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NARRATIO BREVIS IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA: FROM THE FIRST *ITTIGĀHĀT* TO THE RECENT PRODUCTION OF ḤALDŪN AL-DĀLĪ

Abstract. Narratio brevis, in the renewed form of the short story (SS), gained the spotlight in the Arabian Peninsula and played the role of cultural *rendez-vous* or *multaqā* in Arabic. Michalak-Pikulska noted that the short story (*qiṣṣa qaṣīra* QQ) expresses the awareness and sense of injustice suffered in many contexts. In addition to this, Ramsay and Bū-Ša‘īr summarized some main tendencies of the short story, spanning from (magical) realism to folklore, up to (refuse of) modernism. War and conflict are of course found in the Kuwaiti narrative, triggered by the Gulf War events. Al-Ḥarrāṭ individuated the rise of a new sensitivity (*ḥassāsiyya ḡadīda*) as the underpinning factor for the QQ, and he also defined it a phenomenon of transgeneric writing (*al-kitāba ‘abra al-naw‘iyya*). Taking into due account all the above, and the historical factors that framed the literary production, this paper traces the main steps and literary developments of the SS in the Peninsula and focuses on the recent production of Khaldoun al-Dali (Ḥaldūn al-Dālī), a young Yemeni writer who is author of very short stories. The aim is to provide an overall but representative outlook of the literary developments, after al-Faraḡ the Kuwaiti pioneer of SSs in the area.

Keywords: short story, very short story, Arabian Peninsula, Yemen

1. Debates and developments

The literary virtue of *aurea brevitatis* (golden brevity), together with its stylistic value and importance as innovative intellectual behavior, has always been recognized since the classical Greek and Latin ages.

Plato, in his *Protagoras*, distinguished between the effective brevity of the Spartans (βραχυλογία τις Λακωνική) and the wordiness (μακρολογία) of the

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Athenians Sophist philosophers². Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* connected the idea of brevity in exposition with successful persuasion and ethics. Cicero dedicated wide space to the importance of *brevitas* in his *De inventione*³, considering it essential both for the storytelling (*narratio*) and its organization (*partitio*). Quintilianus too, master of rhetoric, praised brevity in his *Institutio oratoria*⁴, where he took up the argumentations that already appeared in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the oldest Latin treaty on rhetoric of uncertain discussed authorship.

Brevity also characterized the poetry of eminent classics, like the Greek author Callimachus and the Latin Catullus. The latter in particular was an eminent representative of the so-called νεώτεροι or the younger ones among poets, and their *ars* (art) resulted from *labor limae* (meticulous finishing) and *brevitas*, instead of alignment to the canons of traditional schools or literary circles. Such voluntary misalignment has represented the most precious ally of philosophy, rhetoric, and artistic writing across many different eras and civilizations up to today.

In the Arabian Peninsula-the target area of this paper-brevity in writing gained the spotlight during the twentieth century with its first *ittiġāhāt* (tendencies) and remains still productive with many recent developments.

Specifically considering that area, Muḥammad Ḥasan ‘Abdallāh wonders if the short story is to be considered a genre without roots, which does not deserve analysis nor studies, as a “satanic plant that has no form and no fruit to be hoped for” (1985: 185)⁵. He answered by defining the short story as an interdisciplinary artistic creation across psychology, literary criticism and sociology. All these concepts reinforce the idea that a connection exists between literature, society, and the writer’s expression of his experience of interacting with others, and such connection is fundamental.

First of all, it must be recognized that in the Peninsula the short story appeared later than in other Arab countries, only at the beginning of the 20th century.

As for the causes of such delay, they have been traced in cultural backwardness and in the lack of means of cultural production, as well as in a tribe-centered society, with no weight for the individuality and expression of the subject, which is the fulcrum instead of the short story.

Various scholars and literary critics have identified some causes of the delay in the appearance of the short story, by comparing it with other genres. Al-Ṭālib (1977: 360-405) compared it with the typology of *ḥikāya* and identified the major difference between the fluidity of the first and the greater technical discipline required for the writing of the second.⁶

² See *Protagoras* 343.b

³ See *De inventione* I, 27-31

⁴ See *Institutio oratoria* IV.2, 34-67

⁵ كالنبات الشيطاني لا شكل له، ولا ثمر يرجى منه

⁶ انسيابية الحكاية وانضباط القصة.

