Studia Litteraria Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis 8 (2013), z. 4, s. 145–157
doi:10.4467/20843933ST.13.010.2010
www.ejournals.eu/Studia-Litteraria

BARBARA MICHALAK-PIKULSKA
Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie

Modern Emirati Literature written by Woman Writers

Abstract

The development of prose in the United Arab Emirates occurred much later than in other Gulf Countries. The local press started to develop only at the end of the 1960s. ‘Abd Allah Saqr Ahmad was the author of a short story *Qulub la tarham* (Merciless Hearts) published at the end of the 1960s and the first collection of short stories in the history of Emirate literature entitled *al-Khashaba* (A Piece of Wood). The first literary attempts of the young generation of Emirate writers were published within the pages of the following periodicals: an-Nasr, az-Zamalik, ash-Shabab, al-Ahli. On the market appeared the journal al-Ittihad, the weekly Akhbar Dubayy and the monthly al-Majma’. The first stage of modern Emirate literature is constituted by a group of writers who started to publish their works in the years 1972–1975. Among them: ‘Ali ‘Ubayd ‘Ali, Muhammad ‘Ali al-Mirri, ‘Abd al-Aziz Khalil as well as ‘Abd al-Hamid Ahmad and Muhammad al-Murr.

In the Emirates women publish their works alongside men. The most renowned names include: Shaikha Mubarak an-Nakhi, Salma Matar Yusuf, Layla Ahmad, Maryam Jam‘a Faraj or Amina ‘Abd Allah Bu Shihab. New generation is represented by: Basima Muhammad Yunis, Su‘ad al-‘Arimi, Asma’ az-Zar‘uni, Ibtisam al-Mu‘alla and Rawda al-Balushi. Their short stories concern social matters i.e. the marriage of underage girls, the lack of respect for the opinions and aspirations of the young. What is more, in those stories we notice attempts at new topics connected with the introduction of a new life style which in turn is related to the economic and financial changes caused by the discovery of crude oil.

Keywords: literature, Emirate, Emirate literature, short story, literature written by woman.

The development of prose in the United Arab Emirates occurred much later than in other Gulf Countries. The local press started to develop only at the end of the 1960s. ‘Abd Allah Saqr Ahmad was the author of short story *Qulub la tarham* (Merciless Hearts) published at the end of the 1960s and the first collection of short stories in the history of Emirate literature entitled *al-Khashaba* (A Piece of Wood). However it was not to reach readers as it was burnt because of its contents, which were full of biting criticism of the British, and the English occupation.[1]

[1] *Multaqa al-awwal li-l-kitabat al-qasasiyya wa ar-riwaiyya fi dawlat al-Imarat al-‘arabiyya al-muttahida* (Materials from the first meeting of short story writers and novelists in the United Arab

The first literary attempts of the young generation of Emirate writers were published within the pages of the following periodicals: *an-Nasr*, *az-Zamalik*, *ash-Shabab*, *al-Ahli*. On the market appeared the journal *al-Ittihad*, the weekly *Akhbar Dubayy* and the monthly *al-Majma'*.[2] The first stage of modern Emirate literature is constituted by a group of writers who started to publish their works in the years 1972–1975. Among them: ʻAli ʻUbayd ʻAli, Muhammad ʻAli al-Mirri, ʻAbd al-Aziz Khalil as well as ʻAbd al-Hamid Ahmad and Muhammad al-Murr.

The years 1975–1979 were a period of infatuation with wealth and material goods so on the book market there did not appear many new titles, among them *ash-Shaqa'* (Labour) by ʻAbd al-Aziz ash-Sharhan. The works contains the conclusions and experiences of the author from his period of study abroad. Moreover the yearning for his country has borne fruit in stories concerning the life and work of people at sea.

The year 1979 was important one for writers, for there were founded many cultural societies, e.g. in Abu Dhabi and ash-Shariqa. Moreover literary evenings were organised there where the works of contemporary writers were presented, together with cultural exhibitions promoting the works of young artists. The *al-Azmina al-ʻarbiyya* periodical was established. In the short stories of this period there dominates social subject matter. Problems of man's freedom and his place in society, the discovery of crude oil and its influence on the everyday life of the inhabitants of the Emirates are discussed. There were published many new collections of short stories including: *al-Khuruj ʻala washm al-qabila* (Breaking Out of the Tribal Tradition) written by Muhammad Hasan al-Harbi, *as-Sibaha fi ʻayni khalij yatawahhash* (Bathing in the Eyes of the Wild Gulf) by ʻAbd al-Hamid Ahmad, *Dhalika az-zaman* (Those Times) and *Zalla al-ʻadhara* (The Mistakes of the Maidens) by ʻAbd ar-Rida as-Sajwani, *Hubb min nauʻ akhar* (A Different Kind of Love), *Al-fursa al-akhira* (Last Chance) and *Sadaqa* (Friendship) written by Muhammad al-Murr. Emirate writers examine in their works the subject of the past. This is linked to the subject of the sea and its influence on the lives of the inhabitants. Writers equally explore the life of the inhabitants of the desert, countryside and the old Emirate districts, describing their traditions and customs, though not avoiding equally contemporary subject matters connected with the discovery of crude oil and the construction of superb municipalities.[3]

