

MARTA TEPERSKA

Development of Short Narrative Forms in the United Arab Emirates

Abstract

This article presents the development of short narrative forms in the United Arab Emirates from the moment of appearance of short story in this country, in the late 1960s and the ends 1970s, the time of the rapid development of current affairs journalism which played a substantial role in shaping this literary form. The article outlines individual phases of development of short narrative forms, presents the names of the pioneer writers, discusses the wide range of topics which illustrate the abundance of genre and moral scenes connected with social, political and cultural changes taking place after the United Arab Emirates acquired independence in 1971.

Modern literature which has dynamically developed in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Oman, and Yemen) has been influenced not only by the literatures of such countries as Egypt, Lebanon or Syria; the writings produced in Europe shaped it as well. Its origins go back to the 1930s, the time when the Arabic population of the Gulf states began to strive for their independence.¹ Though the cultural and literary revivals experienced by the countries in the region varied, they shared such universal elements as, *inter alia*, a sense of the ancient cultural community and the language.

The emergence of the new Arab literature was preceded by general cultural revival coupled with the growing national self-awareness of Egypt, Syria and Lebanon, which ensued from contacts between the cultures of the Arabic East and Europe. Various consequences of these interactions included, for instance, Arab scientific missions being

¹ Saudi Arabia became an independent state in 1932; Kuwait, in 1961; Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, in 1971.

sent to Europe to acquire knowledge of modern civilisations directly from the source, and the activities of European and American missionaries who would set up educational and scientific outposts in the Arabic East as early as in the 17th and 18th century their efforts culminated in the 19th century. Although the new Arabic literature was strongly influenced by the European trends – especially those of France and England, this being a consequence of these world powers' political dominance throughout the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century – it survived to preserve its specifically Arabic character.²

Flourishing schooling (primary, secondary and university level) was instrumental in developing the literature. By the time the country gained its independence in 1971, the United Arab Emirates boasted about 60 schools; the United Arab Emirates University (Al-‘Ayn) was established in 1977. It should be added that revenues from oil considerably contributed to the economic growth of the Gulf states, and, consequently, to education and cultural life of these countries.

Former students of newly-established schools and universities were the country's first generation intellectuals. The young people would gather at literary clubs and write for numerous magazines founded at that time. It should be emphasised that the development of current affairs journalism played a major role in shaping short narrative forms. Editors of the magazines and newspapers were in many cases writers too and wrote their own stories as well; a text focussing on a single aspect seemed to be the most adequate means to discuss important social issues. The writers found short stories also helpful for following rapid changes across the country and the society. In addition, it should be noted that short literary forms were preferred because they were best fitted to be published in magazines and newspapers, and this channel of reaching wide masses of readers was the most effective.³

First writings of Emiratic young generation authors appeared in such magazines as “An-Naṣr”, “Az-Zamālik”, “Aṣ-Šabāb”, “Al-Ahlī”⁴ at the beginning of the 1970s. This demonstrates that the development of prose style in the United Arab Emirates began much later than in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia or Bahrain. Other magazines followed suit shortly thereafter, among them “Al-Mağma”, established in 1973 and “Al-Azmina al-‘Arabiyya” – in 1979. The 1980s saw the inauguration of the daily “Al-Ittiḥād” and the weekly “Aḥbār Dubayy”. At present, the following magazines are playing key roles: “Ar-Rāfid”, a culture-oriented monthly issued by the Culture and Information Association in Aṣ-Šāriqa and monthly “Al-Muntadā”, as well as the quarterly “Šu‘ūn Adabiyya”, which is published by the Association of Writers and Literary Artists of the United Arab Emirates of Aṣ-Šāriqa.

² See: J. Bielawski, K. Skarżyńska-Bocheńska, J. Jasińska, *Nowa i współczesna literatura arabska 19 i 20 w.*, (New and Modern Arabic Literature in the 19th and 20th) Warsaw 1978, p. 75.

³ See: P. Cachia, *An Overview of Modern Arabic Literature*, Edinburgh, no date, pp. 107–108.

⁴ Current newspapers include “Al-Ittiḥād”, “Al-Fağr”, “Al-Waḥda” published in Abū Zabi, “Al-Bayān” published in Dubayy and “Al-Ḥaliğ” published in Aṣ-Šāriqa, *The United Arab Emirates published by Ministry of Information and Culture*, Abu Dhabi 1993, p. 124.