The critic Nūriyya al-Rūmī (1982: 256-239) believes that a decisive factor has been the increase in the level of education in the area, thanks to the creation of non-religious schools. Another decisive factor was, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the influence of the press and magazines, such as *al-Hilāl*, *al-Ahrām*, *al-Manār*, whose echo spread also in the Peninsula, thanks to the experiences of travelers and merchants or thanks to some intellectuals from Hijaz and Iraq.

The increase in education and the circulation of magazines together, paved also the way for translation, thanks to which, in the words of Gibb (1963:160):

“In addition to journalism and original writing, a vital part in the development of modern Arabic literature was played by the translation of western literary works. These served not only as exercises in expanding the range of Arabic literary expression, but also as models, since not a few translators tried their hands at original compositions of the same kinds.”

The explosion of this new genre, however, occurs with the cultural renaissance that followed the Second World War in the period 1940-1980, following the discovery of oil, which in this region paved the way for the transformation of people from merchants, sea captains and divers, to workers in companies, institutions and ministries.

Regarding the connection of the SS with possible ancestors in the context of Arabic literature, Yūsuf al-Šārūnī noted that anecdotes and short narratives already belonged to the Arab literary tradition: *mağāzī*, *aḥādīṭ*, *maqāmāt*, folk literature in general. In addition to these, stories with a religious and moral background (2001: 42-43) were attested. Therefore, it cannot be said in absolute terms that the short story did not already exist because, to put it in the words of Al-Šārūnī, it would be like saying that houses did not exist, only because perhaps they did not exist in the same shape in which we later came to know them. The common idea is the one of ‘refuge’, which is also represented by a cave (ibidem: 10)⁷

The form of the short story is the prose, with wide space for both narration and dialogue. Since these are also typical characteristics of the novel, what is the difference between the two genres? Al-Šārūnī argues that the difference (ibidem: 52) is the same that exists between the cat and the tiger. It is a difference in quantity and size, measurable in the number of pages.

The main feature of the short story is that, thanks to the brevity, present, past and future intersect, while in the novel we find an ordered temporal sequence. The novel is a representation from the source to the estuary, while the short story is instead a depiction of a unique vortex on the surface of the river (ibid: 53)⁸.

⁷ وهذا شبيه بقولنا تماما ان الاقدمين لم يعرفوا البيوت، بمجرد انهم لم يسكنوا العمارات او الدارات التي نسكنها اليها، فكما ان تحديد المأوى هو كل ما يحمي الانسان... بحيث ينطبق هذا المعنى على الكهف

⁸ الرواية اذن - كما يقال - تصوير من المنبع الى المصب، اما القصة القصيرة فتصوير دوامة واحدة على سطح النهر

Furthermore, the novel presents winning themes and characters, while the story expresses loneliness and isolation. If the novel deals with the development of the characters in a temporal key, the short story observes them from a chosen angle, it does not offer a global vision.

Sabri Hafez assigned a hybrid origin to the short story. The delayed development of the story in the Arab world is not so late, but it is a distance of only two or three generations and the Arab art is not born for simple emulation.

“The emergence of a new literary genre is part of a lengthy and intricate process that changes people’s understanding of their society and their perceptions of themselves before changing the discourses that process their experience.” (Hafez 1993: 271)

The themes that take up the greatest field are that of identity and rights, the status of citizens and colonization, testifying to the strong impact played on the story by lived reality.

As for the main character of the short story, ‘Aṭīyya defined him as *al-rağul al-šağīr*, reiterating the anti-heroic tendency (in comparison to the novel, for example) and the weight of the individualistic dimension, therefore extremely modern (‘Aṭīyya 1977: 5-7).

Nūriyya al-Rūmī (1982:240) states that the first short story was published in the magazine al-Kuwait and was authored by the poet Khaled al-Farağ with the title “Munīra” in the number 6/7 of 1930 volume 2, pages 208-218. This contrasts with what Muhammad Hasan Abdallah affirms, who recognized as the first story the one published in the number 4, year 1947 of al-Bu‘ta, a Kuwaiti magazine. The title was “*Bayna al-mā’ wa as-samā’*”, Between water and sky “, signed by Walad ‘Arib as stage name of the real Khaled Khalaf.