In the Emirates women equally publish their works alongside men. To the better known belong the names: Shaikha Mubarak an-Nakhi, Salma Matar Yusuf, Layla Ahmad, Maryam Jamʻa Faraj or Amina ʻAbd Allah Bu Shihab.

The beginnings of short story writing are connected with the writer Shaikha Mubarak an-Nakhi, the author of short stories that were published in 1970 in the collection entitled *Ar-Rahil* (The Departing). The heroine of the tale has to marry old and rich man. Nobody cares about her feelings for the boy from the neighborhood. She finds no understanding either in her family or society at large.

Emirates), Da'irat ath-thaqafa wa al-iʻalam, ash-Shariqa 1989, p. 15.

[2] At present on the market are available newspapers such as *al-Ittihad*, *al-Fajr*, *al-Wahda* published in Abu Dhabi, *al-Bayan* published in Dubai or *al-Khalij* in ash-Shariqa; ibid., p.124.

[3] Cf. B. Michalak-Pikulska, *Modern Literature of the United Arab Emirates*, Kraków 2012, p. 97.

The story which is a study of unrequited love ends in the heroine's death because she was unable to accept her fate. The writer describes the clash with social reality and traditional values. An-Nakhi also brings into the discussion the way in which marriages are concluded and the authority of the father, who often places material gain over the good of his daughters. Through a constant improvement in technique, Emirate female writers like Shaikha an-Nakhi have entered into the social debate on the present and future of the Emirates. This voice within the format of the short story has sought for itself from the very beginning original and individual means of expression.[4]

The later collection *Riyah ash-shamal* (The Winds of the North) is worthy of note.[5] Human suffering and interpersonal bonds constitute the axes around which the tales hang. The collection is compositionally and thematically uniform. Often there appears the motif of a child within the context of its innocence and failure to understand events like war. Shaikha an-Nakhi is not indifferent to the situation of the children, who do not understand the presence of wounded people in their homes, being displaced and the noise of shells. It seems that as a woman she is more sensitive to this aspect of war reality. In story entitled *Ramad* (Ash) the child observe their wounded father, who wants to protect him from the truth as to his fate and who reads in his eyes the desire to learn this fate. The children find themselves with a situation they do not understand. In this story the author does not moralise or instruct, merely influencing the reader through the scenes from everyday life.

In many of the short stories the hero is presented deep in reflection as a result of recollections. These memories are usually of happier times than those experience now. They remember the collecting of shells and pebbles on the seashore.

To sum up, one may say that Shaikha an-Nakhi consistently concludes the chosen subject without the inclusion of numerous digressions or elements not directly linked to the subject. This results in a stylistic and thematic whole. The compositional arrangement as well as the selection of linguistic and stylistic means is characterised by simplicity making the work easier for the reader to comprehend. It is difficult to establish whether the author had any specific military conflict in mind. It seems as if we are dealing with a universal concept of war and aggression, which reside permanently within the territories of the Middle East.[6]

Maryam Jum'a Faraj presents various aspects of the new reality of the Arab Emirates. The collection of stories entitled *Fayruz* (Turquoise) may be seen as literary social criticism. The situation of the individual of the stories: *Fayruz* (Turquoise) and *'Abbar* (The Carrier) in a direct way confront the past with the present. The heroes still functioning according to the regulations in force prior to the discovery of oil are unable to find themselves within the new reality. The works *Wujuh* (Faces) and *Masafa* (Remoteness) presents heroes lost in interpersonal relations. While the short stories *Thuqub* (Holes) and *ar-Rih* (The Wind) depict

[4] Cf. Maryam Jum'a Faraj, *The Short Story in UAE*, [in:] *Cultural Life in Emirates*, United Arab Emirates 2008, pp. 67–80.

[5] Shaikha an-Nakhi, *Riyah ash-shimal*, ash-Shariqa 1999.

[6] Cf. B. Michalak-Pikulska, op.cit., pp. 115–116.

man's struggle with nature and the forces of nature. Man in Maryam Faraj's works is in a losing position, whether this is in relation to the society he lives in or the forces of nature, or simply against disease and illness.

