

BARBARA MICHALAK

LIFE AND WORK OF LAYLĀ AL-'UTHMĀN —
THE CONTEMPORARY KUWAITI WOMAN WRITER

We, the Europeans, can hardly imagine the situation of a contemporary writer in an Arabic country, especially when the writer is a woman — in our case a Kuwaiti woman writer Laylā al-'Uthmān. Although in the course of centuries women have many a time displayed abilities, calling and sometimes also literary activity, yet it should be realized that it was only several dozen years ago that they, even in each of Europe's most civilized countries, gained the right of full education and the social conditions indispensable to pursue the profession requiring high intellectual qualifications.

In Kuwait, a typical Arabic country, where Laylā al-'Uthmān was born, women education was a rarity, and the chance to find recognition and social approval was just negligible owing to the prevailing relations and social norms. It must be, therefore, admitted that it is a, by no means easy, task to try to depict the figure of Laylā al-'Uthmān. First, because there are few publications and translations into the European languages as well as available autobiographic material like notes and memoirs. The scarce and, unfortunately, superficial reviews of her works cannot satisfy a reader who is critical and interested in the person of the writer. For what conclusions concerning her works can be drawn (in a form meeting the demands of literary criticism) from the below sentences of a newspaper review:

Laylā al-'Uthmān writes in a simple and warm way. We can say that the rhythm of her stories resembles the moves of a cat that steps quietly and delicately with no regard for whence it came¹.

The characteristics of Laylā al-'Uthmān's writing included in the above passage, so much specific for Arabic thought, in no way refers to the dramatic title of the collection *Imra 'a fī inā'*. We can see that even the, so sharply brought out in the stories, elements of the individual and social drama of an Arabic woman are let through the prism of the pen of an literary individuality that abounds in intellect to such a degree that the truth, although it breaks through, neither feels clumsy nor hurts nor causes trauma, which may be the case with the style of many an Arabic writer.

Later in the review we read:

The choice of themes for a writer is a matter of his personality, a jewel of his freedom, because not everybody is given the chance to intervene with social affairs. A writer can catch a fish in the sea; sometimes this fish carries in its belly a jewel and that is why it must not be sold in a fish market but only in a market with jewels. So Laylā al-'Uthmān's stories may be regarded as jewels because of their form, style and themes².

Let these and the preceding sentences, maintained it the critical and poetical convention of a review, suffice to show how great a success, literary, personal and spiritual, was achieved by this Arabic woman of unusual character and emanation of spirit.

What strikes us in Laylā al-'Uthmān's autocharacteristics and memoirs? It is the conviction and determinism of literary calling. It is not very hard to imagine how difficult, and at the same time important, was the moment in the life of a citizen of an Arabic country, especially a woman, when a spirit of a writer was awoken. For when it happened, i.e. the conviction of literary calling as a psychological fact ("I dreamt that one day I would become a writer"³), she was no longer able to agree on any other plan which the ready-made life is but certain to impose on one in every corner of the world, or on the narrow and superficial education, which was a handicap in itself for an Arabic woman.

Laylā 'Uthmān, the writer who had her debut in the 70's⁴, was born, as she wrote, "one winter morning"⁵; she had some luck in many respects, if one takes into consideration the difficult conditions and limitations of education and independent thought for an Arabic woman. She was born into a well-to-do family belonging to the social and intellectual elite⁶. Although she was affected by the, typical for the condition of a woman in an Arabic country, limitation in the contacts with the outside world, yet she had the opportunity of attending a public school where she quickly got the orientation of both her abilities and especially her own condition and personal character. Her school compositions revealed, against the background of her classmates, an incredible talent, supported by her inner vision, and evoked a kind of prophecy. Her literary career was, for the first time, prophesied by her teacher⁷. Since the education of girls from better-to-do families was not tolerated in the long run, and particularly in the case of the "publicity" that affected Laylā as a result of her literary works, her father, hurt in his paternal ambition, made her withdraw from public life. And yet even that situation, although allowing for no direct contact with the intellectual elite in Kuwait, let alone abroad, was not so "helpless" as in the case of her coevals. In her notes Laylā recalls that, on the one hand, she had to subdue to the domestic life directed by her father, despotic and intoxicated with his right of mastership over his numerous women, yet on the other, she provides

