyzing the work the words of Oscar Wilde from his introduction to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* come echoing back to the reader that “The artist is the creator of beautiful things”.²¹ For Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ beauty is what imitates the image of a woman. Its form, as he writes, is unique and remains quintessentially artistry. The aim of art is to express

¹⁸ Cf. Muḥammad Jābir al-Anṣārī (ed.), *Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 70.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

²¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Kraków, 1991, p. 3.

this ideal in a way that is as perfect as possible. It is difficult to imagine that the beauty that is a woman can be something that is disturbed. The natural consequence as a result of the writer's initial thesis is the conclusion that woman through her form expresses also other marvellous features such as goodness, love and care.

In the poet's works women appear as mothers, daughters, lovers, friends, fighters, and also as prostitutes. Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīḍ attempts to analyze their feelings, to express desire. We can observe in his poetry a constant reference to romantic literature. Hence the high degree of exaltation, adoration for the female sex. The image of the woman presented by the poet takes on an almost divine dimension and in differing in its purity from the world around it becomes a symbol of hope.²² Also the concept of woman within his philosophy goes far beyond the image known to us from reality. The poet, in departing from a view of the real world, creates his own form of model, an ideal of woman to which he refers in his work.

At the same time both of the subjects mentioned above – art and women, appear the most often in the context of nature. It is nature that surrounds everything and that is the natural place for our existence. We experience love in its shadow, conduct deliberations on art. Many of al-'Urayyīḍ's works are accompanied by numerous images of nature. It seems that country scenes are the closest to him, ones that are often described by the poet. Contemplating nature is a chance for him to get to know the world, but chiefly it is a means of discovering divine truth.²³

The collection *Qublatān (Two Kisses, 1948)* was written in a somewhat similar tone to the previously mentioned volumes of poetry. Here the author returns to the history of Arab Andalusia. The small volume *Arḍ ash-shuhadā' (The Land of the Martyrs)*, published in 1951, deals with a totally new topic. This is an artistic expression of al-'Urayyīḍ's reflection on the political situation of the Middle East, and in particular Palestine. The poet avoids ideological judgements. He concentrates chiefly on people who decided to stand up in arms against injustice. Consequently heroism is the dominating question throughout the entire volume.

We can categorically classify Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīḍ's creativity within the romantic current of literature. The poet often refers to the world of nature and utilizes its elements in numerous descriptions. Nature also creates in his work the backcloth for the majority of works of love and is an inseparable element of the world presented.

The poet uses an extremely poetic form of literary Arabic. Critics underline that his lyricism is similar to a whisper and is a long way off the musical impetuosity and passion so characteristic of classical Arabic poetry.²⁴ This delicacy in al-'Urayyīḍ's style makes him extremely innovative.

As far as the construction of the works is concerned their specificity lies in the use by the poet of phrases and opposite constructions on the principle of thesis and antithesis. It is worth remembering that such a manner of writing had never been

²² Cf. Makkī Muḥammad Sarḥān, *Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīḍ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

²³ Cf. Muḥammad Jābir al-Anṣārī (ed.), *Ibrāhīm al-'Urayyīḍ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 72.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

employed in Arabic literature. Therefore it was not initially easy for readers in Bahrain to get use to. Yet this specific style makes Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyiḍ’s poetry extremely original. Undoubtedly he is inspired by writers who create in Urdu and English, with the literature the writer knew from his youth. We cannot forget that al-‘Urayyiḍ started to learn Arabic seriously when he was twenty one, consequently at an age when he was already psychically developed. It is therefore natural that in relation to certain aesthetic phenomena he already had a formed view by this age. Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyiḍ clearly emphasized his Arab affiliation which is in no way doubted by his colleagues in Bahrain. He is able to make clever use of the countries he knew from childhood which enriches his work and person.

When Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyiḍ gained recognition in literary circles, and his fame extended beyond the borders of Bahrain, he started to cooperate with many journals. Initially he made contact with the Lebanese poet and publisher of the “*al-‘Urūba*” magazine, Muḥammad al-Hūmānī. Subsequently he worked with the journals “*al-Adīb*” and “*ar-Risāla*”. In these publications he published his articles and poetry.

Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyiḍ also was involved in literary criticism. His most important works in this field include the books *Al-Asālib ash-shi‘riyya (Style in Poetry)*, *Jawla fī-sh-shi‘r al-‘arabī al-mu‘āṣir (A Review of Contemporary Arab Poetry)*, and also the already mentioned *Ash-Shi‘r wa-l-funūn al-jamaliyya (Poetry and the Fine Arts)*. In his theoretical works the poet concentrates chiefly on the explanation of principles and the bases of criticism. While in his analysis of individual literary works he employs a method of division and classification.²⁵

The poetic work of Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyiḍ has enriched the literary heritage of Bahrain in an exceptional way. That said, as a result of its specific nature it is chiefly directed to a narrow readership that is able to appreciate the artistry of the poet and his originality. His output enjoys recognition in other Arab countries like Iraq, Syria, the Lebanon and in particular the countries of Maghreb.

One of the individuals who has had the greatest influence on the shape of contemporary poetry in Bahrain is **Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa** (see Biographies). This poet, with over half a century of literary output behind him, has become a symbol of the contemporary literary scene of the country. Evidence of the recognition he enjoys are the many prizes and awards he has received for his work. These have been presented by both state authorities as well as by literary associations. In reading his volumes of poetry we discover the history of Bahrain and the history of the Arab world, as well as becoming acquainted with the changing aesthetic preferences of the artist over the course of the years.

Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa was born in 1929 in the town of al-Jisra. After three years he moved with his parents to az-Zilāq. These formative years spent in this picturesque village situated on the shores of the Persian Gulf were to heavily influence the poet’s creative future. The close contact with nature has permanently

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

loses his sense of reality. He does not know if he is still asleep or whether the whole world has indeed become enchanted. The poet does not experience fear though. He discovers that he has found himself in the land of love. For in his imagination love is just that non-temporal state which is able to change the perception of one's entire surroundings. This gives an unrepeatable colouration to reality. However in this exceptionally dreamy kingdom where the poet finds himself there is an absence of another person with whom he could immerse himself in the magic of love. To some extent with reproachfulness the persona says that he is deluded by, admittedly tempting but clearly alien to him, figures of women as well as giving him the aforementioned wine.

The poem dedicated to the poet 'Alī Maḥmūd Tāha, entitled *Nuzha (The Walk)*, is maintained in a somewhat similar spirit:

We walked in the summer in the world of beauty
 In the spring of our age and dreams
 In the pleasant atmosphere of night.
 Where thoughts soar in the space of imagination.
 Where we lived love in the days full of flowers
 [...]
 We live in a world of joy. We play and sing
 Forgetting our worries and earthly cares.
 Smile to the light of the waves
 To the roar of the river, to the nightingale which awakes in order to sing
 To the fresh puff of wind
 To the glow emanating from the flowers
 To the beautiful ballad, to the spirits, to the great creation
 To the song, when it disappears in the sounds of the stream
 And dream of happiness, grace and naïve love.²⁸

We do not know if the poem was inspired by a real meeting with 'Alī Maḥmūd Taḥa or whether the author is referring to a period when a significant amount of time was devoted by him to the work of that poet and that he has in mind a spiritual form of contact with him. Aḥmad Āl Khalīfa again describes the world of beauty, a world filled with love, goodness and wonderful nature. To live in a world of joy is probably the motto for the poet. Yet his joy is not empty and pointless. It is a long way from the one of laughter that soon ends. The poet's joy is derived from the close contact with nature, from the awareness that he is alive and part of a wonderful world. The author is aware of all the unhappiness and worries which reality brings with it. Despite which nature gives him enough optimism to allow him to forget about all earthly concerns. Once again, in a way similar to the previous work, the idea of dream-sleep appears. This time it is a conscious means of breaking out from reality. It may be interpreted as its own form of safe asylum, an escape from the world. Simultaneously the atmosphere that accompanies the meeting in the poem is very

²⁸ Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, *Nuzha*, in: *Al-Majmū'a al-kāmila...*, *op.cit.*, p. 55.

warm and friendly. Undoubtedly this is derived from the fact that the author is convinced that his friend perceives reality in a way similar to him. The said meeting takes place therefore on the spiritual plane, on the plane of a joint sense of aesthetic experiences, and their expression in the language of lyricism.

Āl Khalīfā, through his innovation and original works, quickly joined the literary avant-garde in Bahrain. Critics emphasize the delicacy and harmony of his poetry. As a consequence Āl Khalīfā's poetry started to appear in various Arab journals from 1951 onwards, including the London based *Mujtama' al-'arabi* and the Cairo published *al-'Ālam al-'arabi*.²⁹

In 1962 Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfā published his second volume of lyrical poems, entitled *Hajīr wa sarāb (Heat and Mirage)*. As before we find many works linked to the subject of the Middle East, particularly the situation in Palestine. There also appear poems where the author attempts to answer the question as to who he is and what links him to the age-old culture of the Arabs. Of especial merit is the work entitled *Anā (Me)*:

I grew up fully free
The love of the Highest drives me against those
Who sow destruction and who are haughty.
If need be I will stand in battle with a burning sword in my hand.
He who complains and grumbles of others
Is not of the Arab tribe.
I am an Arab.
I have striven for the love of the Highest One and I belong to Him
And if I am to be alien to a hurricane, then the sun will recognize where
I come from
And what my destiny lies.³⁰

The poem both in terms of subject matter as form is completely different from earlier works. It constitutes in its own way a manifesto of the poet's identity. It emphasizes first and foremost his origin, the tradition and culture from which he derives. The author is proud of being an Arab. At the same time he is conscious that this places certain obligations upon him. He must be a righteous man, decisively counteracting injustice and maintaining modesty. To be who he is places demands upon him. He is however prepared to cope with everything because he treats his allegiance as an honour and as the highest form of dignity. He knows that in all his endeavours he will be supported by the love of the Highest One. For it is God that is the most important point of reference for him. This way to him is also seen as an indispensable task which must be taken up by every Arab. In a sense the poem entitled *Ilā gharbiyya "I" (To the Girl from the West)* is a form of continuation of the ideas contained in this poem, and which is written in a somewhat bombastic tone.

²⁹ Cf. Manṣūr Muḥammad Sarḥān, *Ash-Shaikh Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

³⁰ Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfā, *Anā*, in: *Hajīr wa sarāb*, Bahrain, 1962, p. 4.

She asked me: And where are you from Poet?
 Then she listened charming me with her sound.
 I replied:
 I am from a country which manages with everything
 I am from Bahrain, a country of might and noble glory.
 From a country of pearls, oil and shady palms.
 From the country of those who tamed the stormy sea with the wind
 For generations they tempered the choppy waves with the hurricane and
 Bravely acted when need arose.
 Such is my country Girl and the people from whom I descend
 [...]
 Astounded she replied:
 Your answer has transported me into a beautiful dream.³¹

This time the author praises the country he was born in and from where his ancestors come. He is proud of everything connected with Bahrain. He writes about his homeland as about a place where the beauty of nature is accompanied by natural riches. “*Palms*”, “*pearls*”, “*oil*” are symbols which unequivocally the author associates with his birthplace. Bahrain is for the poet also a country of enormous possibilities and a land blessed by centuries of marvellous tradition and glory. Aḥmad Āl Khalīfa shows particular respect for his compatriots. He presents them as a proud and fearless people. It is they who for generations have struggled with the sea and when the need arose were able to bravely fight in defence of a just cause. The poet is convinced of the exceptional nature and greatness of his own country. His tale of Bahrain transports into a girl, into a beautiful dream because she had not been able to imagine that such a beautiful place could exist in the world.

The poem *Waṭan wa nasab (Homeland and Origin)* is written in just the same convention and in a similar spirit:

She asked me where I came from.
 I answered: Oh girl from the West I come from those
 Who fight against what is false.
 They bring the joy of the earth of the Highest One and win glory
 My country is a place where every young man is brave
 [...]
 Seeing the honesty and decisiveness in my words
 She said moved: your country really is the land
 Of holy service, the land of revelation, where heaven nears man.³²

The poet, is an important shift, for a subsequent time directs his words towards the woman who represents the West. The work may be interpreted as a certain type of willingness to manifest to the world one’s own identity and pride of origin. The poet emphasizes that his nation has a glorious history and that its greatest trump is its

³¹ Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, *Ilā gharbiyya “I”...*, in: *Hajīr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

³² Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, *Waṭan wa nasb...*, in: *Hajīr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

spiritual values to which it is totally dedicated. Again the poet's words have a marked effect on the listener who full of respect and recognition tells of the land of Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa.

The works mentioned are written in a similarly elevated style. They glorify both the author's origin as the features of his fellow countrymen. This is undoubtedly a deliberate ploy to show the continuity between the earlier greatness of Arab culture and the present day.

The volume *Hajr wa sarāb (Heat and Mirage)* also contains many works that are devoted to Palestine. In one of them entitled *Ṣarkha (The Cry)* the poet directly addresses Western leaders:

Oh Western leaders what do these crimes mean
 In a nation which is dying of emaciation.
 You unjustly drove out of Palestine
 Its Arab inhabitants and allowed Israel to use it.
 I see the Palestinian tents blown by the wind
 I hear as hunger and illness cry in them
 [...]
 The time has come to fulfill your duty
 And listen to the song of glory. Our armies are mustering
 And standards are being raised over them.
 [...]³³

This work is a very articulate sign of the opposition to the situation in Palestine. The poet is directing his words to the leaders of the Western countries. They are directly guilty for the misfortune that befell the Palestinian nation. Āl Khalīfa experiences real pain when thinking about the refugees unjustly driven from their own land. In one's mind's eye one can see the suffering of the Palestinians condemned to wandering and inflicted with hunger and disease. At the same time the poet warns the West that the Arab world will not stand by indifferently to this injustice that has befallen their brothers. The poem extremely effectively conveys the atmosphere that reigned in the Middle East after the Arab-Israeli war of 1956. The Palestinian question had been too widely discussed and many Arabs desired in some ways to become involved in the fight for a brother nation. Hence many poets in their works broach this very question defending with their pens the wronged Palestinians.

Besides these lofty and serious subjects there is no lack in the volume under discussion of poems devoted to the subject of love, women and the joys of life. An example of such lyricism is the work *Bayna al-marāyā (Between the Mirrors)*:

I stood in front of her mirror
 Morn a woman like a flower in a garden
 Looks after her beauty and is the most beautiful.
 I saw an alabaster breast – a temple of grace

³³ Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, *Ṣarkha...*, in: *Hajr ..., op.cit.*, p. 28.

Beautiful lips, long hair of the colour of night
 Marvellous, enchanting eyes.
 Astonishment meant that I stayed behind the corner
 Contemplating the magic of the eyes, dreaming that dream full of hope.
 I was like a monk engrossed in prayer in the holiest of temples
 And my thoughts were unable to comprehend her magic.³⁴

The poet is enraptured by the beauty of the woman. However we do not know whether he is describing a concrete individual who he noticed by accident or maybe in his imagination he created such a wondrous image of a woman. It seems as if the inspiration for this poetic contemplation of the beauty of woman is her mirror. It is in front of this that she daily takes care of her beauty. She reminds one then of a flower in the garden which after the cold of night opens its buds and shakes off the morning dew. Āl Khalīfa treats the whole of a woman's body like a temple or an object of the highest form of cult. He adores her lips, eyes, hair. He writes that looking at her image transports him into a marvellous dream. Suddenly it seems to him that he is a monk engrossed in deep contemplation. He desires the moment to last as long as possible and it seems that he is at that moment experiencing the happiest moments in his life. He is unable to comprehend with his mind the beauty of the woman. Yet she so enchants him that he almost loses contact with the surrounding world. The poem expresses its honesty and simplicity. He does not use too contrived metaphors to convey his feelings. The poet also does not fall into too pompous a tone. He perceives beauty around him and is able to transfer this to the language of lyricism. It appears that just such a light, but at the same time poetic, style on the part of Āl Khalīfa is the most palatable variety for the reader. Subsequent volumes of poetry are to bring more works of this very kind.

In 1966 the poet published a collection, entitled *Baqāyā al-ghudrān* (*The Remains of the Stream*). Here he included a number of poems written in honour of artist friends or celebrations of certain places as finds reflection in the example from the work *Tahīyyat al-Iskandiriyya* (*Greetings for Alexandria*). Besides, this there is no absence in the volume of poetic recollections from childhood as well as reflections on love, poetry and nature.

In the poem entitled *Ash-Shi'r* (*Poetry*) he deliberates as to what poetry actually is:

Poetry, what is there in poetry that means
 That it contains the mystery of eternity.
 Who amongst us has learnt its secrets.
 What is a miracle and inspiration for the world
 Or the mysterious magic that we know.
 Or possibly simply a non-meaning nonsense
 [...]

³⁴ Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, *Bayna al-marāyā...*, in: *Hajr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

And maybe a moving song
Or melody sent from heaven
Thanks to which God maintains us alive.³⁵

There is no doubt that Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa's poetry is something exceptional, something that conveys a huge sense of mystery. He is aware that this constitutes in its own way a kind of lofty mystery play. Yet he himself is unable to unequivocally say what the nature of it is. He debates whether it is a miracle, magic or simply meaningless nonsense. It seems that the poet perceives in it something greater than simply a gush of empty words. He asks whether it is not by chance a gift from God, one that helps us to live. For after all it is through poetry that we express beauty, goodness, anger, love. This is the language in which we convey the most beautiful of our feelings. For the most correct reply would be the claim that it is a mystery, a secret which each of us has to solve in his or her own way. For who is a poet? In the work, entitled *Ash-Shā'ir* (*The Poet*), Āl Khalīfa writes:

Parched, alone he carries his wounds
Through the desert
He walks alone traversing the void
Dragging an infinity of misfortune
And the stick which supports recalls recollections [...]³⁶

The poet appears in the work as the timeless wanderer condemned to loneliness and suffering. What has resulted in such a fate? Is this destiny? Or maybe his own conscious choice? It is not easy to answer the questions that the poem generates. It seems that the poet's especial sensitivity means that he feels alone in the world. His perception of reality is so different from other people's that he prefers to keep to the sidelines. On the other hand there are the abilities he has been gifted with and the calling which he must fulfil. The life of a poet is a constant roaming with the baggage of one's own feelings and experiences. Yet this divine talent for creation enables him to see the world in a much deeper way, allowing him to interpret its mysteries. The poet like no one else feels nature and is able to communicate with it. The work *Anā yā rabī'* (*Oh Spring, it's Me*) is just such a conversation:

Spring, I'm all wounds
I cry and complain to the wind
Wandering alone through the void.
[...]
Somewhere among the flowers
I sing a song of love.
Today sorrow visited me
And I have broken wings.³⁷

³⁵ Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, *Ash-Shi'r*, in: *Baqāyā al-ghudrān...*, Bahrain, 1966, p. 6.

³⁶ Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, *Shā'ir...*, in: *Baqāyā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

³⁷ Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, *Anā yā rabī'...*, in: *Baqāyā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

The poet complains to Spring that his life is full of pain, that all of his misfortunes can be exclusively confided to the wind. He is lonely. He has nobody to sing his love songs to and he wanders aimlessly amongst the flowers. It seems that only nature is able to understand him. He finds partial solace within nature. Once again the concepts of loneliness or alienation appear in the context of the poet. Again he is somebody who perceives nature somewhat differently than the rest. The conversation with spring is merely a pretext to express his own experiences. The poet says that he has been visited by sorrow and consequently his wings are broken. We do not know what has led the writer to this melancholic state but it results in the poet's feeling of unhappiness. An internal pain breaks his wings which may be interpreted as lyrical ability to rise above life's failures and to soar in space like an unrestrained thought.

One of the most beautiful works devoted to love, in the volume *Al-Qamar wa-n-nakhīl* (*The Moon and the palms*), is the poem *Wadā' wa dhikrayāt* (*Farewell and Recollections*):

She cried when I got my bags ready to leave
Then she said: How can you leave me?
The siskin abandons its garden in spring
And in our love we are like the garden and the bird
I replied: Forgive me, but I'm soon going,
Meaning I am one of those birds that migrate.
The winds push them into wandering
And announce the hour of departure.
It was good to live with you in wondrous happiness
But nostalgia calls me to those close and to my country,
Where the Highest One and laudable deeds await me
The Waves of the Gulf are lit by glory, and from beyond islands radiate
Farewell, I feel a deep-rooted pain for I know how your heart suffers.³⁸

The work is written in the convention of a conversation which is something the author often resorts to. Undoubtedly this ensures that his poems are more plausible. The reader has the impression that he is witness to an intimate meeting and what is played out in front of his eyes is described in the poem. He also has the possibility to penetrate into the feelings of both of the individuals conducting the dialogue.

The most painful fact in the work is that the lyrical "I", who may be the author himself, has to leave the woman he loves. Even though he has spent, as he himself says, wondrous happy moments with her, he feels that he should return to his country and those close to him. He himself defines his position as that of a migratory bird. He suddenly starts to feel a deep need to return to his own part of the world and it seems that nothing can hold him. At the same time he is really suffering inside because he is conscious of the immense pain he is inflicting on the one he loves.

This is not the first time that Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa has expressed his deep attachment to his country. Love for one's own part of the world and those near

³⁸ Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, *Wadā' wa dhikrayāt*, in: *Al-Qamar wa-n-nakhīl*, u.p., 1978, p. 99.

and dear turns out to be stronger than feeling for a woman. The poet writes that it is nostalgia that is calling him Home. This feeling takes on the dimension of an obligation which must be fulfilled. Here we read that there, in the land of his ancestors, God is awaiting the writer as equally are the laudable deeds which he must undertake. For his life calling is first and foremost noble service of the Highest One and his fellow countrymen. Therefore nothing can keep him by his beloved's side, even her words which underline that without each other neither will be able to exist. It seems that true happiness will only be found by the poet in his homeland, which consequently becomes an extremely important place for him.

Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa has continuously published subsequent volumes of poetry: *Al-Qamar wa-n-nakhīl* (*The Moon and the Palms*), *Ghuyūm fī-ṣ-ṣayf* (*Summer Clouds*), and *Al-Majmū'at al-kāmila* (*Selected Works*), in 1980, 1988, and in 2000 respectively. Here he deals with subjects similar to those broached in his earlier collections of poetry. Dominant being reflective works on the beauty of nature and love lyricism.

Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa is certainly one of those writers who has contributed a freshness and original angle to Bahraini poetry. He has been involved in the creation of a new lyrical image within his country from the beginning of his artistic career. Hence the innumerable searches in world literature and fundamental studies of classical Arabic writing. Critics are in agreement that it is the harmony, and particular musicality of Āl Khalīfa's poetry that make it stand out. His work is light so that the author is able to reach the reader as closely as possible.

A characteristic feature of contemporary lyricism in Bahrain is the inspiration afforded by romanticism. One can equally find in Āl Khalīfa numerous references to the said current. Yet his originality is based on his ability to cleverly link elements that have been borrowed from foreign literature with the indigenous literary tradition. The poet is true to the classical Arab model of poetry. He takes care to preserve all the formal principles with particular attention being paid to rhythm and rhyme.³⁹ Many of the works written in honour of literary colleagues or important political or cultural figures possess the features of classical works of this particular literary type. Though often Āl Khalīfa transcends the borders of literary convention. His search for new artistic expression adds as a consequence something exceptional to his works. There is therefore nothing to label the poet as a conservative artist. In actual fact Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa is not hampered in the act of creating, while his formal associations with cultural literary tradition add a richness to his poetry.

'**Abd al-Raḥmān ar-Mu'āwida** was born in 1911 in Bahrain, in al-Muharraḡ (see Biographies). In a way similar to many of his peers he started, at the age of seven, to attend a Koran school and there quickly displayed outstanding ability. Subsequently he was to continue his education in the so-called Madrasat al-Khalīfiyya school. In 1928 as one of several scholarship holders he left for Beirut where he studied at the

³⁹ Cf. Maṣṣūr Muḥammad Sarḥān, *Ash-Shaikh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

American University. Upon his return to Bahrain he started working in the school system. He became a teacher at the Madrasat al-Ḥadd school. Full of initiative, he quickly started to introduce changes into the outdated system of teaching. He worked out his own teaching programme and introduced it without consultation with the authorities. This was to create for him many enemies and he quickly had to resign from his position. Later he was to search for a long time for a fitting occupation, one that was not to be contradictory to his convictions; he eventually opened the Madrasat al-Iṣlāḥ al-Ahliyya school. The decision to open his own school for the educating of young people was a form of open opposition to the ineffective educational system propagated by the British. As ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida has said the teaching at his school was based on what was the most important, fundamental and useful: from Arabic, English, mathematics, geography and the fine arts. His aim was also to build up the national consciousness of his pupils and to enliven and direct their interests through theatrical and recitation activities. Initially his innovative project was viewed with reserve but after a long time al-Mu‘āwida gained many adherents for himself. It was he, as one of the first in Bahrain, who so courageously and loudly spoke out for the need for educational reform. What is more he did not merely voice his views but turned his ideas into actual work with the young. The school he founded was fee-paying but in the case of pupils from poor families he charged merely a token fee and in some cases allowed them to study for free. The teaching programme lasted six years with especial emphasis being placed on the Arabic language. The school was noted for its patriotic spirit and the awareness of devotion to the homeland and one’s nation and people. After a few years ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida decided to open a new school under the name Madrasat al-Irshād al-Ahliyya. Unfortunately however, after a certain time, because of various reasons, he was forced to close it.

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida was interested in poetry from his earliest years. He wrote his first poem while still at primary school and it is worth noting that this literary attempt met with an enthusiastic and positive reception on the part of his teachers and colleagues. Everyone encouraged him to continue with his writing and at the same time he read widely and developed his talent through study of the best possible models. He received a lot of support from his family. There were within his extended family poets, including ‘Abd al-Jalīl aṭ-Ṭabāṭibā’ī which surely made the route to becoming a writer all the easier.

Undoubtedly al-Mu‘āwida’s literary interests have their roots in the environment of his home town of al-Muharraḡ. It was there that he came into contact with various writers and slowly discovered the world of poetry. Many times was he to recall the atmosphere that reigned in the town. He underlined the openness of this place to art and what is the most important a widespread respect for art. It was this that to a large extent motivated al-Mu‘āwida to further artistic quests and to work upon his poetic technique. One can view the poet’s scholarship stay in Lebanon as a turning point in the development of his literary sensitivity. It was there that his views on art were

crystallized, and where his own ideas were confronted with other conceptions relating to literature.

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida presented his work at various school, religious and state events and gradually perfected his abilities. From 1939 his poetry started to appear in the newspaper “Al-Baḥrayn”. At this time it was the only publication which acquainted its readers with the familiar work of writers of the Persian Gulf. It is worth remembering that along side ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida both Muḥammad Aḥmad Āl Khalīfa and Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīḍ published their poems here.

The work that brought the poet his first significant success was the elegy upon the death of the king of Iraq Faiṣal I:

Tears flow in a stream
Frightened by painful misfortune
At the hour of victory when his deeds manifest themselves
Fate touched him so terribly
Iraq despairs, Egypt laments
Najd floods tears
With pain the Lebanon lowers its head
Like a mother proud of her home
So still language unites the Arabs
[...]
Oh, why to listen to the cry
And the laments portending death.
Why fate so tried al-Husain’s son
God protected him
He left and together with him our hopes
Fate cruelly destroyed the faith growing in us.
We live chasing our own dreams
And the fate deemed by God carried on its own tracks
On the day when you brought the news of Abu Ghaza’s death
Will you find one his equal!⁴⁰

The poem expresses first and foremost enormous pain upon the death of Faiṣal I. This leader who was descended from the Hashimid clan was the son of the sharīf of Mekkah al-Ḥusain. He was one of the instigators in the anti-Turkish Arab uprising. In 1920 he was elected the king of Greater Syria and a year later he took over the throne of Iraq where he jointly organized the independent state. He died in 1933.

The poet does not list the king’s achievements as these are widely known, but instead places emphasis on the grief experienced by all upon the loss of this great leader. The author has grievances towards fate that it took away someone so illustrious at a moment when he had achieved his greatest successes. We read that with the departure of Ibn al-Ḥusain hope itself departed. This was probably the hope for a unification of the Arabs, the advocate of which was King Faisal I. We discover

⁴⁰ Makkī Muḥammad Sarḥān, *‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida*, Beirut, 1999, p. 39.

in the work more accents connected with the idea of Pan-Arabism and the conception of creating a state for all Arabs. The author emphasizes the significance of a joint language and his own form of national pride that results from the sharing of the same history and culture. These are, as one can imagine, guarantees of unity and inspiration to create a greater commonwealth. Besides sorrow the poet expresses in the elegy a deep sense of faith that God has lavished attention on the soul of the deceased. At the same time 'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu'āwida very correctly notes that people spend the whole of their lives in fulfilling their plans and dreams while the fate designated for each of us is not always in accordance with our desires. Here the poet indicates not two routes but two world orders which often do not consent to each other. Although we are conscious of these discrepancies we are still, in difficult moments like the death of someone great, constantly asking ourselves the question as to why it happened so... did he have to depart just then when we so needed him. At the very end the author with open sorrow wonders whether there is anyone in his epoch who could be similar to Faisal. At the level of content the work hits one with its clarity and fairly personal character. While formally the elegy is constructed according to traditional rules and maintains constant rhythm and rhyme. The poet does not employ particularly sophisticated stylistic devices. He expresses his respect for the deceased and his achievements in a direct way.

The poet's lyrical creativity can be divided into two periods. The first is covered by the two volumes of poetry: *Dīwān al-Mu'āwida* (*A Collection of al-Mu'āwida's Poetry*) and *Lisān al-ḥāl* (*The Language of the Moment*), published in 1942, and 1952 respectively. The second period is connected with the creation of a whole series of panegyrics which appeared in the collections: *Dauḥat al-balābil* (*The Nightingale Tree*) as well as *Al-Qatariyyāt* (*Qatar Poems*).

The volume *Dīwān al-Mu'āwida* (*A Collection of al-Mu'āwida's Poetry*) opens with a dedication for the then ruler of Bahrain Salmān bin Ḥamad Āl Khalīfa:

Grandson of 'Īsa and son of al-Murtaḍā Ḥamad
 They two are for me the only ones amongst others
 Memory about them will remain for ever in the hearts of the people
 And will live for ever
 [...]
 You bestowed culture
 with goodness and grace
 You announced what was hidden
 And there is no way to calculate what you did for the glory of God.
 Your reign was a time of happiness and glory.
 You were a leader of the peoples and nations
 There is nothing strange here that I praise you
 In recalling your works with awe

[...]
 Oh lord I express my thanks for your goodness
 And dedicate my collection of poetry to you.⁴¹

The poet directly addresses sheikh Salmān bin Ḥamad Āl Khalīfa in his work. He expresses his great sense of respect for the ruler as well as his admiration and thankfulness for his actions. The poem begins with a mention of Āl Khalīfa's ancestors. It ensures that their names will remain forever in people's hearts and that they will never be forgotten. Next he turns his attention to how much the ruler has done for culture. He writes that there is no way to calculate the works he has done to the praise of God. The poet seems to be saying that he is merely recording the great deeds of the ruler and in thanks for all the goodness that Āl Khalīfa has shown he dedicates his collection of poetry to him.

In a way similar to the previous poem we can equally find here a large number of personal elements. It seems that the poet's message comes straight from the heart, that his utterances are honest and true and are devoid of the technical manipulation that has at its core the need to artificially adorn his lyrics. Al-Mu'āwida's language is naturally artistic which is a result of the high creative level of his poetry. The words the author uses to express his thoughts are exceptionally balanced, precise while at the same time their selection bears witness to his great eloquence. We do not find here elaborate metaphors or original comparisons, but simply sophisticated language through means of which the poet directly conveys his thoughts and feelings. The poem in its form comes under the jurisdiction of classic Arabic models and retains constant rhythm and rhyme.

The second volume of poems, entitled *Lisān al-ḥāl* (*The Language of the Moment*), is considered by many critics to be the most beautiful and most mature of all the poet's works. The work, entitled *Thaurat an-nafs* (*The Revolution of the Soul*), comes from this collection:

Some day this life will end
 His constant labours tired me
 Some day the spirit will be free from the constricting prisoners
 And will freely travel in space.
 Where a puff of the morning delicately awakening
 And everything is infused with the smell of flowers
 And above my grave they shoot the personification of my loneliness
 Then I will achieve my greatest aim
 [...] ⁴²

As a result of al-Mu'āwida's work with children and the huge amount of commitment he put into this work, he never had what could be described as an easy life. Constantly inundated with other projects he had little time for his own affairs.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 45.

Finally, it seems though that it was through work that the poet was able to realize his dreams and that this constituted the most important part of his life. On the other hand we must be aware that his material situation was not the best and the undertakings he engaged in often ran into various problems. Such was the case with his first job and several years later when he struggled to run a school and constantly encountered numerous administrative problems. As his closest friends tell, he consciously chose such a route. He was to encounter along its path many individuals who were favourably disposed towards his projects, though there was surely no lack of those who failed to understand him and did not see any sense in what he did and made his task all the more difficult. One can be inclined to state that the poet, for the whole of his life, was in a constant struggle with opponents. And although ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida was able to emerge victorious from his clashes they were nevertheless to leave a mark on his reaction to and perception of the world.

The work *Thaurat an-nafs (Revolution of the Soul)* is an extremely personal reflection. First and foremost we see him as a man hampered by the constant struggles with fate. He perceives life as a burden which only limits him. He sees total freedom in the casting off of the material layer. The greatest desire is to be transformed into an unhampered spiritual state. This for him is rest and an end to all struggle. There also appears in the poem a subtly hidden sense of loneliness which accompanies the poet. We can think that in the depths of his heart he feels that he has no one to count on, that no one is able to understand him and that in all his choices and struggles he remains alone. The poet in the formal construction of the work is true to classical lyricism. The poem maintains constant metre and regular rhyme.

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida also translated ‘Umar al-Khayyām’s *Rubā‘iyyāt (Tetrastichs)*. As he himself emphasized his translations, in point of fact interpretations, or reflections were inspired by reading the works of al-Khayyām. Hence the controversies they arouse amongst critics. However the originality of al-Mu‘āwida’s conception is based on his personal reading of the Persian poet and the bestowing on him of a completely new character.

In analysing ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida’s literary output one cannot pass over his works for the stage, remembering that in the 1940s and 1950s this form of art enjoyed huge popularity and was something innovative and new. It appeared in the school room and was often treated as one of the methods of working with young people. School theatre did not have in Bahrain, in a way similar to other countries of the Persian Gulf, a constant professional structure. The artistic layer consisted of chiefly the huge influence of poetry and inspiration was the most often derived from this. The language of dramatists did not noticeably differ from lyrical works, with the subject matter being chiefly the history of the Arab world. Theatre was in its own way a kind of history lesson, one teaching of patriotism. It was in this spirit that al-Mu‘āwida wrote. His most important dramatic works include: *‘Abd ar-Raḥmān ad-Dākhil*, *Sayf ad-Daula al-Ḥamadānī*, and *Suqūṭ Baghdād au Hūlākū Khān*. It is necessary to note that ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida next to Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyid is

one of the pioneers of theatre in Bahrain. He became more than likely interested in drama while studying in the Lebanon, where he had the opportunity to watch the plays of Aḥmad Shawqī who was extremely popular at the time. We know that he participated in the productions of the Yūsuf Wabhī theatre group.

In his plays he gave expression to the current situation in the country through an attachment to the past. He attempted to touch upon current problems which meant that the plays he prepared together with his pupils enjoyed immense interest. al-Mu‘āwida was himself involved in directing, set design and props. The plays were performed the most often at the home of Salmān Maṭar – a friend of the poet where makeshift scenery was erected.

During his life, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida gained the title “the poet of the young” and this term was to accompany him to the end of his days. It says much about the character of his work and about how it was received. What hits one the most about al-Mu‘āwida’s work is its unusual freshness, its optimistic approach to the reality around and its huge sense of emotionality. The poet’s work is distinguished by the richness of its language and the deeply enrooted ideas and reflections. He gives artistic expression to his aesthetic experiences that are connected with the beauty of nature. He deals with political and national questions adopting the position of an unwavering patriot fighting for the good of his homeland.

It seems that the term “poet of the young” is above all an expression of recognition, and even admiration for ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida. It encompasses many meanings and probably best conveys the lyricism of the writer. He talks to us of his emotionality, wonder at the world and constant desire to discover it. At the same time there appears here an unwavering belief in the world, in the possibility to transform the future in accordance with our desires. This opens up an extremely broad perspective for the reader, elevates his dreams and means that he thinks about himself as about the creator of his own fate, as someone who has an influence upon the reality that surrounds him.

Youth in al-Mu‘āwida’s poetry is also a rediscovery of one’s roots and the process of making oneself aware of one’s own identity. The frequent references to the golden ages of Islamic culture are often a certain antidote to the imperfections of the present day. The examples of great leaders and Arab thinkers are, on the one hand, to indicate a noble way of behaviour, while on the other they are a source of pride, reviving ambition. The consciousness of one’s cultural belongings is to give a consequent sense of strength and courage to fight for one’s rights. For youth there is no barrier to be overcome for it is chiefly directed by spirit. So equally is the character of ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu‘āwida’s work which displays transcendence and its advantage over material immanence.

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Muḥammad Rafī’ was born in 1938 in Manama. He grew up in a home where the only book was the Koran. In the 1960s he left for Cairo to study law and it was there that he encountered the “al-Adab” journal which was considered

as a literary school (see Biographies). From the very beginning he searched for answers to questions of life, death, poverty, riches, joy, and sorrow. But truth reached him on the day of his mother's death, who lacked money for treatment.⁴³ He wrote poetry both in classical Arabic, chiefly ash-shi'r al-'amūdī, as in dialect, for he was close to Arabic roots. The first volume appeared in 1970 in Beirut and was entitled *Aghānī al-baḥār al-arba'a* (*Songs of the Four Seas*). The last volume written in literary language *Wa lahā... ḍaḥk al-ward* (*And She Has... the Smile of Flowers*) was published in Beirut in 1996. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī' has also published several volumes in dialect, including: *Qaṣā'id sha'biyya* (*Folk Poems*), *Awwal al-maḥabba* (*First Love*), and *Dīwān ash-shi'r ash-sha'bī* (*A Selection of Folk Poetry*).

In the preface to 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī's collection of poetry, entitled *Wa lahā... ḍaḥk al-ward* (*And She Has... the Smile of Flowers*) 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa succinctly homes in on the essence of the author's creativity, presenting him chiefly as a poet for whom the closest is the grey existence of the ordinary man.⁴⁴ However, as it quickly turns out, this reality is far from as grey as it seems; while man within it is an extremely colourful figure.

'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī' is an excellent observer of everything that is unusual in a normal world. On the other hand he possesses a gift to relate ordinary events in a way which makes them exceptional and unique. Initially his poetic world may possibly surprise the reader, but at the same time it is extremely easy to seduce him that this world is more real, fuller and possibly simply better.

The work, entitled *Al-Qaṣīm*, is devoted by the poet to one of the northern regions of Saudi Arabia where, as one can imagine, he spent some time. Rafī' writes:

I send greetings to the inhabitants of Al-Qasim and the land
I send greetings to the birds singing in its gardens
I send greetings to those bright faces,
We have drawn a little light from their abundant shine.
The heart trembled and intensified its rhythm
As if my heart and the land Al-Qasim pulsated together.
[...]
When I visited Al-Qasim it was as
If I had fulfilled a holy obligation which had laid heavy on my heart.
[...].⁴⁵

The poem expresses the poet's immense admiration for the place described, but at the same time it is a means to express gratitude for all that he has experienced in Al-Qasim. The form used by 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī', which is in turn its own form of poetic greeting, indicates that the work was written immediately after the author's return to his home, Bahrain.

⁴³ On the basis of an interview conducted with 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī' in Bahrain, on 15th March, 2004.

⁴⁴ 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī', *Wa lahā... ḍaḥk al-ward*, Beirut, 1996, p. 7.

⁴⁵ 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī', *Al-Qaṣīm*, in: *Wa lahā... ḍaḥk al-ward*, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

The recollections as well as the reflection on the subject of what he experienced in Saudi Arabia arouses in him the need to directly return to Al-Qasim. Rafī‘ directs his warm words to the inhabitants of the region, for it is they who really created the atmosphere of the place. The poet recalls the smiling, happily disposed people with their positive attitude to life and claims that he himself shared their joy. The author talks of shine and a certain light that emanated from the faces of the inhabitants of Al-Qasim. They appear as exceptional people, filled with some form of magical power. This unique feature of theirs means that they create around them an extremely positive aura in which the poet feels great. He writes that his heart, and the hearts of the people with whom he comes into contact, beat with a common rhythm. Besides which he felt that he had found a place he had subconsciously yearned for and that it is a place of unusual harmony and peace. Who are the inhabitants of Al-Qasim? Extraterrestrial beings gifted with marvelous powers? Of course not. They are the same as others with that possible difference that they live in harmony with nature, that they find it easy to exude goodness and to share this with others. It seems that it is this trait of theirs that captures the poet the most. In Rafī‘’s recollections, Al-Qasim takes on the character of a holy place. It becomes a sanctuary to which he would willingly take pilgrimage. We may again ask whether this is some kind of especially blessed place? For certain no. But ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī‘, thanks to his sensitivity is able to perceive within its ordinariness something unrepeatable, something which means that Al-Qasim has become something so special.

A place of equal importance for the poet is Beirut. Somewhere ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī‘ has devoted a poem to. However, this poem, entitled *Bayrūt* (Beirut), was written in a totally different note to the previous one:

Oh Beirut!
 How long and in what way...
 [...]
 I say: this time is my reply
 Then I write the words of the first poem
 Setting off
 On a journey of pain and dreams
 Searching for a beautiful flower
 For those dead eyes
 Oh Beirut!
 How long and in what fashion...
 Has the time to die really come?
 Ten years have almost passed
 And still that same nostalgia
 And that same joy
 Desires to free itself from the talons of the demon
 * * *
 Beirut!
 Oh you city of lovers and love!
 Who ordered Scheherazade to fall silent?

Who said: – She lies!
 Beirut!
 Oh you, the town of the crescent, cross and tenacity,
 Who extinguished your burning zeal?
 [...].⁴⁶

We are also in this case without doubt able to identify the poet with the lyrical subject of the poem. The work is an extremely intimate reflection by the poet upon the fate of the city and also upon his own experiences brought about by recollections of Beirut. More than anything ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī‘ feels a huge sense of pain and sorrow as a result of what has happened to the Lebanese capital. We are able to suppose that the poet is referring to the bloody incidents that resulted from the conflict with Israel. The author attempts to reconcile the contemporary reality of ruined Beirut with the image of the city that remains in his memory. But this task turns out to be just too much. Rafī‘, despite the passage of time, is unable to believe what has happened. He asks: for how long? That is to say how long will he still be unable to come to terms with reality. He also asks himself the question: in what way? Possibly in what way is he to understand what has happened, in what way is the present state of things to be accepted, or with what words is he to express what he feels. What is even more interesting, as he writes, is that he himself finds the answer to these worrying questions. He says that the passing time is an answer for him. Although will the passing years really bring him solace. It appears not. Despite the passage of more years his heart still harbours regret and a certain inexpressible revolt. The journeys of pain and dreams which he speaks of are something different from the recollections of ‘his Beirut’, the Beirut he knew. It seems that the city touched by destruction represented for ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī‘ a certain sense of the destruction of his recollections. He is unable to find that unique atmosphere in the new reality. An atmosphere that was close to him and which is probably the greatest reason for his sense of loss. The demon of ruthless history does not cease to torment the poet. The saddest is that there is no escape from it. It is the demon who has demarcated youthful dreams and passionate feelings. It has also to a certain extent mutilated the poet’s recollections.

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī‘’s exceptional gift of finding petty, passing things in the world, things we pass by indifferently and their exposure to the light of day finds expression in the work devoted to women *Al-Khālidāt* (*The Immortals*). The poet writes:

[...]
 Patiently and full of sacrifice
 Bearing all without complaint or reproach
 Without these our springs would be dead like the time of autumn
 [...]

⁴⁶ ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī‘, *Bayrūt*, in: *Wa lahā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 45–47.

And what they sacrifice from themselves is like the endless sea.

My words about them are but a tiny particle

And describing it I do as I would wish

To add light to the sun

[...]

What more to add, they are life and even the source of life.

[...]

We are for them bad and coarse, and they tolerate this with understanding

We complain and forget about them, and they fall silent and stay with us.

And when suddenly our joy disappears and over us whirl storm clouds

We return to their embrace seeking in them salvation.

What more to add, they are life and even the source of life.

[...] ⁴⁷

This poem is not only in its own way homage, an expression of gratitude and recognition for women, but surely it is first and foremost an extremely intimate reflection on their subject on the part of the poet. The most interesting thing in the work is that the poet is able to cleverly present women as mothers, sisters and life companions. The author in writing about women in the plural is in fact defining the image of a single person. For suddenly there appears before us someone who accumulates within them so many features as well as social functions that it is extremely difficult to express. The poet writes: "My words about them are but a tiny particle". The poet deserves great respect for his modesty, but on the other hand through this "tiny particle" he informs the reader of who a woman really is and how extremely important her role is. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī' once again brings to light all those fragments of reality which we fail to pay attention to, and yet without which our life would be impossible.

At the same time the poet shows us how extremely important for us are all those little insignificant parts of reality asking in this who we would be without them. Rafī' as it seems directs his work chiefly to men, desiring to draw their attention to the fact that they all too often fail to appreciate women and do not show them sufficient respect. In the poet's extremely simple and laconic statement that they are life and even the source of life there hides a deep truth. These words are also repeated, constituting in the work a kind of refrain provoking one to ask a host of questions the most important of which is what are men's relations to women. Therefore in this perspective the work becomes undoubtedly a literary homage to the fairer sex, but also a balance of conscience for all men.

In the volume *Wa lahā... ḍaḥk al-ward (And She Has... the Smile of Flowers)* there is also no lack of bitter words and sorrowful reflections upon the world around. The world inhabited by the poet. Such is the nature of the work entitled *Insān al-blāstik (The Plastic Man)*:

⁴⁷ 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī', *Al-Khālīdāt*, in: *Wa lahā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

[...]
 I wake up and go to sleep
 and the evenings depart just as they return
 The years pass in vain
 God!... And I'm still alive
 Amongst those people...
 [...]
 Were they really people?
 [...]
 Sorrow for the life that has passed
 And the cities of night and the plastic man are its witnesses.
 [...].⁴⁸

The work expresses first and foremost the poet's sense of loss in the world around him. This feeling means that life has become a burden for him. The mood of the poem is gloomy, it appears as if the author can see absolutely no point to his existence. One may get the impression that 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī' considers himself to be someone from an epoch that has passed indefinitely. As he writes, subsequent years pass and he is still alive. The world around him is constantly changing but he is still the same. The poet does not understand the reality around, and first and foremost does not understand modern man, one geared towards a life of consumerism. He asks directly about his humanity.

The poetry collection *Wa lahā... ḍaḥk al-ward (And She Has... the Smile of Flowers)* is an extremely intimate reflection on the part of the poet on the subject of the reality he lives in. All the works are written in the first person and we have the right to imagine that the poet himself in expressing his own feelings is their lyrical "I". Without doubt attention is drawn by the poet's style and way of describing the world through showing its minor seemingly insignificant elements. In 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī's lyricism they constitute the most important elements of our reality. The poet captures passing moments, fragments of the everyday and creates from them an unusually colourful mosaic with his poetry.

The majority of the works in the collection have been written in accordance with the classical formal regulations and the poems retain constant rhythm and rhyme. In several cases the poet gives up on traditional rhythm but retains the regular rhyme. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī' uses on the whole simple language and rarely resorts to particularly elaborate metaphors. As a consequence of which the poetry remains formally close to everydayness which is unusual for it shows that the magic, beauty and joy of life lies in all of its small and passing moments.

Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn was born in 1942 in the capital of Bahrain, Manama. His father Ibrāhīm Kamāl ad-Dīn was a religious man who put great score on learning and poetry. Little Muḥammad started his education at a Koran school.

⁴⁸ 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Rafī', *Insān al-blāstīk*, in: *Wa lahā..., op.cit.*, pp. 55–56.

Following his completion of secondary school he moved away to Damascus in order to start his degree in Arabic literary studies. It was there that he met the eminent Syrian poet Nizār Qabbānī whose works were to constitute a source of inspiration for him. Following his return to Bahrain he worked for a time as a teacher of Arabic, but since 1973 he has been connected with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He left on a diplomatic posting to Bombay where he lived for six years. He was a member of the National Council for Culture and the Arts, and a member of parliament (see Biographies).

Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn published his first volume of poetry, entitled *Hājis al-khayāl (The Tormenting Thought of Imagination)*, in 1988. Here the dominant theme is love (ghazal) and patriotism (waṭaniyyāt). Clearly visible are the creative influences of Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān, Nizār Qabbānī and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī. He shares with the first of these his love for life perceived as a gift from God. With Qabbānī the linkage can be seen in the figure of the woman – lover, friend and source of inspiration, while his common ground with Bayātī is reflected in the classical construction of the qaṣīda.⁴⁹

An example of these inspirational sources can be the poem *Tarānīm (Psalms)*:

Don't cut your long hair
 Do not deprive my heart of the song of the psalms
 They are silk that seduces silks
 Something pleasant over the lengthening advances
 My eyes love unconsciously
 Melting in the evening glow
 Don't kill that beauty
 For I fear that the thread of daybreak fades

 Don't divide the planets in my heaven
 Do not deprive my waters of shells
 The sand cannot remain without a heart
 For its heart is the pearl in the embrace of the shells
 The wave will not cast it where it will see
 Remaining a prisoner in the arms of the sea
 Do not kill this beauty
 For I fear that the thread of daybreak fades⁵⁰

The next volume, entitled *Min dhākirat ‘Ishtār (Recollections of Ishtar)*, published in Bahrain in 1989, contains a series of patriotic poems (so-called waṭaniyyāt). The poet describes the link between the land of two rivers, i.e. the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia, and the Bahraini Dilmun. He covers the Persian Gulf in a shell, sailing from Bahrain to the city of Ur (the birth place of the prophet Ibrāhīm) which once lay on the Gulf. At present, as a result of alluvium i.e. the silting up through ooze

⁴⁹ Makkī Muḥammad Sarḥān, *Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn*, Bahrain, 2000, p. 39.

⁵⁰ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Tarānīm*, in: *Hājis al-khayāl*, Bahrain, 1988, pp. 29–30.

deposits of the Tigris and Euphrates, Ur is no longer on the sea. He is accompanied on his journey by a fish *al-mīd* which is the symbol of peace.

The poet returns to the times when Bahrain was a huge state that stretched from Iraq to present day Oman. Everything that accompanies the changes over the course of the ages appears to the poet to be a multitude of secrets, something recalled in the poem *Hijrat ṭā'ir an-nawras* (*The Scagull's Migration*):

The Earth is full of mysteries
The grass has mysteries
The palm has mysteries
And the farewell-saying sea
Devours the mysteries of mysteries⁵¹

The volume, *Qanādīl al-fājir* (*The Lanterns of Daybreak*), published in 1994 in Bahrain, belongs to those that are especially personal. This volume opens with a dedication for his wife, who the poet asks to “illuminate” the efforts involved in the writing of these poems, and who he considers to be the one without whom “he would not love life”. These words lead us into the intimate mood of the volume. In subsequent works existential themes are touched on, where the meaning of life is linked to love and poetry. Already the first poem; *Hamasāt al-rūḥ* (*The Whispers of the Soul*), has a character unusually reflective. The poet’s soul expounds on the great feeling he once experienced:

I have assembled your recollections in my heart in this collection
Your voice is still present in my poetry and rapture
Still my stream of love is decisive
It washes poetry in poetry’s most beautiful gowns⁵²

One can imagine from the dedication and the above pieces of poetry that the works are dedicated to the self same person, the poet’s great love, who at the same time is his greatest source of creative inspiration. The connection between creativity and the love that inspires it become apparent in the poem *Anti* (*You*):

You are the pulse of my poetry
You are the poetry in my pulse⁵³

In using many metaphors the poet elaborates on what this beloved is to him:

You are in the story of my life
The first letter...
The middle one... and the last

⁵¹ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Hijra ṭā'ir an-nawras*, in: *Min dhākirat 'Ishtār*, Bahrain, 1989, p. 45.

⁵² Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Hamasāt al-rūḥ*, in: *Qanādīl al-fājir*, Bahrain, 1994, pp. 9, 11.

⁵³ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Anti*, in: *Qanādīl..., op.cit.*, p. 43.

Oh, most beautiful letter
In the dictionaries of my life⁵⁴

In turn in the poem '*Aynāki (Your Eyes)* he displays his fascination with the eyes of his beloved:

Your eyes my lady
Are rivers of silk...
The sun of the day sleeps in their folds
At the hour of dusk⁵⁵

The poet again devotes himself to the same target of love in the poem *Ḥiwār ma'a al-qalb (A Talk with the Heart)*:

I suffer from this illness from the arrow of a young girl
And I have given up my heart for those beautiful eyes...⁵⁶

The poet argues with the voice of his heart. He emphasizes that feelings are unavoidable. Man is condemned as a being powerless in the face of feelings which overwhelm him.

Consideration and reflection upon the subject of the love of a mature man constitute the core of the poem '*Āshiq fī kharīf al-'umr (In Love in the Autumn of one's Years)*. The start of the poem is a description of the autumn of life, to which the poet addresses asking for a slowing down of the tempo, for he, despite his age, still yearns to enjoy love and desire:

Where is she who I flirted with
When the heart was the voice of those in love⁵⁷

The poet regrets the natural state of affairs, he revolts against it, feels sorry for his lost youth that abounded in romantic adventures.

One of the poems was composed in honour of the Bahraini poet Muḥammad Aḥmad Āl Khalīfā, paying respect to the artistry of a fellow poet:

And when he speaks the letters sing
And the rhymes flutter like a pigeon⁵⁸

He refers to him directly in the poem, paying him homage and emphasizing the position he holds amongst other poets:

You have hung the order upon the arrangement of verses⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Anti*, in: *Qanādīl...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 43–44.

⁵⁵ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, '*Aynāki*, in: *Qanādīl...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 225–226.

⁵⁶ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Ḥiwār ma'a al-qalb*, in: *Qanādīl...*, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

⁵⁷ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, '*Āshiq fī kharīf al-'umr*, in: *Qanādīl...*, *op.cit.*, p. 216.

⁵⁸ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Sayyid ash-shi'r*, in: *Qanādīl...*, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

This panegyric ends with the presentation of the poet as someone who can satiate the parched, and as a light dispersing the darkness. This perfectly captures the respect for poetry and the status the poet holds in Arab society.

An interesting work is *Istirāḥa* (*The Rest*) which appears as an intimate poem. The poet talks of a special place in his home which he calls “the field of thoughts”. This is an oasis of loneliness, peace, joy, inspiration, from where journeys set off into the depths of the poet’s thoughts:

Here my soul quizzes
As to the significance of the soul⁶⁰

Of importance in his work are those pieces in which the poet looks upon his own life from the perspective of time: he returns to a period and recalls the days of his carefree childhood, as is the case in the poem ‘*Ahd at-ṭufūla* (*The Period of Childhood*), or recall his mother as in the poem *Ummī* (*My Mother*):

You taught me to survive the difficult nights
You brought me up to be free⁶¹

It is not for the first time that we can perceive in Arab literature respect given to one’s mother. After all the Arab proverb reads: “Paradise lies at the mother’s feet”.

There is no absence within the volume of poems political in nature, for example *Tazāḥum al-ḥijāra* (*The Crowd of Stones*) referring to the Palestinian liberation struggle. We can discover the poet’s feelings towards the Palestinian question in the first lines:

Revolt stones, for this century is the century of stones
Justice comes slowly, but the sword complains of its defeat⁶²

In writing this poem the poet is aware of the importance the word plays in Arab countries. For him and many Arabs the words mean as much as the stones thrown in the Palestinian Uprising. Finally words are the only weapons fitting for a poet. In continuing we can here cite the poem *As-Sayf* (*The Sword*) in which the poet claims:

Like wisdom is needed for the brave
So for the sword is he who sharpens it⁶³

Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn is the author of a collection of poetry entitled *Nahlat az-ẓamān* (*The Gulp of the Parched*) which is dedicated in its entirety to his wife:

For she who prayed for me in the dark night
For she who worships talks with God
For me

⁶⁰ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Istirāḥa*, in: *Qanādīl...*, *op.cit.*, p. 145.

⁶¹ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Ummī*, in: *Qanādīl...*, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

⁶² Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Tazāḥum al-ḥijāra*, in: *Qanādīl...*, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

⁶³ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *As-Sayf*, in: *Qanādīl...*, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

For the companion of my heart
 For my beloved wife
 I dedicate my whole self

Muḥammad

However, other works in this volume are dedicated to other personalities. An example being the qaṣīda *Ra'āk Allāh*⁶⁴ (*Let God Take Care of You*) which is dedicated to the prime minister Khalīfa bin Salmān Āl Khalīfa following a successful operation. Another poem, entitled *Al-'azf 'alā rimāl al-Baḥrayn*⁶⁵ (*Playing on the Sands of Bahrain*), was dedicated to the famous Syrian poet Nizār Qabbānī to mark his visit to Bahrain in 1995.

The poet has also devoted two poems to Iraq. They differ from the rest in that they do not possess the form of a classical qaṣīda, but are rather looser compositions. The first of these: *Man al-'Irāq* (*Who is Iraq?*) is a series of rhetorical questions. The poet is obviously moved when he refers to Iraq, listing its virtues:

Who is Iraq?
 Is it a playing palm
 Under the sky?
 Is it mud
 On the graves of victims?
 Is it the stars
 Shinning over the Gulf?
 Oh Iraq!
 Take me to you
 Take me under your care
 To enlightened years
 Take me so that I can drown in your eyes⁶⁶

In the next poem, entitled *I'tidhār* (*An Apology*), the poet turns his attention to Baghdad. This is a monologue of an individual who is unusually emotionally linked to Iraq and its capital. In reading it one is given the impression as if a husband is returning to his beloved wife from distant travels and asks for forgiveness for his long absence from home.

I have arrived, Baghdad
 From the plantations of palm and mussels
 From the rising of the Sun
 And from the splendor of the day
 From the cloudy coast
 From the coast
 With love

⁶⁴ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Ra'āk Allāh*, in: *Nahlat aḏ-ḏamān*, Beirut, 2001, p. 9.

⁶⁵ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Al-'azf 'alā rimāl al-Baḥrayn*, in: *Nahlat...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 68–69.

⁶⁶ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Man al-'Irāq*, in: *Nahlat...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 27–28.

From the beloved Tigris and Euphrates
I have arrived, Baghdad
Bearing flowers
Forgive, Baghdad...⁶⁷

The poem, entitled '*Alā al-arḍ as-salām (Peace be on the Land)*', is a panegyric in honour of the poet's homeland. There is expressed, besides the desire for a peaceful life amongst kith and kin, love towards the homeland:

Peace, my beloved country, peace! My heart
Peace, my home country, peace! The world's knowledge!
My homeland will not disappear into the darkness like others have
Succulent love imbibe me...
Bahrain is our joint backyard
If a joyful artist sings about her...
Then there is no other home, my life will never be better elsewhere⁶⁸

The poet also reveals his specific views in the poem, entitled '*Irḥāṣāt khalījīyya (The Beginning of Changes in the Gulf)*'. There are numerous direct phrases directed to the Creator. The poet enumerates the things for which he is grateful. The quantity of these iterations increase love to God. At the same time the poet realizes his frailty and ignorance:

Oh Creator of the light and the rain!
Oh Creator of the love in a magical time [...]
In the darkness of the underworld
I know that I am a scapegoat
For millions of people
I know that I am a fragile wall⁶⁹

In one of the parts of the work there appears a monologue which possibly is the voice of the Gulf which, haunted by people's struggle for its natural resources, desires peace:

I am the Gulf of Salt [...]
I am the Gulf of Oil [...]
I am the Gulf of Fire [...]
I am the Gulf of Light [...]
And still I love peace⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *I'tidhār*, in: *Nahlat...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 30–32.

⁶⁸ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, '*Alā al-arḍ as-salām*', in: *Nahlat...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 18–19.

⁶⁹ Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, *Irḥāṣāt khalījīyya*, in: *Nahlat...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 46–47.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 49–50.

At the very end there appears an appeal to the Arabs. It would be difficult to understand if it were not for the notation of the poet who gives us a clue that the dragon is the symbol of Israel:

Arabs, don't think about the murder of the dragon⁷¹

The majority of Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn's works take as their form the classical qaṣīda, although the poet does not shy from other poetic forms. It is not simply through the literary form that the poet moves towards perfecting his artistic means of expression, but also through carefully chosen words. His poetry displays a variety of subject matter, chiefly connected with love, but also dealing with the role of poetry and the poet in the life of the individual, the passage of time, moral attitudes. Many works panegyric in character are devoted to known and deserving personalities from the Arab world. Passionate patriotism exudes from many of the works together with a love of peace. Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl ad-Dīn, gifted with a specific sensitivity, fixed on the beauty of the world and of art, has become an aesthete desiring to make the understanding of the difficult problems and conflicts of his epoch easier.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

CHAPTER 2

THE FLOWERING OF POETRY (AT-TAF'ĪLA FORM)

'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa belongs to the most eminent of contemporary Bahraini poets and his poetry has constituted for many spiritual sustenance. He is a poet of a sensitive nature who is capable of skilfully linking all literary trends though by doing so he in no way cuts "literary" corners.

His first attempt at poetry was published in the 1960s in the literary journal "al-Aḍwā". Later these works were selected and published for the first time in 1969 in the slim volume of poetry entitled *Anīn aṣ-ṣawārī* (*The Sighing of the Masts*). There is a clear dominance within this volume of poems revolutionary in character, which are directed by the poet to his father and workers. In the few words of the introduction, in turning to the reader, the poet warns that these constitute his first poetic attempts and therefore he would prefer them to be rejected if they are incapable of defending themselves.⁷² In point of fact the volume was able to defend its values in the eyes of the reader for it was infused with the unfeigned pain and misery of the woeful life of people plunged into "seas of adventures and the winds of dangers". The volume comprises works on misery and hard work. It is dedicated to workers, pearl divers, sailors and the poor, to all those amongst whom 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa lived and worked. 'Alī Khalīfa was born and brought up in a poor environment, in the reality of eternal unhappiness. He was the son and pupil of poverty for this is how the poet Qāsim Ḥaddād recalled the words of the great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy: "poverty is a specific school and 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa is one of those who learnt in this school of poverty".⁷³

Already in the first poem, entitled *Al-Jurḥ al-kabīr* (*The Great Wound*), we can detect the dominance of pain and despair. Through the poems *Jurḥ fī ḍamīr al-layl* (*Wound in the Conscience of the Night*) or *Āthār al-jurḥ al-qadīm* (*The Marks of an Old Wound*) we eventually reach the work *Khayba* (*Defeat*) whose verses are expressions of exhaustion and protest. This pain flows in a stream to which joins suffering in order to become one great river of blood – the blood of the workers. This

⁷² 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Anīn aṣ-ṣawārī*, Bahrain, 1994, 3rd ed., p. 7.

⁷³ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Ra'y jadīd fī dīwān Anīn aṣ-ṣawārī*, "al-Aḍwā", no 218, Bahrain, 6.11.1969.

pain reflects the processes of social, economic and political changes. This great suffering is the torment of the oppressed and exploited poor man. In the poem *Al-Jurḥ al-kabīr* (*The Great Wound*) we read:

I am dying... I live work in exhaustion
 In the spasms of the poor man
 Nights long the cold clasping the nothingness
 I am a prisoner of the family
 Which in the sweat of the brow wrestles with poverty and challenges
 [...]
 I am from the heart of this community...of every community
 Slowly discarded and wasted...⁷⁴

The poet with a great sense of tact deals with different problems connected with the difficult side of existence: death, darkness, hunger, weariness as one can see in the first half of the poem, entitled *Badhr al-arāḍī al-wāhibā* (*The Seeds of the Abundant Earth*). However, this mood does not dominate the whole poem. The author expresses here many optimistic opinions about a child who is able to suffer, about the morning star which accompanies man throughout the whole of his life, the courage of people who with a smile welcome their days and tasks. The remaining part of the poem consisting of a few segments is elegiac in character. The dominating sadness and lyricism of a throbbing heart characterizes in turns the tragic life situation of the boy and again the direct requests addressed to the sea to take him away. The boy complains about the lack of interest in his person. Everybody is so engrossed in worry, and dawn has not reached the distant corner. The time is described as treacherous, not drawing attention to human affairs and even more hope for a purposeful experience of life full of beauty. Despite this, that which flows out of the boy's soul is poetic, great, protecting the human dignity of dreadful and unwanted suffering:

I am emaciated... I am emaciated
 To the point of death,
 Oh you who planted various plants in the soil
 I am emaciated
 I am life... I equal life.⁷⁵

The traces of suffering appear also in other poems: in the expressions of complaint, the sounds of pain and sorrow. Yet subsequently, slowly, this voice becomes quiet so that in its place the window of the sun and hope can open up for the broken heart and suppressed soul. With this poem he conveys what he himself sees and feels, disclosing a lyrical and mystical tone. Isolation is experienced, the struggle with the adversities of fate and nature, participation in the cyclical changes of life and communing with death.

⁷⁴ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Al-Jurḥ al-kabīr*, in: *Anīn...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 9–10.

⁷⁵ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Badhr al-arāḍī al-wāhibā*, in: *Anīn...*, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

The poems from the volume *Iḍā'a li-dhākirat al-waṭan (Strengthening Memories of the Homeland)*, from 1973, have a patriotic character for they ascribe national matters within the framework of the struggle to create a just society. The pages of Bahrain's most recent history contain numerous references to coups, uprisings and revolutionary movements starting in the fight for rights for the poor and workers who constitute the majority of this small state's population. One such people's movement was the uprising of 1965 which fought for an improvement in the living conditions of workers, a rise in wages and the right to create trade unions. One of the participants in the revolt was 'Abd Allāh Ḥusayn Najm whose name the poet mentions in the poem *Āthār aqdām 'alā al-mā'* (*Traces of Feet on the Water*) wherein he praises his brave attitude. The hero of the poem *Kāna al-fatā sulṭān (The Boy was a Sultan)* is a poor boy who falls victim of a lack of legal regulations guaranteeing a worker insurance and medical care.

Poetry is for the poet a means of cleansing – catharsis. Thanks to the personification employed in the aforementioned volume 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa's poems gain an intensity, for he is not shut off in the trap of history but expresses extremely intimate feelings. The homeland appears as the love of his life, it is his beloved but also the mother expressing the worries of daily life. The whole of the homeland is concealed within the pages of *Iḍā'a li-dhākirat al-waṭan (Strengthening Memories of the Homeland)*, each stone, each grain of sand. The poet's memory is the distant oasis amidst the desert which preserves all the details especially the life of the brothers-in-arms, for example in the poem *Hubūb an-nār 'alā damm al-ward (The Gusts of Fire on the Blood of the Rose)*:

Oh, Gulf! How the tiny boats trust you
They unite sailing in the face of the storm
How you are blue on the walls of the chambers of authority
Green on the maps of invaders
How red, loudly sobbing!⁷⁶

In the poem *Ḥuzn Laylā: Ṭufūl (Sorrow of Laila: Tuful)* the very title indicates suffering. The poet here talks about man, love and death. He expresses fears and universal values; he desires to awaken from lethargy, to be forced to reflect. He is unable to accept the opinions about the world but can with reality.

Over the shoulders of the sea's blue expanse
stand two little girls.
One child kissed me and slept,
sad fields of papaya in the lap of meadows.
One child tormented me long, so long, and never slept.
I arose from her side, wounded,
aged by flames.

⁷⁶ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Hubūb an-nār 'alā damm al-ward*, in: *Iḍā'a li-dhākirat al-waṭan*, Beirut, 2000, 3rd ed., p. 83.

Fire was my exit.
 Fire was the entrance gate to her
 I arose from her side, wounded,
 accompanied by harbours
 and the darkest daisies, cloud-wounds and thunder.
 Weary, her braid kissed me,
 entrusting me to the little birds.
 Laila's heart was tearful, she carried within her
 the sorrows of vagrant birds,
 a bird faced by rifles,
 a bird bleeding and scarred.
 Laila's heart was tearful. I was a lover
 chased forever by hounds of the tribe.
 My love surged to her in waves, stringing death to life,
 interlocking with the tremors of stars, the flights of meteors,
 and eruptions of the hearts.
 I wanted to dissolve within her
 To believe my vision, for space is reddened
 by the blood of the bird which kept its feathers
 and did not sell its song at the auction.
 Believe what the eyes of Gulf oysters say:
 "She whom I did not betray, within whose tumult
 my arms grow stronger,
 will be neither the continuity nor conquest,
 if all of you do not keep faith."
 Laila's heart was tearful: I was combing Tuful's hair
 as she called for her father, whom they had killed and buried
 and wiped the tears of the innocent jasmine
 as dry sands sought water
 springing into grass in her lap.
 Summer delivered its rain on the balcony of waiting
 as Tuful called for her father, drawing a sun in the sand,
 a palm tree,
 and a single arrow, pointing towards a fifth direction.
 Her mother realized her little bird's wound would be
 saddled like a daring horse, to carry her from the
 defeated age of fear
 across all the bridges, wholeheartedly.
 Within in the ripe winds of presence struck root,
 all the wounds wore its scars.
 The roads shed oils to turn coat-threads
 into candles and flames.
 So be rested now, Gulf soil,
 drink up these blazing fires.
 One day the baked brick of buildings
 shall shed sun-froth and jasmine

and glimmers of lightening.
 Be rested now, Gulf soil,
 and wait for me.⁷⁷

‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa constantly worked upon his artistic method and developed his talent so that in his last volume *Fī wadā‘ as-sayyida al-khaḍrā’* (*On the Parting of the Green Lady*) he achieves genuine poetic mastery. One can see in it full creative maturity together with a deep understanding of the world and its ways. Khalīfa, just like his great forebears (e.g. Al-Mutanabbī), complains about the bad, cruel times he has to live in. Reality for him is a prison, even for birds, which he expresses in the poem *Ṣahd ar-ramād* (*Ash*):

This cruel time
 Is the time in whose shadow flowers die
 And the birds are prisoners in its expanse⁷⁸

In the poem *As-Sanābil* (*Ears*) the poet directly refers to this “bad time” where there is no room for good and honest people. The poem is reflective, it contains an aura of silent accusation and revolt, as well as helplessness in the face of the repeating schematic situations of life. However, despite the existing cruelty and hypocrisy in human existence, honesty and truth remain the highest goal for the poet:

In this bad time
 If you come with good
 And dew the withered rose with your blood
 And oppose with truth
 The ugly deceitful face of life.
 Then the company will leave you
 And those near will desert you
 And ignoramus will cast stones at you in the street
 On all sides frogs will surround you
 You will become the prisoner of rumour.⁷⁹

The earth was not basically inclined for the subtlety of its knights, except possibly in rare moments of generosity, of a miracle or of some superhuman practice. The honour of seeing, looking, loneliness remains. Being a clown does not achieve the support of the author. The final lines of the same poem bring the truth of the possible charisma of change and the necessity of the protection of truth by man:

⁷⁷ ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Ḥuzn Laylā: Ṭufūl*, in: *Iḍā‘a ...*, *op.cit.*, translated by Lena Jayyusi and Nami Shihab Nye, *Sorrow of Laila: Tufūl, Salmā Khaḍrā’ Jayyūsī*, in: *The Literature of Modern Arabia*, London–New York–Riyadh, 1988, pp.142–143.

⁷⁸ ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Ṣahd ar-ramād*, in: *Fī wadā‘ as-sayyida al-khaḍrā’*, Bahrain, 1992, p. 11.

⁷⁹ ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *As-Sanābil*, in: *Fī wadā‘ ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

In this bad time
 Maybe help
 Is only being a clown in this disdainful game
 However man should protect the truth
 And from a running wound the ear of corn grows.⁸⁰

In the poem *Ṣahd ar-ramād (Ash)* the poet feels disenchanting with life and isolated when there is no one to talk to, hence he asks:

Who heartens the disenchantment of a soul?
 Oh you great disenchantment.⁸¹

In the work *An-Nakhl wa-aṭrāf an-nahr an-nāḍīb (Palms and the Ends of the Dried Up River)* we read:

Did you try the taste of loneliness when
 The birds pecked memories...?
 My, how wild is that bird of prey!!⁸²

In his isolation the poet feels shattered, defeated and exhausted. He expresses this in the poem *Sayyidat al-qalb (Lady of the Heart)*:

I am exhausted
 Shattered in this world
 Defeated and alone.⁸³

Also 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa himself explains, through his poem, entitled *Ṭā'ir an-nār (The Fiery Bird)*, what poetry is to him:

Poetry is my disenchantment and victory
 And it, oh if you had seen Layla, my madness and suicide
 Poetry is the fiery bird singing in my blood
 And the water flower of watery colour in my withering and bloom.⁸⁴

The poetry is a true witness of his life. It is poetry that mobilises him to follow the course of thoughts and the soul. This sincere labour will never disappear as long as there is a hand able to raise a pen, and breath to penetrate silence. Though after all this is in accordance with the characteristic Arabic poetic soul, in the life of which poetry is always like the loyal horse slightly outstripping the rider. Thanks to which real madness and suicide no longer have a clear road, it is fettered by art, its appointments and pledges of mission. The poem from start to finish plays itself out in lofty areas, amidst the peaks common for God, man, human fate and the enigma of mission. At the same time the poem is directed to a second person, the actual and

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁸² 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *An-Nakhl wa-aṭrāf an-nahr an-nāḍīb*, in: *Fī wadā'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

⁸³ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Sayyidat al-qalb*, in: *Fī wadā'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

⁸⁴ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Ṭā'ir an-nār*, in: *Fī wadā'...*, p. 84.

symbolic Layla. It is directed to her listening and loving soul. We are dealing here therefore with the hidden sense that “all is poetry”. The author’s soul experiences all of which in an unlimited way. Love also is certain, but the author is not steered by love, but through an internally elusive quality, where love must be doubly initiated: by oneself and learning. So the mysterious final words of the poem would indicate:

Therefore accept the pieces of heart and stand...
To the beautiful seclusion
The time of union has come to pass.⁸⁵

The poem *Fī wadā‘ as-sayyida al-khaḍrā’* (*On the Parting of the Green Lady*) touches on the sad subject of the decline of civilisation. This decline is connected with the over exploitation and lack of conscious maintenance of the natural environment, its essence personified here by the female nature of the Green Lady. The Green Lady, treated with disdainful majesty, starts to be respected when her absence starts to be perceived. For up to that moment she had fulfilled a subservient function:

You were a house servant, the refuge of the emaciated
And the mother of the wretched.⁸⁶

The author asks a rhetorical question wondering what will be left when nature ceases to exist:

What is possible, oh, my Green Lady
When life passes, leaving its green colour.⁸⁷

The poem, entitled *Anā an tahja‘ al-khayl* (*The Time Came to Rest the Horses*), speaks of effort, intuition, love, and achievement. The first part of the poem can relate to the happy arrival at a place where matters can be explained, consoled, can liberate love in the raptures of the spirit. It can equally be related to a purely love situation, as equally spiritual – the search for the presence of God. Everything is possible and a thousand doors can answer a thousand yearnings and a thousand questions. The second part of the verse can refer either to the author or the hero encouraged to take a rest on life’s journey, to the luxury of safety earned. However, if one is to look closer it can equally be a polemic with God himself – with he who having lit the wick of suffering in man lost the countenance of his face amongst people. He does not ask why that happens though one may suppose that the spiritual reality did not turn out to be as permanent as we supposed. The poet says:

Submit to your time, for time
Is bringing you to the end.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

⁸⁶ ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Fī wadā‘ as-sayyida al-khaḍrā’*, in: *Fī wadā‘... op.cit.*, p.72.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

⁸⁸ ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Anā an tahja‘ al-khayl*, in: *Fī wadā‘... op.cit.*, p. 49.

With this, however, one can and should engage in polemics – what time is coming to an end? And this refers to the end lines relating to the horse, which for certain are here a metaphor and symbol of intuition, and of the living course.