2. Selection of short stories representatives of the Peninsula

Emirates

The pioneers expressed reformist ideas against the social condition, denounced general ignorance and expressed against backward systems of relationships and traditions based on backward thinking. It is true that, among the countries of the area, the Emirates offer a rich production of short stories, and its tendencies have been schematized in four main ones by al-Rašīd Bū-Ša‘īr (Bū-Ša‘īr 1998: 33):

1. *al-ittiğāh al-rūmansī*, the romantic tendency, exemplified by the works of Šayḥa al-Nākhī, ‘Abd al- ‘Azīz al-Šarḥān and Su‘ād al-‘Uraymī;
2. *al-ittiğāh al-wāqi‘ī*, the realist tendency, typical of Muḥammad al-Murr and ‘ Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad;

3. *al-ittiġāh al-ramzī aw al-usṭūrī*, the allegorical or mythical tendency, as in ‘Abdallāh Ṣaqar, Maryam Ğ. Faraġ or Salmā M. Sayf;
4. *al-ittiġāh al-wuġūdī*, the existentialist tendency, as in the stories of ‘Alī Abū al-Rīš.

Many Emirati women distinguished as authors, and taking up the previous classification, with reference to the realist trend, Michalak-Pikulska (2013: 157) points out that the main themes are that of suffering and pain, despair, sadness and disappointment. In particular, when the SS deals with the events of arranged marriage, and consequently the lack of respect for the will of women, the denial of freedom of expression and opinion for young people and the marginalization of their aspirations.

Maryam Ğum‘a Faraġ wrote *al-Ġāfa wa-1-Maġnūn*, *The acacia and Maġnūn* from 1994, which falls within the trend of magical realism for the symbolism linked to the name of the characters and their stories, modeled on Arabic folk literature. Acacia is the strongest plant in the desert and also gives off a pleasant scent, emblem of feminine charm; Maġnūn is instead the madman of love, bewitched by the charm of the woman. The story of Faraġ tells the story of two young people from two different tribes. Al-Ġāfa, the acacia, is symbolically the name of the woman, in front of the charm of which Maġnūn is unable to hold back his feelings, contravening the endogamous custom as the law of the tribes. Al-Ġāfa generates a son and, despite the slander of the people, she will try to strengthen his bond with him by educating him with epic tales set in the desert, based on a sense of honor and blood bond. The boy will be so deeply involved and exalted by these narratives that he even asks his father for a duel, as in the style of a perfect warrior.

Salmā Maṭar Sayf is the author of *al-Ṭu‘bān*, *The snake*, contained in the 1991 Hāġar collection. Abū Šu‘ayr’s definition of magical realism or *al wāqi‘iyya al-siḥriyya* (Abū Šu‘ayr 1998:45-49) particularly fits the tale (Ramsay 2003: 379-381), which is grafted on the popular beliefs of the area, as well as superstitions that resist despite the forced modernization of society. The snake in question is the one in which the protagonist transforms himself, after a talk with the gardener of his villa. The man is overwhelmed by the sufferings of love and exchanging a brief dialogue with the gardener discovers that the worker is living a pleasant relationship. The protagonist manages to convey his discomfort and his pessimism to the gardener, causing him a crisis and making him lose his serenity, so that the initial dialogue turns into a quarrel. The quarrel and the story end with the transformation, of the protagonist into a snake, who takes refuge in some crevices of the ground in a skillful and shy way like a spirit, a *ġinn*, having by now lost all human semblance. This leaves a sense of vagueness and incompleteness, in the frame of alienation exemplified by the gardener, disoriented after the dialogue with the protagonist.

Oman

Omani writers, especially men, express their pride about ancient times and traditions. Ḥamad ibn Rašīd ibn Rāšīd is interested in historical events and Omani cultural heritage as sources of awareness and patriotism. This interest emerges from the collection *Zaġārīd aṣ-ṣahīl*, “The neighing of horses” from 1990. A story in this collection is titled ‘Azzān, from the name of the son of a fighter against Portuguese domination, who died in battle.

