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THE BEGINNINGS OF THE LITERARY MOVEMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE SHORT STORY IN KUWAIT. THE LITERARY PRODUCTION
OF A CONTEMPORARY KUWAITI WRITER - LAILA AL-UTMAN.

Pure Kuwaiti Literature, as well as the growth of culture and education in Kuwait manifested themselves only when there were more favourable political conditions, which eventually resulted in the full independence of that country in 1961. Long before that time, the repercussions of the Arabian renaissance in Egypt, Lebanon and Syria - known as nahda - reached Kuwait. In the first decade of the twentieth century first public schools were founded in Kuwait, and one could observe the increase of the reading habit, especially of magazines, periodicals and books - mainly from abroad. They were shaping the horizons and the literary taste of the first Kuwaiti artists.

The first Kuwaiti periodical was printed in Iraq and was entitled "Al-Kuwait". Since the thirties literary clubs that remiped in contact with writers and the literary production of other Arabian countries were founded. In Kuwait publicistic prose worked out the contemporary literary language, and it established the ground for new literary genres, such as: drama, short story, novel. These genres had not been present in the classical Arabian literature before. The new literature remained partly under the influence of the traditional subjects. On the other hand, it assimilated European trends to a great extent; these trends were sinking into the Arabian literature through the works of modern European literature. The currents and trends coming from Europe were as follows: romanticism, symbolism, realism, naturalism. They manifested themselves soon in the contemporary Arabian literature. There appeared the tendency to simplify the complex syntactic structure and to remove archaisms. The first prosaist's attempts were focused on the classical form of the Arabian casida, and later on they gave way to more universal forms which corresponded to the development of the so called small prose abroad.

The first short story written in Kuwait was the one entitled "Munira" by Halid al-Farag. It was published in the periodical "Al-Kuwait". Writing small prose which was originally connected with the publicistic stream in literature, meant also the increase of the level of social consciousness. Short stories could easily show the social injustice, they could also express the author's attitude towards this reality. The author's voice represented the suppressed tragedy of the members of the Arabian society, especially women.

In the first few short stories one can observe the impulsive and irrepressible tendency to show the flagrant picture of the dramatic and full of conflicts reality. The problems of social reality were not solved by means of rational judgement and decisions, but by the victim of the pressure of the fossilized structure and fatalism. The dictate of expression and description of the tragedy of social relentlessness in the face of the lack of other psychological and cultural solutions in which an individual could seek support, affects expressively the shape of first short stories, the artistic and formal aspect of which are not fully developed yet.

After the World War II, the writers were still interested in the problems of everyday life in the Arabian community, and they a human being on the background of his natural conditions of life. The historical and social changes that took place after the discovery of mineral oil broke the stiff structure of the short stories, as well as the established pattern of their representation. This was done by relating the very facts and events. The tendency to shape artistically the form, and the differentiation of the means of expression slowly came into prominence. The pitiless was of relating ceased to dominate because the time of the action became differentiated. There came regression or anticipation, further differentiation of the age and the social roles of the characters. All this served to present the differences in social and individual attitudes which resulted from the changes taking place at that time.

Short stories presented the social and the historical changes with great fidelity. At the same time they were filled with humanistic tendencies which proclaimed the foundations of self-determination and freedom of an individual. This concerned especially women and their choice of profession, social position and a husband. One of the favourite and widely used subjects was the sea - something very important in the life of the countries of the Persian Gulf. The problems of the society, treated very extensively, include also polemics with the patriarchal authoritativeness, the motifs of tragic love between the representatives of different social classes, the subjects of service which had been escaped from so far, and the problems of life of a woman who still occupies an inferior position in difficult Arabian reality.

The writing of a contemporary Kuwaiti writer - Laila al-Utman, arises

from the variety of authentic experiences and imagination. On the other hand, it is based on the author's strong determination and protest against the fate of a woman living in the Arabian countries, against the fate of a woman who is subordinated to the arbitrary power of her male relatives from birth to grave. Laila al-Utman began her literary activity with publicism, and soon she concentrated on small prosaist's forms in which she turned out to be a master. The fundamental prosaist's works by Laila al-Utman are the following collections of short stories: "Imra a fi ina", "Ar-rahil", "Fi al-lail ta ti al-uyun", "Al-hubb lahu suwar", "Fathiya tahtar mawtuha", and the two longer short stories: "Al-mar a wa al-qitta", "Wasmiya tahrug min al-bahr".