A momentous occurrence in the cultural life of the Gulf states was marked by the introduction of literary clubs where passionate discussions on a variety of topics related to culture and literature were held. In the case of the United Arab Emirates, it was the literary club *Ittiḥād Kuttāb wa-Uḍabā' al-Imārāt* (Association of Writers and Literary Artists of the United Arab Emirates).

The first prose writings appeared at the time when the citizens' social awareness began to grow. The stories described social injustice; they also communicated their authors' attitude to the reality by frequently representing a hidden drama of some members of the Arabic community, notably that of women. The first short stories concentrated on the dramatic social situation fraught with conflict. The course of events presented in these writings was predictable from the very beginning due to a rigid structure and fixed mechanisms governing the presented Arabic society. The realistic value of the presented world was contrasted with an underdeveloped form. The stories generally recounted pure facts and events. Gradually though, basing on their enriched expertise and knowledge of other writings, more and more writers would introduce more innovative techniques to describe the presented world and add new means of expression to their writing.

Traditional subjects referring to the past, family and social relationships were expanded by adding new topics typical for the region. The new themes primarily included the discovery of oil, and, consequently, the economic growth, political, social and cultural transformation, and the situation of a Gulf state man in the context of the modern Arabic and the global background.

It should be asserted that, unfortunately, the existing literature does not contain sufficient information on the beginnings of the short story in the United Arab Emirates and on its development. The attempts made to discover these origins of the short story are infrequent and incomplete, and refer only to specific topics and persons related to the broadly defined literature.

The opinions on the beginnings of the short story are divided, critics do not speak with one voice on this subject, which is illustrated by the words of the Emiratian critic 'Abd Allāh 'A b d a l - Q ā d ī r in the article entitled *Bānūrāmā al-kitābāt al-qīṣāṣiyya wa al-riwā'iyya fī al-Imārāt* (*An Overview of Prose in the United Arab Emirates*), which was published in the "Al-Muntadā" magazine.⁵ One of few certain facts is that the beginnings of the new Emiratian literature should be traced back to the creation of the new state; this event determined the nature of all-embracing reforms and the broadly defined culture.

The contemporary Emiratian literary criticism voices two dominant opinions as to which short story writer was the first to publish in the United Arab Emirates.

'Abd al-Ḥamīd A ḥ m a d, who is an Emiratian writer and author of many publications on literature and short stories, believes that the first literary work of that type was the story entitled *Qulūb lā tarḥam* (Merciless Hearts) which was written by 'Abd Allāh Ṣ a q r A ḥ m a d. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd A ḥ m a d dates the story back to the end of the 1960s. The

⁵ 'Abd Allāh 'A b d a l - Q ā d ī r, *Bānūrāmā al-kitābāt al-qīṣāṣiyya wa-ar-riwā'iyya fī al-Imārāt*, "Al-Muntadā" 1993, No. 114, p. 43.

story was published in a sports club magazine “An-Naşr”.⁶ The first collection of short stories by that writer entitled *Al-Ḥašaba (Piece of Wood)* was published soon thereafter. The collection of short stories was published in 1975, but the said story was not included in the collection. To many other critics, including Muḥammad Maḥīī ad-Dīn Ma y n ū (*Fann al-qīṣṣa al-qaṣīra* – Short Story, 2000), Tābit M i l k ā w ī (*Ar-Riwāya wa-al-qīṣṣa al-qaṣīra fī al-Imārāt. Naṣā’t wa taṭawwur – Novel and Short Story in the United Arab Emirates. Birth and Development*) and Ar-Rašīd A b ū Š a ‘ ī r (*Madḥal ilā al-qīṣṣa al-qaṣīra al-imārātiyya. Dirāsa* – Introduction to Emirati Short Stories. Research, 1998), that fact proves that this story, which was practically lost due to the destruction of the title and the magazine copies, should not be considered as the actual and fully-confirmed evidence of novelistic writing in the United Arab Emirates. Ar-Rašīd A b ū Š a ‘ ī r also believes that the story may have been so inconsistent with other stories of the collection *Al-Ḥašaba* in terms of literary level that it just could not be published as part of the collection.⁷

In view of these facts, Šayḥa Mubārak a n - N ā ḥ ī, the author of *Ar-Raḥīl (Departure)* written in 1970, should be recognised as the frontierswoman in the field of the short story in the United Arab Emirates. This short story existent until today, and it is a conclusive proof of the origins of this literary genre in the United Arab Emirates. The story was published as part of the collection *Kulluna kulluna kulluna nuḥibbu al-baḥr* (We all, all of us, love the sea), which was published in 1992, but was awarded the first prize in a contest organised by the Ministry of Youth of the United Arab Emirates as early as in 1972.⁸