Al-naḥla al-ṣaġīra, “The little palm” is another story, where nature frames events and characterizes identity. This mirrors the structure of the preambles of pre-Islamic poems. A grandfather tries to pass on the secrets of palm cultivation to his young grandson, taking care that the ancient wisdom is not lost. The palm is a symbol of wealth, affection and has a high identity value, which seems to be unbearable by any modern alternative.

Attachment to the homeland is historically motivated as a heroic struggle against the Portuguese, who controlled Oman from 1507 until the Omani *reconquista* at the times of Imam Nāṣir ibn Muršīd. The first step was regaining possession of the two ports of Maṭraḥ and Šūr, then definitively of the fortress of Muscat, until the defeat of the Portuguese in 1650.

‘Alī al-Kalbānī deals with religious and nationalistic themes together. The collection *Širā’ ma’a al-amwāġ*, “Fight with the waves”, dates back to 1987. The story that gives the collection its name is the story of two brothers in a quarrel, due to the disagreement between their respective wives. The brothers, however, find themselves working together on the same fishing boat, including on the eve of the great Islamic festival of *al-Aḏḥā*, when a storm – later interpreted as punishment for violating the sacred family bond with hostile mutual feelings – causes the boat to pitch heavily. The brothers, shipwrecked, find themselves falling into each other’s arms, finally reconciling because they are happy to have been saved with the arrival on the coast. The sea – probably to be read as the hand of the almighty God in this case – is the master of the lives of the Omanis, and only the union and cooperation among human beings can put a stop to the constant existential precariousness.

Despite the monotony and misery that emerge from this and from other pictures of Omani life painted in the SSs, it is however clear that the sea and the desert, with their palm trees and fish, certainly offer more sustenance to the body and especially to the soul than oil, which is an unreliable resource, and cannot last forever.

Kuwait

In Kuwait, Michalak-Pikulska (1991: 84) assigns to the short story the role of claiming individual freedoms, especially for the woman regarding the choice of

profession, social role and husband. Concerning women status, Dianu (2002: 69-84) reminds us that two important women's organizations were founded in Kuwait in 1963, namely the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS, formerly known as the Cultural and Social Society, CSS) and the Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS).

A typical expression of women claims is found in the writings of Laylā al-'Uṭmān: *Imra'a fī inā'*, *A woman in a trap* from the *Al-Raḥīl, The departure* collection; *Fī al-layl ta'tī al-'uyūn*, *Night Visions* from *Al-ḥubb la-hu ṣuwar, Representations of love* 1992; *Fātiḥa taḥtār mawtaha*, *Fatiha chooses her death* in 1987; *Ḥālat ḥubb maḡnūna*, *The condition of love is crazy* from 1990, in *Yawmiyyāt al-ṣabr wa-l-murr, A Diary of Patience and Bitterness* or *Al-ḥawāḡiz al-sawdā, Black Checkpoints*.

In Al-'Uṭmān's work, women express conflicting feelings, they are often prey to anxiety and these moods sometimes lead them to commit crimes. Women rebel against the psychological and physical conditions imposed, the cause of their pains. However, they are unable to completely free themselves although they are no longer submissive as before the rebellion was enacted. The main characteristic of the author's story is a deep sense of isolation, experienced as a consequence of the disintegration of human relationships. The SSs as a whole express particular individual situations and subjective points of view, which give a poetic quality to prose writings, rich in existential reflections. Laylā al-'Uṭmān (1979) with *Min milaff imra'a*, *File of a woman* narrates episodes of violence and opens the way to the so-called 'murder literature' in Kuwait (Tijani 2009: 51).

The protagonist is an unnamed 14-years-old girl, who confesses before a court of being involved in the killing of her husband. In retracing the dynamics and motivations, she claims to have been forced into marriage with the seventy-years-old man, three years earlier. She reports that the worst came when she realized the man was sexually inactive. This fact, together with other reasons, led her to kill him.

Saudi Arabia

Layla al-Uḥaydib published, among other collections, *Qamīṣ aswad ṣaffāf*, *Transparent Black Shirt* in 2018. The writer has mainly dealt with the themes of repression and revelation, analyzed according to the experience of the female soul. The first, as a violation suffered by the woman on her personality, the second as a feeling of redemption that would induce her to show the traits of her subjectivity, due to the strong desire to succeed in enhancing her condition.