Laila al-Utman's life combines elements typical of the fate of a woman, and of the way in which a woman in the Arabian society was treated; as well as certain uniqueness connected with her outstanding writer's personality. The traditional element, for example, was her isolation and the prohibition on public presentation of her works imposed by her father. On the other hand, what distinguished her most, was her marriage with a Palestinian intellectual and the privileges resulting from her social status, the freedom of thought and the eccentricity manifested by Laila.

In her diaries, to which I had an access, Laila al-Utman says that despite happiness in her private and professional life, the images of hard life in her childhood, the loss of her mother's trust, and the difficult, tyrannical character of father are still vivid in her mind. In that situation, an educated Palestinian husband was to become a true guarantee of the freedom in life and a clear-sighted advisor in the literary art for Laila.

While writing about herself, Laila al-Utman often quotes the statements of her favourite Arabian or European writers: Sholohov or Hemingway. Her erudition, education and the true writer's maturity make her works universal; at the same time they are characterized by the unique, personal tone which can be recognized by the reader after he has read a few first sentences of any text by her. The short stories, to which I had an access, are differentiated both in the content and in the form. All of them concern the situation of woman in contemporary Arabian society; they present a wide range of attitudes and situations. Although they show mainly the scenes from everyday life which realistically present the social situations, they also develop the artistic, expressive and formal aspects. Thus, the short stories fulfill all the criteria of contemporary world prose. Laila al-Utman seems to have own type of a woman, the type that is most typical of her intensions as a writer. A woman of this type is predominantly sensitive, with expanded imagination and sensual perception of the surrounding world. The world of feelings is also developed to a great extent: Laila al-Utman's women are never indifferent or bored, though

almost always they are in the dilemma of contradictory feelings and anxiety; they are often branded with the tragedy that sometimes leads to a crime.

The heroines of the short stories by Laila al-Utman are continually rebelling against psychical and physical constraint; each one does it in a different way, according to her nature and the existential dignity. Most of them practice something which one could call the tragic contemplation of the fate; some of them sink into the progressing isolation and disintegration. The women in the short stories by Laila al-Utman no longer present the type of the submissive and subordinated Arabian women. They are not able, however, to gain independence which would fulfill their needs and dreams; they cannot do that because of social and emotional reasons.

The short stories by Laila al-Utman are mostly short texts, with a coherent construction and a one-track plot. They are characterized by the predominance of dynamic motifs, the clear arrangement of tension and the important role of the dialogue. These short stories correspond to the developed forms of small Arabian prose in many elements of the writing technique. Undoubtedly, the link between them is their subject matter - the picture of human being, and in these particular short stories - the picture of a woman whose fate is conditioned by the society. However, it is not the concreteness of descriptions and dramatic events that win the reader over. The primary principle of these texts is psychology and the sphere of inner experiences of the heroines. Tensions, climaxes and denouements are not achieved by the accumulation of external events, but by the psychological truth that is disclosed in its full intenseness. Unconstrained usage of time sequences, which makes it easier for the reader to concentrate on the emotional object, serves this very purpose. At the same time the material concreteness is manifested only moderately.

Laila al-Utman's short stories, like other works of small Arabian prose, show many features typical of poetry. The main reason for this might be the subjectivism of the short stories in which the narration and the dialogue is carried on by the heroines themselves, who initiate the reader into their tragical inner world, the world which is thrilling and full of existential reflection at the same time. The short stories by Laila al-Utman are linked with poetry also through the way in which tension is constructed, through the beauty of expression connected with formulating feelings. Poetic quality of her works is emphasized also by the arrangement of sounds of the language used, the peculiar rhythimization and the opulence of metaphores. Rich and sophisticated structure of the comparisons used in the short stories comes from the comparisons used in the short stories comes from the plentiful and contrastive Arabian imagination. On the other hand, some of the comparisons such unusual content, that one might think that they not only could have been created by

a woman, but also that this woman must have been as radical in opinions and attitudes as Laila al-Utman is.