In these hostile realities for the poet the light of hope almost extinguishes, only a small spark remains and does not allow itself to be smothered. The poet writes in the poem *Mustawḥish (The Wild Man)*:

I am wild
I was seized by a fear of darkness
The heart despite trying did not reach the light
The light which almost extinguished... in the distance.⁸⁹

In seeking salvation, the poet comes to the conclusion that only love is able to change everything. When the face of the beloved woman takes on the features of festivity, life changes its taste becoming soulful and full of the beauty that the poem *Fī ḥaḍrat man ahwā (In the Presence of the One I Love)* reflects:

When your heart shone with the face of the prophet
The taste of lavishness changed in a bitter time.⁹⁰

In the discussed volume the poet attempts to sever the bonds of the traditional metrical models and to rid himself of the monotony of poems through a shortened form of poetry. In subsequent volumes there appear images of increasingly faster progress on the road to the future; upon which the poet gazes intermittently with hope and with doubtfulness. There is no doubt that he is troubled by the problem of the degeneration of the natural environment something suggested by the title itself. “The Green Lady”, or the palm, and together with her the whole of nature is threatened by complete devastation. In his attempt to provide nature with help the poet enumerates the most splendid images of beauty and life – consequently the poems are filled with dew, flowers and trees. The images of nature are etched on the face of the beloved one, who takes on the personage of the Lady of nature crowned with flowers and roses. One clearly detects the dichotomy: man – nature.

In the year 2000, the volume *Ḥūrīyyat al-‘āshiq (The Hour of the Lover)* was published. This can be considered a continuation of the subject matter contained in *Fī wadā‘ as-sayyida al-khaḍrā’ (On the Parting of the Green Lady)*.

Not in vain did ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa entitle his sixth volume of poetry *Khūrīyyat al-‘āshiq (The Hour of the Lover)*. An awful lot of the feelings here are based on the mistiness of mystery, deep-rooted desires, and first and foremost quests for “the isles of happiness”. The subject matter that unites the collection into a strict whole is love. It is love that is the aim of both the life wanderings of the writer as equally of his artistic quests. However in the way that love has a thousand hues and shades then equally the lyricism devoted to it will never be identical. ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh

⁸⁹ ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Mustawḥish*, in: *Fī wadā‘...*, *op.cit.*, p. 107.

⁹⁰ ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Fī ḥaḍrat man ahwā’*, in: *Fī wadā‘...*, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

Khalīfa's poetry attempts to grasp the unique beauty of this feeling, but in an extremely interesting, individual and with it intimate way. Love, in his poetry, although so ethereal is ascribed to everydayness. We will not find in the volume burning declarations of love, assurances of submission or emotional passion. It appears against the setting of ordinary life yet causes it to become unusual. Love is the manifestation of something wonderful, it is a consciousness that wonder in actual fact can be realized. On the other hand, the sense that this heavenly feeling is constantly under threat from something causes the poet to experience immense torment. Hence the sorrow and yearning that appear in the volume quite a lot. For example in the poem *Marāyā az-zaman al-bāqī* (*The Mirror of Time that Remained*), where we read:

Sorrowful he appeared in a dream
 His voice sounding from the desert by the sea
 Filled with the aroma of musk, cardamoms
 With that note of nostalgia
 His lively voice touched the depth of the heart
 And left
 Leaving the spirit of a splinter and a scar in the cage
 As well as the remains of the lover's flowers.⁹¹

Love for 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa is something that constantly needs to be fought for, something that is lost and obtained. In its self it is a promise and announcement of happiness or despair. The poet does not admonish for a moment how to care for this feeling. He is far from giving out instructions. He is equally unable to answer the question as to why love sometimes weakens. How does it happen that suddenly everything that appeared to be a surrogate paradise starts to end? In the work *Al-Masāfa* (*Distance*) the poet states:

There was an invisible pane between us
 And the cry of the birds...
 [...]
 What did you want
 Why did your eyes gaze at me for so long
 And then searched for haven in the final tears?
 [...]
 Why does fire break out and then spread?
 Why is there an invisible pane between us today?⁹²

The questions asked by the poet are left without answers. He knows only that between him and his partner there exists some kind of barrier that recalls a pane of glass, through which all is visible but which equally stands as an obstacle. A fire

⁹¹ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Marāyā az-zaman al-bāqī*, in: *Hūriyyat al-'āshiq*, Beirut, 2000, pp. 21–22.

⁹² 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Al-Masāfa*, in: *Hūriyyat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

breaks out between the couple, the symbol of purity or destruction. This also means that in the poet's heart, which can be identified with the lyrical "I" of the work, uncertainty grows, fear, and even terror.

Similar feelings are to be found in the poem *Zahrat an-nadam* (*The Flower of Remorse*) where the author deliberates, among other things, on the condition of contemporary man. He asks:

It is interesting whether there is some expensive thing
Whose value is sufficient to live or die for?
[...]
People in today's times are a toy that breaks easily.
While love is the light of a falling star
[...]⁹³

Love is an unusual value, something exceptional, but one also delicate and fleeting. Man today, as 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa writes, is constantly running somewhere. He is unable to discover even the real taste of his own existence. The poet sees people "without faces, without hearts" constantly hurrying somewhere. Can love give to life the proper colouring? It seems as if love is the only value worthy of struggle and effort. Despite the fact that at times it lasts for but a moment, it completely changes us and the world that surrounds us. So the taste of life is that of love, and the value of our existence is measured through the prism of this feeling.

It is difficult to give material form to something so elusive. It is difficult for words to give shape to thoughts and senses, words that are never perfect and which always miss something. A word is a form of compromise, agreed to by the poet. The cost borne as a result is first and foremost the necessity to apply often indefinable thoughts to a conventional and limited system of signs. The poet gives expression to the above dilemmas in the poem *Rabābat al-ghiyāb* (*The Wondrous Rababa*):

I wandered round the streets of a great town
Around the parks and the hanging gardens
I searched for a wonderful butterfly which would take wing with me
To the land of the gentleness of roses... the roses of youth.
[...]
I searched for a rababa with magical strings
Which would express what I wanted to say.⁹⁴

'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa's volume *Ḥūriyyat al-‘āshiq* (*The Hour of the Lover*) is a very intimate and reflective collection of poems. As far as the level of language goes it follows to note that the poet often freely moves from metaphorical stanzas to an almost prosaic description. The author uses primarily blank verse and his works are not subject to constant rhythm or regular rhyme.

⁹³ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Zahrat an-nadam*, in: *Ḥūriyyat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

⁹⁴ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Rabābat al-ghayāb*, in: *Ḥūriyyat...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 55–56.

This subsequent volume constitutes a further wandering on the route of restoration and the search for new poetic dimensions, and here one can detect the influences of traditional poetry with its stable metre and single rhyme, for example in the poem *Ṣabāḥ al-khayr... ‘aynāki* (*Good morning... eyes*). Yet the poet goes beyond the traditional conventional frame of foot, for example in the poem *ar-Raqṣ ḥubban* (*Dance is Love*) while at the same time failing to give the impression that he agrees with poetry in prose, and this is thanks to the preservation of a single rhyme from the start to the finish of a poem. The poet talks on the subject of matters creating circles for the existence of man and nature. One can ascertain that the more mature lyrical voice starts to look at the world through the prism of recollections.

Two volumes of poetry: *‘Aṭash an-nakhīl* (*The Palms’ Thirst*) and *‘Aṣāfir al-masā’* (*Evening Birds*), published in 1970 and 1983 respectively, are written in dialect, which was a conscious choice on the part of the poet to make the work more accessible to the average reader. In the volume *‘Aṭash an-nakhīl* (*The Palms’ Thirst*) ‘Ali ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa developed his poetical talent. In each of the poems in the collection the characteristic structure of the *mawāliyyā*⁹⁵ harmonises with the contents. The majority of them are composed of seven lines (*musabba’*), e.g. the poems *Yā layt* or *al-Ayyām*.⁹⁶ The first three lines have an identical rhyme AAA. The subsequent three have the rhyme BBB, while the last one rhymes again with A (AAA BBB A). The remaining *mawāwīl* preserve a nine-line rhyme structure AAAA BBBB A, for instance the verse entitled *Sayf al-qahr*.⁹⁷ Usually, the first three or four lines depending upon the type of *mawāliyyā* (seven- or nine-line) has the rhyme placed on a homophone used however in its various meanings.⁹⁸ Despite the fact that ‘Ali ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa was proclaimed a poet of *mawāwīl*, he has tried to free himself from its characteristic structure. In one of his interviews he states: “I have tried to completely free myself from the traditional, inflexible form of the *mawāliyyā* turning to modern verse full of space”.⁹⁹

‘Aṭash an-nakhīl (*The Palms’ Thirst*) contains the cries of life and for life. It hides a collection of wisdom, experiences, moral models and traditions which are the essence of Bahraini culture. He directs his volume towards the palms “which grow despite thirst and salty desires”, for palms are life eternally returning birth.

⁹⁵ *Mawāliyyā* (*mawāliyyā*) one of “Seven Arts” (*al-funūn al-sab‘a*) i.e. forms of verse composition which include the classical ode (*qaṣīda*) but also the later multi-rhyme inventions. The first reliable examples belong to the seventh/thirteenth century. Early poems consist of four lines in the *basīṭ* metre with a single rhyme what is called *rubā’ī* or *murabba’*. Later developments are the result of additions between the third and fourth lines. At present the *mawāliyyā* is more commonly called *mawwāl* (pl. *mawāwīl*), the term previously applied to the composer of *mawāliyyā*. cf. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Julie Scott Meisami, Paul Starkey (eds.), London–New York, 1998, vol. 2, pp. 518–519.

⁹⁶ ‘Ali ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *‘Aṭash an-nakhīl*, Al-Manama 1994, IVth editon, p. 41.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 75.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

⁹⁹ ‘Abd al-Ḥamid al-Maḥādīn, *Ma‘a ash-shā‘ir ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa*, in: *ath-Thaqāfa al-‘Arabiyya*, no. 7, July 1975, pp. 62–66.

Another symbol of Bahrain is the sea which will last eternally just like the land which yields palms for the world. These give shade to the inhabitants, feed them with their fruits and protect them in their houses covered by palm leaves. The sea is the source of their wealth, the route for adventures and the window on the world. Everyone must therefore take upon themselves the responsibility to defend the sea, the earth and the palms for these are equivalent to defending one's home and one's family. In the poem *Arđ aṣ-ṣabar (Land of the Aloe)* the image of the transfer of inheritance to a brother is portrayed.

The beautiful mawāliyā *Al-Ayyām (Days)* describes the dignity and entourage of love. The person in love and rejected does not destroy his love. He immerses himself in oblivion, hides on the ocean bed where renewal can not reach him, screams with a justified scream like a child plucked from the breast. The right of love is always dominating.

Oh you loved one, who poured salt onto the wound
I gave you my heart and you tortured my soul
I have no hope for your love, your wings beat, go away
My heart will not be offended, it is in the depths of the sea
Forgets about the pain of the night... it's like a baby
That screams after having been plucked for ever from the breast
There is nothing like time to heal the wounds.¹⁰⁰

The poem *Wayn ashtirī lak dawā? (Where will I buy You Medicine?)* is a kind of a polemic with a son. In 'Alī's poetry the thought range often refers to such a parallel. The contents of this piece is clear. Everybody has on their own to define themselves, recognize and win. In this poem it is expressed as a symbolic medicine.

Where will I buy you medicine, nobody sells for nothing
Around the land where desire can not be satisfied
There is no happiness for a man with stable feelings, only for a scoundrel
Where can I buy medicine for you, everybody has there own affairs
The palms have died, son, the earth is thirsty
And the wounds of my years have opened
Make your own medicine for your wounds, there is no free medicine.¹⁰¹

The mawāliyā entitled *Yā layt (Yearning)* is the poet's poetic picture describing the dissociation of body and soul, wholeness and part, cleanliness and reality, good and evil. The echoes of the polemic collectively reach us. The poet agrees to generalisations because life is alive. He is offended when somebody claims that it is sweet and flowery. Sweetness is desire and a wounded flower is existence. He fully accepts the turns of faith and underlines the energy and greatness of life, life of the

¹⁰⁰ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *al-Ayyām*, in: 'Aṭash..., *op.cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁰¹ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Wayn ashtirī lak dawā?*, in: 'Aṭash..., *op.cit.*, p. 41.

soul wanting to kiss the sun in every house. In every house there lives poetry, and only such a true book of life is worthy of being written and read.

They said: your drink is honey! I said: it's the desire of the soul.
 They said: your youth is a flower! I said: the flower is wounded.
 They said: it's a shame that the moon retires after being full.
 Oh, if only the moon didn't disappear in the morning
 Look, I'm flying, after a while I fall broken.
 I want to kiss the sun in every house.
 But where is the one who would give the soul back to the body?¹⁰²

The volume *'Aṣāfīr al-masā'* (*Evening Birds*) contains poems in dialect, that also abound in feelings and emotions: love, yearning and suffering. Many works have had music composed for them and are sung by the most noted singers of the Gulf.

The poem, entitled *'Aynī 'alā najmat zuhr* (*Looking at the Southern Star*), does not constitute such compact thought compositions as the others, but the four time repeated expression "little bird sing poetry" links the whole. The sight of the poet slides gently over the areas of human existence. Reflection on life is impartial. The main and meaningful thing is always fire:

And he who has fire inside
 Is not afraid of glowing coal in his palm.¹⁰³

Fire, as one of the pillars of Arab life, permanently dominates 'Alī's poetry. The poem *Nār an-Nashāma* (*The Fire of the an-Nashāma Tribe*) is witness to the presence of fire in the life of the Bedouin. Life is happy as long as the fire burns, with its flame constituting the existence of life.

And it is difficult not to agree with the words of the poet himself that poetry is for him: "the total foundation of life satiated with stormy emotions and the base of destiny is the fire in its blood [...] It is the message for all aspects of life".¹⁰⁴

There, on the highest shelf, you will rest.
 Be careful, I want you to settle
 between the perfumes and graceful antiques
 till the day my hands can reach you
 to dust you off,
 sweeping the longing from your cheeks
 and all that waiting may have done to you.

Dazzled lover,
 the road of love has changed.
 The concerns of this strange age become

¹⁰² 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Yā layt*, in: *'Aṭash...*, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

¹⁰³ 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *'Aynī 'alā najmat zuhr*, in: *'Aṭash...*, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ Bāsim 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Ḥammūdi, *Waqf'a ma'a dīwān Fī wadā' as-sayyida al-khaḍrā' li-sh-shā'ir* 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, in: "al-Baḥrayn ath-Thaqāfiyya", no. 16, April 1998, pp. 36–40.

a cross on which the beloved dies,
 a token for those of no invention.
 Wrap yourself in a grave-like silence
 and the solitude of a melancholy night.
 Tell your soul: these days, emotions are hard as wood,
 and you are merely a small concern among many.
 All you are is a swing where one rests a moment,
 or summer fruit, unexpectedly come to us in winter.

Why then, out of the blazing furnace,
 do you exert yourself each evening,
 emerging from the moment of fusion,
 to coax dream – buds into flowers
 and throw open a window for longing,
 a window for longing.¹⁰⁵

‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa’s poems are examples of involved poetry, for the creator himself is a eulogist and defender of the homeland. He identifies with his fellow countrymen and he pierces every poem with a love for the homeland.

‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa’s poetry is subtle. If one does not follow every word, no matter whether it fulfils the reader’s expectation or not, its refined expression eludes, eludes the delicate artistic matter of the thought, which dikes place in time, blossoms or ordinarily shows its intention.

‘**Alawī al-Hāshimī** was born in Bahrain in 1946. He studied Arabic literature at the Arab University in Beirut. He next continued his studies in the United Kingdom crowned with a PhD thesis, entitled *Tajrubat ash-shi‘r al-ḥadīth fī al-Baḥrayn* (*The Experiment of Contemporary Poetry in Bahrain*).

‘Alawī al-Hāshimī is the author of several divans of poetry: *Min ayna yajī‘ al-ḥuzn* (*Where does Sorrow Come from*); *Al-‘Aṣāfir wa zill ash-shajara* (*Birds and the Shadow of the Tree*); *Maḥaṭṭat li-l-ta‘ab* (*The Stops of Fatigue*). He is also an eminent literary critic and of significance in his work are the books: *Mā qālathu annakhla li-l-baḥr* (*What the Palm Told the Sea*), *Shu‘arā’ al-Baḥrayn al-mu‘āshirūn* (*Contemporary Bahraini Poets*), and *Qirā’āt naqdiyya, as-Sukūn al-mutaḥarrrik* (*Critical-Literary Studies*).

‘Alawī Al-Hāshimī discovered the charm and beauty of literature when he was still at secondary school in Manama. This period of his life is characterized by an unusually bold opening upon the world of art. He was fascinated by many areas of art including theatre, painting, calligraphy, and also photography. It was as a result of his wide range of interests that he stood out from his colleagues. He was involved in many artistic projects. He soon started to write himself. The first of his poems which

¹⁰⁵ ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Nāfidha li-l-ḥanīn*, in: *Fī wadā’...*, *op.cit.*, Manama, 1992, pp. 15, 19, translated by Lena Jayyusi and Naomi Shihab Nye, *A Window for Longing*, in: *Salmā Khaḍrā Jayyūsī, The Literature...*, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

was extremely warmly received by his school were published in the “ash-Shabaka” and “al-Maw‘id” journals. His debut works give expression to, first and foremost, his feelings and intimate experiences. Soon poetry was to dominate his interests pushing increasingly to the background his fondness for theatre and painting.

The volume of poetry, entitled *Min ayna yajī‘ al-ḥuzn* (*Where does Sorrow Come from*), published in 1972, can be treated as the announcement of great originality and talent. It was only subsequent volumes of his poetry, which were an expression of his courageous and innovative artistic quests, that were to bring him recognition.

The desires expressed through poetry constantly evolve while simultaneously his technique has become increasingly perfected. The degree in trade he undertook in London in no way affected the continuation of his writing plans.

His first serious poetic debut was the poem *Ḥabbāt al-‘iqd* (*The Beads of the Necklace*) published in 1968. The poet did not use elaborate language, did not revert to original sublime metaphor, but in a simple and economical way he expressed his own thoughts and reflections concerning Arab reality. Khalīl al-‘Abwīnī in his review, that appeared in the journal *al-Khalīj ath-Thaqāfī* of the 26th of April 1982, wrote that the construction of the work is based first and foremost on the dominating role of rhythm, while the language layer is characterized by an almost journalistic conciseness. Despite certain formal imperfections, a simple uncomplicated symbolism can be perceived, a romantic character, and chiefly a sincerity in patriotic feeling are all directed by the author. In this work the poet broaches the extremely difficult subject of unity for the countries of the Persian Gulf, and in a wider context unity for all Arab states:

It is not enough for me...
Beloved Princess, that a small necklace
Should adorn your beautiful neck
Of minute beads
And while I live I will not rest
In the search for greater pearls for you.
[...]¹⁰⁶

He does not lose heart over the situation in the Arab world. He knows that unity between the Arab states has not been achieved, but he does not cast off this notion. He takes upon himself extremely difficult tasks. He tries his hardest to realize this not only his dreams. It is worth drawing attention to the symbolism used by ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī. Words such as: “spring”, “light”, “necklace” contain, besides their literal meanings, a whole host of hidden contents resulting from the artistic work. Besides which the said key words combine within the work into greater structures. They create a whole network of coded meanings. Thus we suddenly discover that the already mentioned necklace for his beloved is at the same time an expression of Arab unity. For the poet this necklace should be composed of the greatest possible number

¹⁰⁶ Makkī Muḥammad Sarḥān, *‘Alawī al-Hāshimī*, Beirut, 2000, p. 30.

of beads that reflect individual countries. The beloved princess is here the poet's homeland – Bahrain. This once Sumerian land of happiness called Dilmun has served in order to be bestowed the necklace, the beads of which are all the Arab countries. In seeing the collapse of his vision he despairs but does not lose hope:

[...]
 The beads of my necklace have fallen apart
 Fallen apart? Oh... my heart
 It is as if pierced by a dagger
 Stealing the spring from my soul
 And covering me with darkness.
 [...]
 But oh beloved one, as long as the sight of your eyes lives on in me
 I will derive strength from them
 [...]¹⁰⁷

Here the poet expresses human strife with adversities. Political events and the fiasco of the struggle for unity has aroused in him a great sense of unease. It appears to him that everything has suddenly collapsed, has lost all meaning. The impulse to live gives him only the memory of his beloved's eyes, a memory as noble as the idea for which he is prepared to give his all.

The critic Khalīl al-'Abwīnī, who has been already mentioned, writes that 'Alawī al-Hāshimī draws particular attention to rhyme and rhythm. These two factors give to his verse a specific sense of melody and mean that his poetry can be read as a song. He shows that in this sense his work is very close to rhyming prose.

As Khalīl al-'Abwīnī claims the harmony of the formal construction at work within the pieces is broken up at times by the style of narration, and even oratorical. On the other hand such a method may be interpreted as something fully conscious, aiming to evoke within the reader specific impressions. The mood of the poem undergoes a certain change in its final part:

[...]
 The butterfly on the lips of the flowers paints love
 A dancing wave bathes in the streams of odour
 And the stream of light arouses joy within me
 Oh my beloved!!
 [...]¹⁰⁸

As we can see despite all the adversities the poet maintains hope in his heart. And what is more it seems that the very beloved – his home country together with the entire beauty of nature strengthens him and bestows life-giving strengths. We can perceive in these words the germ of the creator's evolutionary idea.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

The dream of Arab unity has not been realized, hence attention in its entirety is concentrated on his own country. National freedom is symbolized by a fawn bird who teaches at the same time love for one's country:

The love of your eyes my little wild bird
 Allows me to tread on the wounds which I carry in my heart...
 To rise above my sorrow
 To straighten out broken wings,
 And to scatter my moons in the dusks of the night..
 The love for your eyes has taught me
 To love people, each who is with me.
 And to present to those near
 Heart and knowledge...
 To love my country ... and all of its inhabitants...
 [...]
 Your love has taught me that man
 Cannot live without a homeland.
 I will defend my country from invaders
 If they attack
 Like locusts, plague or infection.
 [...]
 Deforming the face of children and destroying the richness of the earth
 ...Burning it mercilessly
 [...]¹⁰⁹

Therefore love for his country becomes the most important question for the poet. He discovers that despite the wounds he carries in his heart the desire to serve his country still holds him.

There is no doubt that terms like: "bleeding heart", or "broken wings" symbolize disillusioned hope or minimal chances. The all embracing night may be an expression of fear, or uncertainty regarding the approaching days. The poet draws on his strength and trust in a better tomorrow from a belief in his own country. The country's freedom symbolized by the wild bird becomes a source of positive and creative energy which appears to have revitalized the poet. A new element in this poem is undoubtedly the declaration of struggle with the invader. This time round these are not the Mongol or Tartar hordes, but the greedy world empires. The poet directs towards them unusually harsh words. He compares them to the destruction bringing locust. He described them as a deadly infection which maims children and ravages the earth. The author tries to move the reader, to induce him to deep reflection upon the present situation.

Khalīl al-'Abwīnī criticizes the formal imperfections of the poem which are supposed to be seen in the numerous and unjustified repetition. True, after an initial reading the poem could give the impression of being to a degree artificially accented

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

in certain areas. This is the case with the continuous repetition at the end of the work of the words “allowed them...”. However on deeper analysis the work shows that this method is fully intended by the author and does not result from stylistic weakness. The poet is clearly embittered by the situation his beloved country finds itself in. His words constitute an accusation, that of a man who can expect help from nowhere. In the last lines the poem becomes unusually pessimistic. The world is shrouded in night, and existing dreams and desires are brutally destroyed. It seems that the only comfort for the poet is the belief that he himself will become a sacrifice for the homeland.

One must note that ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī’s words are extremely moving. They abound with an enormous love for his homeland, worry about its fate as well as a desire to be a sacrifice and to lay down his life for it. These values contrast strikingly in the work with the overwhelming powerlessness to act. One may consider that it is just this painful experience that arouses in him a powerful strength of spirit.

‘Alawī al-Hāshimī creates the reality of his poems in a way that differs from the traditional canons and it is here that his originality is to be found. Lyricism mixes in his poetry with the epic, the harmonious depictions with the sharp tone of manifestation. However all these elements create a harmonious whole in relation to content as well as what the poet himself emphasizes – rhythm. One can see here the influence of the French school represented by, among others, Hippolyte Taine, who in her artistic principles strongly accentuates the significance of harmony and rhythm. ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī claims:

without rhythm everything is of an ordinary level and pedestrian be it language, images, sounds... or even poetry. [...] Every moment possessing its place on the line of time is a rhythmic moment which searches organization for itself in the rhythmic order, whose trait is the division of time into units. This moment creates a harmonizing essence, complementing the essence of every piece of art without exception.¹¹⁰

Rhythm is an element that penetrates and organizes the whole of reality in such a way that the independent and isolated elements are linked into one organized entirety. It means that the said chaotically existing elements fuse together into a harmonious order carrying within itself an emotional and content load. Hence they create through this a certain unending chain.

Such an approach to art and in particular to lyricism brings the poet closer in a specific way to contemporary philosophy. However, al-Hāshimī is also able to draw on the rich Arab literary and philosophical tradition. As we can see he tries in his creativity to combine many artistic concepts with the fundamental element uniting this rich experience and constituting a departure point for the poet being the harmony of rhythm.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

¹¹¹ Compare: Makkī Muḥammad Sarḥān, ‘*Alawī...*, *op.cit.*, p. 2000.

The poet continues the subject of the homeland in the volume *Al-‘Aṣāfir wa zill ash-shajara (Birds and the Shadow of the Tree)*. Anyone who thinks, however, that his deep-rooted love for his home country is the only beloved place on earth is mistaken. If in his works we find love for the home country then this is a difficult love, one full of contradictions and bitterness. Al-Hāshimī’s feelings conveyed onto paper via his ambiguity constitute a journey into the depth of self. His mind is completely full of painful recollections. The track along which the author’s thoughts travel creates an unusual and disturbing melange of time and sorrow. His melancholy has many hues, they are far from greyness, and are almost multi-coloured.

The poet in writing about his Homeland is not merely thinking of Bahrain but also about the Arab Homeland. In the poem *Qirā’āt fī daftar al-jurḥ al-‘arabī (Readings in the Arab journal of injustices)* he writes about the tragedy being played out in the Lebanon:

In prison the yearning for the world intensifies... and the small things
Become clear that reach us from the world
Outside
[...]
But what is happening in the Lebanon is shocking and terrible
Like a nightmare...¹¹²

In the poem *Waṭanī an aktuba shi‘aran fik (Oh Motherland, I am writing a poem for you)* he addresses his beloved homeland full of hope for her total independence:

But You My Homeland
Shine like a star
In the heart of darkness¹¹³

The poet connects himself to the tradition of classical Arabic poets through his reference to the Arab horse, who despite exhaustion rises up and fights:

And the Arab horse still remains on the field of death
It fell, and did not get up¹¹⁴
[...]
The exhausted Arab horse.. gets up
And on his back hunger
Draws a sword and fights¹¹⁵

In the poem *Zahrat ad-damm (The Flower of Blood)* ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī returns to his description of the suffering country. In the first part of the poem he turns to a woman who is the personification of the motherland, with whom, despite love, he will have to part. In the later lines the poet describes what is happening around him:

¹¹² ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Qirā’āt fī daftar al-jurḥ al-‘arabī*, in: *Al-‘Aṣāfir wa zill ash-shajara*, Beirut – Libya, 1978, p. 140.

¹¹³ ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Waṭanī an aktuba shi‘aran fik*, in: *Al-‘Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 21–22.

he speaks of graves which observe those who pass by carrying the homeland on a catafalque:

They leave
I press my hand on my heart
And shout invisible behind my skin:
Where are they going with my country?¹¹⁶

In the end he calls for opposition to violence, for struggle against those who cause evil. However in the poem *Al-Muṭārada* (*The Chase*) he warns the daredevils with bitterness that the battle with evil is exceptionally difficult:

We will cast them into the cellars of death
We will persecute them
We will silence all feverish voices
We will extinguish them.¹¹⁷

While the image of the defeated humiliated homeland is filled with terrifying sorrow:

I stand face to face with you:
– the bare palms
– a grain of wheat which hides its yearning in the earth
– with butterflies whose wings are crucified...
– streams and birds are terrified
– the besieged land¹¹⁸

The existential considerations concern the loneliness of exile, or equally of an emigrant in the face of the passing of time as exemplified in the poem *Al-Laḥḥa* (*A Moment*):

Alone in your hand like a cut off root
Alone in your sea like a wave abandoning the shore...forever
Yearning for my homeland is eating me alone
Hunger is eating me alone at this moment
[...]
Oh Lord of eternal life
Give me the hand..
Pull me out of this sorrow
Give me the hand...
Take me from this moment: from this abandoned grave.¹¹⁹

Sunk in the all-embracing sorrow the moment contains within itself eternity which gives the impression that time ceases to exist although paradoxically it is more

¹¹⁶ ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Zahra ad-damm*, in: *Al-‘Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

¹¹⁷ ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Al-Muṭārada*, in: *Al-‘Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 45–46.

¹¹⁸ ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, ‘*Alā ṭaraf sabbābatī tataḥarrak al-arḍ*, in: *Al-‘Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

¹¹⁹ ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Al-Laḥḥa*, in: *Al-‘Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 88–89.

present than ever before. A moment of time in 'Alawī al-Hāshimī drags out into infinity, through which he himself listlessly drifts.

Like a boat cut off from the world
 In the darkness of your waters
 One wave gives me to another
 [...]

 Lonely in your hands like a pointed stump,
 Alone on these waters
 Like a wave that has abandoned the shore¹²⁰

The poem is composed of clear parts in which the poet uses images in order to emphasise the effect of temporality and ethereality. The whole work is an apostrophe to the moment of our existence and one great metaphor of the moment:

Oh, moment
 There is in you the murderess of recollections, the reflection of yesterday
 And the history of time stopped
 ...like death at the gate of the night previous
 Oh moment...
 There is in you the executioner of the echo ringing in the broken glass
 ...at the depth of melancholy, in you is the executioner of the echo of the forgotten one
 [...]

 Only I as the cut off root remain in your palm
 Only I in your sea as a wave abandoned the land... forever
 Only I am devoured by the yearning for time
 Only I am devoured by yearning for the homeland
 Only I, oh moment, am devoured by hunger
 [...]

 Oh woman of eternal duration
 Reach out your hand to me...
 Save me from this sorrow
 Reach out your hand to me...¹²¹

June 1974, Cairo

The poet uses contrasts, of which the most obvious is the contrast of man and time, the moment and eternity, as well as light and darkness. Quite often there is also a comparison and other stylistic devices like, for instance, the double oxymoron "devoured by hunger".¹²²

At the beginning of the work the poet presents the image held like a frame in a film. The situation is exaggerated by the reference to the broken glass, the symbol of a splendid merry past, and yet broken, wasted as a result of imprisonment in the

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 87–91.

¹²² *Ibidem*, p. 89.

moment. The subsequent, and several times repeated, image is a comparison of man separated from his country to the plant separated from its roots, a castaway thrown about by the waves of the sea. The next lines stress the poet's loneliness. Somewhere there we feel the presence of our surroundings, and yet despite this the loneliness is all embracing.

In the poem *Ar-Raḥīl fī khadrāt an-nār* (*Departure into the Green of the Fire*) a subject of manners, something political is contrasted with the poet's spiritual position who realizes the subject matter through the use of visions. Many signs signify that we are here dealing with the author's lyricism that touches on self-subject based themes; "The wind gallops on the back of my sorrow". 'Alawī al-Hāshimī grapples with the problem of his patriotism and writing. In order to understand his dilemma, I will briefly outline the socio-political background of the poem which was written in 1973. At that time a constitution was adopted in Bahrain, two years after being given independence by Great Britain following many years of being governed under an imperial mandate. At this very time the mood within Arab countries underwent radicalization especially amongst the anti-Israeli coalition in Palestine. This period is often referred to as the six-year war or the war of devastation. In October 1973 matters came to a head with another conflict with Israel. Hence the beginning of the 1970s abound with key events for "the Arab homeland" (*al-waṭan al-'arabī*). The author notes a certain paradox in loyalty between the two homelands which constitute the subjects of the work. 'Alawī al-Hāshimī admits that he writes and creates only for his country, his people, for the homeland. The author does not want to be and cannot remain indifferent to the suffering of his homeland. In the second part of the poem there appears a desert that starts to become green. The essence of all this is the poem's culminating point i.e. its last line: "And the flags are turning green in my country". The interpretation of this may be varied. It could signify the blossoming of social life within the young country, or in a deeper sense the flowering of Islam for which green is the symbol.

This poem strikes one with its expressionism, talk of matters social and political through the help of striking images. These images, changing like in a kaleidoscope, create in the mind of the reader a certain vision but it is not this that appears to be the most important for this is not impressionism, but rather the expression of all the poet's feelings in all their hues and therefore a kind of therapy for he himself. This theory appears to find credence in 'Alawī's graphics and drawings that complement the volume.

I write poetry for You...
 (I place my neck under the blade of the dagger. On its edge shines death
 Sorrow burns the heart)
 You are there, on the roads of a distant country
 (I kiss death
 Long for all those who are dying before me and after me
 History burns silence)
 I go behind your eyes... behind the steps... I walk behind You, wait...

Then she cries... cries... only she?
 I forgot about You, oh forgive me
 I forgot about You... the first homeland would not let me sleep,
 The homeland bleeding like fire in my body,
 The homeland breathless... tired... glowing like ashes
 Under the lids
 And when I write poetry for You
 ...a girl from my country cries on my shoulder...
 And I forget you in her
 And I forget her in You
 Both are mixed
 You become love, sorrow and hunger
 You become my country
 My country is You...
 It becomes green
 My face becomes green
 The desert around me turns green
 My heart becomes green,
 The greenness of the fire spreads in me...
 From the pain of the earth I germinate for you in the high palm of longing
 For you the sweet dates from me and the snooze in the shade under the palm
 leaves
 I stretch out between the two of you:
 You are the cloud that shades me
 Boiling water pours over my body
 All my seeds in the bosom of the earth absorb Your water
 So fall...
 Fall...
 When the rain falls from your face
 Wetting the palm groves,
 And the flags are turning green in my country¹²³

Bahrain, 1st February 1973

‘Alawī al-Hāshimī’s aim in presenting the events of the poem is to arouse emotions. They express sorrow and yearning, provoking one to reflection and deliberation. On the one hand the style is bombastic, with regard to the patriotic content, though on the other it comes close to colloquial language so that it can be understood by all. There are poems where no division into verses appears and the verse is free. Individual lines are comprised of various numbers of syllables. At times they are full sentences like for instance: *Yatasallaq qāmat aḥzānī shajar al-khawf* (“The silhouette of my sorrows climbs the tree of fear”)¹²⁴; some sentences are even so elaborately constructed that they take up several lines, at other times particular

¹²³ ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Ar-Raḥīl fī khaḍrat an-nār*, in: *Al-‘Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 65–74.

¹²⁴ ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Wajhak/Dhākiratī*, in: *Al-‘Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

lines are single words: *as-sa'īda* (happy) or *yukhaḍḍir* (turn green).¹²⁵ Although there is no division in the poems into stanzas, in some there is division into parts, like for example *Zahrat ad-damm* (the flower of blood) with separate and numerated parts. In turn, the poem *Qirā'āt fī daftar al-jurḥ al-'arabī* (*Readings in the Arab journal of Injustices*) is divided into seven longer sections. We come across, in some of the poems, fragments of dialogue e.g. *Al-Muṭārada* (*The Chase*). In the whole volume there is little in the way of punctuation. Commas, colons and dots are used sparingly.

The poet uses inversion in order to put emphasis on a given word or phrase: *Waḥdī ayyatuhā al-laḥza ya 'kulunī al-jū'* ("Only I, oh moment, am devoured by hunger").¹²⁶ We also find anaphors:

Hal ghannat shams [...]
 Hal ghannat fī [...]
 Hal ghanna fī [...]
 Hal ghanna bayna [...]¹²⁷

The poet also uses anaphors to draw attention to the homeland: *Lakinnak yā waṭanī* ("You, My Homeland")¹²⁸, or *Yā sayyidat al-'umr al-bāqī* ("Oh, Lady of eternal life").¹²⁹ Besides which there appear epithets, metaphors, similes. There appears in the volume only a single phrase in dialect (an-nashal) which the poet explains in the footnote as female attire worn in the Gulf.

'Alawī al-Hāshimī's reflections can be compared to the irregular levitation of flying substances which time and again collide with each other and then pass clear of each other. 'Alawī al-Hāshimī's creative output hides within itself formal richness. A metaphorical richness, an enormous variety of moods and themes over which there rules the exceptionally sharp intellect of the poet. The whole of his poetry is based on a mood evoked by the choice selection of a word, one chosen with great care and the instinctive feel of an artist.

Ḥamda Khamīs is one of the most important phenomena in contemporary Bahraini poetry. Her volumes of poetry are a significant literary occurrence that have been translated into many languages including English, French, German, Spanish and Russian.

Her first volume, entitled *I'tidhār li-l-ṭufūla* (*An Apology for Childhood*), is imbued with sadness for the country resulting from the political happenings of the time. In the poem *Ughniya min al-'ālam ath-thālith* (*A Song from the Third World*) the poet hopes to draw attention to her country and its inhabitants who are citizens of various degrees of disability: blind, deaf or lacking limbs:

¹²⁵ 'Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Ar-Raḥīl fī khadrat an-nār*, in: *Al-'Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

¹²⁶ 'Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Al-Laḥza*, in: *Al-'Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

¹²⁷ 'Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Qirā'āt fī daftar al-jurḥ al-'arabī*, in: *Al-'Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

¹²⁸ 'Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Waṭanī an aktuba shi'ran fik*, in: *Al-'Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

¹²⁹ 'Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Al-Laḥza*, in: *Al-'Aṣāfir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

If the amputated hand were to grow
 I could hold it out to greet
 A man in the future
 If they hadn't removed my leg
 I would run with the wind...
 If they hadn't gouged out my eyes I would see the sun illuminating

The darkness of dusk and the green rain which unites with the earth
 Giving life¹³⁰

The poem is full of sorrow and a lack of faith in a brighter future. It expresses pain that her countrymen have ended up living in a country of constrain, torn internally and externally, unable to cope with the challenges life presents them with and unable to see hope in the future. The poem, as its title suggests, has a song-like character, with each verse sung by a different person.

Another poem, *Kitāba 'alā buq'at ḍau'* (*An Inscription on a Spot of Light*), is in its own way a diary with every previous line beginning with the words 'I write':

I write:
 Words with heart protected at the bottom of the well...
 I write:
 A cemetery wall...
 I write:
 A suitcase of sorrow...
 I write:
 The rain of promises...
 I write:
 With words of anger...¹³¹

The poet writes about everything that surrounds her in order to convey to her descendants knowledge about now and the past conveying the poet's state of mind, her sense of loss, despair and helplessness. Ḥamda Khamīs hits one with a patriotic tone present in the liberation poetry of every nation.

The whole cycle of poems, collected in the volume *Aḍḍād (Opposites)*, was written in Cairo in 1993. The initial poem describes the port which the poet perceives as a symbol of safety, a place to which someone oppressed by the inconveniences of travel would willingly head. There are also in the cycle several sentences which contain the whole truth about what impedes man, e.g.

Our walls are high
 And our horses slow¹³²

¹³⁰ Ḥamda Khamīs, *Ughniya min al-'ālam ath-thālith*, in: *I'tidhār li-l-ṭufūla*, Bahrain, 1978, pp. 92–93.

¹³¹ Ḥamda Khamīs, *Kitāba 'alā buq'at ḍau'*, in: *I'tidhār...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 95–97.

¹³² Ḥamda Khamīs, *Aḍḍād*, in: *Aḍḍād*, Amman, 1994, p. 23.

The said walls are everything that limits us. They are our anxieties which erect walls of fear, failures, defeats slowing down our arrival at a desired goal. In point of fact all the limitations that man encounters in the modern world for constituting a part of society are party to its rules and conditions. However, the second line brings with it an element of hope that even these high walls are unable to imprison man; for man, here compared to a horse, is attempting to ensure himself independence and happiness.

Every end is death
And every mountain is peace¹³³

The poet places the equals sign between end and death for they are synonymous for man. Death is the final end towards which each of us heads during the course of our whole life. The second line talks of a mountain, upon which we can find peace. This mountain is a metaphor that encompasses within its scope many aspects. This may be the aim towards which we strive during the course of our lives, overcoming many of the twists of fate and standing on high we gain joy, fulfilment and peace. The said mountain could be paradise where we expect to find peace after the labours of life.

In another fragment we are again reminded of the brittle nature and limitedness of our life:

We are like a glowing coal
And when the wind subsides
We turn into ash¹³⁴

Stopping the fire, in this case human life, does not belong to man's domain. It is a higher power that watches over this, a force empowered to give and take away at a moment unknown to us. This force is impossible to understand and study fully. It is fleeting and capricious like the wind and we are unable to control it though we understand that it holds sway over our lives. It is because of it that life smolders within us and at its wish that our lives extinguish. The poem is a metaphor for human fate, its brittle nature and dependence on God.

In the series of poems *Khalīj ar-ramaḍ* (*The Gulf Burning with Sun*) the poet does not avoid a description of the nature of the Persian Gulf which intertwines with reflections upon life:

Here is the flame
Established its towers
Between the flickers of the air
And the blows
Salt smoker
While the sea

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

Frees the desire
 Hidden at depth
 The tide takes us out
 And returns us with the incoming¹³⁵

And here the poem calls forth opposites: the desert and the sea inseparably linked with the lives of the inhabitants of the Gulf. Their life is equally moments of rest, joy and love. In a way similar to nature which is not simply the scorched earth and burning sand that makes existence difficult. Life moves with the rhythm of nature like the incoming and outgoing tides of the sea – the sorrows and joys, death and birth, creative elation and despair. Further on the poet takes us on a journey of the land of her ancestors whose souls are still present; to a land which has not been spared by the whirlwinds of history, to the land of ‘two seas’:

Bahrain
 Lost amongst maps and linked
 The salty sea is generous
 The fresh sea is deceitful
 Two seas
 Ah...
 This strangeness is like a tattoo...¹³⁶

This work, written in the United Arab Emirates, where the poet has lived for years, shows the immense sense of longing and attachment to her homeland, flashes of passion which in passing leave emptiness and suffering. Love to her homeland is like a tattoo which will for ever remain engraved on her soul.

The fruit of the pomegranate is a common element in the daily life of Arab countries, and not without reason does it find itself in the title of the next volume *‘Uzlat ar-rummān (The Loneliness of the Pomegranate)*. For Muslims the pomegranate is a gift from God. It is supposed to remind one of the tears of the Prophet Mohammad or the tears of Fatima following the death of her son Husayn who died at Karbala. Islamic mystics look at it completely differently seeing in it – as a result of its structure – a symbol of unity of greatness.¹³⁷ The volume contains poems written during the course of two years 1996–1997. The most important element appears to be nature, in which are interwoven reflections on the subject of life, love and joy.

The first work entitled *As-Sarā’ir (Mysteries)* is its own form of introduction and a type of auto presentation who will lead us through the mystical world of poetry.

It is I who is the seed of struggle
 I am the descendant of greatness
 With the enchanted temptation they became

¹³⁵ Hamda Khamis, *Khalij ar-ramad*, in: *Aḍḍād...*, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

¹³⁷ Compare: Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika arabsko-muzułmańska*, Warszawa, 1997, p. 38.

Also the hidden magic
 The harridan of the soul
 The princess
 Over the flickering expanse
 Like silver
 Held out in the explosions of feelings
 Like a carnation
 In the silence of ecstasy!¹³⁸

Natural phenomena and interpersonal relations are presented in an unusually artistic way in the series of fifteen poems, entitled *Ta'ārīj* (*Zigzags*). The poem, entitled *Qūṭn* (*Cotton*), is an example of word play in Arabic:

Clouds
 Are the cotton of the heavens
 Every time the sea cried
 Drank its sorrow
 And left in tears¹³⁹

The next interesting “zigzag” is the poem *Ahwā'* (*Passions*) which in the course of only a few words contains fundamental truth regarding love and interpersonal dependence:

We are getting closer
 You told me we are getting closer
 I said but
 In terms of passion
 We differ!¹⁴⁰

The constructional essence of the poem is to be found in the use of two Arabic words which are very similar in pronunciation but which semantically differ totally (*na'talif* and *nakhtalif*). These words constitute not only a link but two elements of the rhyme.

The poem *Bahā'* (*Beauty*) is the next dynamic and flowing description of the wind. With its build and tempo it perfectly conveys the characteristics of this atmospheric phenomenon:

That puff of wind, a shot
 How often it has turned in space
 And visited all the ends of the horizon
 Autumn does not suit its spirit
 Winter too
 That puff of wind filled with...
 Beauty!¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ḥamda Khamīs, *As-Sarā'ir*, in: *'Uzlat ar-rummān*, Beirut, 1999, p. 7.

¹³⁹ Ḥamda Khamīs, *Qūṭn*, in: *'Uzlat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Ḥamda Khamīs, *Ahwā'*, in: *'Uzlat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁴¹ Ḥamda Khamīs, *Bahā'*, in: *'Uzlat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

The title poem *‘Uzlat ar-rummān (The Loneliness of the Pomegranate)* is made up of eight stanzas and does not lack symbols taken from the field of nature:

She...
 In the meadow is her love and butterfly
 On the broad plain
 In the waving figs
 In the sparkle of her eye and her insurrection
 Let the window of the pomegranate remain closed before her
 Let her rise
 Like gold molten by the universe
 Let her be calm
 In the peace of the pomegranate
 And her solitude!¹⁴²

The key to an understanding of the final volume of Ḥamda Khamīs’s poetry, *Mass min al-mā’ (The Feel of Water)*, is the symbol of water that appears in various states. Here the metaphor of the sea is dominant together with what it is associated with: sand, gulls, pelicans, shells and masts. This sea fulfils varied functions and possesses a rich symbolism full of offshoots and changeable significance that represents various aspects of life. Once it is a powerful element, another time a lover yearned for by a woman. It is presented as a primordial force which has a huge role to play in the life of man. It is something metaphysical which links man in a mysterious way with the absolute.¹⁴³ In the opening poem of the volume, from the poetic cycle *Hal ashbahu al-baḥr? (Do I recall the Sea?)* water – the sea becomes a symbol of female fertility. An association with the harmony and cyclicity of a woman’s life is suggested which embodies primordial nature not lending itself to intellectual analysis. A woman also embodies enormous strength and wisdom.

Calmly
 The sea rocks
 In the shine
 Of that morning
 Calmly
 Like a woman
 Participating in wisdom
 Fertility
 Antiquity!¹⁴⁴

The sea-woman arouses a sense of safety, guarantees a mother-like calm. Although the poet declares that a woman does not recall the sea they do have many

¹⁴² Ḥamda Khamīs, *‘Uzlat ar-rummān*, in: *‘Uzlat... op.cit.*, pp. 45–46.

¹⁴³ Compare: Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa, 1990, 2nd ed., pp. 232–235.

¹⁴⁴ Ḥamda Khamīs, *Hal ashbahu al-baḥr*, in: *Mass min al-mā’*; United Arab Emirates, 2000, p. 7.

traits in common and the sea is very close to her. A woman, like the sea, possesses: “waves, incoming and outgoing tides...”, which is a clear analogy to the cycle of a woman’s body. Also in common are:

...worries, the mystery of death and birth:
 I am a woman
 I do not recall the sea
 But I have waves
 incoming and outgoing tides
 I know about worries
 I know the mystery of death
 And Birth
 And the beauty of pearls
 And the softness of water
 When it flows
 Onto calm areas
 Do I recall the sea
 Does the sea recall me?¹⁴⁵

The sea has been ascribed attributes like goodness, happiness, harmony which in their entirety together with the sky and earth form the glittering horizon. There also appear “humming shells” which maybe also symbolize a woman. This poem appears to be its own form of panegyric in honour of the sea that arouses calm and harmony in the life of man.

In the series of short poems, entitled *Mass min al-mā’ (The Feel of Water)*, the sea becomes a safe haven, an asylum in which the poet can find solace. Its absence is synonymous with madness for her. She treats the sea as someone close, also protective, a friend and the loyal companion of her loneliness. The sea gives her internal harmony and allows her to calm down. She submits to it with pleasure. The title *Feel of Water* is a life enhancing touch which is essential for everyday life:

But my lungs were not touched
 By your delicate air
 [...]
 I did not greet you with the morning
 So that my day surfaced from the darkness
 [...]
 And I dissolve along with the salt in you
 [...]¹⁴⁶

We can sense in the above stanzas the poet’s great fusion with nature, particularly with the element of water. Water is for her as necessary as the air. She yearns for water as for a lover whenever she finds herself distant from it. Every time, even a short separation, is felt deeply by the poet:

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

[...]
 How long my separation from you has been
 How many days have passed since you sent me a shell
 Or a delicate ocean breeze
 Or a wave
 Which would roll in my direction
 [...]¹⁴⁷

She desires to sleep and dream that her beloved will visit her in her dreams. Sometimes the expression of her desires takes on a clearly erotic nature which rebounds, for example, in the line “touched your secret”.

The sea has a power over her which she is unable to define. It tempts her like a little girl, promising salt and sweets, lures with its powerful strength and arouses the senses.

In the poem *Nashīj al-malak (The Cry of an Angel)* water appears as something sacral, divine. It is subordinated to the angel of the title, who appears once in the form of the lyrical “I”, another time as the addressee. It is the emissary “of waters and creations”¹⁴⁸ and the instrumental strength of the beneficial action of the sea. Once more the sea pulsates with life (gulls, pelicans, shellfish, snails), arouses dreaming and helps in its realization, if only one stays together with it. Water also appears in the form of tears: longing, sorrow and finally the crying of an angel. It cleanses the heart, relieves all pain, it is an antidote to all sorrow. It possesses magical power.

Hamda Khamīs’s poetry is very individual in character. Water appears in various forms and in these varied personifications is animalized which results in it becoming a living being. It symbolizes woman and female fertility. It embodies the first union of man with nature. Sometimes this union takes on an erotic character. The sea is a safe harbour while remaining an element untamed by man. It seems that Ḥamda Khamīs’s poetry deals with simple daily events, but with this those that are the most important, and the spirit of her poetry remains uniquely individual.

Yūsuf Ḥasan was born in 1942 in Bahrain into a conservative Muslim family. In 1967 he gained a diploma in Arabic literature at the Arab University in Beirut. He actively participates in the cultural-literary life of Bahrain publishing within the pages of the leading newspapers and literary journals articles on literary subjects: “al-Aḍwā”, “al-Waṭan”, “al-Baḥrayn ath-Thaqāfiyya”, “al-Kātib al-‘arabī”, and others. He was one of the cofounders of the Bahraini Writers’ Union (Usrat al-Uḍabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and its chairman in 1996–1998. He is the author of many critical sketches. In 1999 his book, entitled *Al-Baḥrayn fī shi’r Abī al-Baḥr al-Khaṭṭī (Bahrain in the Poetry of Abu al-Baḥr al-Khaṭṭī)*, appeared in Sharjah.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁸ Ḥamda Khamīs, *Nashīj al-malak*, in: *Mass min...*, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

In 1988 he published a slim volume of poetry, entitled *Min aghānī al-qarīya* (*From Country Song*). This volume is an example of the realistic poetry which occurred in Bahraini literature in the mid 1960s. The poems from this collection are characterized by constant references to the everyday life of the countryside and its inhabitants. The very title of the collection signals its content, while the vocabulary taken from the local dialect creates a natural climate for rural life. It is clear that the poet feels good a long way away from the town. It is here, in the peace and quiet, that he devises the projection for his feelings, ruminations and reflections on various aspects of life.

The volume begins with a dedication for a dead father who was the poet's first teacher as well as being a great authority figure. He taught him to use Arabic and probably stimulated his interest in poetry, opened before him new horizons for thought, imbued him with ideas of good, beauty, love and justice. In the poem '*Allamanī abī* (*My Father Taught Me*) a voice from the past talks to the reader. The poet recalls his life from his childhood days:

I was a delicate child... playing amongst the dunes
 I sowed joy in my father's heart
 [...]
 I got down to real work for you
 Like men
 I collected wood on the sea shore
 And attire was my sail
 Tied with string in the waist
 Just like my granddad used to do
 [...]¹⁴⁹

He expresses his affiliation and love for the severe nature of Bahrain:

I have been attached to the palms
 I have been attached to the earth
 Since I was small¹⁵⁰

In the end he talks about the death of his father. The poet remembering the parent's teachings, comes to terms with destiny and his departure. The world according to laws is born to live and in its own time die, something that is a natural state of affairs. It is significant that the father's death is not pointless, and everything that he inculcated his son with now takes on, in this moment, a special significance. We arrive at the heart of the work in the last line which is directly linked to the title:

He told me that evening
 My little one, remember
 To give to others
 And illuminate the sky with light

¹⁴⁹ Yūsuf Ḥasan, '*Allamnī abī*, in: *Min aghānī al-qarīya*, Bahrain, 1988, p. 62.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 63.

On the paths of people met
 For the youngest to rest satisfied
 Protected in the shade of the palms
 Before the sun of the day...¹⁵¹

The recollections of the dead man recalls by its nature his teachings in which an important place was taken up by goodness. This part of the work is full of nostalgia and yearning for the deceased. From the formal side of things there are clear repetitions of particular lines through which the author creates a framework for the selected fragments. Thanks to this approach the achieved effect emphasizes those values which are especially significant for him. It is necessary to add that this framework does not coincide with individual stanzas, but appears within their limit. The appearance of an irregular rhyme influences the partial rhythmization of the work.

Similar in character is the poem *Min kitāb an-nakhīl (From the Book of the Palm)* referring to the greatest treasure for the Bahrainis – the palm. In bygone days Bahrain was referred to as “the land of a million palms”. The poem contains numerous names used locally for palms and their cultivation. In order to aid the understanding of others the poet has placed a glossary at the end of the poem.

Despite the superficial impression that the language used by Yūsuf Ḥasan has, as much simplicity as the content conveyed, a reader of his poetry is in fact dealing with works that are written in a manner that is extraordinarily refined and exceptional. This concerns in particular the content which in itself demands especial emphasis in relation to its connection with poetry and the Arabic language. In this sense the conveyance clearly corresponds with form. An example for which could be the poem entitled *‘Audaṭ Imrū’-l-Qays min mashāghilihi al-layliyya (The Return of Imrū’-l-Qays from his Nightly Duties)*. This is clearly connected to one of the most eminent poets of the pre-Islamic era: the master of the qaṣīda, Imrū’-l-Qays. It is worth remembering that the form of qaṣīda created by him was in later times considered an unattainable model for the poetic art; one imitated by others. In the work presented Yūsuf Ḥasan had a chance to express his love for language by paying his respects to a great ancestor:

[...] you were not an ignorant
 But a newly born amongst the tribes [...] ¹⁵²

In this work there is clear reference to the struggle of Imrū’-l-Qays which he undertook following the murder of his father. From that moment the whole of his life obtained a single goal: to avenge the deceased.

[...] You weren’t there
 You did not notice the wind

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

¹⁵² Yūsuf Ḥasan, *‘Audaṭ Imrū’-l-Qays min mashāghilihi al-layliyya*, in: *Min...*, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

When it carried clouds of dust
 After it suddenly arrived, from the hands of the murderer [...] ¹⁵³

This desire to take revenge on the murderer redefines his life, one may say that it has created the poet in the way we know him today.

[...] You became the heights
 That stand as an obstacle for the expanses of the plains [...] ¹⁵⁴

Yūsuf Ḥasan in an unusually metaphoric and pictorial way presents a profile of the great poet. The very act of undertaking the subject of this great poetical authority brings with it the need to apply the self same forms at least as a mark of respect, something that Yūsuf Ḥasan attempts to do as well as he can.

Each of the works contained in the volume of poetry *Min aghānī al-qarīya* (*From Country Song*) has a particular character. The reader experiences in almost every poem the impression of encompassing freedom. To a large extent this is brought about by the frequent usage of the words: air, wind, sun which gives a sense of a constant communing with nature regardless of the problem matter dealt with by the poem. The poem, entitled *Ṣalāt al-khauf* (*The Prayer of Fear*), is a specific type of liberation from fear:

Fall silent like me in order to hear the lark
 What does a sparrow do in a frosty and rainy gust of wind?
 Fall silent so that we may be rendered unto God through faith
 We pray in the cloak of night
 We beseech God to erase fear from our inside
 And he opens us to love
 And gives us hope... ¹⁵⁵

The poet presents an image of a man conscious of his minuteness, something symbolized by the sparrow in the face of the huge forces of nature. Especial attention is paid to the prayer in silence. Silence for this has something in connection with divinity:

Fall silent like me, in the silence hear the magic language...
 Fall silent, don't hear the wind
 Which means that magic embraces the lovers ¹⁵⁶

Prayer is a specific form of statement. By definition it is to bring together two elements: the human and the divine. It is a form of man's relations to a personal God, treated as the deepest expression of the religious act. As with every prayer the aim of those who pray is an opening on supernatural events, divine reality as well as grace.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹⁵⁵ Yūsuf Ḥasan, *Ṣalāt al-khauf*, in: *Min..., op.cit.*, p. 30.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

The poet, who appears to be leading the common prayer, prepares himself and all those praying with him for this very act before he starts to ask God. He desires in silence and concentration to pray for the highest values that man has been bestowed with: faith, hope and love.

In reading Yūsuf Ḥasan's work one is able to uncover a richness of form linked with the specific, characteristic type of elements used by him in creating the work. The volume *Min aghānī al-qarīya (From Country Song)* contains varied poems: prayers, songs, qaṣīda, as well as other poetic forms in which one often can notice the framework for fragments of text, meter and irregular rhyme. As Dr. 'Ālawī al-Hāshimī has pointed out, the author of the preface to this volume, Yūsuf Ḥasan was someone who opened up a new rural chapter in the poetry of Bahrain.¹⁵⁷ Words such as: "palm fronds", "clay", "dust", "hut", or "village" are indelibly connected with his poetry which acquires as a result a unique character.

Ibrāhīm 'Abd Allāh Būhindī was born in 1948 in al-Muḥarraḡ but was brought up in al-Manama. During his childhood while learning from the Qur'an in a religious school (*kuttab*) and in reading the Prophet's hadiths he became acquainted with the literary language which he mainly uses in writing his poems (*'āmūdī and taf'īla*). He also produces folk songs and stories (partially rhyming) in dialect as this constitutes a part of national heritage.

The first of his volumes of poems, written in dialect, was published in 1974 and was entitled *Aḥlām najmat al-ghabasha (The Dreams of the Morning Star)*. This is a collection of "subjective poems" for as the poet admitted during conversation with myself, he does not see any borders between what is subjective and that which refers to humanity in general, for poetry is a collection of human emotions.¹⁵⁸

The second diwān; *Ashhadu annī uḥibbu (I Confirm that I love)*, written in literary language in free verse (*taf'īla*), was published in 1987. It constitutes subjective reflection on man in confrontation with life and suffering. The lyric poetry contained here is a long way from the classical lyric poetry that deals with joyous fulfilled love. At times the impression is given that they have their origin in the al-'udhrī lyric poetry i.e. about platonic love bringing suffering. Taking into consideration the limited number of dialect words that the author interjects into the poetry we are able to compare it equally with zajal whose authors wrote about love, making use of similar symbolism: the unfathomable sea, yearning and love. The poet writes about love – a timeless and universal feeling which makes it difficult to place his poetry in any particular environment or epoch. It is only the modern form of the poetry which betrays its temporal context. The poems are written in an exceptionally simple language with numerous repetition, e.g. the word *'ayn* (eye) which appears in the text over forty times starting from the motto sentence: "Your eyes ordered me to

¹⁵⁷ 'Ālawī al-Hāshimī, *Hadhā ash-shi'r...*, in: *Min aghānī al-qarīya, op.cit.*, pp. 5–9.

¹⁵⁸ On the basis of an interview conducted with Ibrāhīm Būhindī in Bahrain, on the 23rd of March 2004.

become your lover so you became my beloved”.¹⁵⁹ Eyes, the incunabulum of love, appear as the reason for everything already at the very beginning. The eye is multifaceted in its meaning: it constitutes love, knowledge, reason, character and the soul, the energy of treasure, while a pair of eyes is the male-female pairing, as well as signifying the past and the future.¹⁶⁰ Belief in the “evil eye” constitutes a permanent element of the Islamic tradition, something conveyed by the words of the Prophet: “The eye is reality” (*al-‘ayn ḥaqq*).¹⁶¹ In Būhindī’s poetry the eye orders one to love the entire volume with its visions and images of love.

Her eye told me much about you
 [...]
 It said to me
 That the sorrow of your eyes is beautiful
 I said: you are my eyes
 It laughed... I flew off ... I gave the wings to my love
 Is the love which has come to me already in you?¹⁶²

The poet’s love has stages, doubts, highs and lows. Such images emerge from this simple poetry, but in its own charming way it is enriched with only a few comparisons and modest epitaphs.

[...]
 Your silence is his poem
 Your breasts the station where my fatigue will rest¹⁶³

Or

[...]
 The letters are not playing for me
 They dance in the book
 Your eyes are a trap and freedom
 I am too infirm to fly¹⁶⁴

The poet emphasizes the significance of love, love that in its richness always makes language inadequate. The limited punctuation indicates that the flow of words is delivered to the paper as a liberated, unhindered stream. This is one could say “the poetry of keys and images” for it is composed of several basic words which create the images: “the eye”, “life”, “the river”, “night”, “the sea”, “the heart”, “love”, “letters”, “melody”... Each of these words is characterized positively or negatively depending upon what charge of love they contain, for example “night” (*layl*) is suffering and the home of sorrow but at times of love:

¹⁵⁹ Ibrāhīm Būhindī, *Ashhadu annī uḥibbu*, Bahrain, 1987, p. 5.

¹⁶⁰ Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 271–275.

¹⁶¹ Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika...*, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

¹⁶² Ibrāhīm Būhindī, *‘Aynāki wa qalbī wa al-ḥubb*, in: *Ashadu...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 10–11.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ Ibrāhīm Būhindī, *‘Aghraqu fī nahr ‘aynayki*, in: *Ashadu...*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

[...] night leaves when you arrive
 And when you are not here night is the home of sorrow [...]¹⁶⁵

An important role is played by verbs of motion which give to the works dynamism as well as emphasising the evolutionary nature of the constantly developing love. Flying, swimming and immersion brings to mind the striving for a goal and the waiting for its realization: “[...] your face is a full moon which rises and sails away [...]” (p. 7), “[...] I flew off [...] I gave the wings to my love [...]” (p. 10), “I am immersing myself lost in you [...]” (p. 31).

The repetition of these self same words is like mantra, for love is at the same time pain and suffering. The poet’s beloved is undefined, hence one can conclude that he is in love with love itself, that he professes the Shakespearean understanding of love for love’s sake, for the object is not important only he who loves. Equally possible is another approach – that the object of affection is poetry. As poetry and love have remained in a constant relationship since time immemorial. The pairs of lovers: Romeo and Juliet, or Mainun and Layla who have take possession over the pages of literature with their display of unhappy love. Only a few enjoy happy love. This slim volume can be considered as a poetical evaluation of love, beauty and elapsing.

As a reaction to contemporary events the poet wrote the work *Al-Waṭīsa (The Relentless Battle)* in which he talks of the political changes connected with colonial imperialism and oil in the countries of the Persian Gulf. Here equally he presents images of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as well as of the Iran-Iraq War. This is politically involved poetry.

In reading one gains the impression that the work is suspended somewhere at the border of poetry and prose. The versification pause speaks here for the poetry:

A woman demon descended to Earth
 She overcame the powers that were
 And the princesses and kings she took prisoner.
 With the gold of those captured or dead
 She built herself a palace¹⁶⁶

The author makes use of a rhythm characteristic for poetical works, though one that unfortunately is not conveyed in the translation. The poet uses both total and partial vocalization for the correct reading of his works. There is an absence, with the exception of a few dots, of any punctuation. These works are characterized by their discretion in the usage of words; they are written in a modest language where epithets, similes and metaphors are few.

Dialogues are, however, numerous:

Shawhu kicked the earth
 And asked:

¹⁶⁵ Ibrāhīm Būhindī, ‘*Aynāki wa qalbī wa al-ḥubb*, in: *Ashadu...*, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁶ Ibrāhīm Būhindī, *Yānkī sāḥira as-saḥḥār tulqī Shawhū fī at-tayyār*, in: *Al-Waṭīsa*, Bahrain, 1994, pp. 7–8.

“Who was that wandering man?”
 Sarafil answered him:
 “That was a shepherd
 Asking for salvation
 He turned his gaze to the light
 And saw us [...]”¹⁶⁷

I personally would consider this volume amongst the metrical epic. It most clearly recalls epos – one of the oldest epic forms, one already known in the literature of the ancient East, for example the epos about Gilgamesh. Myths, legends, tales about gods and heroes served as the sources for the epos. This is the case in *Al-Waṭīsa*'s *volume* where side by side with people we have supernatural forces, demons, gods. The world presented is played out on two levels: on the one act the supernatural forces, on the other are sketched the events in which there is human participation. The repeated use of the term *Yānkī* refers to outsiders: Americans.¹⁶⁸ The parallelism of the two series of events is characteristic. These events dovetail, creating the storyline of the work. The reason for many of the events is the encroachment of supernatural forces:

The weak lowered their gaze out of fear
 Salvation was all they sought
 [...]
 At night they offered in sacrifice
 To the impertinent rulers
 The most beautiful of the women
 Such were they...
 Therefore Shawhu sent forth the flood they dreamt of
 [...]”¹⁶⁹

There exists a direct dependency between the processes of nature and the supernatural world. Gods-demons are equipped with human features of character such as anxiety, pain and fear:

Shawhu hit the earth
 And called forth
 “Come closer Sarafil
 I am ill
 Fear has seeped into my blood
 And the light has deserted my eyes
 Help me Sarafil
 Help me” [...]”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

¹⁶⁸ On the basis of an interview conducted with Ibrāhīm Būhindī in Bahrain, on the 23rd of March 2004.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 24–25.

Shawhu's fear and shock result in a premonition of approaching extermination. Possibly the era of many gods and demons is shortly to end:

Kāhin visited me
And revealed that
My star is already going out
[...]¹⁷¹

The appearance of the character of kāhin possibly suggests that events are being played out in pre-Islamic times and portends the destruction of the gods. For kāhin played a huge role in the culture and life of the pagan Arabs of the peninsula. He fulfilled the role of magician, soothsayer and fortune-teller. During a trance he made contact with the gods, foretold the future and interpreted dreams:

Suddenly Kāhin awoke
Terrified by his vision he presented himself to Shawhu
And said:
A huge snake will come
To devour our flesh¹⁷²

Here we are witnesses of an important moment. The pagan world full of demons and capricious gods will shortly cease to exist. The world of chaos is being replaced by a world where decisions will lie with a single God.

Undeniably the most interesting element is the rich symbolic layer. The poet freely borrows from, first and foremost, Arab-Islamic symbolism, though references exist to Christian symbolism and that of the religions of India. The symbol of fire is used repeatedly in various contexts. Fire in pre-Islamic and Arab-Islamic tradition has various meanings. On the one hand it is a protective agent, it possesses purifying and healing powers, and as a result of its usefulness for people it constitutes a manifestation of divine grace.¹⁷³ Many pagan ceremonies including the request for rain are connected with the lighting of fire. In the text the man who Shawhu observes from on high is praying at the fire:

When he throws a dry wood chip on the fire he said:
“Even tons of gold will not free one from sin
My God promised he would come...”
The old man continued the prayer
And the soul was washed by Allah's breath.¹⁷⁴

In folk tradition fire is also an attribute of supernatural beings. In this case Shawhu:

¹⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁷³ Cf. Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 76–77.

¹⁷⁴ Ibrāhīm Būhindī, *Yānkī sāḥira as-saḥḥār tulqī Shawhū fi at-tayyār*, in: *Al-Waḥīsa...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 14–15.

Sitting on the bed
 He held in his palm the Sun and hurled thunder
 While fire surrounded him on all sides¹⁷⁵

In the Koran fire is the symbol of the hellish punishment that awaits sins and the infidel:

Terrified by his vision
 He came before the countenance of Shawhu
 And said
 “[...]”
 it enveloped you, my Lord
 And threw into the fire like a dry blade of grass
 “[...]”¹⁷⁶

Interesting symbolically are night and darkness as the opposites of divine light. On the one hand night (Arabic: *layl*) is a time of rest, on the other hand it constitutes the absence of divine light. Night is the symbol of the humiliation of the unbelievers, while for Islamic mystics it constitutes the expectation of the light of divine truth.¹⁷⁷ Darkness (Arabic: *zulumāt*) was equally created by God (Qur’an 6,1). God leads those who believe in Him from the darkness to the light, while the false gods lead people from the light into the darkness.¹⁷⁸

In the East
 [...]”
 The sun slept deeply
 And the night engulfed with waves of fear
 And submerged people¹⁷⁹

Here equally appears the snake which in Islamic tradition constitutes on the one hand evil and misfortune, while on the other is the symbol of divinity.¹⁸⁰ The snake has the power to bring death, but also is the announcer of changes. In the work *Al-Waṭīsa (The Relentless Battle)* the snake symbolizes the annihilation of the old world, it heralds the on coming of the new as Kāhin predicted:

Oh master of fire
 My almighty Lord
 During sleep I had a vision
 A huge snake
 Came in order to devour our flesh

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika...*, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁷⁹ Ibrāhīm Būhīndī, *Yānkī sāḥira as-saḥḥār tulqī Shawhū fī at-tayyār*, in: *Al-Waṭīsa...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika...* *op.cit.*, p. 111.

[...]
 water poured forth from its mouth
 And flames flared from its eyes¹⁸¹

This volume is noticeably different from those that preceded it. The romantic Ibrāhīm Būhindī, under the influence of political events, has realized that he has to talk about matters that concern his homeland, hence this epic has found a special place amongst its readership.

Ibrāhīm Būhindī returns to the subject of love in the fourth volume entitled *Ghazal aṭ-ṭarīda* (*A Flirt with an Exiled Woman*). Here he expresses the expectations of a man in relation to the woman that he desires to love. The poem *Su'al ad-dukhūl* (*An Introductory Question*) are the rhetorical questions and dreams of a poet falling into reflection during creation:

[...]
 If you explained my dreams
 The heart would abscond from my breast
 If you would come closer to my desires
 And you would be the soul in my soul...
 If you were to enclose me within you
 If you were to enclose yourself in us
 Then like the blood flows in the veins
 I would love every approaching thought
 I ask you
 If the days freely presented themselves to you
 You would be water
 I would become an arsonist
 You would be the river
 I would become the fire
 You would be the letter
 I would become the melody
 And if we were to become one flowing river
 What would throw the current?¹⁸²

The poet makes it understood that the woman to whom he is directing his words is dear to him, with every thought arousing a great influx of feelings. He requires total submission on the part of the woman although the spiritual aspect of the relationship appears to be the most important. The union of souls prevails over temporal desire. A part of the desires take on the form of questions which bear witness to the dilemmas in relation to the direction feelings should develop, and whether a relationship based purely on a idealized union of souls would have a realistic chance of survival.

¹⁸¹ Ibrāhīm Būhindī, *Yānkī sāhira as-saḥḥār tulqī Shawhū fī at-tayyār*, in: *Al-Waṭīsa...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁸² Ibrāhīm Būhindī, *Sakrat al-'īshq*, in: *Ghazal aṭ-ṭarīda*, Bahrain, 1994, pp. 31–35.

A completely different ambiance is conveyed by the poem *Sakrat al-'Ishq* (*Waning Passion*). The poet attempts to liken the sensations resulting from love to those that result from the consumption of alcohol. He envisages a lover who has become a wine:

I'm telling you
 I enter the book of passion
 Of letters
 I see you, wine in a glass
 I sip
 With your taste I converse in my head
 It intoxicates me
 I am stupefied by love
 I am a bird the one in the formation
 With which I fly and sail off
 To your eyes
 I penetrate them, I give myself up to them
 A chalice of blooms splashes me
 So I tremble
 Intoxicated I arouse love
 I announce silence
 Depression
 They did not know
 That I have cleansed my soul
 I am discovering you
 And admit
 You are the shackle of my dreams
 No sooner do your leaves pull my heart
 I will leave¹⁸³

The words “With your taste I converse in my head” bring to mind the tasting of the taste of wine, though equally well they could be ponderings over one’s beloved. The comparison of wine to intoxication is even more strongly felt in the line “I am stupefied by love”. Also possible is the fact that it is wine which helps the poet enter into the state of love rapture which can be seen in the words: “Intoxicated I arouse love”. This love however, like alcoholic stupefaction, finally leaves with it a sense of emptiness. Despite all the beauty, neither one nor the other is perfect. The closer we get to the end of the work the more clearly we observe the poet’s doubts as to his choice. The oxymoron “And admit You are the shackle of my dreams” certainly has no negative characteristics. This line has a stronger overtone when compared to the earlier description of intoxication where the lyrical “I” compares himself to a bird which is an allegory for freedom. In another poem, entitled *Al-Inti‘alāt* (*Agitation*), the poet expresses doubt as to the advisability of giving one’s affections to another:

¹⁸³ *Ibidem*, pp. 8–9.

I am afraid
 That if I gave you my love
 I would be like water in the desert
 On which trees grow
 I am afraid
 That if I were to link myself to you through feeling
 You would take my soul
 You would dress in secrets
 Or the secrets would come to you
 I am afraid
 That if I were to free imagination
 To meet my feelings to doubt in you
 Good advice and light
 Beat from my heart
 Lovers do not become partners
 If the partnership is not going to have it in itself
 You were in my heart like a song
 Climbing on the strings
 And you would pull feelings to the strings
 Return to the birds
 Their strength
 Smell
 I give you the heart
 Which always if I was to give away
 Would become helpless¹⁸⁴

Already in the first lines the poet claims that the object of desire is on the whole imperfect which arouses in him anxiety. He is frightened for some reason or other in deeper feelings. This is possibly because he knows the woman he is at present directing the words to, and understands how risky it would be to fall in love with her. The sentence “Lovers do not become partners / If the partnership is not going to have it in itself” sounds like advice or like an accusation directed towards the beloved one. The comparison between a woman and the rising chords of a song is an interesting one; for it is known that the lute was used by women who wanted to draw the attention of men. The last three lines clearly show that the poet is not able, however, to live far from his betrothed.

It appears that the aim of Ibrāhīm Būhindī’s poetry is to reflect upon universal values which are always relevant, those such as: love or the meaning of life. This results in confrontation between two attitudes – the poetic, the idealized, that sensitive to the beauty that surrounds one in the world and the grey, colourless, day-to-day grind. His poems are in a sense meditation on the subject of love and elusiveness.

¹⁸⁴ Ibrāhīm Būhindī, *Al-Inti‘alāt*, in: *Al-Waḥīsa...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 28–29.

'Alī ash-Sharqāwī belongs to those writers that are difficult to classify and who evade an unequivocal evaluation. He has been active in Bahraini literature since 1975 when he published the volume of poetry *Ar-Ra'd fī mawāsim al-qaht* (*Thunder in the Season of Bad Crops*). Since then he has regularly published subsequent volumes¹⁸⁵ which are written both in the literary language and in dialect. He has written fairy tales for children as well as theatrical pieces. In the 1980s he spent many years in prison. Upon his release he published the volume of poetry entitled *Al-Mazmūr 23* (*Psalm 23*) which contains the story of a man who experiences freedom and does not know what to do with it. From the poems, included in the volumes: *Li-l-'anāšir shahādātuhā ayḍan aw al-madhabaḥa* (*Natural Forces have their Testimony or Carnage*) and *Wā 'arabāh* (*A Call to Arabs for Help*), emanates the belief in the defeat of contemporary civilization and culture brought about by war catastrophes such as the Israeli invasion of Lebanon or the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The poet clearly opposes any form of aggression as there is no justification for the murdering of other nations. He criticises any struggle for existence which is won by the stronger and more cunning side. *Kitāb ash-shīn* (*The Book of the Letters of Shin*) is a slim volume which lends itself to various interpretations beginning with the title because many words begin with this very letter, for example the author's surname, *sha'b* (nation), *shī'r* (poetry), etc.

From 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī's great literary output I have selected three small volumes of poetry which were written after 1990. The first of these is *Mā'idat al-qurmuz* (*The Crimson Table*), published in Bahrain in 1994. It is composed of three long works as well as a selection of short poems which appear under a common title of *Istirāḥat 'A. Sh. Al-qaṣīra* (*A Short Pause 'A. Sh.*). The first work is entitled *Faṣl at-tīh* (*Mistaken Chapter*) appears as its own form of game with the Arabic language, a mixture of its forms, types and styles. This game has also been subordinated to the content of the poem through prose, as it is its own form of stream of consciousness. There flows within it individual, sometimes gathered in groups, images from the past, that are born systematically in the mind of the person developing the utterance. The text causes the reader difficulties as a result of its formal variety. The first isolated fragments are clearly poetic verse, often closing in one, two or three words. In many places the text takes on features of a prosaic work. There appear sentences that are divided in accordance with punctuation. As I have already mentioned the content is subordinated to a form of stream of consciousness, a recoding of thoughts, recollections or visual impressions which eventually lead to a certain form of chaos. I would like to draw attention to the appearance at the level of content references to the very nature of the Arabic language – which is strongly rooted and constantly bound to the place of its origin and development, covering the entire alphabet from *alifā* to the letter *yā*.