The dates quoted above decisively place Šayḥa Mubārak a n - N ā ḥ ī before ‘Abd Allāh Ṣaqr A ḥ m a d, whose collection includes stories written in 1974–1975 and published in 1975. This is what Šayḥa Mubārak a n - N ā ḥ ī said about her first short story:

„Participating in the cultural scene was a beautiful and motivating experience for me; it was a voice of protest, a sort of manifesto for research, discussions, also a challenging criticism of prevailing conditions too. It felt like expressing an individual attitude to social problems. It was an expression of a private perspective on marriage and high dowry issue. It was bold of a girl to write about these topics in such a way. These first attempts led me to start writing short stories.”⁹

Despite the lack of unanimity with respect to purely formal aspects, many citizens of the United Arab Emirates emphasize that the essence of that literature is its national character, its ambition is to be “the source of national culture in the United Arab Emirates”.¹⁰

⁶ Cf. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, *Tawṣīfāt ‘amma ḥawla al-qīṣṣa wa-ar-riwāya fī dawlat al-Imārāt*, [in:] *Al-Multaqā al-awwal li-al-kitābat al-qīṣṣiyya wa-ar-riwā’iyya fī dawlat al-Imārāt al-‘Arabiyya al-Muttaḥida*, Aš-Šāriqa 1989, p. 15.

⁷ Ar-Rašīd A b ū Š a ‘ ī r, *Madḥal ilā al-qīṣṣa al-qaṣīra al-imārātiyya. Dirāsa*, Aš-Šāriqa 1998, p. 12.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 12.

⁹ Muḥammad Maḥīī ad-Dīn Ma y n ū, *Fann al-qīṣṣa al-qaṣīra*, Dubay 2000, p. 85.

¹⁰ Cf. Ramaḍān Baṣṭāwīsī M u ḥ a m m a d, *Al-Ibdā’ ka-maṣḍar min maṣādir at-taqāfa al-waṭaniyya fī dawlat al-Imārāt*, “Ar-Rāfid” 1998, No. 17, p. 27.

The phases of the development of the Emiratian short story may be defined by applying the criterion of economic and social changes. This measure is used by many subject matter experts, including ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, who was the author one of the first ever systematisations of specific phases of the Emiratian short story’s development. He distinguished for phases of the development of the short story in the United Arab Emirates: phase one – the end of the 1960s, marked by the publication of the first short story *Qulūb lā tarḥam* by ‘Abd Allah Ṣaqr Aḥmad. Phase two continued the developments of phase one, with new names appearing on the scene. Phase three was dominated by a cultural stalemate which also affected literary writings produced at the time. Phase four began at the end of the 1970s and has continued until today. In that period, the development of the modern technique of short story writing has been really rapid.¹¹ This has been proven by such figures as, for instance, Muḥammad al-Murr, whose literary work comprises over a hundred short stories.

The development of the short story in the United Arab Emirates may be also described by referring to the following phases defined by literary debuts and continuation. Dissimilarity and lack of consistency in terms of character and volume of literary writings in individual phases of the short story’s development are clearly recognised. Significant debuts and continuation of literary careers by writers already present on the literary scene should be presented for each specific phase.

In the first phase of the short story’s development, some young writers having their debut in 1972–1975 should be mentioned: *Ar-Raḥīl* by Ṣayḥa Mubārak an-Nāḥī dated 1972 (1970), ‘Alī ‘Ubayd ‘Alī’s debut *Ḍaḥiyyat at-tama* (Victim of Greed) dated 1972, Muḥammad al-Mirī’s short story *Yawm fī ḥayāt muwazzaf ṣaḡīr* (Day in a Life of an Ordinary Clerk) dated 1974 and the collection *Al-Ḥaṣaba* by ‘Abd Allah Ṣaqr Aḥmad (containing short stories from 1974–1975).

All the stories were published with a delay: after their first publication, they were again published in the second edition of the collection of short stories entitled *Kulluna kulluna nuḥibbu al-baḥr* in 1992, which was issued by the Association of Writers and Literary Artists of the United Arab Emirates.