several evidences that her father was sometimes proud of his, ambitious and interpid in her cognitive passions, daughter and he entertained great hopes about her. We can guess that since the house was full of translations of foreign literature and current foreign press. Laylā could do self-education: however, under the watchful and severe eye of her father who did not burden her with numerous domestic works that might have hampered any cognitive curiosity and desire for creative expression, which was the lot of many other hard working women. "I used to listen to songs, [...] read books and I wanted to become one day a somebody"⁸ — she writes in her memoirs. How many women could write of themselves like this?

And this was to become part of the literary characteristics of Laylā al-'Uthmān whose dignity and particular sensitivity did not allow, almost at the threshold of her life, to accept as her own the condition of the Arabic women, humiliated, despised and deprived by their male partners of any rights of dignity and personal independence.

The fate of a writer — the holder of the sanctified right to speak, establish and obtain the attention in the socially cherished form was for her the dreamt-of fate that finally came true. Being a writer — to follow Laylā al-'Uthmān's words — it was possible for her to break free, if only in thought⁹, from the social restraint and the yoke of traditional roles and duties. It was possible to be a witness, who was not silent because she could skillfully face, through word, the reality which she could master with the light of thought, get to know through keen observation, pity and sympathize with and competently recommend better solutions. Such a hidden play with function of literature worked, in the case of Laylā, in a mutual way — it was an answer to the common reality.

Being a writer, she could also be just and bear testimony to social, historical and moral truth. The secrets of the tightly closed shutters and the houses surrounded by walls could get out into daylight and, clothed in words, pass a judgment on the reality which was their source.

Laylā was fully aware that in order to face evil it was necessary to have some tools that would allow for another natural area of reference, where had experiences could have a reflection of themselves: thus she could disenchant them and in a secret way gain the catharsis of soul — an effect of the interrelation of experiences. And perhaps this is what she has in mind when writing the following:

A writer has in his life various moments and it often so happens that the feelings which are experienced and which he has to share are rendered onto the paper¹⁰.

While reading the modest memoirs by Laylā al-'Uthmān, what comes to mind at once is the uncontrollable protest which, as it seems, is an autoreflexion that either concerns the conditions of her own female sex, the limitations of the social tradition, or results from acute

awareness of the epoch, broadened through reading and independent thinking, which evokes polemics with the world that is colourful, complex, giving opportunities, but at the same time brutal and endangering the individual. However, her own literary and philosophical programme concerning full world-view of the values professed or supported, negated or rejected by her, can be fully received from her work, both as a journalist and novelist. What she concentrates her attention on in her memoirs is the problem of, as it seems, two "sacred" pillars of her life: freedom — endangered from the very beginning by her female sex, family, environment and, in broader perspective, the world, and her writership — the desired-for and socially sanctified state, which for her meant the fullest contact with reality, because it could be grasped in creative work. It must be said that the work that did not come without anxiety of fight for it never quenched her thirst for writing, which perhaps characterizes in the fullest way the person of Laylā al-'Uthmān.

Laylā al-'Uthmān is the "writing" — as continuous and persistent, although changeable in its themes, as unmoved and inexhaustible as the sea she watched everyday in the gulf — to venture to use such a metaphor. In this she is close to many great European writers whose works were for her a revelation, inspiration and companions in her own path, or they, unconsciously, corresponded with her own experience of tensions and imperatives of the epoch. Kafka, as determined by his vocation as Laylā, writes thus:

To write is to open oneself up as wide as to an excess:

it is a complete sincerity and total surrender¹¹.