¹⁸⁵ See Biographies.

Language exceeds the expanse of the letter alif.¹⁸⁶
 It does not stop at yā.¹⁸⁷
 Language asks the crimson hero of the universe to dance?
 Oh essence of pure language¹⁸⁸
 Take the days of my dreams and shut the expanse of the port
 Eve, apple of Adam¹⁸⁹

The poet juggles the word, demonstrating how fluency he commands Arabic. The sentences are descriptive in character, they fulfil an informative function. The poet makes the Arab language into the addressee of the utterance, giving it personal features, but first and foremost emphasizing its weight in culture. There are numerous references to the classical symbolism connected with Arabic culture in its broadest understanding, especially to the many elements of the scenery of the Arabic Peninsula, and in particular the part that lies on the Gulf. We read of deserts, the sea, palms which create the local universe.

Subject matter connected with everyday life, questions and reflections on the essence of life and death are contained in short poems composed of a mere few lines and which are to be found in the last part of *Istirāḥat* 'A. Sh. al-qaṣīra (A Short Pause 'A. Sh). Over 30 enigmatic works force the reader to search for their meaning at the level of text. An example can be the poem, entitled *Taḥaddī* (The Calling):

Who
 Will explain
 The feelings
 Of an Orange?¹⁹⁰

The poet asks this question of both himself and the recipient and without doubt it is a calling to find an answer to the question. The poem has a simple and concise language construction. Attention is drawn by the orange which invokes at least three senses: sight, smell and taste through which the scope for searching for an answer widens. Another example of this short poetic form is the poem *Fawz* (Success). This is lyricism directed towards the addressee, here nameless:

Here is a piece of paper
 Draw me a letter similar to the cloud of my mother
 No.
 Draw me a bird
 That interrupts domestic chat
 Sitting on my lips
 No

¹⁸⁶ The first letter of the Arabic alphabet [translator's note].

¹⁸⁷ The last letter of the Arabic alphabet [translator's note].

¹⁸⁸ *Fuṣṣḥā* the highest degree [the superlative] of the adjective *faṣīḥ* (clean) in its female form is used in Arabic to define the Arabic literary language [translator's note].

¹⁸⁹ 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Faṣl at-tīh*, in: *Mā'idat al-qurmuḥ*, Bahrain, 1994, p. 23.

¹⁹⁰ 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Taḥaddī*, in: *Mā'idat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

Draw me a pen
 That writes the voice of the star
 Or bring me it
 Paint me on the sky blue
 Give the piece of paper.¹⁹¹

This poem is somewhat longer than the previous one and at the same time conjures up the sense of sight. This time the poet turns to the addressee with a request that he complete certain tasks and in a way like in *Tahaddī* (*The Calling*) the addressee is undefined which gives a universal dimension to the poems. The symbolism that appears here is readable for a wider range of recipient. The poem deals with the subject matter of home, yearning for one's mother and recollections of domestic dialect. We observe an interesting procedure in the last poem where an almost physical, tangible narrowing of the space between the object and the addressee takes place. This request "give me the piece of paper" creates before the reader's eyes the image of a stretched out hand, and with it the whole figure of the one who uttered the words.

The work, entitled *Talab* (*The Request*), enters into a wider field of the essence of man:

Do not pay attention to what I said
 And what you said to me
 As well as what we will say.¹⁹²

The tone of this poem is deeper with the assumption that our words define us and place us in a certain position in the universe, a request for disagreement as to what we say is a request for disagreements as to our nature. Thanks to the procedure of using two grammatical tenses – the past and the future – we can perceive the whole problem area in its temporal aspect. Time plays here a huge role and the work becomes that much more dynamic. A decidable majority of the works from *Istirāḥat* 'A. Sh. al-qaṣīra (*A Short Pause* 'A. Sh.) is – using for the description a term proper for reflections upon prose – single themed.

On the whole single-themed titles signal individual concepts – a considerate problem. A specific example is the poem *Unthā* (*The Female*):

She drank herself on the way, publicly
 Her breast equal to a boulder
 She lost her former overfilled days
 Her worry died on the bed of the word
 And she became a male.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Fawz*, in: *Mā'idat...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 121–122.

¹⁹² 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Talab*, in: *Mā'idat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁹³ 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Unthā*, in: *Mā'idat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 105.

The subject of the work is here defined by means of metaphor and simile, which gives the image something that is the negation of femaleness. The impressive function of the text appears, which is to evoke definite negative feelings in the reader. This poem, which deals with human frailties is a negation of the stereotype of a woman in Arab poetry who constitutes an object of sighs and feelings.

An interesting piece of satire on the modern consumer's style of life is offered by the poem *Imtilāk* (*Possession*):

He entered the market joyful
He bought a wife whom he dresses at the entrance
To the bed
He bought a cupboard of books in which they spread words
And he bought an ashtray where the pigeons coo
He bought a smile up until the evening.¹⁹⁴

The lyrical "I" buys things and phenomena that are by nature not goods, indicating through this the direction of development that mankind intends to go to such a point where it will be possible to buy a smile or an ashtray for the cooing of pigeons. Into this group is also thrown a wife who is sold at the market right next to clothes. This is a strike against Islamic culture where marriage is essentially decided upon in relation to financial considerations. This is an entry into the route of social poetry, condemning consumerism not only in its contemporary guise but also that which has been sanctioned by tradition and religion.

The volume, entitled *Al-Wa'ala* (*The Mountain Goat*) from 1998, begins with a dedication (*al-Ihdā*) that possibly constitutes an echo from the prison experiences of the poet. The poem-dedication is a type of invocative lyricism for the poet turns to a definite addressee, who in this case is an abstract concept. The poet dedicates the poem to "life" that hides in the rain that brings life to the desert, as well as to the sky-blue, deep eyes in which desire has found its solace.

Worthy of notice is the cycle of four numbered poems that are located in the volume on various pages (17, 46, 84, 148) and entitled *Manẓar* (*The View*). Besides the title it is difficult to find common features that link these works. Maybe this is an attempt to describe some kind of observation. *Manẓar 1* (*View 1*):

The tree of likelihood
Sleeps and awakes
Like a boat of letters
In the shadow of the tongue sea¹⁹⁵

The ambiguity of the poem is suggested by the word *iḥtimāl* which possesses various meanings: being patient, suffering, bearing something, as equally the mysterious "letter" which could be the beginning or end of everything. The poet uses

¹⁹⁴ 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Imtilāk*, in: *Mā'idat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 120.

¹⁹⁵ 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Manẓar 1*, in: *Al-Wa'ala*, Bahrain, 1998, p. 17.

here an interesting metaphor of speech: “the tongue sea”. The second poem in the cycle, entitled *Manzar 2 (View 2)*, clearly talks of passing:

The wind which
Passed
Did not cease to be fulfilled
With the power of two letters
Disseminated
Like a rainy morning.¹⁹⁶

The continuation of words connected with letters intrigues. Again the question arises: what significance do the letters have and why this time round are there two? Maybe it follows to look for a dualism of worlds and in this good and evil.

The last poem of the cycle *Manzar 4 (View 4)* is probably a relapse to the poet’s prison recollections, rather surprisingly transferring to a description of a beloved one:

She
Struts like a holiday half moon
In the corner of the heart
He struts
Like the sun’s question
About the first bud of grass
Which overcame the soil
And gave the universe its own singular significance.¹⁹⁷

The woman mentioned in the poem must play a role of immense significance in the poet’s life. There appears “the sun’s question about the first bud” suggesting spring, the arousal of nature to new life and love. The universe may constitute a metaphor for God which is borne out by the epithet *singular* being an attribute of God. The universe as the personification of God is the beginning and at the same time the end of everything and it is this that is its “significance”.

In all the poems of the *Manzar (The View)* cycle the poet employs indirect lyricism, as the emphasis has been placed on impersonal reflection. There can be perceived here an existential significance for in the particular poems there appear elements of lasting, passing and stagnation.

An interesting graphic form, at the same time a play on words, is the poem *Al-Kawn (The Cosmos)*:

Fruit
When touched by the heat of the summer
Glitters
with the

¹⁹⁶ ‘Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Manzar 2*, in: *Al-Wa‘ala...*, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Manzar 4*, in: *Al-Wa‘ala...*, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

w
o
r
l
d

between the evaluations of the palm.¹⁹⁸

The poem presents a flower the three first lines of which are the calyx and the corolla, the stem is the single word “world” written vertically while the soil from which it grows is the last line. So from both content and form there pulsates an affirmation of life.

The joint subject – “I” and “I” appear in the poems *Muwāṣalat al-fatḥ* (*A Continuation of Killing*) and *Anā wa anā (I and I)*. The first of these poems has an intriguing title particularly as the content has nothing to do with killing:

I
And
I
In the night of desire
We ring the bells of our wolf-celled body
Discover the nakedness of the universe
And fall
Like the Polar Star
On the trembling years
I
And
I
Are on our way to an Earth unlike the one we come from
We restrain from that which was aid by that who will say
We continue our tasks
Like spring
Grows from the blossom of spring.¹⁹⁹

If the title is treated as a metaphor for sleep then everything starts to take on meaning. It was already the ancients who saw a similarity between death and sleep. They believed that a man sunk in sleep resembled a dead man, and that his soul roams somewhere far away. In a similar way the poet dreams of discovering the “nakedness of the universe and on our way to an Earth unlike itself”, before he undertakes impossible things. The line in which the lyrical “I” “restrains from that which was aid by that who will say” is puzzling and might relate to the past and the future. Maybe one I is reality and the other is reflection in the unreal world, in the world of day dreams where both figures – the ego and the alter ego – jointly exist next to each other.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Al-Kawn*, in: *Al-Wa‘ala...*, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁹⁹ ‘Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Muwāṣalat al-fatḥ*, in: *Al-Wa‘ala...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 22–23.

The poem *Warā' al-lugha* (*Beyond Words*) is worthy of note where the poet personifies speech:

Words have three hands
 And seven sets of lungs
 And five sets of eyes
 Words have mouths
 That remind one of a wolf at the moment of killing...
 Words have words
 You go after them in the mirages²⁰⁰

The poet describes words as living entities, ascribing them with human organs: hands, lungs, eyes, and even mouths in order to emphasize their living character and their weight in the human form of life. Words with one utterance live their own life, breathing through seven pairs of lungs, observing through five pairs of eyes, barring their teeth like a wolf over its prey, seducing, recalling. They constitute a bridge between the past and the present, reaching the future and acting as man's guide in life.

The poems from the collection *Zurqat al-ashhal* (*Blueness*), published in 2003, deal with a woman and love. The majority of the poems are pessimistically coloured where the poet expresses his anxiety, bitterness and doubt. Various types of women appear in the individual poems: independent, subjugate, harlots, mistresses. He himself is unable to say what is a woman, something given expression to in the poem *Lā aḥad* (*Nobody*):

Nobody knows what hides behind a woman's self-importance
 Nobody
 Knows
 What mist
 Lives
 Behind
 The expanse
 Of the soul²⁰¹

The subject matter of the poem *Qaṣīdat al-mudun* (*A Poem for the Towns*) is hidden carefully under the massed stylistic devices and unusually rich form. As a result of the sophisticated metaphors ("in the lake of my heart, the streets of silence, the strikes of white women", etc.), similes ("to conquer the storms like the consciousness between two souls"), animalism ("Their streets carry the taste of noise"), personification ("kicking them with the worry of ships in the upheaval of fire"), and symbols ("cities") it is difficult to get to the heart of the matter:

²⁰⁰ 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Warā' al-lugha*, in: *Al-Wa'ala...*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

²⁰¹ 'Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Lā aḥad*, in: *Zurqat al-ashhal*, Bahrain, 2003, p. 65.

Cities
 Occupy their fires
 Planets are found in the soul of autumn
 Joy which roams on the streets of silence
 Dividing to the side
 Which shatters in their water an explosion of anger
 Cities
 Their streets carry the taste of noise in the pulses of females
 Try to conquer the storms like the consciousness between two souls
 Kicking them with the worry of ships in the upheaval of fire²⁰²

It seems that ‘Alī ash-Sharqāwī’s aim is to imitate life in poetry, the seizing of the reader’s imagination through the amassing of an unusually rich set of metaphors and unclear associations. The poet transfers to the terrain of poetry philosophical and psychological thought, he shocks with his surrealist scenes. He expresses the boredom, pessimism and loneliness of man lost not only in the back streets of the everyday life of the modern world, but also lost in the universe itself.

Aḥmad Madan’s collection of poetry, entitled ‘*Ushb li-damm al-waraqā (Bloody Leaves)*’, is an extremely beautiful though equally extremely difficult to interpret lyrical story. The author invites us from the very first pages of the work to his internal world, to a world that is unusually intimate. However it is not easy to move around here and one may quickly get lost. The reality of sensual impressions described by Aḥmad Madan demands a gradual acquaintance, peeling off layer by layer to reveal the hidden sense and meanings. The poet very rarely speaks directly about his intentions leaving us with far too many doubts as to his meaning and the truths he conveys. Who is Aḥmad Madan? What can we say about the poet and his world on the basis of his work? In one of the poems he says:

In the mirror
 The glass dresses in our face
 And I dress in what the glass is adorned in²⁰³

Yet it is difficult to guess who we really are. Each and everyone of us is assigned some mask or other. Behind which our true image lies hidden. Yet are we really able to get to know ourselves as we really are by the removal of masks and screens? It seems that at times we have identified ourselves with them, that we have become an inseparable one. The mask for Aḥmad Madan is rather not material in nature but first and foremost our external pose which we display in our contact with others and the world that surrounds us. The screen described by the poet is in its way a form of acting. We learn this craft gradually through the whole of our lives and it serves as an effective defence in the face of overt exposure to others. Our daily experience show

²⁰² ‘Alī ash-Sharqāwī, *Qaṣīdat al-mudun*, in: *Zurqat...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 81–82.

²⁰³ Aḥmad Madan, *Ḥalat li-l-jami’*; in: ‘*Ushb li-damm al-waraqā*, Bahrain, 1992, p. 45.

that too much exposure of our true self can result in destructive tendencies. The world is not always able to appreciate truth. And for the world there surely exist several truths. Hence we have laboriously learnt our art of acting and increasingly connect ourselves with our mask for after all we only know others through the prisms of their own masks.

Aḥmad Madan to a certain degree justifies himself through the work cited. He does not speak about himself directly. He rather invites us to his world through his lyrics. The poet rather clearly defines the place to which he belongs. In one of his poems, in a direct but very metaphorical way, he expresses the unusually important union that connects him to his country.

Opening the garden of my thoughts
Not knowing anything except for your flowers, oh fatherland
Offering my steps as sacrifices
To the trembling of the epochs
I collapse in spring
As if I were the very first almond
And the last date...
Intoxication
Threw me into your embrace
And death meant that
I became a flower in your hands²⁰⁴

The work is in its own way a form of poetic reflection on the subject of devotion, respect for one's homeland and one's family home. On the other hand it also constitutes the existence of consciousness that is closely linked to a concrete place. The lyrical "I" within the poem is thoroughly saturated with his country. That he perceives reality in this and no other way results from the characteristics of the place he belongs to. The poet's words are not overly lofty. The personification to which he escapes emphasizes the intimate bond that links him with his home country. He so strongly feels a part of this very land that he compares himself to the nature that is to be found there in his home country.

In contrast to the land that is so close to the poet's heart the place where he finds himself is far from as warm and friendly. In the poem entitled *Du'ā'* (*Prayer*) he writes:

Next to you my soul
I measure myself with time
And only we two stand before God
And silence accompanies us
The rhythm of struggle elicits its sound
I hide it within me
And conceal myself in the rhythm of the silence
Gathering sorrow

²⁰⁴ Aḥmad Madan, *Ḥadīqat li-rā's*, in: *Ushb...*, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

From the tray of everyday news
 We play with the papers full of wars
 Bequeathing our homes to the lot of destruction
 As if we were poisoned by the plague of graves
 Oh God!²⁰⁵

This work is not merely reflection on the subject of the rather grey reality of the present. The poet also includes thoughts that concern extremity and transience. The world is encompassed in the madness of violence and hatred. We ourselves have become already impervious to evil and human misery. Tragic news which inundates us has no effect upon us whatsoever, and we treat instances of such as a form of entertainment. The constant images of death that persistently accompany us have resulted in us being overpowered by an illness, a plague that leaves us first and foremost indifferent to the sight of human blood and the injustices that occur.

Yet in the cited piece the prayer is directed towards God who as the only one is able to change this grey reality, words of warning fall equally. This world passes along with its cry. We stand in front of the Creator in silence and in the truth about us. While there is still time each of us struggles with time but however it is important, as the poet reminds us, to not forget about our soul. This, the most intimate area for us, is to be left untouched because it constitutes the deepest particle of our very beings. It may also become a kind of haven or escape from the world so poisoned by evil and indifference.

Aḥmad Madan writes that he remains alone in the face of time. The said consciousness does not manifest itself exclusively in relation to this category, the action of which each and everyone of us is subordinated to. In the subsequent work we read:

The wind is the window of the body
 And the route through madness of the feet
 And I...
 Hands are my head
 While the head an extensive house
 The rite of entry, blood
 The rite of exit, blood
 The rite of words, a poem
 The rite of space, my heart
 Alone, alone
 In the face of my dreams
 Only heaven lies above my head
 Only the earth is my cloak²⁰⁶

The sense of loneliness that is expressed through various means in Aḥmad Madan's poems may be the result of a certain conviction that our feelings, thoughts

²⁰⁵ Aḥmad Madan, *Du'ā'*, in: *'Ushb..., op.cit.*, p. 18.

²⁰⁶ Aḥmad Madan, *Mamarrāt bi-rasm al-fuṣaḥ*, in: *'Ushb..., op.cit.*, p. 35.

and desires cannot be totally conveyed to others. The lyrical “I” emphasizes his psychophysical condition within the works. He describes his own functioning in a reality that is subordinated to defined laws. He is probably tormented by the scheme like nature of such an existence. He is unable to move beyond a world limited by material form. He constantly struggles with the space of his own desires and does not find anyone upon whom he could support himself. Hence he remains to the end alone not only in relation to his internal world but also the reality that surrounds him.

Aḥmad Madan’s poetry inspires one to much reflection on chiefly our inner life. One may gain the impression at times that the author is seeking through the medium of his work a route to become acquainted with himself. Gradually he discovers subsequent screens behind which the truth about him is hidden. At the same time the reader is also drawn into the game of exposing masks and arrives at a point where he himself starts to ask fundamental questions about himself.

Aḥmad ash-Shamlān’s literary output contains not only volumes of poetry but also works for the theatre and books with articles and sketches of a critical literary hue (see Biographies). His poetry is characterized by its rich symbolism, ambiguity in meaning, imagery and allusiveness.

In 1998 he produced a volume of poetry entitled *Rā’iḥa fī adh-dhākira* (*Aroma in Memory*), the title verse of which is a bow towards the essence of man. Here he attempts to go deeper into the nature of man himself and to study the causes of loneliness despite the presence in the life of every man of elation, love and freedom:

How strange it is that on arriving home
We doubt whether a fire was burnt last night
And that tea was prepared in our mouths²⁰⁷

We allow ourselves to send away love while at the same time awaiting its return to us:

The words of the song fill up
And even the stars do not remain after the evening
Not a single star falls within our embrace
We remain far in the depths of the smoke
Crammed into backstreets
So sure of love
Why do we hold back
And dance in disbelief
Invincible?²⁰⁸

Aḥmad ash-Shamlān although not using rhyme in his poetry is for all that characterized by his melody. Through metaphors and symbols he expresses

²⁰⁷ Aḥmad ash-Shamlān, *Rā’iḥa fī adh-dhākira*, in: *Rā’iḥa fī adh-dhākira*, Beirut, 1998, p. 15.

²⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

complicated and elusive meanings. The poem, entitled *Mu'ānāt (Pains)*, is admittance of the fear in the face of creative impotency which at any moment may seize the artist, poet or writer. Over a cup of coffee enveloped in cigarette smoke he, on the one hand, understands that he is mixing with a force that is the motor for creative work, while on the other hand no sooner does he attempt to convey on paper his inner sensations than he experiences just this very creative block:

When I fell in love with those magic eyes
 In my head speech rustled
 And beneath my pen a thousand words will gather
 And each to express the expected
 And when I am to write at last
 A dryness takes my throat in grasp
 And with sorrow my face in hands
 The damned written word.²⁰⁹

The poet's interests and the cause of inspiration is given away with already the first stanza. Further on in the work the initial creative powerlessness, the result of the pains of the title, is transformed into a poetic piece:

I smoke one after another
 And in my head a sickening confusion
 For now the moment of creation comes
 I grasp therefore my white sheets with earnest
 And my hand grabs my head in shame

* * *

I still await
 And wait
 And the cup of coffee waits for the talk
 And my patient pages wait
 And time when it already seems that everything wilted through waiting²¹⁰

The entire poem is devoted to the question of creation and the barriers associated with it that seize the poetic nature of inspiration.

Aḥmad ash-Shamlān's whole volume is a synthesis of considerations concerning man, his existence and the ethical-aesthetic questions that result from this. Words become marks presenting phenomena and spiritual states.

My attention was drawn to a work which should be classified as poetic drama with regard to its loose composition, two-planed meaning, variety of stylistic references and poeticism of language. This is *Malikat Bārbār (The Queen of Barbar)*. Despite its loose construction the poet has been able to sketch in a plot, the action of which takes place in the kingdom of queen Barbar in times gone by. The ruling royal couple have yet to produce an heir despite persistent requests and the carrying out of

²⁰⁹ Aḥmad ash-Shamlān, *Mu'ānāt*, in: *Rā'iḥa...*, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 41–42.

rites. One day a mysterious man arrives at court who claims that he knows the answer to the questions and quandaries of the royal couple. His prediction is that in exchange for the birth of an heir to the throne the country will descend into darkness and the king will depart on a military campaign without seeing his son. The royal couple therefore have to choose between the happiness of their subjects and the fulfilment of their dreams. Finally the king sets off for war and the prophecy fulfils itself. In order to save the country the queen throws herself into the sea making a sacrifice of her own life. The county is saved upon her death.

We find within the work examples of invocative lyrics like the queen's prayer to the goddess of fertility 'Ishtar for well-being for her son:

Oh Ishtar!
 This child is born from a mystery
 Open for him the door of abode
 Open for him human hearts!²¹¹

Some of the monologues are stylized into songs through the usage of repetition and appropriate versification:

Every year
 When spring comes
 The heights are awash with flowers
 Dreams dance
 But a perfidious fate mocks us
 Our husbands leave
 Our hearts dry up
 Therefore every year
 Dreams sail away
 In the land of Barbar²¹²

The language employed in the work is extraordinarily poetic, packed full of metaphors which gives rise to difficulties in comprehension:

When the sun was in the sign of the Gull
 The sea pulled back
 The tide retreated
 And we said: It will come!
 And so it was, war came, but under the sign of the sea
 Seven suns circled over the palm...²¹³

The language in this case is intentionally stylized and of limited comprehensibility in order to convey the character of the prediction. The final fragment of the work is the dying queen's monologue:

²¹¹ Ahmad ash-Shamlān, *Malikat Bārbār*, Bahrain, 1994, p. 50.

²¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 13–14.

²¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

I bathe in my own blood
 Oh my beloved!
 Legends will speak of me...
 It is for you that I fulfill the promise...
 Walking in the arms of death...²¹⁴

There are many references in the work to biblical motifs and to mythology, e.g. Mount Ararat is to be the destination of the queen's funeral cortege. There appears the hero of the Sumerian epic story, Gilgamesh, and the goddess of fertility Ishtar. The poet willingly employs symbolism. The world is a constant and eternal battle of good with evil represented in the work by light and darkness, dusk, death. The palm, sun and water symbolize life, while the smoke and dust in which the country is plunged represent death. Birds (doves and gulls) are intermediaries between heaven and earth, sacrum and profanum.

Aḥmad ash-Shamlān in referring to the past shows us the contemporary – a tragic vision of the world. On the one hand there exists law, while on the other hand the non-observance of moral norms. This results in the anger of the gods and calamity – brought about by an individual on a whole state. The work considers matters of life and death, raises questions of faith, truth and doubt. Human passion is worn thin here and spiritual conflicts develop. A similar approach to these questions can equally be seen in the rest of his critical literary work.

'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā'id (see Biographies) became known in Bahraini literature thanks to two volumes of poetry: *'Āshiq fī zaman al-'atah* (*Lover in the Era of Thirst*) and *Ṣakhab al-hams* (*Noise of Whisper*) which are devoted to national, love and existential matters. In the first volume of special note is the poem *al-Hāmishān* (*Two Margins*) which illustrates the deep sense of alienation felt by contemporary man. This is accompanied by a feeling of revolt and simultaneously a desire to escape into the world of dreams. Even the very title suggests this association. The first part is a clear wait for rain which signifies life and changes:

...And my alienation which begs for rain
 Approaches, is not approaching...²¹⁵

The second brings with it a certain optimism. The poet has a chance to return to the world he was exiled from. He returns and shouts in a whisper in the second volume. This oxymoron in the title "noise of whisper" brings about the effect of paradox. Noise is never without a response, everyone hears it. The same is with an appeal to do something, while a whisper is calm, mysterious, a secret. Therefore everyone who has heard the noise of a whisper is unable to pass by indifferently for it

²¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

²¹⁵ 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā'id, *al-Hāmishān*, in: *'Āshiq fī zaman al-'atah*, Bahrain, 2002, 2nd ed., p. 47.

is addressed to all. This refers, for example, to the patriotic subject matter contained in the poem *al-Madā yarsumuhu ad-damm* (*Blood Defines the Horizon*):

Should we declare your death now
 You... the nation in whose name we challenged extinction
 Should we carry your bier now
 Oh... Arab Nation
 It is enough
 War is in the way
 Death is in its way
 And the horizon
 Will be defined by blood...
 The blood time has come
 Streets are flowing
 Flowers are dying
 Blood on blood on blood
 Who can bring an end to this distress?²¹⁶

The poet is hugely involved in the matter of his country, pondering its situation in an existential, political and cultural aspect. In his terrifying vision of the world he sees blood everywhere. He expresses however a lot of hope that someone will appear who will bring an end to wars and stop any further bloodshed. The fatherland is also a keyword in the poem written in 1999–2003 without a title:

I put myself inside a crystal glass
 and with my wine
 I quench the thirst of my home
 so I become my home
 and my home becomes me²¹⁷

The poet is partial to dealing with the subject of the Palestinians and the wandering fighters struggling for the liberation of Palestine:

Oh, the knight who returned
 without sword or horse
 What brought you back
 to this gloomy forest
 what brought you back?
 Is it the fear of death
 or of losing memory?²¹⁸

The fighting knight is a Palestinian fighter who is deprived of horse and sword which suggests another defeat in the struggle for the liberation of the homeland. The mentioned “abandoned forest” could be on the one hand a metaphor for Palestine

²¹⁶ ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā’id, *al-Madā yarsumuhu ad-damm*, in: *Ṣakhab al-hams*, Jordan, 2003, p. 94.

²¹⁷ ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā’id, *Ṣakhab...*, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

²¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

from which the Arab population had to flee, while on the other it could be the lack of support from fraternal countries. One can see that the Palestinian problem is one very close to the poet. He is full of hope and belief that this country will exist on the map of the world.

Suffering, passing time and the difficulties of existence are the subjects of other poems in the volume:

Hanging by a thread of saffron
Suspended between the dream
And the moment just before wakefulness
The moment whips me to wake up
The dream stubbornly holds way
...one cigarette after another
Smoke into ashes
And away with the wind²¹⁹

The poet describes the moment of awakening, so fleeting and precious, that it is compared to the snapping of a thin thread woven from precious saffron. Possibly here there is reference to the awakening of Arab consciousness, its own form of rebirth on all the layers of life in order not to waste this unique opportunity. Life is, after all, only a moment like the passing smoke of a cigarette which explains some of the pessimism contained in the poem. The poet's opposition to the fleeting can be equally observed in other poems:

Oh, you... the cursed clock
Slain by your sweep of hands
Caress my blood
Cherished moments lost in your folds
Oh, you the final clock
Keeper... secrets of my agony²²⁰

The poem expresses the despair of man helpless in the battle with time. The poet turns to the clock accusing him of wasted moments and bringing man closer to death when he is unable to stop the movement of the hands. In the final analysis everything is illusion for we are condemned to suffering and unavoidable death.

In the work of 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā'id there is also room for love and feelings. Here equally is hope that there exists a place where each and everyone will find happiness:

There is a place for us
There is a time for us
Other than the isthmus of dream
We are more than we seem²²¹

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

²²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

In the series of poems entitled *Risālat ḥubb* (*The Love Letter*) the poem addresses, as the dedication suggests, a woman of nineteen which may be read as hope for the chance to bring closer different worlds, nations and people:

Time must have a portal somewhere
 a window
 We could peep through to each other
 and bound to meet
 In my time
 or your time²²²

There is an abundance of stylistic devices in the poem which portray the poet's feelings and internal world influencing the senses, including rhetorical question, e.g. "could the impossible dream glow and become as truth?"²²³ onomatopoeia "oh", epiphora *nā'īya anti jiddan / qarība anti jiddan* – "so far are you / and yes, so near", anaphora *lakay naltaqī fī al-ḥaqīqa burhatan / likay ataḥassasa sha'raki al-ashqara* – "so we could truly meet for a while / that I might touch your blond hair". The poet uses interesting examples of paraphrase, for instance *zaman mukhtabi' fī kahf at-tārīkh* – "time hiding in the cave of history", and numerous metaphors *hāwiyat al-mawt* – "the abyss of death" or *quḍbāni az-zaman* – "bars of time".

The poet's credo is a three-line poem without a title:

I write so I don't die
 I write until I die
 Oh, my homeland that never dies²²⁴

'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā'id writes about how important poetry is for him. He considers it to be something existing outside of time and the universe, in a way similar to one's homeland or country, something mentioned in the final line. Poetry has the immense power that it will never die. It also plays a very important role for the whole nation, especially in the Arabian Peninsula. Poetry lasts in the human memory making the poet immortal.

Salmān al-Ḥāykī completed his education as a teacher of physical education and Arabic literature at the University of Bahrain. At present he works at school as well as contributing articles to the "Akhbār al-Khalīj" newspaper where he writes about sport. He is the author of many volumes of poetry which deal with national, sporting and political problems. He often makes reference to the Arabs' past, to the times of the Prophet Muḥammad and his successors.

His poetry contains numerous symbols as can be seen in *Shahqat al-kawkab al-akhīra* (*The Planet's Last Breath*) – the volume published in 1998, where in the foreground one notices the clear symbolism of numbers. The title poem is

²²² 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā'id, *Risālat ḥubb*, in: *Ṣakhab...*, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

²²³ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

²²⁴ 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā'id, *Ṣakhab...*, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

constructed out of 12 stanzas, with each comprising 5 lines which relates in the text to the twelve planets. Twelve symbolizes the universal order, time, harmony, justice, perfection, the division of the zodiac into twelve signs. Gilgamesh's story is no more than the *Epos of the 12 Tables*. Twelve is the number of temporal-spatial divisions on the earth, the four ends of the earth times by the three dimensions.²²⁵ There are equally the 12 Shiite imams. While the symbolism of the number 5 is that of eternity, the all-mightiness of God, of a micro-universe, and of the senses. It may relate to the five pillars of Islam and the prayers said five times a day. One exposes all five digits of the right hand to the "evil eye". Five is a great mystical number that contains all the forces of nature.²²⁶

The volume is dominated by unhappiness, sorrow, even apocalyptic visions:

When the planet's last breath is taken
To the gates of heaven
The burning fingers will reach to all faces
The shadow sits on its throne...
And the wind roars in the clothing²²⁷

In the above cited stanza it is difficult not to find an image of struggle, one which may result in the destruction of civilization. The planet that draws its last breath is the Earth, while the figure on the throne is the ruler of the world. In the subsequent eleven verses the poet deals with a vision of struggle that breaks out after the death of the Prophet amongst his successors, one that has lasted right up until the present day. The poet desires to demonstrate to each and everyone who reads the poem that despite the passing of time and the development of civilization those self same ends are realized in the contemporary world in the achievement of power.²²⁸ There appears in the poems the elements that have been inseparably linked to the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula for centuries: camels, horses, wild animals, the sea and poetry.

In the poem *'Uṣfūrāt al-aḥzān al-jadīda (The Bird of New Sorrows)* there appears again the symbolism of the number 5 (stanzas in the poem). The poem illustrates the wanderings of a bird in space and time. The time here closes a certain annual cycle. The final fifth verse sums up the whole series:

The sea crossed by her...
She wore her pink sandals and disappeared

²²⁵ Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 77–78.

²²⁶ Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 58–59; Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 320–321.

²²⁷ Salmān al-Ḥāyḳī, *Shahqat al-kawkab al-akhīra*, in: *Shahqat al-kawkab al-akhīra*, Bahrain, 1998, p. 61.

²²⁸ On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Salmān al-Ḥāyḳī in Bahrain, on 8th March 2004.

Then fell asleep..
Amidst the new sorrows.²²⁹

In the poem *Fī dā'irat as-samāwāt wa al-arḍ* (*In the Realm of Heaven and Earth*), the poet begins each of the four stanzas with the words: "You cross a circle wide like the heavens and the earth".²³⁰ These words return as a refrain and are directed towards the beloved homeland, something borne out by the final lines of the poem:

Wherever you look... in maritime shirt, with a hurt heart
You sleep in your wounds like a country which arises from your love! Great²³¹

In the poetry of Salmān al-Ḥāykī we come across original and interesting word comparison in defining the phenomena of nature, individual figures, the elements of the other world, e.g. "the chambers of hell, injured rain". The dynamics of his descriptions play an important role in his poetry:

From beyond the cold horizon there started to approach
The sounds of beating drums
Above the roofs
Through the salon shot the foam of a knight and the best camels
A slave steals the milk which spilt in the silence.²³²

The poet additionally adds to the image through the creation of sound images in order to convey the atmosphere of the noise and to intensify the effect of the events described.

Threat, struggle and mystery are the domain of Salmān al-Ḥāykī's poetry. Captivated by the sea he perceives its strength and vastness. Scenes of death, violence, pain and unhappiness dominate in the poems. In al-Ḥāykī's poetic vision man is marked by the heel of the past. The poet sees more than mortals do and therefore is unable to sense happiness. Even everyday life is mixed with a totally black view of history awash with blood. The poet proposes freedom of imagination and treats his poems as a calling from the depth of his soul. This understanding of civilization processes is imperative for the development of a correct relationship towards oneself and one's fellow man.

Karīm Raḍī has been actively involved in the literary life of Bahrain for a long time (see Biographies), it was, however, only in 2004 that he published his first volume of poetry, entitled *Aḥādīth Ṣafīyya (Safīyya's Stories)*. This volume is in its own way a manifesto where the poet presents his own observations and reflections on the reality that surrounds him and consequently the content of the poetry dictates its form. Despite the fact that Karīm Raḍī prefers poetic prose for his work he does

²²⁹ Salmān al-Ḥāykī, *Uṣfūrat al-aḥzān al-jadīda*, in: *Shahqat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

²³⁰ Salmān al-Ḥāykī, *Fī dā'irat as-samāwāt wa al-arḍ*, in: *Shahqat...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 27–29.

²³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

²³² Salmān al-Ḥāykī, *Shahqat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

not avoid using blank verse and classic *qaṣīda*. His work expresses revolt against rules, accepted social norms while being at the same time a form of regret as is the case in the poem *at-Tarika (Legacy)* which excellently conveys the atmosphere of the whole volume:

I left my beloved
 Not long ago
 Thousands of times
 I order my things for sleep
 I left my beloved
 Through previous generations
 We drown in the heat of discussion
 And they research
 The future of tea
 Study the new system
 Of a clean cord to hang up clothes
 I left my beloved
 On an archipelago
 And the dawn appears in their homes
 From a window in the window
 Between night and night
 I left them as they were writing their stories
 With ash on the water
 Or sat with oranges
 They tell of their northern secrets
 A thousand times
 They open their letters
 They read short stories and poetry
 At night
 They dream of the smell of woman
 And recite something mindless from the talismans
 In the long prayer
 I left my beloved
 Somewhere in the cosmos
 I left iron beating the doors
 Almost crying²³³

The poem shows the great difference that exists between generations which the author intentionally emphasizes using words like: “archipelago” and “cosmos”. He himself has departed into the world and despite the fact that from a distance he has perceived the failings of society he still misses home, his family and friends. He looks at the world through the prism of his experiences but this is not able to shake his belief in God.

²³³ Karīm Raḍī, *at-Tarika*, in: *Aḥādīth Ṣafīyya*, Bahrain, 2004, pp. 27–30.

In the last poem, entitled *Al-Malik (The King)*, he calls God the king of text. One can easily read into this a connection with the Qur'an. The poem carries the message that man is unable to cut himself off from his roots, past, tradition and religion.

The king of the text who cast us out
Beyond the walls of planets...
Power remains in the hands of God²³⁴

The poet also touches on the question of man's loneliness in the modern world. Young, educated people who are interested in the world feel lonely and misunderstood. They do not identify with society, often rejecting its values. In the poem *'Asalān al-fālawāt (Fierce Wind of Barren Land)* he uses words such as *waḥīd* (lonely, single). His lyrical persona is located in the very centre of a merciless desert which symbolizes a world devoid of values, void of people with whom views and dreams can be exchanged:

Lonely
Fuses with his desert being alone there²³⁵

In the poem *Marthiyyat ṭifl (The Child's Elegy)* the poet jumps from subject to subject like a lost child. After a moment, however, the reader notices that the poet is simply enraptured by the beauty of the world around him. Karīm Raḍī as an adult person tries hard to take joy from, and pleasure in, the world as if still a child.

For faith and its lack
For the sea recalling the surprise of God before Creation
For the cities blooming in evening encounters and in reading
For the mornings..., which slept²³⁶

Karīm Raḍī as a representative of the young generation expresses his ideals in the very title of the volume *Aḥādīth Ṣafīyya (Safīyya's Stories)*. The poet several times repeats the word *'ṣafīyya'* which means not only a woman's name but also purity:

I, Safīyya, am these words²³⁷

He ponders it:

Did she bring me Safīyya
In one hundred years of love²³⁸

An innovative poem in the volume, both in terms of form as well as content, is *Qamar yatīm (The Orphaned Moon)*. It is constructed in four clearly separate parts (in relation to each other) and each of them relates to a semantic thought unity: *al-*

²³⁴ Karīm Raḍī, *Al-Malik*, in: *Aḥādīth...*, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

²³⁵ Karīm Raḍī, *'Asalān al-fālawāt*, in: *Aḥādīth...*, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

²³⁶ Karīm Raḍī, *Marthiyyat ṭifl*, in: *Aḥādīth...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 69–70.

²³⁷ Karīm Raḍī, *Aḥādīth Ṣafīyya*, in: *Aḥādīth...*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

²³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 11–12.

-*Fatāt (The Girl)*, *Al-Jundī (The Soldier)*, *Al-Jadda (Granny)* and *Rukn abyad (The White Pillar)*. All the parts are linked by an earlier absent sorrow:

1. The Girl

At dawn

A dangerous rook surrounded me with a talisman and flew off

Disappearing into the fog

A climber envelops me around the neck

2. The Soldier

I am alone

The year comes to an end

And they will follow me

3. Granny

Between her ribs

We planted a palm

And wrote a line of the Koran on her coffin

4. The White Pillar

Great sorrow yesterday engrossed me

A silvery tear on his face²³⁹

The palm appears in the poem as a symbol of a woman, of a mother, of the motherland. She is everything for the poet. When it grows and gives fruit then the world around develops, but when the destructive civilization around encroaches then there is no longer any place for her. The poet refers to the wars that constantly trouble mankind. The world is engulfed in changes that not everyone is able to keep up with. The above stanzas paint a portrait of lonely people, ones lost and disillusioned, powerless in the face of life and fate.

All the works are devoid of punctuation. The trains of thought and sentences are cut off and continue in the next line. The poet often uses very carefully chosen words, ones that are rarely used in modern Arabic.

Karīm Raḍī's poetry is a register of feelings, thoughts and associations. It speaks to us in images, from which he constructs the significance and meaning of the work. History and tradition are linked in an entirety with the present mutually intertwining. This is criticism intended against the order reigning in the modern world, against injustice and war, tyranny and iniquity.

The key to understanding the work of **Ibrāhīm Sha'bān** can possibly be found in the poetic miniature, entitled *Lā tas'alīnī (Don't Ask Me)*, from his last volume of poems *Zabad al-'adamiyya (A Foam of non-existence)*:

²³⁹ Karīm Raḍī, *Qamar yatīm*, in: *Aḥādīth...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 63–65.

Don't ask me "what do you want?"
 But the matters, I would say
 What do I want?²⁴⁰

The poet here turns to his muse that is supposed to inspire him to create and find himself. The themes of love dominates here. This subject matter has already been dealt with in earlier volumes (see Biographies). All the compositions constitute examples of free verse although one comes across a poem written in one of the sixteen classic metres. Already in the first poem *Liqā' tashrīfī* (*An Honourable Meeting*) the author gives expression to his feelings and fascinations:

Allow me to know now
 The dimensions of the breasts
 And waist
 The circumference of the neck and the height²⁴¹

This poem bursting with eroticism is cut short by a vision of death:

You are, my death, that which I have waited for
 Oh most beautiful suicide²⁴²

The next fragment brings with it moral-religious reflection:

Don't be frightened today of fatwa²⁴³
 The hand of the holy one has been paralyzed
 And the law of the jungle is ended
 All matters have collapsed
 And the night remains the lover of day...²⁴⁴

The lyrical "I" consciously breaks all laws and orders as a result of this great love. This combination of love and faith is a reference to the Sufis philosophy of al-'Arabī who saw the road to God in love, for love towards another person is a sign of divine love. This is something that is characteristic for the remaining works, like for instance *Qiblat al-ayyām*. The title of the poem is difficult to translate and could mean "qibla of days". The use of metaphor here is dual in nature. The whole phrase refers to the one beloved, to whom the poem addresses the work. She is for him like a "qibla" i.e. the place in the mosque designed for the direction of prayer (the direction of Mecca). The second part of the title – *ayyām* (of days) refers to the whole of one's life, by analogy, and also a conscious reference to the autobiographical novel by Taḥa Ḥusayn, entitled *Al-Ayyām* (*Days*). His beloved is

²⁴⁰ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Lā tasā' līmī*, in: *Zabad al-'adamiyya*, Beirut, 2003, p. 10.

²⁴¹ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Liqā' tashrīfī*, in: *Zabad...*, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

²⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 7.

²⁴³ Fatwa – the legal opinion given in matters of Islamic law by a scholar called a mufti; Cf. Janusz Danecki, *Kultura islamu*, Warszawa, 1997, p. 73.

²⁴⁴ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Liqā' tashrīfī*, in: *Zabad...*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

therefore everything to the poet. In the poem we find erotic motifs, personification and contrasts:

You are water and fire
 You are the spirit of intimate whispers
 I inhale the story of your palms
 I flow in the fields of hair²⁴⁵

There appear next to the classic symbolism of water, fire, and spirit that lead us into metaphysical reflection that of hair and palms. The palm for the Shiite is a symbol of divine blessing as in the case of the famous palm of the daughter of the prophet Fatima, while hair is the symbol of man's body, and in particular his strength of vitality.²⁴⁶ The poet continues:

There is here blueness sticking to me
 And there a fascinating whiteness blinds me²⁴⁷

The colour blue is the colour of protection that defends one from the evil eye, while white is the symbol of religion (the white clothes of the faithful during pilgrimages, and the white of the turban means a follower of Islam).²⁴⁸ The torment accompanying the poet culminates in order to explode:

I call out in the enormity of silence
 God
 God
 I am at the border of understanding
 I ask about the range of my eye
 I ask where my hand will reach?²⁴⁹

This dramatic appeal to God is an expression of helplessness in the face of law and tradition, and at the same time a question concerning free will, man's possibilities and freedom in general. "Understanding" or "explanation" concern the commentaries to the Qur'an called the *tafsīr*, hence "hand" and "eye" are expressions of the authority of human strengths. The poet does not want to renounce love, beauty and desire.

There appear in the poem words in negation, for example *al-lāwaqt*²⁵⁰ (without time), *al-lāma'nā*²⁵¹ (meaningless, without meaning), *al-lāru'yā*²⁵² (non vision). The last two lines express the pessimism associated with the creator's lack of understanding:

²⁴⁵ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Qiblat al-ayyām*, in: *Zabad...*, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

²⁴⁶ Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 28, 106.

²⁴⁷ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Qiblat al-ayyām*, in: *Zabad...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

²⁴⁸ Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika...*, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

²⁴⁹ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Qiblat al-ayyām*, in: *Zabad...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 14–15.

²⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

²⁵¹ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Zabad al-'adamiyya*, in: *Zabad...*, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

²⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 86.

Who is there to know
What I think²⁵³

In the title poem *Zabad al-‘adamiyya (A Foam of non-existence)* the poet feels as if he is at the Last Judgment:

I am the candle of consciousness
Which does not listen to my heart
Or the people conversing in the language of *dād*
Which brings with itself defeats
They spoke and they were disgraced.²⁵⁴

The poet recalls *Ahl aḍ-Ḍād*, i.e. Arabs speaking a form of Arabic where there is the letter *ḍād*. This letter symbolizes the number eight hundred and the name of God “the Harmful”.²⁵⁵ The poet asks also about the future of the Arab nation in relation to its moral corruption, prudishness and hypocrisy. There are here references to Azra’il the angel of death:

Who will revive the ashes of Arabness?
In a country of one season
The season of debasement
Of undergoing death
Azra’il changes the shape of their bodies²⁵⁶

Ibrāhīm Sha‘bān published in the year 2000 in Bahrain a small volume of poetry *Huzzī ilayki bi-qalbī (Brandish my heart to you)*, where the majority of the poems refer to love, sometimes mysterious and platonic, like the repeating motif of romantic *udhrī* love (*al-ḥubb al-‘udhrī*).

The poet places love to the fore in life. He feels good when he is loved and every love he treats as a new calling:

Whenever I meet a new woman
I feel like Christopher Columbus
And she is a continent of an unknown name²⁵⁷

The poem *Qanā‘āt (Convictions)* is a list of the quandaries and doubts connected with love:

Don’t misunderstand my silence
My weakness is shame
I have my convictions, yet
I am not from among those who love discussion

²⁵³ Ibrāhīm Sha‘bān, *Qiblat al-ayyām*, in: *Zabad...*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

²⁵⁴ Ibrāhīm Sha‘bān, *Zabad al-‘adamiyya*, in: *Zabad...*, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

²⁵⁵ Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika...*, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

²⁵⁶ Ibrāhīm Sha‘bān, *Zabad al-‘adamiyya*, in: *Zabad...*, *op.cit.*, p. 88.

²⁵⁷ Ibrāhīm Sha‘bān, *Aqwāl ghayr mā’thūra*, in: *Huzzī ilayki bi-qalbī*, Bahrain, 2000, p. 120.

Don't misunderstand, my heart
Has been lost in the world of hope²⁵⁸

The title masks are a symbol of the poet's multiple personality, for the many faces are a metaphor referring to the complexity of his character. The asceticism of the poem's form is sensed thanks to which the utterance is clearer. The heart and with it love has been lost in the world of hope. The poet emphasizes his uniqueness and unusualness in the poem *Al-Yaqīn (Certainty)*:

Don't compare me my sweet
To the banal men
I am a lover nevertheless
From my heart the certainty has disappeared
Don't compare me with another
For I am the invaluable one²⁵⁹

Banal men is an epithet to describe the ordinary eaters of bread. The poet yearns at any price to define his originality and to cut himself off from the mass of men. There is a sense in the poem of a certain narcissism that results from a desire for feeling.

There are also poems in the volume that relate to contemporary reality, for example *An-Nās (People)*:

All religions stifle man
Without reason
All products of art kill the senses
People have whims
Everything is pure chance...²⁶⁰

The repetition of the words: "all religions, all products of art" and the meaningful personification: "religions stifle man, products of art kill the senses" gives a bitter form of criticism to the reality that surrounds us. The poet does not falter to openly criticize faith and art. He concludes that everything that surrounds us is a great unknown, even human life is brittle and accidental.

The subject of the next poem entitled *Intilijānsiyā waṭaniyya (Patriotic Intelligence)* is the phenomenon of life in a technical civilization:

I don't believe
That you wrote this
I don't believe
That you read this
It is not you who live
In the epoch of the fax
And computer

²⁵⁸ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Qanā'āt*, in: *Huzzī...*, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

²⁵⁹ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Al-Yaqīn*, in: *Huzzī...*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

²⁶⁰ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *An-Nās*, in: *Huzzī...*, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

In the epoch of satellites
 It is not you who are on Earth
 Because you are different²⁶¹

The language borrowings: fax, computer, satellite are of a symbolic significance here and characterize the contemporary world. Today's world is nothing more than a computer which serves work, serves science and even entertainment. Fax machines and showers are comforts, modernity and speed. The whole poem appears to be directed to those, possibly the dead, whose life moved in harmony with the rhythm of nature. The present generation has been completely and irreversibly taken over by technology and modernity.

All the poet's volumes deal with similar themes, the existence of man, God, the universe, and first and foremost love. The poems do not have an ending, they remain open so that, as the poet claims, they can continue to develop. Ibrāhīm Sha'bān does not provide us with direct answers to the questions raised in his work. He says of himself: "My heart is Christian, while my mind is Muslim" which means that he desires to make use of life and its charms, including even those forbidden by Islam.²⁶²

The title of Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī's volume *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī* (*What Abu Tahir al-Qurmuti did not Say*) suggests that the poet is inspired by the activities of the Carmathians movement. This socio-religious movement which advocated ideas of equality and justice gained many adherents in the ninth century especially amongst the poor within the areas of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula including those in Bahrain. In 930 they even took the Black Stone from al-Ka'ba.²⁶³

The subject matter of the twenty two poems that compose the whole volume of *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī* (*What Abu Tahir al-Qurmuti did not Say*) is concentrated around the person of the poet because the al-Qurmuti of the title was also a poet. The cycle of poems begins with a short one stanza piece entitled *Fātiḥa* (*Opening Up*) the title for which is connected with the first sūra (chapter) of the Qur'an. It claims that the history of mankind is a history of blood in the name of religion and power:

I read your story
 With my sword
 Severing²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ Ibrāhīm Sha'bān, *Intilijānsiyā waṭaniyya*, in: *Huzzī...*, *op.cit.*, p. 107.

²⁶² On the basis of an interview conducted by the author with Ibrāhīm Sha'bān in Bahrain, on the 10th of March 2004.

²⁶³ Compare: J. Danecki, *Kultura Arabów. Słownik*, Warszawa, 1997, p. 112; M. Dziekan, *Arabowie. Słownik Encyklopedyczny*, Warszawa, 2001, p. 229.

²⁶⁴ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Fātiḥa*, in: *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī*, Bahrain, 1996, p. 9.

Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī appears to be bent on breaking models and set schemes of things. He often breaks up phrases that could be created as a coherent whole. He gives up on the succession of cause and effect, mixing the logical flow of images. He does not make use of conjunctions as a result of which the images appear to be all the more disjointed from each other:

I emerge from history
 Time is eternal
 I am a naked ear
 But with a tattoo between the shoulders²⁶⁵

Or:

The hand eating of the sword
 Leaves marks on the palm
 Crossing into the time of impossibility
 My time is bitterness
 My ash is a spider²⁶⁶

Through brief imaging and textual incoherence, the individual fragments mutually exist intrinsically and everything to various degrees fulfils its expressive-
 -impressionist function. The art of poetic communication, although characterized by linguistic elasticity fits into certain frameworks in which the work may achieve maximum ambiguity. On the one hand this is dependent upon the active cooperation of the reader, while on the other on the author's intentions and for example cultural conventions. The poet does not impose on his readership a single solution or answer, rather he stimulates the associations and imagination of the addressee.

In congealed blood
 On the pillow
 I seek my rhymes
 The scraps of my tongue
 Rest
 In subordinated towns²⁶⁷

The poet resigns himself from the amassing of meaningful epithets and similes. He rather opts for the application of shocking metaphors which mutually play on the randomly cut up phrases:

I cried: clay
 Takes on the form of a breast
 In the towns
 Which hide their desire

²⁶⁵ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Shaffatāy tuharribān al-ḥashīsh*, in: *Mā lam...*, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 26–27.

²⁶⁷ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Al-'Ashīra*, in: *Mā lam...*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

Under the roots
Of the grasses²⁶⁸

The organizational element is in Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī the lyrical situation in its reference to history, yet the symbols which he operates with force one to go deeper into the cultural, religious and philosophical sphere. Some fragments can be interpreted with ease like for instance one from the poem *Kun* (Be):

Be
A camel
In the dusk of an unfathomable dream
Oh homeland of mine
Be²⁶⁹

The camel is instantly associated with the desert or homeland. It was always associated with strength, perseverance and love. The greatest ancient Arab poets have devoted many of their works to this animal. The homeland was always everywhere where the camel was.

The fact that the poet possesses an unusual ability to use words is borne out by the first lines of the poem number 8:

God allowed me
That I could bathe words
With my water²⁷⁰

Water appears here as a symbol of the life-giving power connected with the eternal water. The poet also associates himself with Plato's perfect city i.e. al-Farabi linking it with a new life and with the dreams of people.

I still
Get drunk in my cities
From the time I became
A creature of imagination²⁷¹

The cities mentioned are cities of poetry, so the very fact that they have become a creature of imagination signifies their complete identification with the poetry written by the poet. That poetry is essential for him in life is shown by the line:

My heart swallows poetry and words²⁷²

The rest of the poem shows us that Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī lives in order to create:

The distance between us is a word²⁷³

²⁶⁸ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Mudun al-ballūr*, in: *Mā lam...*, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

²⁶⁹ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Kun*, in: *Mā lam...*, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

²⁷⁰ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī (8)*, in: *Mā lam...*, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

²⁷¹ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī (9)*, in: *Mā lam...*, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

²⁷² Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī (5)*, in: *Mā lam...*, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

²⁷³ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī (15)*, in: *Mā lam...*, *op.cit.*, p. 83.

In the fourteenth poem the poet deals with socio-political subjects. He stands out against the Arab way of looking into the past, the lack of progress accompanying the elevation of symbols of Arabness. This almost worthless dust, preserved for recollection, is considered something almost dangerous:

Strain your gaze
 These are the maps that in an Arab bosom
 Give birth to locusts
 Sores that tear apart our body
 Our standing clock
 Attached to a horse
 Witnesses
 Dust preserved for recollections
 An echo that no one listens to²⁷⁴

Among the symbols used by Ḥusayn as-Samāhījī we find night representing something that is not known totally, is unpredictable, often even frightening. It is night that allows him to create and accomplish unusual acts, like engagements with the sky. Night, in a way similar to darkness, is a symbol of loneliness and isolation. In the poem number twelve as-Samāhījī writes:

I went down into the crypt
 Having put out all the candles
 In the darkness there is oblivion...²⁷⁵

It seems that the poet at times identifies himself with night:

I am the wounded night
 Suspended between the seasons of the year...²⁷⁶

Ḥusayn as-Samāhījī's poetry is saturated mystic and mysterious issues which can not be achieved by means of intellectual effort. They can be understood by the heart. For words are powerless in the face of the experiences of the layers of the soul of creation.

Mysticism, mystery, women, wine and poetry constitute the canvas for the works incorporated in the volume *Imra'a ukhrā' (Another Woman)*. The poem *Ṣahīl imra'a (Whinny Woman)* conveys the content and soul of this collection:

We were...our poems flew away together with the pages
 We dream
 But...
 Oh, we have just returned
 We drink

²⁷⁴ Ḥusayn as-Samāhījī, *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī (14)*, in: *Mā lam..., op.cit.*, p. 82.

²⁷⁵ Ḥusayn as-Samāhījī, *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī (12)*, in: *Mā lam..., op.cit.*, p. 80.

²⁷⁶ Ḥusayn as-Samāhījī, *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī*, in: *Mā lam..., op.cit.*, p. 67.

A toast
For the dead...²⁷⁷

Despite the fact that the consumption of wine is forbidden in Islam the poet writes in almost every poem about the drinking of this forbidden fruit. This is always accompanied by women:

How many lovers
Before you
Have been exchanged with your beloved glass of wine
Right up to falling asleep in the embrace of the Lord
Inebriated with wine, man
Pouring down his throat
The memory of God in the Koran
And I...
Tawny body²⁷⁸

Or:

You have borne a poem
In my blood
You have borne the appearance of the summer sun with burns
You have borne the eyes drinking the desert of voice
You have borne the tear in our palm
You, my woman
Silence became nightmares²⁷⁹

The works in the volume *Imra'a ukhrā* (*Another Woman*) are thematically connected to classical Arabic poetry, to the poetry of love – ghazal and the poetry of wine – *khamriyyāt*. Love and wine provide inspiration for the composition of eternal poems which is according to Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, despite the enormous effort, not an easy matter:

I have written a poem
But I have not slept
For five days²⁸⁰

The next volume, entitled *Nazawāt sharqiyya* (*Eastern Mistakes*), in a way similar to the previous, is tied in with classical poetry. One of the poems entitled *Sīrat Majnūn* (*The Life of the Crazy One*) is dedicated to the famous Arab poet of the Umayyads period Qays ibn al-Mulawwah known as Majnūn i.e. crazed with love for Layla. Though it is not totally clear if Qays was a historical figure or simply the quintessence of a legend about ideal love all the same he played an important role in

²⁷⁷ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Ṣahīl imra'a*, in: *Imra'a ukhrā*, Beirut, 1999, p. 21.

²⁷⁸ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Yaltadhdu Allāh bi-ladhhatinā*, in: *Imra'a...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 6–7.

²⁷⁹ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Ṣahīl imra'a*, in: *Imra'a...*, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

²⁸⁰ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Al-Yamāma*, in: *Imra'a...*, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

Arabic literature. He fell in love with Layla whose father had forced her to marry another. After the loss of his beloved he lost control of his senses and started to wander around the world reciting poems about Layla. The legend about Qays inspired many poets including as-Samāhijī who refers directly to Qays recalling the days of his glory against a background of desert, horses and wine. The poet, fascinated by Qays, attempts to write and discover the immortality of poetry:

I uttered my first letters to you
 And when the word made of me a saint
 I assured myself that the casyd was young
 In the embraces of the white page²⁸¹

Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī in describing Qays as an object of desire and fear dreams of a man similar to him who could construct in the contemporary world the order of things from scratch:

Oh Qays... a thousand tribes observe you
 Oh Qays... a thousand tribes threaten you...²⁸²

The poem ends with a toast and permission for Qays to depart to the past with the recommendation that it is not he who is isolated in his suffering:

In every passing caravan
 There is Layla
 And the young Qays surrounding with his poetry...²⁸³

The understanding of the word *junūn* (madness) is extended noticeably in as-Samāhijī's repertoire for it refers not only to the poet in the general meaning of the word, but contemporarily refers to authority and religion.

One can perceive historical, political and religious subtexts in the poem *Kitāb at-tawqī'āt* (*The Book of Notes*). The poet relates to Arab tribal traditions and the inheritance of the Quraysh. And even though the name of the Prophet Muhammad does not appear once, it does nevertheless evoke memories of the huge role played by the Quraysh in the shaping of Arab history and culture:

Quraysh...
 The letter in my blood
 Saturated with wine
 And honey
 Noted down our heritage
 In tears and in rubies
 On the bloody table
 Beauty
 Bloody²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Sīrat Majnūn*, in: *Nazawāt sharqiyya*, Bahrain, 2002, p. 54.

²⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 55.

²⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 59.

The poet expresses belief in Arab unity through the solidarity of the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula to this very day. The most important matters of human fate interest him the most, while he places especial emphasis on historical conflict and the struggle of contemporary order with tradition.

‘Alī al-Jallāwī was imprisoned many times for his political convictions and artistic work, consequently it would be misleading to interpret his poems as the notes of an ordinary citizen. The author himself gives us a strong indication as to this in the motto contained in one of his volumes, entitled *Al-‘Iṣyān. Risālat al-Mundhir (Revolt. The Mundhir Treaty)*: “because the tribe meant love I created a book of passion and announced my prophecy”.²⁸⁵ And in actual fact the poet’s verse is in a way prophecy relating to the changes in Bahrain.²⁸⁶ The title refers to Mundhir bin Sāwā who ruled in Bahrain during the period of conversion to Islam. These are murky visions, an understated prediction, images full of symbols, made unreal yet concerning reality. The tribe mentioned by the poet appears to be the departure point for his solutions. His creativity is first and foremost patriotic lyricism – the homeland’s past and its state at present (e.g. *Anā min hunā – I’m from Here*, Part II) as well as the condition of man entangled in the history of his country, e.g. *Yā sayyidī al waṭan (My Homeland!)*. All of a citizen’s actions, thoughts and feelings are conditioned by the homeland. In the poem *Yā sayyidī al waṭan (My Homeland!)* he writes:

I love you like the sea...
Because you are close...
And I have joined
The vee formation of the wild doves²⁸⁷

In the work *Al-Faṣl al-akhīr qabla al-wilāda (The Last Period before Birth)* amidst the tender filled admissions we encounter the words:

My hands
Reach for the final noble cities
In our minarets
There is no exile
And there is no homeland²⁸⁸

The portrait of Bahrain is not in any way defined unambiguously by the poet: love for the soil, although truthful is a difficult feeling. The homeland in al-Jallāwī’s work

²⁸⁴ Ḥusayn as-Samāhijī, *Kitāb at-tawqī‘āt*, in: *Mā lam..., op.cit.*, pp. 11–12.

²⁸⁵ ‘Alī al-Jallāwī, *Al-‘Iṣyān. Risālat al-Mundhir*, Damascus, 2000.

²⁸⁶ On the basis of an interview carried out by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with ‘Alī al-Jallāwī in Bahrain, on 22nd March 2004.

²⁸⁷ ‘Alī al-Jallāwī, *Yā sayyidī al waṭan*, in: *Al-‘Iṣyān..., op.cit.*, p. 31.

²⁸⁸ ‘Alī al-Jallāwī, *al-Faṣl al-akhīr qabla al-wilāda*, in: *Al-‘Iṣyān..., op.cit.*, p. 25.

is a well-known landscape marked with palms and blue skies, e.g. in the poem *Anā min hunā* (*I'm from Here*):

I stand
 Time passes
 A palm of snow stops him
 In her hands (palms) of blue
 An unbeliever on the surface
 Gathered (the blue) all its strengths
 They stand
 The blue sky drinks
 From their columns of foundation
 Whole bunches of palms
 Are hungry and barefooted²⁸⁹

This homeland is also a bad mother and a disloyal lover deserving of condemnation:

We came maintaining that:
 You are the one who stole God²⁹⁰

Man does not love here without criticism, he demands and even forces:

We celebrated your death
 Until you became great²⁹¹

But also is just when he feels care:

They came with revenge within them
 You became a child embracing the light
 Of the river of all prophecies.
 You are sowing a field of peace²⁹²

For 'Alī al-Jallāwī it is tradition, religion and language which defines the identity of man. These elements can constitute asylum and a safe haven in life. He calls upon Shiite symbolism: Karbala – in the poem *Anā min hunā* (*I Am from Here*, Part 2) and the murdered Husayn, killed together with his people, the personification of a saint for the Shiites – in the poem *An-Nubū'a al-ūlā. Nubū'at al-Ḥusayn* (*The First Prophecy of Husayn*). He feels an especial connection with his native tongue to which he devotes a lot of space in his works, something that is a deadly weapon from time immemorial and which is permanent and holy:

Only knives are language, young lady
 So you'd better understand
 For although I do not know how

²⁸⁹ 'Alī al-Jallāwī, *Anā min hunā*, in: *Al-'Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

²⁹⁰ 'Alī al-Jallāwī, *Yā sayyidī al waṭan*, in: *Al-'Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

²⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

²⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 34.

It was pulled, wounded
 And on the cross spread
 It remains constant²⁹³

Man, in al-Jallāwī, is contained only in language, he is it, he does not possess any other means of expression. In the face of fluctuation, the instability of traditional values, language becomes a haven:

Language
 I don't know
 If I or the words
 Are language?!²⁹⁴

In the difficult relationship with his own country the poet's attitude refracts and polarizes two extremes. The first is loneliness, escape to peace:

We sent back
 We summarized
 As we moved
 To the trenches of silence²⁹⁵
 [...]
 Foreignness, foreignness
 Foreignness...
 How can I divide
 Between my presence in fire
 And poetry²⁹⁶

The second is a sense of unity and a call for revolution:

People come with anger
 That which combines the body of anger with the fire of anger
 And combines anger with anger²⁹⁷

'Alī al-Jallāwī emphasizes in his poems the wide cultural-historical context. He calls not only upon the figure of Husayn but also on the half legendary king Gilgamesh who allegedly reached Bahrain in order to drink the waters of immortality. The figure of Gilgamesh is to be found also in the cultural heritage of Iraq where he is a symbol of the power of the ancient Sumerian state.

In the volume of poetry, entitled *Wajhān li-īmrā'a wāhida* (*The Two Faces of One Woman*), 'Alī al-Jallāwī extols love for his motherland and women, for a woman, according to him, is the motherland and the motherland a woman. The poems are written under the influence of the language of the Koran, though that said they are not religious in character. The poet deals with taboo subjects i.e. sex and

²⁹³ 'Alī al-Jallāwī, *Al-Mamnū' min aṣ-ṣarf*, in: *Al-'Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 80–81.

²⁹⁴ 'Alī al-Jallāwī, *Tifl yajurruhu lisānuhu*, in: *Al-'Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

²⁹⁵ 'Alī al-Jallāwī, *Yā sayyidi al waṭan*, in: *Al-'Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

²⁹⁶ 'Alī al-Jallāwī, *Tifl yajurruhu lisānuhu*, in: *Al-'Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

²⁹⁷ 'Alī al-Jallāwī, *Mawsim aṣ-ṣawā'iq*, in: *Al-'Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

eroticism, expressing in them a wealth of feelings, sensations and emotions. Love overcomes all:

I can even become an enemy of my own tribe out of my love for you
 They said: She enchanted him and he died bewitched
 And they said: I went mad for her
 She filled my lips with the wine of hers²⁹⁸

Love is described in an unusually artistic way as hot feelings demanding devotion, sacrifice and offerings. Al-Jallāwī's works are characterized by a semantic duality, for the author refers in them both to the motherland and a yearning for its freedom. The volume is unusually mature for such a young poet who was a mere nineteen when writing the poems.

The majority of the pieces possess no punctuation, here and there appearing as if randomly. Let the words of Michał Głowiński serve here as evaluation: "resignation from stopping is only protection money paid to fashion, if one could add to the empty spaces commas, full stops, semicolons etc. nothing fundamental would change".²⁹⁹

The syncretism of the various types of utterance appear in a mixture of direct and indirect lyrics. For example in the poem *Yā sayyidī al-waṭan (My Homeland!)* one can discern elements of lyrical monologue, invocative lyrics and lyrics of a collective subject:

Who is now going to be braver than me
 And announce that the land which we have in our blood
 Was not a standard
 Who struck the wound
 And then
 Will live
 With a fossilized memory
 Who again will inflict injury
 Teaches silence and speech
 My sick country
 At least it doesn't have a cold
 Who now will turn
 Notebooks into seagulls
 And then descend to the water
 Like a child liberated
 From the yoke and divisions...³⁰⁰

All of these together with the numerous ellipses that do not reveal the subject for the course of the entire poem, through the simultaneous introduction of new figures, creates its own kind of chaos conducive to the style of prophecy though making the text's reception for the reader all the harder.

²⁹⁸ 'Alī al-Jallāwī, *Uḥibbuki tayran*, in: *Wajhān li-imrā'a wāḥida*, Beirut, 1991, p. 5.

²⁹⁹ Michał Głowiński, *Kunst wieloznaczności*, „Pamiętnik Literacki”, 1970, vol. 3, p. 130.

³⁰⁰ 'Alī al-Jallāwī, *Yā sayyidī al-waṭan*, in: *Al-'Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 29–34.

‘Alī al-Jallāwī utilizes synecdoche (e.g. a “palm” instead of an entire landscape appears many times in various poems), or metonymy (he calls a horse simply “neighing”).³⁰¹

He uses the comparisons: of a “fatherland to a child”³⁰², or “carrion to fire”.³⁰³ In order to strengthen the suggestiveness he uses personification: “the hands of the palm”³⁰⁴, “the shoulders of time”³⁰⁵ and animism: “the mouth dries”³⁰⁶, “the blade sprouts”.³⁰⁷

The poet dreams of a city of poets but not in a utopian way like in Plato or Al-Farabi where everyone is free to express his own thoughts. He has transferred his desires into the works contained in the volume *Al-Madīna al-akhīra* (*The Last City*). The whole work was dedicated to his friend Isa who was condemned to death and with whom the poet spent time in prison. A continuation of the subject matter of a perfect city is to be found in the two volumes of poetry entitled *Dilmūniyyāt* (*Things from Dilmun*).³⁰⁸

‘Alī al-Jallāwī’s poetry falls outside any concrete concepts and cannot be closed within certain frameworks. It deals with a wide range of subject matters, failing to offer a single solution. It stimulates the association and imagination of the reader encouraging cooperation. The content of the works plays a far greater role for the poet than does the form, and the poetic images are saturated with reflection and intellectualism.

Ḥiṣṣa al-Bū‘aynayn’s lyrical poetry (see Biographies) is a tangle of meanings, contexts and relations behind which hides the poetical world. The author has entitled her volume *Li-l-waqt li-l-makān* (*To Time and Place*) and definitely most of her poems involve the concept of space. Yet the understanding of this concept is in the poet exceptionally broad and functions in several contexts. First and foremost there is the obvious linkage between time and place but also that with interpersonal relations. Time is the indicator of certain changes, of passing, but also of the very real time of our existence. Often it loses its linear nature and simply starts to last, to be a value limited by nothing, liberated from the burden of its significance. In appearing only once on this earth we last in unendingness with the entire richness of our experiences. In as far as time violates within the poems, extending beyond its range and limits, then equally place is always something which creates definite boundaries. We are limited by it and to some extent ascribe to it a concrete scope. Of a completely different quality is the expanse of interpersonal relations. These are

³⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

³⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 34.

³⁰³ ‘Alī al-Jallāwī, *Mawsim aṣ-ṣawā‘iq*, in: *Al-‘Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

³⁰⁴ ‘Alī al-Jallāwī, *Anā min hunā*, in: *Al-‘Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

³⁰⁵ ‘Alī al-Jallāwī, *al-Faṣl al-akhīr qabla al-wilāda*, in: *Al-‘Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

³⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

³⁰⁷ ‘Alī al-Jallāwī, *Anā min hunā*, *op.cit.*, in: *Al-‘Iṣyān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

³⁰⁸ Dilmun – the historic name of Bahrain.

equally directed by certain laws and limitations that result from the character of our very nature. Yet this expanse is in a way closer to us and to a degree it is this that defines us. The work *Yasmīn ash-shitā' al-akhīr* (*The Last Jasmine of Winter*) touches upon this very question. The poem was written under the influence of a picture seen by the poet in the Louvre in Paris:

If the horizon covers with blood
 All the clouds of death
 And the wind of dispersion directs
 Its trumpets on a branch
 I will hide in your glow
 [...]
 If his glass fills up with two drops
 and the whiteness becomes transparent
 with the red of the west
 I will hide
 I will place my head on the pillow
 From the branch
 Without your scent
 [...] ³⁰⁹

Repeatedly a mysterious addressee appears in the poet's work, someone to whom she directs her thoughts. We can draw the conclusion from the context of the work that this is not only an accomplice in conversation, a friend, but also someone with whom she is strongly attached emotionally. This figure is to turn out to be extremely important for the poet. It constitutes its own form of spiritual haven. It results from talks with the poet that she had in mind night that gives such a huge sense of safety and guarantees asylum in moments that are especially difficult.³¹⁰ At the same time Ḥiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn conducts a dialogue with it. She writes:

What does that stranger stare at so
 What does the priest see
 [...]
 He spills his blood
 From breast and lived.
 I stood for a long time
 I returned to him
 I asked you:
 Does the one who deserves the place
 Have to wrap up in wounds?
 You answered:
 A stranger is crucified for no sins
 [...]

³⁰⁹ Ḥiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn, *Yasmīn ash-shitā' al-akhīr*, in: *Li-l-waqt li-l-makān*, Bahrain, 2006.

³¹⁰ On the basis of an interview conducted by the Author with Ḥiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn in Bahrain, on 17th March 2004.

I asked:
 Do you feel touched by wounds
 By the wounds of a stranger?
 Between the shadows of towns beyond the place
 A stranger bleeds... innocent but condemned
 You had forgotten the question
 You abandoned time³¹¹

What occurs in the most important space, and this is the space for interpersonal relations, is the subject of the work *Lasta al-madā* (*You are not Expanse*):

You are not far
 Let us not differ
 But we are two languages
 In a single fog
 And may be we are herbs
 Which will pull together the distant banks of the river
 [...]
 May be we will be gifts of the sun
 Through which the dawn appears
 [...]
 I said to her:
 Abandon those things even if they were ours
 Things are only their names
 This is a raincoat, and this a pot
 There is no difference between form and meaning
 [...]
 An hour – its name is empty
 Lost in a form without meaning
 [...]
 Don't speak
 I destroy the sorrow which destroys us
 Or regenerates our wounds³¹²

The poem speaks of the relations between a woman and a man which are constant searches for understanding.

It appears that the one possible form of honest and genuine contact with another person is provided for us by spiritual space. This sphere is completely independent of matter, for interpersonal relations find for themselves the best places in non-material space.

According to the poet we are able to liberate ourselves equally from rigid boundaries, like those assigned us by time. In the work *Marfū' 'alā 'arshihā* (*Raised on her Throne*) we read:

³¹¹ Ḥiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn, *Sarīr al-yamām*, in: *Li-l-waqt...*, *op.cit.*

³¹² Ḥiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn, *Lasta al-madā*, in: *Li-l-waqt...*, *op.cit.*

Give me time
 For my cast away time
 [...]

The earth knows that you didn't die
 If you live within us
 No you were crucified
 You recalled the one raised up
 Choose a star
 Offered to the time past
 Which remained in us
 [...] ³¹³

The reality of human feelings is directed in Ḥiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn's poetry by its own rules, ones that are completely independent of the order of the world that surrounds us. The past and the present mutually intermingle and there does not exist between them a clearly defined boundary. And we do really all of us live at the intersection of two realities, the one that surrounds us and the one which is deeply embedded in us. The poet attempts to combine these two expanses and to show that we can exist harmoniously in them.

Ḥiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn's work is on the whole long poems where many thoughts finally join into a single image. The poet employs her own original codes for the description of reality, she does not employ any punctuation marks. She presents her reflections in a refined literary language in the form of tafīla versification with a free division between line and stanza.

³¹³ Ḥiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn, *Marfū' 'alā 'arshihā*, in: *Li-l-waqt...*, *op.cit.*

CHAPTER 3

MODERN TIMES – MODERN POETRY (QAŞĪDAT AN-NATHR)

Qāsim Ḥaddād, in the book entitled *Warshat al-‘amal. Sīra shakḥṣiyya li-madīnat al-Muḥarraḡ* (*Workshops. The Story of the Town of al-Muḥarraḡ*), which was published in 2004, presents the subsequent stages of his life and the story of his beloved home town. We become acquainted with the poet’s biography through an extremely poetic text, while at the same time discovering his strong attachment to the place that he was born. For al-Muḥarraḡ functions in the imagination of the poet not simply as the place of his childhood, but also as somewhere which has noticeably changed over the years. Memories and reflections are an occasion to present a philosophy of life and man’s place in the world.

Qāsim Ḥaddād talks on the subject of love, poetry, creation as well as the influence of time and place on the human psyche. He has included a self-portrait on his internet website:

I put a mirror on the table. I glare at and wonder: Who is that person? I hardly know him. When I use more mirrors, the person multiplies in front of me, and increases like an echo in the sides of a cathedral of mountains. Then I believe that I am able to recognize him. He is almost [...] Qassim Haddad.³¹⁴

The book begins with a poem where he expresses the significance of love nurtured in the heart of a child who loves his own country:

Child [...] how are you going to write the word al-Muḥarraḡ with ink and water?
I will write it like a child’s name is chosen
In order to design the future of the book³¹⁵

Although Ḥaddād writes in prose he expresses his feelings and deep attachment to al-Muḥarraḡ in an exceptionally poetic way. He says that writing about the country of his childhood is extremely difficult and with it moving. This undertaking appears to be unbelievably complicated, therefore the utterances of the author are not always unambiguous and discernable:

³¹⁴ www.qhaddad.com/english/frame1.htm

³¹⁵ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Warshat al-‘amal. Sīra shakḥṣiyya li-madīnat al-Muḥarraḡ*, Bahrain, 2004, p. 7.

