

---

---

## PAST AND FUTURE IN THE PROSE OF QATAR

N.B. Kovyreshina, E.V. Mussawi

Department of the Philology Faculty and  
the Humanities and Social Sciences Faculty  
of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (PFUR)  
*Mikluho Maklaya str., N 6, Moscow, Russia, 117198*

This article is dedicated to the literature of Qatar that is underinvestigated in the Russian Oriental Studies, to tangle of multi-stage forms in the works of the Arabic prose writer Nasser bin Abdallah al Maliki.

**Key words:** national literature of Qatar, genesis aspects, personalias, “symbiosis” of traditions, artistic influence, novel writing.

It is rather difficult to trace birth of any national literature in the Arab world as far as there are a lot of Arabic literature (or literatures) scientists with their own ideas, who differ from each other by different understanding of some literary processes, special tendencies in the history of development and specific character of genres formation. Up to the XIX<sup>th</sup> century Arabic literature existed as some traditional unity mainly in the terms of canons of classical Islamic Middle Ages. The process of literature renewal begins in Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt, which were first influenced by the western culture after becoming centers of movement “an-Nahda” (“uprising”, “resurrection”). Chronologically this movement can be divided into two stages: “new” (till the mid-XX-century) and “modern” (contemporary) literature. However, it is unacceptable to talk about such chronological stages concerning genesis of national Arabic literatures in such countries as Mashreq and Maghreb, as the majority of Arab countries saw literature renewal only in the 40s of the XX<sup>th</sup> century (Jordan, Yemen, and Morocco), and the others (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar) only in the 60s of the past century. Because of this chronological “retard” it becomes possible to distinguish a set of genetic traits in the literatures of some Arab countries. All modern national literatures are an integral part of pan-Arabic literature written in the Arabic language and having unified tradition going back to the early Middle Ages. At the same time literatures of Jordan, Yemen, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other countries were originating and developing under the influence of both Occidental and more advanced oriental, in the process of “an-Nahda”, literatures of Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, which were far ahead of the other Arab countries concerning the matter of creation of new prose genres, artistic idioms, and change of the theme of writings [2, p. 4]. Arguably, works of mature classic writers of new Egyptian and Syrian and Lebanese literatures (Jirji Zaydan, Mikhail Nwaima, Mahmud Taymur, Taufik al-Khakim and many others) can be considered to be some “school of art” for national authors of “young” Arabic literatures. The writers assimilated classical principles of artistic expression, traditions and findings of their predecessors very fast, bringing in their own characters and “findings” of expression. “Imitateness” touches to a greater extent expressive means of artistic presentation of reality and is derivative, as far as substantive aspect of emerging literature

of Arab countries is rather specific and diverse. Besides, double-quick formation of Arabic literatures makes itself evident in the fact that the writers choose rather prose genres — novels, stories, fiction, though the poetry prevails in a number of literatures of the Arabian Peninsula as it is considered to be “Chronicles” of the Arab ethnic group, and nowadays “verses in prose” gain in popularity more and more. All these traits can be traced in a number of modern literatures of the Arab world, including that of Qatar.

It was the 60s of the XX<sup>th</sup> century that saw the “birth” of national Qatari literature, though some pioneer works of Qatari literature were published in the 50s. At the initial stage of the development of Qatari literature the prose, as it also happened in the Arabic classics, was greatly behind the poetry. First essays of national prose are represented by “small” genres, which were closely related to journalism, raising urgent problems of social and cultural development of country. It was a hike in economics, politics and finances, and the government’s focus on national interests while creating developed and highly literate society that enabled Qatar to make a great progress in all spheres of life. Nowadays, Qatar is one of the most advanced and highly powered countries of the Arabian Peninsula [3]. It originated in the latter half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century when a small country (22 thousand square kilometers in area) with a small population of 260 thousand, whereof only 32.7% were natives [4, p.5], proved to be able, among others with the help of media, to mobilize social forces, and first of all the youth. At the time amongst 14 periodicals eight (“News of Qatar Petroleum Company” — “Ahbar sharika naft Qatar”, “Doha”, “Arabic World” — “Al Uruba”, “New Bay” — “al-Halij al-jadid”, “The Epoch” — “al-Ahd”, “The Jewel” — “al-Jwahara”, “The Arabs” — “al-Arab”, and “The Banner” — “ar-Rayah”) paid great attention to the issues of education, enlightenment, culture, literature, and preservation of the Arabic language and national heritage [5, p. 192].

In 2012, Muhammad Hassan al-Kavari, Head of the Research Office under the Qatar Department of Culture, published his book “Guide to Qatar writers” (“Dalil al-muallifin al-qatariyin”), aiming to introduce the most outstanding figures of the country’s social life (226 personalities) to his readers and to experts. All these people contributed significantly to diplomacy, policy, jurisprudence, management, medicine, social sciences, culture, Islamic researches, and literature. Each entry devoted to a separate author consists of background, information on the sphere of activity, publications and e-mail address. The book comprises information on 8 novelists, 37 short-story writers (10 of them children's book writers), 13 playwrights, 40 poets of different styles, 14 political writers, 4 translators, 21 literary scholars and one critic.