Maryam Faraj's heroes are lost, presented in isolation if not physical then mental. Their life stories are tangled and abound with tragic events. The sudden changes that occur in their lives not only shape their personalities but also lead them to madness. Madness is clearly a feature within the entire collection. This results from disturbance in the balance between what is spiritual and material, between the past and the present, poverty and riches. We encounter such a situation in the works *'Abbar* (The Carrier), *Wujuh* (Faces) and *Fayruz* (Turquoise).

The writer employs various registers which enriches her prose. Maryam Faraj sometimes switches to urban dialect or employs the 'broken' Arabic of foreigners. The composition is noted for its detail. Given the nature of the short story this is usually a feature negatively affecting the fluency of the action. Maryam Faraj's works give an unnatural impression through the constant division into new motifs, which does not allow the reader to concentrate on the fundamental subject of the story.[7]

Salma Matar Sayf (Maryam 'Abd Allah Bu Shihab) is one of the most important Emirate writers. She has published collection of short stories *Ushba* (The Herb). Her originality in form and expression of clearly defined thoughts illustrated by a concrete story has ensured her enduring popularity. Women are the central figure within Salma Matar's short stories. A woman has a considerable influence on the shaping of these relations, though at the same time is subjected to outside influences. The writer accentuates the situation in which the heroine has to subordinate herself to the models of behaviour reproduced by generations. An attempt at dialogue with traditions in this matter is strictly linked to the struggle that women most often have to conduct alone. Dependence on male protection, the disfavour of the family, and the loneliness of the woman are the subjects which constantly wind their way through her work.[8] Short stories such as *Sa'a wa a'ud* (I'll be back in a moment) or *Al-'Urs* (The Wedding Reception) shows how painful the struggle with their unusually difficult fate is for their heroines. Escape from family, resistance to the father or even attempts to commit suicide are motifs that repeat themselves often in the works of this Emirate female writer. They constitute a form of dialogue with tradition and the reproduced models of social behaviour.

The heroine of the work *an-Nashid* (Song) is an example of a woman imprisoned at home and isolated from the external world. In point of fact the heroine Duhma never had the possibility to become a part of society. Closer to her are animals, amongst which she spends more time that with people. A deformed personality and a distorted way of perceiving reality are the fruit of the rigorous enforced in the name of adherence to tradition. The victims of such perverted schemes of behaviour are not only the individuals concerned but the whole of society. Salma

[7] Cf. Anwar al-Khatib, *Adab al-mar'a fi al-Imarat*, [in:] *Al-multaqa ath-thani li-l-kitabat al-qasasiyya wa ar-riwa'iyya fi dawlat al-Imarat al-'arabiyya al-muttahida*, ash-Shariqa 1992, pp. 83–101.

[8] Salma Matar Sayf, collection of short stories *'Ushba*, Dar al-Kalimat li-l-nashr 1988.

Matar Sayf shows through the tragedy of her heroine the misfortune faced by the community living around Duhma.

In *Al-'Urs* (The Wedding Reception) we have an example of social permission for women to be treated as objects, almost as goods to be sold. Hamama is given in marriage five times and yet she has never been given the right to decide who will be her future partner. Threatened with violence and the perversions of subsequent husbands she can do no more than escape from them, in this way saving her own life and dignity. The heroine's name is significant – Hamama, which means 'dove'. In effect Hamama identified with peace and reconciliation becomes an innocent victim of the rules that govern society.

Very often Salma Matar constructs her stories on a scheme, in which reality abounding in negative phenomena is confronted with a persistent attempt to overcome the adversities of one's lot. Death seems to be the only salvation for Salma Matar's heroines. Each is young, with a life and future in front of them. This intentional contradiction is undoubtedly one of the most important elements the works' composition. Its purpose is to ask the question as to whether everything should end as it does, or whether other solutions could have existed. The death of the heroines is the most final of solutions, while escape from reality is an irrational world of fantasy, as is the case in the short story *az-Zahra* (The Flower) or *'Ushba* (The Herb).[9]

It is worth drawing attention to the language used. The stories are full of poetry and have a deep lyrical quality. Poetry is not alone in enhancing the narrative but does constitute an indispensable part. Only through the language of lyricism is one able to decipher Salma Matar Sayf's message, resulting in reflection and deeper analysis.[10]

The short stories of another Emirate female writer, Layla Ahmad who deal with social problems and generational conflict. In the collection of stories *al-Khayma, al-mihrajan wa al-watan*[11] (A Tent, a festival, a homeland) recourse is made to the symbolism of the homeland, which in Layla Ahmad's understanding is an abstract concept, but a living being represented through people. The more love within them, good and sense of community the greater import is taken on by the word 'homeland'. Divisions and mutual discords lead to the impoverishment of the common good and its weakening.