How will you write?
 I place the alphabet of the people in the dictionary of the elder
 I will forget about satire and panegyrics
 Ravaged by travel I start a tale forgotten by the sea³¹⁶

According to Qāsim Ḥaddād, al-Muharraḡ is not simply an ordinary place inhabited by various people. This town for the writer's generation appears as its own kind of proposition concerning the future. It is characterized by an immense openness, this is a place where sense an unusual bond between themselves. In addition al-Muharraḡ exceptionally pulsates with life and the desire to act:

So al-Muharraḡ is, on the one hand, a place where the doors are constantly open, and on the other a place of work. In both cases the moment when I discovered the town was the moment when my dreams about a life of action interweaved.³¹⁷

The author describes various events from his childhood. He recalls his school, contact with teachers, studying the Koran. He talks about the history of the town, recalling in memory the uprising that occurred in 1965, emphasizing the participation of all the inhabitants. This matter clearly expresses something that unites various, at times totally alien, people.

Al-Muharraḡ in Ḥaddād's understanding is not a collection of houses and streets but first and foremost a defined experience, a sense of linkage with a concrete place and nation. The author also very clearly expresses his solidarity with the entire Arab world, particularly with Egypt and the politician Gamal 'Abd An-Naser.

Sometimes Qāsim Ḥaddād utilizes a form which recalls a realistic short story but even then there is a mass of emotionality and symbolism contained. Such is the case when he recalls the mysterious figure of Dalub who, for him, is closely connected with the atmosphere that predominated during Ramadan.

Ḥaddād is also the author of another story *Niṣf 'ā'ila, fī niṣf shāḥina, fī muntaṣaf al-layl* (*Half the Family in Half a Lorry at Midnight*) which was written as a true story from his childhood. Though equally here too the writer transports the reader to the world of tales. Images of his local area constitute the backcloth for life and work in the book *Naqd al-amal* (*Criticism of Hope*).

The work *Qabr Qāsim yasbiquhu fihris al-mukābadāt talīhi jannat al-akhṭā'* (*Qasim's Grave A List of Difficult Experiences Precedes it, Behind it a Paradise of Sins*), from 1997 is stocked with numerous sketches that present people in a fairly abstract and surreal way. Just the title itself suggests a division into three parts a subject matter marked by suffering. The motto in which Qāsim Ḥaddād recalls Ibn Manẓūr, the author of the thirteenth-century lexicon of Arab poetry *Lisān al-'Arab* (*The Language of the Arabs*), shows his commitment to achieve creative perfection. He dreams of being the equal of the greatest writers in Arab literature.

³¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

³¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

The first part of the book, entitled *Fihris al-mukābadāt (A List of Difficult Experiences)*, is a collection of short poems which run from one to ten stanzas. They are almost aphorisms, thoughts, and images that within themselves recall the writings of Gibran Khalil. Ḥaddād pays no attention to the rhyme and rhythm essential in classical Arabic poetry. The unusually rich and varied stylistic forms employed can, on the one hand, constitute a problem in understanding the writer's intentions, though on the other they open up a wide spectrum of possible interpretation. The poet is certainly conscious of his mission, for there exist people who have been earmarked the role of guides for humanity.

Is a text the desire of the tongue?
Is meaning the total form of the letters?³¹⁸

Language is the image of thought for it requires being written down in order to last. Therefore if one was to imagine language as something capable of feeling then it clearly becomes a metaphor of its desire. The poet most clearly ponders text and its significance. The next fragment is possibly able to explain the mystery of the creative process. The soul and body are linked by the madness that is the drive behind creation:

This is not the cry of the body
This is the madness of the corpses
And the hallucination of the soul³¹⁹

Overwhelmed by madness the poet pours onto the paper the fruit of his desire and again arrives at the thought of Gibran Khalil and his poet – the inspired madman.

The next works deeply reflect the subject of war in their wording, as if the writer has allowed a bloody act to occur. The world that surrounds the poet, i.e. the situation that exists in the Arab world inspires just such military associations. It seems that the words are as if bullets from a gun, which hit the paper in streams, while their significance is as hurtful as reality:

Around him tyrants armed to the teeth with the ammunition of death
He fired from the forearm
And wrote with this notebooks of fatigue and toil³²⁰

The words are shots from a gun: cruel, sowing death, destruction and pointless cruelty:

I read the blood. Like the night reads the face of Qasim³²¹

The body is subjected to tests of love, impudence, and yet wades through war, for the words born out of the first two are no longer sufficient. The body burns, desiring

³¹⁸ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Qabr Qāsim*, in: *Qabr Qāsim yasbiquhu fihris al-mukābadāt talihi jannat al-akhtā'*, Bahrain, 1997, p. 11.

³¹⁹ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Fihris al-mukābadāt*, in: *Qabr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

³²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

³²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

and craving to revitalize itself in the land of the dead. Is war really to hasten this rebirth?

Among Qāsim's poems there is a work close to the wine poem, *khamriyyāt*, where we read about a wine that allows one to make it through the night:

Peace be with you the keeper of the wine [...]

You shake our bodies and when dawn comes

And the light of the olive lamps demasks our exhaustion

You pour indifferently thick, thick wine

And the flames enlivens and the flash of the sun announcing the defeat of

night³²²

The poet does not omit including thoughts concerning the universal dimension of love and goodness. He places love on a pedestal:

On Judgment Day when the threshold of the first death is crossed

And the next gate opens before you

Each who has elevated himself in the face of love

Or has incited the body in a night of desire

Will be subjected to nothingness and renounce pleasure³²³

And elsewhere he says:

Love is also	the route to death
Love is also	a flower for the losers
Love is also	the paradise of loss
Love is also	the iron of former ages
Love is also	
The stamp of All ³²⁴	

The poet desires to forget aspects of love. It is important to draw attention to the different construction, in relation to his other works, of this *qaṣīda*. Here we are dealing with two-lined lines where the first *bayt* (part) "Love is also" is repeated throughout the poem. We learn that it is the beginning and the end, paradise, solace, rest.

The poet looks within the soul of man:

People fear my ugliness,

I am appalled by the ugliness of their souls³²⁵

³²² *Ibidem*, p. 15.

³²³ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

³²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

³²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

He is touched by the arrowhead of sorrow:

Oh sorrow, you have struck me with your arrowhead
You have doomed me to eternal damnation³²⁶

But at times he says:

This is not death
This is lasting non-presence³²⁷

It is difficult for the poet to come to terms with the loss of a beloved individual so, in describing the said, he tries to understand whether death is the end of life or simply a different form of life and whether love is also a route to death itself.

The poems of the second part, entitled *Qabr Qāsim (Qasim's Grave)*, were composed in 1989–1991. They are longer works – running to several pages – and are written in poetic prose, thematically uniform and rich in stylistic devices. However the poems that make up part three: *Jannat al-akhṭā' (The Paradise of Sins)*, written in 1994–1996, are shorter and dominated by free verse. Of note is the poem devoted to a woman. Here the language is extraordinary for the poet attaches inseparably to the person of the woman the fate of man and the dependence of his existence on woman – enchantress, goddess and carer, performing miracles and endowed with the element of fire:

She	the divine presence of fire
He	sitting in the temple of creativity fearing recollections ³²⁸

Qāsim attempts to offer us a dualistic conception of the soul and the body. In the poem *Madīḥ an-nīrān (Praise of Fire)* he says:

The body / is longing which takes on the shape of letters
The body / is love which disappears in the quicksilver of sorrow
The body / is gold in the praise of fire
The body / is a sacrifice offered to a body³²⁹

And elsewhere:

The body is the temple of the spirit³³⁰

This fragment is an example of Qāsim's quest into the understanding of life, a state between body and soul, in which the alienation, loneliness, the isolation experienced by contemporary man arises:

³²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

³²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

³²⁸ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Imrā'a*, in: *Qabr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

³²⁹ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Madīḥ an-nīrān*, in: *Qabr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 112.

³³⁰ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Al-Ḥadiya*, in: *Qabr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 222.

Who are you
 You are alone in loneliness
 You do not know who you are
 Your grandchildren don't know you, in a way like the ancestors who know of
 you neither³³¹

For all the poems are searches for an answer to the question as to what life is. And he tries to answer this:

It is a little light amongst the darkness³³²

The next volume, entitled *Intimā'āt (Affiliations)*, written in 1982, opens with the poem *Awraq al-Jāhiz aṣ-ṣaghira (Jahiz'a Little Pages)*. This poem is dedicated to the eminent writer, scholar, encyclopedist and one of the most noted medieval Islamic humanists of the Abbasid period, al-Jāhiz. The poet repeats several times the description of al-Jāhiz's bulging eyes:

I stared, I stared and stared
 Until my eyes became bulging³³³

One of the longest poems is dedicated to the sea. The poet describes here the enormous role that the sea plays in the life of a man from the Gulf. It becomes his whole world, his joys, his sorrows, his life and death:

The sea is the depths, the grasses and two windows
 One window furnishes the wedding room
 The second wanders in search of the sun³³⁴

The sea is like a man, it has "ribs" and "shoulders", it feels everything that is around, and besides there sleeps within it a "mystical" strength.³³⁵

Far more difficult for the poet is to discover the town, despite all the attempts made to befriend it. It is for him a symbol of darkness, loss, and even death:

And I left the town (you are not my voice)
 I attacked it (you are my death)³³⁶

It is obvious that he is unable, despite displaying willingness, to befriend the town. He considers life in the town to be artificial and without expression. Tower blocks, tarmac, concrete do not allow for the close contact with nature which man should have access to.

The last poem of the volume is devoted to the homeland. *Al-Khalq yabdā'* (*Creation Begins*) concentrates itself on national affairs and problems, for there is

³³¹ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Dā'i'... wa yaḍī*, in: *Qabr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 207.

³³² Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Fihris al-mukābadāt*, in: *Qabr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

³³³ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Awraq al-Jāhiz aṣ-ṣaghira*, in: *Intimā'āt*, Beirut, 1982, p. 12.

³³⁴ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Al-Bahr*, in: *Intimā'āt...*, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

³³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 76–80.

³³⁶ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Al-Madīna*, in: *Intimā'āt...*, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

nothing more important and beautiful than one's home country. Man is a miserable entity in the context of the homeland; he lives only to support it and to fight for it:

How huge is the homeland
 In the light
 And how small am I³³⁷

In the volume *'Ilāj al-masāfa (The Cure of Distance)* Qāsim Ḥaddād does not create new worlds – “happy islands” and does not depart from the at times painful truth of everydayness. He rather attempts to explain this ordinariness. He searches for meaning within an apparently grey existence. “Space” in his considerations is not necessarily a desert. Rather it is the distance that divides us from others, from ourselves and our various matters. However why the “cure of space”? Can there really exist on the horizon that the artist's imagination draws before our eyes some flaw or blemish?

The world presented in his collection is far from an ideal one. It is one with a lot of greyness, blood and eclipses of the sun. The cure of this reality is in fact a search for a remedy, an attempt to seize hold of certain phenomena and understand them. It is this understanding, awareness of the truth that takes on a curative dimension. Equally, it is meaning and the search for it that constitutes salvation for the poet. Ḥaddād equally interprets the world through the word. The word is to a certain degree the key to understanding oneself and constitutes a way out from one's closed, internal world. Therefore the word becomes in a more distant perspective a way towards a cure for the space perceived in a way specific for the poet. We can speculate, however, as to whether a word that is at times so ambiguous and imperfect can in fact describe the unacquainted reality of the human soul? As to whether there exist meanings that fully reflect our thoughts and feelings?

Qāsim Ḥaddād identifies himself with rock, with something that is permanent, hard, unchanging. With something that does not undergo a process of destruction over the centuries. In the poem *Akḥbār al-ḥajar (The Rock's Words)* he writes:

For you
 I wrote this old rock in the oblivion of a passing lightning bolt
 I wrote with it the letter missing in the word of night
 I built with it nature and her yoke.³³⁸

The word rock is certain strength, energy. We can identify the poet with a new demiurge.³³⁹ His creation is more perfect, complements the existing world, making

³³⁷ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Al-Khalq yabdā'*, in: *Intimā'āt...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 126–127.

³³⁸ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Akḥbār al-ḥajar*, in: *'Ilāj al-masāfa*, Beirut, 2002, p. 67.

³³⁹ Demiurge (gr. Demiourgós) 1. The name applied in ancient Greece to handicraftsmen, e.g. poets and architects. 2. Philosophy: a) in Plato – the divine constructor of the world bestowing a definite shape to eternal though shapeless matter; b) in Hegel – the thought process understood as an independent force, 3. fig. creative strength, force, power, creator., from Jan Tokarski (ed.), *Słownik wyrazów obcych*, Warszawa, 1979, p. 142.

concrete certain phenomena. On the other hand the term “old rock” shows that this is something that has existed for a long time. The “old rock” is written into nature, as if saying that it has existed always. However from the perspective of the lyrical I it takes on new values.

The “word-rock” is also salvation from the hell of loneliness, consciousness that man is never left to his own devices.

The rock accompanies you
As if it were your old companion
With the rock alone you are not.³⁴⁰

Often when we think about a “word” we perceive it as the material of one’s contact with another. However within the literary construction of a poem there is an absence of clear references to the situation of dialogue. Ḥaddād’s “word” appears to us as something that is experienced at a much deeper level. It touches upon the very nature of things. The ambiguity of this designation in the work results in it being everything, but everything that has meaning for us. The “word” has been uttered and therefore something comes into existence. Yet in Ḥaddād there exist within the context of the “word-stone” only essential content. The man described in the poem equally requires such content. His critical situation results from a desire for living words, true words.

When a knight falls from the back of a journey [...]

Warriors do not stop on his account

Or turn their horses round to face him.³⁴¹

The poem *Turāth as-safar (Heritage of Traveling)*, which begins with the above quote, is a depiction of our lifelong wanderings. Wanderings constantly plagued by disappointments and lows. However, the hero of the work is not left alone. There appears someone who looks after him. In the poem this someone are women – “wet nurses”.

Wet nurses alone pay him attention, dress his wounds [...]

Slipping breasts full of life experiencing milk

Under his parched lips.³⁴²

The figure of a woman occupies an extremely significant place in the collection *‘Ilāj al-masāfa (The Cure of Space)*. Here she is the personification of wisdom, reason and caring. In this she possesses a range of supernatural features which mean that everything she does is filled with magic. The world of women – sorceresses remains for men an unfathomable mystery. Their secrets, looks, whispers, passing gestures are an expression of a reality bordering on the fabulous. One that continually intrigues men.

³⁴⁰ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Akhbār al-ḥajar*, in: *‘Ilāj... op.cit.*, p. 68.

³⁴¹ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Turāth as-safar*, in: *‘Ilāj... op.cit.*, p. 47.

³⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 47.

We can interpret the work *Ḥikmat an-nisā'* (*The Wisdom of Women*) as a tribute to the fairer sex:

Sobbing women betrayed by husbands
 And so sad were they that they almost cast rings in their faces
 But they put all to right and restrained from separation.
 [...]
 They lit lamps with the saffron of evening
 Went to confess before the mirror
 Uttering in their hearts the names of their lovers
 And in this there was wisdom.³⁴³

The poet describes with sorrow and compassion the women mistreated by men. He emphasizes their devotion and sacrifice for their family. On the other hand they are presented as goddesses who appear in the smoke of incense “surrounded by a choir of angels”. One can identify them in the work with gentleness, sensitivity floating through all the nooks and crannies of the flat:

A woman would allow the sun to keep watch at night in the lounge
 And for the stars to guard the entrance
 So no creation would feel sad in the darkness.³⁴⁴

The goodness and calm that emanate from women results in everything around them being of the purest harmony and as the poem’s lyrical “I” says: “in this there is wisdom”. The said wisdom is an endemic feature of the female sex. The world of ‘sorceresses is not totally lucid for the poet, therefore he understands their reality as a veiled mystery of incomprehensible gestures and spells. He is, however, convinced of their uniqueness, hence he writes that even if they betray their men then they do so in such a way that in the betrayal wisdom manifests itself.

The volume *‘Ilāj al-masāfa* (*The Cure of Distance*) is an attempt to comprehend the world of the artist and to understand it. An explanation of reality which is to lead finally to its cure is no easy matter. Consequently reading Ḥaddād is no easy venture, and is one that requires concentration upon certain tropes, key words which allow one to pass through the world of the poet’s feelings. Hence the symbols of: a rock, word, journey and glass. They bring with them a certain meaning, one which we are not totally able to decipher. Often the symbols are ambiguous. Their interpretation depends upon our viewpoint. That said the presence of “key words” substantially enrich the works and allow the reader the possibility of perceiving within them a constant spiral of new meanings.

Qāsim Ḥaddād, in presenting his poetic vision of the world, makes use chiefly of blank verse and poetic prose. He resigns from the use of rhythm and rhyme and resorts to an apparently random verse division, one which is not always semantically a whole. The poet’s most often used figure of speech is metaphor. The poem *Akḥbār*

³⁴³ Qāsim Ḥaddād, *Ḥikmat an-nisā'*, in: *‘Ilāj... op.cit.*, p. 21.

³⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

al-ḥajar (*The Rock's Words*) is particularly figuratively rich. The most interesting of which are: “the alphabet of oblivion”, “the chessboard of memory”, “the mist of oblivion”, and “the night of loneliness”. Besides which Ḥaddād significantly makes use of animation including personification, such as: “the wind praises words” in *Ḥikmat an-nisā'* (*The Wisdom of Women*), “the rock stops” in *Akhbār al-ḥajar* (*The Rock's Words*), as well as animatism, e.g. “the back of the journey” in *Turāth as-safar* (*Journey*). There is no lack in the volume of epithets: “tiger-like dexterity”, or “debauched care” in *Adh-Dhakhā'ir* (*Treasures*). The volume also contains many comparisons: “words as sweet as juice” in *Akhbār al-ḥajar* (*The Rock's Words*) or “the wind started to praise words like someone who arouses attraction” in *Ḥikmat an-nisā'* (*The Wisdom of Women*). In the poems one can also find stylistic methods such as the oxymoron “correct mistakes” in *Raqṣat ad-dhi'b* (*The Wolf's Dance*) or periphrasis “green wings” in *Akhbār al-ḥajar* (*The Rock's Words*).

All the figures of speech used by Qāsim Ḥaddād result in his “space” becoming more colourful and exceptionally vivid. Thanks to the richness of the linguistic devices employed the poet's lyrical world draws the reader's attention and arouses individual reflection.

The book *Al-Jawāshin* (*Breasts*), published in Morocco in 1989, written in conjunction with Amīn Ṣāliḥ is a individual literary hybrid that combines prose with the search and symbolism of lyric poetry. The work is divided into five autonomous parts – successive capitals (*‘āṣima*), that symbolize the successive stages in the development of mankind. The number five – associated in Islamic tradition with Fatima's palm – symbolizes the Prophet Mohammed and his offspring: Fatima, ‘Ali, Hasan and Husayn.³⁴⁵ In the various parts the authors attempt to analyze the most important stages in the life of man and on his example the development of humanity. The title of the work refers to maternity, and the breast refer to the first stage in the development of man.

The first of the capitals, *al-‘āṣima al-ūlā*, constitutes an ontological description of the creation of man. The role of the demiurge is played by the earth (*al-arḍ*) which creates man and the whole of human society. The world is described as a black goddess which in Islamic tradition is ascribed to the element of earth³⁴⁶ “an area flowing with milk that is the home of beings still to be formed”.³⁴⁷ Man arose as a result of the physical act of sex. The symbol of the earth undergoes personification and at the same time the deity “displays his nakedness to the first woman”³⁴⁸ causing with the same a wave of reproduction and the propagation of the human race. The earth gains human attributes and copulates with a woman. The earth's offspring multiply. The earth is the conveyor of prophetic mysteries, it possesses “a temple

³⁴⁵ Marek M. Dziekan, *Symbolika...*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

³⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

³⁴⁷ Qāsim Ḥaddād, Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Al-Jawāshin*, Morocco, 1989, p. 9.

³⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

can take something that does not exist?”³⁵⁵ The question refers to the unreal life which constantly is treated within the convention of dream. The entirety is rounded off with a dialogue between the earth and the knight:

What is your name, noble knight?
I'm summoning death³⁵⁶

Generally the message of this piece is moving – it is an image of war which brings with it only death and suffering.

The subsequent stage in the development of the potency of the earth, in the third capital (*al-‘āsima 3*) is exile: “in the place of exile creation begins”.³⁵⁷ But comfort comes: “dream is the spring of all, the childhood of yesterday”.³⁵⁸ In exile the bandit alien in his new environment is forced to adapt to his new homeland. The next stage of development arrives: childhood is associated with the acquaintance of new stimuli, maturity or the period of changes and the adaptation to new conditions of life and love which are the most amazing type of dream, doubts which fall and surprise in the moment of spiritual calm leading to reinforcement or collapse. All of these experiences take on a totally different hue in exile, in a place where the individual is always going to feel foreign. Support can be found only in dreams. This is shown by the fragment which begins with the words: “the evening will console you”³⁵⁹ opening the litany which begins from the summons: “*Oh exile*” and continues through a whole range of references to: “crying, friendship, creativity”.³⁶⁰

The fourth capital (*al-‘āsima 4*) from the start leads through the existential symbolism of blood. It encounters here a range of callings for blood: just, immoral, haughty. Everything is blood, but meaning is given by through whose veins it courses. The first fragment finishes with an existential question: “So who are you?”.³⁶¹ The next brings reflection upon the subject of the longevity of recollections helped by history: “History protected memories for my body”.³⁶² These recollections are the result of experiences which create history as generally termed. History is ascribed to the body, for the soul has its own emotional baggage.

“We tell a story without meaning”³⁶³ – hence begins one of the fragments of the fourth capital (*al-‘Āšima 4*). This question raised by earth seems to be a summarizing of the whole of existence. Life is simply a story. And we as its authors attempt to give it as much colour as possible, introducing plots, characters, everything in order to make our own lives more interesting. Despite all this effort it ends in death.

³⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

³⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 66.

³⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

³⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

³⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

³⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 92–93.

³⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

³⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 136.

³⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 145.

The final capital (*al-‘āsima 5*) constitutes the shortest part of the book. This is a free reflection on the subject of existence. It is a work that self communicates through “the unique sound that is the addition to its birth”.³⁶⁴ It is full of mysteries which are not able to penetrate the nature of existence.

The work *Al-Jawāshin (Breasts)* is in its own way an approach to western futurism. It is saturated with symbols conveyed through a most searching language, full of neologisms and metaphors. Qāsim Ḥaddād and Amīn Ṣāliḥ play with text. They introduce to the text an array of spatial forms, which through the typesetting convey the content. The earth’s utterances are utilized as those of a quasi narrator presenting the development of her creations. It is she who possesses the breasts of the title. She is the mother who cares for her progeny allowing them simultaneously full freedom of action. The leading idea within the work is the permeating of the nature of existence contained in reality and Arabic symbolism. Of the highest import is the message of condemning violence and war which do wrong to the innocent.

It has already been mentioned as the co-author of the book *Al-Jawāshin (Breasts)* – **Amīn Ṣāliḥ** was born in Bahrain in 1950 (see Biographies). He started to dabble in literature towards the end of the 1960s, starting from simple romantic short stories. When he felt that he was close to European literary experiences (Gorky, Dostoevsky, Dickens, Kafka) he started to distance himself from classicism in order to get closer to the poetic soul in the short stories, as far as possible from banal realism. He has written, besides short stories, poems and novels, although the complexity in structure of his work makes it rather elitist in character.

In his volume of poetry *Madā’ih (Panegyrics)* the theme of love dominates. The poet expresses his yearning for his beloved with whom a meeting is possible only in dream, hence the dominance in the poems of a dreamlike atmosphere. Everyday he escapes into dream in order to see his beloved:

The dream flows before your eyelids
 Open up on him...³⁶⁵
 [...]
 It is I
 Lost in dream I seek you ...
 Sleep beloved,
 So that I can see you³⁶⁶
 [...]
 Oh, don’t knock on the window of my dream
 In order to not bring me awakening³⁶⁷

³⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 177.

³⁶⁵ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Madā’ih*, Bahrain, 1997, p. 11.

³⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

³⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

One may get the impression that the poet's beloved is merely the projection of the image of an idealized lover, one present only in his thoughts. He is unable to stop thinking about her. There are no possibilities to meet her except those afforded him by dreams. The poet attempts to show the timeless role of love, the meetings of those in love and the atmosphere that accompanies them, hence the volume has a universal character.

The start of the twenty first century has produced a poetry that is depressing and reflective, and that is assembled in the volume *Mawt tafif* (*Death without meaning*). This is not some tearful complaint about fate, which can be at times cruel, but a calm observation of life and its aspects: of sorrow, suffering, fear. And this is not some bombastic form of sorrow that results from philosophical or existential indecisions tormenting the soul of man, but simply the sadness that is the yearning of a mother for her sons who have gone away (possibly to war, maybe they are dead, but none of these hypotheses is stated straightforwardly), the pain on losing a beloved woman, or also fear in the face of the passing of time and death:

[...] The old woman dipped her finger into the surface of the well
She touched the strings of memory so as to awaken in it the faces of her sons
And the face of time, still without wrinkles³⁶⁸

[...] Follows the scent of a woman.
Whose voice already a long time ago had flown from his recollections³⁶⁹

[...] A sixty-year-old man shakes with fear
Because time is knocking hurriedly at the door³⁷⁰

An important poetic motif in the world described by Amīn Ṣāliḥ is the elapsing and fear in the face of the relentless passage of time; consciousness of death:

[...] But in the depths of the mirror a man passes with a slow step³⁷¹

The poet uses the Sufis symbol of the mirror, the looking glass that reflects the soul of man, his worries and feelings. The mirror is a magical symbol of unconscious recollections, the instrument of self observation, self awareness and reflection upon oneself.³⁷²

He does not express, however, his relations to the phenomenon of passing; he merely observes it and describes it, for that is the order of the world:

Many people have passed and gone.
Many dreams have come and gone.
And in the old house still dust accommodates...³⁷³

³⁶⁸ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Mawt tafif*, Beirut, 2001, p. 56.

³⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

³⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

³⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 69.

³⁷² Cf. Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 206–209.

³⁷³ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Mawt...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

[...]
 They have gone,
 One after another
 They have left their illusions under the stones turned in the direction of the
 past³⁷⁴

There appears in the poems life and death, but there is an absence in them of God. The poet does not refer to religion and does not attempt to explain through it phenomena that exist on earth, he also does not ascribe to it the status of medicine for suffering. There appears, however, the unattainable desire for immortality.

There is also a fascination with women: with their beauty and magic, for example the beauty in the way they cry, or comb their hair:

From a far observing the woman seated by the window
 Fascinated by her angelic face [...]
 Enchanted by the tears flowing in the air like drops of rain³⁷⁵
 [...]
 The beloved sits over the source
 And combs her hair
 When she leaves her face is still covered by a veil of water³⁷⁶

The fact that the poet perceives so much beauty in human sorrow makes this sorrow all the more noble. For the tears were not shed in vain if someone was found for whom they became the source of a completely mystical experience.

The poet does not shun from looking at the female body. When she exposes her body completely the enchanted universe holds its breath:

The clouds covered the moon
 But not to shade its shine
 But to veil the desire
 Which swells on the sight of a woman undressing at the end of the day.³⁷⁷

A woman appears as a phenomenon that possesses natural charm and strength, which cannot be resisted. In the whole volume the poet utilizes a simple vocabulary for there is no need to use complicated words to describe simple things. The mood is aroused through metaphors:

And then amongst the panes of the windows the dance of souls begins
 On the squares gripped with the fever of unrealizable desires³⁷⁸
 [...]
 The sea is omnipresent
 In the valleys, houses and squares

³⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

³⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

³⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 118.

The sea is in a sleepy dream covering the salt clotted on the eyelids³⁷⁹
 [...]

The silvery night

Aids the elevated desire

Which knocks on the dozed eyelids amongst the scent of forest³⁸⁰

The poet uses, in the above fragments, an image that in its entirety is a metaphor forcing one to reflection. There often appear undertones and even contradictions that create a specific mood:

In haste he leaves the cafe

Leaving on the table a paper and a cold coffee

The waiter approaches the table

There was neither a paper nor a cold coffee on it

There was no man leaving in haste³⁸¹

The poet is not frightened to consider what is human, painful or saturated with sorrow:

The door slammed

For no one knocked at it³⁸²

In his first collection of short stories, entitled *Hunā al-warda... Hunā narqūṣ* (*Here the flower – here we'll dance*), published in 1973, he presents a new spirit and style of rejecting the cannons of the romantic short story. He does not describe his characters from the outside but their internal self; experiences and feelings. He rejects also classical narration. He himself emphasizes that a good short story should contain within itself a spark and the rules of time, place and composition in force need not apply here.³⁸³ He often mixes poetry and prose, claiming that a short story should have a little poetry in it and a little prose, which he calls open prose, i.e. that which knows no borders and cannot be defined by them.³⁸⁴ He utilizes difficult language, applying words whose meaning he himself determines so that they may be understood only through context. One can clearly see the influence of symbolism here.

Amīn Ṣāliḥ published in 1983 a collection of short stories, entitled *Aṭ-Ṭarā'id* (*Game Animal*), that is as minimalist in appearance as it is in form. The short stories contained in the collection take the form of sketches or pictures. They are not merely descriptions of characters and events but to a certain degree images painted through dialogue, monologue or narration. There dominates an economy of words as well as

³⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

³⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

³⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 109.

³⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 68.

³⁸³ On the basis of an interview conducted by the Author with Amīn Ṣāliḥ in Bahrain, on 23rd March 2004.

³⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

simplicity. There is clearly observed a love for containing the maximum of content with the use of the minimum of words. There is in force in the short stories analyzed here an absolute single-threadedness like in Boccaccio. We do not notice elaborate plot, complication in events, for the whole of the narration is concentrated around a single happening. In every image there remains an isolated compositional dominant that becomes the culminating point usually at the end of things. The narrator sometimes is in the third person, another time in the first person or the author also introduces two narrators.

At times it seems that Amīn Ṣāliḥ is attempting to create something along the lines of a new genre, specific alone to he himself, because he adds parable to these novellas, short stories, sketches and images. The effect of these measures is complete syncretism which should negate the minimalism of the content, however the lightening intellect of the writer controls all. For the content is usually based on social occurrence although as if not of this world and unreal. This impressionistic, or even expressionistic side of the short stories is strengthened by the language; sometimes excessively rich and elevated, e.g. in: *Jasadān* – (*Two Bodies*; pp. 35–38), and sometimes colloquial and simple, e.g. in: *Fī maḥaḥḥat qīṭār [...] laylan* (*At the Railway Station [...] at night*; pp. 31–34).

The subject matter of the works concentrates itself around matters of war and social affairs, and in particular the author lays stress on the situation of poor people and those from the margins of society.

The short story *Al-‘Arḍ al-akhīr* (*The Last Show*) is a short image of a tank driving into the centre of the town and the people petrified by the sight, who – according to the narrator – are not totally aware that this is a military vehicle. Initially they see in the tank rather a strange sort of human being and wait to find out what the reason is for the arrival of this intruder in their market. The waiting ends in a massacre from which nobody, at a guess, comes out whole:

The tank drew closer to the main square. It travels slowly, wheels around and stops in the centre of the square. [...] The tank proudly stops [...]. Without warning the tank starts to let out a stream of fire, and from time to time emits a high, loud noise. The screams die down, terror seizes all. The buildings are destroyed, limbs smashed, piles are created with the coughing of death.³⁸⁵

The short story reveals the helplessness of all people in the face of war, which in an obvious way is symbolized by one tank, as if impersonal, automatic, and impossible to hold back. The comments of the people gathered at the square strike:

- That soldier is mad. He got lost and found the square. The madman informs of his mad excesses in a novel way.
- the father of the family protests because the prices are high and the means of transport insufficient.

³⁸⁵ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Aḥ-Ṭarāʿid*, Beirut, 1983, pp. 19–22.

- The mad lover doesn't have a horse.
- Mechanical man³⁸⁶

Amongst the observers are those who think that some soldier has gone mad or that he is a rebel greedy for power, or a man desperate because of living conditions. The construction of the work appears to be, however, carefully thought out. The tension rises with each subsequent line in order to find its outlet in the culminating point that is the massacre. There appears the question: what war are we here talking about? Maybe the author is referring to war in general, or maybe only to the Palestinian war about which much was written in the countries of the Persian Gulf at the beginning of the 1970s.³⁸⁷ Many men of letters, finding themselves influenced by reports of the catastrophic situation of Palestinian refugees, gave expression to man's helplessness as an individual, and even as a society, in the face of the destructive machinery of war.

The subject is continued in the story *Fī maḥaṭṭat qīṭār... laylan (At the Railway Station... At Night)*, which is a conversation between a girl and a soldier at a railway station. There is nobody there besides them, because the inhabitants "have gone to watch the war".³⁸⁸ The soldier seems to be overwhelmed by his duty to shoot and kill:

- I have no family and no friends. Only the gun talks to me, and I can talk to my enemies [...] by use of this gun.³⁸⁹

The girl does not understand it and offers him to play with her. The serviceman loses himself in it and falls asleep lulled by his childhood memories:

- I got tired. Come, let's sit on the bench. I feel overcome by a sleepiness that droops my eyelids[...] But I cannot get rid of the thought of the war awaiting me [...]
- Don't worry. Lay your head on my arms and think of nothing. Close your eyes and imagine you're little [...] little as years ago when you would leave the house and go to school with your friends from the neighbourhood, crossing the old bridge. Recall the name your mother called you by, birds and meadow flowers. Close your eyes and sleep.³⁹⁰

The girl is, without any doubt, a symbol of innocence that contrasts with the soldier's feeling of enormous guilt. In spite of the situation seeming hopeless, the child's chastity and innocence brings hope back to the soldier. He will have to begin his life all over again, find true meanings of feelings, notions, and words. They talk to each other in a simple language, telling of the tragedy of absent families – the soldier has no one but the gun and the girl's family probably died – as if united by

³⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 20–21.

³⁸⁷ Józef Bielawski, Krystyna Skarzyńska-Bocheńska, Jolanta Jasińska, *Nowa i współczesna literatura arabska*, Józef Bielawski (ed.), Warszawa, 1978, p. 657.

³⁸⁸ Amin Ṣāliḥ, *Fī maḥaṭṭat qīṭār... laylan*, in: *Aṭ-Ṭarā'id...*, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

³⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

³⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

a secret thread of understanding. Huda, releasing the soldier from the burden of his weapon, saves him from the overwhelming feeling of duty he does not want to perform. The compositional dominant in this work is the moment of the soldier's falling asleep on the girl's knees.

In the story *Al-Ḥuḍūr (The Arrival)* the war is replaced by the state judicial apparatus. The work is characterized by the presence of two narrators: the main, the first-person narrator, and the additional, third-person narrator. The narrator says goodbye to his colleagues with whom he, by accident, took part in riots in a factory. In these riots one man was killed. The protagonist of the story is convicted of this murder and hanged on the gallows. He leaves his wife and son, but at the end, after his death, he comes back from the beyond as a mysterious figure appearing to his wife:

His wife was sitting on the bed, resting her head on her knees. Lifting it slowly, she jumped slightly, as if surprised by a human phantom or something unreal. She saw him, standing and looking at her calmly and gently. Whispering, as if coming back from distant places, he said: I want to see my son.³⁹¹

A similar motif is present in the story, entitled *Ṭifla (The Girl)* and, to some extent, in *Fī al-ḥadīqa al-ḥajariyya (In A Stone Garden)*. It seems that Amīn Ṣāliḥ joins realism with fairy-tale writing, and stylistically pays homage to a rich ornamentation, which contradicts the rules of modern novel writing. This is why it is difficult to state categorically if this miraculous resurrection of the character of *Al-Ḥuḍūr (The Arrival)* is supposed to give hope, and fulfils a didactic function of the novel, or if this is only an illusion of a woeful wife. This kind of ending can also be a trace of symbolism and expressionism, the negation of the empirical perception of the world and the power of the mind, and the affirmation of what is intangible, invisible, and known by feeling and intuition. If we assume that this is it indeed, we cannot deny the western influences on the Author, particularly of Schopenhauer's or Bergson's conceptions, or perhaps even of the French existentialists, if Amīn Ṣāliḥ's characters do not wish to fight, but give up and accept what life brings to them.

The short stories from the collection *Nudamā' al-marfā'. Nudamā' ar-rīḥ (Companions from the Port, Companions of the Wind)* are difficult to characterize and classify unequivocally. Theoretically, these are works written in prose, and yet still the reader has the impression that he communes with poetry. The complicated structure of the sentences is accompanied by the equally complicated language, full of repetitions and sophisticated epithets, like e.g. *'awānis qirmiziyyāt* (crimson old maids)³⁹², *dhi'ba kastanā'iyya* (a chestnut she-wolf)³⁹³, and even oxymora, like "a silent cry".³⁹⁴ Short paragraphs written in prose intermingle with lyrical fragments.

³⁹¹ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Al-Ḥuḍūr*, in: *Aṭ-Ṭarā'id...*, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

³⁹² Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Man dhā al-ladhī yahuzzu qāribanā?*, in: *Nudamā' al-marfā'. Nudamā' ar-rīḥ*, Bahrain, 1987, p. 8.

³⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³⁹⁴ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Ad-Dalīl*, in: *Nudamā'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

The narration is of a double character, too. In part of the stories the narrator is third-person, omniscient, like in *Man dhā al-ladhī yahuzzu qāribanā?* (*Who is the One Rocking our Boat?*), where he knows the protagonist's thoughts and the world of his internal experiences. In another part, the narrator is first-person (singular or plural), e.g. in *Nudamā' al-marfā'* (*Companions from the Port*). In each story there is a different character, a woman or a man, whose name and appearance remain unknown to us.

The exception may be the story *Nudamā' al-marfā'* (*Companions from the Port*) in which quite a detailed description appears:

There is a man amongst us who picks metallic grapes and dreams of meeting a garrulous friend. [...] He stands on the hill where we saw him for the first time, bareheaded and slim-faced. ...his eyelashes touch the cloud... the cloud decorates his curls with pearls...³⁹⁵

The common feature of all the main characters is the dilemma they experience between reality and dream, life on the borderline of two worlds, the real and the unreal.

All the stories, from the collection in hand, are full of symbols. The basic group includes the sea which is connected with the daily lives of the Arabs, inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. In the stories *Man dhā al-ladhī yahuzzu qāribanā?* (*Who is the One Rocking our Boat?*) or *Nudamā' al-marfā'* (*Companions from the Port*) the sea is a destructive force, but at the same time one that builds. It gives life, but it can also take it away:

In the moonshine he howled with a chestnut she-wolf, while in the daylight he walked with his salamander along the coast and watched how proud young boys go on the deck, wearing baggy purple coats.³⁹⁶

For the characters of the story *Nudamā' al-marfā'* (*Companions from the Port*), the sea is something powerful, something far more important than the place which gives a man food and work. It is treated like a deity, a creating power, an everlasting force influencing ordinary people's lives: "We offer a thousand songs to the sea..."³⁹⁷

Surrealism, an avant-garde trend shaped in the 1920s and 1930s in France, postulated reaching the sphere of the subconscious. The privileged states in the creative process were dreams and hallucinations. Undoubtedly, Amīn Ṣāliḥ's works, where the real world blends with the world of dreams, have a surreal character, melting into the local colouring.

The most important surreal symbols are dreams and the mirror. According to Freud, dreams, as a reservoir of unusual images, are a symbolically coded matter of the inmost human feelings and needs, as in the story *Man dhā al-ladhī yahuzzu qāribanā?* (*Who is the One Rocking our Boat?*):

³⁹⁵ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Nudamā' al-marfā'*, in: *Nudamā'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

³⁹⁶ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Man dhā al-ladhī yahuzzu qāribanā?*, in: *Nudamā'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

³⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

He was an unusual child. He did not know his father and mother. The woman that had given birth to him, they say, set off to look for a man who had seen her in his dream. In this dream they made love on the bed of grass, uttering passionate sighs. When their bodies began to shake, they sighed and covered themselves with their nakedness. She cried and he along with her, because the dream was over.³⁹⁸

The matter of dreams usually contradicts logic and the sense of life, because it allows for an unusual course of events that escape the laws of the mind and nature:

We often saw her immersing in her dreams. She followed the breath of her soul, running away as a squirrel, or she bathed joyfully among the stars inhabited by demons. [...] We often saw her leaving her dreams, carrying baskets filled with paradise fruit and stars.³⁹⁹

The mirror is another symbol derived from surrealism. It presents two worlds: the real one and the unreal one (an object and its reflection). Going through the mirror means transition to another dimension where there is no logic:

In the chasm of the mirror ostriches are crying. After a while their feathers are burning, they commit suicide, naked and lonely.⁴⁰⁰

The stories from the collection *Nudamā' al-marfa'*. *Nudamā' ar-rīḥ* (*Companions from the Port, Companions of the Wind*) lack the classic structure of a prosaic work which usually includes: the establishment of the action, the culmination point, and the denouement. It is difficult to see any continuity of action here. The reader accesses only fragments of the events and on their basis he must make his interpretation. Everything is as if suspended in an unspecified space.

Amīn Ṣāliḥ, as many other writers, has made a brave attempt at examining woman in a quasi scientific way in the collection *Al-'Anāṣir* (*Ingredients*). Separation of the “constitutive” parts of a woman is supposed to draw the reader’s attention to the particular parts of her body: trunk, face, and arm.

The story called *Khifāfan tamshī wa taḍī'* (*Paces and fires*), belonging to the collection *Jidha' imra'a* (*A Woman's Trunk*), is an attempt to describe a girl’s feelings and her relations with the world of men. The beginning of the story is a lyrical tale of the girl’s innocent walk through the meadow. The whole story suggests that we are reading a highly metaphorical description of sexual intercourse. These associations are made by numerous references: “She sits on his hand and wets her face in the white juices of his roots”.⁴⁰¹ The atmosphere of the description implies the girl’s sexual initiation which already determines the confines of her contacts with men. They are supposed to rule her life and she is supposed to be submissive:

³⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

⁴⁰⁰ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Ad-Dalīl*, in: *Nudamā'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

⁴⁰¹ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Khifāfan tamshī wa taḍī'*, in: *Nudamā'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

You have no better guide over this creature in order to lead her through the pathway of the magical day. He is the only one to know. He is the only one not to go astray. However, he never reaches, so when his eyes melt everything around him, he bursts into laughter.⁴⁰²

The man appears here to be the only possible life **guide**, despite the fact that he never reaches his goal and has a definitively destructive character. The next episode of the girl's life is the dramatic story of her family. She, possessing only an apple, wants a baker to exchange it for bread. The ensuing description of sexual intercourse differs from the previous one. It is full of pain and humiliation, and uses metaphors that suggest animal associations:

She did not understand why the owner of the bakery expected her to offer him her body in return for bread. She asked him: what are you going to do with my body? He answered with a smile in the corner of his lips: I am going to possess it. [...] Her suffering was coloured with breaths and sobbing. She saw blood coming out from her and she did not understand. [...] What she had done to deserve this pain.⁴⁰³

The author does not finish this thread and jumps to another. The girl sees workers who were "crushing the rock and carrying huge pieces of it on their back".⁴⁰⁴ One of them advises her to go away. Going away, she takes a few stones and throws them into space, as if they were traumatic memories she is trying to get rid of. Passing by the shops in the town, she is amazed how much people can possess. On her way she meets poor Hamid who becomes her confidant. It is only then that we learn her name: Na'ima. Together they go to the seaside where they build a boat and set off, symbolically running away from the world that is full of suffering. In this imaginative world they organize a festival of shoeblacks who recite panegyrics in honour of the ceremony. Enraptured by the idyll of the moment, the girl gives herself away to the boy who runs away scared by her cry. She is abandoned once again and comes back to town. Without any money, she offers to mend shirts for one of the traders. However, her offer is turned down. When being alone and trying to sink into the void, she is caught up by all the humiliations she has suffered from men: "men lifted her and were tearing her insides with barbarian blades".⁴⁰⁵ Eventually, her suffering takes a form of devouring cancer. The story is ended with a bath she shares with porters she has met, which has a cleansing meaning. After the bath Na'ima asks if there is anyone who could remove the fatal tumour from her body. This is her last desperate attempt to look for help among men. Seeing the lack of reaction, she goes away. The author suggests that a man uses a woman, and in an authoritarian way imposes a harming patriarchal model of social relations on her. Na'ima cannot shake off this yoke, even after being hurt many times.

⁴⁰² *Ibidem*, p. 20.

⁴⁰³ Amīn Ṣāliḥ, *Jidha' imra'a*, in: *Nudamā'...*, pp. 21–22.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

Amīn Ṣālīḥ surprised the readers in 2004 by publishing the novel called *Rahā'in al-ghaib wa al-ladhīna habatū fī ṣaḥn ad-dār bilā ajniḥa* (*Hostages of the Invisible and those who descended to the Yard without Wings*), although his first novelistic attempt had been the book *Ughniya A. Ṣ. al-ūlā* (*The First Song A.S.*) from 1982. The novel consists of 74 chapters, and each of them concerns a different event, story, or character. The author describes the quarters the characters live in, and the nature surrounding them. The main character, Ḥamīd, is at the same time the narrator of the novel. He is joined by children at the age of 13 to 15: lame Karīm, Zakariyya, Muftāḥ, 'Azzūz, who come from the local poor people. Hamid observes the quarter's evolution and the fate of the little characters. The novel is set in the 1960s, i.e. in the time of the author's childhood. The quarter represents the whole of Bahraini society, undergoing quick social and economic changes.

In the introduction, *Muftataḥ*, the writer, using his character's voice, establishes the aim of the novel:

I want to tell about fate, about the whole being, about the days that I want to save from the trap of oblivion, about the needs of the body, about the destructions left by wars. I am telling about the mirrors of the quarter al-Fadil in 1963.⁴⁰⁶

The essence of the novel is the search for the sense of existence and destination of man:

I look and wonder and ask about all these strange changes that creatures experience. I ask about unknown journeys in unknown mirrors and about all of us in the world [...] I ask but I get no answer.⁴⁰⁷

The writer clearly is embarrassed. He can see the world is inhabited by ghoul ghosts, i.e. by illusion, and is governed by supernatural forces and this is why it is so difficult to understand. Despite this, we love both this world and our lives just the way they are. Therefore, the novel ends with an optimistic accent; the companions meet, laugh, and play as in the years of their youth, paying no attention to the problems surrounding them. Zakariya asks Hamid at the end of the novel: "What will be our fate when we grow old?". The answer is: "We will not be the same as we are now". Hamid answers the question whether we must grow old by saying: "No, we don't. The choice is ours".⁴⁰⁸ The word *ghaib* in the title refers to Islam and means the invisible, e.g. the world, God. In the context of the novel it may mean that a human is a hostage of God who, although giving us free will, has determined our end. The writer speaks to us in a beautiful poetic language with many metaphors concerning nature, especially the sea,⁴⁰⁹ or rain⁴¹⁰ – the symbols of blessing and benefaction.

⁴⁰⁶ Amīn Ṣālīḥ, *Rahā'in al-ghaib wa al-ladhīna habatū fī ṣaḥn ad-dār bilā ajniḥa*, Beirut, 2004, pp. 12–13.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 228–229.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 257.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 216.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

All Amīn Ṣāliḥ's works, both poetic and prose, are distinguished by intellectual aggression, expressivity of the language and abstract ideas with simultaneous rich imaging. This technique of artistic collage reflects chaos and the lack of an internal spiritual order. They are abstract texts, often irrational. The writer uses puns, metaphors, paradoxes, paying great attention to literary experiment. Despite this, he is spiritually linked with the reader who understands his writings based on the multi-layered construction of complicated meanings.

Īmān Asīrī belongs to the generation of contemporary Bahraini female poets. She was born in Manama in 1952 and started to compose classical poetry (*al-'amūdī*) at the beginning of the 1970s. Later, however, under the influence of Qāsim Ḥaddād and Ḥamda Khamīs she attempted to write poetic prose for, as she claimed, her poems are based on an image, for qaṣīdat an-nathr does not limit her, and gives freedom for creation.⁴¹¹

The power and richness of her work is a result of its variety: the combination of social subject matter with the existential. The poet often emphasizes her origins, returning in her poems to the place where she originates from. Time is not without significance in her work. She attempts to exist beyond it, there where the unhappiness of this world does not touch her. She fully accepts her femininity. She even emphasizes it. Common is her sensuality and boldness.

The poem that begins with the words *Daqīqa kā-l-ghazāl* (*A Minute is like a Gazelle*), from the volume *Ḥadīth al-awānī li-l-qubbara* (*A Vessels Talk with a Capercaillie*), is in its own way a certain mystification:

A minute is like a gazelle
As voluminous as a moat
And above its whiteness
There is a barrier of flowers⁴¹²

The mentioned minute undoubtedly signalizes time, but the comparison with the gazelle draws one's attention that the description does not concern the value of time nor femininity. It seems that this woman is the great essence that arouses to action. The whiteness bears witness to her purity and innocence. In this coherent image there appears a flaw (a barrier) suggesting that the woman is fencing herself off against something. She achieves this through the flowers which are also a symbol of femininity. The poet flows with the current of culture and literary tradition, ascribing to a woman delicacy and slenderness. The flowers (roses) are a symbol of love which means that the heroine of the poem is motivated in her actions by feelings. Within the conditions of the terror of contemporary civilization, the imposing of ways of behaviour and the limitation of freedom that extends to one's very innerness,

⁴¹¹ On the basis of an interview conducted with Īmān Asīrī in Bahrain, on 13th of March 2004.

⁴¹² Īmān Asīrī, *Daqīqa kā-l-ghazāl*, in: *Ḥadīth al-awānī li-l-qubbara*, Beirut, 2001, p. 7.

together with the need to fight one's own way, this constitutes the best way out, therefore for this reason equally the minute is so important.

In the poem that begins with the words *Ānā ka-l-safīna* (*I am like a ship*) the lyrical "I" is a woman describing her feelings:

I am a ship
The sea lived in me
I am not able to escape from it
And it is not what threw me out⁴¹³

It is the undecided and variable which symbolizes the ship, connected obviously with water, an inseparable symbol or equally companion of the female psyche in literary works. Despite the fact that the borders of the ship are designated, the lyrical "I" desiring to portray this psyche fills it with the sea exceeding natural and permitted borders and levels. The ship can equally symbolize a body which as if limits man's possibilities. While the sea, a vastness of possibilities, is able to hold within itself innumerable and unlimited elements. The woman tries to achieve some aim and maybe hopes to make a life directional choice. She most clearly expects some sort of impulse, although such choices should be for her all the easier for she brings with her a baggage of experience that must surely equal the immensity of the ship. The poem is written in the first person which means that it is a manifesto of the poet's roots and her state of mind.

Īmān Asīrī has also attempted to write erotic poetry beginning with the words: *'Aynuhu muftarisa* (*His eye looks penetratingly*):

His eye looks penetratingly
His arms embrace me
The darkness of my foetus within me
Will they smash these vessels?⁴¹⁴

This eroticism can be divided into two parts: the first, describing a woman admiring a man, emphasizes her corporality while the other a woman manifests her dilemma. Her comment expresses the need for safety (arms), while the eyes are declarations of sensuality and passion. There is, however, a flaw in this image. "The darkness of the foetus" points to a doubt or the dark recesses of the soul do not allow for an emotional union, possibly as a result of what has occurred between the woman and the man. The heroine does not share her reflections with her partner, she alone wants to make the choice – to continue the relationship or not? She is no longer some imaginary lover, a martyr, but a real woman who wants to direct her own life. The vessels are symbols of feelings: brittle, delicate, and fleeting, for emotional relationships need treatment. She expresses her fears as to the future fate of these feelings. She has to answer the question herself, and the work becomes a fragment of an internal monologue.

⁴¹³ Īmān Asīrī, *Ānā ka-l-safīna*, in: *Ḥadīth...*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

⁴¹⁴ Īmān Asīrī, *'Aynuhu muftarisa*, in: *Ḥadīth...*, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

The poem beginning with the words: *Tadhakarnī biṭufūlatī* (*Remind me of my childhood*) is a sentimental journey, an attempt to return to one's roots:

Remind me of my childhood
 Of my mother when she spreads honey on bread
 It reminds me of my family and the pleasant smell of the huge backyard
 Perfume bottles of dreams
 Open the door for me
 So that I can catch the scent of childhood⁴¹⁵

The period of childhood appears here as an idyllic period of peace and safety, full of the harmony of family life, particularly in relation to the mother. In that reality there are no sorrowful events. Nothing disturbs the joy of life, the all-pervasive sweetness. The poet concentrates upon details, little things, trivia in the creation of the image. The bottle of dreams represents a certain lack of knowledge for these dreams are locked away inside, like a genie, and possibly could be released at a certain moment. For the moment they need to be gathered and one simply has to wait. The request to open the door is a metaphor for the desire to return to that former land of happiness and carefreeness, which has passed irreplaceably. Who should one turn to with a request for help? Possibly to someone close, who was a friend at play. Or maybe to oneself in desiring to rediscover those delicate childish particles in order to immerse oneself in another reality.

A short four-lined poem, that starts with the words *Man yaduqq al-bāb* (*Who slams doors*), is devoted to the subject of war. It presents the nightmare of war and its social consequences. The symbolic slamming of doors is a metaphor of abruptness and fear. Nobody is able to defend themselves from the tragic effects of an armed attack; neither men nor women and even less so children:

Who knocks at the door
 A child or an old man
 Dead men and women without children
 This always happens⁴¹⁶

Death injures innocent children the most. The last line is not optimistic. It emphasizes that the inescapability of death in conflict situations is an inevitable matter, that the reader feels helpless in the face of terrifying reality. There is not a grain of hope for a change in the cruel cycle of history.

The reply to the question: What are the white heights? Is given in the poem that begins with the words: *Qārrāt bayḍā' tatasharrakh* (*The Continents Tremble*):

The Continents tremble
 Where is the rain?
 Where is the river?
 There is only the salty sea

⁴¹⁵ Īmān Asīrī, *Tadhakarnī biṭufūlatī*, in: *Ḥadīth...*, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

⁴¹⁶ Īmān Asīrī, *Man yaduqq al-bāb*, in: *Ḥadīth...*, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

Life death
On these white heights.⁴¹⁷

Maybe the poem talks of an approaching threat, the bitterness of the emptiness of existence, changes in civilization. The whiteness of the hill is possibly a metaphor for dying human sensitivity. There is no positive colouring here, but rather repelling, relating to alienation and fear. The sense of hopelessness is all-pervading. The work could be a possible reference to the progressing alienation and isolation of man in the world, who is not able to defend himself before the surroundings that are destroying him.

The whole volume constitutes a chain of fifty works that compose a single poem. Each poem is called either in the masculine *inā'* which means "vessel" or "ship", or *āniya* in the feminine plural that becomes in a way a phrase for a woman. *Inā'* may also mean "mystery", a certain shutting away of oneself or equally lyrical solitude in a trap. At the end in *Āniya 51* there is praise of God who created woman:

[...] He who created woman
is blessed.⁴¹⁸

The poems from the volume *Khams daqqāt li-qalbī* (*Five Beats of my Heart*) talk of the dilemmas and problems of tormented people, for whom struggle has become the aim and desire of a normal life. The entirety is maintained in a philosophical tone and Īmān Asīrī asks difficult questions which she herself attempts to answer.

The poem *Al-Muqātil* (*The Warrior*) describes a fierce struggle where no one gives into his weaknesses and the wounds from the bullets mount but do not kill off.

[...] suddenly, a blind piece of shrapnel wounded him!
He weakened for a moment
His wound strengthened him⁴¹⁹

The poem *ar-Ruka'āt al-khams* (*Five Bows*) has been clearly divided into five parts, each of which appears to recall a part of a prayer, something borne out by the use of the word *ruka'* in the title that means a specific gesture employed during prayer, e.g. bowing, hitting the forehead. The first part is as if a philosophical line of reasoning on the subject of cosmology, from which it results that people did not arrive from non-existence but when they appeared on the Earth there were already waves, in other words water. It is praise to the Earth that ensured mankind the conditions for life, water, air, plants, animals as well as room at the building of the first real house of prayer. It emphasizes the relationship of man and the earth as well as the necessity to remember the beginnings of the world – people die but the house of prayer still stands, subsequent generations come to ask God for mercy and to thank him for life.

⁴¹⁷ Īmān Asīrī, *Qārrāt bayḍā' tatasharrakh*, in: *Ḥadīth...*, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

⁴¹⁹ Īmān Asīrī, *Al-Muqātil*, in: *Khams daqqāt li-qalbī*, Bahrain, 1994, p. 9.

We did not come from non-existence
 In truth the waves were exposed
 When we were born
 [...]
 We praise the Earth
 [...]
 Here we built the first house of prayer.⁴²⁰

A flood of water has flowed by
 Lifted the marble muscles
 But stopped!
 The muscles were attached to the earth
 Just like us!
 [...]
 And here we are now
 We return to prayer
 In the first house.⁴²¹

In the second bow there is employed a phrase that perfectly describes the whole history of the world: “river of wars”. And in point of fact the piles of coffins grow higher and one dreams even exclusively of fire and explosions. People on Earth still think only about killing, only the dead find solace and the intoxication of happiness for it is only then that they discover that it is given by praying to God.

What, you aren't
 Settled now between
 The piles of open coffins?
 What,
 The snooze of the child
 Dreaming of a thousand twittering birds
 Was not killed?
 How can we now sit quietly...⁴²²

 The river of wars woven between
 The tombs of the living,
 And the dead
 Come our
 Smiling
 To those who are approaching...⁴²³

The subsequent part is a quick image of a dying child, which recalls the tragic death of Muḥammad ad-Durra who died in his father's arms. Despite the terribleness

⁴²⁰ Īmān Asīrī, *Ar-Ruka'āt al-khams*, in: *Ḥadīth...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 31–32.

⁴²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

⁴²² *Ibidem*, p. 36.

⁴²³ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

of war life goes on with its own rhythm and there will always be someone to welcome the next spring.

...above the glacier
there blossomed a source
another town for spring.⁴²⁴

In the fifth and final part the poet explains that these parts of bowing are not ordinary, mechanically performed parts of prayer, but questions about the dying earth and people, that they express anxiety not only about the present but about the future for the river of wars flows on and the world is plunged into killing.

In the poem *Khams daqqāt li-qalbī* (*Five Beats of my Heart*) the beating of the heart is compared to the twittering of birds that forces one to dance. This work seems to be an anticipated break from the subject of death and war. It is imbued with warmth and love.

In my house there are five
Of the twittering birds
Five beats of my heart.⁴²⁵

The volume *Khams daqqāt li-qalbī* (*Five Beats of my Heart*) is another description of the suffering of the Arab nation. The reader finds here first and foremost: blood, death, struggle without end. Sometimes there are warmer words on love and human intimacy dispersed among the tragic descriptions.

The thematic content of Īmān Asīrī's works is impressive: from the erotic to existential questions, from a joyful desire to return to childhood resulting from disillusionment with the present to sorrow resulting from the inevitability of suffering.

Fawziyya as-Sindī during the conversation she had with me said that she would write to the very end because poetry is for her like the air that is essential for life. Something that constantly encircles her and fulfils her very being.⁴²⁶ Despite the fact that she finished trade studies in Cairo she has devoted more of her time to literary matters. She enthusiastically participates in poetry festivals and regularly publishes volumes of poetry (see Biographies).

In the volume *Ākhir al-mahabb* (*The Last Gust of Wind*) Fawziyya as-Sindī writes about feelings of pain and despair caused by loneliness. She lays bare her suffering because of rejected love in the poem *Mamarr wa ashyā' ukhrā* (*The Corridor and the rest*). She calls for help when she herself is unable to manage with loneliness and despair:

⁴²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁴²⁵ Īmān Asīrī, *Khams daqqāt li-qalbī*, in: *Ḥadīth...*, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

⁴²⁶ On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Fawziyya as-Sindī in Bahrain, on 23 March 2004.

I have distanced myself from me myself
 The house almost went mad
 The garden deprived of the wisdom of plants
 I call for help
 My throat becomes torn like a necklace...
 No [...] ⁴²⁷

She desires to stop loving but is simply unable. Equally her suffering increases. However as she herself admits, “sorrow is the other face of joy”.⁴²⁸ She attempts in various poems to describe the emotions that accompany those in love and those after break-up. They are most hit by nocturnal nightmares and loneliness:

I am dissolutely bound in white clothing fighting with the blueness of the night
 [...] ⁴²⁹

The poet searches for hidden desires and ideas in dreams and whims. The poem’s language is full of mystery and symbolism. The colour blue signifies in her work the sea, black night, wings are freedom.⁴³⁰ Visions, dreams and hallucinations are deepened through the use of words derived from the folk tradition, from beliefs and legends: such as genies and others.

In the whole volume the poetry deals with love which is considered by the poet to be the most valuable gift. The pain of parting is so huge that the solution can be only death which can free one of the desire to be close to one’s beloved. Death is treated as a part of another reality – another life:

I achieve fullness through my death
 And flood revolt in me I would come alive ⁴³¹
 [...]
 I am not afraid of death
 Let him come
 I will spite him ⁴³²

The last volume, entitled *Malādh ar-rūḥ* (*Asylum for the Heart*), is a thematic continuation of the previous ones in relation to love and the feelings that accompany it. The first nineteen works describe the feelings and experiences of individuals while the last one the twentieth although not versified bears the traits of lyricism – relates to the concept of poetry and describes the role that it plays in the poet’s life. We find in this volume examples of direct lyricism, like for example:

⁴²⁷ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Mamarr wa ashyā’ ukhrā*, in: *Ākhir al-mahabb*, Beirut, 1998, pp. 44–45.

⁴²⁸ On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Fawziyya as-Sindī in Bahrain, on 23 March 2004.

⁴²⁹ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Mamarr wa ashyā’ ukhrā*, in: *Ākhir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

⁴³⁰ On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Fawziyya as-Sindī in Bahrain, on 23 March 2004.

⁴³¹ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Antaziru miḥalla tisa’ al-‘ālam*, in: *Ākhir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

⁴³² Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Al-hawā’ ad-ḍayyīq*, in: *Ākhir...*, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

I came close to the port
 Where craft do not call
 And which has nothing in common with the sea⁴³³

Like also invocative lyricism where the poet refers to a person or phenomenon:

I ask you woman, my destroyer
 Why flashing like a light
 Do you take delight in the surge of tears to the eyes?⁴³⁴

Of interest are the layers of means of expression used exceptionally aptly and willingly by the poet. She relishes the use of an oxymoron i.e. expressions that combine two contradictor words. On the whole they are epithets at odds with a definite noun, their presence means that the meaning of the phrase is to be understood metaphorically:

I embraced with my hair the resistance of the pillow
 Like a ravine at the foot of a mountain
 I lay observing the white of the ceiling protecting me [...] ⁴³⁵
 [...]
 Fascinated by the dream of the hedgehogs
 I squeeze the soft prickle to myself⁴³⁶

There is no absence of anaphora in the volume i.e. the repetition of the same words at the beginning of successive lines:

How is it possible that a trustworthy prisoner is not afraid of himself
 When others are afraid of him
 How is it possible that the mast trusts the variable moods of the sea
 How is it possible that the pillow forgets about the offer from the air⁴³⁷

As well as similes:

I observe her eyes
 Like two lakes⁴³⁸

Even though the poems are characterized by deep reflection and a reflection of the poet's internal experiences they do not lose their gentle tone in utterance:

Why is it that every time I have immersed myself in your love
 I lose the more⁴³⁹

Human life is not only successes and joy but also sorrow and failure:

⁴³³ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Mā min aḥad*, in: *Malādh ar-rūh*, Beirut, 1999, p. 95.

⁴³⁴ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Lī ghurfā*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

⁴³⁵ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Mashī'ta al-wisāda*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

⁴³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

⁴³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 74–75.

⁴³⁸ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Imra'a bi-l-kād*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

⁴³⁹ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Mundhaka*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

This is my matter
 Don't forget,
 That a trick is embedded in life
 That life invites me to fail like a hostage⁴⁴⁰

Love and death have for centuries been seen as indispensable elements of life. Love was perceived not only as a creative force but also as something destructive leading even to death:

I love you
 Like unavoidable death
 My route is the longest of all⁴⁴¹

In the poems we do not find any unambiguous answers. The poet herself says:

I escaped
 In one direction I didn't know⁴⁴²

The words: "night", "darkness", "insomnia" run through all the poems of the volume in question. Night and darkness are inseparably connected. The demons awake that have been lulled to sleep by the light of day. At night we dream and drowsy dreams are a reservoir of unusual images that constitute the encoded content of human experiences and desires. Many would like to see their soul, their real "I" just like the woman from the poem *Imra'a bi-l-kād* (*Almost a Woman*) who standing in front of the mirror can, on her own, dare to speak frankly with herself:

She walks in the direction of the mirror that sleeps
 In the face of her dishonesty,
 Marked with the stress of the lines of a woman's face:
 The paleness of a face soothed by the sun of the autumn past
 Plaits flow on the shoulders in bands of anger [...]
 The lashes flutter out of fear like the homeless without hope
 Lips which delay the inhaling of fear
 The nose slowly breathes in and out air
 Bringing life to the body [...]
 A woman created for an unavoidable tragedy,
 Which touches her directly.⁴⁴³

A mirror, dream, drowsy dreaming is often used by surrealists for through a mirror (crossing onto the other side, to the unreal world), or dreams we can really discover what we represent.

In her lyrical declaration, entitled *Fī mā aḥissuhu aw aḥsabuhu ash-shi'r* (*About What I Feel or What Poetry is to Me*), located at the end of the volume *Malādh ar-*

⁴⁴⁰ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Liannī al-maṭar lam adhuq siwā suqūṭ al-alam*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

⁴⁴¹ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Qabla al-qatl bi-qalīl*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 147.

⁴⁴² Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Mundhaka*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 45.

⁴⁴³ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Imra'a bi-l-kād*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

rūḥ (Asylum for the Heart) Fawziyya as-Sindī talks of her poetic motivation. We can already guess from the title that poetry is for her something that she feels, and contact with poetry, the act of creativity, provides her with great experiences:

Nourishment for the senses [...] sighs, convulsions pervade all the parts of the body, the state of searching for in imperfections of the mind, desires causing muscular trembling [...]⁴⁴⁴

Poetry is for her everything and she experiences it everywhere:

The sound of the flute mixed with the air from the lungs [...], this something I don't see even though it is around me and this something I do not describe, even though it has already happened [...], this something is inescapable [...] a desire for wine even before the grapes have been harvested [...], the illusion of eternity [...], the trembling of the paper in the face of the creativity of the pen [...]⁴⁴⁵

Fawziyya as-Sindī does not provide ready prepared answers, she does not impose interpretation, she opens new horizons and the depth of the reception depends on the boundaries and possibilities of our imagination.

Hidden content [...] struggle for the soul, [...] words branded with madness, [...] freedom.⁴⁴⁶

Poetry is something ordinary and extraordinary at the same time, mysterious and unknowable:

Where does all the magic in poetry come from
Can I catch a glimpse of it?⁴⁴⁷

The poetry of imagination was always the poetry of metaphor because it wanted to convey a content that slips out of logic, almost unable to be expressed. The poet in part leans towards simplicity as a means of expression, in part digs deep into complex symbolism. Often the impression is given that the poetic work remains a creation not entirely clear in its appeal for interpretation.

The experience gained by reading poetry is a very personal and subjective matter. Everything is based upon our own sensitivity, the search for all encompassing beauty even in small insignificant things. Poetry can be escapism and rest. For Fawziyya as-Sindī it is undoubtedly the asylum of the soul cited in the title.

Aḥmad al-'Ajāmī was born in Bahrain in 1958. He started to write in *taf'ila* form, although later he experienced freedom of form when writing prose poem (*qaṣīdat an-nathr*). He was strongly influenced by the Iraqi poet Nāzik al-Malā'ika, whom he

⁴⁴⁴ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Fī mā aḥissuhu aw aḥsabuhu ash-shi'r*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 152–153.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

⁴⁴⁷ Fawziyya as-Sindī, *Mundhaka*, in: *Malādh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

met while a student in Kuwait. Thanks to her input he became aware that modern poetry is open to new forms and content.

He is the author of many volumes of poetry (see *Biographies*) where various subject matters are explored. Initially this was political subject matter for at this time Bahrain was subject to a wave of political repression. When al-‘Ajamī returned to Bahrain his poetry started to exude mysticism and philosophy. In the volume *al-Manāsik al-qurmuziyya (Bloody Rites)* under the impressions of the Gulf War he expresses concern as to the future of the region. In the next volume, entitled *Zahrat ar-raw‘ (The Flower of Fear)*, the dominant subject is the relation between mother and child. Then, the volume *al-‘Āshiq (The Enamoured)* is a collection of erotic poems. From this volume onwards, in which short poems predominate, one can date his affiliation to the short form for as he states – as we live in the world of the Internet, quick communication and haste, man does not have time to read long poems and poetry should harmonize with the spirit of the times. Aḥmad al-‘Ajamī’s poems are uniform with regard to form – in accordance with the tendencies prevalent within contemporary Arabic lyricism, an example of blank verse.

The most interesting aspects of the poet’s entire output appears in his last volume entitled *Rubbamā anā (Maybe Me)* published in Beirut in 1999 and dedicated to his friends. We come across as a dedication the mysterious sentence: “Where is the universe?”

The whole volume, composing a dozen or so poems, is divided into two parts: the first is characterized by the repetition of the word in the title [...] *ākhar* ([...] *other*), the second part contains in the titles of the poems *Mā ba‘d* [...] (*that which follows* [...]).

In the poem entitled *Amal ākhar (Another Hope)* the poet accuses people of indifference in relation to the world around. They demand a lot and offer but a stone which does not give hope to save what has been lost.

You come with me [...]
And you leave
But a stone
Which knows no hope⁴⁴⁸

The poem *Julūs ākhar (Another Meeting)* talks of the bonds of friendship that break with time and distance:

How friends depart
And become distant⁴⁴⁹

In another poem he talks of lost love, about a woman to whom he showed enormous affection and who left leaving him alone with his pain. He realizes the

⁴⁴⁸ Aḥmad al-‘Ajamī, *Amal ākhar*, in: *Rubbamā anā*, Beirut, 1999, p. 17.

⁴⁴⁹ Aḥmad al-‘Ajamī, *Julūs ākhar*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

expression of this internal “I” on the various levels of the organization of this personal utterance through an expressive function.⁴⁵⁰

Autumn...
I can speak
Of many clouds...
Of the stupefaction
Far from here⁴⁵¹

The poet attempts to show his loneliness, his existence without the person so dear to his heart, who was his encouragement and hope, without whom he feels like “without the sky”.⁴⁵²

The past and the present also take voice in the poems in the form of birds which are in no way self-conscious and enjoy freedom and liberty. At the same time the lyrical “I” signifies that:

I am not a palm
At the welcome of slander...
I am not a tunic
For a light story⁴⁵³

Which proves that he himself will not accuse anyone or judge them for bad deeds but is disgusted with lies.

He is filled with bitterness and sorrow, he concentrates only on himself and his suffering. The form to express this state are words direct from the recipient: “come” or “leave”.⁴⁵⁴ In this way also the recipient is written into the mass of those accused by the lyrical subject in the poem for his unhappiness.

The poet uses only a limited range of similes. That said metaphors abound. These serve to code feelings and impressions within which the meaning of the literal image is hidden. Individual events and motifs remain in a cause and effect relationship. The logic of the utterance is based upon the composition of image-metaphors which create a loose whole.

And I see those lost kisses
In bonds from the air
With the weak light of absence⁴⁵⁵

The second part of the poem begins with the phrase *Mā ba‘d...* (*That which Follows...*) following which we have the key word for reading the given composition (*glass, night, void, hesitation...*).

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. Janusz Sławiński (ed.), *Słownik terminów literackich*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków, 1998, 3rd edition, p. 278.

⁴⁵¹ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Kalam ākhar*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

⁴⁵² Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, ‘*Alāqa ukhrā*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

⁴⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 15–16.

⁴⁵⁴ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Amal ākhar*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

⁴⁵⁵ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, ‘*Alāqa ukhrā*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

The majority of the works that appear in this part are expressions of the poet's emotional states, petty reflections and considerations. In the poem, entitled *Mā ba'd al-farāgh* (*That which Follows the Void*), the poet returns to thank the woman for her presence and the moment of conversation which he so needed:

Thank you
 For your talk at night
 As if you realized
 That I needed your voice[...]
 My body was dark
 As the fur of autumn
 And my head
 Rocked like the motion of a cuckoo clock[...]
 I retrieved
 Your smell
 Your thoughts
 Your last smile
 From the world
 Before the claws of dawn
 And slept happily⁴⁵⁶

The meeting with Her is the remedy for the surrounding void manifesting itself in the need for “her voice and trace of thought”.⁴⁵⁷ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī in such a simple poem emphasizes the importance of values such as presence, talk, smiles, smell.

Another poem, *Mā ba'd at-taraddud* (*That which Follows Hesitation*), is a recollection of a pleasant time spent in a wine bar where the poet derived pleasure from chatting:

Again
 I want to sit with you
 In that same wine bar
 [...]
 We enjoy idle chat⁴⁵⁸

The reader does not get to know the reason for the hesitation of the title. Possibly it was brought about by a lack of courage to express one's feelings and desires? However after reading the poem one almost physically feels the gathered “air full of uncertainty”⁴⁵⁹ which is connected to the semantic layer of the work.

In the poem *Mā ba'd al-waqt* (*That which Follows Time*) the poet, directing his words to his beloved recalls the rock which was certainly the place of their meeting. Now the man wants to undertake an attempt at renewing the relationship by asking in

⁴⁵⁶ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba'd al-farāgh*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 98–100.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

⁴⁵⁸ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba'd at-taraddud*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 101.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

the last line “what do you think about starting again?”⁴⁶⁰ Maybe this will take place after some time – after time which will allow them to solve problems and maybe forget about the painful past.

Amongst the poems of part two one can find poems that can be ascribed to Bacchic poetry, for example *Mā ba‘d al-layl* (*That which Follows the Night*) or *Mā ba‘d al-ka’s* (*That which Follows the Glass*). Both concern a similar subject matter though one can clearly see that they present different points of view. The work *Mā ba‘d al-ka’s* (*That which Follows...*) is its own form of enumerating the reasons and positive things connected with drinking wine:

How the wondrous expanse resting between us
With lightness transfers
On the lashes of the ancient lamps
At the last glass
And fragrance of the most beautiful ḥafīf⁴⁶¹

Both the content and the tone of the utterance leads to a euphoric thought of the state of intoxication. At the end there falls a significant and at the same time rhetorical question: “And how is one to avoid you here?”⁴⁶² which suggests the close and frequent connections of the glass in the title.

The poem *Mā ba‘d al-layl* (*That which Follows the Night*) arouses in the reader a completely different atmosphere. It is a form of describing a drunk tormented by a “splitting headache” and protected by a shield “from the curiosity of the world”, along with a description of the place of the nightly booze-up:

The wall clock mocks the empty bottles
And disperses the smoke
Gathered over the remains
Of the pistachios and bread
As far as the glasses go
They are not interested
In my terrible headache⁴⁶³

Despite everything the poet decides that such a night will repeat itself. Both poems have a light accent and induce a smile of leniency on the face of the reader, for they aptly convey the character of both what takes place during and after a night spent with a glass in hand.

The poet introduces an interesting play on words in the poem *Mā ba‘d al-ma‘nā* (*That which Follows Meaning*):

⁴⁶⁰ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba‘d al-waqt*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

⁴⁶¹ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba‘d al-ka’s*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 94; kaffī is a type of Arabic metre [translator’s note].

⁴⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 94.

⁴⁶³ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba‘d al-layl*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 105.

I wrote once
 About our short talk
 In a distant cafe!
 You had the possibility
 To reach
 The window open
 For dusk
 And to remember the light
 Which divided the silence with us
 For two moments
 One of those you called
 The rising of thought.⁴⁶⁴

There is no direct reference to the sun in the poem, but rather through the metaphorical use of the word *miṣbāḥ* which apart from lamp can mean someone with great charisma who inspires others, emanates knowledge and experience. These meanings, referring to the Sufi theory of emanation via light, correspond perfectly to “the rising of thought” the writer notes at the end of the work.