Even more dramatic was the question of the existence of the collection *Al-Ḥaṣaba* by ‘Abd Allah Ṣaqr Aḥmad. After its first publication in 1975, the collection was banned by censorship for almost 25 years and withheld from the United Arab Emirates public. Finally, it was published again in 1999 with the assistance of Sheikh ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Zayd an-Nahyān.¹²

The most outstanding young writers also included ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Ḥalīl, who wrote *Min aḡli waladī* (For My Son); and ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, the author of *Al-Firār* (Flight) and *Ḥalfā al-bāb al-muḡlak* (Behind the Closed Door).¹³

¹¹ *Abḥāt al-multaqā at-tānī li-al-kitābat al-qīṣaṣiyya wa-ar-riwā’iyya fī dawlat al-Imārāt al-‘Arabiyya al-Muttaḥida*, part 1, Aṣ-Ṣāriqa 1989, p. 158.

¹² Cf. ‘Abd Allāh Ṣaqr Aḥmad, from the introduction to the collection: *Al-Ḥaṣaba*, Bayrūt-Lubnān 1999, p. 9.

¹³ *Abḥāt al-multaqā at-tānī...*, op. cit., pp. 88 and 158.

The stories written during that phase were permeated with pain, sorrow and suffering. They may well be ascribed to the traditional romantic trend. The topics raised by the writers touched upon such social issues as marriages of underage girls, the lack of respect for opinions and wants of adolescents, etc. Besides, some attempts were made to relate latest topics concerning a new style of living which ensued from economic changes after the oil discovery.

The second phase (1975–1979), was the time of fascination with wealth and material goods, so rather few writings were published then, and that period is referred to as the cultural stalemate. The few writings of that period included a collection of short stories entitled *Aš-Šaqā* (Toil) written by ‘Alī ‘Abd al-‘Azīz aš-Šarhān. The stories contained in the collection were written during the writer’s stay abroad while studying. In terms of literary form, that writer is considered as the one who, despite consistently preserving the “old” short story form, managed to incorporate the classic western technique in his writing.¹⁴

The following short stories were written in the discussed period: Muḥammad Mağid as-Suwaydī’s *Al-Ittiğāh* (Direction) in 1976, ‘Alī Muḥammad Rāšid’s *Al-Baḥiṭūn ‘an lā šay* (In Serach for Nothing) in 1978 and the collection *Dalika az-zamān* (Those Times) by ‘Abd ar-Riḍā as-Siğwānī published in 1978, featuring such stories as *Al-Bi’r al-maskūna* (Inhabited Well), *Qalb ra’ūf* (Merciful Heart), *Āḥāt al-iḍṭhād* (Persecution Sigh) and *Ablah* (Moron).

The end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s was a special time for writers in the United Arab Emirates. In 1979, the magazine “Al-Azmina al-‘Arabiyya”, and cultural and social clubs in Abū Zabī and Aš-Šāriqa were established. So-called literary evenings were held, at which writings of contemporary authors were presented; new events also included cultural exhibitions promoting young artists. Stories written at that time were predominated with social issues, such as the question of human freedom and the man’s place in the society, the discovery of oil and oil’s power to affect everyday existence of people living in the United Arab Emirates. The following writings were published at that time: *Al-Baydār* (Mud Floor) by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, and *Ḥubb min naw’ āḥar* (Love of Different Kind), *Al-Furṣa al-aḥīra* (The Last Chance) and *Šadāqa* (Friendship) by Muḥammad al-Murr.

The beginning of the 1980s saw great numbers of short story collections published in the press. At that time, it was relatively easy to get a magazine to publish literature due to low costs related thereto. Moreover, the quality of the writings was never verified. However, it should be noted that the artistic level of the stories published at the beginning of the 1980s was higher than that of the stories from the 1970s; the ease with which texts could be published had no adverse effect on their artistic quality.¹⁵

Some writers of the United Arab Emirates tackle the issue of the past, too. This relates to the sea and its potential to affect people’s lives. Such writers as ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, the author of the following short stories: *Al-Fa’s* (Cliff) and *Aṭ-Ṭa’ir*

¹⁴ Cf. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, *Al-Qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra fī al-Imārāt, marḥalat at-tağrīb... marḥalat at-ṭufūla*, “Al-Muntadā”, 1987, No. 46, p. 14.

¹⁵ *Abḥāt al-multaqā at-tānī...*, op. cit., p. 89.