The very title of the collection *Transparent Black Shirt* evokes, with the black color, the suggestion and depth mixed with a sense of gloom; transparency, on

the other hand, symbolizes emotionality. Both characteristics are part of the woman's soul, who is sometimes devoted to full concealment, sometimes resorts to veiled tricks to conceal her moods in a society that does not allow her to conquer her space.

In the tale *Al-ğasad*, *The body* the heroine complains that the role of the female figure has been reduced to that of a machine controlled and calibrated for specific roles, obviously at the service of man. Ultimately, by pressing a specific button, it responds to certain functions, without being able to oppose any force and remaining powerless in front of what is programmed. The woman has become a machine with precise activities and timings to perform: at home, at work and in the context of a relationship. Her body is expropriated (*inḥilā' al-ğasad*) and alienated from her soul and will. The body is there for others and no longer belongs to her.⁹

3. Today's Yemen by Ḥaldūn al-Dālī

Moving to our times, Ḥaldūn al-Dālī (1984) is a young Yemeni writer, who has taken up the legacy of the short story and embarked on the path of the very short story. He published in 2018 the collection "Pile of Tears", *Rukām al-dumū'*. The title expresses the suffering and the difficulty of collecting the signs of suffering. The idea of pile refers to solid materials suitable to be piled up on top of each other and, sometimes, falling from the top to the bottom. The tears, however, are liquid in nature, which cannot be stored in a pile, but only in containers if necessary. "A Pile of Tears" are indeed texts that have fossilized in the hearts of the Yemeni people and in the eyes of every Arab. The author stated¹⁰ :

"It is a pile of sorrows and torments that it is impossible for humans to predict or imagine [...] A miserable condition, which is marked by hostilities, attacks, and injustice. The reality of the Yemeni man's condition is that he lacks the minimum for a decent life that guarantees his dignity and freedom, in principle declared the bare minimum in every Holy Book."

In Al-Dālī's writings, never translated until today, we hear a calm human voice that tells us, without hesitation, our daily pains, aches, and national concerns, as a besieged tormented human being suffering from war, oppression, and injustice. The stories are filled with feelings and emotions: love, sadness, anger, and disappointments. The pile of tears is not stored in boxes but in the writer's heart only. Such a pile equals an incomputable sorrow, and the tears are those shed by Yemeni people because of their countless tribulations. Injustice is Yemen's

⁹ هكذا صار مجرد "ماكينة" مضبوطة المسار والعمل والمواقيت؛ في المنزل وفي الوظيفة وفي العلاقة البينية. استلاب تام وغربة كاملة عن الجسد. كأنما هو لآخر.. لآخرين: "الجسد الذي لا يخصني

¹⁰ Al-Dālī words, when cited in this article, refer to an interview he released to me in October 2022.

permanent condition, as Al-Dālī suggests. Despite this, he deeply loves his homeland and hopes for security, stability, and peace.

For the first time a selection of four very short stories is translated here below, the most eloquent of both Al-Dālī thinking and the country's reality, as he reveals it to us.

Humanity, short story nr. 8

إنسانية

تحاشيتها، لكنها أصررت التنازل في مسامات جلدي.. أرذت التصل منها؛ جذبني نحوها بحنو...
كُلَّمَا قَطَعُوهُ التَّمَّ: ذاك الشريان الذي يصل جذورها بدمي.

"I avoided her, but she insisted on procreation in the pores of my skin. I wanted to get rid of her; She pulled me towards her with tenderness... Every time they cut it, it healed: that artery that connects its roots with my blood."

Humanity is a feminine force, the mother of humankind, (she) who never abandons her beloved creatures, and never dies in the hope of her oppressed children. This text embodies an outcry in the face of confusion and loss experienced by contemporary men, and it portrays the soul in a beautiful and discreet manner. This soul is representative of the Yemeni one that (hopefully) has not been affected by malignity yet. Perhaps this very short story looks for human harmony in times of oppression, death, consumption, ruin and poverty. It may be considered a call to push man to be in harmony with himself and his society. The story wishes a world of individuals in harmony with themselves and their humanity, and the hero of our story is probably one of those who cannot abandon their humanity and their conscience, despite his living in a distorted society. He is still connected to mankind's humanity by an artery that arrives in his blood. Perhaps the hero of this story wishes for a revolutionary change in order to free himself first and liberate mankind after, and this liberation can only happen by returning to the best human nature represented by the human spirit and his true noble values.