The poet sometimes uses enjambment, for example in the poem *Mā ba‘d al-hashab* (*That which Follows Wood*):

Do you still remember
 That old chair
 The chair which was made
 From the last tree
 On our planet?⁴⁶⁵

Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī does not spoil us with the richness of semantic tropes or stylistic features. Even such popular tropes as epithets appear fairly rarely e.g.: “cloudy weather”,⁴⁶⁶ “forgotten flowers”,⁴⁶⁷ “the lazy stare of women”.⁴⁶⁸ The poems also include similes, e.g.:

My body was dark
 As the fur of autumn
 And my head
 Rocked like the motion of a cuckoo clock...⁴⁶⁹

Or:

You were ready for flight
 like an adult butterfly⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁴ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba‘d al-ma‘nā*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 73–74.

⁴⁶⁵ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba‘d al-khashab*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 66.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

⁴⁶⁷ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba‘d al-ka’s*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

⁴⁶⁸ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba‘d al-taraddud*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

⁴⁶⁹ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba‘d al-farāgh*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

⁴⁷⁰ Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī, *Mā ba‘d al-makān*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

Metaphors are few: “the coat of the garden”,⁴⁷¹ “the wind’s stories”,⁴⁷² or “the curiosity of the light”.⁴⁷³ Examples of animism are: “the cries of the clock”,⁴⁷⁴ or “the candle’s face”.⁴⁷⁵

One gains the impression upon reading the poems in the collection *Rubbamā anā* (*Maybe Me*) that the poet intended to share with the sensitive reader his states of mind, feelings, thoughts, reflections concerning various events and life situations, hence it follows to treat them as “variations on a subject...”. It seems that the poet himself is asking the question: am I me or not? And the poems constitute a part of his life history. It seems that the ultimate aim of the poet is the poetical portrayal of certain situations from daily life – in a café, a garden, at home – in such a way that everyone can find their place within the depicted scene.

Nabīla Zubārī has an artist’s soul – for many years she has written poems in prose and short stories as well as painting. Yet she finds herself fully in poetry (see Biographies). Her first volume of poetry, entitled *Ḥawājiz ramādiyya* (*Barriers of Ash*), was published in 1994 in Bahrain. All of the works contained here are filled with a strange sense of sorrow. The poet writes about the barriers that exist between people who have experienced painful experiences and alienation. There appear in the poems palms – symbolizing the homeland, and the sea – which has a magical significance for the inhabitants of Bahrain as it surrounds them on all sides. The second volume of poetry ‘*Asā an yarji‘ al-baḥr...!* (*So the Sea returns*) is divided into three parts, each of which is subtitled. The first, *Mawjāt al-waṭan* (*The Waves of the Homeland*) begins with the motto: “Homeland... From which we begin and to whom we return!!”. These words fully reflect the unique patriotic themes that run through this part, something borne out by the titles of the poems: *Qublat li-l-waṭan* (*A Kiss for the Homeland*), *Ṣubḥ fī al-waṭan* (*Morning in the Home Country*), and others. In part two, entitled *Mawjāt mulawwana* (*Coloured Waves*), the theme of love appears and not necessarily in relation to the beloved country, e.g. the poem *Intimā’* (*Affiliation*), or equally *Fātin* (*Temptation*). Part three, *Mawjāt sha‘biyya* (*The Waves of the Nation*) is composed of only three poems that constitute a form of summing up. The poet writes down the dates and the places where the poems were written under the majority of the works which shows that she is aware of the passing of time – as if she gradually divides what separates her from her homeland. As it is sorrow that has led her to write there is consequently no lack of such sorrow in the volume. One can conjecture from the content of the volume that the poems are not merely a poetic projection of imagination but have their genuine origins – which are

⁴⁷¹ Aḥmad al-‘Ajamī, *Mā ba‘d al-khashab*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 67.

⁴⁷² Aḥmad al-‘Ajamī, *Mā ba‘d al-ka’s*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

⁴⁷³ Aḥmad al-‘Ajamī, *Mā ba‘d al-layl*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

⁴⁷⁴ Aḥmad al-‘Ajamī, *Mā ba‘d al-waqt*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

⁴⁷⁵ Aḥmad al-‘Ajamī, *Mā ba‘d al-lāshay’*, in: *Rubbamā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

the journeys taken. These poems, created in various parts of the world, mean that the sorrow experienced intensifies. The homeland is for the poet the land of happiness she writes about in the poem *Maqāṭi' min ... abjadiyyāt ūlā* (*Fragments from Initial Alphabets*):

I placed you within me...
 Oh sweet plant
 Jasmine gave off a pleasant aroma for me
 And the almonds gave me greenness...
 The palm gave me roots...
 I mixed the gifts in my blood...
 I watered them with my artery blood
 And they became [...] the homeland!⁴⁷⁶

The poet compares her country to a plant signifying something beautiful and defenceless. All recollections of everyday life are connected with the homeland, which have grown to the scale of monumental experiences: the smell of flowers and incense, the rising of the sun, pearls. Nabīla Zubārī, as the two final lines suggest, wrote the word Homeland on a sail. The culminating point of this poem conveys the climate of all the others, expressing parting in metaphor, a parting that is probably connected with the poet's departure from her home country. It seems to her that she is losing something especially valuable, for which she desires to give everything she possesses:

Oh country!
 Take me to you
 Take from my soul
 Every line and every song
 Take every moment of my life...
 Embrace me...⁴⁷⁷

In the next poem, entitled *Ma'zūfā ... min sīmfūniyyat al-ghurba* (*A Fragment from a Symphony of Exile*), the yearning for her country intensifies unspeakably. Nabīla Zubārī wrote this poem on the 24th of August, while in Great Britain:

They write the name
 Which is not in dictionaries
 And is not limited by time...
 The sound of rain... your voice...
 They write yearning in my veins...
 Yearning...
 Whose name is Homeland!⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ Nabīla Zubārī, *Maqāṭi' min ... abjadiyyāt ūlā*, in: 'Asā an yarji' al-baḥr...!, Bahrain, 1998, p. 9.

⁴⁷⁷ Nabīla Zubārī, *Qublat li-l-waṭan*, in: 'Asā..., *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁴⁷⁸ Nabīla Zubārī, *Ma'zūfā ... min sīmfūniyyat al-ghurba*, in: 'Asā..., *op.cit.*, pp. 24–25.

The return to the homeland becomes the only aim. The joy at the approaching return gushes forth like a source of life in the poem *Mā qabla ar-rujū'* (*Just before the Return*). The poet does not regret leaving anything behind, neither the rivers, nor the apple trees, nor the hills. Despite the fact that she has made many friendships and has become attached over the course of the years to this place she decisively states:

I say farewell to you...
Because I return... to my country!!⁴⁷⁹

We can observe a different perspective in the poem *Min ... azminat an-nisyān* (*From... Times Immemorial*). The poet yearns for her beloved who has remained in the home country. So her sense of yearning doubles:

You are surrounded by faces...
Around you words flow like waves...
You smile...
Share the joy...
And don't remember [...]
That my distant face lies here on the threshold of the *qaṣīda*...⁴⁸⁰

The poet is tormented by conflicting feelings – yearning and fear. She does not know whether her beloved is waiting for her, for time and distance work their own, and he is for certain to be surrounded by many women. Frenzied imagination does not allow for normal functioning, it arouses phobias and suspicions, as well as the questions she asks in the poem *Kayfā ughliq ritāj al-'umr dunak!!* (*How could I shut the gates of time without you!!*):

Will you travel in your world alone...
Lonesome...
Without me?!⁴⁸¹

A woman cannot imagine her life without her beloved. Even though she has been subjected to the harsh test of separation she awaits impatiently for her return and while she waits she recalls jointly spent moments:

As I am use to seeing you
As you awake in the morning
On your forehead
And how with your breath you care for the joyful lilies
As I am use to seeing you
Concealing my dream in your palms
[...]
So how could I close the lock of life without you...⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁹ Nabīla Zubārī, *Mā qabla ar-rujū'*, in: 'Asā..., *op.cit.*, p. 33.

⁴⁸⁰ Nabīla Zubārī, *Min ... azminat an-nisyān*, in: 'Asā..., *op.cit.*, p. 41.

⁴⁸¹ Nabīla Zubārī, *Kayfā ughliq ritāj al-'umr dunak!!*, in: 'Asā..., *op.cit.*, p. 47.

⁴⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 45.

The next poem of part two, entitled *Nisba! (Relationship!)*, most fully conveys the feeling of total devotion and surrendering for love, although in an unusual way love is compared to death:

I die once...
Through real poison
Through the poison of your letters
A thousand times... I die!⁴⁸³

The poem *Wajh! (Face!)* is also an admittance of love. There dominates in it however suffering which symbolizes the wound to the heart. It seems that some painful memory has taken total control over the positive side of the relationship:

Your face in my heart
In your voice
In your colour
And in the trace of the old wound
Your face
Reflects
Becomes the wound
Another!⁴⁸⁴

In the end, after a long period of waiting the beloved appears in the poem *Adh-Dhākira ... wa al-ḥulm (Memory... and dream)*:

You came close
In the blink of an eye...⁴⁸⁵

Both Nabīla Zubārī's patriotic and love poems show man as desiring to find himself in the reality that surrounds him. He discovers how significant the role is that he has been given to play in life. From this realization there is born the determination to revise attitudes towards one's beloved and one's homeland which involves not only great deeds but devotion in the course of everyday labours. The poet, while abroad, is unable to enjoy either nature or freedom for all of her thoughts are directed towards her home country which appears as someone who is the closest to her heart. Unveiled before us is the change that has occurred in her life during the long period spent abroad.

Nabīla Zubārī writes poetic prose. She freely uses metaphor ("the shores flirted",⁴⁸⁶ "the shining stream exchanges gifts"⁴⁸⁷), epithets ("sweet plant"⁴⁸⁸),

⁴⁸³ Nabīla Zubārī, *Nisba!*, in: 'Asā..., *op.cit.*, p. 49.

⁴⁸⁴ Nabīla Zubārī, *Wajh!*, in: 'Asā..., *op.cit.*, p. 63.

⁴⁸⁵ Nabīla Zubārī, *Adh-Dhākira ... wa al-ḥulm*, in: 'Asā..., *op.cit.*, p. 97.

⁴⁸⁶ Nabīla Zubārī, *Maqāṭi' min ... abjadiyāt ulā*, in: 'Asā..., *op.cit.*, p. 10.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

repetition (“the sound of the rain”⁴⁸⁹), and symbols (“the rain” – signifying goodness, fertility⁴⁹⁰, or “the sun” – the symbol of existence, joy and freedom⁴⁹¹).

Her literary world is unusually individual, it is the world of a loner tormented by yearning. The main sphere of her interests is the phenomenon of existence amongst other objects, different people, often in various parts of the world where her poems are composed (Great Britain, the Czech Republic). As light in the tunnel there appears the possibility for the longed for return home, which will be crowned not only by her career path but her personal one as well.

Fāṭima at-Taytūn was born in Bahrain in 1962. She studied Arabic literature at the University of Kuwait. After finishing her degree she worked as a teacher of Arabic language, and at present cooperates with the journal *al-Ayyām*.

Fāṭima at-Taytūn’s creative output is one huge pessimistic declaration on the passing of time and death, although it is not devoid of patriotic lyrics reflective in nature. She has published many volumes of poetry,⁴⁹² out of which I have selected *Arsumu qalbī* (*I Paint My Heart*) and *Al-Awqāt al-mahjūra* (*Deserted Years*). The poem *Ṭa‘m ash-sharāra* (*The Taste of a Spark*) from the first volume is a personal admission of love and submission to the homeland even in the face of approaching death. The poem starts with a directly bombastic call to a personified homeland:

Oh Fatherland
Your cold voice fills with sorrow
I cry for You
In your embrace I give my ragged heart
From your face the gleam disappears⁴⁹³

Also characteristic are the appearance of emotionally charged words such as: “cry” and “sorrow” which display the sorrow at leaving one’s country.

The poet talks of coming to terms with death:

I immerse myself and sink
The sea is my face
I arose from the waves of his lips⁴⁹⁴

The sea is one of several symbols used by Fāṭima at-Taytūn. It is undoubtedly linked to its direct presence in the life of the inhabitants of Bahrain. It symbolizes something unmeasured, unlimited, a bastion of peace and instrumental strength. It is irrevocably linked to the fatherland, whose name is after all Bahrain (two seas). This may also lead one to speculate that the second poem, entitled *Buḥūr* (*The Sea*),

⁴⁸⁹ Nabīla Zubārī, *Ma‘zūfā ... min sīmfūniya al-ghurba*, in: ‘*Asā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 21–25.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 21–25.

⁴⁹¹ Nabīla Zubārī, *Qublat li-l-waṭan*, in: ‘*Asā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

⁴⁹² Cf. biography of the poet.

⁴⁹³ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Ṭa‘m ash-sharāra*, in: *Arsumu qalbī*, Bahrain, 1991, pp. 24–25.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

despite the fact that it does not contain the word fatherland is also a patriotic one. The very title signifies the sea that is etymologically linked with the name Bahrain, but in the poem it represents a proper noun. And this work starts from the invocation: “Beloved”. Later the word is replaced by others like: “Buhur, oh creature of strange look”, or “Buhur, child of nostalgic moments”.⁴⁹⁵ Despite such personification we can read into the figure of Buhur the image of the fatherland. This poem, in a way similar to the previous one, is imbued with an emotional tone through the introduction of the expressions:

You fill the time with crying,
When your eyes disseminate the spark in my morning heart?⁴⁹⁶

There also appear negatively saturated epithets: “cloudy morn”, “bitter flame”, or “ploughed up face” emphasize the mood of the poem. At the beginning of this monologue Bahrain is described as an elusive, distant being. The impression is gained that the poet is distancing himself from it without desiring to whatsoever. In the second part of the poem we deal directly with the lyricism. This to a great extent constitutes rhetorical questions: “How can we meet: in winter or summer?”, “How can we fuse with one another?”. This emphasizes the emptiness and yearning. And here the sea appears as a symbol of power and necessity, inseparably bond to the fatherland: “We shall dive in your maritime heart. Can I drink?”.

The maritime motifs, which in the two previously examined poems appeared only partly, are the main subject matter of other poems collected in the volume: *Arsumu qalbī* (*I Paint My Heart*). For it is not only the sea which arouses emotion in the poet, but water in general which is treated as something exceptional. Such is the case in the poem *Raqṣat al-māʾ* (*The Water’s Dance*):

A year ago
After a year
The water dances in the depths
Explodes like fire
Burns the faces of time
Explodes
The water dances at the festival
Naked
Are those who see it
Sought-after dance
Not repentant and not reveling her breast
The water like a bride
Is the queen of the evening
Is relentless
Is hard
Does not hold back

⁴⁹⁵ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Buḥūr*, in: *Arsumu...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 14–15.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 14–15.

Does not know the day or night
 Dances
 Dances in the heart of the sea
 [...]

 Does not stop dancing where the words begin
 Does not stop where the tears end
 Still dances⁴⁹⁷

The poet does not reveal her “I” through the expression of opinion but obviously her emotions draw themselves clearly. The personification of water emphasizes her essence, her eternal being, in opposition to other phenomena in nature. She creates in the final lines a contrast between water and man who is born and dies while “she” exists without a break. This conveys the humility with which the poet treats certain phenomena in nature which are ruled by existence. The epithets used here to define water such as: “relentless”, “hard” as well as the comparison, for example, “The water like a bride Is the queen of the evening” convey her character as well as eternal youth. Her strength is compared to the strength of fire burning the faces of time.

Water is a symbol of life, and its might results from its necessity for all living things. Such symbolism is shown by the poem *Zillu al-mā’* (*The Shadow of Water*). This work is full of metaphors of passing and death: “The night fades, the dead bodies of trees”. At the same time all the elements of the presented world constitute both phenomena as the elements of nature that undergo personification: “Night dances in the shadow of trees”, “The forests wander towards the sea [...] contemplating”. Here equally is employed clearly fantastic imagery, for the links between the phenomena are created by the poet, it is she who gives them new shapes which have no reflection in the real world, for example: “The forests wander to the sea, drying the waves from the fire”.

Equally, the poem *Baḥriyāt* (*Sailors*) is saturated by such imagery:

The sea speaks the choppy silences in explosions
 The flowers of the jasmine pitted with pearls
 Hundreds of souls muffled their aroma
 But churns in fish eyes
 Swirls in the songs of night
 Runs around corners, escapes
 Into an underground haven⁴⁹⁸

The world presented here is unreadable, although it may concern submarine life. Also emotions, moved into the first plane of things, mean that the content is difficult to decipher. Animism and the personification of smell appear through the usage of verbs: “churns”, “swirls”, “runs”, or “escapes”, whose aim is to convey the impression of speed. The sea as a container of uncountable, undiscovered treasures

⁴⁹⁷ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Raqṣat al-mā’*, in: *Arsumu..., op.cit.*, pp. 16–17.

⁴⁹⁸ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Baḥriyāt*, in: *Arsumu..., op.cit.*, p. 23.

and the attitudes that hide in them is also the symbol of the unconscious psyche and it is just that meaning that we can here perceive.

The poet is hugely attached to the sea, something rooted in old Arabic poetry, where the poets, whose surroundings is the desert on which whole generations live, are unable to broach any other subject, for they did not know any other reality. The comparison of the motif of the sea with the subject matter of death is not without grounding for the sea like death appears as something endless and vast.

Many words that signify death also appear in other poems, like for instance *Lā aḥad* (*No one*). The subject arousing the emotions is the “no one” of the title, i.e. a dead man. In the phrase: “That someone is no one” we have the entire hopelessness of human existence for what remains after him is contained merely in “the crowd of tears, in the cries of despair, in the carnival of death”.

The poem *Adrī* (*I Know*) is constructed around the subject of death.⁴⁹⁹ The word constituting the title of the poem is repeated several times and has as its aim to prove that the poet is conscious of the inevitable approach of death, but it is difficult for the poet to come to terms with this fact. “I know that together with the rose grow thorns” is a neat reflection of man’s fate which together with birth is condemned to die for “a shady imprisonment follows them” and this imprisonment is one’s own consciousness that our life will one day end. Simultaneously man is assigned loneliness for “only in the grave and in the heart are we alone”. For death has also much to do with love for we remain alone in its face. Death is characterized by the phrases “stifling rain”, “gloomy wind”, or “sick mirrors”, in other words the procedure of using negatively characterized adjectives with the aim of arousing in the recipient definite emotions is repeated. Within the work the motif of the dying palm develops, something which brings with it a huge emotional load: “These palms are dying, but they remain”.

A similar motif also appears in the poem: *Nakhlat al-‘awīl* (*The Palm of Tears*)⁵⁰⁰ and *Ẓilāl* (*Shadows*).⁵⁰¹ In each of these it is a reflection of some kind of suffering: “Oh palm, do not explode into bloody tears in the middle of the road”,⁵⁰² “Give my strength to the wilted palm”.⁵⁰³ The death of the palm is its own form of termination of life. Full of doubt, sorrow and consciousness of the passing of events is the title poem *Arsumu qalbī* (*I Paint My Heart*). The poet here gives expression to her loneliness through the introduction of a series of images that reflect her internal experiences:

I enter behind the tree of silence
And whisper
Not one feather has fallen from the wing of the wind

⁴⁹⁹ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Adrī*, in: *Arsumu...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 11–13.

⁵⁰⁰ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Nakhlat al-‘awīl*, in: *Arsumu...*, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

⁵⁰¹ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Ẓilāl*, in: *Arsumu...*, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

⁵⁰² Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Nakhlat al-‘awīl*, in: *Arsumu...*, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

⁵⁰³ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Ẓilāl*, in: *Arsumu...*, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

I stand like a shadow
 And the features of my heart change
 Into silence
 Into sorrow which lurks in the corners
 And lifts the burden of prayer⁵⁰⁴

Loneliness is characterized by the words “I enter behind the tree of silence / And whisper”. With the same there appears fantastic imagery so characteristic for the poet’s work. The words: “silence”, “whisper”, “shadow”, “sorrow” mean that the work becomes calm and softened. Simultaneously there takes place an animism of the sorrow which “lurks in the corners” giving it a threatening edge and deepening the impression of omnipresence. It also “lifts the burden of prayer”. We can see through this a repetition of the linkage to religion.

The poem *Sifr al-asfār (The Book of Books)* has a similar echo in which we discover beautiful metaphors of old age:

The summer which does not burn like fire
 [...],
 His heart borne on the dreams of the day,
 As if tens of gusts of wind had come hence...⁵⁰⁵

It is conveying the fear before inevitable passing, but also the calm of life’s experience. “Why do words drown and remain feverish shinning corpses?” it asks and with it proves that this is not how it appears to the poets that when one dies there remain after one *those* words because in point of fact there remains only the recollection of their death. This is an unusually pessimistic vision of human passing that states that man is unable to leave behind him anything lasting. Such a negation of obvious truth emphasizes his alienation and loneliness, similarly to the question: “Where am I to turn my face where to throw the baggage of pain?”. The repetition of the word *where* deepens the impression of being lost. The title, *Sifr al-asfār (The Book of Books)*, is for sure a metaphor for life which contains the written down laws God employed in his creation of the world. The closing of this book is to some extent a form of coming to terms with the end of one’s own existence, for here are written down the fates of man.

The volume *Al-Awqāt al-mahjūra (Deserted Years)* contains works that are saturated with personal emotions that are especially visible in the cycle of threnodies devoted to her father *Ilā abī (To My Father)*. On the initial plane, vocabulary characteristic for an atmosphere of sorrow, death and mourning is advanced. Words like: “night” or “father” grow to the significance of key-words. Their frequency of usage speaks of their significance in the mechanism of constructing the poetic image. The word “night” constitutes a metaphor for evil and unhappiness:

⁵⁰⁴ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Arsumu qalbī*, in: *Arsumu..., op.cit.*, p. 7.

⁵⁰⁵ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Sifr al-asfār*, in: *Arsumu..., op.cit.*, pp. 9–10.

And night lies when it speaks its truth
 And the walls lie when speaking their truth
 That death is dying!⁵⁰⁶

The poet also uses vocabulary that arouses repulsion, for example: “spiders”, “creepy crawlies”, “fear” or direct references to the symbolism of death, for instance “grave”, or “lament”. In the poem *Jidh' al-laylak* (*The Lilac Trunk*) we find a euphemism i.e. the replacement of the word coffin by “wooden box”:

I have no walls
 No wooden box dies with me
 Even if they entwine me in a spider's web⁵⁰⁷

The dramatic call: “Fathers, the spiders of recollections still recall You!”⁵⁰⁸ is a manifestation of the poet's helplessness against a fact which cannot be overturned. A similar function is fulfilled by the rhetorical questions which Fāṭima does not expect a reply to. They are asked only to deepen her pain which allows for an understanding of the purpose served by the death of someone near:

What nightfall could reach out for him?
 How do you find the earth now?⁵⁰⁹

In her elegies the poet emphasizes scenes that stimulate imagination with the help of an unusually artistic description:

The creepy crawlies are now carrying you to feed their children with your body
 They drag you despite the cold of the winter
 In order to bury, cover with sand and hide from the sight of others...⁵¹⁰

Fāṭima at-Taytūn presents in her poems a world viewed through the eyes of an individual obsessed with a vision of death. The poet leads us through the dusky depths of her own suffering and reflections so that her emotions appear to be faltering, at times calm and at others lost. Sometimes death appears to her as a saviour, at other times a catastrophe. She invites us to grow through love for a fellow man and for one's country which becomes possible when we come to terms with our own mortality.

Laylā as-Sayyid (see Biographies) published her first volume of poetry, entitled *Mararnā hunāk* (*We Went There*), in 2003 in Beirut. The first words of the dedication: *Ishtar said to them...* emphasize that the poems are going to be devoted to love and male-female relations (in Arabic the dual numeral *lahumā* is used) for the

⁵⁰⁶ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Ilā abī*, in: *Al-Awqāt al-mahjūra*, Bahrain, 1994, p. 12.

⁵⁰⁷ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Jidh' al-laylak*, in: *Al-Awqāt...*, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

⁵⁰⁸ Fāṭima at-Taytūn, *Ilā abī*, in: *Al-Awqāt...*, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 10–11.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

Babylonian-Assyrian Ishtar was the goddess of love and battle. The individual poems in the volume are designated by consecutive numbers. Hence the first work (1):

She was there
 She drank a cup of coffee
 And warmed the winter with it
 That winter that outlasts the flesh.⁵¹¹

The poet clearly yearns for tenderness which the contrast between the coldest season of the year, winter, and the coffee conveys. Coffee is on the whole hot and helps to warm the body. It is true that beside her there stands a man, as is recalled in poem number 2, but he does not live up to her expectations for he is not there during difficult moments:

You approach me
 In moments of joy
 You flow in my blood
 You leave when I cry
 And the joy disappears
 Stay, you...!
 Sucked on to a cup of good cappuccino
 And to the image of unhappy dream.⁵¹²

Epithets denoting cold, for example: “winter”, “coldness”, “snow”, “snowy”, dominate in Laylā as-Sayyid’s work. They express fears that a lack of love and the closeness of a beloved person will lead to the demise of feelings:

Neither the air has duped me
 Nor the smell
 It’s you, you...
 I bestow on you fantasy
 The loneliness of the cry
 And shackles of dissatisfaction
 And the millions of aquatic creatures
 Ignite in me a unity of slogan
 And sea...⁵¹³

Idāfa (genitival modifiers) are used to express pain and yearning e.g. *qayd aḍ-ḍajar* (the shackles of dissatisfaction), *waḥdat aṣ-ṣakhr* (loneliness of the rock), and repetitions: *anta, anta* (you, you), *ghurbaṭ ar-rūḥ* (alienation of the soul), *jasad* (body). She desires to point out that although the impression is given that somebody is with her, in point of fact in her reception of things there is absolutely no one there.

⁵¹¹ Laylā as-Sayyid, (1), in: *Mararnā hunāk*, Beirut, 2003, p. 11.

⁵¹² Laylā as-Sayyid, (2), in: *Mararnā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

⁵¹³ Laylā as-Sayyid, *Thalāthiyat al-hawājīs dafātirat aḍ-ḍajar*, in: *Mararnā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 17–18.

No one
 Only the pain of downfall itself
 Occupies an edge of the heart
 Soundlessly collides with my sorrows
 Without address
 The pulse consecrates joy and love⁵¹⁴

The most important values for her are feelings:

It is the wind
 The echo of your voice...⁵¹⁵

She strenuously attempts to arouse feelings in her beloved and even desire
 “binding him with threads of passion and painting the mouth of endearment”.⁵¹⁶

Wondering whether everything takes place only in nocturnal dreams:

You turn over the sheets like a child
 I sit
 In the invisible corners of my mirror
 I am adorned with my storms
 You put in order
 The expanse
 Of my love
 You ignite the apple tree
 Fruit falls
 I see you
 Like a cry squeezing the throat of time
 Going far within your obstinacy⁵¹⁷

She hopes for changes, not only in dream but in reality something conveyed by the metaphor “the expanse of love” heightened by “the apple tree”. For it was Eve who successfully tempted Adam with an apple. She continues her dream in the poem *Al-Ḥulm* (Dream):

Yesterday
 I cut my dreams into pieces
 Going to him I order everything that should not remain within him
 Going I leave behind his loud laugh
 And I have passed over the other side by the time I have stopped laughing
 Going without a poem
 Without love
 Then I saw that my body
 Was left full of lust
 I therefore turned in the direction of the door

⁵¹⁴ Laylā as-Sayyid, *Kharāib al-ghad*, in: *Mararnā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 19–20.

⁵¹⁷ Laylā as-Sayyid, *Niṣf al-baḥr*, in: *Mararnā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 26–27.

And left

Without the body

And dreamed:

That the victims will come in the evening

And will count my sins.⁵¹⁸

Laylā as-Sayyid stubbornly returns with her thoughts to the dream, hoping that in this very dream she will again be able to find happiness and love. But equally here she is unable to escape from yearning, all the more that this affects her not only spiritually but physically:

It is my body

Lust

Reflects in the mirrors of flame

It is my soul

Shattered in the pillars of fire...⁵¹⁹

[...]

The last glow of passion

The desire of fire

The explosion of lust...⁵²⁰

In the last poem the poet asks many questions to which she has been unable to find answers before:

Next to your hands

Everything will be noticed

How will it be?

What are your hands?

What is my body?

What is our night?

What is our smile?

What is your warm gaze?

The hand lowers

The tomb

Of time.⁵²¹

Barwīn Ḥabīb has introduced much that is fresh to Bahraini poetry – she is a representative of the educated young generation (see Biographies). Born in 1969 she is at present preparing her PhD thesis, entitled *Body and Language in the Poetry of the Countries of the Persian Gulf*.

She published her first volume of poetry, entitled *Rujūlatuka al-khā'ifa. Ṭufūlatī al-waraqīyya (Your Timid Masculinity, My Paper Childhood)*, in 2001. This volume

⁵¹⁸ Laylā as-Sayyid, *Al-Ḥulm*, in: *Mararnā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 41–42.

⁵¹⁹ Laylā as-Sayyid, *Shahwat al-lahab*, in: *Mararnā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

⁵²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

⁵²¹ Laylā as-Sayyid, *Lastu siwā qabḍat yadik*, in: *Mararnā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

contained poems on the subject of love and loneliness which were written in 1999–2001 in Cairo, Bahrain, Beirut and Damascus. Barwīn Ḥabīb must have been connected with poetry from childhood, treating it as a form of play if she placed on the dust cover of the volume in the very first line the words: “poetry is childhood, and childhood is play”. Later she writes: “love is language which penetrate to what torments the soul giving out a mute cry... [...] opening the senses to the light of the world, on to that which is wild and wounding in us, and what is more this is not the grasp of small moments but destructive adventure”. Poetry in this context, as she writes further on, is only “blood flowing from this experience”.

All the works from this volume are works of the poet’s feelings, thoughts and desires. Barwīn Ḥabīb dedicates her volume to her father who is a light for her. The feelings that dominate in these poems are those of anxiety, suffering and loneliness something reflected in the poem entitled *Hubūb (Gusts)*:

It is I who in the mist is adorned by wind
Runs in the power of light on earth
I see the sea colliding, the water splashes
I go to the sea which beautifies the expanse around
I go to the fire leaving the roots of night
And in the light I exceed the noise of the soul
He is the bottom
In the end
If I were to explode in the blizzard of the day⁵²²

Then, in the poem *Rahbat az-zama’ (The Fear of Thirst)* the poet writes that “Our loneliness is the juice of the willow on the heights of the graves”.⁵²³ For love, even the greatest, is always paid for by suffering and yearning.

Next, she turns to the trembling disturbed heavens for forgiveness for the devouring wave of the sea of sorrow, in the poem *Ittiqād (The Explosion of Fire)*:

Drowning that evening
There is no shadow with us which would restore the cry of the palm
And the silver of the fruit falls apart in the mirage of the eye
Oh the trembling of the heavens
The division of the sea for our passing wave⁵²⁴

The poet often makes use of the motive of light which is to illuminate life, she writes about the shine which manifests itself in matters of love. In the poem *Zahw (Shine)* she writes:

Under the ashes of my homeland, like a lonely cloud I return proud
To you

⁵²² Barwīn Ḥabīb, *Hubūb*, in: *Rujūlatuka al-khā’ifa. Ṭufūlatī al-waraqiyya*, Beirut, 2001, p. 8.

⁵²³ Barwīn Ḥabīb, *Rahbat az-zama’*, in: *Rujūlatuka...*, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

⁵²⁴ Barwīn Ḥabīb, *Ittiqād*, in: *Rujūlatuka...*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

Possibly I will avoid the anger of the exiled
I illuminate your heart in the hour of the chasm⁵²⁵

The poet compares herself to a “lonely cloud” which has decided to return to her beloved in order to illuminate his heart after the parting and with this save him. The poem strikes one as a continuation of the work *Wahsha mudajjaja* (*Armed loneliness*) where the lovers turned against one another through some conflict are stuck in solitude but are still full of deep love:

...Overwhelming suffering kindles your fingers with the prediction of the
prairies,
May be it recalls the stream of words
And she returns to the loneliness of my suffering
And listens intently to the rustle of your shoe brush⁵²⁶

We get the impression that this moment of isolation draws them even closer to each other and strengthens their love:

I await you...
On the edge of dreams
I await you...⁵²⁷

In the poem *Sarir yatim* (*The Abandoned Bed*) the poet recalls the marvelous, sensual past:

You became me, and I was in You,
We entered into the rain of the letters...
You are the thief of sorrow from the “Persian garden”,
You sooth the bloody flow in the time of storm,
You are the blood of the pomegranate and the ends of the soul
And I under the fire of the undefeated front am the naked flame of the fire
Pensive in the extinguished body
“The I Love You”
Will come
In your mysterious declaration⁵²⁸

We encounter declarations of love in the poem. Desire is totally subjected to feeling, but care, joy and stability are also expected. An admission of beautiful love is also encapsulated in the poem *Ya'khudhuni 'aliyan* (*It raises Me on High*), where there is talk of the joy that comes from love:

Your love
Completely
Takes me

⁵²⁵ Barwīn Ḥabīb, *Zahw*, in: *Rujūlatuka...*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

⁵²⁶ Barwīn Ḥabīb, *Wahsha mudajjaja*, in: *Rujūlatuka...*, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

⁵²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 29–30.

⁵²⁸ Barwīn Ḥabīb, *Sarir yatim*, in: *Rujūlatuka...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 18–19.

Every evening
 From a cup of coffee and many others things
 Up high...⁵²⁹

The poet finished the volume with the extremely meaningful poem, entitled *Thalāthūn (Thirty)*, which reflects the poet's age at the time of writing. Possibly the said moment is a moment to which the poet returns:

Thirty
 My friend
 In the cellar of desire is his cry
 Our meeting is between the wound and the shadow
 Which awaits the lightning bolts of times.
 Thirty
 My friend
 Did they constitute rain encompassed with lightning bolts
 Or burning poems?!
 Thirty,
 The past is distanced by a bell.
 Dismiss the sounds of the past.⁵³⁰

A certain stage in the life and creativity of Barwīn Ḥabīb ended with this volume. Her poetry is understandable for all for the motif of love relates to universal values in every culture.

The collection of poems *Hawāmish imra'a fī-l-hāmish* by Fathīyya 'Ajlān is, on the one hand, poetry deeply rooted in the poet's private life, while on the other, is its own form of escape from everyday life. For Fathīyya 'Ajlān lyricism is a means of talking about things that are totally ordinary, about how she lives and feels. As a result of the "unusual" form that is described by her, ordinary pedestrian actions take on a somewhat heightened dimension. Poetry gives unto them a unique character. Waking up early morning, awaking the children and preparing breakfast become something extremely significant and valuable:

I begin my day
 I busy myself, wake the children.
 But still get up!
 This sleep is beautiful
 Oh the most beautiful of my dreams
 [...]
 Oh most wonderful moment of all moments⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ Barwīn Ḥabīb, *Ya 'khudhunī 'aliyān*, in: *Rujūlatuka...*, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

⁵³⁰ Barwīn Ḥabīb, *Thalathūn*, in: *Rujūlatuka...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 67–68.

⁵³¹ Fathīyya 'Ajlān, *Hawāmish imra'a fī-l-hāmish*, Bahrain, 1998, p. 7.

This confession on the part of the poet is extremely sincere and genuine. However the said “most wonderful moment” can quickly transform itself into a burdensome chore.

When the gas bottles are empty
Or the door slams shut on its own
I start to laugh
What joy is this!
I prepare nothing
Little eyes protest
Where is lunch!
I throw off my tiredness
[...]
And shout where is the time?⁵³²

Amongst the whirl of activities and the constant bustle of domestic life it is difficult to find a moment for oneself. The impression can be gained that at times Fathīyya ‘Ajlān has had enough of all of this and waits eagerly for some domestic gadget or other to break down. For then she will be able to rest with a clear conscience and lose herself in poetry.

Other poems from the second part of the collection are totally different in character. They are extremely metaphoric and oneiric, conveying the internal world of the poet. As opposed to the first part the works here are short and often contain rhyme. It appears as if they have been created in those rare moments when the poet could enjoy a break from domestic chores and duties. Fathīyya ‘Ajlān gives an especial place here for reflections on love. If it were not for the first part of the volume one would gain the impression that she lives exclusively for this feeling. Love has immense significance for her. It constitutes a certain haven and even a closed world which possibly is not always friendly for her but is at least one that belongs exclusively to her. An unusually significant role is fulfilled within this world by man. However after analysing Fathīyya ‘Ajlān’s work no concrete image of her partner materializes. This is an elusive figure, on the one hand close and warm, while on the other distant and unattainable:

Neither walls nor rivers hold me back from loving you
[...]
Not even my heart can repress my love
Only your love can forbid me from loving you⁵³³

The role of the poet in the relationships described is ambiguous in character. One can even have doubts as to whether she herself is the lyrical “I” of the works:

I am Scheherazade and you twilight
Whose whisper sounds like madness

⁵³² *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁵³³ Fathīyya ‘Ajlān, *Taḥaddī*, in: *Hawāmish...*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

[...]

In the rhythm of my heart there hides a tale which I will dream until sunrise⁵³⁴

Faṭḥiyya ‘Ajlān’s poetical world can really at times be its own form of escape from everyday life and life’s monotony. On the other hand her poetry is also a means of experiencing her own feelings, it is a way of expressing everything that hides within her and that which surrounds her as well. Of especial note in her poetry is the fact that throughout it remains authentic and that the poet is able to share this authenticity with the reader.

There are very many concepts regarding what exactly poetry is and equally what it bestows on the reader and the writer themselves. Some claim that it is an expression of an unseen reality, the world of the senses perceived through intuition. Others say that poetry is the garden of the imagination created by an artist’s sensitivity. There are also those for whom poetry is a certain way of perceiving and describing the world in which we live.

It is just such a poetry, with its roots deep in our reality, that **Sawsan Dahnīm** presents in her volume *Qubla fī mahabb an-nisyān* (*A Kiss on the Breath of Forgetfulness*). Already in the introduction the poet talks of the mood that the collection will take when writing about the poem *I’tidhār* (*An Apology*):

Forgive me reader
If my sobbing becomes yours
But, when sorrow fulfils your heart
Or weakness pervades your soul⁵³⁵

Sawsan Dahnīm is far from elated. The world in which she lives and observes on a daily basis is rarely able to move her to feelings of happiness and joy. The reality viewed through her eyes is one that is first and foremost false, full of deceit, a lack of understanding and pain. The poet does not refer directly to concrete situations. Her works are general though at the same time very intimate reflections on the subject of life; these are presented in a poetic and unusually metaphoric form. In the poem *Al-Amīr al-muḍnī bi-l-maḥabba* (*The Prince difficult to Love*) we read:

We drank the pain
And sowed the flower of suffering
Which threw the shadow of the past poisoned with deceit on the present
We drank our tears like old wine on a sleepless night...⁵³⁶

The work is imbued with bitterness which appears to have, in an indissoluble way, a link with human existence. We do not discover what has caused the poet, who

⁵³⁴ Faṭḥiyya ‘Ajlān, *Taḥawwulāt Shahrāzād*, in: *Hawāmish...*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

⁵³⁵ Sawsan Dahnīm, *I’tidhār*, in: *Qubla fī mahabb an-nisyān*, Damascus, 2002, p. 7.

⁵³⁶ Sawsan Dahnīm, *Al-Amīr al-muḍnī bi-l-maḥabba*, in: *Qubla...*, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

is at the same time the poem's lyrical "I", to perceive the world in such a way. Her words are a bitter commentary on what she feels and experiences.

For us a dreamy night
Balconies full of gallows
We jump on the gilded guillotines
The graveside flowers, the hell of despair
And the throne flowing with tears on which the victims fight
They say that this is the curse of the gods⁵³⁷

Life is a constant struggle for Sawsan Dahnīm, tears and struggle are as much with herself as with others. Conscious or not we head towards self-destruction. There is no turning back from this route. It is difficult to understand why this should be so. The poet does not explain reality but merely describes it as she perceives it.

One may gain the impression that the poet's view of the world is also influenced by her lack of success in love. In one of her poems we read:

The one who is no longer
Non-present has passed into non-memory
And my heart searches for the remains of love and drops of feeling
The balcony awaits for the whispers of a lover [...]
Groans, it smashes and the echo dies!⁵³⁸

It is difficult to live alone in a world devoid of love. It is difficult to derive joy from such a life and to see in it even the slightest rays of hope for the future. A lack of understanding, unrequited feelings mean that our existence becomes the greyness of autumn. However in autumn the most wonderful colours can be seen, one may take joy from the pastel shades of the landscape and read the announcement of change. Sawsan Dahnīm is, however, too deeply rooted in this greyness for her to see the brighter sides of life, even though her poetry exudes a beauty in metaphor and language. She most often refers to the reader in the first person. Her works are unusually intimate and as a result of their form they can constitute their own call for dialogue or challenge for the readers. The poems from the collection *Qubla fī mahabb an-nisyān* (*A Kiss on the Breath of Forgetfulness*) are above all inspiration to reflect on the contemporary world and the spiritual state within man.

One may freely state in the context of **Ja'far Ḥasan's** (see Biographies) poetry that lyricism has more than one face. At times, flowing lightly, it carries the readers on the metaphorical waves of the author's imagination, while at times it entwines us in a verbiage of hidden meanings and associations, the meaning of which we are never totally sure of. The subject of love dominates in Ja'far Ḥasan's works, undefined desires, yearning and unfulfilled hopes. It is difficult to point here to a dominant motif which would unite the collection into a single whole. It seems that the joint

⁵³⁷ Sawsan Dahnīm, *Naḥnu al-ladhīna*, in: *Qubla...*, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

⁵³⁸ Sawsan Dahnīm, *Wayamūt aṣ-ṣadṣadā*, in: *Qubla...*, *op.cit.*, p. 30.

element in all of the poems is the atmosphere that reigns in them, a certain characteristic mood which is possibly a mood of loss or uncertainty. In the poem *'Awdā (The Return)* the author writes:

Your voice
 In music in my heart
 Which at night
 Overflows in the soul
 With love
 [...]

 This is you...?
 Is night busy
 With the fabric of unhappiness⁵³⁹

Love is such as we see and experience it. Though it is also how we would like it to be. It is we who create the myths about it and we ourselves who create the unreal images of those we love. In confrontation with reality our imagination about love often changes, it is corrected by everydayness. This feeling can elevate us, give us hope and conviction as to the sense of existence, but there are moments when it loses its sparkle. There then remains only a memory, a consciousness that it was, that we ourselves were a part of it and that it pulsed with life in us. The lyrical "I" returns in the work to the past, to the days filled with peace and harmony. It recalls in its memory a character unusually close to it, at the side of whom it would again wish to be. Unfortunately there remains in it only the images of times passed which have irrevocably gone.

The said uncertainty and loss which is so visible in Ja'far Ḥasan 's poetry is called forth by a consciousness of a certain inability to cross the immanent nature of the world that surrounds us. Desire embraces fully everything that is around us, that which is a part of we ourselves, our experiences and recollections extend beyond human possibilities. At times we would like our emotions to be linked to concrete experiences to become in us tangible reality but then we would be standing on the border of two worlds – that of the spirit and that of matter. In the work *Man yu'ṭīnī (Whoever will give me)* the poet asks directly:

[...]

 Whoever offers me a palm
 Whose shoulders reach the heart
 Whoever offers me a river
 The sea
 A beach
 [...] ⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁹ Ja'far Ḥasan, *'Awdā* (on the basis of a manuscript given me by the Author, in Bahrain).

⁵⁴⁰ Ja'far Ḥasan, *Man yu'ṭīnī* (on the basis of a manuscript given me by the Author, in Bahrain).

We are a part of the world but it exists in part in us. Yet this mysterious existence of the world within us is achieved exclusively in the expanse of the spirit, thought and emotion. Is Ja‘far Ḥasan’s poetry an attempt to penetrate the spirit and matter? Rather not. His lyrics are first and foremost an expression of his extremely personal dilemmas. He does not create poetic castles in the sand. He attempts to give a material form to his reflections, and apparently even more often to his emotions. Hence they are not always clear to the reader. The author writes in blank verse and it occurs that the division into stanzas proposed by him does not help in the appropriate reading of the works.

PART TWO
MODERN PROSE OF BAHRAIN

THE BEGINNINGS OF PROSE WRITING

The contemporary rebirth of literary cultural life in Bahrain began only with the start of the twentieth century. At the head of these Bahraini restorers of Arabic and literary tradition stood **Sheikh Ibrāhīm bin Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa** (1850–1933) a poet, writer and bibliophile.¹ He undertook in his works an examination of social questions, in a way similar to Amīn ar-Rīḥānī and ‘Abd Allāh aṭ-Ṭā’ī. The meetings of Bahraini intellectuals that took place at his home constituted a discussion forum for poetical and literary matters. Sheikh Ibrāhīm Āl Khalīfa possessed an enormous library. He brought Arabic books from India, subscribed to religious and socio-cultural magazines, as well as maintaining contact with many eminent minds of the day including Amīn ar-Rīḥānī, ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ar-Rashīd and Ibrāhīm al-Yāzījī. As has been noted by the poet and eminent literary critic Dr. ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī: “Sheikh Ibrāhīm bin Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa belonged to those pioneers responsible for the renaissance of contemporary poetry in Bahrain”.² At present his work is being continued by **Sheikha Mayy Āl Khalīfa** the director of the Sheikh Ibrāhīm bin Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa Centre. The centre has its own library, publishes literary materials in the “Ishrāqāt” series, as well as organizing lectures and literary evenings and meetings.

Thanks to the efforts of the known thinker and poet **Salmān at-Tājir** the National Public Library was founded in Manama in 1913. Shortly afterwards the Nādī Iqbāl Club was established, with the first Literary Club, An-Nādī al-Adabī, appearing in 1920. This Literary Club was founded in Muharraḡ thanks to the significant support of the Bahraini dean for culture and literature – Sheikh **Muḥammad bin ‘Īsā Āl Khalīfa**. Later other clubs came into being which propagated cultural-literary activities, including Nādī al-Baḡrayn (1937), Nādī an-Naḡḡa (1946) and others.³ The Club Nādī al-‘Urūba, founded in 1939, organized from the moment of its inception dozens

¹ Muḥammad Jābir al-Anṣārī, *Al-Majmū‘a al-kāmila li-āthār Sheikh Ibrāhīm bin Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa*, Bahrain, 1968; Makkī Muḥammad Sarḡān, *Ash-shā‘ir al-kabīr Ibrāhīm bin Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa*, Bahrain, 1993.

² ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, *Shu‘arā’ al-Baḡrayn al-mu‘āṣirūn*, Bahrain, 1988, p. 17.

³ ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *al-Mu‘assasāt ath-thaqāfiyya*, in: *Ath-Thaqāfa fī al-Baḡrayn fī thalātha ‘uqūd*, Bahrain, 1993, p. 200.

of lectures and literary-cultural meetings. From the very beginning the most eminent thinkers and men of letters met there. The Club produces the journal “al-‘Urūba”.⁴

An important literary event was the founding, in 1969 in Manama, of the Union of Bahraini Writers – *Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb* whose foundation was largely down to the activities of eminent Bahraini thinkers and poets and writers like: Dr Muḥammad Jābir al-Anṣārī, Dr ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, Dr Ibrāhīm al-Ghulūm, ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, Qāsim Ḥaddād, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf, Ya‘qūb Muḥarraqī, Ḥamda Khamīs, Yūsuf Ḥasan, and others. The Union was to support the development of the intellectual and literary movement in Bahrain, support young literary talents, develop cooperation between artists, as well as to organize national and international literary meetings. In 1983 the journal “*Kalimāt*” started to be published. Here were published the poetic and prose works of contemporary writers along side literary sketches.

In 1986 the National Council for Culture, the Arts and Literature was called into being (*Al-Majlis al-Waṭanī li-l-thaqāfa wa al-funūn wa al-adāb*), its aim being the support of the development of artistic creative life in Bahrain, the support of the creators of culture, the organization of artistic exhibitions and cultural festivals, as well as cooperation with other cultural centres abroad. Since 1994 the Council has published the journal “*al-Baḥrayn ath-Thaqāfi*”.⁵ The National Cultural Forum (*al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfi al-Ahlī*), founded in 1995, has been from its very inception an important element in the literary and national life of Bahrain. The National Cultural Forum regularly organizes poetry meetings and lectures on literary criticism. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Jāsīm Kānū deserves especial note for his services to this cultural institution, supported by the well-known modern poet ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa. The National Cultural Forum, through the organizing of literary workshops, cultural festivals and the publication of the most interesting literary works, attempts to promote the achievements of young creative talent from Bahrain and abroad.

An important role in the development of contemporary Bahraini literature has been played by the press. Its development is linked with the name ‘Abd Allāh az-Zā’id who, in the period 1939–1944, published the weekly “*Jarīdat al-Baḥrayn*”. The first socio-cultural journal was “*Ṣawt al-Baḥrayn*” which was published from 1950 to 1955. The cultural-literary weekly “*al-Khamīla*” (1952–1956) appeared side by side with newspapers of a political character like “*al-Qāfila*” (1952–1954) or “*al-Waṭan*” (1955–1956). The newspaper “*Jarīdat al-Aḍwā*” started to be published in 1956. In the period 1976–1985 there appeared in the literary arena the quarterly “*Kitābāt*” which had been founded by ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa. This journal published innovative articles and literary works that propagated the rebirth of Bahraini literature.

⁴ Taqī Muḥammad al-Baḥārna, *Nādī al-‘Urūba. Sittūna ‘āman fī khidmat ath-thaqāfa wa al-mujtama’*, Bahrain, 1999.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 201–210.

The creation of literary clubs and the development of the press directly influenced the flowering of cultural-literary life in Bahrain by creating conditions in which writers, poets and intellectuals could be published. Their works presented a vast array of viewpoints and positions reflecting the changes underway in the country.

One of the pioneers of short stories is ‘Alī Sayyār, born in 1926 in Bahrain. Years of studies in Cairo, numerous journeys and longer stays in Kuwait, the Arab Emirates, Qatar, Syria, and Lebanon, provided him with enormous literary material for short stories. In 1976 he published his first collection of short stories, entitled *As-Sayyīd (The Master)*. The subject matter of the stories revolves around power, greed for money, and authority of a father dominating in a family. The writer insists on limiting the father’s power and demands more freedom in deciding about an entity’s individual needs. The title *As-Sayyīd* decides about his 10-year-old son Muhammad’s fate in a way that is incomprehensible for the boy:

On Saturday my father entered the house. It was late. He said to my mother in a strange cold voice: Today everything must change.⁶

Despite the fact that the boy did not understand the meaning of those words:

I saw the father for the last time [...] I did not understand my mother’s tears, and why I left the home where I had lived and where I had been born. The home that was a little kingdom [...] I understood it only after years had passed... This was when I understood the meaning of an odious thing whose name is divorce [...]⁷

The situation of the mother and the boy changed. Both were forced to work to earn their living. The boy found a job at a “new Master’s” (*As-Sayyīd al-jadīd*). He was supposed to transport something to Lebanon, something he did not see. He got a thousand liras for each transport. He was grateful for the master for hiring him to do the job. After some time, his life changed. He took pleasure in all sorts of entertainment including wine and women: “I started to look at life from the perspective of money. From the perspective of pleasures...”⁸ He bought his mother a house, willing to recompense her for all those years of pain and suffering:

She asked about this mysterious wealth that I had acquired. I did not answer. I only laughed and calmed her saying I had found a decent job.⁹

Eventually, this job led him to prison. The title *As-Sayyīd (The Master)* is a reference to the new master whose name was money.

The protagonist of a story, entitled *Fī yadī jamājim (There are Skulls in my Hand)*, becomes lost because of his desire to rule life. He was locked up in a mental hospital after he ran into the street with a skull in his hand. The reason for this was

⁶ ‘Alī Sayyār, *As-Sayyīd*, in: *As-Sayyīd*, Bahrain, 1976, p. 66.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

his mother's death which he, as a doctor, could not have prevented: "My mother died in my hands [...] Her hand dropped on my arm. A drop of blood appeared on my shirt".¹⁰ The man is woeful and feels guilty that after studying in England he let the person he loved so much die. His fulfilled dream of becoming a doctor, because "a doctor carries the keys of power on earth",¹¹ fell into ruin. His desire to decide about the fates of others' did not come true.

Ambition was also the motivation for characters in the story *Al-Ma'raka (The Battle)*. Like previous works, this story is of a retrospective character. Abu Muhammad claims that Abu Su'ad is a liar. Both men were ship captains. They dealt in pearl fishing, which was a common activity in Bahrain. They rivalled with one another trying to fish the biggest pearl possible. Abu Muhammad wants to beat Abu Su'ad at any price. The action takes place on the sea where their ships meet. Their goal is to fish out this one biggest pearl. Meanwhile, the weather gets worse, which causes Abu Su'ad to withdraw from the competition. Abu Muhammad, filled with greed for victory, does not care about his and his crew's fate and wants to fish out the pearl regardless:

Death opens its mouth with every leap of a wild wave [...] The ship sinks. The torn sail flaps in the air [...] Mountains of waves surround the ship [...] One of them leaps on the deck. The men struggle with the waves. They commence a battle for their lives [...]¹²

Finally, Abu Su'ad's ship reaches the shore. A black flag flaps on the mast. Those who survived fight with fear. Abu Muhammad also survived, but this event drove him insane. For the next thirty years, till his death, he claims Abu Su'ad is a liar since it is he who is the biggest pearl fisher.

'Alī Sayyār sees power not only in ambition and money, but also in corruption and hypocrisy. The protagonist of the story *Sa'aṭruduka yā 'Abd as-Salām (I Will Throw You Out, 'Abd as-Salām)* is a high-ranking civil servant on whose decisions a lot depends:

On my desk there lies a piece of paper on which I signed my name. It is not the only one. There are more than a hundred of them. Each of them has a different name on it. I signed my name on all of them. I left only one piece of paper without my signature. I put it aside so that it would not get mixed up with the others.¹³

It was documents of 'Abd as-Salam's, a friend of this civil servant, who did not sign his old friend's leave:

¹⁰ 'Alī Sayyār, *Fī yadī jamājim*, in: *As-Sayyīd...*, *op.cit.*, p. 62.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

¹² 'Alī Sayyār, *Al-Ma'raka*, in: *As-Sayyīd...*, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

¹³ 'Alī Sayyār, *Sa'aṭruduka yā 'Abd as-Salām*, in: *As-Sayyīd...*, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

Eight years ago, I and ‘Abd as-Salam were colleagues attending the same school. He was good at mathematics, and I at geography. We were more than just colleagues; we were friends. His life was a part of my life. My interests were a part of his interests.¹⁴

The writer values friendship but opposes settling things because of connections. This is reflected in his other works, e.g. in *Ḥikāyat ‘asharat danānīr* (*A Tale of Ten Dinars*) in which a civil servant is visited by a petitioner with a bribe. When the civil servant asks him who had suggested this idea, he hears that it was his friend Yusuf from the ministry. It turned out that this important Yusuf obtained his position by handing out bribes. Nevertheless, the civil servant does not accept the bribe.

...ten dinars in my hand. I could do nothing... but look at those ten dinars and throw them into the bin. My lips say to the man standing in front of me: I am subordinate to Yusuf. Please take your place in the queue.¹⁵

The author draws attention to the fact that often inappropriate people occupy administrative offices only because of connections or bribes.

‘Alī Sayyār criticizes bribery, superfluous ambition and hypocrisy. In the story *Ma’ziq* (*Dilemma*) we meet civil servants again. Each of them is false, envious, and willing to gossip about their colleagues.¹⁶ There are few who want to be honest in their occupations, which is the desire of the protagonist of a story, entitled *As-Salālim* (*Stairs*):

On the stairs of this ministry, more than two months ago there was a piece of paper in my hand with a request for a job. Any job. Even if this meant being a porter. I had finished secondary school.¹⁷

The man visited the office every ten days. He was going to and fro on the title stairs and each time he was sent away empty-handed. He said to himself:

Look, what is the value of being a human in society. I want to live. I just want to live. I do not want a marble palace, or a luxurious car. I do not want a beautiful wife. I just want to live. Sometimes it seems to me that animals are luckier than I am. They may find something to eat. And me, a human... where can I find something to eat?¹⁸

For this young man a job meant humanity. Inability to find a job meant humiliation. When he finally found a job he shouted: “I have become a human!”¹⁹

In his works ‘Alī Sayyār expresses his regret that it is hard for honest people to find their place in the modern world. A greed for money and power destroys the joy and beauty of life. In his short stories he also included a critique of men who do not identify themselves with the reality they live in. The fact that he omits moralizing

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁵ ‘Alī Sayyār, *Ḥikāyat ‘asharat danānīr*, in: *As-Sayyid...*, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁶ ‘Alī Sayyār, *Ma’ziq*, in: *As-Sayyid...*, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

¹⁷ ‘Alī Sayyār, *As-Salālim*, in: *As-Sayyid...*, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 47–48.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

tones makes his stories approachable. They make people sensitive and open their minds to the aspects of reality they have not noticed before. They will not become invalid despite social development and historical changes.

Muḥammad al-Mājid's work breaks free of the scheme of the difficult and hermetic. His short stories are written in a simple language and the images presented attempt to arouse reflection on contemporary man. In the first short story from the collection published in 1970 in Kuwait, entitled *Maqāṭi' min sīmfūniyya ḥazīna* (*Fragments of a Sorrowful Symphony*), he presents us with reflections on the subject of day and night. One can clearly see that day values itself the more, because: "In the day one can forget who one is",²⁰ while at night one fears: "the next day died, and the next night begins!... Darkness approaches. Every time I sense it like a spear thrust deep into the depth of my heart".²¹ The hero is presented as a part of the whole, experiencing those same desires of freedom. The language and style of the short story is worthy of attention. Here the hero conducts conversations with an internal derisive voice:

- How long can you hold out, ha, ha
- Haven't I told you to be quiet?!... I drained the glass²²

In observing the room full of drunk people various thoughts come to his mind: "Are you able to discover what happens behind their laughter?"²³

The author employs in the short story many dots in order to realize the natural pauses in thought. The exclamations "ah", "ha" that appear are often used in daily conversations.

The subject of darkness is continued in the short story *al-‘Ālam yamūt fī miḥraq* (*The World is Dying in Fire*). Darkness brings forth strange thoughts and a lack of activity intensifies it: "I will die this night, if boredom and emptiness die".²⁴ The hero is taken by a deep depression, he talks to himself:

My grandma is better than I am a million times. At least she believes in something. And I... What do I believe in? Emptiness? Death? Defeat?... I have only known this in life.²⁵

For people like him there is no future in the country. They have been deprived of the possibilities of a normal life and work. The first part is written chaotically, there are a mass of rhetorical questions. In the second the hero gives voice to his feelings to a woman over the telephone who turns out to be a prostitute.

²⁰ Muḥammad al-Mājid, *Bukā' šamt fī layl ṭawīl*, in: *Maqāṭi' min sīmfūniyya ḥazīna*, Kuwait, 1970, p. 3.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 6.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

²⁴ Muḥammad al-Mājid, *al-‘Ālam yamūt fī miḥraq*, in: *Maqāṭi'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

We can find various faces of sorrow and depression in the volume *Maqāṭi' min sīmfūniyya ḥazīna (Fragments from a Sorrowful Symphony)*. In the short story *Ṣadāqa 'ajība (A Strange Friendship)* the hero realizes the truth about himself, that he and more than likely his internal "I" are different people, behaving differently when in private and reacting differently to the exterior and that the true value of life is to be found in he himself: "You and I, we are different, Friend! We should understand this. I have so much to tell you".²⁶ In his evaluation only two things count in life: love and friendship.

A yearning for a free homeland runs through the short story *Liman yughannī al-qamar? (For Whom Does the Moon Sing?)* which the hero defines as "the search for light in the dark".²⁷ In another short story *Al-Jahīm (The Hellish Fire)* a lack of faith in his own strengths pushes the hero to abandon his surroundings. The short story shocks with the pessimism of the first sentences:

If everything disappeared then it would be a triumph and success... If the whole world and everyone in it drowned in an abyss it would be a great victory.²⁸

With time the tone of the short story calms down as if under the influence of a woman's recollections, a woman the hero loves although he cannot be with her. They have a rather different idea of happiness. According to him: "happiness is when a man does not feel alone in this world".²⁹ While she claims: "It is enough that a man thinks he's happy".³⁰ Participating in the wedding of his beloved to another man he experiences pure agony:

Maybe there will be an earthquake and this world will be destroyed before I give her my hand...

Maybe everything will stop and I will die before I give her my hand...³¹

All allusions relate to the motherland which poets and writers have many times identified with a woman. The author expresses hope that one day his country will be free for its citizens and not bound to an occupying power. The hero feels sorrow and is depressed when talking to his beloved: "I created a poem. But it was not written in blue ink, but in the blood of crimes and darkness".³²

In this short story there is no room for happiness and hope. The hero falls into depression. He does not see any future for himself or any aim in life. His feelings are expressed by the words: "I haven't found anything in my life... Sorrow I meet at every step and I will continue to meet it. Always".³³

²⁶ Muḥammad al-Mājid, *Ṣadāqa 'ajība*, in: *Maqāṭi'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

²⁷ Muḥammad al-Mājid, *Liman yughannī al-qamar?*, in: *Maqāṭi'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 59.

²⁸ Muḥammad al-Mājid, *Al-Jahīm*, in: *Maqāṭi'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 22.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

In the last short story that brings to an end this symphony of sorrow there appears a certain medicine: “Raise your glasses! Hide yourself in them for ever! For this is the one asylum from the sorrows of the world”.³⁴

But is alcohol able to muffle the questions whirling in his head? The hero engages in discussion with a friend on the subject of the meaning of such a life where there is a lack of hope for a better tomorrow. He himself admits to defeat with the words: “Someone else better than me will be able to put the sparkle back into her eyes!”.³⁵ With these very words Muḥammad al-Mājid finishes his short story and the whole volume. His short stories are a reflection of the views and dilemmas of a generation, a valuable and interesting document. There is an absence in them of principles and over sensitivity, but there is a vein of hope without which it would be difficult for man to live.

Joseph Conrad claimed that art is the great ear and a great eye of the world; in listening and seeing one is able to feel shame, irritate and awaken one’s conscience. It is just such creativity that characterizes the work of **Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf**. Of especial note is his second collection of short stories, entitled *Fīzinār* (Viznar)³⁶ in which, on the one hand, he takes us into the world of intimate experiences, while on the other he reflects the difficulties of Arabs associated with the political situation in the Arab world. The collection opens with a short story, entitled *Khawārij az-zamān al-ātī* (*In the Direction of Approaching Time*), in which against the setting of a desert landscape the writer sketches the characters of a father and a son who exist on the border of life and death for the son Madi was born in secret and therefore all the time must spend in hiding:

Madi looked around in all directions. He calmed down on seeing no one on the horizon. He disappeared into the tent to waken his sleeping son Muqbal and to take him out for the daily custom of observing the setting sun.³⁷

The author, in a long monologue by the father, ensures for himself the possibility of reflecting on the subject of the political situation in the Arab world:

We lived here amidst the dunes... we had homes – I don’t know if you understand what I mean – what a house is that is not a tent... These memories torment me. They took away power from us and it was not then animals who covered this land and did not carry on their backs our profits. How proud we were! Do you know what pride is Muqbal? Do you know what the gleam of gold is and what it can do? News of our good fortune became known in all the corners of the world. And when a foreigner passed by our headquarters we would invite him in and would serve him wine from our groves.

³⁴ Muḥammad al-Mājid, *Aṣḍā’ al-fajī’a*, in: *Maqāti’...*, *op.cit.*, p. 89.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

³⁶ The place where the poet Federico Garcia Lorca was executed, shot by Falange militia on August 19, 1936 and thrown into an unmarked grave in or around between Viznar and Alfacar, near Granada, as explained by Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf himself.

³⁷ Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf, *Khawārij az-zamān al-ātī*, in: *Fīzinār*, Beirut – Bahrain, 1985, p. 6.

Our bravery weakened, our laws disappeared, we started to act strangely and small mindedly not like our forefathers. In the end we became models of stupidity and fodder for dullards who dared to defile our most holy places... We were overcome with sorrow and the whole splendour faded. They occupied our strongest capitals and they became the most docile of capitals. We forgot the codes and law to fight for the remains, we mistook friend for foe. And when they started to destroy our most beautiful city we hid... and it became the most submissive city. We allowed for everything, as weak-willed as the grass we were plucked from our roots, buried in a sand storm. We forgot with every attack about the previous one. Our memory forgot names and dates... We are dispersed, on the border of extinction, as other nations have died out before us. You ask me if one of us lives somewhere in cities? Of course, kingdoms derive from us..., which in every matter turn to their occupiers for help.³⁸

This sentimental tale of unity, prosperity and the bright past of the Arabs contrasts with the present situation, deriding human dignity, the life situation of two lonely Bedouins – portrayed almost as the last representatives of a dying breed. The monologue clearly points to those who are guilty for this state of affairs. On the one hand a lack of foresight, a loss of strong will, the degradation of the Arabs themselves, while on the other hand the willingly utilization of this state of affairs by the colonial powers. The writer, through the mouthpiece of Mahdi, condemns the submissiveness of the Arabs and is unable to come to terms with the loss of unity and the loss of Jerusalem: “And when they started to destroy our most beautiful city we hid... and it became the most submissive city”. Blameworthy, for the writer, are the leaders of the Arab world, the self-proclaimed authorities sponsored by Western governments. This very fact represents the greatest obstacle for a return to Arab unity (*al-waḥda al-‘arabiyya*). The story ends however with a certain note of optimism for Muqbal is a character who does not accept passive waiting. He wants to act and helped by a character similar to himself from the literary world of Ghassān Kanafānī, who inspires Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf, he sets off in the direction of the new generation and times devoid of opportunism and servility.

The short story *Al-Waqt (Time)* is a display of unusual literary inventiveness. Its subject matter is the passing of time and death, yet portrayed in an unconventional way, constructing an unusual conception of death and through this of life itself. We are dealing here with personified characters of time. The writer shows us his own key to one of the aspects of human life which belongs to the time of the title. Time is subordinated to physical changes. It clearly speaks of dividing and scattering its particles, and also transforming into a drop of sweat. The next stage of the transformation that proves the manifestation of this dimension of our reality is that time: “again falls into sleepiness”.³⁹

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 9–10.

³⁹ Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf, *Al-Waqt*, in: *Fīzinār...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 12–15.

The closing of the works with descriptions of scenes occurring just after the death of the main heroes is a certain creative concept. This is what happens in this case. Sin, ecstasy, a sense of guilt and the role of time all finally link together.

One of the shortest of the short stories is *Qirā'a fī al-waraqā al-qadīma* (*A Drawing from Childhood*). It deals with the very personal experiences of a child and its developing consciousness, which is the writer's regression to childhood and the feelings associated with it. The writer tells of the misunderstanding experienced by small children on the part of those closest to them by means of the example of a short episode in drawing. The work is on the one hand reflections upon childhood sensitivity, while on the other it shows the way children perceive reality which is not understood by adults.

Problems of motherhood, preparing for it, the desire to become a mother as well as strict social norms of behaviour are dealt with by the short story *Al-Maw'ūda* (*Buried Alive*). On the one hand it is a surprising subject for a man to take up, on the other hand the writer is a psychology and philosophy graduate. Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf attempts to go deeply into the consciousness of a young girl who is transforming into a woman. The first period makes her sensitive to her body and its changing shape. She starts to think about herself as about a perceived mature person, falling into the embarrassing gazes of men. And finally she experiences pride in being

a woman. And here the Islamic norms of morality in relation to women step in. The heroine's mother, a representative of an older generation, knowing what a girl of her age knows and should do, tells her as a warning a story about her peer Maryam who was murdered by her father as a result of an ordinary law that demands the death of a girl in a case whereby she becomes pregnant outside of marriage. Here there occurs a dramatic description of the severing of the head by means of a sickle during work in the fields:

The father came, grabbed her by the hair and pulled her back. He touched the delicate girl's neck with the blade of the sickle. Initially she heard the cutting of the grasses growing in the weak damp soil, and then the blow, dealt neither hard nor soft. And the next armfuls of grass ripped from the brown earth fell similar to balls. The father carelessly cast her there where the rest were piled up. The head hit against many others and her eyes looked at the figure of her father with blind submission. The drops of blood did not separate from any of the stalks after they were severed. The girl was gripped by a desire to shout: Father, but I'm a palm! But her mouth filled with earth. Her consciousness registered the beginning of the last impressions, the last moments on earth and the first in the other world... noise... and the muffled crying of her mother moving off into the distance.⁴⁰

From this cruel moment the writer combines in one the story of the adolescent girl desiring to derive from the fertility growing within her and the murdered Maryam.

⁴⁰ Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf, *Al-Maw'ūda*, in: *Fīzinār...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 39–40.

The palm – the alter ego of everyone desiring the state of motherhood – fulfils an unusually momentous role and is the symbol of fertility.

Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf is actively engaged in theatrical and journalist activities (see Biographies). In his works he depicts people who are not suited to life, unable to fight, passively subjecting themselves to their fate. His artistic sensitivity and poetic impressionism are the most lasting aspects of his creativity.

Two views on literature and artistic creativity have abounded for centuries. The first proclaims that literature is divinity with the creator being its priest – elevated above the crowd, talented and immortal. The second brings literature down to earth ascribing to it practical and didactic aims with the creator a teacher who passes on the works of his life for future generations. **Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik** conveys to us and his heirs his life’s literary output (see Biographies). He is already able in the first volume of short stories; *Mawt ṣāhib al-‘araba (The Death of a Carriage Owner)*, published in 1973, to perceive in a masterly way shocking images from rural life and that of the urban poor. He employs the technique of the visualized short story, characterized by lucid significance and the utilization of direct stylistic relations. According to Nāfi‘ ‘Aqrāwī:

Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik’s literary beginnings are extremely close to socialist realism where the emphasis is placed on postulates of typicality, class affiliation, didacticism, bias and aspects rural in character.⁴¹

Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik’s realism is marked by his adoption of descriptions of Bahrain before the discovery of oil, as well as the stigmatization of social indifference towards the injustice dealt out to the weakest. The hero of the title short story, ‘Abd Allah, despite his slight physique works everyday pulling a huge cart. In this way he earns his daily bread. When he dies, however, no one even notices the fact because people absorbed in their own life have never paid him any attention whatsoever. And if it were not for the stench of his decaying body no one would even notice that he was no longer around.

The second collection; *Naḥnu nuḥibbu ash-shams (We Love the Sun)* was published in 1975, and is political in character. This was an important period for Bahrain. Parliament had been dissolved, and the lives of ordinary people were influenced by the colonizing powers. The sun became a symbol of freedom. The author was politically involved as a member of the national independence movement of Arabs who sympathized with Naser (Ḥarakat al-Qawmiyyīn al-‘Arab). The action of the stories takes place in a small Arab village with the heroes being typical representatives of closed societies and social groupings. We get to know their problems, worries, we learn how complex their internal lives may be. The first of the short stories *Al-Intizār (Awaiting)* is extremely personal in character for it talks of the author’s brother Be-

⁴¹ Nāfi‘ ‘Aqrāwī, *Al-Qāṣṣ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik fī riḥlatihi al-ibdā‘iyya*, in: “al-Ayyām” 4.08.1990, no 516.

der who was arrested at the age of 17. The father recounts in the story: “Look, he was my only source of earthly joy and they have taken him from me...!”⁴² He starts to radically age with the loss. He is not to learn whether his son returns before he dies. The tale ends tragically:

The hand hung in the air, I said not a sound. I felt that a gloom well-known to me was engulfing my being. A bitter, ominous unease grew in my breast like trees in a dark wood. I continued to be silent. My head fell down and hung there like a load which wants to fall. A woman dressed in black approached the place where I stood motionless and said: Poor thing, he died of grief...⁴³

Thanks to the writer’s restraint in the presentation of facts the short story, entitled *Ash-Shaykh al-ladhī yaḍḥak* (*The Old Man Who Laughs*), keeps one in an unusual tension. The cleverly linked descriptions of characters and the world compose themselves neatly into the subject matter which is the illegal taking of land from its rightful owners. The old man who is unable to understand the situation reacts by way of hysterical laughter:

What’s happening in the village?! Not secretly but in full view of all the inhabitants is land being taken from the peasants. Acts of ownership are being destroyed, and in their place new ones appear. Hajj’s land went yesterday, but his laugh began together with the unlawful appropriation of plots in the north. Even Hajj once met with his fellow countrymen in order to talk about drawing consequences from what had happened yet did nothing. He only laughed until he cried with his cheeks puffing out as he did so. His breathing quickened and he quickly calmed down!... At night, even after 12 o’clock people could hear his laughter echoing around...⁴⁴

In the short story *An-Nāfidha* (*The Window*) Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik undertakes the difficult subject of the drama of unmarried women and their world which leads to the window of the title. It closes with a clasp the wholeness of the short story and constitutes a symbol of expectations and dreams. The heroine of the short story each day painfully feels the flow of time for she constantly is unable to find a man with whom she can share her life. She becomes, with each wedding procession viewed through this window, all the more depressed. Sara’s grey room contrasts with the joyful and colourful procession, emphasizing her suffering. ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa has said of the collection:

[...] We arrive at a critical analysis of one of the most important Bahraini collections of short stories which is *Naḥnu nuḥibbu ash-shams* [...] Here we see prototypes sculpted by pain, suffering, expectation [...] The collection is the height of critical realism for ‘Abd al-Malik [...]⁴⁵

⁴² Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, *Al-Intizār*, in: *Naḥnu nuḥibbu ash-shams*, Beirut, 1975, p. 9.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, *Ash-Shaykh al-ladhī yaḍḥak*, in: *Naḥnu...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 18–19.

⁴⁵ Manṣūr Muḥammad Sarḥān, *Wāqa’ al-ḥaraka al-fikriyya fī al-Baḥrayn 1940–1990*, Bahrain, 1993, p. 75.

Despite the short nature of the stories, which appear to be uncomplicated in their construction, they often present the reader with difficult tasks. If they are fragmentary in character, the story appears as if plucked from a context which one must reconstruct for oneself and therefore the need to build the said fragment and to find an appropriate reference point for it.

Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik’s short stories from the collection *Thuqūb fī ri’at al-madīna* (*The Holey Lungs of the City*) are written into the Arabic tradition. The author relates to ancient Arabic folk beliefs of “the evil eye” which represents the evil gaze of a man or a genie which brings with it misfortune.⁴⁶ There appear in the text typical sentences from the Qur’an. Two of these short stories: *Dhū aḍ-ḍaḥak adh-dhahabī* (*The Man with a Laugh like Gold*) and *Aṭ-Ṭā’ir al-akhḍar* (*The Green Bird*) recall the hermetism of tribal bonds in the Arab world pre-Islam. The heroes of the short stories *Al-Ḥuzn al-akhras* (*Silent Sorrow*) and *Al-Fuzā’a* (*The Coward*) play on the monotony of life. Tiredness and toil are a symbol of a world in which the sun beats down mercilessly, the pace of life steadily slows down, and man himself becomes a burden for himself:

[...] he imagined his tomorrow and its passing. The streets which he crosses, the pavements, the people, the traders and the faces, those self same faces. Everything is extremely monotonous – the boring office, the boring home, the boring street and boring conversations. Nothing in his life changes, nothing happens.⁴⁷

In the short story *Al-Fuzā’a* (*The Coward*) the author presents also the problem of the strong bonds between a son and his mother, something characteristic for Arab families:

When he was small he went everywhere with his mother. With his thumb in his mouth he would hide amidst the folds of her woollen coat [...] He became a man, so life brought to him additional burdens. Who would give him a crust? Who would shave his whiskers? Who would wipe his face or wash his mouth? He lived as if dead amongst people, he was not to belong to this world or any other.⁴⁸

The reader is easily able to notice the clearly drawn border within the short stories between the worlds of men and women:

Everyone came in front of the houses and alleys, al-Wafā’ started to recall a blooming heart. Umm Su‘ad followed the procession of children and old sailors. Only embarrassed girls stayed at home watching the proceedings from windows.⁴⁹

In the short stories from the collection *Thuqūb fī ri’at al-madīna* (*The Holey Lungs of the City*) the writer clearly draws the world presented, the time and image of the hero. He decides against telling the whole story and composes fragments rather

⁴⁶ Marek M. Dziekan, *Arabia Magica*, Warszawa, 1993, p. 105.