And in his *Diary* he writes:

Immense is the world that I have in mind. But how to liberate myself and this world without being torn apart? And yet it is a thousand times better to be torn apart than to detain it in myself or bury it. That is the reason I live for; it is quite clear to me.¹²

It will remain Laylā's secret how it was possible for her to maintain so great a determination for writing while being a woman, a member of an Arabic society, and, what is more, with the burden of family. Everybody who is familiar, even superficially, with the work and life of any great writer, does know that to externalize one's consciousness and to give one's own vision a literary shape is usually associated — as we read above — with being torn apart, uncertain social position, or some sacrifice anyway. In this case we deal, it seems, with a fortunate and exceptional paradox: she happened to be a woman from an Arabic country who had the will strong enough to be provided with motivation and hidden mission to put into effect such a state of affairs that would be thinkable for few European women writers. The solution to the riddle seems to have been the, after all, mild verdict of fate that allowed for a continual, but small "sacrifice" of the burning fire of anxiety of passionate inspiration: endurance and inexhaustible

talent was, however, rewarded with the continual fulfilment of literature.

This good luck was, as we may guess, brought by the men close to her, who, even if they could not oppose her despotic father and the environment, yet protected her with their presence and encouragement to work. It happened exactly so when she was married to a Palestinian in 1965, which originally caused her father's protest and later increased the distance between them because of her husband's nationality, and created the hope for her literary calling.

I entered the society in which a woman's feelings and ambitions were respected, and where she was encouraged to learn and work. Since then I have started, to learn many things and discover life around me. I learned the word "no" because until then I had used only the word "yes"¹³.

In these enigmatic expressions Laylā shows us her real state of personal freedom that allows to live in accordance with one's own dignity and the vision of one's own life; with no humiliation and subordination. Soon after the wedding her father, still unable to be reconciled with the loss of the power over her, died, Laylā al-'Uthmān, usually describing her emotions concerning her family with some restraint, this time can bewilder us. To admit so openly that she at last gained total freedom? In our society the conventions and the barrier set for the next of kin would not, perhaps, allow for such words:

I will admit, and may God forgive me, that my father's death did not grieve me, for he was the foe of my freedom. True, I wept, but inside I felt joy, the real freedom and the chance to make the first step¹⁴.

However, in order for justice to be done, it must be admitted that some years later she wrote a confession implying her understanding of the situation of her parents and her forgiveness of the negative experiences from her childhood and youth concerning her parents' attitude towards her:

When I grew up and started living in the difficult conditions that prevailed in our society. I came to understand my mother's behaviour, love her and forgive her, and I wept long after she died. I also forgave my father his forbidding me to continue my studies, for it was not he, but the society that refused a woman the right of education¹⁵.

The lack of education did not, however, handicap Laylā al-'Uthmān, but became an additional stimulus for self-education and self-cognition, for due to her excellent memory, sensitivity and determination of expression as well as her individual calling she had been a writer in her mind since her earliest years.

Also the following sentences in the autoreflective work by the eminent French writer Sartre may concern her:

Through writing I existed, stole out of the sight of the adults, but I existed only in order to write, so when I said: I, it meant: I who am writing¹⁶.

One may wonder how it happens that Laylā — in her notes and stories as if against the potential expectations of the European critical, psychological and literary stances — never struggles with the dilemma of being a thinking woman, of having the right to speak aloud; and that she never reveals any fear about the depth, justification and realness of her experiences or motivations. In a word, Laylā entirely feels herself to be called to be a writer.

Drawing on the common feelings, motives and attitudes of the European writers of her time Laylā does not seem to share their individual apprehensions. She is not afraid that the source of her writing will run out (although the Gulf War, as she confessed in her letters, diminished her literary potentials¹⁷); nor is she afraid that, being a woman, she has no right to speak her mind. She does not share, either, the apprehensions which sometimes are the case with men writers, namely that she will lack life, its juice, its excess and strong enough ties with it, which might prevent her from achieving a literary work that would have the right to exist and be convincing. It is possible that this was the interest rate of the environment of her parents, disliked by her, but having a high social position, or perhaps, the Islam possessed some mystery that was obvious for her: namely that the literary language was the common work of people and Allah. For it seems that the words of Koran but prompt to great deeds and the expression of knowledge both by man and woman:

Only those of His servants who have great knowledge are truly afraid of God¹⁸.