In *al-Khayma, al-mihrajan wa al-watan* (A tent, a festival, a homeland) as well as *al-Mawt fi qariya* (Death in the country) the mutual complementing of a woman and man in the harmony of love becomes the symbol of the unity of both concepts – earth and homeland, in the material and spiritual dimensions. Marriage as the union and alliance of two subjects such as homeland and its citizen are clearly visible in the work *al-Masafa* (Remoteness). In this case consciousness is the tie of a citizen with a concrete country, a tie that grows with the acquiring

[9] Cf. Anwar al-Khatib, op.cit., pp. 36–62.

[10] Cf. Badr 'Abd al-Malik, *al-Qissa al-qasira wa as-sawt an-nisa'i fi dawlat al-Imarat al-'Arabiyya al-Muttahida*, ash-Shariqa 1995, pp. 61–111.

[11] Layla Ahmad, collection of short stories *al-Khayma, al-mihrajan wa al-watan*, no place of publication, 1984.

of life experience and the passing of time. The homeland is a faithful wife, waiting always and to the end for the husband's return. A question closely linked to that of the homeland is its state as expressed by the relations between its inhabitants. Here is generational conflict within the realities of a rapidly developing country. Two generations: the one that remembers the difficulties of the period pre economic development and that which has never known poverty, and their coexistence within a single state.

The story *Hashraja* (The Last Breath) is divided into two parts; each symbolising one of the generations. The first is represented by the father, who, as a young man, planted a palm grove. After fifty years he awaits death in expectation of the final meeting with his sons. Part two examines the contemporary generation, personified by the three sons. Despite the mother's pleas none come to meet their father. Each finds an excuse. The writer uses simple devices to express her views in the public debate as to the nature of the modern Emirates. Work, the idea of family, doggedness in achieving goals, and the unwavering labour of the father are contrasted with the egoism and heartlessness of the sons.

The economic changes have not only affected this remodelling of traditional values. Economic development has upset a stable social structure via the influx of numerous foreigners. The question of responsibility for future generations is raised against the backcloth of the increasing number of foreign child minders. This is directly addressed in the story *Ra'iha* (The Smell). The heroine initially thinks nothing of the consequences of leaving her child in the care of a foreign nanny. She realises, however, fairly quickly that her influence on her son is weakening. The writer directly points out that children are not only the earthly possessions of their parents but equally the language, traditions and values that constitute identity.[12]

Space as distance within various concepts is also an important element in Layla Ahmad's work. One of her stories is entitled *Al-Masafa* (Remoteness). This refers equally to the human sphere conducted at the two points deemed birth and death, as equally within the spatial expanse that divides people and in addition the divide between the citizen and the state. The question of the homeland is analysed often in her work resulting in an infusion of the spirit of song or an anthem always dedicated to the homeland as well as man himself.[13]

Amina ʻAbd Allah Bu Shihab relates her work to the current problems of the UAE in the collections of short stories: *As-Safar ila al-janna* (The trip to the Paradise) and *Mahra* (name: Mahra). The author analyses the social situation in the country and the historical context. She does not only describe the external manifestations of these social phenomena but searches for their causes in the near and distant past. For the writer social relations are nothing more than a continuation of forms of dependence between the representatives of various economic groupings.

Khumays – the hero of *Zahira hamiya* (The Scorching Afternoon) comes from a poor family. The man painfully becomes aware of what the rich and influential

[12] Cf. B. Michalak-Pikulska, op.cit., pp. 136–137.
[13] Cf. Anwar al-Khatib, op.cit., pp. 63–83.