⁴⁷ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, *Al-Fuzā’a*, in: *Thuqūb fī ri’at al-madīna*, Bahrain, 1979, p. 28.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, *Aṭ-Ṭā’ir al-akhḍar*, in: *Thuqūb...*, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

than writing the order of particular events. These fragments rivet the reader's attention with their plasticity or are so minimal that the reader himself must enlarge upon them:

Dusk falls. His way leads to all the routes of the world. Impressed in them are the tracks of human feet and the paws of dogs... A wandering trader.⁵⁰

In this way he is the co-author of the story, he builds it out of the images suggested. These are placed within two or three time divisions which, however, fairly quickly, and sometimes completely unexpectedly, intertwine. The essence of this technique is syntax which gives the impression of chaos, and yet organizes the construction of the short story. The sentences are on the whole short and succinct, but reality appears only at the moment of placing them into a whole:

Damned disappointment. Why did she do this? Did he still not believe her? She raised her voice. Asked fate for it all to be as in a dream. Then she said: It seemed to me... that you... They laughed.⁵¹

The author employs also verbless sentences, or fragmentary sentences, which results in a quick, as if in a kaleidoscope, movement of images and a whirling reflection of thoughts: "Fear, unease, death. Unable to escape from these. Is he really ill? The illness lurks in wait for him..."⁵²

This recalls a stream of consciousness, though sufficiently unusual as it is not led directly to the hero, only the author relates all in the third person. His vision of the world presented appears to be limited, although he penetrates the consciousness of the characters. The reader however learns nothing in advance, he can but expect a certain development to the events, summing up subsequent images. The sentences plucked from somewhere impose a fragmentarization of the viewed expanse as if surreptitiously. The author does not allow for a concrete insight into it, but merely a few passing glimpses. Equally the hero appears initially in a hazy vision, and a clear outline is only obtained after the synthesis of all the images. The author rejects therefore the role of the traditional story teller and inclines us to read in a way reminiscent of viewing an album with unordered illustrations.

Two of Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik's short stories: *Dhū aḍ-ḍaḥak adh-dhahabī* (*The Man with a Laugh like Gold*) and *Aṭ-Ṭā'ir al-akhḍar* (*The Green Bird*) are noted for a specific element that dominates their composition and around which the presented world is constructed. The main character possesses the key to the events that unfold, while all the events connected with the remaining protagonists are subordinated to him. They always, however, act voluntarily, admire him, listen and unconditionally believe him. This eminent individual is identified with the hope for

⁵⁰ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik, *Al-Huẓn al-akhras*, in: *Thuqūb...*, *op.cit.*, p. 103.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 101.

⁵² Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik, *Al-Fuzā'a*, in: *Thuqūb...*, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

a better life, he is a symbol of animation, and even frees himself from painful constraint:

Umm Su‘ad says: his words are like cold water for the thirsty [...]. When on the Lunar Shore the wave roared, and the sound flowed like soft music, a seagull under a white sky started to sing a song, awakening in hearts elation and joy and suspended lamps in the alleys. Today al-Qadiri returns.⁵³

The saviour appears suddenly in order to abruptly change the existing state of affairs. He functions registered in everydayness and fulfils the role of a healer, in a more or less literal sense:

A wide smile spreads across his lips, expands like sunlight on the whole of his face and radiates on others, flooding human hearts. He has great power of change. He elucidates all worries and turns tears and sorrow into joy.⁵⁴

He is accompanied by a celebratory atmosphere and an aura of adoration. The author suggests that without him the whole world would collapse:

Suddenly Mustafa stopped smiling as if he had exhausted all his supplies [...] It was a strange thing. Everything died, one was questioned by another, they discussed, but completely differed. The women ascribed this to “the evil eye”, others – envy, anyway all were taken by the unusualness of this event.⁵⁵

He paradoxically also emphasizes the unusual role of faith and the myth based upon it, which conditions the existence of the saviour. If it was not for society’s belief in him, he would not fulfil this main role. It turns out, however, that the element of unusualness ascribed to him does not guarantee the divine strength and firmness that the author gives expression to in the moving end to the story *Dhū aḍ-ḍaḥak adh-dhahabī* (*The Man with a Laugh like Gold*). When the main hero is losing nothing occurs. The story can not go on, because no one has fixed its course. The short story *Aḥ-Ṭā’ir al-akhḍar* (*The Green Bird*) has a lot of optimism in it though it also emphasizes the necessity to come to terms with the lot that fate has dished out. Expectation of what is good, in other words expectation of a saviour, demands a lot of patience, for one never knows when hope will be fulfilled:

He did not appear. The glasses stood empty in the place that the boys had prepared for the party. Umm Su‘ad was no longer a small butterfly which circulated and sat on every passing door. He did not squeak with joy at every bend. In al-Wafā’s alley there was silence and a startling peacefulness.⁵⁶

Both stories suppose the necessity for the existence of motor strength in the world, and equally its integrating element. Both are constructed on the scheme of a closed circle and if they were to end then they would return to the starting point.

⁵³ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, *Aḥ-Ṭā’ir al-akhḍar*, in: *Thuqūb...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 17–18.

⁵⁴ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, *Dhū aḍ-ḍaḥak adh-dhahabī*, in: *Thuqūb...*, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

⁵⁶ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, *Aḥ-Ṭā’ir al-akhḍar*, in: *Thuqūb...*, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik decides to base himself on contrasts which in many cases give a moving effect. The images presented by him, not always clear in their final significance, are based on interpretable contrasts. In the short story *Al-Ḥuzn Al-akhras* (*Silent Sorrow*) the writer concentrates on human existence, its radiance and shadows in order to find how man came to be in the world:

Sometimes this ambiguity led him to bitter reflection... Why am I hungry... while others are full? He stopped in the sun between the young welders. He tried to make them laugh. What is the law of this world? He saw her – emaciated with a yellowed complexion, sleepy, and her eyes filled with silent sorrow. Her slight shoulders. How do they bear those worries?⁵⁷

In an unusual way he shows through this the physical beauty of man. In describing, for example, the mysteries of the female body he employs meaningful metaphors that induce in the reader extremely clear images:

Her eyes dilated like marshes hidden somewhere beyond a wild forest – what’s happened? She opened her mouth like one who wants to call someone from afar (this happens in sleep). She spoke. What did she say? She really cried. He saw her tears as even more transparent and sweet than always. He saw a child... He imagined himself in her womb a minute embryo strained like a bow to the limits of possibility.⁵⁸

Nothing is shown in these descriptions exactly, he resigns himself from numerous adjectives and epithets. The presentation is rather succinct and short, but extremely lyrical, particularly in relation to the artistic descriptions of human toil and ugliness. Particular fragments either arouse admiration or repulsion, they rarely remain neutral in their significance. The author builds up mood in a similar way that leads one to reflection, excitement, fear or repulsion:

Disease lurks in wait for him in order to attack in the gums, nails grow in the body, something eats away at his face, heart, eyes... death. Thoughts madly whirl in his head, take him into the gloom, he falls into a deep ravine. And plunges all the deeper.⁵⁹

In the short stories *Al-Ḥuzn al-akhras* (*Silent Sorrow*) and *Al-Fuzā‘a* (*The Coward*) gloomy elements dominate, emphasizing the labour and suffering that marks human fate. The hero of the title of the latter – the coward – is a man who feels hounded by fate and is unable to find medication for his fear. He required, however, just one flash of hope in order to give solace equal to all those earlier and later experienced fears.

In the collection of short stories, entitled *An-Nahr yajrī* (*The River Flows*), we are dealing with the phenomenon of the magnitude of forms serving the conveyance of a uniform content. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik here shows follies in relation to his own world while at the same time distancing himself from the said by means of his

⁵⁷ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, *Al-Ḥuzn al-akhras*, in: *Thuqūb...*, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

⁵⁹ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, *Al-Fuzā‘a*, in: *Thuqūb...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 23–24.

heroes. Everything shown is in essence a projection of perceptions created through his literary protagonists. The author shares his knowledge while at the same time remaining hidden. His role often limits itself to the introduction of the characters – as in the short story *Al-Ghuzāh (The Attack)*⁶⁰ or *An-Nahr yajrī (The River Flows)*.⁶¹ The narrator draws back from his indifferent position only in a single fragment of the novella *Al-Bi'r (The Well)* introducing a subjective description of the main heroine:

One can see the childishness in the leanness of her face, in the youthful movements of the hands, in the character and freshness of her smile. Naivety and purity loom in her narrow eyes, which are not able to drown out her exhortation.⁶²

In attempting to paint an image of his country, debauched society and lost freedom, the author utilizes simple forms of literary utterance. The world that is presented to us is broken up into fragments. The dialogical and eclectic construction of *An-Nahr yajrī (The River Flows)* means that the reader is lost in a tangle of form and content. The author leads us through images that are full of symbolism and allegory which gradually reveal the final meaning of the short story. This work possesses a form in which the individual depictions and fragments of the action are impossible to formulate in a logical whole. It is only with the ending that he allows one to observe the whole picture, as if composed of scattered jigsaw pieces. In the title short story we equally observe the exceedingly interesting connection of the heroes of the action. Here we are dealing with multi-axial creation on the part of the characters: rivers, guilt and Muhammad. This course results in the plot becoming three-dimensional.

The world presented in the short story *Al-Bi'r (The Well)* is equally conveyed in a fragmentary form. We observe the inherent symbiosis of the heroes. One element of which is the life of Nuwwar, while the character of Hamdan is as if a satellite of the character Nuwwar.

Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik uses undefined time in the works *Al-Ghuzāh (The Attack)* and *An-Nahr yajrī (The River Flows)* which results in their ability to be read two-fold: as a warning of what could happen as well as an image of what has taken place and which should constitute a lesson. In the short story *Al-Bi'r (The Well)* time is almost non-present (with the exception of a fragment of retrospection) which emphasizes the hopelessness of the described situation. Only at the end, together with the announcement of a change in the state of things does time move from its place.

The collection of short stories, entitled *As-Siyāj (Farmsteads)*, is the beginning of symbolism in Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik's works. These are mature works, with a concrete gaze on the world. The writer gradually distances himself from politics and concentrates on moral matters. He undertakes universal subjects: homelessness, as in the short story *Fī al-qā' (At the Station)*, or the passing of time, e.g. in the short

⁶⁰ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik, *Al-Ghuzāh*, in: *An-Nahr yajrī*, Bahrain, 1984, pp. 45–51.

⁶¹ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik, *An-Nahr yajrī*, in: *An-Nahr...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 97–112.

⁶² Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik, *Al-Bi'r*, in: *An-Nahr...*, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

story *Shay' lan ya'ūd* (*Something that does not Return*). In the latter he provides the reader with an unusual description of snow, something rather not encountered in Arabic literature, and serving to emphasize the brittleness and ephemerality of existence. In a way similar to the love that links the main heroes:

The blue surface of the river. The wings of birds quickly fluttering from cold... Unknown lovers hide under trees or come out from them tenderly embraced, resting heads on their shoulders... The snow covers the summits of the trees, buildings and pavements. Thousands upon thousands of minute snowflakes like an enchanted bird, rest here... They lie then fly away becoming water or nothing...⁶³

In the next collection *Ra's al-'arūsa* (*The Head of the Bride*) the writer attempts to deepen the arcana of the soul of the heroes who stand in front of moral and existential problems. He internally characterizes their loneliness, fear and dilemma. Elements that often repeat themselves are states of fear, depression, mental disease and death.

Finally, the collection entitled *Ghalyūn al-'aqīd* (*The Lieutenant's Pipe*) is satiated with metaphor. The author was undoubtedly under the influence of Latin-American literature, in particular Marquez. The heroes of the short story *As-Sitāra al-mughlaqa* (*The Drawn Curtain*) are a pair of newly weds who find themselves spending their honeymoon in a luxury hotel situated opposite a cemetery. The hotel is in Kuwait. The man wants to leave as quickly as possible as he feels a fear of dying by staying there. The woman looks at death differently, seeing it as an inseparable element of life. The whole short story is a game between life and death, here the hotel and the cemetery.

The events of the short story *Qā'a muzlima* (*The Dark Room*) take place in a club, with the heroes being people out to enjoy themselves. The action moves up in tempo what the light goes out, which causes panic amongst those enjoying themselves: "[...] the robbed bodies move aside, while the robbing bodies move from the scene of the crime [...]".⁶⁴ The writer shows the animal-like behaviour of people when the light goes off and the return to normality when it is back on. The title word is not without significance here which can be read as *muzlima* which means dark, or as *muzlima* a term referring to a bad deed, vileness.

The short story *Ghalyūn al-'aqīd* (*The Lieutenant's Pipe*) is the story of the lieutenant of the title, and more precisely his corpse which following his death his wife places in a glass coffin with the inseparable attributes of authority – his sabre and the pipe of the title which he had almost constantly in his mouth. Even though he was not a good man during his life he is idealized in death and his countless descendants come to celebrate his memory. Finally the authorities order the body to be buried which is opposed by the widow. This results in a fight and the coffin is damaged with children playing with the skull and bones of the lieutenant. The story shows an ironi-

⁶³ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik, *Shay' lan ya'ūd*, in: *As-Siyāj*, Beirut, 1982, p. 107.

⁶⁴ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik, *Qā'a muzlima*, in: *Ghalyūn al-'aqīd*, Beirut, 2002, p. 45.

cal image of the heroes' celebrations, as well as the ease by which crimes and ignominy can be raised up on the pedestal of heroes.

The most metaphysical short story is *Al-Juththa tuṭliq ar-raṣāṣ* (*The Shooting Corpse*). The action for the story takes place in a night club, and the nameless narrator observes a strange figure entering the premises. As a result of the peculiar nature of the said figure, dressed in a white shroud, and which shrinks and expands in turn, he does not know whether it belongs to the world of the living or of the dead. He is helped by the mysterious voice of a man revealing the mystery of the shrouded figure which constantly comes back to life and dies. It derives its great powers from the death and souls of others. On confirmation of these words the man pulls out a revolver from under the shroud, shoots himself in the mouth and yet does not die and later starts to shoot to random people in the room. The narrator being a witness to all the events, is unable to comprehend this figure as he is not totally convinced whether what he sees is real or merely a product of his imagination. He decides to overcome fear and talk to the mysterious murderer who says: "the living will not know the luxuries of life, unless they experience death".⁶⁵ With surprise he notices that the bodies of those murdered disappear. The story ends with the shooting of the narrator and the escorting of him by the figure in the uniform, paying honour to the man in the shroud. In this short story the author oscillates between the real world and that of his own imagination.

Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik is also the author of two novels. The first of these, entitled *Jadhwa* (*Heat*), is an image of the national liberation struggles of the 1960s. The socio-economic changes are portrayed in the novel, the way of thinking and the mentality of the citizens that occurred in Bahrain after the discovery of oil. The novel is an attempt to disclose all those who strive to acquire profit at the cost of the poor. There is also secrets of the relationships occurring in society and the family.

The novel *Laylat al-ḥubb* (*The Night of Love*) is a novel of manners, being in its own way a study of love in its various aspects. The plot is one of romance which blossoms between Zahra and Fahd. Yet to the disbelief and despair of the hero his beloved becomes engaged to someone else. The novel is intertwined with fragments of Shakespeare's drama *Romeo and Juliet*, as the main hero plays the figure of Romeo in a production by one of the theatre groups. For some time the illusion of love forces him to believe that he is a real Romeo and his beloved Zahra – Juliet. The author takes pains to emphasize the psychological outline of these characters. Fahd is the personification of a contemporary Romeo, excessively sensitive, tender, warm, and intelligent, head over heels in love and painfully naïve. He is unable to resist the beauty of Zahra who shuns him by choosing as a partner the businessman Ziyab who has amassed a huge fortune in dodgy businesses and bribery. And besides he is full of himself believing only in the power of money. The ending is fairly bleak as all the heroes die; each in his own way; Fahd's friend, who introduced him to Zahra, dies in

⁶⁵ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik, *Al-Juththa tuṭliq ar-raṣāṣ*, in: *Ghalyūn...*, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

a car accident, Fahd dies as a result of despair resulting from his lost love; Zahra because of her unsuccessful marriage and Ziyab as a result of moral decay.

Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik’s literary output shows how unusually one can convey the complexity of the world through various means of perception. He proves simplicity of style is not a brake on the possibility to create multi-dimensional literary constructions and that it is not identified with rearrangement of a seemingly uncomplicated reality. The writer is an engaged creator, sensitive to all manifestations of harm and social injustice. He dreams up philosophical solutions to the sense of human life and his relations with the world in which civilization development has brought about moral decay leading to the degeneration of the energy of the living individual. His works bring to light all that has aroused in him a sense of injustice.

‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa published his first collection of short stories, entitled *Laḥn ash-shitā’* (*The Melody of Winter*), in 1975. The stories touch upon political topics connected with the fight for independence. In that same year, he was sent to prison, where he remained for 6 years.⁶⁶ In the following years up to the present date, he has published a series of publications including both stories and short stories (see Biographies).

At the beginning, he focused on presenting the life of the sea people. Examples of this can be found in the story, entitled *Al-Hirāt*.⁶⁷ The entire plot focuses around the sea, which constitutes the main element of the world presented in the story. On the one hand, it represents something, which is life-giving, while on the other it represents a destructive force. The main characters of the story are four men and a boy, who all work for a ruthless and cold-hearted pearl trader. Hamdan, who lost his father while working at sea, narrates the story. He takes us through the difficulties of working at sea, which entail rowing the boat and following orders. As an accurate observer, he shows the brutality of his surrounding world, dominated by greed and cruelty aimed at those who are weak:

You really didn’t show any concern... He said – Mahmud, you have now become a sailor. Row with the men!... I have rowed for the first time in my life. Compared to his small hands, the oars seem gigantic...⁶⁸ [...] He tried his best to hold back the tears. He wanted to scream, but he couldn’t. Hamdan turned to him and said: – What’s wrong? And he looked at his hands, all covered in blood...⁶⁹

The narrator presents the events in a very dynamic way: the work at sea and pearl trading. The reader not only becomes familiar with the relationships, but also with the social hierarchy in Bahrain, enriched by an entire spectrum of the main charac-

⁶⁶ On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa in Bahrain, on 15th March 2004.

⁶⁷ It marks the places where pearls are found, as explained by ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa in Bahrain, on 15th March 2004.

⁶⁸ ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Al-Hirāt*, Beirut, 1983, pp. 42–43.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

ters' private lives, and all of this is supplemented by numerous descriptions of sunrises and sunsets, meteorological events and the sea itself:

[...] talons of gigantic waves disappeared, and the sea went to sleep [...] ⁷⁰;
 [...] the sun sank into the water and a light breeze rapped at the gates of the atmosphere [...] ⁷¹

The reader is confronted with a large dose of negative emotions from the first pages in the collection of stories, entitled *Yawm Qā'iz* (*A Hot Day*). This is most often frustration, anger, disappointment and sadness. In the story *Ad-Darb* (*The Road*), which opens the collection, the world is presented as being built upon artistic, dynamic and rabid descriptions:

We began sowing in the direction of a group of palm tress, standing in a strange bent-like fashion, as if they were a group of beggars, extending their hands towards the water. The yellow bulldozer is grinding its teeth at them. It attacks the small palm tress and the grass and cuts them with a sharp strike. We look at the sun, rising in the sky, then we quickly lower our heads, as the view clenches our hearts and drinks our blood. The bulldozer attacks a tall palm tree, standing deep into the road. As it shakes, it tries to hold on. Groans of despair can be heard all around, and the teeth tear apart the black bark, in order to get to the beautiful white wood. The palm tree bends a bit, the fangs go in deeper. It pricks its ears above the indifferent earth. It cuts through the roots, the tree falls to the ground, and crashes with the others [...] ⁷²

The above fragment is typical for the entire story, a description of a situation in which the presented world as well as the main characters are etched. The description of the palm tree clearing resembles the relations from an unequal battlefield. The palm tree puts up resistance against the machine. Man becomes degraded to the role of the machine operator. The author presents a picture of the battle between technology and nature, the latter of which must lose.

In the stories entitled *Ummāh ayna anti?* (*Moher, Where Are You?*) and *Al-Khurūj* (*The Way Out*), the main characters are prisoners. In the first story, the world is presented as the glum reality of a small prison cell:

I woke up at night. It was almost dawn. I saw a light emerging from the pale greyness so I climbed up to the high window. Peace and silence encompassed the jail cells, the kitchen and the guard tower facing the prison [...] ⁷³

However, once we pass through the gate of the prison's mind, we enter into a larger world of memories and desires, which decidedly extend beyond the aims as well as the prison walls and the island, on which it is located:

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 103.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 89.

⁷² 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Ad-Darb*, in: *Yawm Qā'iz*, Bahrain – Beirut, 1985, p. 6.

⁷³ 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Ummāh ayna anti?*, in: *Yawm Qā'iz...*, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

I didn't dream about anything interesting, but I did see, what a person who is asleep sees, a fist coming towards its head. The sleeping space was a huge shadow, with strange sparks flickering, as if fish were turning in water. A familiar voice tickled my memory, it was swimming in the shadows on wings and I was weeping quietly.⁷⁴

It is not clear from the content of the story as to why this prisoner was in prison. We do not even know his name. His thoughts, desires, and especially his suffering, which he experiences, not due to the Spartan conditions, but rather because he misses his mother, are the most important. The pain is caused by the awareness that she may no longer be there, once he is set free. The narrator, who at the same time is one of the main characters, moves us into the deep, internal world. Passing through the gates of the human psyche opens a wide field on the narrative plane for the author, as it ceases to be linked with the frames of logic and consequence.

The anonymous character, who draws his silhouette in a world far from perfection, is both the narrator and the main character at the same time in each of the stories in this collection. Each of the presented realities is a type of prison for each of the main characters – more or less literally. The immigrant, from the story entitled *Ad-Darb (The Road)*, cutting down palm trees in order to build a new road on the desert is a prisoner of his own responsibilities towards his employer and his family. The main character leaving the prison in the story, entitled *Al-Khurūj (The Way Out)*, becomes a prisoner of freedom in his home town, which has become foreign and unfamiliar to him. He has no more close friends and family, and the changes which have taken place while he was in prison are unacceptable. The dividing of the world into two spaces: the land and the sea, is of significance. The land is dry, raw, unfriendly and limited, as an island prison. The sea is in opposition to the land – it is beautiful, blue, endless, but is it often presented as a place which is inaccessible for the majority of the main characters. The story is filled with pessimism and the conviction that people who have been in prison have great difficulties in returning to a state of total freedom.

The novel, entitled *Aḍ-Ḍabāb (The Mist)*, is an attempt at understanding the anxiety of a person trapped in a chain of ill-fated events. The plot is based on the tragic story of Aḥmad Nāṣir – a fifty year old writer and intellectual, who is pathologically “addicted to books” and is trying to deal with different types of problems, condemned to the incessant battle between adversities, which his horrible fate will not spare him from. His story is one ill-fated event after another: crime, death, pain, poverty, hunger, prison, torture, artistic powerlessness, disease, hospital and insanity. He tries to regain his lost memory by returning to various facts from his past, after which he is arrested, accused of rape, and put in prison. His memories take him back to his childhood, he remembers life under one roof with his step-father, whose “house became a living hell”.⁷⁵ The only positive person in his life from that time was his grandfather, who took him in and took great care of him. He tries to remember what

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

⁷⁵ ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Aḍ-Ḍabāb*, Damascus, 1992, p. 38.

really happened, but “he lacks the key to unlock his memory”.⁷⁶ He remembers how he wound up in the psychiatric hospital, from which he does not want to leave, since in fact, he has no place to go: “[...] Where do I go? How am I to live? No, no, no, I don't want to leave. This mental hospital has become my home!”⁷⁷

He leaves the hospital to go and live in a shoddy flat. He began washing cars and removing rubbish from the dustbins to earn a living. He has an affair with a local prostitute, who looks after him in a motherly way. We learn her tragic story, as well as the fate of two vagrants, who wind up at his flat by accident. The author summarizes their story with the laconic sentence: “The world has no conscience”.⁷⁸

His memory takes him back to the time when he worked as an editor in a publishing house. There, he met the love of his life, who then left him along with their daughter because of material difficulties. As they were entering the car, they were killed on the spot. With that, his life ended “there was nothing left at home apart from the ghosts”.⁷⁹

The title mist is a repeating motif in the stories, symbolizing oblivion, the vague picture of the main character's life. It is cold, thick and is associated with the foretaste of death.

Ill fate caused his friends to have money and social status, while he washes their luxury cars. He rebels against this and against himself. He sneers at his life: “you educated fool with empty pockets and a life which has ended”.⁸⁰ He reveals the brutal truth: “I am now nothing but an animal”.⁸¹

As a conclusion, the main character is brought to the place of his execution, among a yelling gathered crowd. Once again the facts of his life are presented, this time in a magical irrational frame of a dream. It is not clear whether Ahmad Nasir was guilty of a crime or not.

The stories from the *Sahra (A Party)* collection may be divided into two groups. The first group includes stories which end with a philosophical and melancholic message, as in *Khamīs (Khamis)* and *Qabḍat turāb (A Handful of Dust)*. The second group includes longer stories, maintained in a sombre tone, and their main characters are mainly children, who have been harmed by the world and taken advantage of by adults, i.e. *Hadhā al-jasad laka (This is Your Body)*, *Hadhā al-jasad lī (This is My Body)*, and *Anā wa ummī (My Mother and I)*. They are characterized by full descriptions, ambiguity and the artistic forms used give them a poetic melody. Women appear in these stories, who disgrace the honour of their families by their behaviour, as for example in *Anā wa ummī (My Mother and I)*. The mother's ill conduct becomes a torment and an obsession. It sends him insane, despite the fact that his

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 57.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 98–99.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 99.

mother lives far away and no longer interferes in his life. He is mad with the desire to kill her and to rid himself of her disgrace upon him and subordinates his entire life to this desire: “My mother is a disgrace to me, which follows me anywhere I go”.⁸²

In effect, he also torments the life of his sister, fearing that she will follow in her mother’s footsteps. The consequence is contradictory to the intended one and the sister wanted to be closer to her mother and release herself from her brother’s tyranny. The plot reaches its climax when the main character beats his sister because he found blush for her cheeks:

One day while I was looking through her things, I found some blush on the bottom of her handbag, which she tried to hide from me. I beat her brutally. She is horrified.⁸³

In *Hadhā al-jasad lī* (*This is my Body*), the author gives a detailed description of the events of a young circumcised boy, who was neither informed nor made aware what this procedure entailed. He felt resentment towards his father for not psychologically preparing him for this experience: “He didn’t tell me anything. I received some sweets, some money and a promised outing to the cinema”.⁸⁴ The main character is then also forced into homosexual acts during his sister’s wedding: “One of them took me into the darkness and ravaged my body”.⁸⁵

I believe this could be taken as succumbing to public judgement about the current problem of homosexuality as well as forcing children into prostitution. Children’s experiences and the exponential injury in relation to one’s parents connected with infidelity is shown in the stories, entitled *Hadhā al-jasad laka* (*This is Your Body*) and *Anā wa ummī* (*My Mother and I*):

I want to scream because a bald man has just plunged his face into my mother’s breasts and she has fallen back on the chair, allowing him to fondle her without any objection!⁸⁶

It seems that the main character, in presenting his story begins screaming: “This is not my body”.

In many of the stories the descriptions of the semi-conscious ravings and pathological predictions are pictures of what he sees and he exaggerates the mind of a sick child. An outline of the objects begins to take on a demonic shape. Everything becomes blurry or multiplied, and the body rises and falls into a precipice. On the one hand the man is aware of the high temperature and sweat which overwhelms his body, while on the other, he feels as if his body has separated from his mind and his soul. These descriptions are highly complex and full of metaphors. It seems as if the author is fascinated with what happens to a person when they lose control over their bodies and their minds:

⁸² ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfā, *Anā wa ummī*, in: *Sahra*, Beirut, 1994, p. 83.

⁸³ ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfā, *Anā wa ummī*, in: *Sahra...*, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

⁸⁴ ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfā, *Hadhā al-jasad lī*, in: *Sahra...*, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

⁸⁶ ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfā, *Anā wa ummī*, in: *Sahra...*, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

I am covered in sweat and incense; I am pulling at the bed with my fingernails. Large fire-like shapes are dancing around me, and a huge snake is wrapped around my body. I run out into the darkness and the fog which is full of long, drawn-out moans. I pass marshes, in which frogs shine like blazing coals. I hear men's hissing [...] I turn into a butterfly, then into a hermit, who lives in a cave. I die. I fall into eternal darkness. I flutter on angel's wings and fly towards heaven.⁸⁷

In many fragments one has the feeling that the author is deliberately emphasizing the ugliness and the unbalanced mental state of the main characters:

[...] I lie covered by a sheet in a pool of sweat and thick hairs, listening to voices calling around me.⁸⁸

[...] I am crawling along the black earth covered in seeds and excrement.⁸⁹

The author builds sentences which are full of metaphors and which present an image of insanity.

'Abd Allāh Khalīfa does not condemn his main characters. He does not express his opinion in relation to their actions, plans and feelings, although killing one's mother is the worst of all crimes. The mother, regardless of her behaviour, loves her son and helps him get out of prison, she looks after him and feeds him when he is sick. Prison was punishment for setting fire to the house along with the persons inside it. The reader learns the entire story from the main character's subjective point of view: accusations and guilt directed towards his mother. The ending is rather surprising, since when it seems that there is no salvation for the sick boy whose soul is full of hatred, and his obsession will lead to a vicious crime, it turns out that somewhere within the depths of his soul, he has warm feelings and emotions towards his mother. Finally the moment of reconciliation comes: "Our heads come closer together. She snuggled up against my chest".⁹⁰ This is undoubtedly a premise that positive feelings and emotions as well as true love are able to conquer harm, injury and prejudice and it is never too late to find love within one's heart. The mother shall remain a mother above all else, and the love towards her shall always be stronger than hate.

The key element which appears in a majority of the stories from the collection, entitled *Dahshat as-sāḥir* (*The Magician's Surprise*), is the future, which inclines one towards reflections and the incessant search for one's identity in confrontation with the reality of the present day. It is no coincidence that the collection opens with a story, entitled *Ṭarīq an-nab'a* (*The Route to the Source*), in which the author's opinion of the future is clearly emphasized. "The route to the source" is a memory of childhood, the days of learning about the world and all its riches and secrets in a carefree manner. The author draws a poetic picture of the Arabic village. A specific

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 76–77.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

⁸⁹ 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Hadhā al-jasad lī*, in: *Sahra...*, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 84.

place is the source, not only giving life to the surrounding palm trees, but also to people as well. The atmosphere of uniqueness of both the place as well as the time is emphasized by the traditional rituals performed by the main character's father. This idyllic picture of the past disrupts the consciousness that all of this has irretrievably passed, similarly as the twenty years of his life: "He remembered with pain and bitterness how he wanted for time to stop at this very place".⁹¹ With a nostalgic image of childhood, he makes a clear contrast with contemporary times, in which there is no room for magic, or secrets, or close contact with nature. People are not able to learn from nature and live in harmony with nature, but they close themselves within their artificial lives. The main character associates water from the old source with life-giving strength and wisdom. Therefore the path to the source means the path to finding one's own roots and drawing riches from them. This is the way in which the main character in the story, entitled *Dahshat as-sāhir* (*The Magician's Surprise*), tried to live. This man devoted his entire life to exploring the secrets of natural medicine. He travelled all over the world and "asked God, the angels and the stars if he could return to his land".⁹² What he learned throughout his journey extended well beyond the immanent picture of reality: "he was filled with a luminous liquid which makes him exist between heaven and earth".⁹³ The wizard took advantage of his knowledge for the good of others, as in his hierarchy man holds the highest position. This is a clear connection with the history of outstanding doctors who at the same time were also philosophers and magi, such as Ibn Sina and Ibn Razi. There is no lack of references in the stories to contemporary figures like Khomeini. The author examines this phenomenon in the story, entitled *At-Tarānīm* (*Psalms*). He presents the main character as a man with a unique talent for creating psalms, which help people regain their health, give them vital strength and help them to find the meaning of their existence. There is something in him that allows us to see the entire world in his eyes: "forests, the horizon, cities and eternity".⁹⁴ Everyone is eagerly waiting to hear more wonderful psalms which cause the reality which surrounds them to change. From the story we can see how this took place in Iran, where a simple and sick man was given the utmost dignity.

The story, entitled *Najmat aṣ-ṣabāḥ* (*The Morning Star*), shows how the past influences a person's personality. The main character, who has been working as a journalist for a leading newspaper for 32 years remembers the work atmosphere that existed before the death of its owner with nostalgia. He cannot find himself in the new reality under the management of the dead owner's son, who only looks after his own interests. There is a stark contrast between the new and the former owners of the newspaper. A change in the approach to work as well as to the employees is a clear sign that a new order has come. In the past, work for this journalist was like

⁹¹ 'Abd Allāh Khalīfā, *Ṭarīq an-nab'a*, in: *Dahshat as-sāhir*, Damascus, 1997, p. 9.

⁹² 'Abd Allāh Khalīfā, *Dahshat as-sāhir*, in: *Dahshat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

⁹⁴ 'Abd Allāh Khalīfā, *At-Tarānīm*, in: *Dahshat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

an asylum, it gave him a sense of self-fulfilment. He is unable to function in the new environment, he therefore decides to destroy the source of his hardships. His anger is directed towards the new owner, who he kills in a fit of rage. For the subsequent time, the main character stands helplessly towards the past confronted with the present moment. This motif is continued in the following short stories collections, entitled *Junūn an-nakhīl* (*The Madness of the Palm*). As one can see, it is difficult for the author to come to terms with the economic changes and the progressing urbanisation:

He now feels foreign in his city. There is no one around him. Both the birds as well as the buyers and the bus drivers cannot see his face. There were no seagulls. The unknown passers by meet for the sole purpose of going their own separate ways. Their faces exchange a stream of facial expressions. [...] they fall asleep, wake up and hear the pounding diggers and concrete mixers, which deafen the peace and the birds [...] The earth shakes [...] The seagulls clash with the walls [...] I awaken, seeing myself as a boy rowing, the white clouds crush the mirrors. It changes into a bird flapping its wings in this strange universe full of bitterness.⁹⁵

Not even the seagulls mentioned in the title are able to adjust to the new reality. They lack space, freedom and the life-giving sea, while the people sitting in their luxurious houses by their pools, roasting a lamb on the spit have been called shallow and punished by the element of the sea, which floods the coastal electrical plant: “the water knocks over the poles and the entire coast trembles”.⁹⁶ We also read about the tragic consequences for the natural environment as the result of the development of the city. The workers place pipes among the groves, throw bird nests into the trash bin, cut down the palm trees, which are an integral part of the Bahraini way of life:

The palms look like people, they had human faces, speaking, looking sombrely, their trunks pervaded towards the sea and they looked like a large herd of isolated insurgents.⁹⁷

Despite this, the author pays great attention to tradition, which does not refute the progress of civilization altogether which is reflected in the last collection of short stories, entitled *Sayyīd aḍ-ḍarīḥ* (*Mr Mausoleum*). For several years, ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa has written epics on the history of Bahrain. *Al-Yanābī‘* (*The Sources*) going back to the beginning of the 20th century up to the 1950s. Two parts have already been published, the last part is still being printed. Many historical figures such as the rulers of Bahrain as well as its citizens, British governors and others as well as facts from the country's contemporary history, especially the discovery of crude oil in the 1930s and the social and economic changes which surrounded this event can be found in the stories.

The world presented in the stories and novels of ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa is full of personal reflections and thoughts as well as experiences, fears and worries. Life is full of

⁹⁵ ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *An-Nawāris tuḡhādir al-madīna*, in: *Junūn an-nakhīl*, Cairo, 1998, p. 72.

⁹⁶ ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, *Junūn an-nakhīl*, in: *Junūn...*, *op.cit.*, p. 60.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

struggles with fate, the fight for survival, internal problems and conflicts. People incessantly contend with obstacles which are the result of the environmental surroundings, which shape the psyche. Irrespectively of how complex the storyline is, the author wants us to understand that there are higher values, which give man the strength to fight against all the disasters and antithesis that fate has to offer. These are the joys of life, the ability to see beauty in the world as well as to live in harmony with our surroundings, respect for tradition, freedom, love and hope.

CHAPTER 2

THE PERIOD OF DEVELOPMENT

‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl joined literary circles early in his life, co-operating with local newspapers and magazines, as well as with Al-Majlis al-Waṭanī li-l-Thaqāfa wa al-Funūn wa al-adab (National Council for Culture, Arts and Literature). His books began a lively critical discussion and placed the writer at the head of Bahraini authors. He started writing in 1972 and published his first collection of short stories, entitled *Istighāthāt fī al-‘ālam al-waḥshī* (*Crying for help in the wild world*), in 1979. The stories are of a fantastic character. He uses irony and satire to seize only these moments that are on the borderline of reality and fantasy. Subsequent books are a continuation of this direction.

He dedicates his collection *Ash-Shawkarān* to two outstanding countrymen of his, Qāsim Ḥaddād and Amīn Ṣāliḥ, men of letters: “They have traversed the seven cities of writing; we are still at the turn of the road”. By means of this quite enigmatic dedication and the equally mysterious reproduction of Argentine Carlos Alonso’s picture (showing a man climbing up the stairs and an astounding pair of legs cut above the knees), he introduces us to the atmosphere of the stories from the collection.

The writer takes up social problems that are typical of modern Arabic literature. They include also those concerning human nature, like in the story *Al-Baḥr* (*The Sea*) depicting an account of two broken homes. The characters, i.e. a mother with a son, and a father with a daughter, meet at the sea. The children quickly establish contact with each other and make friends. When they find an empty bottle buried in the sand, they decide to send a letter to God and ask Him to bring their absent parents back to them. Full of hope, they fix the date of receiving a reply. In the meantime, their parents exchange glances and smiles. Despite mutual goodwill, they do not decide on a closer acquaintance. This is to result in continuing burdensome loneliness of the adults and harm of the children who long for the love of both parents. ‘Aqīl, like many other writers, draws attention to the suffering of children from broken homes. This is an exceptionally up-to-date topic in the Gulf countries because it is connected with polygamy and frequent divorces.

In a story, entitled *Marāyā al-qalb al-maksūra* (*Broken Mirrors of the Heart*), ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl focuses on depicting the mental and spiritual states of a woman who is in hospital. She is suffering from a nervous and psychic breakdown, probably as a result of being raped by her father. Again and again, she wakes up from nightmares in which her father, and simultaneously an oppressor, is often present. These dreams contain many unbelievable images: hyenas, ghosts, a pelican, a doll, a castle full of human remains, bones and vermin. We can read:

Why does my heart sink in the tears of sorrow when I wake up and when I sleep? Why does my soul suffer from an agonizing pain, covered with an abaya of constant fear?⁹⁸

Her anguish has no end. While awake, she is tormented by hallucinations and goes berserk. She sees hands emerging from under the bed and crawling over her body, or a viper sneaking under the quilt. The story ends with the father’s arrival:

I have noticed my father. He has twisted horns like two humped swords. His feet are goat hooves. He has long ears and a horse tail. He leads a pack of wild hyenas armed with starving fangs [...] ⁹⁹

The author refers also to Arabic myths from the period before Islam. He calls up the figure of a ghoul whose voice reminds the woman of her father’s voice:

I am terrified at the view of a giant ghoul with a burning body, an obnoxious face, wide lips and many teeth. In the middle of his forehead he has a third eye which is dimmed and still. His beard, full of lice, reaches his knees. ¹⁰⁰

It is important to draw one’s attention to the symbol of the pelican:

I notice a snow-white pelican trying to come to me with help. I reach out for him. The bird opens his wide beak so that I can jump inside and hide. It takes me far, far away. [...] He flies away and leaves me alone. ¹⁰¹

The pelican may symbolize, among other things, sociability, kindness, parental love, mercy, pangs of conscience, grief, melancholy, sacrifice, penance, and loneliness. ¹⁰² In this story it undoubtedly means the woman’s lonesomeness in the modern world.

The author does not avoid the subject of death which is reflected in the story *Ḥadīqat al-marāyā* (*A Garden of Mirrors*). A huge house is inhabited by an old lady and her granddaughter. The age difference is underlined at the very beginning:

⁹⁸ ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl, *Marāyā al-qalb al-maksūra*, in: *Ash-Shawkarān*, Bahrain, 1994, p. 84.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 89–90.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

¹⁰² Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa, 1990, 2nd ed., p. 306.

She, an oak that survived a hundred winters and a hundred years... [...] And she, a heart in the age of *light-heartedness*... at the age of twenty... plays a melody of youth and bloom...¹⁰³

The work is divided into two intermingling parts. The first is a depiction of the mutual relations between the lady and the granddaughter, which contains images of feeding and care. The other describes the lady's dreams. This part provides a meaning to the story, because the dreams reflect the state of soul of the lady who slowly approaches death. It has to be stated that the story is an example of intertextuality because these dreams reflect the events described both in the Koran and in Genesis. They also refer to the tales of Joseph sold to the Ismailite caravan for twenty silver coins by his brothers who loathed him. Joseph ultimately finds himself in the Egyptian home of Aziz. The choice of this tale is not accidental since Joseph, both in the Koran and in Genesis, explains dreams to his fellow prisoners and then to his ruler. Perhaps dreams are an attempt at settling up with the world and with life. The most important is the last dream describing a vision of passing to the other world. The old lady floats on water which takes her away to the verge of a waterfall. Falling down from there, she stretches out her arms and awaits the crash with the water, which is supposed to symbolize the final departure:

I float on shimmering water which takes me far away. The feeling of happiness fills my heart when I see the colours of the sky, the sun, and greenery around me. The water takes me to the verge of a high waterfall. I stretch out my arms and wait to crash with water.¹⁰⁴

The protagonist of the story *Dhākira ukhrā* (*Another Memory*) is a man desiring to leave his country and go to Australia which is presented as splendid but too idealistic:

Isn't it paradise, this Australia! There is no government, no police, no prisons, and everyone is equal. [...] Its walls are made of pearls, its doors of rubies. Its soil is greedy, and its plants as valuable as saffron. Water is whiter than snow and sweeter than honey. [...] It has something a man could not even dream about.¹⁰⁵

While 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aqīl's short stories are very mysterious and enigmatic, or even unclear, in its text, which is probably influenced by the frequent use of the convention of dream, they are very expressive and innovative in their form. They are all unusually dynamic since the author focuses on activities and changes of state. This dynamic is exemplified well by the following quotation:

I easily climb the branches that are a shelter for hyena shrieking wildly. It shakes the tree with all its strength. I hold on tightly not to fall down with the leaves. It stops shaking, lifts its paw and urinates on the tree. The oak grows up to the sky in a fraction

¹⁰³ 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aqīl, *Ḥadiqat al-marāyā*, in: *Ash-Shawkarān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁵ 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aqīl, *Dhākira ukhrā*, in: *Ash-Shawkarān...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 94–95.

of a second. I scream for fear of falling. The ground slowly disappears and the tree will not stop growing.¹⁰⁶

The stories contained in the collection *Ash-Shawkarān* are difficult to read. Many images and symbols are unclear for the average reader, and the convention of dream, which is often used, allows for ambiguity and numerous interpretations. But this is what creates the atmosphere of enigma, mystery and sometimes even horror, which is undoubtedly innovatory in this collection.

In the novel *Ayyām Yūsuf al-akhīra* (*The Last Days of Yūsuf*), ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl showed his unusual intuition and understanding for different views, the conduct and thinking of children. Young characters, 13-year-old Mahmoud, his 11-year-old brother who tells the story, and 5-year-old Yousuf, very early on have experienced the bitterness of an independent life. Apart from having to deal with financial problems, they had to prepare themselves for maturity on their own. This task was very difficult, especially as far as their age and the patterns they followed are concerned. Their father was stiff, reticent and rather secretive. He lived in his own world, not paying attention to anything but his work and fun. He used to run away from his family to desolate places. Eventually, he abandoned his wife who soon died leaving the children alone. On the day of her death, the older brothers decided to sacrifice their lives for Yousuf. They taught him to write, inculcated good manners in him, and gave him an example of perseverance and diligence:

It hurt us that we were not able to send him to school with other children in his age. Whenever I could, I taught him to count, and to write a little bit. This is how he learnt letters. He could even sign his name [...]¹⁰⁷

Yousuf became the only reason to live and the goal of life for the older brothers. The dependence of the brothers was not returnable. They would not hesitate to fulfil all Yousuf’s whims:

That day Mahmoud whispered in my ear: There is a thing to do. When we deal with this, we will have enough to buy Yousuf a bicycle.¹⁰⁸

Despite such great sacrifice and care, Yousuf dies. Soon Mahmoud joined him; he could not stand the bitterness of defeat. The third brother was also close to death, but he turned out to be stronger than the first two. Love for the father and the hope of seeing him again kept him alive. The oldest brother did not know these feelings since he held the father responsible for the mother’s death:

After his mother’s death, Mahmoud did not hide his reluctance towards his father. He tore up all the photos of him and swore not to repeat his mistakes. He held him responsible for his mother’s death and all the misfortunes that touched them. [...] Unlike Mahmoud, I really wanted him back... to appear, or at least to ask for us. I wanted to

¹⁰⁶ ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl, *Marāyā al-qalb al-maksūra*, in: *Ash-Shawkarān...*, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl, *Ayyām Yūsuf al-akhīra*, Beirut, 1999, p. 31.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

know where he was, if he was still alive, if he knew anything about us, if he cared about our worries, if we meant anything to him.¹⁰⁹

Yousuf is the character around whom the action revolves, but who does not have significant influence on it. Despite being the central person, he is static. The other two brothers take part in all the events together and react in a similar way: “We kept a straight face but Yousuf burst into laughter”.¹¹⁰

Beginning life of their own after their mother’s death changed the group of three boys into a two-person community concentrated on the third. The remaining characters that the children have contact with seem to constitute only the background for the drama. This explains the lack of interest in their fortune. Descriptions of the background of the events are not only informative; they are often extended to slow down the action and build up an atmosphere of suspense. The time succession of the action is ignored. The plot seems to be divided into fragments that are later cited in an accidental, random order. The time inversion does not make the reception of the novel difficult but rather more vivid and interesting. The last scenes were distinguished in an exceptional way. At the moment the boy met his father, the time of narration changed from the past to the present and remained so till the last sentence.

The novel *Ayyām Yūsuf al-akhīra (The Last Days of Yūsuf)* focuses mainly on the character’s feelings. The formal operations, although used in a masterly way, do not draw one’s attention when the book is read cursorily. However, the psychological portrait of the character is presented very clearly.

The world of the sixties is shown through the eyes of a child in the novel *Kaff Maryam (Maria’s Hand)*. The main character, and simultaneously the narrator, is a little boy with an unknown name who describes the surrounding world with a reporter’s accuracy. He lives with his family. His grandmother plays a huge role in his life. Despite her age, she is cheerful and plays with children, bringing a lot of joy into the family’s life:

The grandma is sixty but she is in good shape, has a child’s face, cheerful eyes, and beautiful silver hair. She likes jokes and fun [...]¹¹¹

The mother is the opposite of the grandma. She is always busy with something and barely speaks:

Contrary to the grandma, my mother was silent and unwilling to joke. However, she was lively and active, always cleaned things up and arranged them. In her free time she would sit in front of her sewing machine.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 29–30.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

¹¹¹ ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl, *Kaff Maryam*, Bahrain, 1997, p. 14.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, p. 22.

Another important person is the boy's father, a harbour worker who does not speak to anyone at home and listens to the radio in silence. But in a cafe during meetings with his friends, he undergoes metamorphosis and changes into an eloquent erudite debating about world politics:

In the cafe he was an entirely different person. He discussed with his friends, laughed, debated... He was respectable. Discussions in the cafe jumped from one subject to another. Once they discussed about Nasser and Israel, the war in Yemen, about the defeat of the union between Egypt and Syria, the possibility of a breakout of a third world war..., about the mysterious assassination of Kennedy...¹¹³

The boy watches these simple, ill-paid harbour workers attentively. During the meetings in the cafe they become respectable people, discussing politics, sport, and peace in the world. However, the person closest to the boy's heart is his blind sister Maryam. Perhaps this is because she was born blind and he wanted to be her carer. When she dies, he feels guilty about her death:

I cried and swore to God before my grandma, my mother and father that it was not me. But their eyes held me responsible for what had happened.¹¹⁴

The boy lives in two worlds: the real one and that of fantasy. The real world is his home, school, cafes, first love, and the life going on around him. There is the Six-Day War in the Middle East at that time. The boy perceives the war through the prism of discussions, manifestations, and eventually the defeat:

A TV announcer informed with his broken voice about the defeat of the Arab army and the Israeli occupation of the Arab lands. I did not know what was going on. The day before we had celebrated the victory and today we announce the defeat.¹¹⁵

The world of fantasy is more important for him, because it is where his beloved sister lives:

- Where's Maryam, father?
- Are you out of your mind? Your sister is dead. She is no longer in this world. It is time for you to understand this!
- You're lying! Maryam is not dead. She's always with me.
- But only in your imagination. I buried her two years ago.
- I didn't kill Maryam! She fell into the ditch herself! I didn't kill her!
- You're not guilty of this. It was God's will. Understand this.¹¹⁶

The moment of announcing the defeat of the Arabs is at the same time the moment when the boy understands his sister is dead. And just like the boy had deluded himself through all those years that she was alive, so the Arabs are deluding themselves that they will beat Israel. They do not accept their defeat.

¹¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 80–81.

The action of ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl’s works unfolds through a constant overlapping of layers, and the traditional chronology of events is replaced with flashbacks and fragments describing the characters’ thoughts. Time changes its dimensions: the past becomes the present, and the present turns into the past. Life denies the existence of tenses. Each character lives his time in his own way, because he lives in a particular dimension. Some sentences stand on the borderline of time and it is impossible to state whether they express the present, past, or perhaps the future consciousness of the narrator. Most of the stories are realized only in the sphere of imagination and dreams.

Literary creativity is not only the labour of writing but also the joy of writing resulting from the possibility of creating a new reality over which one has total power. Just such a reality is created by **Fawziyya Rashīd** (see Biographies) who has successfully hit the tastes of the times and her books are extremely popular.

Her novel *Al-Ḥiṣār* (*The Siege*) was considered to be the best novel in Cairo for the year 2000, while in Damascus it merited translation into six languages.¹¹⁷ The writer depicts the tragic lot of people engaged in a fight for freedom and justice, people defending their rights and honour at any price. One of the main characters in the novel is Khalid – an incorrect dreamer and idealist who is alone in being arrested on the basis of unproven suspicions concerning illegal political activity. He is sentenced to a long spell in prison. He is visited only sometimes by his father and his beloved Amal. These highly moving visits last for too short a time. It is Khalid’s love for Amal that helps him tolerate the difficult time in gaol. He reads over and over again her letters, delighting in every word. The lack of direct contact with her causes him immense pain:

How life becomes like hell when there is no feeling in it. How vile is loneliness like an executioner savouring the killing of children.¹¹⁸

The conditions at prison are harsh. There are only thirty prisoners there. The cells look like small match boxes. Each houses from two to four prisoners. For breakfast they receive dry bread and tasteless cheese accompanied by a cup of bitter tea. There only form of entertainment is the hourly game of football on the prison yard, or work on a small plot of land under the watchful eye of the guards: “[...] with time some of them learnt to laugh; for some time never taught them this”.¹¹⁹ The world outside the prison walls is the dream of every inmate for: “there is freedom, there is light, there life and dialect mix in hearts pulsating with life”.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Fawziyya Rashīd in Bahrain, on 24th March 2004.

¹¹⁸ Fawziyya Rashīd, *Al-Ḥiṣār*, Beirut, 1983, p. 27.

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

Three other people live with Khalid in cell number four: ‘Abbas, who is heavily hit by the news of his mother’s death, crying and mourning her demise; ‘Ali who is able to laugh at everything even at himself and Muhammad who is the complete opposite – serious with a tendency “for philosophizing” and who likes to attach importance to everything. The situation in the country is tense. All the time new riots break out. There is only smoke visible above the city, one can hear the sound of shooting and the crying of children. Armed soldiers walk the deserted streets. New prisoners are all the time being brought to gaol and given the rioting and new arrests there is no chance at all that those already arrested will be released. Amal does not lose hope though that her beloved will gain his freedom. Although a long time has passed since his arrest she still waits for him longingly. Mustafa, Khalid’s father, is a fisherman who has worked for twenty years for a certain Mr. Yousuf. Every day after the morning prayers, together with a group of other workers, he sets off sea trawling. Mustafa’s relations with his employer are fine until the day he is reprimanded in front of everyone else, something that he finds extremely painful. He recalls at that time the words of his son Khalid who many a time had warned him of such treatment. Now it became clear that Khalid was right. Mustafa is sorry for his son and those years which he must spend in a gaol cell:

Wouldn’t it be better if he had thought about himself as other young people do? How to find the right flat and wife to accompany him and sweeten this earthly wandering so full of worry and sadness? But he always objected and said:
– Father, this is our destiny. You will not understand now the aim of our striving [...] ¹²¹

The father’s wish was for the son to be with him, for them to work together fishing. Now he is afraid that he will never see his son again. On top of which the younger son – Ahmad also takes part in some kind of protest and has been arrested. Shaikh Mustafa on hearing this breaks down completely and gives up his job: “This country! [...] Will the situation not stabilize at least a little?” ¹²²

Khalid is brought before court. He is accused to acting against the national good; although he does not admit to the charge he is sentenced to yet more long months of prison. The only good news is that they have released his brother Ahmad. The situation in prison deteriorates day by day. ‘Ali turns out to be a grass; ‘Abbas commits suicide by cutting his wrists; Yusuf dies while being tortured. An atmosphere of fear and despair fulfils the whole gaol. Everyone mourns their lot: “Nothing is in our hands. We were born misfortunate” ¹²³.

The siege of the title stretches out not only for those who are under arrest, whose living space is closed inside the prison walls, but also for those so-called free; limited every day by their own life possibilities and daily problems. People outside the prison walls are also not happy. We get to know the difficult material situation of

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 45–46.

¹²² *Ibidem*, p. 51.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, p. 82.

Amal's family, where arguments break out almost every day. Amal sometimes is even jealous of Khalid's stay in prison. The volatile brother cruelly accuses her that she is almost thirty and still waits for a man whose release from prison is far from certain. Khalid's father is able to find a new job, though the conditions there, as well as the way employees are treated, are worse than in the previous one.

The novel ends with three revolts: a hunger strike by the prisoners including Khalid fighting for justice; a revolt by the employees of the company where Mustafa started to work in the name of their rights and human dignity; as well as a great demonstration of dissatisfaction with the situation in the country, within the ranks of the demonstrators is Amal. These are three desperate attempts for liberation from the general metaphoric siege that is all pervading. This siege personifies the limitation of freedom, the denial of rights to people, base, unjust treatment, a system limiting the basic freedoms of a citizen as well as the difficult financial situation which encloses man in a cage fighting to satisfy basic daily needs. The heroes of the novel bravely risk their lives and are prepared to sacrifice themselves in the name of a broadly understood sense of freedom and justice in order that "finally the seagulls could glide in their sky".¹²⁴

Fawziyya Rashīd has set his novel, entitled *Taḥawwulāt al-fāris al-gharīb* (*The Changes of the Strange Rider*), which was published in 1990, in the Abbasid period, to be exact in 1055 when the Abbasid dynasty became a puppy in the hands of the Turks. The novel is composed of three fundamental parts, the title part: *Al-Fāris al-gharīb* (*The Strange Rider*), *Al-Baḥth* (*The Search*) and *Taḥawwulāt* (*Changes*). It begins with the new arrival's wander around town:

His origins were unknown. Some said that he was a Turk and others that he was Persian, still others said that he was a descendent of the Abbasid's themselves. His mother came from Hijaz, while his father from one of the oldest tribes in Najd [...]¹²⁵

Fawziyya Rashīd recalls the Tigris river and describes the banquets given by the caliph:

[...] the castle was full of singers, musicians, comedians, flutists and magicians. Everywhere reverberated to song. There were a lot of people at the banquet. The tables heaved under the various sorts of meat: mutton, goat, lamb, pigeon and other fowl [...]¹²⁶

And it is during one of these banquets that an unknown rider comes to the palace who has murdered an old vizier and taken his power. The people did not protest and return to their daily activities. For the author this is certainly criticism of the contemporary political moves, for the evil which is to be found in every corner of the world is accepted. Fawziyya Rashīd underlines the incompetence of those who rule and the powerlessness of the citizens. She perceives the need for change. She illustrates, upon the example of the Abbasids, how it is possible to lose independence

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

¹²⁵ Fawziyya Rashīd, *Taḥawwulāt al-fāris al-gharīb*, Beirut, 1990, pp. 11–12.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 21–22.

in order to refer to the present in which, despite the development of civilization, problems and the behaviour of people does not differ from that hundreds of years ago.

Emmanuel Mounier, the creator of the monthly *Esprit* and the author of *A Personalistic Manifesto* presented in 1936, in recapitulating his ideas, said: "An individual is not even a social cell, but constitutes the peak from which all the roads of the world diverge".¹²⁷

Mounier's concepts are certainly not new in the history of philosophical or social thought. Man as a concrete person with a unique story had previously inspired chiefly Pascal and Kierkegaard. The latter placed particular emphasis on personal existence, on its intensity and truth. He considered that only a life that was real and perceptible is an apt and worthy subject for investigation. Acquaintance with the world is for Kierkegaard an acquaintance with a concrete individual, one experiencing his own singular internal life. This uniqueness of the individual is the greatest value, yet simultaneously it constitutes the source of conflicts. Kierkegaard writes of "the tragic sense of life". Tragic for it is never totally fulfilled.¹²⁸ The world of human desires is often a world of defeats and disillusionment. It seems that man's greatest misfortune is his loneliness, the borders of which are impassable, from whence there is no exit in any direction. Kierkegaard sees man's salvation only in God. This matter is however perceived differently by his heirs.

The French existentialist Gabriel Marcel sees a way out from the circle of loneliness, achievable through the help of another man. In his play *The Destroyed World* (*Le monde cassé*) of 1933 he writes: "We are not alone, nobody is alone [...] There exists a community of sinners [...] There exists a community of saints".¹²⁹ "The apostle of despair", Sartre, perceives reality somewhat differently. He writes:

Existence exists without justification, without causes and without need, the world is a whirl of nonsense and man a vessel of damnation.¹³⁰

Mounier's personalism combines in itself the concepts of the existentialists yet in contrast to the ideas of the philosophers cited by me it does not constitute a certain systematic whole but rather a perspective, a method in evaluating facts and phenomena. One could state that it is a living philosophy, one developing with life itself and impinging on it. Its aim is the revealing of the world pervaded thoroughly by man, to the most mysterious depths of existence, a world of the fullest flowering and the greatest volume of all personalities.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Emanuel Mounier, *Co to jest personalizm*, w: Tadeusz Terlecki, *Krytyka personalistyczna*, Warszawa, 1987, p. 27.

¹²⁸ Cf. Søren Kierkegaard, *Choroba na śmierć*, Warszawa, 1966, p. 5.

¹²⁹ Gabriel Marcel, *Le monde cassé*, in: Tadeusz Terlecki, *Krytyka...*, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

¹³⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, in: Tadeusz Terlecki, *Krytyka...*, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

¹³¹ Cf. Tadeusz Terlecki, *Krytyka...*, *op.cit.*, p. 32.

Such personalistic ideas find their total confirmation in the short stories by Fawziya Rashid selected by me from the collection *Marāyā az-ẓill wa al-farah* (*Mirrors of Light and Shade*).

Helena Zaworska, in her analysis of Jaroslaw Iwaszkiewicz's short stories, writes that in real life we are never able to totally get to know human nature, its desires and aspirations. There exists however, according to her, a reality of imagination and art within which the artist is able to comprehend a range of experiences which are on a daily basis inscrutable.¹³² It is just such an internal inscrutable world that Fawziyya Rashīd attempts to sketch for us in her short stories. This is far from being a world that is clear and lucid, in the way that our thoughts and desires are not totally clear. The author often ventures blindfold into the depths of her heroes' reality slowly discovering their true features. The reader can easily lose himself in this jumble of feelings and events. However this encourages him all the more to reflection. Fawziyya Rashīd's man stimulates us to search for meaning, purpose, motive, forces us to ask constant questions. He does not allow us to pass by indifferently.

The heroes of the short stories from the collection *Marāyā az-ẓill wa al-farah* (*Mirrors of Light and Shade*) are the people we meet on the street, so different from us and yet so similar. Questions about them are questions about us. Their failure tastes as bitter as our own. Their life is as alarmingly real as our own. The simplicity and commonplaceness of the events described by Fawziyya Rashīd is striking. Beyond that commonplaceness, however, one can reiterate Helena Zaworska's writing about Iwaszkiewicz: "Danger peeps out, beyond commonness the macabre, beyond the realistic, sensory detail – metaphysics".¹³³

The hero of the short story *Lawḥa ghayr muktamila* (*An Unfinished Picture*) is a painter. His problems begin when he is detained by the police without any documents. Shocked by the arrest and plagued by constant summons to the police station he is unable to create freely. Unceasing tension and fear paralyze him to such a degree that he almost stops painting. The constant police intrusion leads him to a gradual nervous breakdown. His relationship with his beloved woman collapses. He feels all the time that he is being followed. Despite this the immense desire to create allows him to survive the moment of crisis and face up to his internal problems. However, at the very moment when for the first time after many months he reaches for his brush the police arrive to arrest him. In this short story Fawziyya Rashīd exposes for us the functioning of the human psyche in a state of extreme nervous tension. The events are related by a narrator in the third person though the majority of the story consists of the hero's monologue. It is from this that we learn what the artist feels. We discover that he suffers the most from creative impotence which he himself is not totally able to understand and which causes him immense

¹³² Cf. Helena Zaworska, *Opowiadania Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza*, Warszawa, 1985, p. 12.

¹³³ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

pain. He repeats many times that “If I only could... [...] I would never have thought that something like this could have happened to me”.¹³⁴

The world is presented in the short story from the perspective of the hero. Recollections are intertwined here with fragments of conversation and the narrator’s commentary. This kind of expression on the part of the author is difficult for the recipient, yet superbly reflects the reality of human perception and our psyche. Fear plays an important role in the work, in the shadow of which the hero lives. The feeling of constant threat and the tormenting memories of arrest do not allow him to live normally, not to mention his artistic work. When finally he is able to pull himself together sufficiently to take a brush in hand he says: “I will start from my own tragedy [...] I will transfer that world to canvas”.¹³⁵

In accordance with the spirit of Mounier’s tragic optimism, the artist after months of struggle with himself finally starts to paint. This immense strength of constantly raising oneself above one’s own weaknesses and defeats that is so strongly emphasized by the creator of *A Personalistic Manifesto* becomes almost also the magical strength of the hero of Fawziyya Rashīd’s short story *Lawḥa ḡhayr muktamila* (*An Unfinished Picture*). To be, as uttered by the already mentioned Marcel, means to be on the way, become, to exceed oneself, to constantly strive further.¹³⁶ Such an attitude also characterizes the character created by the author in the story *Lawḥa ḡhayr muktamila* (*The Unfinished Picture*) from the collection *Marāyā az-zill wa al-faraḥ* (*Mirrors of Light and Shade*). Despite victory over himself the artist is finally arrested. In considering his lot further we become simultaneously aware of how correct another existentialist Karl Jaspers was in writing that “the source of our actions and our self-consciousness is freedom”.¹³⁷

‘Adnān Sharīf, the hero of another short story *Al-Wajh al-ākḥār* (*Another Face*) finds himself in a similar situation. An active student activist when young he is made to pay heavily for overly brave viewpoints. At present as a man “with a past” he is faced with a none too easy choice, to support the striking workers or to hand over the names of the main activists to the management by which he will gain promotion and go abroad. We equally become in this case acquainted with the hero from, as if, the inside. We follow his struggle with himself from the very beginning. Personal problems influence his perception of reality. We can note that the whole image of the world that surrounds the hero is to a large degree distorted, pervaded with a certain indeterminacy and fear of what will occur. ‘Adnān Sharīf’s insomnia is the consequence of a life led under constant stress. It is for this reason that he goes to a clinic although he is not really seeking help there. He only wants to be given sleeping tablets. When asked by a doctor for the symptoms of his illness he says to

¹³⁴ Fawziyya Rashīd, *Lawḥa ḡhayr muktamila*, in: *Marāyā az-zill wa al-faraḥ*, Beirut, 1983, pp. 13–14.

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹³⁶ Compare: Tadeusz Terlecki, *Krytyka...*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

¹³⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Filozofia egzystencji*, Warszawa, 1990, p. 36.

himself: “There was no point in coming here... I should have tried to get my hands on the tablets some other way”.¹³⁸

We can clearly notice in this short story a fear of others, and particularly the conviction that another person will never totally understand us. This belief gives rise to a sense of solitude constituting an element of the Sartre-like wall which always will divide us from the world and another man.

The author does not evaluate her hero. She presents his story remaining impartial to the end. ‘Adnān Sharīf constitutes the centre of reality, he directs himself by his own reason and possibly just like Mounier’s man remains the only measure of the Absolute.

The subject of alienation and loneliness is undertaken equally by the title story *Lu‘bat laylat al-jum‘a* (*The Friday Do*). The heroine, who is within the work equally the narrator, relates the events addressing the reader directly. She recounts how she spends Friday evenings together with a group of friends. Deep down she has had enough of the repetitive cycle of the party ritual, occurring at a table laden with food and the stuffy atmosphere fanned by dancing, wine and cards. She turns to herself: “I don’t know why I came here”.¹³⁹ She feels that really nothing connects her with the people she meets. She does not participate in their conversation or games. She shuts herself off in her reality so different from the turmoil that on all sides surrounds her. But the heroine does not disclose what she desires. We do not know what she actually desires from life. The only thing that we clearly perceive is the dissonance between her and the group of people enjoying themselves: “You sit amongst them and you wonder what the reason is you spend every Friday evening with them”.¹⁴⁰

Besides the heroine’s extremely Sartre-like standpoint, one close to repeating the “philosopher of despairs” words that hell is different, Fawziyya Rashīd gives us examples of a complete stance. One of the characters in the course of conversation says: “This world is a prison... we are its windows...”, after a moment the personage adds: “Love is its only window”.¹⁴¹

Once again the author provokes the reader to taking the appropriate stand in the questions raised in her work, but what needs to be emphasized is that she herself does not evaluate the stances of her heroes. Her philosophy is shaped by definite events and the psyche of a concrete individual.

The next two short stories: *Min arshīf al-waḥḍa* (*From the Archive of Loneliness*) and *Shay’ mā* (*Something*) are written in the form of recollections or confessions that concern the intimate spheres of human life i.e. love and the need for acceptance. The heroines of these short stories have many features in common. Both feel that love is for them something unusually important that brings into their lives completely new values. However in both cases the women’s dreams are shattered by reality. They

¹³⁸ Fawziyya Rashīd, *Al-Wajh al-ākḥār*, in: *Marāyā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

¹³⁹ Fawziyya Rashīd, *Lu‘bat laylat al-jum‘a*, in: *Marāyā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 51.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

quickly become aware that their conceptions as to feelings and life as a pair do not adhere to the outlook of their fiances. We do not learn much from the works as to the two women's stories. The author presents the world of their thoughts and feelings. We detect how strong their desires to open up to another human being are, to get to know him and simultaneously to be known. It appears that their striving to meet others is internal coercion. They discover the truth about themselves only through contact with the reality of people met. Undoubtedly the full realization of an individual in the world depends to a great degree on being open to another person. However, connecting with this "other" is not easy and does not always end successfully. Situations place Fawziyya Rashīd's heroines before many unknowns. The girl from the short story *Shay' mā* (*Something*) after breaking up with her fiancé asks herself the apparently trivial question: "Will anyone want me now for his wife?"¹⁴²

Romantic experiences expose for the women obvious truths that they will have to, however, arrive at on their own. The heroine of the work *Min arshīf al-waḥda* (*From the Archive of Loneliness*) says at the end: "I realized that it is still along way from dreams to reality".¹⁴³

In the collection of short stories *Marāyā az-zill wa al-faraḥ* (*Mirrors of Light and Shade*) the question of man and his place in reality runs through in various forms. Such is the case in the short story *Hikāya lam tantahī* (*The Unfinished Story*) where events are related by a narrator in the first person. We get to know the lot of Layla from his perspective as well. We learn that following unsuccessful attempts to study the girl takes up a job in the local factory thereby helping to keep the family. She gets to know new people, starts to meet with friends. Day by day she becomes more and more independent something which does not please her father who had wished for something more from his eldest daughter. He had wanted her to become a teacher. He shuts out the idea that she could get married and leave his house. It is certainly not insignificant that the girl contributes every month to the family budget. In a conversation where the mother is touching on the subject of marrying the daughter off, the father clearly says: "Do you really understand? How are we going to live without her working?"¹⁴⁴ The young girl is unable to agree with her father's decision and places him before a fait accompli. After Layla's suspected ill health it turns out that the girl is pregnant and in order to avoid embarrassment she is forced to get married.

Fawziyya Rashīd here confronts two different worlds. The life and dreams of the young girl are contrasted with the world outlook and ambitions of the father. This collision of two different realities can be interpreted in many ways. Undoubtedly the presentation of the conflict between generations and the family's difficult financial situation is important. Equally the presentation of the contrasting personalities of the

¹⁴² Fawziyya Rashīd, *Shay' mā*, in: *Marāyā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 71.

¹⁴³ Fawziyya Rashīd, *Min arshīf al-waḥda*, in: *Marāyā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁴ Fawziyya Rashīd, *Hikāya lam tantahī*, in: *Marāyā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

father and daughter is not without significance. Within this context it appears that the hero of the “unfinished story” is man who in contacts with others is constantly faced with a choice, who finds himself somewhere at the crossroads between his own priorities and compromise and a sense of responsibility in the face of those who are closest. On the one hand he does not want to give up on his own values, while on the other he does not see how often his desires differ from those of people close. Layla can not count upon understanding on the part of her father. For him it was important to keep his daughter for as long as possible at home. He did not think sensibly about her happiness, for he realized that when the girl gets married she will stop giving him the money she earns. When she is bored of waiting for her father’s permission to get married she says to her mother: “I can’t continue to carry on as helplessly as an oxen”¹⁴⁵ making it clear that she does not intend to delay with getting married. The author equally this time leaves any evaluation of the heroes’ attitudes to the reader. And so the reader decides upon the perception of Layla and he evaluates what she does.

Fawziyya Rashīd’s world of stories is one shown from the human side. Emmanuel Mournier says: “The human person is the only reality that we know and that we create at the same time”.¹⁴⁶ And just such a reality is extremely close to the author of the collection *Marāyā az-zill wa al-farah* (*Mirrors of Light and Shade*) who advances on the first plane of things first and foremost man. It is not easy to reflect human thoughts and desires, it is also not easy to read the short stories of Fawziyya Rashīd. Often following a hero’s single thought we find ourselves in it relations with many varied and at times contradictory truths. But is that not the case in our life? The author takes us upon a real journey through the recesses of the human consciousness. She allows one to discover the richness of the characters of individuals personages and to wonder as to the motifs for their actions. We are, however, unsure to the end. Many questions remain unresolved. Just as if the truth about man is constantly eluding us. Maybe the fact that we are constantly changing and missing matters means that it is not possible to discern such a truth. That said, however, I feel that Fawziyya Rashīd through her subtle descriptions and analysis of her heroes’ feelings endeavours to reach the general common situation of man. One that Gabriel Marcel encapsulates in the words: “We exist separately, each in his own way, yet the basis and sense of existence is common to us all”.¹⁴⁷

Man remains, in the short stories by Fawziyya Rashīd that have been mentioned, in the spirit of personalism, the most important subject. One that appears to have been only superficially considered by us. There always remains for us some mystery about others and we ourselves for “without this mystery life would be unbearable”.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁶ Emmanuel Mournier, *Co to jest...*, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁷ Gabriel Marcel, *Le monde...*, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 70.

“A writer is a dreamer, dreaming while awake, and a literary work is a dream in reality”. The above is the most succinct summary of views held in the literary theory of psychoanalysis, the author of which is the Austrian philosopher and psychiatrist Sigmund Freud. Almost one hundred years later, during the period of the post-structuralist breakthrough in Europe a certain group of literary critics in conducting a debate as to the interpretation of a literary work presented a similar viewpoint whose exponent was Jonathan Culler.¹⁴⁹ His vision in the interpretation of a literary work as a text flowing out of the recipient’s subconscious, who enters into direct contact with the work, in connection with Freudian thought finds exemplification in the work of the Bahraini writer Na‘īm ‘Āshūr (see Biographies).

His collection of short stories from 1989, entitled *Dhākirat al-mā’* (*Memory of Water*), portrays estranged heroes who are unable to totally identify themselves with the surroundings in which they live. There takes root in them fear, uncertainty and anxiety in the face of the world, hence the obsessive repetition of the motive of death displayed through the prism of the dead, a cemetery, the grave. In the short story *Dā’irat al-ghubār* (*The Circle of Dust*) the hero is paralyzed yet possesses a sizeable fortune. Family and friends eagerly try to care for him counting on inclusion in his will and surround him as if a crowd of beggars:

Women beggars wrapped in black rags approach the man. In beseeching gestures they stretch out hands to him. They kiss his palms. The face of the man reddens with rage... They pay no heed to this and do not let up their deeds [...]¹⁵⁰

Despite his riches the man has no great needs, and his only wish is for his bed to be placed by the window in order that he may observe the life that goes on beyond it. However death inevitably comes:

The man disappears and in his place there appears a white coffin like cow’s milk, lying on a small carriage pulled by black horses. They approach in order to disappear. And behind them appear four figures attired in black cloaks [...] On their heads are tall hats [...]¹⁵¹

The short story *Wa kāna al-ḥilm yaḥlum bī* (*In this Dream I Dreamt about Myself*) ties in with the Freudian theory of subconscious domination. Dream is the gate that opens up the route for analysis: “Jasmine and love in my dreams drench me like a flood of fresh water [...]”¹⁵²

Further wanderings lead us to the heart of the dream. We discover here terror:

A wild beast appears in the dream of the sleeper. It awakes me this roaring monster in the depth of my heart. My dream rumbles and resounds like a huge elephant [...]¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Jonathan Culler, *Teoria literatury*, Warszawa, n.d.

¹⁵⁰ Na‘īm ‘Āshūr, *Dā’irat al-ghubār*, in: *Dhākirat al-mā’*, Bahrain, 1989, p. 80.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 80.

¹⁵² Na‘īm ‘Āshūr, *Wa kāna al-ḥilm yaḥlum bī*, in: *Dhākirat...*, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 131.

We observe hidden desires and a thirst for physical sensations:

Rain in its divinity falls from the heavens slipping and crawling in the shapes of strange beings escaping to their lairs, and the lovers cuddle in their embraces caressing the delicate breasts swollen with blood...¹⁵⁴

We perceive also the hidden desire for blood hidden in the crannies of the brain. In this collection the subject of loneliness best suits the writer, the gulf that divides the individual from the world that surrounds him, the absence of a common language that allows for mutual understanding. Loneliness and isolation condemn the heroes to shut themselves off, to search for escape in dream, in the world of fantasy and aroused imagination. The heroes undergo an analysis of their own feelings, testing their interiors and the motives for their actions. However in many cases self analysis turns out to be a faulty instrument. For man even in the deepest layers of consciousness is not honest, for the subconscious is a hotbed of lies.

Na'im 'Āshūr in the collection of short stories *Hālāt al-'ib' al-awwal* (*The First State of Difficulties*) touches on a subject connected with war and the struggle for national liberation. The stories were written in the years 1976 to 1983 and it seems that they were written under the influence of events in the Arab world that took place at this time: the Palestinian problem, the Iran-Iraq War, the problems in Bahrain. The world was subjected to deformation with the aim of showing its chaos, post-war reality, or the conflict of generations. Na'im 'Āshūr starts the collection with the story entitled *Sūrat al-īyāb* (*The Sura of Return*) where the main hero is a dead man wrapped in a shroud lying on a catafalque. Suddenly his soul awakes:

He spoke softly to himself: have I lost my sight? Am I surrounded by whiteness? [...] A small group of men in the prayer room hold books. He turns his gaze and everything becomes obvious. He has discovered the mystery: this is a mosque and he lies close to the mihrab covered in a shroud.¹⁵⁵

The men, despite attempts to engage them in contact, do not react and continue deep in prayer. The mourners lament outside. The only person who recognized him is his daughter. She calls out: "Father! I can't touch you! [...]".¹⁵⁶ At home he understood however that nothing will ever be as it was on hearing the words of his wife: "Your father has died and will never return"[...] ¹⁵⁷ He recalls how this death came about and desires once again to take solace in life:

Is it possible to bring back your one and only life? Is it possible for you to stand in the doorway once more? [...] He recalled his life. He was unable to hold back the tears, he sobbed.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

¹⁵⁵ Na'im 'Āshūr, *Sūrat al-īyāb*, in: *Hālāt al-'ib' al-awwal*, Bahrain, 1986, p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

A hero's personal drama more than likely also brought about by war, is presented in the short story *Dif'... lā waṣf lahu* (*Indescribable Warmth*) in which the hero laments the fact that he has lived for fifty years without a mother, father, daughter or son: "as lonely as the stump of a tree sun blasted in the desert. Alone in its dark cellar..."¹⁵⁹ More than likely a prison sentence is being served. It seems to him that he hears voices calling him which compound his suffering: "I opened the door of my heart and cried: come to me, but no one came"¹⁶⁰ Finally he is taken by a strange sense of warmth which appears to him as his mother. Probably he has been sentenced to death for defending his country. After all war is a process of constant contact with death. The reality of battle and death contrasts with the world which takes them away.