It might be, then, her own cultural background that this hidden determination as well as the unexhaustible inspiration, literary powers and self-credit are derived from. For it is this cultural circle that is the source of one of the most important literary creeds that one might come across in the history of culture: "Art and literature are not a trifle, but a powerful weapon. I dare say, more effective than the atomic bomb, for they do not destroy man, but shape him and make him strong magnificent, "endowed" with the proper strength: good and beauty"¹⁹. These words were written by the, culturally related to her. Egyptian writer Yūsuf Idrīs, for whom "writing is a dynamic and innovative process, a revolution and sudden confrontation with the subject that arrests him unexpectedly"²⁰. Laylā al-Uthmān is related to him also in the fact that she became famous in her circle because of her sudden tides of inspiration and, like the "red-haired priest" Vivaldi who is said to have gone away from the altar in order to take down a phrase, she would leave even the most splendid company in order to

note down a theme, implant it so that it could flourish and, one day, yield: the fruit of a ready story.

Laylā fought for her calling, and with the "verdict", as it were, of her own passion, good luck and the favour of fate and her closest friends from the intellectual environment, she achieved the status of a writer. Yet she has never forgotten the fear and uncertainty that accompanied her first literary steps:

It must be said that fate may help one to make the first step, but the question arises what the percent of such cases in the society is. And what is the percentage of the voices that have been choked by the society because fate was not favourable for them? But I was one of those who were supported by fate²¹.

The traces of this anxiety and also the, nearly obsessively recollected, atmosphere of the family home ("Believe me, when bringing up my own children I all the time had before my eyes the cruelties of my mother"²²) are constantly present in the broad psychological background of her lively and developing literary individuality.

As has already been mentioned, the original fears were fully compensated with her life and work. Encouraged by her closest friends Laylā started to write for newspapers. One of her works was published, as she reports in her autobiographical notes, along with her picture, regards and favourable evaluation of her talent. She herself, however, critically estimates her works from that period:

I will confess to you that I wrote many banal and useless things, but people liked them and wrote many letters to me with encouragements to continue writing²³.

Why did Laylā al-Uthmān give so critical a mark to her initial steps that, after all, shaped her further path? Maybe because her destiny was the purely literary form and real literature about which Yūsuf Idrīs so rightly writes:

The aim of literature is not the recording or description, but the achieving of results — the deliverance of truth²⁴.

Regardless of our guesses her own journalist activity did not evoke any joy or satisfaction in her, which she stressed many times, for instance in such words:

Journalism is a propaganda creation attracting a writer and encouraging him to continue writing, but it is also a cemetery full of mud in which any neglected talent may be drowned. And I was drowned in this mud from 1965 to 1974²⁵.

Laylā's first husband, friendly to her development and career, in her opinion did not prove a good critic of her creative activity. What a subtle irony and grief speaks through this short sentence in her notes:

I could not count even on my husband who was always happy when I was happy²⁶.

However, the departure of this, close to her, man in 1974 was

a painful caesura in her life: in respect of her literary activity, as she writes, it resulted in stories:

It was the only relief in my loneliness²⁷.

Becoming increasingly active in the radio, television and press Laylā met her second companion of life, who encouraged her to write stories and who also became her real partner in life; soon she got married to him, thus gaining considerable professional support in the literary and intellectual environment. In his estimation Laylā could come into being only as an author of stories. Indeed her first story, published in the newspaper "Al-Watan", brought her success and further offers as well as her future husband's prophecies according to which she, specializing herself in stories, was surely to become an eminent writer in the Arabic world.

Soon after that Laila published her first collection of stories under the title of *Imra'a fi inā'* which, as she writes, gained a great popularity in the literary environment²⁸.

After her first success there came another ones. Laylā al-Uthmān who was always keenly interested in social life and who, through her keen observation of both her own life and the lives of other people (especially women) from her own environment, gained natural and broad knowledge of the real course of events of the people of her own time: she was by all means obedient to her inner voice of vocation, the Arabic vocation, the voice of the imperative of mission similar to that expressed by M. Proust in his crown work:

All the time the artist should be obedient to the instinct, thanks to which art is the greatest reality, the most severe school of life, the actual Doomsday²⁹.