descendants of the pearl fisherman and traders can achieve. Social status is determined by money and material goods. In such a society relations between a captain of a boat and an ordinary pearl diver are transferred to other spheres of life. This model passed down through generations has endured and has only somewhat evolved in modern times. According to Khumays the world has changed not at all. The occurrences of the past are still clearly visible. After his wife being raped he is unable to find his place in the world. He works as a taxi driver and day in, day out he observes those he meets. This convinces him that the modern world has changed little. Seeing the rich heirs of the former order fills him with hate and anger. He wants to stone them, but is too weak to fulfill his madcap scheme. He remains on the periphery, abandoned with his burden, bitter and condemned to defeat. The author depicts the conflict between two social strata. This same, age-old division into the rich merchants and captains and the poor pearl fisherman remains in a somewhat modified form to this day. Modern society is the heir to the systems of dependence of the past. The figure of the main hero is somewhat pushed to the rear within this sociological analysis. His personality is not revealed, making the character difficult to assess. The drama experienced leaves the hero of *Zahira hamiya* (The Scorching Afternoon) completely devoid of hope that he will ever change anything in his life. Khumays' opposite is *Mahra* from the story of the same name by Amina Bu Shihab. The story depicts the inhabitants of a small village which suffers from a poverty it cannot break out of. This is exploited by the heartless Sulayman, who appears every now and then and in exchange for a sizeable dowry takes as a wife one of the local girls. The marriages do not last long, however, as Sulayman divorces after a few months. This makes the reaction to the young Mahra, who says what she thinks about the debauched man. Thanks to her attitude Sulayman has to leave the village. Her stance not only surprises all the villagers but becomes an inspiration for others to act. Amina Bu Shihab is saying that reality should be shaped by decisive actions. An inherited social system is not ascribed to a given collective forever. There exist realistic possibilities to modify it and improve those aspects that violate in interests of individuals, particularly the weakest.

In undertaking a social subject the writer is attempting to concentrate the reader on the conflicts resulting from a given situation. This aims at depicting the incessant abrasion of two realities. The characters carved out by the writer are highly realistic, which means that the stories Amina Bu Shihab tells have the credibility to arouse reflection in the reader.[14]

The presentation of the complicated relations between men and women (father – mother – daughter – son – husband – wife – lover) are examined by Basima Muhammad Yunis. Her collection of short stories *I'alan* (Announcement) or *'Alaqa khatira* **(**The Dangerous relation) talk of human suffering and are a reflection on the everyday affairs of one's average Emirate citizen. She demands equal rights for man and women. She is capable of creating an original psychological portrait through questioning the complicated situations in which women have to func-

[14] Ibid., pp. 101–116.

tion. An example is the tale *Istighatha* (The Call for Help), in which the voice of despair mixes with one of hope, and all this due to the lack of heirs. The heroine lives in a backward and unjust society where everyone have designated stereotypical roles. The failure to produce children results in a personal crisis for her as a woman. Finally, the heroine escapes into a world of magic and succumbs to spells. The drama is enhanced when her psychically destroyed husband is crushed by the wife's obsession. This story, like others by Basima Yunis illustrates social injustice. They also display the author's attitudes to the reality around her, a society secretly playing out unseen dramas, particularly for women. Universal humanistic tendencies come to the fore, proclaiming greater freedom for man and women in their choice of career and partner.[15]

The collections herein dealt with are a diagnosis of the problems – social, existential and moral. They throw light on family and marital problems. They are collections actively involved in the shaping of the reality within which they exist. These women writers are as equally understandable for readers from the East as from the West for the universal motifs of love and patriotism running through them are the source of creative inspiration in all cultures.[16]

Su'ad al-'Arimi presents herself as a person of a unique sensitivity, a sharpened sense of observation and the skill of making reflections of a psychological and philosophical nature. The author of *Ra's dhi Yazan (Ra's of Yazan – the name of the King of Yemen)* forces the leader to make an effort in receiving the context on the essence of humanity.

Many stories in the collection describe the specific personalities of the main characters and presents their life experience. The narration first and foremost fulfills the cognitive functions in them. And so in the story entitled *Tall Abib Kafih (The Tel Aviv Cafe)* we learn the story of Zuhayra from Marocco, who wins a green card to the United States. After coming to a foreign land, she has only three nights guaranteed in a hotel. The she must count only on herself. Money received from her family and friends is spent quickly. She then meets Munir the Jew, who is the manager of the title cafe Tel Aviv. He offers her a job as a bartender. Ultimately, Zuhayra works there as a belly dancer, making the guests' stay for enjoyable. However, her body was found in a gym room on 9 November 2001. The event took place two months after the attack of 11 September 2001: "The case was closed as the perpetrator was never found and her body was buried in the presence of the police."[17] This story has a message. It may be assumed that in his own weakness, a man may prove to be his greatest threat.

However, the problem of immigration touches all those, who decide to leave their homelands. The story entitled *Kull al-mawasim* (All the seasons) talks about the illegal Mexican immigrants coming to the United States. Their path to freedom and a good life is not any easier. The need to cross the border illegally, combating nature and their own weaknesses. Not everyone makes it to their paradise.

---

[15] Cf. B. Michalak-Pikulska, op.cit., pp. 138–139.

[16] B. Michalak-Pikulska, *Rozwój prozy w Zjednoczonych Emiratach Arabskich*, "Przegląd Orientalistyczny", No 1–2, Warsaw 2001, pp. 96–101.