A second text that exemplifies Al-Dālī thoughts is 'Humiliation'.

Humiliation, short story nr. 9

مَهَانَةٌ

جَلَسَ أَمَامَهَا، نَظَرَتْ إِلَيْهِ شَرَّراً.
سَأَلَهَا: أَمَا مَرَّ بِكَ...؟!
بَعْدَ صَمْتٍ.. أَفْصَحَتْ،
أَشَارَتْ إِلَى كِسْرَةِ خُبْزٍ بِيَمِينِهَا: "هُوَ ذَا"
لَمَسَهَا بِيَدِ رُؤُومٍ، تَنَحَّى جَانِباً... بَكَى جَبِينَهُ!

He sat down in front of her, and she looked at him scornfully.
 He asked her: "Has it happened to you that..."
 After a silence... she revealed,
 She pointed to a piece of bread in her right hand: "Indeed, here it is!"
 He touched her with a merciful hand, stepped aside... He cried about
 his cowardice!

The writer depicts with maximum respect and delicacy the outcome of the most disrespectful and obscene act, which humiliates not just one person, but two at the same time. Misery, old age (of the man), helplessness, girlhood and violated integrity (of the woman) are all included in a few half lines of writing. Misery has distorted the Arab values of the proud and vengeful man, the warrior who defends his *hurma*; the woman here does not cry on her brother who died in the battle, nor for her husband. Both the man and the girl mourn themselves, with no rite to celebrate, no remedy, and no revenge for their humiliation. Most of the texts of "Piles of tears" depict the situation in Yemen as extremely tragic. These texts are characterized by extreme realism that relies on lived events, as the key for explaining the tragedy of both the man and the homeland together, and the struggle against the cruelty of injustice and the tragedy of war, disease and ignorance.

Inkisār, Fracture is the title of the story nr.18, which deals with the violence of mismanaged power in Yemen:

انكسار
 أَسْمَعُ الصَّدى، كَأَنَّهُ العَوِيلُ.
 أُطَلُّ مِنْ نافذتي جِزْواً..
 الشَّوارِعُ على امتدادها، تَعْصُ بِجَنَاحِ مُتَقَحِّمةٍ..
 أَفْرَكُ عَيْني مَحْمَلِقاً.
 اللهبُ الأسودُ يُعانقُ السماءَ، يَتَّحِبُ مع نعيقِ الغريبانِ، فيما الذنابُ تزهو بالعواءِ حدَّ الغنجِ...
 تقدَّم (سيدُ الزنانة) نحو العرشِ المُبجَّلِ، محروساً بالأفاعي والذئاب والتماسيح المعمَّمة بعماماتٍ
 سوداءَ، ليشهد عيد النحر السنوي..
 بهلعٍ أُغلقُ النافذةَ على المشهد... أسْتَدِيرُ... يُفاجئني، المُهرِّجون بزخَّاتِ الكلاشينكوف..

I hear the echo, as if it were howling.
 I look out of my window, frightened.
 The streets are littered with charred corpses.
 I rub my eyes, dazzled.
 Black flames embracing the sky, weeping with the croaks of crows, while
 the wolves howl arrogantly...
 He (the master of the inner prison) advanced towards the glorified throne,
 guarded by snakes, wolves and crocodiles with black turbans, to witness
 the annual Sacrifice Feast...
 Horrified, I close the window on the scene... I turn... It surprises me, the
 clowns with Kalashnikov shots.

The title of the story, *Fracture*, signifies what people live in Yemen, because of the vile war. Commented the authors when I interviewed him:

“It is the fracture of souls... the fracture of hearts... the fracture of love... the fracture of childhood... the fracture of all the beautiful things in the homelands of goodness, kindness, and jasmine smell. And if we search in all the papers of our tragedies that we live in, we will find the fracture present in every detail. The condition referred to is one in which pain overtakes us, we remain silent and listen until the voices in our ears become an echo of the pain of others, and in fact it is nothing but the echo of the pain dwelling in us... an echo in which cries, crying and wailing resound... How can a person of blood and flesh remain deaf to this wailing?!”