If not for the fear of too a brave mental synthesis, based perhaps on too few premises, one could venture an assertion that nothing else better creates the communion of thinking and the humanistic path of peace than the, so commonly manifested, literary calling; almost sanctified in this calling "resurrection of word." And it might be the solution to the real sense of unity of all the people regardless of time, circumstances and, what Laylā definitely feels and expresses, individual experiences. In this sense perhaps all the people are the "passionate sons of the desert" who used to say:

Centuries will pass — poetic works will remain; the mountains will disappear and the seas will dry out — the word of song will reach up to the sky and, like an ever self-renewing monument of thought, will last for centuries. Nobody will be able to pull down its edifice. What it wrote in the books of time nobody will erase; who was acquitted by it, he is clean; whom it brings consolation, he has no reason to despair³⁰.

Such is also the inner line of thinking of Laylā al-Uthmān who regards the literary workshop and its "eternal inspiration" as the main pillars of her own life; and when we take into consideration her

upbringing and her prosocial, even democratic attitude towards the world, she always locates the adequate word strictly within the writer's duty toward the society she lives in. It is hard to enumerate the numerous functions possible, but the chief ones that can be detected in Laylā's restless thought are the following: the sense of unity of the Arabic world (inspired in her by her father who used to recommend some reading to her), the broadening of her cultural knowledge of the neighbouring countries (especially, through the people close to her, the Palestine), her keen observation of life not covered by any prejudices and finally, real duty to exchange the literary, social and cultural experiences through her participation in the literary activity and through other writers — her participation in meetings, conferences and the educational movement that was carried out in the media. As has earlier been mentioned, her second marriage, directly through the person of her husband, radically influenced the activation of thought and almost explosion of Laylā's creativity which was crowned by many publications. As she herself writes: "With the publication of my second collection of stories under the title of *Ar-rahil* my dreams started to come true".³¹

Laylā got under the auspices of Dr. Sahil Idrīs who was the owner of "Dār al-Adāb" and who took care of young talents. In this collection there were included stories with a clear bias of involvement in political problems both of her own country and other Arabic countries.

The following collection *Fi 'l-layl ta 'tī al-'uyūn* also came out in the Dār al-Adāb publishing house. The stories continue the political and social involvement of the preceding collections, with the particular exposition of the Palestinian themes that attracted the opinion of the world at that time. She writes:

In this collection the most interesting, and my favourite, story is *An-naml al-ašgar*, of which I am very proud, for by the decision of the Ministry of Education it became the obligatory reading for secondary school students. It won a considerable interest of the critics³².

The scale of this success for Laylā al-Uthmān, who had no higher education due to the "verdict" of the social law and her family environment, cannot be overestimated. And although we find in her notes such sentences: "Today I can say that my four children are grown-ups and each is successful in their fields. I am proud to say that my greatest success was not the one I won in the field of literature, but the one I brought off as a mother"³³, we should not let ourselves be misled; this success was the result of the thorough realization of her literary calling.

Laylā al-Uthmān's next creative step was the important collection of stories *Al-hūbb lahu Suwar* published in 1992. This collection — as

she herself writes — brought about strong protest among the enemies of women liberation, but this did not discourage Laylā. For it was impossible to discourage somebody who was, to such an extent, a sensitive resonator of unique instances of the life around her that abounded in problems. Laylā did not have to make a philosophy out of it, for there was no discrepancy between what she saw and what she wrote about, and the reality revealed to her its true countenance, because her literary sense gave her the certainty that she touched truth. Truth, perhaps, not any longer easy, for it had been contaminated by civilization and its meager pragmatic cowardice.

Everything has become fake, even the men's faces, their smiles — the signs of love. Truly the grand city living in luxury has devoured their purity. The people have become colourful vehicles bumping into each other, crushing each other³⁴.