[17] Su'ad al-'Arimi, *Til Abib Kafih*, [in:] *Ra's dhi Yazan*, ash-Shariqa 2008, pp. 23–24.

The main character Carlos is one of the lucky ones, who was successful. He gets a job in agriculture in San Diego. He is happy from every dollar he is able to save. However, when the season ends he decides to stay and find a job in a different sector. Since the job offers were not satisfactory, he decided to return to his family. Unfortunately, on the way he is stopped and deported: "I saved five hundred dollars, but they took it from me as the fee for the bus, that was to deport me. He returned with a plastic bag, in which there was a dress for his six year old daughter and red shoes for Marwa."[18]

The story is tragic. It shows a main character who comes illegally to the place he has always dreamed of – America – the land of financial opportunity thanks to which he will be able to ensure a good life for his family. For the good of those closest to him, he agrees to the fate of someone condemned to the hardest labour, which in the end turns out to be in vain.

In the presented stories Su'ad al-'Arimi wanted to paint the portrait of persons from various countries and to present their life experiences during their stay in the United States of America. We learn about them, we know what they thought and felt. The stories of al-'Arimi were born from a feeling of helplessness and bitterness, the source of which is the surrounding reality. The author treats the facts and reality instrumentally. They are the signs of the reasoning, she cites in order to justify the approach towards reality.

In the collection of short stories entitled *ash-Shawati' al-farigha* (Empty Beaches), Asma' az-Zar'uni with a substantial dose of criticism outlined realistic images from the life of the Arab society. She confronts the fundamental issues of human existence such as love, youth, and old age.

The short stories entitled *al-Jarthuma* (The Virus) and *ash-Shawati' al-farigha* (Empty Beaches) are tales of the Arabs' infatuation and fascination with women from Europe or America eventually leading to marriage. The main character of the first story abandons his Arab childhood fiancée to meet an American during his studies in America and start a house with her. Their love bears fruit – two daughters whom, when they have grown up a bit, the main character wants to take to his homeland. Her mother refuses to grant her consent to this: "Do you think that I want to leave for the country of prohibitions? You can go there yourself, if you please, for me and my daughters there's enough space in America."[19]

Finally, the main character returns to his homeland on his own, going back to his children in his thoughts. One day, when his brother is getting ready to wed an Arab girl, he also starts to ponder marriage in his own country: "His mother said: I will choose a girl from your own country for you, a girl to make you forget all your worries. She will banish your grief and your loneliness. I listened to her and left the matter to the fate."[20]

The main character is well aware that the emotional bonds with his American wife were based on their mutual fascination, ideas, and projections of their own expectations which in the end turned out to have been nothing but false. The

[18] Su'ad al-'Arimi, *Kull al-mawasim*, [in:] *Ra's dhi Yazan*, ash-Shariqa 2008, p. 70.
[19] Asma' az-Zar'uni, *al-Jarthuma*, [in:] *ash-Shawtii' al-farigha*, Dubai 2000, p. 16.
[20] Ibid., p. 18.

author displays a tendency to take characters in psychological categories, i.e. the unidentifiability of a human being whose personality is constantly changeable, escaping the grasp of ideas or definitions.

Also the second story entitled *ash-Shawati' al-farigha* (Empty Beaches) is similar in its content.

The authenticity of this morality pageant is beyond any doubt. A feeling born one day, if it existed at all, was based on appearances. Yet again, we come across criticism of relationships forced and arranged by families in childhood, in the adult life resulting in the violation of the partners' freedom of choice. Even if such a relationship does take place, it not always has a happy ending as the story entitled *'Indama yamut al-farah* (When the Joy Dies) proves. The story presents the woman's dreams of love concealing complexes following from previous rejection. The main character discovers that in secret her husband married another woman. Initially hurt and humiliated, she decides to leave her husband, but her family convinces her to make the sacrifice for her children's sake. Finally, the main character comes to terms with her fate, but her life is filled with grief and lack of faith in another human being: "So I have come back. Since that day, I have lived only for my children. Green grass withered in my heart. My clothes gather dust. I live while my wounds grow bigger with each day. The joy in my eyes has died. I pay no attention to my husband and I feel nothing for him anymore."[21]

Asma' az-Zar'uni penetrates the personalities of her main characters and analyses spouses' behaviour. Not only does the narrator know what the main characters feel and think, but also where their relationship to the family and their surrounding world comes from. The psychological analysis of the main characters makes up the mosaic of characters and attitudes constituting the basis for the collective portrait of the Arab society.