The soldier from the short story *Sūrat al-īyāb* (*The Sura of Return*) is a tragic figure because he dies anonymously, in a crowd of other people. War and prison destroy the psyche of the hero of the short story *Dif'... lā waṣf lahu* (*Indescribable Warmth*). He has to give up all the privileges of youth in return for participation in the world of death.

The title of the short story *Dif'... lā waṣf lahu* (*Indescribable Warmth*) is simultaneously the title of another collection of short stories which contain a plethora of social problems linked to male-female relations. For example in the short story *An-Nāfidha* (*The Window*), or the fantastic *Shabaḥ yukhayyim fawqa madīna* (*A Spirit Rising Over a Town*). An exceptionally interesting story is *Wayl liman yabqā waḥīdan ma' ashbāḥihi* (*Wail to Him Who Remains Alone with His Spectres*). The events of the story take place in the writer's imagination and constitute a dialogue with Pablo Neruda the Nobel Prize winner, who always sought new forms of expression in the spirit of the avant-garde. One can see in it Na'im 'Āshūr's unusual fascination with the Chilean poet whose work is extremely diverse thematically. The hero of the story fights with the spectres of the title which influences the cause and result sequence of the story. Chaotic thoughts are intertwined with various happenings and comparatively rich descriptions of the beloved. As it turns out this love is unreal, being the result of illusions that remained from reading the works of Pablo Neruda who is equally one of the heroes of the story. The writer addresses him so: "Does copying become me [...] Neruda, I must admit! Thanks to you, Neruda, I got to know Irina [...]"¹⁶¹

Na'im 'Āshūr at times loses the border between fiction and reality, he falls in love with the hero of another work, and feels guilty:

I did not conspire to kidnap her. When I wiped the dust off the book I was thinking about something else.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Na'im 'Āshūr, *Dif'... lā waṣf lahu*, in: *Dif'... lā waṣf lahu*, Beirut – Bahrain, 1985, p. 95.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 100.

¹⁶¹ Na'im 'Āshūr, *Wayl liman yabqā waḥīdan ma' ashbāḥihi*, in: *Dif'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 44.

The detailed descriptions of the beloved and the hero's philosophical confessions deceive us, leaving no indications that everything that is happening is occurring exclusively in the sphere of our imagination.

The next short story entitled *An-Nāfidha* (*The Window*) has been written in the form of a drama. Stage directions have been placed between the dialogue that deal with the hero's appearance, the lighting, and the echoes that appear. The central element is the window of the title "that faces the desert".¹⁶³ The heroes are two men who conduct a conversation about a woman desired by both. The story is, from the beginning to the end, enveloped in an aura of mystery, though the animal power of desire and lust is clearly shown, in the face of which the men are powerless.

The short story *Al-Ḥarb wa al-layl... wa al-baydā'* (*War, Night and the Desert*) presents a completely different relationship between men and women. The heroes' conversations and reflections are intertwined with acts of war something we learn about from the radio communiqués. A man tormented by doubts wants to leave his beloved but she does not agree to this and keeps him with her body:

My lips commenced to kiss her nipples, as hard as stone... Two units, the left and right advanced further in the direction of the burning earth [...]¹⁶⁴

The role of the woman gradually changes though. She is no longer merely a comforter, but becomes a guide to the demoralized world. She takes her lover on a mysterious journey, showing him images of depravity:

She led me like a lamb to the slaughter [...] and she goes on her route into the depth and shows me this boy masturbates on hearing the sound of rockets and artillery fire. And that woman.. awakes her husband and tells him that a policeman is pulling a girl by her hair and at the same time is undoing his fly. Clowns dressed in rags entertain a naked sultan [...]¹⁶⁵

The last sentence may be criticism of the debauched and corrupt ruling class. Other grotesque images appear:

Throwing themselves into the embrace of bogs, playing with severed heads and gouge out from them the sleeping eyes. Blood streams from the cracked walls and does not clot. Beyond more and more blood gushes forth.¹⁶⁶

The meaning of these images may be characterized as a symbol of the horror of war and the bestiality of human nature.

Na'im 'Āshūr belongs to that group of writers who are unable to clearly define their writer's profile, something that is visible in the last collection of short stories *'Im ḡalāman ayyuhā al- ḡajar* (*Good Evening Darling*). It is all written in prose that turns into poetic prose. This is divided into sub sections that are given sub titles. The

¹⁶³ Na'im 'Āshūr, *An-Nāfidha*, in: *Dif'...*, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁴ Na'im 'Āshūr, *Al-Ḥarb wa al-layl... wa al-baydā'*, in: *Dif'...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 36–37.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

first short story *Ad-Dukhūl fī marāyā al-maṭar* (*Entry into the Mirror of Rain*) is its own form of introduction to the whole:

Relaxed on my sofa... wrapped in a soft cloth around the expanse of recollections of lust.

Relaxed and before me a screen of flashing silver and pain...

Relaxed, and time flows before me, dragging the body with itself, fragments of bodies, the remains of bodies, a little blood... and rain.

The rain depresses. The carving of the groves in the umbrella takes control of my head
...The murmuring of the flood seizes me and raises me above the joy of the heart...

Oh, my heart!...

I want and I don't want!¹⁶⁷

The writer maintains his attention throughout the whole of the volume on scraps of reality, on fragments of images. He is able to look and to hear. He is sensitive to colours and sounds. He values the trivia that constitutes the writer's micro cosmos, a symbolic world and the stage for his deliberations.

A range of word-forming measures appear in the work. "a screen of flashing silver and pain" is a metaphor linked with animatism. There is a lot more animatism in the text: "time flows before me dragging the body with itself [...] The rain depresses. The carving of the groves in the umbrella takes control of my head [...]".

The whole work is awash with symbols and metaphors, which is an omen of difficulty in the interpretation of poetic prose.

I want and I don't want!

I crouch between the fingertips open like a rose from which nectar drips like silver ships looming before me: moons in the waves of light are crumpled in my head. Milk attributed to envy drips into my throat... Drops of silvery water accumulate. Melted silver gurgles in the heart of the earth and I do not know: the days pass, flow, and the remaining drops of water spy on my heart, my heart... break my heart, tear me open, both me as her.¹⁶⁸

A great deal of description appears in this part of the short story, metaphor as well as similes. One of these similes is the following phrase: "fingertips open like a rose [...]". Nectar the drink of paradise is a symbol of incomplete and extreme happiness; given to only those lucky few who deserve rest in heaven. Through the symbol of nectar the author touches on the eschatological questions of Islam, smuggling in spiritual matters. With the same he emphasizes the divinity of the rose that he compares to a finger.

A characteristic feature of Na'im 'Āshūr's prose is the richness of description. The writer in a detailed way attempts to characterize the objects he writes about.

¹⁶⁷ Na'im 'Āshūr, *Ad-Dukhūl fī marāyā al-maṭar*, in: *'Im zālāman ayyuhā al-hajar*, Beirut, 1998, p. 5.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 5–6.

...Above the earth there was a table, on the table a cloth, a white tablecloth, and on this cloth a bottle, a bottle stuck with decoration, and inside water, water that quenches thirst, replenished, and a bird in the expanse...

I was in a backstreet on the outside of a tomb

Just like

It clearly felt that the air was a mixture of oxygen, carbon dioxide, nitrogen, sea water, water circulating in space, a dormant knife [...] ¹⁶⁹

The detailed descriptions are here enhanced by a series of hyperbole: “[...] on the table a cloth, a white tablecloth, and on this cloth a bottle, a bottle stuck with decoration, and inside water, water that quenches thirst [...]”. The air is characterized with the preciseness of a chemist, citing the individual components that go into its make-up. The care and detail of the descriptions is at times at odds with the writer’s sensitivity and the richness of the metaphors employed. Gradually there emerges the link that connects the particular parts of the work, i.e. a woman and love.

The balcony had the width of a wall and the thickness of a curtain, and the moon was the size of a room. The bed was tight, iron, yellow in colour... ¹⁷⁰

The balcony, the moon, the bed, these are elements that are seemingly unconnected. They take on in this fragment of the work a completely new significance. Each on its own is merely one of the obvious elements that surround us. Here, selected deliberately they emphasize the simplicity and naturalness of the described scene, making the hero an ordinary man. Erotic desire is linked to the bed.

In one of the stories the author also writes about *hijab* which limits the field of vision of a woman, overpowering him, it constitutes for her an indispensable element of life, without which one can remain at best at home, in other words locked up, while in the external world it must accompany one. The same is the case with the main hero. In getting rid of thoughts of a woman, he feels like in a prison and is unable to feel happy.

It is difficult to find in Na‘īm ‘Āshūr’s work a uniform plot. It is undoubtedly a new way of looking at the world, based on the use of new means of expression. All his collections of short stories defy rational classification and interpretation via means of recognized concepts and ways of analysis. It seems that everything intentionally breaks literary conventions. Their joint feature is to be found in ambiguity. ‘Āshūr imposes his own order on things, seeing within it what he himself considers of value. In every collection of short stories he constructs his principles afresh, exposing them to further transformation, development and clear complication. This additional enrichment is achieved by means of a series of word-forming and syntactical devices, and also by means of the allusions that are made in relation to matters of life and the functioning of man in Islamic society.

¹⁶⁹ Na‘īm ‘Āshūr, *Fī madīḥ an-naḥfa al-akhīra*, in: *‘Im ḡalāman...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 70–71.

¹⁷⁰ Na‘īm ‘Āshūr, *Ākhir al-kharīq, awwal al-barīq*, in: *‘Im ḡalāman...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 80–81.

Farīd Ramaḍān was born in Bahrain in 1961. He made his literary debut in 1984 with the collection *Al-Bayāḍ (Whiteness)* which contained short stories that dealt with social and political subject matter as well as with love. These stories showed an important stage in the life of Bahrainis – the period of repression. He subsequently started to write literary texts that border between poetry and prose and also novels.

The novel *At-Tannūr (The Furnace)* was dedicated to the poet ‘Alī ash-Sharqāwī for whose cause Farīd Ramaḍān started to write. It is made up of three parts each of which deals with loneliness, something borne out by the first words: “His days were lonely”.¹⁷¹

As with many other Bahraini writers he also looks at the sea. He desires to be free, to reach home through it, to the islands of his brothers. He is not the first nor the last to seek comfort in the sea, bird life and the old benches he sits on. He observes people living in these areas. He sees how they work and play. In the next part *Ṣalāt as-safār (The Travel Prayer)* a lonely father appears who has allowed his sons to leave home despite the advice of well-meaning people. Despite the pain of parting he is unable to contribute to wasting their life. He waits for days on end for letters with news of them. The sense of yearning grows with every day: “Your mother repeats songs she has thought up while I sit in front of the stove in the lewdness of time”.¹⁷² Towards the end of the work, like towards the end of life, the father desires his sons’ return. The mother suffers also with him:

This is the torment of your mother. Return to us so that we can recall the features of your faces. Enter the darkness that we sit in. Disperse it with your bravery, for we are not able to. Enter into the crossroads of routes and enlighten us with your calling.¹⁷³

In the fragment *Asrār Allāh (The Mysteries of God)* the hero desires to increase the size of his family. The would-be father’s worries are tempered by the words he hears: “Pregnancy has its source with God and you, and not with women. [...] Creation belongs to God”.¹⁷⁴ These fragments can be termed erotic. Employing the advice the couple climb up into a mountain range and consummate their union in a cave. Farīd Ramaḍān in a vivid though reserved way describes the incident in the cave:

But when his desire had intensified, he entered [...] The signs of Amina are heard [...] She emerges from under his body and moves away...¹⁷⁵

During their stay in the cave the village has been hit by an earthquake:

When they reached the village it was not as they had left it. A large cemetery had come into being where the men were carrying several dead bodies [...] It was an earthquake, ‘Abd Allah. Come, help us bury the dead. There was no village.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Farīd Ramaḍān, *At-Tannūr*, Bahrain, 1994, p. 8.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 15.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 29–30.

Amina becomes pregnant though which constitutes a happy ending to a sad story. Farīd Ramaḍān expresses a shocking image of loneliness in the short work entitled *Raythama ansā ibtihālātikum (They Even Forgot to Pray)* in which the hero ‘Abd Allah dreams that he is standing on a bucket in a dark room. It seems to him that there is someone else there but he can’t make him out. Short sentences abound which reflect the gloomy atmosphere: “It seems to me that I can see someone. A man or a woman?... I can’t make out who it is”.¹⁷⁷ A moment later the nightmare intensifies when it seems to him that Salah has appeared to set fire to him. Then ‘Abd Allah is awoken by his wife, Amina. Everything returns to normality: “A small flame bursts into life from the glowing embers in the small stove”.¹⁷⁸

In the work *Hafāfā’, hafāfā’ ayyuhā al-abnā’ (Careful, Sons!)* once more loneliness is examined. This time it is loneliness that results from a woman’s psychological illness. In the first part of the story her qualities and hardworking nature are described:

She was still able to cook and repair clothes [...]. She would wash and milk her one goat, a present from her husband’s family, or sit at her cottage and chop wood.¹⁷⁹

When she had had enough sleep she would raise her voice and wake her husband. She would repeat all around: Welcome to you who have passed on and will not return! Raise your heads high and go peacefully beyond the sea...¹⁸⁰

In a way different from the previous fragment, the gloomy mood is maintained right up to the end. The husband with time stops paying attention to his wife’s strange behaviour. She gave birth to just three children and died. The husband’s loneliness reaches its zenith when he finally stops praying.

The hero of the last part is a baker ‘Abd ar-Rahman and his son Muhammad:

You, as the only one, are able to sit by this glittering fire and look at the people crushed into the crowd, awaiting their daily bread

You

Only You

Muhammad!¹⁸¹

For not the first or the last time Farīd Ramaḍān creates the impression of a plucked or subsiding utterance. Individually, the lonely words amongst the broken text look like poetry forcing its way into prose. They are in their own way interludes. A good example is the fragment *Wāqif yashudd nafsahu (Standing He Experiences Himself)* in which the baker ‘Abd ar-Rahman plans in isolation radical changes in the standard of living for his family. He desires to start from building them a new

¹⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

¹⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

house. The description of the flat as well as the baker's ponderings are interrupted by a short poem that slowly changes the heavy atmosphere that pervades the short story.

An axe with great hunger opens wood
 With ease it comes apart and breaks
 The house exposes them when they pray
 When they pray in the amulet of quiet
 Injured hands and wood¹⁸²

The novel ends with a fragment *Shahqat an-nār* (*The Whinnying of the Fire*). The writer returns again to a chaotic style. This time he introduces many heroes. The entirety is maintained in a gloomy atmosphere. Dark streets, the whinnying of a donkey, the sounds of beating and the smell of blood results in immense confusion. But here also the ending changes completely this dark atmosphere. Yusuf switches on the radio, dances and sings: "Rejoice, Bahraini People! Rejoice!"¹⁸³

In the novel *At-Tannūr* (*The Furnace*) Farīd Ramaḍān attempts to look at people who are of different origins. It is a tale of a baker's family from Iran which has come to Bahrain and has started to work by opening a bakery. The writer himself comes from Iran so there appear in the novel descriptions of many places that he comes from.

In the book *Tilka aṣ-ṣaghīra al-latī tushbihuk* (*The Small One Who Is Like You*) the writer starts the subject of associating with death. Despite the prosaic form of the work we are able to find many lyrical elements. The whole work is composed of three parts which are entitled: *Al-Mushāhadāt 1, 2, 3* (*Observations 1,2,3*). Each of the parts contains short chapters which cover images and visions of fragments of reality. The first part opens with the image of an injured, possibly dying, woman:

The rain proud that it sprinkles her face full of grace, washes her cheeks and flows further in the direction of a terrified, pulsating breast, wets her clothes coloured in blood which unexpectedly flows from it. The colour of the wound on the body surprises her and the unconstrained intensity of the events.¹⁸⁴

This scene becomes the beginning of a metaphysical journey. In the chapter *Al-Ḥabībān* (*The Two Lovers*) the character is presented even closer up:

So the morn unfolds its brightness before us, and you, sleepy, with your torn body do not remember anything from the carnival. Now then let's finish the story.¹⁸⁵

There appear next to her two men who have appeared to carry out a rescue mission or to take her to the other world. In the chapter *Al-Karnafāl* (*The Carnival*) we are witnesses to an unusual event:

¹⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 93.

¹⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

¹⁸⁴ Farīd Ramaḍān, *Tilka aṣ-ṣaghīra al-latī tushbihuk*, Bahrain, 1991, p. 6.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 49.

I'll switch on the light she said, and turn that palace into a minaret which will call all entities in their most varied form. They come with gifts as well as the word of old songs on their lips. They hunt stars in order to hang them over the walls of the palace. From this brightness a tree is formed which will never wither and will never lose its fruit, and the leaves will be adorned with the names of the invited.¹⁸⁶

This carnival appears as a posthumous reality:

Two companions opened the huge doors set with emeralds and many wanted to pass through them. They fought before them, fell over and trod on each other.¹⁸⁷

Farīd Ramaḍān's most recent novel *Al-Barzakh... najmat fī safar (Al-Barzakh... Star in Traveller)* published in 2000 in Jordan continues the mystical subject matter. Already the very title itself contains several indicators as the author has not accidentally made use of a term drawn from a dictionary of Arabic myths. Barzakh, according to Ibn 'Arabī is the region dividing two worlds – the world of divine unity and the world of creation (*'ālam al-wahda and 'ālam al-kathra*). Between these two worlds stands insane kāmīl i.e. a perfect man. The content of the novel is the crossing over and entering of various thresholds and the overcoming of the subsequent stages of the journey on the route of life. The whole is constructed on the principle of permanent disharmony permeating the constant oppositions, the juxtapositions of two worlds, the wandering between reality and dream. The author recounts here the story of the thirteen-year old daughter of a gravedigger, Sara, who was never accepted by her father. He, leading the miserable life of a gravedigger, constantly complains that his child was not born a boy:

It would be better if you had been a boy. He would often stand in front of my mother and repeat this, not paying any attention to me whatsoever.¹⁸⁸

The girl's mother washes the corpses preparing them for their final journey. The girl's psyche takes first place in the story. She wanders in sleepy visions in which reality mixes with fantasy. It is from her that we learn the story of her father and the relationship that exists between them. The reader is shocked by the maturity of what she says, of her comments and observations. The girl is often accompanied by fear. She tries to fight with it, but at the cemetery she is paralysed with fear when she sees the dead. This fear intensifies within her a sense of guilt that she is unable to equal her father's expectations, and that she deeply yearns to do so:

The water was warm... It flowed over me lightly and delectably... I felt as if I was the child of this compassionate water which frees me from the obligations and duties that daily finish off me and my father.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

¹⁸⁸ Farīd Ramaḍān, *Al-Barzakh... najmat fī safar*, Jordan, 2000, p. 11.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

She equally does not understand what is happening to her body when she reaches the age of sexual maturity:

My body was until recently completely different. I suddenly felt those changes which chose themselves as the aim, as if I slept and then awoke and discovered that my body no longer tolerated itself, the body that was snatched from childhood.¹⁹⁰

Sara is an example of a child rejected because of her sex. It is also difficult for her to understand the fact of her maturing and the role that she is to fulfil in society. In the bathhouse at home after throwing off the dirty clothes covered with cemetery dust she does not want to admit to her maturing, saying to herself: "My body is still that of a child".¹⁹¹ She tries to prove that she is able to work at a cemetery:

He, the father, the guide to the dead, and I, his daughter, am taking practice from him. I dig and move the stones and play with the bones I come across...¹⁹²

Sara recalls her uncle's story about the star of the title which possesses each one of us and which brings him to life:

I was always sure that behind my face there was hiding another which I deeply wanted to see. The face, thanks to which we were able to elevate ourselves high and far from the everyday work which I fear was assigned to me in the way that it was assigned to my father and mother on the day she married him.¹⁹³

The fear that constantly accompanied Sara is reflected in her gloomy and disturbing dreams. In them she encounters death, ascending between heaven and earth. In these sleepy dreams there appear a fox, owl and peacock. The first of them searches for understanding in a way similar to Sara. The owl is the symbol of ill tidings. People on seeing it imagine the worst. The peacock in turn is the symbol of royalty although in al-Qazwīnī's work *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt* it is presented as the angel of death Azra'il.¹⁹⁴ After the meeting with the peacock she is ready for her journey to the other world: "She had expected a terrifying creation, but you seem friendly and beautiful. Can I accompany you, if you agree".¹⁹⁵

The ending is surprising; God sends the angel of death to earth in order to annihilate all people and animals, and then he kills the angel of death which might suggest that life on earth will end.

In the book entitled *Nūrān (Two Lights)* Farīd Ramaḍān includes a selection of texts which are prosaic and lyrical in character and which talk of the genesis of feelings between Adam and Eve. The entirety opens with a poem that recounts to some extent the story of how God created first a pen to write down his mission:

¹⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 14.

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

¹⁹⁴ On the basis of an interview conducted by Barbara Michalak-Pikulska with Farīd Ramaḍān in Bahrain, on 10th March 2004.

¹⁹⁵ Farīd Ramaḍān, *Al-Barzakh...*, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

I heard the Prophet Muhammad, peace and prayer be upon him, saying: The first thing created by the God was the Pen and as soon as Allah had created it, he said: O, Pen! Do write down! The Pen said: What shall I inscribe? Allah retorted: Do write Destiny. At that moment the Pen jotted down all what was and all that shall be for ever.¹⁹⁶

God often appears on the pages of the book. Even the description of how the present text came about is linked to a description of God's creation of the world:

After everything was stagnant and silent for years and years, the first ray emerges, the moving light from amidst the sand where the steps become closer and closer towards the twilight of the directions. In this darkness, the first light slipped away, gripping the place with its radiant wisp where the land is the land. Here the names born as the first cheer in the nebula, entering the wings of the clay, full of sweetness and agony for the very supple crust, which is complete in absentia, regaining its flexibility despite the psalms of the scriptures and the volcanoes.

What a horizon! It is tempting with the advent of darkness from the eternal being. A summons for reunion, for confession before the lucidity of the recitations. Here you can see them crawling towards each other, exchanging touches in affection, softness and gentleness. A clay harmonizing, engaging in its cool ascension, breeding thongs that have no name except pertinence to glory.

When they emerge, the first word does so with them, so as to shake the stagnant water, to shake the dark sky, so that silence shall vanish into nothingness in the presence of immaculate whisperings.¹⁹⁷

In the text entitled *Humā (They)* we become acquainted with the first couple in the world:

Two bodies in the process of procreation. The plains throw their lavish extension, open up their windows, towards which a compass course is set by the bright night, which is the most capable of all for:

Flaring up
The Universe
Through the hilarity
Of childhood.¹⁹⁸

Further texts, as is indicated by their titles, are descriptions of the power of nature: the wind, thunder, rain and others following on from which is a description of the emotional and psychic states tormenting the lovers. There is talk of their revolt, mistakes, sorrow, love. The whole text is penetrated by bitterness that results from the conflict of love with divine laws. Despite this love can not be restrained.

The lovers fight for their feeling:
Firstly love
Finally love

¹⁹⁶ Farīd Ramaḍān, *Nūrān*, Cairo, 1997, p. 7, translation by 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā'id.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 9–10.

Here are the bodies telling of their journey
Vainly
We try to restrain them.¹⁹⁹

Farīd Ramaḍān appears to be fascinated by the subject of death for he constantly searches for answers to the question what is death and what is expectation about it. He also expresses in his works revolt against social injustice. He often looks at the question of the sense of existence for man in the modern world through reference to the past, history and religion. He offers immense scope for the interpretation and his own judgments.

The first collection of short stories by **Munīra al-Fāḍil** (see Biographies), entitled *Ar-Rīmūrā*²⁰⁰, contains stories of a social subject matter. It touches the sensitive issues of relations between a man and a woman.

In the story *Al-Wahm* (*Illusion*) there is hidden a fear of parting, loneliness and betrayal:

[...] She has the right [...] I cannot stand my face myself... [...] When he was busy thinking, a shadow of a man appeared. He approached the doorstep and entered. He looked around: Oh my God, she is cheating on me! Walking fast he thought: I'll kill you.²⁰¹

In the story *Khalfā al-jidār* (*Behind the wall*) a character is charged and imprisoned after sexual intercourse with a woman:

After spending five years in prison, you will go back to your country and you will not be able to enter this country for the rest of your life.²⁰²

Throughout the whole story the same sentence reappears: "I have never seen a woman's body before"²⁰³, saying how great an experience it was for him. The narrator's descriptions imply that the character is innocent. He feels strange and helpless, recalling his mother's words: "Keep away from women".²⁰⁴

Munīra al-Fāḍil deals also with penetrating relationships within a family. In the story *Tadākhul al-azmina al-mu'tima* (*Gloomy Time*) she has attempted to expose the authority figures as represented by a mother and the oldest son. The female character is one-hundred percent dependent on her brother who decides totally about her life, and on her mother who interferes with everything. She cannot feel comfortable even in the bathroom, as she instantly hears the question that is repeated several times in the story: "What have you been doing in that bathroom for so

¹⁹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

²⁰⁰ *Ar-rīmūrā* – Arabic: this is the fish that preys on bigger fish, on the basis of an interview conducted in Bahrain, with Munīra al-Fāḍil, on 13th March 2004.

²⁰¹ Munīra al-Fāḍil, *Al-Wahm*, in: *Ar-Rīmūrā*, Kuwait, 1983, p. 88.

²⁰² Munīra al-Fāḍil, *Khalfā al-jidār*, in: *Ar-Rīmūrā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 130.

²⁰³ *Ibidem*, pp. 127–130.

²⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 130.

long?”²⁰⁵ In the relations between the members of the family one is struck by a total lack of understanding, indifference, an ignoring of basic human needs, like love or work. Not without reason therefore does the character describe herself as “a prisoner of the age”²⁰⁶.

A woman from another story called *In‘ikāsāt wahmiyya (Reflections)* is in a different situation. In love, she does not notice that she is abused by her partner. Despite the warnings of her relatives, she is not able to resign from love. The story is characterized by a certain compositional chaos. Fragmented dialogues are intermingled with the brief comments of the author, which are in turn disrupted by the characters’ thoughts. In spite of this, this chaotic form harmonizes with the work’s subject matter, the characters of which are tormented by a storm of feelings and passions. The uncertain situation of a woman is analyzed in the story *Al-Khurūj min ar-ramād (Coming Out of the Ash)*. She is totally dedicated to him and calls herself a woman of the East. He has many lovers, because he claims: “I am not able to love one woman. Love fills me up and the whole world around me”²⁰⁷. The man’s attitude to the woman is full of calculated cruelty and disrespect. We observe how a protest grows in her when she realizes how humiliated she is. Her consent to the divorce is the first step to independence and taking up a fight to regain dignity in her own eyes.

On the pages of the collection a romantic love also appears, as in the story *Hīna nasruq al-ḥubb (When We Steal Love)*. The love of two people is a ubiquitous filter through which they feel and perceive the world. It harmonizes with everything that surrounds them. It is expressed in waves beating the coast, a delicate breeze, and the stars. The author describes the characters’ emotional states in a poetic way:

He took her by the hand and they walked. The coast carried a pleasant breeze which kisses the earth like a bird only to soar up to the air. He held her hand. In his heart the longing filled his every thought that was born. He said to her embarrassed: I love you. They walked in silence. The flapping of the wings of unspeakable joy carried her above the ground with every breath she took.²⁰⁸

The story, entitled *Nabaḍāt fī ad-dākhil (The Beating Inside)*, is a dramatic depiction of the experiences of a woman forced by material conditions to have an abortion. The whole work is filled with an atmosphere of fear, lonesomeness and at the same time the indifference of people. The character has to deal with her drama alone. She is tormented by doubts, especially because she has already loved the baby. She tells herself that she has to forget but she knows she will not be able to and the burden of guilt will never leave her.

²⁰⁵ Munīra al-Fāḍil, *Tadākhul al-azmina al-mu‘tima*, in: *Ar-Rīmūrā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 139–140.

²⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

²⁰⁷ Munīra al-Fāḍil, *Al-Khurūj min ar-ramād*, in: *Ar-Rīmūrā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

²⁰⁸ Munīra al-Fāḍil, *Hīna nasruq al-ḥubb*, in: *Ar-Rīmūrā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

In the story *Al-'Anākīb (Spiders)* the author presents a picture of a mother caught by her son betraying her husband. The boy reacts to the situation by killing spiders which he identifies with the mother's lover:

The father was a doorkeeper. He did not know that thieves in his house lived on pleasure and I saw them as dead spiders.²⁰⁹

The mother, having realized that the boy knows the truth, decides to intoxicate him with wine. All of this leaves its mark on the boy's psyche who later, in his adult life, subconsciously feels reluctance towards women and cannot trust them.

In the works of Munīra al-Fāḍil there are many topics connected with bringing up teenagers. In the story *An-Nār (Fire)* the protagonist is under the care of both of his parents and his school teachers:

At school the teacher tells me firmly: You are a clever child but you do not feel like learning! Instead, you prefer to play on the road. This time you will get away with it but in the future, remember that I will whip your hide, understood?²¹⁰

Despite being taken care of, the boy is probably sexually abused by a man, accidentally met, who seduces him with sweets:

I asked him what he wanted from me. And why he told me to take off my clothes. I felt a sudden pain in my body.²¹¹

With this story the author wants to draw attention to the problem of paedophilia which is widespread in the modern world. A father has problems with bringing up his son in the story *Al-Qarār (The Decision)*.

In the collection *Ar-Rīmūrā* the writer focuses on the human psyche. In a peculiar way she depicts the situation of women, their experiences and the drama of loneliness. She stresses the characters' isolation, and lack of understanding of people. The characters are seized by feelings of fear and a lack of fulfilment. They are filled with passions that are unable to find an outlet, which make them unhappy by giving birth to various obsessions. The reader sees quite a sad picture of human relations, a lack of understanding between a man and a woman, and simultaneously an insatiable hunger for love. Society, which is ruled by cruel laws, gives birth to hurt souls that desire pure feeling and joy in life. The characters are closed and haunted, literally by walls and metaphorically by social norms. The depicted world is limited to the main characters, while the barely defined background, serving only to express their mood, leads one to discover their psyche and the most intimate details from their lives.

Stories from the recent collection *Li-ṣ-ṣawt li-hashāshat aṣ-ṣadā (To the Voice, to the Perishable Echo)* contain childhood memories. The situations presented are very vivid and seem to be very close to the reader because of their experiences. In the first

²⁰⁹ Munīra al-Fāḍil, *Al-'Anākīb*, in: *Ar-Rīmūrā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 56.

²¹⁰ Munīra al-Fāḍil, *An-Nār*, in: *Ar-Rīmūrā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 79–80.

²¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 80–81.

story there appears Wisam who runs through subsequent stories and is an important motif in the characters' memories:

We stayed in that place tidying up and removing the dust from letters that contained our history, in which others also participated. The paper was heavy and wet when it emerged before our eyes. We thumbed yellowed pages, a little humid and creased [...] And all this for the sake of revealing a fragment of our face and traces of joy.²¹²

Wisam is an ideal woman for men. They are tormented by love for her and feel torn seeing her with another man. This first love causes strong emotional reactions in them, especially strong when Wisam leaves after her grandma's death. After years have passed, she comes back with a man. We observe numerous intercourses of theirs, subtly described by boys secretly watching them: "We cunningly watched them. When we felt the touch of her lips, our hearts bumped".²¹³ The author stresses the spiritual sphere, but she also shows the boys' fascination with the mature woman. Wisam's comeback is joined with memories of family life:

Worn out doorstep hid many tales about passion, bitterness, weakness, love turbulences. People wrote down their stories with saffron letters and silver threads.²¹⁴

A great merit of the collection is the stories' common subject matter. The threads and characters intermingle as if constituting one tale of childhood, partings and comebacks. The narration changes by describing either real situations, or the mental experiences of the characters. The author uses numerous metaphors, comparisons and symbols. A motif of letters appears. They cross boundaries when Wisam reads the correspondence. Ideas gleamed from reading between the lines appear to especially interest Wisam. The author shows how important literature is for her because it is an escape from loneliness and daily worries. It seems that this is the way Munira al-Fāḍil introduces autobiographical elements to her works. The stories feature acceptance of all fate's buffets that include Wisam's leave, the grandma's death, and losing a job by the protagonist of *Hāris (The Guard)*. It seems that gained experiences, like those from childhood, leave deep traces in the memory. They direct thoughts and feelings to particular tracks, which is revealed in the reactions of the boys recalling Wisam even after many years. Wisam, after numerous experiences, achieves a balance between her internal and external life. She has fulfilled her duty towards her family and has gained personal happiness.

In the collection *Li-l-ṣawt li-hashāshat aṣ-ṣadā (To the Voice, to the Perishable Echo)* Munira al-Fāḍil touches not only on existential issues, but also Sufism that is so much connected with daily life and the struggle with reality. The characters understand that the basis of their existence is changeability. Everything is subjected to growing and passing away. No matter what values a man chooses and how he does

²¹² Munira al-Fāḍil, *Wisām*, in: *Li-l-ṣawt li-hashāshat aṣ-ṣadā*, Beirut, 2000, pp. 12–13.

²¹³ Munira al-Fāḍil, *Habbat al-'āshiq*, in: *Li-l-ṣawt...*, *op.cit.*, p. 26.

²¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

this, nothing is certain and long-lasting. Possessing, health, happiness are momentary and fleeting values. A man, like the characters, suffers in this world for nothing.

A characteristic feature of the stories is that the protagonists mostly remain anonymous. It does not matter what their names are, where they come from and who they are. An exception is e.g. Wisam. Their identities are described by the author's comments. It is their feelings that matter and the way they behave. This makes them universal.

Munira al-Fāḍil' short stories present a rich panorama of genre and social scenes. They show life without embellishments and problems resulting from personal tangles in conflicts connected with the traditional state of affairs in Arabian society. The characters come from different social environments. They are stigmatized by anxiety and torn by contradictory feelings.

Jamāl al-Khayyāt started his literary career from short stories. The first collection, called *Laylā dāfi'a* (*A Warm Night*), includes social topics, but the stories are of a surreal character. The second, *Ma'āwil... wa al-jidār qishrat bayḍa* (*Hammers... and the Wall is an Egg Shell*), comprises realistic stories depicting problems of Bahraini society, in the form of a film screenplay. The collection *Kāi'nāt al-mustanqa'* (*Boggy Creatures*) is an expression of the writer's experiences after reading Latin American stories of e.g. Jorge Luis Borges and Garcia Marquez. He returns to the realistic trend with the collection *Walīma li-l-nawāris al-laṭīfa* (*A Feast for Kind Scagulls*) touching on social topics from the life of a normal citizen of this Gulf state.

It is in the first story, called *Al-Kābūs* (*Nightmare*), that the author's position becomes visible. He is a fierce opponent of war and social injustice. The protagonist, waiting for his daughter, is a witness of the army's march. This view haunts him. He sees giant military machines moving down the street, and "heavy military boots forcing asphalt to surrender".²¹⁵ Still, the town inhabitants are not interested in the march, because it is only in the character's imagination. He is afraid of the war. Almost the entire work is a series of reflections and doubts. Jamāl al-Khayyāt wrote it under the influence of the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait in 1990. The title itself may be interpreted in various ways. It is not only the war that is the nightmare, but also the main character's life. He does not feel fulfilled and happy in his relationship.

A story, called *Yawmiyyāt rajul 'ādī* (*From the Days of an Ordinary Man*), has a tragic social tenor. Its action takes place in the circle of the homeless, those existing outside society's structures. The main character is a beggar Ya'qub who walks the streets in order to fill his stomach "whose capacity only God knows".²¹⁶ His silence and calmness make him an object of sneers and gossip. Jamāl al-Khayyāt calls Ya'qub a citizen, yet who is still treated as a social outcast, unable to gain support from the state or religious organisations. The author touches here upon the difficult topic of the poorest in Bahrain, willing to draw attention to their tragic material status

²¹⁵Jamāl al-Khayyāt, *Al-Kābūs*, in: *Walīma li-l-nawāris al-laṭīfa*, Cairo, 1993, p. 6.

²¹⁶Jamāl al-Khayyāt, *Yawmiyyāt rajul 'ādī*, in: *Walīma...*, *op.cit.*, p. 16.

and living conditions. We may also find criticism of the lack of acceptance for dissimilarity that is coded in people's consciousness.

Poverty is a conspicuous motif in Jamāl al-Khayyāt's works. The story *At-Tilifzyūn* (*The TV Set*) also serves as an example. This object, just as ice-creams, is a sign of wealth. A beggar's dream of a TV set evolves to end up as his life's credo: "Life without desires is worth nothing".²¹⁷ In the characters of a father and a son the generation gap is depicted. The father feels dependent on God's will, while the son believes in the causative power of dreams. The story reflects the author's youthful fascination with socialism and the slogans of Jamal 'Abd an-Nasir, who wanted good for every man and restoration of Arab unity.²¹⁸

In the short stories from the collection *Walīma li-l-nawāris al-laṭīfa* (*A Feast for Kind Seagulls*) there appear the same motifs uniting characters. This is poverty, a window being a symbol of limited freedom and the only contact with the outside world, and the character of the fierce and simple father. This touches on the characters' anger and helplessness towards social relations.

Jamāl al-Khayyāt's *Hāris al-awhām ar-ramādiyya* (*A guard of Illusions of the Ashes*) is a novel, the main character of which speaks directly to the reader from the first sentences. The first-person narration is a depressing monologue of a grief-stricken man. What is interesting is that the author anticipates Rashid's lot by making him tell about it:

Madness about a woman, about womanhood, dear gentlemen, is what I have made up in order to satisfy your curiosity for the erotic and lechery, and to free you from the chains your instincts are in.²¹⁹

This lechery is strengthened by the fact that the second main character is a woman of loose morals who is the object of Rashid's dilemmas, reflections, and the cause of his peculiar conduct. Yet through the larger part of the novel she remains a mysterious Ruqayya whom we know from the undeveloped retrospections of Rashid, and from the reports of people he has met. It is impossible to learn the truth since these opinions are extremely divergent. The whole action focuses on the two, but we meet the man at the beginning, while the woman exists only in his thoughts. All his actions are directed towards his meeting with Ruqayya and expressing his feelings for her. Rashid, nicknamed Fā'r²²⁰, is considered by his fellows to be a homosexual. He says about himself:

Women know perfectly who Rashid, nicknamed Fā'r is. He does not pant, desiring a woman he sees. They know I have never been and never will be like those animals.²²¹

²¹⁷ Jamāl al-Khayyāt, *At-Tilifzyūn*, in: *Walīma...*, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

²¹⁸ On the basis of an interview conducted by the Author with Jamāl al-Khayyāt in Bahrain, on 13th of March 2004.

²¹⁹ Jamāl al-Khayyāt, *Hāris al-awhām ar-ramādiyya*, Beirut, 2000, p. 7.

²²⁰ Fā'r in Arabic means a Mouse.

²²¹ Jamāl al-Khayyāt, *Hāris...*, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

In the above words Rashid's hostility towards men, and especially towards their subjective treatment of women, is clearly visible. He is sensitive to the subtlety of women's nature, and he considers them to be the only persons who can understand him. This hostility is met with the open criticism of other men, which is perfectly depicted in the following statement of one of the passers-by that keeps sneering at Rashid: "But this is Rashid al-Fā'r! We should know if he has found something new. A new boy!"²²²

The reader is presented with a series of the failures and humiliations he has suffered. Beginning from the first scene in a restaurant, where he is a victim of an arrogant waiter, an Asian. From this moment he pays attention to people of Asian origin, especially in the context of violence and the unkindness he experiences from them. In the face of such a situation he drops his head as usual and walks away, promising himself that he will never go back there.

At the beginning the reader finds Rashid a resigned man, loathing everyone and everything. His failures are to a large extent an effect of extraordinary sensitivity, not to say oversensitivity towards his own self. This attitude to the world presupposes its corruption and hostility. It seems that he treats the unkindness he experiences as a direct and open attack on himself. On the first pages of the novel we can read something resembling an appeal to the teasers. He asks them to dismiss him from "this boring role" of a social object of all kinds of sneers. As he says, he has played the role of a clown for years and being "a loser" has tired him. The end of the first chapter brings also a declaration of the final breaking up with his old image. Rashid makes a reckoning of the past years of his life, and also a reckoning with the people surrounding him. He is tormented by the present situation, which is reflected in the long list of critical comments he wrote about himself. The character is introduced to the reader at the moment he, by nature a calm person, breaks down under the burden of the lack of social acceptance. It is only in the subsequent chapters that we learn about the causes of such a state of affairs, as well as learning more about Rashid.

Ruqayya and Rashid are joined by a common past. Yet, they have not been in touch for a long time. In the apogee of his misery he realizes that in the past he made a mistake by not deciding on a serious relationship with Ruqayya. Now he is sure that he wants to be with her, despite the age difference and experienced humiliations. It is other people he despises so much, hates so much for their wickedness, unkindness and unjustified attacks on himself and her. This hatred towards people is with no doubt something the two have in common. Left alone, they understand one another without words. Rashid begins his search for his beloved. The fragment describing it is an excellent illustration of the character's misfit to social norms, the absurdity of which Jamāl al-Khayyāṭ discloses. We do not know whether this is because of the long-time humiliations Rashid suffered, or his innate nonconformity and his lack of distance to the surrounding world, that he breaks down with each consecutive confrontation. Apart from that, he tries to fight with his submissive

²²² *Ibidem.*

nature, he does not let him react decidedly to the signs of other people's stupidity. For example, an old woman he meets by accident, asked of Ruqayya, first shouts at him excessively and then, when he keeps inquiring, throws a cold Coca-Cola tin at him. Rashid with an injured head runs in the town streets, and the only reaction of people is laughter. We do not know for sure if this scene and many similar ones are a sign of the character's paranoia, or if this is the author's way of condemning the worst of men's vices, stripping them off from the rest of humanity. There is a moment Rashid claims:

The problem of the people from this town is that they do not know their goals of life. Let them go to hell! Them and their perverse nature!²²³

He utters this sentence after visiting a hospital where he has to face blows to fate. It is also in this context that the author's negative attitude to people of Asian origin becomes visible. It is strangers that disdain him and it happens in his own country, in his own home. This is why frequent and adequately characterized statements appear. It seems that this deepens the whole tragedy. In the hospital Rashid asks for the cut on his head to be stitched. A nurse, an Asian, refuses claiming the cut is not deep enough. At this moment his despair reaches a bottom. Rashid, like a little child, becomes angry and hysterical, quarrels and curses the Asian. He is suffering and demands immediate help. In response, he hears that he is *Rajul min waraq (A Paper Man)*.

At the beginning of the third chapter we can read:

I am the same as you are, no matter how much you have tried to deny it. [...] We are very similar. [...] Before I knew you, I was happy to be as innocent as a child. Now, in your presence, I have lost this joy, I have hated talking. In my mouth, instead of words, you will find only local tobacco.²²⁴

Here Jamāl al-Khayyāṭ touches on the important issue of the mutual relation of language and society. A man, by distancing himself from his language, simultaneously distances himself from his relation with a group, as well as from belonging to it. Society's existence is a condition of language's development. Rashid conducts his small war with society through his actions. One can say language reflects a way of thinking and perceiving things that is proper by nature. Rashid is an entity who for various reasons wants to annihilate the order that surrounds him, the order created by man. On his way to a meeting with an old friend, he refuses to answer the questions of a driver who wants to start a conversation:

I took a seat in the front, right behind the driver, by the window. I did not take up a conversation with him despite his attempts. I do not wish to meet another jerk. Silence is a million times better than conversation.²²⁵

²²³ *Ibidem*.

²²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

²²⁵ *Ibidem*.

The novel suddenly changes its character. The author directs the reader to a series of joint events that correspond with the character he has been building up so precisely. After meeting with Ruqayya, Rashid feels calmer in planning their joint future. His old friend Sa'd comes back from Egypt, but suffering from an incurable disease, dies on the day of the meeting. The end of the novel and a surprise for the reader is Sa'd's will. Rashid finds out that he has been given a part of his fortune. The other part is inherited by Sa'd's beloved of years ago, who turns out to be Ruqayya.

The reader becomes a witness to Rashid's rejection of people, cancelling of his contacts with them, and even a loathing of words as a means of communicating. Entities, such as Rashid, in the face of the lack of acceptance, go into their shell and feed hatred towards others. Taking up such a way makes them even more helpless. In this case the main character's life undergoes a sudden change. He finds a small, bright side and walks in its direction. This bright side of Rashid's life is Ruqayya. Through these characters the author depicts the people in Bahrain, their worries and joys against the background of society. This novel is a picture of Muharraḡ; Jamāl al-Khayyāt's hometown.

In his prose writings Jamāl al-Khayyāt gives a very realistic picture of modern life in Bahrain. The literary characters are tangled up with various conflicts that derive from economic and moral changes. They are often put to a test of character, from which they can end victorious. His prose reveals his strong engagement with the social issues connected with Bahrain's progress.

CHAPTER 3

THE YOUNG GENERATION OF WRITERS

The short stories of ‘Ā’isha Al-Ghulūm (see Biographies) from the collection *Imra’ā fī adh-dhākira* (*Woman in Memory*) resemble parables because of their simplicity and ethical dimension. They are clearly a part of the women’s literary trend. They have been written by a sensitive woman and tell about women. The only isolated male characters are: a husband, a messenger, a driver, and a bus passenger. The other men’s roles are marginal, in contrast with those of women.

The story *Jawhara* (*Jawhara* – a female name) touches the subject of fulfilment as a mother. The key to understanding the author’s concept are two characters: the title *Jawhara* and a rich woman, different both in financial status and personality. The former, a midwife *Jawhara*:

[...] had black shining skin. Everything shined on her, as if you had poured a jug of oil on her. You could see your face in the dimples of her wrinkles or on her smooth forehead. Her eyes were big and deep and nose straight. She barely spoke when you noticed that her whole face conveyed a message. This face, created by God in His masterwork, always smiled [...] She won everybody who knew her, leaving in their hearts love and respect for her. She delivered most of this peaceful quarter’s children. She was the one to hear their first cry when they were leaving their mothers’ wombs to see the light and join the big world, people and crowd.²²⁶

The other character is a wealthy woman:

[...] around her thirties, with a robust body and gloomy facial features. She wore countless pieces of jewellery. She had a strange look in her eyes. The colours of her face seemed vulgar, thus destroying the calmness of silence and transforming it into a cry of mixed colours.²²⁷

Both women have different personalities and living conditions. Searching for causes of the first woman’s calmness and the other’s neurosis, we notice that they have a different experience of life. The moment when the two meet changes their

²²⁶ ‘Ā’isha Al-Ghulūm, *Jawhara*, in: *Imra’ā fī adh-dhākira*, Bahrain, 1995, pp. 125–126.

²²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 128.

lives, since they are both expecting a child. In the case of the wealthy woman everything goes right and she gives birth to a boy. Yet the story of Jawhara is tragic: she bears a girl and dies. Afterwards, however, the wealthy woman decides to take care of Jawhara's family:

May God have mercy on you, Jawhara, and on all of us. Give me her child. I will name her Jawhara. She will stay with her sister and father under my care.²²⁸

The message of the story is the goodness which lies in wait everywhere, but is not always noticed. Jawhara's death was beautiful, because she gave birth to a child who seemed not to be destined to exist. The child was born out of love, carrying goodness in herself. The story is deeply emotional. Jawhara works miracles and is walking goodness:

Together with the progress of science and medicine, and the increase of the number of doctors who treated pregnant women with respect, it turned out that her popularity had not suffered damage and her position among people had not changed. Many still blessed her hands, and everyone who visited her was certain to be cured. Just as many women, who preferred to give birth to their children with Jawhara as a midwife, because she was good, patient, and her small, delicate, and caring hands were necessary attributes in this profession.²²⁹

It seems that the arrangement of the text contradicts its contents. The text is dynamic. Each thought begins in a new line and is additionally interlaced with dialogues. The contents, however, are simple and calm. This dynamics of the text and punctuation used – exclamation marks, question marks, and ellipses – reflect feelings and anxiety. The story has also a hidden symbolic layer. It is indicated by the characters' names which in Arabic mean the attributes people possess. The name of the title heroin Jawhara means a jewel. Not only does her extraordinary beauty confirm that, but also her features of character. The author, while describing the rich woman, mentions that she wears jewels, which in comparison with the genuine jewel seem to fade. Jawhara's daughter's name is also symbolic; Fidda means silver. The notion of "folk character" in the context of the story appears to be vital since it reveals itself in Jawhara's profession. A good midwife's blessing is necessary for a successful delivery. Folk tradition is more important than scientific medicine. This subject has appeared many times in Arabic literary works, like for example in *Qindīl Umm Hāshim (St Zenobia's Lamp)* by Yaḥyā Ḥaqqī. Eventually, it is Jawhara who gives birth to a child in hospital and dies there. This opposition of science and tradition is often present in Arabic literature. The latter is obviously praised, which may be a sign of a certain fear of modernity that forces its way into a traditional community's life.

In the story called *Tharthara (Chatter)*, 'Ā'isha Al-Ghulūm focuses on the problem of indifference to harm and human suffering. The action takes place on

²²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 134.

²²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 127.

a public bus, whose passengers constitute a cross section of attitudes and ways of behaving. In order to make the work universal, the author does not give names to anyone; she does not specify the characters' social status, either. The passengers react neither to a lament of a tired passenger complaining about the heat, nor to two children getting off without being taken care of:

The bus stopped. A few people got off, a couple of unnoticed children among them. They got off, one holding the other. The bus started off again.²³⁰

The situation shows the total insensitivity of the passengers. Subsequent episodes reveal the character of a driver, who remains unresponsive towards the request of the passengers who are tired by the heat. Yet sometimes he demonstrates his sympathy, like when he waits for a woman rushing for the bus. She turns out to be the mother of these lost children. It is only she who is able to draw the interest of the passengers whose reactions are limited to that of the title's chatter:

She was standing and constantly looking around, without a break. The driver put out his hand to collect the money for the ticket but found her silent. She did not even look at him. Her eyes were busy searching for something [...] She would always come back with a disappointed look.²³¹

Eventually, seeing the woman's unhappiness, they decidedly resist the driver's intention of changing the route and want to help the mother. The title chatter shows various reactions to the heroine's suffering. The people utter only needless and empty phrases. The characters' description is typical for moralistic stories. The central character is a woman whose unhappiness is a background for the whole story. Against this background, the other characters' attitudes become visible. Through this story, the author exposes and condemns society's attitudes, such as egoism and a tendency to useless discussions in the face of a single man's tragedy. The story constitutes an excellent depiction of human relations, just as the story called *Al-Khawf (Fear)* does. It describes members of a family who are not able to communicate with each other. The characters of the husband and wife are modest ones. We do not know their names and their looks, but we know what they feel and think. They have difficulty in establishing contacts with people, which causes their mental suffering:

She turned towards him and heaved a sigh. She looked into his eyes [...] She was overcome by strange feelings that threatened her deep inside [...] They distanced her from him. From a man who had always given her happiness.²³²

'Ā'isha Al-Ghulūm's short stories are all linked together by respect for tradition and religion. The author builds her stories around basic moral and existential categories, like good, evil and loneliness. She expresses her protest against human

²³⁰ 'Ā'isha Al-Ghulūm, *Tharthara*, in: *Imra'a...*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

²³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

²³² 'Ā'isha Al-Ghulūm, *Al-Khawf*, in: *Imra'a...*, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

insensitivity and lack of reaction towards the suffering of others. She describes the situation of a woman in society and her relations with other women, children, and men. This is why her work should be analyzed within social and moral criteria.

Ḥasan Būḥasan (see Biographies) published his first collection of short stories, entitled *‘Awāṭif fī aḥḍān al-ghūl (Feelings in the Arms of Ghul)*, in Bahrain in 1999. The stories deal with the subject of Bahraini countryside with its problems, traditions and customs. The main characters are usually elderly people, who have bitter experiences of life.

In the story *Ad-Dūka (Confusion)* the subject is a man from a poor village, craving for a better and more interesting life, as his current one has been a series of torments and hardships. He still has a chance of changing his living conditions, because when we first meet him, he is waiting with his friend for a plane, which is supposed to take him to a better world:

In just a few moments we'll be carried by the plane [...] We'll be carried to a new wide world, where we'll realize our great plan.²³³

Brooding on his miserable past and dreaming of incoming happiness, he misses the moment of departure, thus wasting his once-in-a-lifetime opportunity:

The view of the empty hall violently brought him back to reality. At the thought that his short-time dream had come to an end, he dropped his suitcase from his trembling hands. Fury caused by the sudden disruption of joy mingled with despair and a feeling of helplessness. He swallowed back the tears that had welled up in his wide hollow eyes but then could not resist crying. He realized that it was too late for anything.²³⁴

The author has a sense of nostalgia for countryside as it looked before oil was discovered. Being a farmer is no longer profitable and people have started to leave in search for work in the oil and industrial towns of the Persian Gulf area. Before the oil boom, Bahrain was associated only with palms and the sea. The former symbolized work on the land, and the latter catching fish and pearl fishing. The hero of a story, called *Inkisārāt (Defeat)*, is a sullen disabled man, looking back on his life in a poor village as full of hardship and sacrifice:

In the days you were a strong man, you lived in this small village. Your whole world was that large flock of sheep which made you happy. You were the happiest man in the world when you set an example, one considered the right one to follow. Or when you walked with dignity watching over the sheep with your son [...] But it has been a long time since you left the field and were confined to your bed. Since your feet stopped traversing the friendly sands [...] You have been looking on your land with disdain [...]²³⁵

²³³ Ḥasan Būḥasan, *Ad-Dūka*, in: *‘Awāṭif fī aḥḍān al-ghūl*, Bahrain, 1999, p. 18.

²³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 22–23.

²³⁵ Ḥasan Būḥasan, *Inkisārāt*, in: *‘Awāṭif... op.cit.*, p. 28.

The author compares his former abilities with his current state of disability. The drama of the man deepens because of the departure of his son who was supposed to be an heir to the family's land. The young man leaves the village in search of a better life in a big city:

Your son grew up seeing only pasture. Now he runs quickly ahead of him. He crosses the valley. He goes far, led by his new dream. He is not going back to this dry prairie. He is tired of your solitary way of living. He no longer wants to crowd in the small cottage standing in the shade of the wide-stretching tree and invaded by bugs living on dung. He is fed up with a pelican diving in the nearby bog and the sounds of animals that do not quiet down even at night. Have you ever believed that he likes the view of men heading to work in their torn and worn-out clothes every morning? Men who are exhausted and looking like hunted birds? Have you thought that he likes looking at humiliated women, rolling around in their black robes in pens full of the dung of cows and other animals, that he likes the view of naked children [...] ²³⁶

In the short story, entitled *Al-Mu'āmalā (The Case)*, the character is an elder, who has to face offices, queues and procedures, which he is not used to:

I looked carefully behind me. The string of people was even longer than the one in front of me [...]

– Could you, please, take a look at this?

– This case needs to be fixed at the second counter.

– Does it mean I have to stand in a queue once more?

– Yes, sir. Goodbye.

– But I can't stand that long. My doctor told me so. I'm ill...

He no longer paid attention to me [...] This lack of interest shocked me deeply. I felt how weak and helpless I am [...] ²³⁷

The hero bravely faced the machine of bureaucracy and heartless clerks. Turned away empty-handed at one counter and another, he eventually blacks out and ends up in hospital, having failed to fix the case he came with.

The story, called *'Ahd wa ṣadā (Time and Echo)*, is about a desperate man, drowning his sorrows in drink. Despite his age, since he left his family home, he still misses it, misses his mother and the atmosphere of those days:

His heart filled with a series of memories as he went over those long gone days in his memory, visiting the town he had left a long time ago. The images of the past still materialize in front of his eyes. The beautiful past, which he does not want to forget now [...] ²³⁸

The author wants to emphasize his attachment to the past, tradition, family relationships, meetings, and the joy of living close to nature. Yet the present day and possibility of a better and more affluent life cannot compensate for the peace of the

²³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

²³⁷ Hasan Būḥasan, *Al-Mu'āmalā*, in: *'Awāṭif...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 40–41.

²³⁸ Hasan Būḥasan, *'Ahd wa ṣadā*, in: *'Awāṭif...*, *op.cit.*, p. 77.

old days in the minds of those who remember them. These changes, perhaps too quick, cause great tensions and frustrations.

Ḥasan Būḥasan uncovers the truth about family relationships. In *Masāfāt* (*Distances*) he depicts the rebellion of a son against his father:

He believed it was normal to live like an ordinary man. To be happy about a monthly salary, to make friends with other village inhabitants, and travel for pleasure in favourable circumstances. Yet his father forbids him to do it. He even forbids him to go out [...] He cannot stand his father's despotism any longer, as well as his dull mother-in-law's constant orders [...]²³⁹

The father's despotic rule along with the mother-in-law's attitude pushes the boy to run away from home. After a long march he reaches a lit tent, one emanating with warmth, where he stops to indulge in debauchery.

None of Ḥasan Būḥasan's heroes is given a name. This lets a reader identify with particular characters, by finding a little bit of their hopes, frustrations and disappointments in them. The characters are both elderly and younger people. The former represent a traditional way of living, thinking and working. It is extremely hard for them to get used to the contemporary requirements of life, ubiquitous bureaucracy and the lack of respect for traditional professions and the countryside. They feel estranged from this kind of "civilization". Whereas young people are shown as lost and confused. On the one hand, their hearts are filled with hope for a better and easier life. Yet at the same time they long for real love and true happiness, which cannot be bought for the money they earn. The short stories are dominated by descriptions of the country. On the one hand, they are very naturalistic, often appalling, revealing dirt, poverty and lack of perspectives. Still this village lifestyle is something to yearn for:

You marked with flowers the road back to the small house in the valley [...] Sometimes you took shelter in the shade of a thin lonely palm tree. You left your sheep far away to delight in picking the flowers growing on a rocky surface.²⁴⁰

Mahdī 'Abd Allāh (see Biographies) took inspiration for his collection of short stories entitled *Tajriba (Experience)* from everyday human struggle. Everything that made him uneasy or delighted found its place on these pages. Most of the twenty four stories included in the collection deal with the subject of reality and modernity. But there are also stories which derive from the writer's imagination, such as *Dhāta layla (This Night)*. A dream, connected with the title, is possibly the best definition for a journey that the character begins in circumstances that are not totally clear. Thanks to some mysterious person he finds himself on another planet, a planet of happiness and welfare, dominated by moral order:

²³⁹ Ḥasan Būḥasan, *Masāfāt*, in: *'Awāṭif...*, *op.cit.*, p. 49.

²⁴⁰ Ḥasan Būḥasan, *Inkisārāt*, in: *'Awāṭif...*, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

- What is this planet?
- The planet of truthfulness. Everything you are going to say or do must be true. Then all your requests will be listened to.²⁴¹

The world presented differs from the world we are used to. This is illustrated by the description of machines the main character is being acquainted with during an initial trip to some town:

Here we have a machine for polishing feelings and making them delicate. This one is for uprooting hypocrisy, and the last one which makes you merciful and unites everybody. We have made efforts in this field. We plan subsequent inventions and development.²⁴²

Each story is interspersed with dialogues that to a greater or lesser extent comprise poetic depictions of the external world and the character's emotional state. In *Makhāwif (Fears)* a narrator, in the third person, introduces us to the world of problems of a certain Muhammad 'Abd Allah, who suffers from insomnia:

The minutes dragged on endlessly. The night reached its zenith while his eyes constantly resisted his desire to sleep. He resorted to an old trick. He did it every time he was caught up by insomnia. It was based on counting different things but simultaneously not focusing on the activity itself. He was reading short Koran chapters which he was learning by heart and repeating, counting on his fingers and [...] Yet this time they seemed to be alert and the brain worked as in a daytime. He got up from his bed and went to the bathroom, wishing to change the surroundings. Then he tenderly switched off the light which enveloped the room in misty brightness, and darkness ensued. He returned to counting. He changed position and was breathing deeply. He tried to remain a man not tormented by any emotions or feelings. Apart from that, beside this forced calmness, a burden of apparently repelled thoughts lay with him or rather weighed heavily on him. He changed the pillow's position. He laid his head where his legs had been and forced himself to close his eyes to doze off. Muezzin began his song, calling for a prayer before sunrise. Muhammad got up, completed an ablution and started his daily ritual. Then he asked God: Bring me relief, my Lord, to my suffering. Please dispel my troubles and make my case end happily. Indeed you are great. He took the Koran and was reading its verses ceaselessly, in a voice full of dignity, until the morning filled the room with bright light.²⁴³

'Abd Allah decided, in response to a press advertisement, to find a lost cat. He was motivated by a high prize, because, as he claimed, he hated cats. The situation radically changes when the cat is poisoned in vague circumstances. Instead of the prize, the protagonist gets a summons and faces the possibility of punishment for the cat's death. In the court he denies his hatred of cats:

²⁴¹ Mahdī 'Abd Allāh, *Dhāta layla*, in: *Tajruba*, Bahrain, 1999, p. 82.

²⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 82.

²⁴³ *Ibidem*, pp. 92–93.

- Do you like cats?
- Yes, Your Honour. I'm a peaceful man. I have a tender heart and I love animals.²⁴⁴

In such a short piece of writing these words become meaningful. Perhaps if he really loved animals, he would not be buffeted by fate.

The story called *Yawmiyyāt shāb* (*A Young Man's Diary*) was written in the form of a diary, which is indicated by the exact dates. A character, after finishing a school, tries hard to get a job. Yet he quickly notices the unjust and disregarding approach of clerks towards the unemployed. His situation, which millions of people in the world may identify with, makes him frustrated. Eventually, he finds a job as a cleaner in a travel agency, but it does not give him any satisfaction: "Everyday I felt humiliated by the lack of a job corresponding to my qualifications".²⁴⁵ After losing his job and not finding another, he is forced to become involved with smuggling to India. Although he realizes the dangers that await him, his desperation pushes him towards this move:

We will try to leave the country, in spite of the dangers connected with it and the possibility of imprisonment for many years. But if we fail, we will find thousands of young people that will be prepared to pay tens of dinars to get at least one gram.²⁴⁶

Unfortunately similar situations happen in many countries all over the world. People, in order to survive, resort to crime and breaking the law. The writer draws attention to a world of tragedy and social injustice.

The subject of the story *Khafaqāt qalb* (*Beatings of a Heart*) is the exploitation and unjust treatment of workers:

Two years ago an employer, before renewing my contract, informed me that he was forced to lower my salary.²⁴⁷

The character, despite his heart disease accepts the employer's conditions for fear of losing his source of living:

Four weeks of leave have not passed yet, and still his supervisor called to him to tell him, after wishing him to get well soon, that his help is necessary.²⁴⁸

Particular short stories by Mahdī 'Abd Allāh may exist separately because they touch different subjects. The plot has many threads and concentrates on events from everyday human struggle with the surrounding reality. His stories are a realistic way of depicting the processes of social transformations, changes of human relations and life conditions.

²⁴⁴ Mahdī 'Abd Allāh, *Makhāwif*, in: *Tajruba...*, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

²⁴⁵ Mahdī 'Abd Allāh, *Yawmiyyāt shāb*, in: *Tajruba...*, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

²⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

²⁴⁷ Mahdī 'Abd Allāh, *Khafaqāt qalb*, in: *Tajruba...*, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

²⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

Su'ād Āl Khalīfa (see Biographies) treats her first short story, called *Anfās al-kitāba* (*The Freedom of Writing*), from the collection *Al-Maqhā ar-ramādī* (*The Grey Café*), autobiographically. She describes writing as creating, listening to the inner voice that suggests the subject: "She reached for the voice deep inside her [...] and started to write and write [...]"²⁴⁹ It seems that she does what gives her satisfaction and self-realization:

I write down the voice that has been inside me for years [...] It is the only voice that inspires me [...] It excites my imagination. I do not care what literary genre I write in about my feelings [...] I do not care whether this is a poem, a short story, or an article... It is the freedom of writing that matters [...]²⁵⁰

Many stories deal with the subject of love and woman's enslavement by men, e.g. *Faḥīḥ al-maqhā ar-ramādī* (*Rumble In the Grey Café*), *Ḥawāfir ar-rūḥ* (*Hooves of Soul*), *Rā'īḥat 'īṭr* (*A Scent of Perfumes*), or *Hadhayān māqabla as-sābi'a* (*Halucinations Before Seven*). The images of this love are however different. Women are loved, sometimes disregarded or betrayed. Against this background, the story *Uṣṭūrat Dunjūwān* (*The Legend of Don Juan*) is exceptional. The author reveals not only a woman's thoughts, but also the feelings of a man who compares himself to the legendary Don Juan because of his numerous love affairs. He tells the woman of his life about his romances.

Seeing his partner's reaction, he regrets his momentary surge of honesty: Why did I tell her all those things? I have lost her! Will she come back? Will she forget my dirty past? Will she take me back after she learnt that I am similar to Don Juan? I love her, I have not stopped loving her and I love her even more!²⁵¹

Then we are presented with the woman's point of view. She feels hurt but at the same time looks for justification for her lover:

Was he that lonely, deprived of a woman's feeling? Or was his sinking into the world of pleasure and joy simply revenge for an unhappy love?²⁵²

In this story, the author examines the reactions of the lovers during frank conversations. She seems not to believe the man when she puts the words into the woman's mouth: "Being Don Juan is a vision each man thinks up for himself"²⁵³

We find an interesting image of feelings compared to reactions of the sea in two stories: *Wamīḍ ash-shāṭi' ash-shimālī* (*Sparkling of the Northern Sea*) and *Al-Mawj al-munkasir* (*Destructive Wave*). In the former, the feeling is warm and passionate like the sea:

²⁴⁹ Su'ād Āl Khalīfa, *Anfās al-kitāba*, in: *Al-Maqhā ar-ramādī*, Bahrain, 1999, p. 10.

²⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

²⁵¹ Su'ād Āl Khalīfa, *Uṣṭūrat Dunjūwān*, in: *Al-Maqhā...*, *op.cit.*, pp. 173–174.

²⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 175.

²⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 179.

He felt the warmth of her longing, the warmth of her feelings [...] She started to pour out on him everything she had [...] ²⁵⁴

In the latter, the female character goes through an emotional drama and love euphoria. And all this happens against the background of the rough sea, at the shore where she sits releasing her sorrows. She feels bitter that after she got married, her life did not turn out to be a fairytale, as she had imagined it. Her husband “did not try to understand her needs. He did not show her love or affection”. ²⁵⁵ The woman suffers from depression, which deepens in the face of her friends’ unhappiness. The writer touches on the subject of marriages arranged by families. The marriages are usually contracts, which means a bride often does not know her future husband and is severely disappointed after the wedding. This is why the woman decides to betray her husband. She meets her lover at various places, fulfilling her dream of great love:

I could not imagine myself loving so much [...] She was giving herself over to love more and more [...] She was forgetting about many things, immersing herself in endless love [...] She was forgetting that she was married. ²⁵⁶

Fulfilled and eternal love is described by Su‘ād Āl Khalīfa in a story, called *Bukā’ al-ḥanāyā* (*A Cry from the Bottom of the Heart*). The female character cries over her husband’s death. She has suffered terribly since he passed away. It is hard for her to accept that he is gone. She imagines she can hear his footsteps and feel his breath:

All my senses wanted him to be here, to stay, but God Almighty chose another path for him. He was ill and suffered but is death a solution? ²⁵⁷

The woman breaks down mentally, claiming that along with her husband’s death, she died, too. Reflections on death and a man’s fear of it are present in the story *Maw‘id fī sāḥat aṣ-ṣamt* (*Meeting in Silence*). This time the main character is a male who has lost a friend:

He was afraid of what life might bring. He was afraid that he might join his friend. He was afraid to stay alone in this world. ²⁵⁸

The characters, of the collection *Al-Maqhā ar-ramādī* (*The Grey Café*), are introduced to us through internal monologues. It is hard not to notice their confusion in the contemporary world and attempts to find their way of life.

The second collection, *Al-Ghurfa al-mughlaqa* (*The Closed Room*), was published in Beirut in 2001. The author continues to deal with social problems. In the story *‘Ankabūt* (*Spider*) the female character travels along a sentimental road, recalling her late mother. A physical pain in the back is a symptom of a pain in her soul. She has a grudge against her family, especially her brothers, for them receiving

²⁵⁴ Su‘ād Āl Khalīfa, *Wamīd ash-shāṭi’ ash-shimālī*, in: *Al-Maqhā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

²⁵⁵ Su‘ād Āl Khalīfa, *Al-Mawj al-munkasir*, in: *Al-Maqhā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

²⁵⁷ Su‘ād Āl Khalīfa, *Bukā’ al-ḥanāyā*, in: *Al-Maqhā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

²⁵⁸ Su‘ād Āl Khalīfa, *Maw‘id fī sāḥat aṣ-ṣamt*, in: *Al-Maqhā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

the whole of the mother's inheritance. Her position implies her irritation of human life and the nature of man:

[...] the weakness of a human is disgusting – lonely, abandoned and stupid. Did my mother feel that too?²⁵⁹

It was only after her mother's death that the woman understood her position and role in the family where she was tyrannized by the father and sons. There are traces of an analysis of social and family relations in the story, as well as of the role and authority of a father and the oldest son in a married woman's life. The whole story is filled with an atmosphere of terror which strengthens when the woman enters the mother's room and wants to open a box covered with cobwebs:

She tried to tear off the cobweb [...] She went into hysteria and started shouting loudly but she could not move.²⁶⁰

It seems that the woman, just as her mother, is tired of fighting for her position in the family. She is overwhelmed by all this, like by the spiders, and she decides to give up. Breaking up with another fiancée turns to be Sisyphean labours.

The main character and narrator of the story *Hādith 'alā at-tarīq (Incident on the Road)* is a man whose name we do not know. He presents his vision of life with his beloved. He claims that because he chose a wife for himself, he can decide about her way of life: "She does not go to beauty salons because I did not let her get used to it".²⁶¹ He does not like the passage of time that touches women. It seems that he is suffering from a midlife crisis, which explains the idea of his second marriage. He constantly underlines his feeling of masculinity and strong desire for approval:

Approaching the car, I touch my skin delicately. I do not have a single white hair. Youthful vigour has not abandoned me yet.²⁶²

An important fragment of the story is a conversation of the couple. It seems the man lives with the idea he created in his mind, while reality is unacceptable for him:

Listen to me carefully. I tried to understand you, but I'm tired of this life. You are overwhelmed by inertia. I leave the house and you sleep. I come back and it's the same. Will you ever be the person you used to be ten years ago when I married you? Why has everything changed? Why isn't your hair yours anymore? Your face is strange. Your smile is delicate – is it your smile? Do you think I love some kind of idea? What idea? I want to live like I used to. I don't want to live with a woman behaving like an old lady.

God have mercy on you! I try to be attractive for you so that you may desire me. But you don't understand what responsibility is. I and the children live your life. You don't understand me, my home duties. You think only about your needs.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Su'ād Āl Khalīfā, *'Ankabūt*, in: *Al-Ghurfā al-mughlaqa*, Beirut, 2001, p. 29.

²⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

²⁶¹ Su'ād Āl Khalīfā, *Hādith 'alā at-tarīq*, in: *Al-Ghurfā...*, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

²⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 75.

The man wants an ideal love. He treats his partner as an object. It seems that all his wisdom of life is invaluable. All his moves tell us that he is an immature person who is not able to find his place in the world and decide which values are the most important for him.

This story's starting point is again observed reality. The author wants to depict the inner state of the characters, these tiny details that affect a human psyche. All this Su'ād Āl Khalīfa does with the use of a language that is full of images, metaphors and descriptions.

The collection of short stories *Ḍarīḥ al-mā'* (*The Sea Tomb*) by Ḥusayn 'Īsā al-Maḥrūs opens with a story, entitled *Dhākirat aṭ-ṭīn* (*The Memory of Clay*). After reading this story, the reader is intrigued not only by its content, but also by its title. What in fact is this mysterious memory? What does the author mean when he makes references to clay?

We could say that the story is built on two different planes. Each of them is constructed according to a specific logic and inseparably forms oneness in the perspective of the entire story. The first level is made up from the literal reality directly resulting from the content of the story. However the second level is an abundance of associations as well as meanings which are often hidden in the incomplete and unfinished statements made by the main character.

The author presents a man, perhaps an author, who is unable to express his feelings through words sitting next to a pottery wheel. From the initial moments of his work, we can see how easily he gives shape to a piece of clay. Its smooth consistency contrasts with the complicated materials of thoughts and words. The man's efforts do not lead him towards any specified aim. He would like to, above all, express himself through a creative act. The effects of his work seem to be the material form of intimate experiences and feelings, which are very difficult to interpret. On the other hand, from the main character's point of view, the creation process is somehow inscribed into human nature and is something which is closely linked with our existence. The man says:

I put the wheel in motion and started shaping something which was not known to me from the clay [...] just as I know nothing about my own history and I don't understand it.²⁶⁴

According to the main character, the creative act, similarly as the creation of our own lives is controlled by the forces of intuition. We are not able to explain why we give reality one form as opposed to another. A woman unexpectedly appears next to the man. We do not know who she is. What's more, the main character does not recognize her facial features. They do not talk to each other, but after a short time the mysterious woman sits behind the man, embraces him and they mutually begin

²⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

²⁶⁴ Ḥusayn 'Īsā al-Maḥrūs, *Dhākirat aṭ-ṭīn*, in: *Ḍarīḥ al-mā'*, Beirut, 2001, p. 9.

shaping the clay. The effect of their mutual work is also surprising. At the end, the main character says:

Together we pressed against a block of clay [...] It took on a shape, which we do not know [...] It became clay that we do not know [...] A foreign creature [...] But it recognized us immediately.²⁶⁵

The author gives the reader the choice of a wide variety of interpretations for the piece of art and it is therefore rather difficult to state what the main premise of the story is. It may be said that the title clay as well as its memory are certain types of symbols. Clay is a material, from which the artist was to create a human body. Man somehow repeats the initial act of creation through varied artistic activities. On the other hand, just as a potter gives a specific form to a shapeless lump of clay, we give our lives their individual features. We are not alone in our actions. There is always room for someone to stand next to us. Perhaps this is someone who we do not know very well, but with whom we take on the task of shaping our lives.

The story, entitled *Ḥamāma (The Female Dove)*, brings a completely different mood into the *Ḍarīḥ al-mā'* (*The Sea Tomb*) collection. Its main character is a boy who catches pigeons. As he himself says, his experience and individually prepared methods make him the best in his field in the entire region. He slowly goes toward a pigeon, which he is going to catch. He sprinkles some oats for it and skilfully imitates the sounds given off by a bird. When he is close enough to his winged opponent, he grabs it energetically. Most of the pigeons in the area know who he is and he is easily able to catch those, which have escaped from their owners. One day however, a white dove appears in the area. Catching it becomes the boy's lifelong challenge. The task becomes exceedingly difficult since the bird does not eat barley, with which he could entice it. Moreover, it keeps moving from place to place, as is seen here: "it doesn't sit on any roof for longer than three minutes".²⁶⁶ The main character of the story boldly undertakes a new task. Without resting he jumps from roof to roof trying to get closer to the bird. While doing this, he unknowingly observes all the secrets taking place inside the houses through the windows: fights, infidelity, etc. He finally was able to get close to his opponent. However, when it was at arm's length of the boy, he was unable to resist the dove's beauty. He begins talking to it, wondering if perhaps it is not the bird, which Noah set free from his arc. The main character imprisons the dove just for a moment. He quickly releases it and is overcome by the sight of its white fluttering wings against the light blue sky. This picture is the greatest compensation for the effort he put into catching the bird. The next morning the boy's surprise is even greater when he sees the white dove atop his house with an entire school of birds, which have escaped from the owners. *Ḥamāma (The Female Dove)* is a very simple, but at the same time a touching story on the relationship between man and nature. The respect and awe which the main character

²⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²⁶⁶ Ḥusayn 'Īsā al-Maḥrūs, *Ḥamāma*, in: *Ḍarīḥ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

gives to the pigeons is put in first place. The fact that he is able to see their unique beauty is moving. His great sensitivity is awarded. The birds can sense his warm heart and reciprocate with their friendship.