The rich plan was enriched by another two novels: *Al-mar'a wa l-qitta* in 1985 and *Wasmīyya taḥruḡ min al-baḥr* in 1986. They were followed by very important collections of stories *Fathiya taḥtār mautahā* in 1987 and *Hala hubb maḡnuna* in 1990. Most of the included works betray the features of the hand and mind of a master, and certainly an unusual individuality — depicting and experiencing the reality in a rich way — which remains in contradiction with the immensely modest evaluation of her own person:

I am not an eminent woman of letters. I have not completed any philological or literature studies, I have no university degree. The difficult conditions I grew up in evoked in me a desire to write. Writing was not a pastime for me, but a pain that I experienced and endeavoured to render onto paper³⁵.

It is a modest evaluation, but we know that not in every person a talent is awoken in difficult conditions, but it was Laylā in whom the string equalizing the misfortune was struck: the only one and effective, as she felt her writing to be. Against the background of other writers Laylā's style is in no respect less professional than the style of the other works of the Arabic literature that was developing according to its own rights. It must be stressed how great the author's heroism was when she exposed so many threads of suffering and the attempts to face them with the imagination of harmony, justice, beauty or just testimony: "My ambition has no limits, and all this success is the way to intellectual development"³⁶ — writes Laylā in her memoirs. After years of success there came, however, a wave of immense suffering, connected with the loss of independence and the necessity of divorcing her husband who was deported from Kuwait³⁷. As it follows from the letter written to me, the deportation of him and of many other friends of hers encroached, to a considerable degree, on her integrity. Reporting of her working on the new collections *Min yaumiyyat as ṣabr wa 'l-murt* which will tell about the days of the Iraqi invasion, and

Al-hawāḡiz as-saudā Laylā confesses: "I have to calm down and come back"³⁸. Laylā al-'Uthmān, who survived the invasion and has so much to say, does not give in: "I have not lost my hope. [...] Now the most important for me is my return to writing, because it is the essence of my life"³⁹.

Neither the life nor the literary work of Laylā al-'Uthmān have recorded the last word and they will for a long time be an open page of this unusual woman's activity, who, among dramatic strifes and successes, is capable of the heroic effort to cope with the experiences, dreams and the ideals of reality through language and imagination⁴⁰. And when she writes that "it was my childhood that created me as a writer and influenced basically every stage of my life. It was it that shaped my attitude and individuality"⁴¹, we know that it happens so because in the mind of a child, uncontaminated by the experiences of the adults, a just evaluation is not separated from the feeling of the possible realization of good, of our full potential. The eye of a child is rich in the imagination that is not diminished by routine and compromise of the adult life; it knows the way of heart which balances the poverty with imagination, especially when it is the poverty of consciousness, and it creates the reality of heart, the reality of boundless world, the world of God.

NOTES

¹ Abū al-Mu'āti Abū an-Naḡā, *Imra'ā fī inā'*, unpublished review, in my possession.

² *ibidem*.

³ Laylā al-'Uthmān, *Min as-sira az-zatiya wa't-taḡriba alqaṣṣiyya wa'r-riwāiya*, Al-Adāb, Beirut 1990, p. 46.

⁴ Her debut collection had the title *Imra'ā fī inā'*. Kuwait, 1976.

⁵ Cf. note 3.

⁶ Laylā 'Abd Allah Abdul Latif al-'Uthmān, born in Kuwait, came from a family with artistic interests. The little volume of poetry was published by her father who was a poet and a careful reader — a note from the writer's folder — at my disposal.

⁷ "One day you'll become a writer" — quotation from *Min as-sira*, p. 49

⁸ *ibidem*, p. 46.

⁹ "My thoughts were my dreams" — in the writer's manual in my possession.

¹⁰ *ibidem*.

¹¹ Kafka, F., *Listy do Felicji i inne z lat 1912—1916*, Warszawa: PIW, 1976, vol. I, p. 244—5.

¹² Kafka F., *Dzienniki 1910—23*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1969, p. 234.

¹³ Laylā al-'Uthmān, *Min as-sira* p. 50.