Dahshat al-matarat (Surprised with Airports) falls within the category of Asma' az-Zar'uni's innovative and interesting stories. The author presents how Americans perceive the people of the Persian Gulf region. Stereotypes of affluence of the sheikhs prevail: "They all think that everybody in the Gulf region has an oil well next to their houses."[22] Yet another stereotype is the image of a man who treats his wife with contempt and disregard. The story at the airport serves this very purpose. An Arab, under the guise of a picnic trip, abducts his children. A woman who witnesses the incident expresses her grief and sympathises with the mother: "The word 'grief' is unable to express the pain I experienced when he told me what had happened. What does his poor wife is going through now? How will she bear the parting with her kids? What sort of marriage is that? What catastrophe? When my husband came, I was wiping tears trickling down my face."[23]

In Asma' az-Zar'uni's short stories, it is the environment that defines the individual, decides the direction for their development and the hierarchy of their values. Her main characters are both individuals while simultaneously being typical representatives of various environments. In most of the stories, the fundamental

[21] Asma' az-Zar'uni, *'Andama yamut al-farah*, [in:] *ash-Shawti' al-farigha*, Dubai 2000, p. 44.
[22] Asma' az-Zar'uni, *Dahshat al-matarat*, [in:] *ash-Shawti' al-farigha*, Dubai 2000, p. 77.
[23] Ibid., p. 84.

ethical principles, feelings, and dignity are not of importance. There is no room for sentiment, sensitivity, nobleness, and honour. They are just a communication of truth about the contemporary Emirate society.

Focus on simple people and ordinary events – this is the most general characteristics of the collection of short stories *Daw' yadhhab li-l-nawm* (The Light Is Going to Sleep) by Ibtisam al-Mu'alla. The story entitled *Hidadan 'ala Adisun* (Mourning after Edison) in its theme refers to the title of the entire collection. It is portrays a story of an average family deprived of electricity. The situation serves the author to bring back the times of yore when there was no electricity. Life went on completely differently. Everyone would stay together, talk, play games together, jog by the sea, and have fun. Nowadays, everyone locks themselves up in their own rooms with their PCs or TVs. The author's longing for the past is clear: the smell of baked bread, the aroma of spices at the bazaar, and conversations with people who are in no rush to get anywhere.[24]

Next two stories: *Khayt tawil wa nahil* (A Long Thin Thread) and *Amakin dayyiqa* (Tight Places) are an attempt at showing professional problems with bearing on family life. The first of the stories is a portrait of a neglected man whose wife is pursuing her career and work long hours, neglecting her family: "He remembers the past weeks he spent with her as if with a stranger. He incessantly complains about her long hours in the editor's office and about her neglecting home. She accused him, in front of their daughter, that he didn't appreciate her work, didn't read her articles, and was envious of her income."[25]

Ibtisam al-Mu'alla takes on a subject extremely difficult subject of loneliness and alienation of a man neglected by his wife and treated by her as an outright stranger. At home she talks only to their daughter and treats him as thin air while at weekends watches films on DVD. The author has shown the woman as a person who gives up on creating a loving family and a warm home in exchange for her career. Perhaps, feeling the weakness of the man, she strives to achieve the position that will furnish her with the sense of domination at home and at work. In turn, the only person left to the man is his mother: "His mother always knew he wanted to talk. She would always hear him out. After all, she's a mother. She knows he's been bashful since his childhood and the thirty years spent with his wife was just waiting for sympathy."[26]

The short story entitled *Amakin dayyiqa* (Tight Places) also concerns professionally tied-up spouses. Their work, nonetheless, does not bear well on their private life. They constantly argue since the woman feels undervalued and unappreciated at work: "She was vexed by his questions and the way he addressed her using the word 'Daughter'".[27]

The woman feels disappointed that her husband does not share the problems of his work with her and that he does not accept her work. The story shows an average day in the life of a married couple. The sense of their life gets watered down in

[24] Cf. B. Michalak-Pikulska, op.cit., p. 159.

[25] Ibtisam al-Mu'alla, *Khayt tawil wa nahil*, [in:] *Daw' yadhhab li-l-nawm*, Abu Dhabi 2009, p. 28.

[26] Ibid., p. 33.

[27] Ibtisam al-Mu'alla, *Amakin dayyiqa*, [in:] *Daw' yadhhab li-l-nawm*, Abu Dhabi 2009, p. 67.

the deluge of professional problems. The spouses are people whose time is spent on monotonous and unproductive activities. They are unaware of the vapidity of their own existence.