(Bird) and Nāṣir az-Zāhīrī, who wrote *Safar al-asfār* (Journey's Journey) and *Al-Ġarād* (Locust) described the life of inhabitants of deserts, villages, towns and cities, with emphasis placed on tradition and customs. Such names as Muḥammad Rāšid (*Riḡāl fī miḥna* – Unhappy Man), Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Ḥarbī (*Hikāya 'arabiyya* – Arabic Story), 'Abd ar-Riḍā As-Siġwānī (*Buṣrā fī as-sittīn* – Buṣrā Is Sixty Years Old) and Muḥammad al-Murr, the author of *Ḥabbūba* (Ḥabbūba), *Makān fī al-qalb* (The Place in Your Heart) and *Naṣīb* (Destiny) deserve a mention as well.

From the end of the 1970s, the practice of short story writing was developing, which was closely related to the flourishing scientific and cultural life, the activity of cultural magazines and literary clubs. As 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad noted, the themes of short stories written at that time not only focused on the problems of the Emiratian society, but also on more universal issues relating to human feelings and existence. This shift was evidenced by the search for new, more mature forms of artistic expression in terms of quality.¹⁶

The majority of contemporary Emiratian short stories have been written in the last phase of the short story's development, which continues until today. These stories are characterised by considerable diversity and abundance of forms and, primarily, by multiplicity of examples.

Critics generally emphasise the high number of women among short story writers.¹⁷ Ṣayḥa Mubārak an-Nāḥī, who wrote two collections of short stories (*Ar-Raḥīl* – Departure, *Riyāḥ as-šimāl* – Winds of North), just begins the list of women-writers. Other authors to follow suit are: Laylā Aḥmad (the collection *Al-ḥayma wa-al-mahraġān wa-al-waṭan* – Tent, Festival and Homeland), Maryam Ġum'a Faraġ (the collections: *Fayrūz* – Fayrūz, *Mā'* – Water), Su'ād al-'Uraymī (the collections: *Ṭufūl* – Ṭufūl, *Haql al-Ġamrān* – Ġamrān's Fields), Salmā Maṭar Sayf (the collections: *Ušba* – Grass, *Haġir* – Haġir), Bāsima Muḥammad Yūnis (the collection: *'Adāb* – Torture, *Ṭarīq ilā al-ḥayāt* – Road to Life), 'Ā'īša az-Zi'ābī (the collection: *Ġašāwa* – Mist), Faṭīma Muḥammad (the collection: *Ātār 'alā an-nāfida* – Trace on the Window) and Zābiyya Ḥamīs (the collection: *Ibtisāmāt mākira* – Malicious Smiles).¹⁸

The themes raised in the short stories of the most recent period touch upon social problems, but they describe personal and existential problems of individuals too. As regards the means for expressing content (imagery, language level, construction and style), they are becoming closer to the contemporary global short story.¹⁹

The range of topics raised in contemporary short stories published by Emiratian writers is highly diversified. Writers describe the past by presenting cultural traditions which separate Gulf states from other Arab countries as well as the longing for the times before the discovery of the 'black gold'. They also approach the present, i.e. the

¹⁶ 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, *Al-Qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra...*, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁷ Cf. Ḥalīl as-Siwāḥīrī, *Šūrat al-marā'a fī al-qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra fī al-Imārāt*, [in:] *Abḥāt al-multaqā at-tānī li-l-kitābāt al-qiṣāsiyya wa-ar-riwā'iyya fī dawlat al-Imārāt al-'Arabiyya al-Muttaḥida*, part 3, Aš-Šāriqa 1989, p. 7.

¹⁸ Cf. Anwar al-Ḥaṭīb, *Adab al-marā'a fī al-Imārāt (al-qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra)*, [in:] *ibid.*, pp. 23–118.

¹⁹ 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, *Al-Qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra...*, op. cit., p. 15.

abrupt growth of the country's economy after the discovery of oil, which transformed a formerly backward society into a modern community, provided access to education, and, ultimately, produced a multitude of pre-eminent writers and, consequently, short story readers. Emiratian short story writers seem to be strongly attracted to the past of their country. They stress the collapse of the old society's values as a result of the new urban civilisation, hence authors frequently retreat to the countryside or seaside where they can find respite and oblivion. Contemporary topics describe the society and problems related to the institution of marriage (generous dowries, young girls marrying rich old men, etc.). Other themes include feelings, disappointment and unrequited love; dominated by grief and emotion, they are clearly romantic by nature.