- ¹⁴ *ibidem*, p. 50.
¹⁵ *ibidem*, p. 52.
¹⁶ Sartre, J.P., *Ślowa*, Warszawa: PIW, 1965, p. 121.
¹⁷ Letter to Barbara Michalak of Aug. 28, 1992: "My work over new stories is going very slowly due to my present personal and health problems. Nor do I have enough emotional balance to work more efficiently."
¹⁸ *Koran*, Sura XXXV, Warszawa: PIW, 1986, p. 522.
¹⁹ Rudnicka-Kassem, D., *Egyptian Drama and Social Change*, Cracow—Montreal: [The Enigma Press], 1993, p. 33—4.
²⁰ *ibidem*, p. 33.
²¹ Laylā al-'Uthmān, *Min as-sira*, p. 50.
²² *ibidem*, p. 52.
²³ *ibidem*, p. 52.
²⁴ Rudnicka-Kassem, D., *Egyptian Drama*, p. 33.
²⁵ Laylā al-Uthmān, *Min as-sira*, p. 51.
²⁶ *ibidem*, p. 50.
²⁷ *ibidem*, p. 51.
²⁸ *ibidem*, p. 51.
²⁹ Proust, M., *W poszukiwaniu straconego czasu*, vol. II, p. 41.
³⁰ Święcicki J.A., *Historia literatury arabskiej*, Warszawa 1901, vol. III, p. 19.
³¹ Laylā al-Uthmān, *Min as-sira*, p. 51.
³² *ibidem*, p. 52.
³³ *ibidem*, p. 52.
³⁴ Laylā al-'Uthmān, *Min as-sira*, p. 51.
³⁵ *l. cit.*
³⁶ Laylā al-'Uthmān — from her manuscript in my possession.
³⁷ A letter to Barbara Michalak, dated Aug. 28, 1992: "The liberation brought many personal problems. My husband, Walīd Abū Bakr, was expelled from Kuwait. I had to divorce him. The children stayed with me. All that was a great experience to me. I feel grief and emptiness after the expulsion of the Palestinians. I had so many friends among them and now I am so lonely."
³⁸ A letter to Barbara Michalak, dated Aug. 28, 1992: "I am working, very slowly, on a new collection of stories under the title *Min yaumiyyāt as-sabr wa'l-murt*, that will tell about the days of the Iraqi invasion. The second one I am simultaneously working on will be entitled *Al-hawağiz as-saudā'*. Here, too, progress is slow."
³⁹ A letter to Barbara Michalak, Aug 28, 1992.
⁴⁰ Laylā al-'Uthmān, in the manuscript in my possession.
⁴¹ Laylā al-'Uthmān, *Min as-sira*, p. 46.

BARBARA MICHALAK

THE MAGIC EVERYDAY WORLD IN "THE DELUSIVE DAWN" SHORT STORIES BY NAĞIB MAHFŪZ

Nağib Maḥfūz - a writer and Nobel prize winner - is a well - known great personality of Egyptian literature. Living in Cairo, educated in philosophy, he has been an oracle of literary taste and profoundness of message for the whole circle. It may be said that there still exists anxiety whether this great personality with tranquility, inner balance and uncompromising attitude which allows reaching the full picture and expression - has not sealed his individuality on the whole literary circle, which cannot escape his influence. His works "will remain a living picture of the Egyptian society of the first half of the twentieth century, an evidence of his talent which makes him take a lead of contemporary Arabian writers".¹

Short stories by Nağib Maḥfūz, published and gathered in numerous anthologies represent a wide range of the illustrated psychological problems, and their action is closely connected with urban circles of the Egyptian society. In his short stories and early dramas the author breaks with realistic trend represented in his novels and passes to existentialism introducing symbolism and surrealist elements, keeping, however, a simple classic style, which together with the consistency of narration make his works positively universal. I am presenting here a set of short stories called "The Delusive Dawn"² from 1989 containing works differentiated thematically

A short story entitled "A Half of the Day"³ shows one of the most important days in life of a member of the Arabian society - the first school day