In ‘Fracture’ the sight from the window is horrific and unbelievable, because of the ugliness and cruelty of what is observed. So, there is a need to alert all the visual energies to hold the truth of what appears in front of us. Are the bodies on the street the ones of the neighbors, friends and comrades, mothers, fathers, or brothers? For this reason, the protagonist rubs his eyes many times, observing a fire that is starting to eat everyone. The charred corpses and the destroyed houses emit smoke and flames, symbols of the extent of the disaster. In addition, the croaks of crows are heard, as typical signs of ruin, destruction and death. “Human wolves” probably continue to kill and love blood, and of course are proud because they stand above the dead bodies and the ruins. They are the criminals who are happy with their crimes. The writer describes how happy those wolves feel: humans-wolves celebrate the annual sacrifice with blood, smell its odor, and get drunk with it.

Al-ḍaw’ al-azraq, Blue light is the title of the short story nr. 25

الضوء الأزرق

قالت له:

لماذا تصر أن تعود للصفحة الأولى مجدداً؟

أخاف عليك..، ويخالج، قلبي حزن لم يهتد إلى كنهه...!

أه يا سيأ...!

ليتك، تخافين على نفسك أكثر، فدقات قلبك محسوبة..

ما أخاف إلا من سيل تلعتي، وأنا

أراهم يمسخون بأختامهم السرية، تلك الصفحات المضيئة، التي كتبناها بالدم، على وارفات نخيلك..

She told him:

Why do you insist on going back to the front page again?

I am afraid for you...and my heart is overwhelmed by a sadness whose essence it has not been able to discern

– Oh, Saba people!

I wish you were more afraid for yourself, your heartbeats are counted

I am only afraid of the flow of my creek

I see them wiping their secret seals, those luminous pages, which we wrote with blood, on your palm leaves...

The main concern here is the behavior of Yemenis betrayers, who may overwhelm their fellowmen, like the waters of a creek that flow from the top of a hill to the bottom of a valley, and destroy everything they meet along the path. The betrayals are trying to cancel all the gains of the revolution, unity and republic that free people conquered and put in pages written with their pure blood, throughout the country.

We understand from the reading of the four short stories analyzed above that al-Dālī succeeded in denouncing the unfortunate condition of his country and the hopeless precariousness of the population.

When I asked him about the advantages of choosing the very short story, compared to the short story or the novel, he provided me with an illuminating answer:

“We live in an era of creative magic. Unlimited creative cosmopolitanism. [...] The revolution of communications and electronic communication gave us a strange and magical world, [...] highly intertwined and interaction. Will – or was – the creative writing of the very short story a witness to this strange world in which we live”.

He also added that, a part the specific Yemeni case, he considers the very short story both the most appropriate space for the “universal”, *kawnī* or “cosmopolitan”, *kūsmūbūlītānī* creative writing, and the most suitable tool for talking about “this era full of novelties and strangeness”. al-Dālī thinks that the art of the very short story is an inevitable result of globalization and the “age of speed”, due to its tendency towards condensation and reduction in literary expression. It is true that the very short story has gained more space recently, but it also raises many important issues. For example, the definition of the art of the very short story, its artistic features, its pillars and techniques. I will conclude with the words of al-Dālī who told me:

“It is known that the very short story is full of diversity and transformation, and is capable of generating surprise, and is unique in its linguistic deviations. Its astonishing artistic ambushes, its stylistic formulation, its aesthetic intensity swarming with suggestions, images and symbols <made possible> by adopting

a condensed style, rich in suggestion, and characterized by aesthetic fluidity that is revealed by the coherence of the sentence, within the worlds of the construction of the text, with a central objective unity around which the meaning revolves, thus provoking the reader, who in turn responds to his aesthetic flow.

The immediacy of a very short text is then considered more appropriate for depicting the precariousness of life in precise contexts – like today’s Yemen in Al-Dālī writings – which are subject to sudden changes within the same very short time of telling a very short story, and without many hopes left for the improvement of life conditions in the near future.

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