In a similar fashion, the story, entitled *Al-Asadiyya (Al-Asadiyya)*, also shows man's relationship with nature. The main character in this story is a tree *al-asadiyya*, which the local women worship and surround with respect. No one is sure what caused such a great attachment to the tree called *al-asadiyya*. It may be mainly the issue of tradition and the belief in the unusual characteristics possessed by plants. Someone apparently heard the strange sounds it emitted. Apart from this, there was also a small grave near *al-asadiyya* which stimulated people's imagination. All this fuelled with folk superstitions have made the tree into a local sanctuary, around which many pilgrims gathered. In accordance with tradition, each woman having conceived a child prepares a traditional meal and leaves it under *al-asadiyya* along with an abundance of sweets. A feast takes place, which always brings lots of joy to the local children. News came one day that a new housing development was going to be built on the spot where *al-asadiyya* grew. At the beginning no one could believe that anyone would dare raise a hand against the local "holy place". However shortly afterwards workmen start appearing and despite the general opposition they proceed to remove the tree. To the delight of all the residents the first attempt at removing the tree proved unsuccessful due to the workmen's insufficiently sturdy equipment. This only reinforces the conviction that *al-asadiyya* possesses unusual powers. Unfortunately, despite the failure the workmen do not give up. The tree is unable to withstand the huge bulldozer and it quickly falls due to its great pressure. Along with *al-asadiyya*, something more than just the shadow which its wide-stretching branches gave on hot sunny days was destroyed. In the story the tree becomes a symbol of the local tradition, which surrenders to the pressures of modernity, which reflects contemporary times. It is extremely difficult to save it because it cannot withstand the competition of the development of modern technology. Only its small fragments looked after with the same solemn dignity with which the remnants of *al-asadiyya* were treated have a chance of survival.

The stories, entitled *Al-'Atā'ir (Victims)* and *Ḍarīḥ al-mā' (The Sea Tomb)*, introduce an atmosphere of anxiety, which in fact is a part of human life, to the whole collection of short stories by Ḥusayn 'Īsā al-Mahrūs. Both of them are monologues and they show the internal condition of a person, who is facing difficult life situations, or even tragedies. The most sought after story is *Ḍarīḥ al-mā' (The Sea Tomb)*, whose content is linked with a plane crash, which crashed along the coast of Bahrain. Reflections concerning the tragedy are intertwined into a prosaic scene. Two friends have planned to meet at the seacoast. The meeting takes place as usual, however at one point they notice that something bright, resembling a star, has fallen into the bay: "The star wanted to know what water is. It came closer, so it could touch the sea".²⁶⁷ In fact, the story is a huge question mark. Why did this

²⁶⁷ Ḥusayn 'Īsā al-Mahrūs, *Ḍarīḥ al-mā'*, in: *Ḍarīḥ...*, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

happen? Why did something so tragic have to happen? We do not find the answer here. The only thing we discover is the unique, existential pain, which can lead to paranoia. The main character himself states at the beginning: "I had no idea what paranoia was until that night... I found its hiding place".²⁶⁸ Paranoia is born when our minds are unable to comprehend the facts which have taken place. In one moment, just as in the mentioned catastrophe, a piece of land falls apart, a certain order of reality. It is extremely difficult to go back to a normal way of life after such an experience. The world is no longer the same for those who witnessed the event.

The family of the main character, in *Al-'Atā'ir (Victims)*, in aspiring to fulfil their life-long dream, wanting to visit Husain's grave, lose their entire estate due to human dishonesty. The hero, already experienced in the hardships of life, has a different approach to religion and to pilgrimages to places of religious cult.

The other story, entitled *Al-Amr (Envoys)*, is deeply rooted in the Muslim religion. In order to understand it, one should become familiar with the opinions of the Imams – the heirs of 'Ali. A characteristic trait for the Shiites is waiting for the return of the last Imam, (who did not die, he disappeared) as a saviour for all of humanity. A lot of people claim to be the last Imam, the so-called Mahdi. In Bahrain, the author's homeland, a man by the name of 'Abd al-Wahhāb appeared about fifteen years ago, claiming to have contacted Mahdi in his dreams. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Baṣrī, while in the Bahraini prison spoke to his co-prisoners in a beautifully literary voice claiming that they come directly from Mahdi. All those who left the prison believed in his message. All those who believed him called him *al-bāb*, meaning door, which one can enter in order to contact the imam.²⁶⁹ The main character of the story is a girl by the name of Maryam, who wants to meet 'Abd al-Wahhāb in person. Za'im is to assist her in this. He enters into a temporary marriage with her. Since he is still living with Maryam after the marriage certificate has expired, she begins doubting whether he really does have any contact with Mahdi's messenger. Despite many difficulties, she is able to regain her freedom.

Ḥusayn 'Īsā al-Maḥrūs's stories links respect with religion. The author does not shy away from expressing changes which have taken place through the generations. In his work, he aspires in a philosophical direction, at the same time not agreeing with the indications of injustice in the real world.

Anīsa az-Zayyānī (see Biographies) published her first collection of short stories *Khandaq an-nār (The Moat of Fire)* in 2001 in Beirut. The stories are characterized by their conciseness, simplicity in plot, numerous plots taken from the world of nature, and their simple language. The author has a concrete message for the reader, examining subjects that occur in her immediate circles. And so, for example, in the short story *Al-Kalb wa ḥawḍ az-zuhūr (The Dog and the Flower Bed)* she

²⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

²⁶⁹ On the basis of an interview conducted by the Author with Ḥusayn 'Īsā al-Maḥrūs in Bahrain, on 11th March 2004.

concentrates on a description of the flowers that the heroine desires to plant which despite constant care are dug up by a dog. In another, entitled *Al-Hulm aṣ-ṣaghīr* (*Small Dream*), the centre stage is taken by canaries which are unable to have young in captivity. In *Zā'ir al-masā'* (*The Evening Guest*) there is described an insect whose presence at home causes unease. This is a symbolic work, for the cockroach always appears in the evening in a way similar to many other bad things that happen under the cover of darkness. In reading these short stories one has the impression that the author identifies with the heroes which bears witness to the authenticity of the events presented.

The world that is presented is chiefly that of nature, as for example in the short story *Zuhūr ṣafrā'* (*Yellow Blossom*) in which the heroine cultivates a new plant from several branches she has managed to save from a part of a beautiful tree that was cut down during the construction of a new road. We observe in the stories the coexistence and intermingling of the world of people and of nature. The writer concentrates simply on external description, she does not deepen herself in the psychological recording of a character's feelings. One of the rare moments in which we get to know the heroes' emotions appears in *Zuhūr ṣafrā'* (*Yellow Blossom*):

I was seized by a strange feeling that they would block my way and take my flowers. I lent against the shut door and observed them. Tears flowed from my eyes in the quantity that the blossom fell from the tree.²⁷⁰

In somewhat longer stories the author looks at the subject of love, feeling that torment women, as well as the changes that have taken place in society. The heroine of the story *Al-Hulm* (*The Dream*) is a forty-year old woman who finds out that her former lover is going to return after a long absence. From that moment on she unsuccessfully attempts to contact him. The awoken feelings explode with new force, showing the world of this woman in love through behaviour characteristic for the love state of infatuation:

She goes to the kitchen in order to help her mother prepare the lunch, of which she will eat not a mouthful. Instead of this she leaves the table, goes to her room and stretches out on the bed. She stares at the ceiling and sees him before her. She quickly closes her eyes in order to not lose him and falls into a deep sleep.²⁷¹

The woman does not eat, suffers from insomnia, often becomes pensive dreaming of her beloved like during a meeting with a friend. She sees in her mind's eye how her beloved approaches and proposes to her.

In the short story *Al-Bi'r* (*The Well*) the heroine returns after twenty years to a town where a lot of changes have occurred: the family is living in a new house, the neighbours have moved on, and her favourite neighbour who knew many stories has gone mad out of loneliness. She wants to save the past, at least that from the stories

²⁷⁰ Anīsa az-Zayyānī, *Zuhūr ṣafrā'*, in: *Khandaq an-nār*, Beirut, 2001, p. 11.

²⁷¹ Anīsa az-Zayyānī, *Al-Hulm*, in: *Khandaq...*, *op.cit.*, p. 33.

of the old woman and therefore she digs a well for them, in which everything can fit. They next go to the sea which alone has not changed and the overjoyed old lady starts to tell her stories:

She entered the sea and started to recount, recount. It listened and I observed her from afar... waiting for her to finish.²⁷²

The sea appears here as something unchanging, it is a symbol of permanence, constituting a springboard for the changes that have occurred in all aspects of life.

In the short story *Al-'Arūs (The Groom)* the main character is a man whose best years appear to belong to the past. He feels lonely, misunderstood by his wife. During a break in a café his attention is drawn by a young, shy woman. And even though he sees her from this moment every day, their acquaintance does not go beyond the exchange of smiles and stolen glances. However the beautiful stranger increasingly engages the heart and mind of the hero:

I collapsed into the armchair and started to recall every detail... My God! What wonderful eyes she has [...] how her lips set when she smiles.²⁷³

The infatuation in this short story differs from that in the short story *Al-Hulm (The Dream)* where the heroine desires more emotional closeness. While the hero of *Al-'Arūs (The Groom)* is exclusively devoted to contemplation of the carnal sphere of his chosen one. When at the end of the work he decides to ask her for her hand he finds out that she has been arrested by the police. The story ends in this painful and unexpected way for the hero:

I left the café heading home, carrying on my back the whole load of my sixty years... seventy years... no, even eighty.²⁷⁴

All of Anīsa az-Zayyānī's short stories show life as a route full of challenges, obstacles and adversities. They bring the world of the heroes' closer, worlds that represent contemporary society against the background of a panorama of social life. The writer hopes to seize in them the moment of the departure of old reality and the appearance of the new.

Ma'sūma al-Muṭāwa' (see Biographies), in the collection of short stories, entitled *Lan yu'īd at-tārīkh nafsahu! (History will Not Repeat Itself?)*, touches on universal problems that concern Arabic society. She talks directly about things which were until recently pushed to the margins of the social consciousness. In the majority of her short stories she presents life and family customs concentrating on the drama of women, injustices, the meanness of men and the weakness of the human character. Her characters do not possess concrete names and the complete anonymity appears intended so that everyone can feel the hero of the drama. The author passes over

²⁷² Anīsa az-Zayyānī, *Al-Bi'r*, in: *Khandaq...*, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

²⁷³ Anīsa az-Zayyānī, *Al-'Arūs*, in: *Khandaq...*, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

²⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

descriptions and does not waste time on introducing the reader to the backcloth, quickly moving on to concrete events. The reality presented in her stories is sad, there is a lack of warm relations between happy people. The stories are devoid of emotions in conveying the stories which means that everything can be viewed with distance. The heroes reconcile themselves with pain and suffering. There is an absence within them of the spirit to fight for their own happiness. There is no lack in the stories of connections with present-day reality, something reflected also in alcohol and drug dependence. The writer speaks of prostitution, violence within the family, taking advantage of children and forcing them to undertake heavy physical work. She is not afraid to write about forcing girls to marry too young and the drama associated with the loss of childhood. The women portrayed are continually tried by fate. The male protagonists are divided into two groups. The first concerns those who cause harm, the second those who attempt to rectify this situation. The writer competently sketches the condition of the Arab community unable to manage the growing problem of unemployment, poverty, the breakdown of the until recently existing system of values. For the first time we encounter a subtitle for each short story, which is a sentence summarizing the problem presented in the short story.

Khawfan min al-faḍīḥa (Out of Fear of a Scandal) is a short story that is close to social reportage, in which the author presents the drama of women used by men, blackmailed and left to their own devices. A taxi driver – an Asian, is involved in drug dealing and prostitution. In the eyes of the writer he is one of many who come to her country hoping for a chance to get rich quickly, not necessarily legally. The main plot of the short story is the change in a man, a potential client for prostitution, who moved by the drama of a woman forced into prostitution, decides to help her, and does not as he initially intended to use her sexually. The prostitute is married, caring about her image as a good wife and mother she is paralyzed with fear at the prospect of her double life being revealed – a life she was forced to enter into under blackmail. She is a puppet in the taxi driver's hands and his trump card are the photos he has taken of her in an underhand way. They appear to be indestructible for this woman:

When we got home the driver gave me his telephone number and I was forced to give him mine. From that moment he has threatened to send the photos to my husband and family if I refuse to cooperate. If I don't answer his calls or put the receiver down he will push one of my photos, in which I appear naked, under the door of my house. This means that I have to constantly listen to his orders fearing a scandal.²⁷⁵

All women used in this way feel themselves condemned to defeat and condemnation on the part of their families and surroundings.

A shocking story about the complete debasement of a man and the selling out of all moral principles, as well as the lack of respect for a mother is shown in the short

²⁷⁵ Ma'sūma al-Muṭāwa', *Khawfan min al-faḍīḥa*, in: *Lan yu'īd at-tārīkh nafsahu!*, Bahrain, 2002, p. 61.

story *Aqṣā darajāt al-inḥiṭāt* (*The Highest Level of Humiliation*). The heroine is a loving mother and wife. When her husband dies prematurely she does not decide to remarry despite being young. She decides to devote herself to her sons. And when one day she learns that she is pregnant a host of absurd thoughts and questions fly around her head:

Is it possible that someone entered the house and I did not know about it? Is it possible that I could have had sex with someone and not remember it?! Or could something in the food have brought about my pregnancy? Or maybe I leave home and go to the bed of some man in my sleep?! I don't know what's happening to me?! I really don't know?!²⁷⁶

Initial disdain for the widow changes into compassion and understanding. One night a terrible truth comes to light. The sons have been adding intoxicating drugs to the mother's tea, and then rape her with her being totally unaware. There are now no longer any rules, borders and principles that protect man from degradation. There is only some animal drive and a lack of resistance in the face of the degradation of another man.

The story *Luhūm ādamiyya li-l-bay'* (*Human Flesh for Sale*) is another brutal story. This is the story of a girl whose family decides on her marriage at a very young age only because they have managed to find a very well-off candidate for the husband. As a result the ten-year old girl is forbidden to go to school and her toys are taken away, and as the heroine says: "they raped my childhood".²⁷⁷ She is burdened with the responsibilities of a wife which horrify her. She had to cope with the reality of daily life, repulsion for her husband and his alcoholic breath. Then becoming accustomed to things, she put up with the beatings, humiliation and insults. Liberation comes during the moment of giving birth. It seems to her that she has embarked upon a new life when at her side there appears another man, who despite the love borne for him has betrayed her. The short story is an internal monologue of a woman tried by fate, wronged by men and thrown out by her family. People who were closest to her caused her suffering and loneliness.

Ma'sūma al-Muṭāwa' does not limit herself to the portrayal of portraits of women. We also have several attempts to present the problems of men crushed by duties beyond their psychological strengths. In the short story *Anā lastu rajulan!* (*I'm Not a Man!*) we have an interesting study of human personality dominated by fear of failure, woman, men. The main character is a man who is the opposite of the Arab stereotype of someone caring for the honour and life of his family. He decides to get married because of the influence of his mother. Women are a great puzzle to him because his whole life was spent in the company of men. He is unable to talk to them and does not understand them. His wife is murdered before his very eyes and years later the self same murderer asks for his daughter's hand. The hero is unable to

²⁷⁶ Ma'sūma al-Muṭāwa', *Aqṣā darajāt al-inḥiṭāt*, in: *Lan...*, *op.cit.*, p. 150.

²⁷⁷ Ma'sūma al-Muṭāwa', *Luhūm adamiyya li-l-bay'*, in: *Lan...*, *op.cit.*, p. 98.

oppose him and defend those closest to him. The author desires to show that life is the test of our humanity, that it mercilessly defines our predispositions and calculates things on the basis of acts committed.

Ma‘šūma al-Muṭāwa‘ is evaluating an Arab society that is still strongly influencing the behaviour and decisions taken by the individual. The attempts to draw attention to controversial social phenomena, like the traffic in children, drugs and homosexuals, are innovative. The author hopes that by shocking the reader she will make him realize that beneath the surface layer of order, behind the semblance of a safe life, dramas are being played out.

Aḥmad al-Hujayrī should be included amongst the generation of modern pioneering writers in Bahrain. He started to write at the beginning of the 1970s and was one of the most significant authors alongside ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, Qāsim Ḥaddād and ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa. However, following an extremely promising literary debut, Aḥmad al-Hujayrī was to terminate his artistic endeavours for quite a long time. He was not to write for around fifteen years. It was only at the beginning of the 1990s that he returned to the Bahraini literary scene, and it is worth noting here that this was a big-time return. In the course of the fifteen years when Aḥmad al-Hujayrī did not officially publish during which he subordinated himself to the prose of life, he developed an extremely mature prosaic reflection upon life itself. Aḥmad al-Hujayrī is first and foremost an acute observer. He elicits all those phenomena which directly concern him as a man, and as an adherent of a certain way of life and the representative of a concrete culture. It is from this perspective that he relates events in his short stories. It is equally for this reason that his works are marked by a highly defined character. And this is a character and atmosphere connected with the place and culture the author identifies himself with. We find in his texts a lot of observations on contemporary social phenomena, cultural differences, changes in customs and traditions as well as the state of traditional values.

The main subject of Aḥmad al-Hujayrī’s work is the image of contemporary Bahraini society. It is worth noting that the writer devotes a lot of space to rural communities which, on the one hand, are the mainstay of traditional values, while on the other are plagued by negative phenomena characteristic of fairly closed societies.²⁷⁸ These matters are examined, for example, in the short stories *Al-Hāmāt* (*The Heads*), *Al-Mibshara* (*The Palm*) and *At-Taḥawwul* (*The Change*). Extremely interesting observations are noted in these stories which portray conflicts resulting either from cultural discrepancies or from differences in world outlook. This subject is especially interesting given the context of countries of the Persian Gulf where for years there have existed together extremely diverse social groupings.

The short story *Inḥisār al-mawja* (*The Outgoing Tide*) is an excellent example of how differences in world outlook play a significant role in social life, and in particular in the life of individuals. The hero of the work falls in love with a woman

²⁷⁸ Cf. Maḥdī ‘Abd Allāh, *Kitāb ‘atīq b‘ad inqitā‘*, in: “Akḥbār al-Khalīj”, 19.03.1991.

who appears to be the manifestation of all his dreams. He starts to meet her. Their feelings develop. Gradually they get to know each other better. The initial fascination passes and the man discovers that his partner is a true individualist, who behaves extremely freely something far from the dictates of tradition. This results in the hero distancing himself from her. While the woman, on hearing comments about her way of dressing, starts to treat the man as a boring traditionalist and decides to split up from him. Finally the two of them part and all that remains from what at the start appeared to be a promising acquaintance is a sense of disappointment, disillusionment, though equally, probably, regret.

The world of traditional values in confrontation with often startling everydayness is also the subject of the short story *Aṣ-Ṣafqa* (*Transaction*). Its main characters are two men who come from countries of the Gulf. Both arrive in Los Angeles and spend the evening in one of Los Angeles' night clubs. There they meet a woman who after a short chat proposes to them an offer of a fairly personal nature. She proposes to agree to marry one of them for money resulting in the possibility to apply for American citizenship. The men are shocked by what they hear and leave the establishment in a state of extreme agitation. Within a moment the two of them start to laugh loudly reacting in this way to this situation so absurd for them. Yet behind this laughter there hides first and foremost a sense of alienation and fear in the face of an incomprehensible otherness.

Aḥmad al-Hujayrī's short stories are short scenes, fragments of reality captured in the frame of extremely penetrating prose. The writer is extremely good at his use of this difficult literary form and appears to feel comfortable in this mode. The most important thing in his work is that he is able to grasp and show the state of man in situations where choices are necessary as well as in situations of conflict when we really show who we are.

Walīd Hāshim was born in 1982 and belongs to the youngest generation of Bahraini writers. He is the author of the novel, entitled *Lam akun hunāk* (*I Wasn't There*), which was published in Beirut in 1999. The heroine is a twelve-year-old girl whose name is Josephine. She does not accept any rules and escapes from the reality that surrounds her. She is constantly running away: from her family, from herself, she rejects love. She says:

I don't like light, I don't like the sun. I only love darkness. If I were strong enough I would slap the sun in the face with my own hands. I hate light. I like darkness and this means that the whole of my life I have spent in shadow [...]²⁷⁹

Despite her young years she has her own views on the world, life and the society she lives in. She is hostilely disposed towards the people she cooperates with, something reflected in her attitude towards an old woman she cleans for: "She only

²⁷⁹ Walīd Hāshim, *Lam akun hunāk*, Beirut, 1999, p. 7.

wastes the air giving nothing in return”.²⁸⁰ She is not afraid of death. Quite the opposite, she is constantly prepared to die. She was born in order to fulfil a calling. In rejecting the help of all and sundry she feels lonely.

The world in Walid Hāshim’s novel undergoes deformation, values, generational conflicts, absurdities in thought and existence are submitted to a headlong flight.

²⁸⁰ *Ibidem.*

CONCLUSION

It is difficult at the present stage of stormy creative development to sum up or close this book devoted to the contemporary poetry and prose of Bahrain. Without doubt Ibrāhīm al-‘Urayyīd, Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa, ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, ‘Alawī al-Hāshimī, Qāsim Ḥaddād and Ḥamda Khamīs belong to that generation of poets whose creativity has had an enormous influence on the shape of contemporary poetry. A similarly important role has been played in prose by Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik, Fawziyya Rashīd, ‘Abd Allāh Khalīfa, Amīn Ṣālīḥ and ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl. Their output constitutes its own form of literary document. They introduced a new means of viewing the world and new ways of expression.

The whole of contemporary Bahraini literature turns out to be strongly rooted in the ground of indigenous tradition. However, there has occurred in poetry an unusually dynamic development of traditional forms of expression, from classical verse (*ash-shi‘r al-‘amūdī*) through verse based on metric foot (*at-tafīla*), right up to prose poetry (*qaṣīdat an-nathr*). Via the aptness of words and the cognitive function of the poetic image, Bahraini poets have achieved a unique precision in language. Creative awakening has equally embraced prose, something expressed by the explosion of creative talents and the clear involvement of writers in social matters and questions of human fate.

Bahraini literature deals with subjects in various interpretative and philosophical depictions. There is room here for the question of contemporary man’s place and role in the world, the alienation of the individual, for questions of moral and psychical voids. There is also a bias towards mysticism. Contemporary literature has been enriched by personal experiences through emphasis on the individualism of the creator. There is also no absence of protest against a reality that does not give a sense of safety, as well as revolt against war.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF BAHRAINI AUTHORS

Īmān Asīrī was born in 1952 in Bahrain. She has graduated from a vocational educational college and she works as a gym teacher at school. Īmān Asīrī is a member of the Writer's Association of Bahrain (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb) and she was a board member of it in the 1970s. In the years 2000–2001 she wrote for “Al-Ittihād” newspaper. She actively participates in poetry competitions in Bahrain and abroad, e.g. United Arab Emirates in 1986, Baghdad in 2001, and Algeria in 2003.

She has published three volumes of poetry: *Hadhī anā al-qubbara* (Beirut, 1982), *Khams daqāt li-qalbī* (Bahrain, 1994), *Ḥadīth al-awānī li-l-qubbara* (Beirut, 2001).

Ḥasan Būḥasan was born in 1961 in Bahrain. He graduated in 2003 from the University of Bahrain in business management. He is an editor of the cultural supplement to “Al-Ahd” the daily and “Al-Mawāqif” magazine. Ḥasan Būḥasan is a member of the Writer's Association of Bahrain (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb) and The National Cultural Forum (al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfī al-Ahlī), where he is the editor-in-chief of all NCF's publications.

Ḥasan Būḥasan has published his own collection of short stories, entitled *'Awāṭif fī aḥḍān al-ghūl* (Bahrain, 1999).

Hiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn was born in 1959 in al-Muharraq, in Bahrain. She graduated from the University of Bahrain in education, then from Cairo University in Arabic studies. She works for the Ministry of Education and actively participates in the cultural life of Bahrain. Hiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn was one of the founders of The National Cultural Forum (al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfī al-Ahlī), where she is at present the head of its Studies and Research Committee. She also took part in founding The Folk Poetry Society. She participates in poetry competitions in Bahrain and abroad (Jordan). Her poetry has been sung by Arab star singers; Khalid ash-Shaikh or Hasan Haddad.

Hiṣṣa al-Bū'aynayn has published one poetry volume in Bahraini dialect: *Ṣaḥīl al masāfa* (Bahrain, 2000). Her first volume of poetry in classical Arabic entitled *Li-l-waqt li-l-makān* is to be published soon.

Ibrāhīm 'Abd Allāh Būhīndī was born in 1948 in al-Muharraq, in Bahrain. He learned from the Qur'an in a religious school. He received his MA in business administration and works in a bank. Ibrāhīm 'Abd Allāh Būhīndī is the president of the Writer's Association of Bahrain (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb) .

He has published one volume of folk poetry: *Aḥlām najmat al-ghabasha* (Bahrain, 1974), as well as three volumes of poetry in classical Arabic: *Ashhadu annī uḥibbu* (Bahrain, 1987), *Al-Waṭīsa* (Bahrain, 1994), and *Ghazal at-ṭarīda* (Bahrain, 1994). He is also an author of plays: *Surūr*, *Hal yajaf al-qalb*, and others.

Fāṭima al-Taytūn was born in 1962, in Bahrain. She studied Arabic literature at the Kuwaiti University in the years 1982–1986. After her studies she worked as a teacher of Arabic language (1988–1998), and now she works for “al-Ayyām” magazine.

Fāṭima al-Taytūn has published several volumes of poetry: *Arsumu qalbī* (Bahrain, 1991), *Al-Awqāt al-mahjūra* (Bahrain, 1994), *Ṭuqūs fī al-’ishq* (Bahrain, 1996), *Rajul abyad* (Bahrain, 1996), *Ḥabībī al-ladhī* (Syria, 1998), *Aqrab min al-’iṭr wa ab’ad* (Iran, 1998), *Kitāb al-jasad al-akhīr* (Damascus, 2000), *Kitāb al-iḥtīdār* (Syria, 2002), and *Kitāb ash-Shams* (Bahrain, 2003).

‘Alī al-Jallāwī was born in 1975 in Manama, in Bahrain. He was imprisoned in 1992, in 1995, and in 1998. ‘Alī al-Jallāwī actively takes part in the literary life of Bahrain. He is a member of the Writer’s Association of Bahrain (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb).

He has published four volumes of poetry: *Wajhān li-imra’a wāhida* (Beirut, 1991), *Al-’Iṣyān. Risālat al-Munzīr* (Damascus, 2000), *Al-Madīna al-akhīra* (Jordan, 2002), and *Dalmūniyāt* (Damascus, 2002)

Barwīn Ḥabīb was born in 1969 in Manama, in Bahrain. She graduated from the University of Bahrain in Arabic literature in 1993. During the years 1991–1992 she was a leader of the Students’ Drama Society (Nādī al-Jāma’ī). In 1997 she received her MA in Arabic literature from ‘Ayn ash-Shams University in Cairo, Egypt. At present she is working on her PhD thesis on the Body and Language in the Poetry of Women Poets of the Gulf Countries, while working as a speaker for Dubai TV, she also has her own TV program on Arabic literature.

Barwīn Ḥabīb actively takes part in cultural life, participating in poetry events in Bahrain and abroad (Cairo, Copenhagen), and is a member of The National Cultural Forum (al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfi al-Ahlī).

In 1999 she published in Beirut a book, entitled *Taqniyāt at-ta’bīr fī shi’r Nizār Qabbānī* and in 2001, also in Beirut, a volume of poetry *Rujūlatuka al-khā’ifa. Ṭufūlatī al-waraqīyya*.

Aḥmad Ḥujayrī was born in 1950, in Bahrain. He studied Arabic language and literature at Beirut University. In 1989 he obtained an M.A. in Management from California University in USA. In 2000 he obtained license in law from the Arab University in Beirut.

Aḥmad Ḥujayrī is active in the cultural life of Bahrain, publishing in newspapers and literary magazines, such as: “al-Bahrain”, “al-Aḍwā’”, “al-Waṭan”, and others.

Qāsim Ḥaddād was born in 1948 in Manama, in Bahrain. After completing high school studies in Bahrain he worked at the public library from 1968 to 1975, then for the Ministry of Information, being responsible for art and culture.

Qāsim Ḥaddād was one of the founding members of the Writer’s Association of Bahrain (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and also one of the founders of Bahraini theatre (1970). He was the editor-in-chief of the literary magazine “Kalimāt”. Since the early 1980s he has been publishing regularly his articles from the series *Waqt li-l-kitāba*. He eagerly takes part in international cultural events.

Qāsim Ḥaddād is the author of several volumes of poetry; he has received many prizes for his works and many of his poems have been translated into other languages.

He has published the following volumes of poetry: *Al-Bishāra* (Bahrain, 1970), *Khurūj ra’s al-Ḥusayn min al-mudun al-khā’ina* (Beirut, 1972), *Ad-Damm ath-thānī* (Bahrain, 1975), *Qalb al-ḥubb* (Beirut, 1980), *Al-Qiyāma* (Beirut, 1980), *Shazāyā* (Beirut, 1981), *Intimā’āt* (Beirut, 1982), *An-Nahrawān* (Bahrain 1988), *Al-Jawāshin* (Marocco 1989 – co-author Amīn Šāliḥ), *Yamshī makhfūran bi-l-wu’ūl* (London 1990), *’Uzlat al-malakāt* (Bahrain 1992), *Naqd al-amal* (Beirut 1995), *Akhbār Majnūn Layla* (London – Bahrain 1996), *Laysa bi-hadhā ash-shakl, wa lā bi-shakl akhar* (Kuwait, 1997), *Qabr Qāsim* (Bahrain, 1997), *Al-’Amāl ash-shi’riyya* (Beirut, 2000), *’Ilāj al-masāfa* (Beirut, 2000), *Lahu ḥiṣṣa fī al-wala’* (Beirut, 2000), *Al-Mustahīl al-azraq* (Roma, 2001), *Warshat al-’amal. Sīra shakhsīyya li-madīnat al-Muḥarraq* (Bahrain, 2004).

Ja'far Ḥasan was born in 1955 in Bahrain. He graduated from the University of Bahrain. He is extremely active in the cultural life of Bahrain publishing in the pages of leading newspapers and literary magazines, such as: “al-Baḥrain”, “Akhbār al-Khalīj”, “Hunā al-Baḥrayn” and others.

Ja'far Ḥasan has published many critical works. The most important are: *‘Ubūr al-adab aṣ-ṣāmit. Muqaddimāt ulā li-dirāsa sīra Ṭurfā bin al-‘Abd wa mu’allaqatihi* (Bahrain, 2001), and *Nuṣṣ fī ghābat at-ta’wīl* (Bahrain, nd., – co-authors: Fahd Ḥusayn, ‘Abd Allāh Janāhī, Karīm Raḍī)

Yūsuf Ḥasan was born in 1942 in Bahrain. He graduated in Arabic literature from the Arab University in Beirut. Yūsuf Ḥasan is active in the cultural life of Bahrain publishing in leading newspapers and literary magazines, such as: “al-Baḥrayn”, “al-Aḍwā”, “al-Waṭan”, “al-Baḥrayn ath-Thaqāfiyya”, “al-Kātib al-‘Arabī”, and others.

He was one of the founding members of the Writer’s Association of Bahrain (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and its president in the years 1996–1998.

He has published one volume of his poetry: *Min aghānī al-qarḥya* (Bahrain, 1988), and his critical sketches collected in a book, entitled *Al-Baḥrayn fī shi’r Abī al-Baḥr al-Khaṭfī*, published in Sharjah, came onto the market in 1999.

Salmān al-Ḥaykī was born in 1952 in Bahrain. He graduated from the University of Bahrain in Arabic literature and in physical education. At present he works as a coach and sport referee, writing also for the sport newspaper “Akhbār al-Khalīj”. He is the author of many volumes of poetry which deal with national, sporting and political problems. Salmān al-Ḥaykī is a member of the Writer’s Association of Bahrain (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb).

He has published three volumes of poetry in classical Arabic: *Al-Jawāriḥ* (Bahrain, 1991), *Ar-Rabāb hiya at-tabūl* (Bahrain, 1992), *Shahqat al-kawkab al-akhīra* (Bahrain, 1998), one volume in dialect *Maṭat ‘alā wajh al-ḥabība* (Bahrain, 1996) and three lyrical plays, political in character *Qaws qazah* (Bahrain, 2000).

Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf was born in 1948 in Bahrain. In 1972 he received his MA diploma in philosophy and psychology. In the years 1966–1967 he was editor-in-chief of “al-Aḍwā” magazine and a member of the editorial committee of the literary magazine “Kalimāt”. For the next five years he worked at the public library and in the years 1971–1974 he lectured and taught Arabic language, philosophy and psychology. Later, he became director for studies and research in the Ministry of Labour where he worked until 1981, then director for social affairs in the same Ministry, and from 2004 he became an advisor in the Bahraini Parliament.

Khalaf Aḥmad Khalaf became a member of the Writer’s Association of Bahrain (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) in 1969 and for some time was its president. He takes part in numerous literary festivals.

He is the author of two collections of short stories: *Al-ḥilm wujūh ukhrā* (Beirut – Bahrain, 1975), *Fīzinār* (Beirut – Bahrain, 1985) and plays: *Al-Lu’ba* (Iraq, 1981), *Hawājīs al-‘umr* (Beirut – Bahrain, 2000), *Al-‘Ifrit wa waṭan at-ṭā’ir* (Damascus, 1983), *An-Naḥla wa al-asad* (Bahrain, 1989).

Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa was born in 1929 in Jisra, in Bahrain. After three years he moved with his parents to az-Zilāq where he was to live until 1951. In 1952 he moved to Manama. It was there that he finished secondary school and there where he learnt Arabic. He learned classical Arabic literature from outstanding Bahraini authorities, mostly from Ibrāhīm al-‘Urāyyīd. Āl Khalīfa’s poetry started to appear in various Arab journals from 1951 onwards, including the London based “Mujtama’ al-‘arabī” and the Cairo published “al-‘Ālam al-‘arabī”. Aḥmad Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa died in 2004.

He is an author of the following volumes of poetry: *Min aghānī al-Baḥrayn* (Beirut, 1955), *Hajīr wa sarāb* (Bahrain, 1962), *Baqāyā al-ghudrān* (Bahrain, 1966), *Al-Qamr wa an-nakhīl* (n.d., 1978), *Al-‘Anāqīd al-arba’a* (Bahrain, 1980), *Ghuyūm fī aṣ-ṣayf* (Bahrain, 1988), *Al-*

-*Majmū'a al-kāmila li-l-shā'ir Muḥammad Āl Khalīfa* (Bahrain, 2002), *Anfās ar-riyāḥīn* (Bahrain, 2003), *Ubrīt al-fātiḥ* (Bahrain, 2003).

Su'ād Āl Khalīfa was born in 1966 in al-Muharraḡ, in Bahrain. She graduated in Arabic studies from the University of Bahrain. Since 1986 she has been collaborating with the press: The "Ṣadā al-Uṣbū" and "Bānūrāmā al-Khalīj" magazines as well as "Akḥbār al-Khalīj" and "Al-Ayyām" newspapers.

Su'ād Āl Khalīfa has published two collections of short stories: *Al-Maqḥā ar-ramādī* (Bahrain, 1999), *Al-Gḥurfā al-mughlaqa* (Beirut, 2001).

'Abd Allāh Khalīfa was born in 1948 in Bahrain. He graduated from the Educational College in Bahrain in 1970. He worked as a teacher until 1974. Since 1981 he has been collaborating with several magazines and newspapers in Bahrain and abroad. He is a distinguished literary critic, publishing extensively his critical studies on modern Arabic prose, and particularly on the works of Naḡīb Maḥfūz and Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik. He is a board member of the Writer's Association of Bahrain (Usrat al-Uḍabā' wa al-Kuttāb).

'Abd Allāh Khalīfa has published the following collections of short stories: *Laḥn ash-shitā'* (Bahrain, 1975), *Ar-Raml wa yāsmīn* (Damascus, 1982), *Yawm Qā'iz* (Bahrain – Beirut, 1985), *Sahra* (Beirut, 1994), *Dahshat as-sāḥir* (Aleppo, 1997), *Junūn an-nakhīl* (Cairo, 1998), *Sayyid aḡ-Ḍarīḥ* Cairo 2003, and novels: *Al-L'ālī* (Beirut, 1981), *Al-Qurṣān wa al-madīna* (Beirut, 1982), *Al-Hirāt* (Beirut, 1983), *Ughniyat al-mā' wa an-nār* (Damascus, 1989), *Imra'a* (Damascus, 1991), *Aḡ-dabāb* (Damascus, 1992), *Nashīd al-baḥr* (Beirut, 1994), *Al-Yanābī'* (vol. I – Sharjah, 1998; vol. II – Sharjah, 2000; vol. III – soon to be published).

'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa was born in 1944 in al-Muharraḡ, in Bahrain. Since early the sixties he has been publishing extensively in many magazines and newspapers in Bahrain and abroad: "al-Ḥawādīth", "Ḥunā al-Baḥrain", "Al-Aḡwā'", "Al-Waṭan", "Al-Baḥrayn ath-Thaqāfiyya" and others. He also cooperated with Kuwaiti radio.

He was one of the co-founders of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Uḍabā' wa al-Kuttāb). In the years 1976–1985, he was the editor-in-chief of the quarterly "Kitābāt", which he established, and then the subsequent two years he spent in Qatar, where he founded the Center of the Cultural Heritage (Markaz ath-Thurāth ash-Sha'bī). Since 1989 he has acted as a director of the National Board for Culture, Art, and Literature in Bahrain – Majlis al-Waṭanī li-l-Thaqāfa wa al-Funūn wa al-Adāb. In 1994 he became the Editor-in-chief of the cultural magazine "al-Baḥrayn ath-Thaqāfiyya", newly established by him, and in the next year he founded the National Cultural Forum (al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfi al-Aḥlī). At present he is a director of cultural affairs in the King's Diwan. He actively participates in poetry recitations in Bahrain and abroad, as well as represents Bahrain at International Congresses. He has been awarded many prizes and honorable mentions, and a lot of his poems has been translated into foreign languages.

'Alī 'Abd Allāh Khalīfa has published four volumes of poetry in classical Arabic: *Anīn aṣ-ṣawārī* (Bahrain, 1969), *Iḡā'a li-dḥakirat al-waṭan* (Bahrain, 1973), *Fī wadā' as-sayyida al-khaḡra* (Bahrain, 1992), *Ḥūrīyyat al-'ashīq* (Beirut, 2000) and two in Bahraini dialect: *Aṭash an-nakhīl* (Bahrain, 1970), *Aṣāfir al-masā'* (Bahrain, 1983).

Ḥamda Khamīs was born in 1946 in Bahrain. She graduated in Political Sciences from Baghdad University. At present she lives in the United Arab Emirates and collaborates with many newspapers, like "Umān, al-Ittiḥād", and others. She is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Uḍabā' wa al-Kuttāb), and has received many prizes for her works. Her volumes of poetry are a significant literary occurrence that have been translated into many languages including English, French, German, Spanish and Russian.

Ḥamda Khamīs has published the following volumes of poetry in classical Arabic: *I'tidḥār li-ṭ-ṭufūla* (Bahrain, 1978), *Tarānīm* (Beirut – Bahrain, 1985), *Masārāt* (Sharjah, 1993), *Aḡdad*

(Amman, 1994), *'Uzlat ar-rummān* (Beirut, 1999), *Mass min al-mā'* (United Arab Emirates, 2000).

Jamāl al-Khayyāt was born in 1958 in Bahrain. He graduated in biology from the King Sa'ud University in Riyadh in 1982. He also completed studies in bank management at the Bahraini Institute of Science and Banking in 1999. At present he works for the banking sector. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb), and of The National Cultural Forum (al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfi al-Ahli). He writes for "Al-Baḥrain al-Yawm", "al-Aḍwā'", and "Akhbār al-Khalīj" magazines.

Jamāl al-Khayyāt is the author of the following collections of short stories: *Laylā dāfi'a* (Bahrain, 1986), *Ma'āwil... wa al-jidār qishrat bayḍa* (Bahrain, 1988), *Kāi'nāt al-mustanqa'* (Bahrain, 1990), *Walīma li-l-nawāris al-laṭīfa* (Cairo, 1994), *Ḥadiqat al-aḥlām* (Bahrain, 1996) and novels: *As-Sāḥīliya* (Cairo, 1993), *Hāris al-awhām ar-ramādiyya* (Beirut, 2000).

Sawsan Dahnīm was born in 1980 in Bahrain. She graduated in accountancy from Bahrain University. She works as an accountant. She actively participates in the cultural events in Bahrain.

Sawsan al-Dahnīm has published the following volumes of poetry: *Ghā'ib wa lakin* (Bahrain, 1998), *Qubla fī mahabb an-nisyān* (Damascus, 2002).

Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl al-Dīn was born in 1942 in Bahrain. He was taught in a Qur'an school, and then he studied Arabic Philology at the University in Damascus in 1965–1969. After his return he worked for a time as a teacher of Arabic, but since 1973 he has been connected with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs being responsible for scientific research. In 1974 he was sent to Bombay, India as a Consul-general, where he lived for six years. During the years 1992–1994 he was a member of the National Council for Culture and the Arts, while from 1992–2001 he was a member of parliament

Muḥammad Ḥasan Kamāl al-Dīn has published the following volumes of poetry: *Hājis al-khayāl* (Bahrain, 1988), *Min dhākirat 'Ishtār* (Bahrain, 1989), *Qanādīl al-fajr* (Bahrain, 1994), *Nahlat az-ẓamān* (Beirut, 2000), *Hūriyyat al-baḥr* (Beirut, 2000), *Al-Majmū'a ash-shi'riyya al-kāmila* (Bahrain, 2002), as well as two historical studies: *Huqūq al-insān bayna half al-fuḍūl wa mīthāq al-umam al-muttaḥida* (n.p., n.d.), *Wajhān fī al-masīra* (Bahrain, 1993).

Fawziyya Rashīd was born in 1954 in Bahrain. She cooperates with literary and cultural magazines in many Gulf countries including Bahrain; e.g. "Akhbār Khalīj". She has her own column 'Ālām yataghayyar. She is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb). She actively participates in cultural events in Bahrain and abroad.

Fawziyya Rashīd has published the following collections of short stories: *Marāyā aẓ-zill wa al-farah* (Beirut, 1983), *Kayfa šāra al-akhḍaru ḥajaran* (Damascus, 1986), *Imra'a wa rajul* (Damascus, 1996) and three novels: *Al-Ḥisār* (Beirut, 1983), *Taḥawwulāt al-fāris al-gharīb* (Beirut, 1990), *Al-Qalaq as-sirrī* (Cairo, 2000) and the critical study: *'An al-mar'a al-'arabiyya al-mubdi'a wa wa'y adh-dhāt*. Many of her works have been translated into other languages: English, German, Japanese, Swedish, and Danish. Her novel *Al-Ḥisār* has been included in the list of the hundred best novels of the XX century.

Karīm Raḍī was born in 1960 in Bahrain. He finished a vocational school as an electrician in 1979 and worked in his field in Bahrain until he left, in 1980, to UAE to work in the oil industry. After his return to Bahrain in 1984 he started working in a metallurgical processing plant. The years 1997–1998 he spent behind bars as a political prisoner. Since the early eighties he has published in local newspapers, e.g. "Al-Khalīj", "Al-Ayyām", "Majallat al-Baḥrayn ath-Thaqāfiyya". At the beginning of 1990s he joined the Youth Association (Al-Multaqā ash-Shabābī al-Ibdā'ī). He is a board member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb).

Karīm Raḍī is the author of one volume of poetry: *Aḥādīth Ṣafīyya* (Bahrain, 2004) and a co-author of a collection of Bahraini literary works: *Nuṣṣ fī ghāba at-tā'wīl* (Bahrain, nd, – co-authors: Ja'far Ḥasan, Fahd Ḥusayn, 'Abd Allāh Janāhī)

'**Abd ar-Raḥmān Muḥammad Rafī**' was born in 1938 in Manama, in Bahrain. In the sixties he studied law in Cairo, in Egypt and there he came into contact with "al-Adab" magazine. He composes his poems in classical Arabic, mostly *ash-shi'r al-'amūdī*, (classical) as well as in Bahraini dialect.

'Abd ar-Raḥmān Muḥammad Rafī' has published three volumes of poetry in classical Arabic: *Aghānī al-baḥār al-arba'a* (Beirut, 1970), *Ad-Dawrān ḥawla al-ba'id* (Bahrain, 1980) *Wa lahā. ḍaḥk al-ward* (Beirut, 1996), and five volumes in dialect: *Qaṣā'id sha'biyya* (Bahrain, 1970), *Awwal al-maḥabba* (Bahrain, 1973), *Diwān ash-shi'r ash-sha'bī* (Kuwait, 1970–1981), *Sawālif dunyā* (Bahrain, 1978), *Diwān baḥr wa 'uyūn* (Kuwait, 1987).

Farīd Ramaḍān was born in 1961 in Muharraḡ, in Bahrain. He graduated in Business Management from the Gulf Polytechnic College, University of Bahrain in 1988, and later in Business Computing and Business Studies from Bournemouth Computer and Technology Center in London in 2000. He worked in the editorial sections of "Hunā al-Baḥrain" and "Kalimāt" magazines, and the "Al-Ayyām" newspaper. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb), Bahrain Cinema Club, and Bahrain Human Rights.

Farīd Ramaḍān has written the screenplay for a film *Aḥlām saghīra*, and he is the author of the collection of short stories *Al-Bayād* (Bahrain, 1984), and of the following novels: *At-Tannūr* (Bahrain, 1994), *Nūrān* (Cairo, 1997), *Al-Barzakh... najma fī safār* (Jordan, 2000), as well as other literary works like: *Tilka aṣ-ṣaghīra al-latī tushbihuk* (Bahrain, 1991). His novel *Nūrān* has been translated into English as Nooran.

Nabīla Zubārī was born in 1956 in Bahrain. She graduated from the University of Wales, Great Britain and in 2002 she received her Ph.D. degree from the University of Leeds. At present she works for the Bahraini University. Since 2004 she has been head of the department for the advancement of teaching. She is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb), and since 1995, a member of The National Cultural Forum (al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfī al-Ahlī). Being a very active person, she frequently takes part in literary festivals (in Bahrain: 1996, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2004; United Arab Emirates: 2000; Paris: 2004).

Nabīla Zubārī has published two volumes of poetry: *Ḥawājiz ramādiya* (Bahrain, 1994), *'Asā an yarjī' al-baḥr...!* (Bahrain, 1998). Some of her poems have been translated into English and French and some are sung by the famous singer Khalid ash-Shaikh.

Anīsa az-Zayyānī was born in 1954 in Muharraḡ, in Bahrain. She graduated in Arabic Studies from the Kuwaiti University in 1976 and in 1985 she received a diploma in Education from the Bahraini University. After completing her studies she worked as a journalist for "Al-Baḥrain al-yawn" magazine, and then as a teacher of Arabic language. She is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb).

Anīsa az-Zayyānī has published one collection of short stories *Khandaq an-nār* (Beirut, 2001).

Ḥusayn as-Samāhījī was born in 1967 in as-Samahij, in Bahrain. He studied Arabic Philology at the University of King Sa'ud in Riyadh and he received his M.A. in Arabic Studies from the Bahraini University. In 1987 he was awarded a prize for poetry achievements, in UAE. After returning home in 1989 he became an activist of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā' wa al-Kuttāb), of which he was twice a board member. He takes part in international poetry festivals; UAE (1987), Kuwait (1995), Abu Dhabi (2000), Baghdad (2000, 2001).

Ḥusayn as-Samāhījī has published four volumes of poetry: *Mā lam yaqulhu Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī* (Beirut, 1996), *Al-Ghīrbān* (Beirut, 1999), *Imra'a ukhrā* (Beirut, 1999), *Nazawāt sharqīyya* (Beirut, 2002).

Fawziyya as-Sindī was born in 1957 in Manama, in Bahrain. She completed her studies in marketing at Cairo University. She co-operates with literary newspapers and journals, and is an editorial board member of “Kalimāt” and “Al-Baḥrayn ath Thaḳāfiyya”. She is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb), a member of the Bahraini Women’s Association; Al-Ittiḥād an-Nisā’i al-Baḥraynī. Besides, she actively participates in poetry festivals, like those in Morocco (1987), Libia (1988), UAE (1989), Oman (1999), Tunisia (1999), Beirut (2000), Qatar (2000), Paris (2000, 2003), Cairo (2002), and many others.

Fawziyya as-Sindī has published the following volumes of poetry: *Istifāqāt* (Bahrain, 1982), *Hal arā mā ḥawli, hal aṣif mā ḥadatha* (Bahrain, 1986), *Ḥanjarat al-ghā’ib* (Bahrain, 1990), *Ākhir al-mahabb* (Beirut, 1998), *Malādh ar-rūḥ* (Beirut, 1999). Many of her works have been translated into English, French, Spanish, and German.

‘Alī Sayyār was born in 1926 in Bahrain. He graduated in 1948 from the Industrial Institute in Cairo. He founded his first weekly “Al-Qāfila” in 1956, then in 1969 “Ṣadā al-Uṣbū” and for some time he was editor-in-chief of the “Al-Waṭan” newspaper. He has traveled widely in many Arab countries; to Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria. In 1973 he was a member of editorial body of the first Bahraini Constitution. At present he runs his own business.

‘Alī Sayyār is the author of collection of short stories *As-Sayyid* (Bahrain, 1976), and of a book entitled *Riḥlat qalam* (Beirut, 2003).

Laylā as-Sayyid was born in 1960 in Bahrain. She graduated in Arabic Studies from the Bahraini University, and later she received a diploma in Literature and the Arabic Language from the Saint Joseph University of Beirut. She is a member of the Cinema Club in Bahrain (Nādī Al-Baḥrayn li-l-sīnamā), and a board member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb). She has participated in poetry evenings in Jordan (2001, 2002) and in Bahrain (2003). She co-operates with many literary magazines of the Gulf.

Laylā as-Sayyid has published one volume of poetry *Maramā hunāk* (Beirut, 2003).

‘Alī ash-Sharqāwī was born in 1948 in Manama, in Bahrain. He worked for the Ministry of Health and the years from 1968 to 1971, he spent in Iraq, as he was granted a scholarship at the Baghdad Laboratory. After his return, between the years 1971 and 1979, he spent many years in jail for political reasons and it was then he started publishing his poetry. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb). In 1997 the Ministry of Information of Bahrain founded a special literary fellowship to allow him to concentrate on literary work. Being extremely active he co-operates with many literary newspapers, like “Al-Ittiḥād”, “Akḥbār al-Khalīj”, “Al-Aḍwā”, “Al-Ayyām”, “Ar-Riyād”, and “Al-Waṭan”, as well as magazines, like “Al-Baḥrayn ath-Thaḳāfiyya”, “Adab wa naqd”, “Al-Aqlām”, “Awraq”, “Al-Bayān”, “Ash-Shi’r”, “Al-Kātib al-‘Arabī”, and “Nizwā”.

‘Alī ash-Sharqāwī is an author of many volumes of poetry composed in classical Arabic and in dialect, of dramas, plays, fables and fairy tales for children, scripts and song for radio broadcasting. He has published the following volumes of poetry in classical Arabic: *Ar-Ra’d fi mawāsīm al-qaḥṭ* (Bahrain, 1975), *Nakhla al-qalb* (Baghdad, 1981), *Taqāsīm dāḥī bin Walīd al-jadīd* (Bahrain, 1982), *Hiyā al-hājsu wa al-litimāl* (Beirut, 1983), *Ru’yā al-futūḥ* (Bahrain – Saudi Arabia, 1983), *Al-Mazmūr 23* (Beirut, 1983), *Li-l’anāṣir shahādaturḥā ayḍan aw al-madhbaḥa* (Bahrain, 1986), *Mashāghil an-nawras aṣ-ṣaghīra* (Bahrain, 1987), *Dhākira al-mawāqid* (Bahrain, 1988), *Makḥṭūtāt Ghayth bin al-Yarā’a* (Bahrain, 1990), *Wā ‘Arabāh* (Bahrain, 1991), *Mā’idat al-qurmuḥ* (Bahrain, 1994), *Al-Wa’la* (Beirut, 1998), *Kitāb ash-Shīn* (Bahrain, 1998), as well as the following volumes of poetry in dialect: *Ufan yā fulān* (Bahrain, 1983), *Aṣḍāf* (Bahrain, 1994), *Bar wa baḥr* (Bahrain, 1997), *Lūlū wa muḥār* (I vol. – Bahrain, 1998; II vol. – Bahrain, 2001), *Sawāḥil ṣayf* (Bahrain, 2000), *Hīwār shams ar-rūḥ* (Bahrain, 2001). His poems are sung by famous Arabic singers, like Samira Sa’id or Khalid al-Shaikh.

He is also the author of several plays for children: *Miftāḥ al-khayr* (Bahrain, 1984), *Al-Fakh* (Cairo, 1989), *Al-Arānīb at-ṭayyīb* (Bahrain, 1990), *As-Samawāl* (Cairo, 1991), *Thulāthiya ‘adhārī* (Bahrain, 1994), *Khūr al-mudā’ī* (Bahrain, 1995), *Al-Burhāma* (Beirut, 2000), and books of fables for children: *Aghānī al-’aṣāfir* (Bahrain, 1983), *Shajarat al-aṭfāl* (Bahrain, 1983), *Qaṣā’id ar-rabī’* (Bahrain, 1989), *Al-Aṣābī’* (Bahrain, 1991), *Al-Arjūḥa* (Bahrain, 1994), *Aghānī al-ḥikma* (Bahrain, 1996), *Al-’Ā’ila* (Bahrain, 2000).

Ibrāhīm Sha‘bān was born in 1963 in Bahrain. He completed religious studies in Iran and Egypt; at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. He used to work for Lebanese TV and the “Al-Anwār” newspaper and now he works at the Dār al-Hadī library in Bahrain. His poems composed in dialect are sung by recognized Bahraini singers: Ahmad Al-Jumayri or Muhammad ‘Ali ‘Abd Allah.

Ibrāhīm Sha‘bān is the author of nine volumes of poetry: *Qadarī* (Beirut, 1991), *Al-Mar’a tarfud aṣ-ṣilaḥ* (Bahrain, 1993), *’Alā ḥawā’ al-fāṭiḥa* (Bahrain, 1994), *Ma’a al-ḥubb waṭan* (Bahrain, 1997), *Laysa li-l-qalb ḥabīb wāḥid* (Beirut – Bahrain, 1997), *Sabaqa al-ḥubb al-’adhal* (Beirut, 1998), *Huzzī ilayki bi-qalbī* (Bahrain, 2000), *Fajr al-qalām* (Bahrain, 2001), *Zabad al-’adamiyya* (Beirut, 2003).

Aḥmad ash-Shamlān was born in 1942 in Bahrain. He vigorously participates in the cultural and literary life of Bahrain. He worked for the literary journal “Kalimāt” and cooperated with many newspapers and magazines, e.g. Kuwaiti “At-Ṭalī’a”. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb).

Aḥmad ash-Shamlān has published the following volumes of poetry: *Zanābiq al-’ushq* (Bahrain, 1988), *Al-Akhḍar al-bāqī* (Bahrain, 1989), *Rā’iḥa fī adh-dhākira* (Beirut, 1998), and critical works: *Al-Maḥw wa al-kitāba* (Beirut, 1999), *Ajrās al-amal* (vol. I – Bahrain, 2001; vol. II – Bahrain, 2002).

Amīn Ṣāliḥ was born in 1950 in Manama, in Bahrain. He is one of the most active participants in the cultural life of Bahrain and one of the founders of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb). He widely publishes in the pages of newspapers and journals in Bahrain and abroad.

Amīn Ṣāliḥ is the author of the following books: *Hunā al-warda... Hunā narqūṣ* (Beirut, 1973), *Al-Farāshāt* (Bahrain, 1977), *Ughniya A.Ṣ. al-ūlā* (Beirut, 1982), *As-Sayd al-malikī* (Beirut, 1982), *At-Ṭarā’id* (Beirut, 1983), *Nudamā’ al-marfā’*. *Nudamā’ ar-rīḥ* (Bahrain, 1987), *Al-’Anāṣir* (Bahrain, 1989), *Al-Jawāshin* (co-author Qāsim Ḥaddād, Morocco, 1989), *Tamīma li-l-ḥujra al-kawniya* (n.p., 1994), *Madā’iḥ* (Bahrain, 1997), *Mawt ṭafīf* (Beirut, 2001), *Rahā’in al-ghaib wa al-ladhīna ḥabaṭū fī Ṣaḥn ad-dār bilā ajniḥa* (Beirut, 2001), and a collection of articles entitled *Handasa aqal, kharā’It aqal* (2000). He has also translated into Arabic the book *As-Sīnamā at-tadmīriya* (1995).

Na’īm ‘Āshūr was born in 1952 in Bahrain. In the years 1969–1972 he studied at the American University of Beirut. He graduated with a diploma in Philosophy and Psychology from the University of Beirut in 1997. He worked as a translator in the Arab Bank, Bahraini TV, etc. At present he lives and works in Saudi Arabia. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb).

Na’īm ‘Āshūr is the author of the following collections of short stories: *Dif... lā waṣf lahu* (Bahrain, 1985), *Ḥālāt al-’ib’ al-awwal* (Bahrain, 1986), *Dhākirat al-mā’* (Bahrain, 1989), *’Im zalāman... ayyuhā al-ḥajar* (Beirut, 1998).

Mahdī ‘Abd Allāh was born in 1954 in Bahrain. He graduated from Beirut University with a diploma in Business Administration. At present he works for the ship yard in Bahrain. He started writing for “Akḥbār al-Khalīj” and “Al-Ayyām” magazines in 1988. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and The National Cultural Forum (al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfi al-Ahlī).

Mahdī ‘Abd Allāh has published a work in two volumes: *Nakha al-Māḍī* (vol. I – Bahrain, 1994; vol. II – Bahrain, 1996), and has translated many books and articles from English into Arabic. He is the author of the collection of short stories *Tajruba* (Bahrain, 1999).

Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik was born in 1944 in Bahrain. He actively participates in the cultural life of Bahrain. Since 1965 he has been a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb), and he was president of the Association in 1975. He co-operates with many newspapers and literary magazines in the country and abroad.

Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik has published the following collections of short stories: *Mawt ṣāhib al-‘araba* (Beirut, 1973), *Naḥnu nuḥibbu ash-shams* (Beirut, 1975), *Thuqūb fī ri’at al-madīna* (Bahrain, 1979), *As-Siyāj* (Beirut, 1982), *An-Nahr yajrī* (Bahrain, 1984), *Ra’s al-‘ārūsa* (Bahrain, 1987), *Ghalyūn al-‘aqīd* (Beirut, 2002), and the novels: *Jadhwa* (Beirut, 1980), *Laylat ḥubb* (Beirut, 1998).

Faḥiyya ‘Ajlān was born in 1954 in Muharraq in Bahrain. She actively participates in poetry festivals, like those in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and many others. Her poems are sung by famous Arabic singers, like ‘Abd Allah Ruwaishid, Muhammad al-Balushi and others.

Faḥiyya ‘Ajlān has published the following volumes of poetry in classical Arabic: *Ashri’a al-‘ushq* (Bahrain, 1983), *Shams az-zahārī* (together with ‘Alī al-Sharqāwī, Bahrain, 1983), *Ji’tu faghādartu dammī* (Bahrain, 1988), *Hawāmish imra’a fī al-hāmish* (Bahrain, 1998), and in dialect: *Khaṭāwī ar-rīḥ* (Bahrain, 1998).

Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī was born in 1958 in Bahrain. He actively participates in the cultural life of Bahrain, publishing widely within the pages of literary newspapers and magazines. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and he was its president in the years 1999–2001.

Aḥmad al-‘Ajāmī has published the following volumes of poetry: *Innamā hiyā jalwatun wa ru’ā* (Bahrain, 1987), *Nasl al-maṣābīḥ* (Beirut – Amman, 1999), *Al-Manāsik al-qurmuziyya* (Bahrain, 1993), *Zahrāt ar-raw’* (Beirut, 1995), *Al-‘Ashiq* (Beirut, 1997), *Rubbamā anā* (Beirut, 1999).

Ibrāhīm al-‘Urāyīḍ was born in 1908 in Bombay, India. He died in 2005. Soon after finishing secondary school in 1925, Ibrāhīm al-‘Urāyīḍ moved to Bahrain. Initially he worked as an English teacher. Then he was appointed the headmaster in one of the state schools. He resigned from this job in 1931 and opened a private school in the same year where he used to stage his own plays. He was forced to close his school after three years, for financial reasons. In 1937 he became the head of translation for an oil company. This position he kept for most of his life. Only during the Second World War, due to the unclear economic-political situation in the whole region did he work for a short period as a secondary school teacher as well as for a radio station. He cooperated with many journals; with the “al-‘Urūba” magazine, “al-Adīb” and “ar-Risāla”. In these publications he published his articles and poetry.

Ibrāhīm al-‘Urāyīḍ has published the following volumes of poetry: *Adh-Dhikrā* (Bahrain, 1931), *Al-‘Arā’is* (1946), *Qublatān* (1948), *Arḍ ash-shuhadā’* (1951), *Shumū’* (1956), *Rubā’iyyāt Al-Khayyām* (1966), *Fī haykal al-ḥubb*, *Mudhakkirāt shā’ir* (1982), *Yā anti* (1998). He also published plays: *Wā Mu’taṣimāh* (Cairo, 1932), *Bayna ad-dawlatayn* (1934), and critical works: *Al-Asālīb ash-shi’riyya* (1950), *Ash-Shi’r wa-l-funūn al-jamāliyya* (1952), *Ash-Shi’r wa qaḍaya fī al-adab al-‘arabī al-ḥadīth* (1955), *Jawla fī-sh-shi’r al-‘arabī al-mu’āṣir* (1962), *Fī al-Mutanabbī ba’d al-‘ām* (1963), *Dirāsāt fī al-adab wa an-naqd* (1996).

‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl was born in 1954 in Manama, in Bahrain. He works for the Ministry of Information as a head of the cultural department and he is an editor-in-chief of the literary magazine “Al-Baḥrayn ath-Thaqāfiyya”. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb).

‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aqīl has published the following collections of short stories: *Istighāthāt fī al-‘ālam al-waḥshī* (Bahrain, 1979), *Masā’ al-ballūrāt* (Bahrain, 1985), *Shawqarān* (Bahrain, 1994), the novels: *Ru’yā al-jālis ‘alā ‘arsh quddāmuhu baḥru zujāj shibh al-ballūr* (vol. I – Bahrain, 1989; vol. II – Bahrain, 1990), *Kaff Maryam* (Bahrain, 1997), *Ayyām Yūsuf al-akhīra* (Beirut, 1999), the book *Ash-Shawāriq* (Bahrain, 1991), and the collections of fables for children: *Man saraqā qalam nadā* (1977), *Al-Ittifāq* (1980).

‘Ā’isha al-Ghulūm was born in 1952 in Bahrain. She graduated in Arabic Studies from the Kuwaiti University in 1979. In 1991 she received her M.A. from the Bahraini University. She worked for the Ministry of Education, taking part in the preparation of many school textbooks. At present, she is a headmistress of a school for girls in Muharraḡ, in Bahrain.

‘Ā’isha al-Ghulūm has published two collections of short stories: *Imra’a fī adh-dhākira* (Bahrain, 1995), *Ayyām maḡat* (Bahrain, 2002).

Munīra al-Faḡīl was born in 1958 in Bahrain. She graduated from the Kuwaiti University in English Philology, and then, in 1989, from the University of Essex, in Great Britain with a master’s degree in English and American Literature. In 1994 she gained a doctorate from the same university, based on her thesis on the XIX century English novel. At Bahrain University she was made professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures. She writes extensively for literary and scholarly journals in Bahrain and abroad, e.g. in Jordan, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait. During the years 1997–2001 she was a member of the National Council for Art, Culture, and Heritage in Bahrain. Between 1997 and 1998 she was a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Humanities, published by the College of Arts, University of Bahrain, and since 2001 she has become a member of the Editorial Board of “Thaqāfāt”, published by the College of Arts, University of Bahrain. She is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and of the Human Rights Group in Bahrain.

Munīra al-Faḡīl has published two collections of short stories: *Ar-Rīmūrā* (Kuwait, 1983), *Li-l-ṣawt li-hashāshat aṣ-ṣadā* (Beirut, 2000).

‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā’id was born in 1948 in Bahrain. He has completed several courses on banking management and administration in London and Hong Kong. For many years he worked in a bank. Nowadays, he works as an Arabic-English translator, but participates in poetry festivals and writes for Arabic newspapers. He is a Board member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb).

‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Qā’id has published two volumes of poetry: *‘Āshiq fī zaman al-’atash* (Bahrain, 1975), *Ṣakhab al-hams* (Jordan, 2003).

Muḡammad al-Mājid, one of the pioneers of Bahraini literature, died in 1986 in Bahrain. He co-operated with newspapers and magazines, like “Al-Aḡwā”, or “Akhbār Khalīj”.

Muḡammad al-Mājid has published three collections of short stories: *Maḡāfi’ min ṣimfūniyya ḡazīna* (Kuwait, 1970), *Ar-Raḡīl ilā mudun al-faraḡ* (Bahrain, 1977), *Ar-Raqs ‘alā aḡfān az-ḡalām* (Bahrain, 1980). One volume of his poetry, entitled: *Anti awwal man sā’lanī ‘an ismī* (Bahrain, 1998) was published after his death.

Ya’qūb al-Muḡarraḡī graduated from Cinema College in Paris. He was a Board member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and a member of The National Cultural Forum (al-Multaḡā ath-Thaqāfi al-Ahlī). He is the editor of the website www.jehat.com. He was the editor-in-chief of the magazine “Kalimāt”. He is extremely active in the cultural life of Bahrain, publishing in the pages of leading newspapers and literary magazines, such as: “Akhbār al-Khalīj”, “al-Ayyām” and others.

Ya’qūb al-Muḡarraḡī has published one volume of poetry *‘Idhābāt Aḡmad bin Mājid* (Beirut, 1973).

Ḥusayn ‘Isā al-Maḡrūs was born in 1964 in Bahrain. He graduated from the Bahraini University with a master’s degree in Arabic Studies in 2000. He is a fine art photographer and he works on

biographies of Bahraini photographers (e.g. Aḥmad al-Māḍī, Yūsuf Qāsim, ‘Azīz ‘Alī al-Zubārī), which he publishes within the pages of local journals, like “Al-Baḥrayn Ath-Thaqāfiyya”, “Al-Fütūghrāfi al-Baḥrayn”. He is the editor-in-chief of the yearly “Ishrāqāt”.

Ḥusayn ‘Īsā al-Maḥrūs has published a book: *‘Abd Allāh Al-Khān... aḍ-ḍaw’ ‘uyūn* (Bahrain, 2003), and one collection of short stories: *Dariḥ al-mā’* (Beirut, 2001).

Aḥmad Madan was born in Bahrain in 1955. He graduated from the University of King Sa’ud in Riyadh in 1980. He works as a civil engineer. Since 2002 he has been a director in the Bahraini Municipality. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and for three terms he was its treasurer.

Aḥmad Madan has published three volumes of poetry: *Ṣabāḥ al-kitāba* (Bahrain, 1984), *‘Ushb li-damm al-waraqā* (Bahrain, 1992), *Samā’ thālitha* (Bahrain, 2000).

Ma’šūma al-Muṭāwa’ was born in 1977 in Muharraḡ, in Bahrain. She graduated from the University of Bahrain with a diploma in maths in 2000 and three years later she gained her M.A. from the University of Beirut. She works as a teacher at school, but co-operates with the press, writing for the “Hunā al-Baḥrayn” and “al-Baḥrayn al-Khairiyya” magazines, “Al-Ayyām” newspaper and the “Ṣadā al-Uṣbū” weekly. She is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and The National Cultural Forum (al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfi al-Ahlī).

Ma’šūma al-Muṭāwa’ has published one novel: *Wa taḥaṭṭamat al-quyūd* (Bahrain, 2000), and the following collections of short stories: *Lan yu’id at-tārīkh* (Bahrain, 2002), *Wayḥahā min Ghafḻa* (Bahrain, 2002).

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu’āwida (1911–1996) was born in Muharraḡ, in Bahrain. He graduated from the American University of Beirut. He worked in education (Madrasat al-Ḥadd, Madrasat al-Iṣlāḥ, Madrasat al-Irshād al-Ahliyya). From 1939 his poetry started to appear in the newspaper “Al-Baḥrayn”. ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu’āwida lived in Bahrain up until 1956. He subsequently moved to Qatar and it was there that he lived until his death in 1996.

‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mu’āwida has published the following volumes of poetry: *Dīwān al-Mu’āwida* (Bahrain, 1942), *Lisān al-hāl* (Bahrain, 1952), *Dauḥat al-balābil* (Bahrain, 1960), *Al-Qaṭariyyāt* (Bahrain, 1960), and poetic dramas: *‘Abd ar-Raḥmān ad-Dakhil*, *Ar-Rashīd wa Sharlamān*, *Sayf ad-Daula bin Ḥammadānī*, *Al-Mustasim bi-l-laḥī*, and *Suqūt Baghdād aw Hūlākū Khān*.

Walīd Hāshim was born in 1982 in Bahrain. He has published one novel *Lam akun hunāk* (Beirut, 1999).

‘Alawī al-Hāshimī was born in 1946 in Manama, in Bahrain. He graduated from the University of Beirut in Arabic literature, and he gained his Ph.D. in Great Britain based on his thesis *Tajrubat ash-shi’ar al-ḥadīth fī al-Baḥrayn*. He works for the Bahraini University and he actively participates in the cultural life of Bahrain. He is the editor-in-chief of the literary journal “Thaqāfāt”, published by the Bahraini University. He is a member of the Bahraini Literary Association (Usrat al-Udabā’ wa al-Kuttāb) and The National Cultural Forum (al-Multaqā ath-Thaqāfi al-Ahlī).

‘Alawī al-Hāshimī has published the following volumes of poetry: *Min ayna yajī’ al-ḥuzn* (Beirut, 1971), *Al-‘Aṣāfir wa zill ash-shajara* (Beirut – Libia, 1978), *Maḥaṭṭāt li-l-ta’ab* (Cairo, 1988), and many critical works: *Mā qālathu an-nakhla li-l-baḥr* (Baghdad, 1981), *Shuarā’ al-Baḥrayn al-mu’āṣirūn* (Bahrain, 1988), *Qirā’at fī qaṣīda ḥayāt* (Baghdad, 1989), *As-sukūn al-mutaḥarrīk* (vol. I – Dubai, 1992; vol. II – Dubai, 1993).

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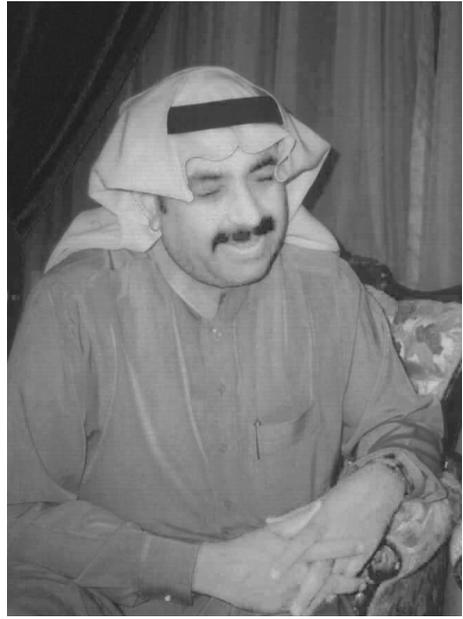
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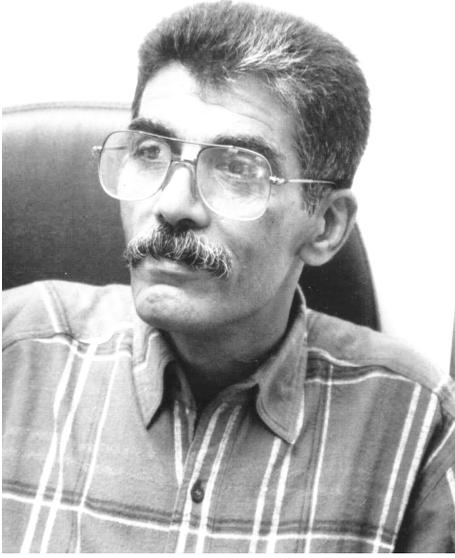
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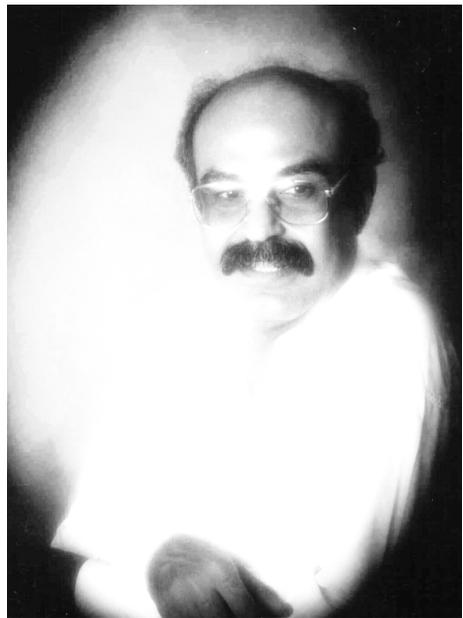
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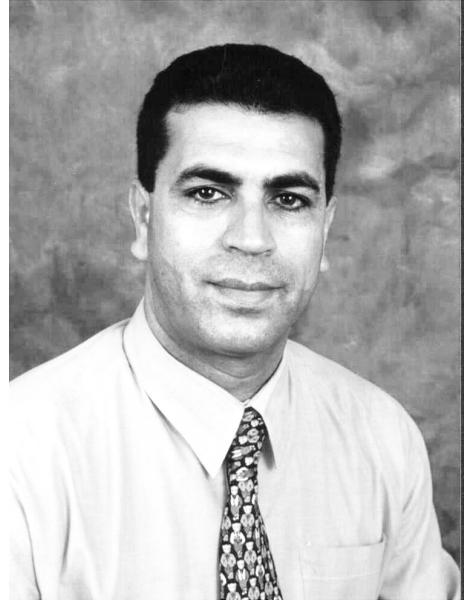
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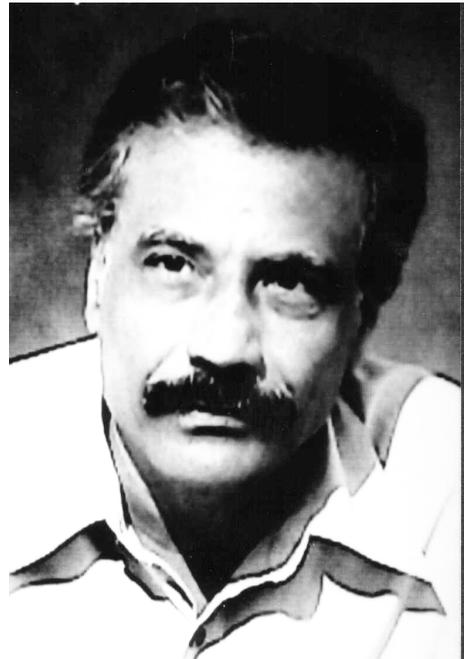
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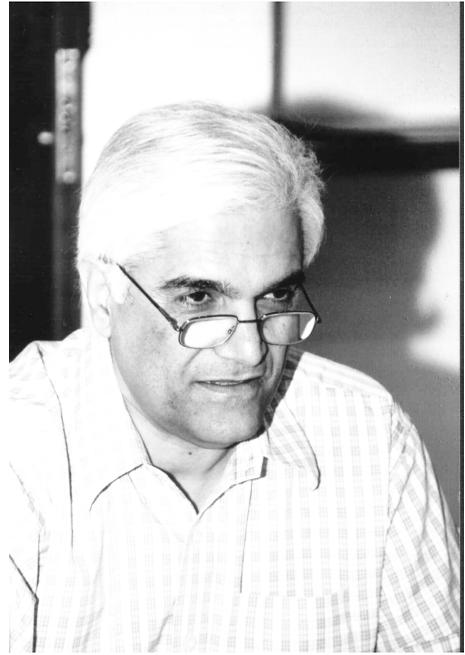
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