The next story dedicated to the loneliness of a man who feels pain after the loss of his wife and after his daughter's wedding is entitled *Lawn al-ma'* (The Colour of Water): "There has been nothing to cause sadness, yet he is sad. It is a completely different type of sadness compared to the sadness he had experienced after his only daughter's wedding fifteen years before. That sadness then was different to the grief he experienced after his wife's demise several years ago and spending time at home alone."[28]

Immersed in loneliness, the hero focuses all his attention and activity on publications of reviews in magazines: "He isn't lonely. He is but sad. For eight years, looking in the mirror, he has kept repeating that sadness is a state that must pass."[29]

The hero struggles against the sadness and monotony of his life by writing poetry. His interest in the world is seeming and devoid of value. After all, it is limited to reading the press only. He notices only these fragments of reality which he can translate into the language of the notions and object he is familiar with.

The short stories by Ibtisam al-Mu'alla are a culmination of the knowledge about humans and society. The dominant role of narration oriented personally on concrete characters constitutes the reflection of the processes of their arrival at specific awareness, of the evolution of their ideas in the direct contact with the matter of life.

The collection of short stories by Rawda al-Balushi entitled *Bas al-qiyama* (The Bus of Resurrection) takes up various social and moral issues, such as, e.g. the tragic fate of immigrants or a difficult situation of women. The author displays in them a difficult skill of selection of observation material at the same time achieving the objectivism of account and succinctness. The works are free of any rhetoric and moralising without losing the sharpness of seeing difficult matters. There are five passengers on the bus in the title. The main character doesn't know where she is to go and then the driver informs her that they are bound for hell. The entire vision of the world in this short story is surrealist. A bus driver is the main character of the next short story *Hafif al-mir'a* (The Rustle of the Mirror). Fayruz Khan is a citizen of Pakistan and each day he takes girls to school. Each day he watches new faces in the mirror. From the girls, he is exposed to ridicule and derision. They treat him as a worse category citizen only because he is poor. Despite the insults and abuse, he remains calm and represses sadness and embitterment inside. He cannot afford to lose his job. The money he earns allows his family to survive. He is aware that everywhere in the world poor and uneducated people are mistreated and held in contempt. It is by no means better in his own country. Lack of possibilities, suffering, and strife are their daily bread: "The mirror draws him into other times: faces of brothers, images of his homeland appear before his eyes... His father's face fades in a tribal battle. As does the smell

[28] Ibtisam al-Mu'alla, *Lawn al-ma'*, [in:] *Daw' yadhhab li-l-nawm*, Abu Dhabi 2009, p. 104.
[29] Ibid., p. 106.

of the clay family house which he carries inside. Cold nights and black days."[30] The hero finds the sense of isolation and humiliation difficult to accept, however, he is reconciled with it, understanding the need for work and the obligation to his own family.

The writer in the next story entitled *Mithl shat marida taqifina* (You Are Standing Like Sick Sheep) seems to be deeply involved in the case. She can penetrate thoughts and feelings of her main character – a young girl with abdominal pains. Upon examination, the physician tells her she is pregnant. The diagnosis turns out to be a curse for the entire family since the girl is unmarried. She is imprisoned at home, subjected to torture and beating. She defends herself and begs for mercy, swearing that she's a virgin. Her family, however, do not believe her entreaties. Only after several days does it turn out that it was a mistake: "An accursed nurse is the cause of it all. She made a mistake while tidying up test results and put them to the file from examination of another patient."[31]

Not for the first time, a short story shows the instrumental treatment of women. Incapacitated by her families, only with a difficulty were they able to follow what was going on with their own life. Their drama is a result of individual entanglement in the conflict with the dogmatism of traditional systems of the Arab society.

Sensitivity to human distress in an individual and collective dimension, the internal disagreement for the found and commonly accepted system allowed Rawda al-Balushi to preserve the freshness of moral judgment, independence of opinion, and objectivism in perception of the world. In the writer's understanding, the human is simultaneously an individual and a part of a community. Both these functions merge and supplement each other. However, al-Balushi recognises the human's social sphere to be more important. According to her, everybody is defined only by their own attitude to other people, their relationship to the society.[32]

It can generally be concluded that short stories from this period belong to the traditional romantic and realistic currents. They were filled with pain, suffering, desperation, sadness and disappointment. The short stories concerned social matter i.e. the marriage of underage girls, the lack of respect for the opinions and aspirations of the young. Besides which in those stories we notice attempts to undertake new topics which are connected with the introduction of a new life style linked to the economic and financial changes caused by the discovery of crude oil.

[30] Rawda al-Balushi, *Hafif al-mir'a*, [in:] *Bas al-qiyama*, Abu Dhabi 2009, p. 18.
[31] Idem, *Mithl shat marida taqifina*, [in:] *Bas al-qiyama*, Abu Dhabi 2009, p. 41.
[32] Cf. B. Michalak-Pikulska, op.cit., p. 161.