The contemporary Emiratian criticism is developing a general view on the character of the Emiratian short story, in particular in relation the character of this genre in the Gulf states. The Arabic literary critic *Ḍiyā' aṣ-Ṣaḍīqī* claims that the short stories in the Gulf states may be classified into three types: social and rectifying, romantic and realistic.²⁰ According to *Ḍiyā' aṣ-Ṣaḍīqī*, the first type is characteristic of the first phase of the short story's development. It is closely related to social issues and representation of tradition and its impact on life; it frequently uses descriptions of nature to reveal specific problems (the critic mentions here, among others, the works of 'Abd ar-Riḍā as-Ṣiġwānī). The romantic type relates to social problems too, but it also strongly emphasises the question of emotions, especially those relating to women's situation in the world, and yearning for the past. According to the author, the third type, the realistic one, is currently the prevailing trend in short-story writing; it is often used in combination with other artistic techniques (cf. Muḥammad al-Murr).

Another critic, Ar-Rašīd Abū Ša'īr, while admitting the incomplete achievement of the Emiratian short story, claims that the dominant characteristics and trends in the short story may already, be defined. His findings are to a large extent consistent with the opinions and trends specified above, but they also provide some more detailed insights. Ar-Rašīd Abū Ša'īr distinguishes three trends in the development of the short story, namely, romantic, realistic and symbolic.²¹ Each of them is illustrated by relevant examples which reasonably justify his classification: the romantic trend is exemplified by the work of such writers as Šayḥa Mubārak an-Nāḥī, 'Alī 'Abd al-'Azīz aš-Šarḥān and Su'ād al-'Urāyīm; the realistic – 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad and Muḥammad al-Murr; and the symbolic and mythic – Maryam Ġum'a Faraġ and Salmā Maṭar Sayf.²²

After 1979, the form of short stories began to change rapidly. This date marked the beginning of a new cultural era which has lasted until the present. The short story became more mature in terms of artistic achievement, while the range of its topics increased significantly, though, obviously enough, it cannot be argued even now that

²⁰ Cf. *Ḍiyā' aṣ-Ṣaḍīqī*, *Malāmīh aš-šaḥṣīyya al-ḥalīġīyya fī qīṣaš al-marḥala at-tānawīyya fī al-Imārāt*, "Šu'un adabīyya" 2005, No. 48, pp. 22–25.

²¹ Ar-Rašīd Abū Ša'īr, *Madḥal ilā al-qīṣa al-qāṣira...*, op. cit., p. 33.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 33.

the Emiratian short story has fully achieved the vital artistic assumptions and found its discrete form.²³

According to ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, the contemporary Emiratian short story is still seeking its identity:

“There are not any established directions in this art. Many writers are still looking for new experiences to consolidate their style. (...) After a few years of experience and mistakes, despite its initial success, the short story in the United Arab Emirates is still making its way to identify its genuine form, shape and character.”²⁴

In the opinion of Ḍiyā’ Aṣ-Ṣaḍīqī’, Emiratian short stories are based on three main elements. The first is their main character – a woman, a man or an immigrant. Immigrants are servants; men are masters whose relationship with the family is often tense; women are often presented either as a symbol of the past, i.e. personalised as grandmothers, or as suffering or cheated women. Women as mothers, sisters, or simply women who are loved are infrequent in the stories. The second element in writings is the place of action – village, desert, sea, town or city, while the third component is time – the past or the present.²⁵

In some writers, a realistic trend seems to prevail, while others appear to be more concerned about personal anxiety (for instance, concerning social issues) which is often the most valid element in their writings.

In the summary, it should be emphasised that in the case of the United Arab Emirates the tradition of writing short stories is very young, and that these stories are virtually unknown in Europe. They are written in a classical literary language which has survived for almost one thousand and five hundred years, though the writers frequently and willingly use their local dialects to stress cultural differences or render every day life more adequately. A universal feature of this literature is the criticism of old traditions, the abuse of the paternal authority, and the oppression of women and children. Moreover, writers reinforce rapid social, economic, cultural and political changes currently underway, while bringing the Arab world and its background closer to us and presenting the abundance of genre and moral scenes. They serve as messengers, agents and interpreters of reality, as well as representatives of the creative thought and literary culture, regardless of the level of their work. They have exerted, and continue to exert, influence on behaviours which promote relaxing the absolutely binding restrictions on the freedom of people irrespective of their sex.

²³ Cf. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad, *Al-Qiṣṣa al-qashira...*, op. cit., p. 15.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

²⁵ Ḍiyā’ aṣ-Ṣaḍīqī, *Malāmih aṣ-ṣaḥṣhiyya al-ḥalīgiyya fī qīṣaṣ...*, op. cit., p. 19.