Modern Qatar literature preserves features of the Arabic classics and educational ideals of the Modern Age, and appeals to ideological and artistic conquest of the West-European literature. This “symbiosis” of traditions of common Arabic heritage and diverse forms of foreign literature reception is one of the formal features of the national uniqueness of Qatar literature, especially of its prose. Works of “small prose” are bound by common tendency — appeal to development of national identity in the society, education of young people on the basis of conscience and good morals, patriotism, and focus on individual improvement. Didactic origin can be traced both in familiar literature genres, such as: fairy-tales, parables, and fables of preaching “example” going back to folk

origin, and in new genres — short stories, novels that differ by their artistic structure from the old ones but nevertheless use old oral and written traditions. Collection of short stories of Nasser bin Abdallah al-Maliki (born 1966) can be considered as an example of such a focus on new conquests based on tradition. He was a highly educated person, who studied in England and the USA, a journalist, a literary man and a wrestling coach. N. al-Maliki is the author of the collection of stories called “An Advisor and a Listener” (“an-Nasih va ar-Rabih”). The Qatar writer uses conversation as an optimum form of expression of his ideas, and at that the main characters are animals and birds. Narrative ingenuity of the author lies in his ability to keep the action itself out only hinting (“*ki-naya*”) at it, and to make the reasoning and the moral, confirmed by a bunch of examples from the world and Arabic folklore, a central part of story. In the opinion of the author, it is the intriguing narrative style aiming to “instruct by amusing” that is the most important thing. According to the author the sermons of the book are delivered to the readers in the form of sequent entertaining stories (“*makama*”) about life in the forest that are narrated by two “little songbirds” [6, p. 9]. The story begins in keeping with the best medieval traditions of the Arabic fairy-tails in nature’s lap: «Once upon a time there lived two little birds... They woke at dawn / And fell asleep before the light falls... They were free day-long / Now they chased away their laziness / Then they were cooing in the nest/ About how huge the world is around them» [6, p. 11]. Then the author narrates using the poetic prose of the “predetermination and destiny” (“*al-kadaa va al-ka-dar*”) of these birds, of hardship that fell to the lot of inhabitants of the forest, when the birdmen came. Nasyh “was smart and reached his goals”, but he “got above himself” and for the sake of “a handful of seeds” he was captivated and found himself in a song-bird cage in the zoo. Rabih grieved about him for a long time, but could not help his friend, and then was also caught and put into the same cage. During the conversations these friends bring forth human problems of external invasion, freedom, divine decree, possibility to make own life choice, to do this or that deed. The author’s sermons represent a limitless number of moral lessons, instructions, precautions, quips and proverbs focused on weal and good. These short and simple amusing stories about animals’ life cause positive emotions, inspire to positive actions, hint at appropriate behaviour pattern in one real-life situation or another. Mixture of symbols and reality, didactic style of stories of N. al-Maliki are mainly devoted to the establishment of abstract ideals of justice and the good that are meant to triumph over the evil. According to their genre traits they are close to the fairy-tales and fables dated back to the classic examples of the Oriental prose such as: “*Kalila and Dimna*”, and to such European literary tradition as Aesop’s and I.A. Krylov’s fables, where people are main characters but under the guise of animals.

The stories of Nasser bin Abdallah al-Maliki can be characterized as “fairy-tales for adults”. It is a collection of short prose stories that are aphoristic and succinct. Among them we can find satiric fairy-tales, short sketches, fable-like short stories, philosophic fairy-tales, and all of them are really multi-layered. In his works the author turns into ridicule such things as cruelty (“*A Snake and a Man*”, “*A Wolf and A Fox*”), precipitance (“*A Lion and a Weasel*), greediness (*A Fox and a Hunter*), conceit and many other sins. The whole collection is imbued with the humane idea to educate and to enlighten the reader, with the author’s aspiration to see sense in small life events.

The Qatar writer continues transformation of medieval Arabic genres “adaba” into modern prose genres. Such is his novel “The Curse of the Sea” (“Laana al-Bahr”, 2008) consisting of 8 chapter-novels with one main character. The author keeps up to the traditional Arabic opinion concerning the Sea, which according to the writers of the countries of the Arabian Gulf (the Persian Gulf) is a source of life and death, poverty and wealth, love and hatred.

Contemporary Qatar literature is developing as certain forms of co-existence of multi-stage writer’s creative products. The reason for this is the law of accelerated development of this national literature.

New style of writing is on the one hand a detached outlook on the realities of the prosperous and fast growing society which sees its future in the well-educated and well-bred youth constant in their devotion to the ideals of national patriotism and defending the reputation of their country in the world.

### REFERENCES

- [1] *Kirpichenko V.N.* New Arabic Literature // Study of Oriental Literatures. Russia, XX<sup>th</sup> century. — M., Oriental Literature, 2002.
- [2] *Dolinina A.A.* An outline of history of modern age Arabic literature. Egypt and Syria. — M., Science, 1973.
- [3] Access mode: [ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qatar](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qatar)
- [4] Aisha al-Saliti. Sand grains of Desert: formation and development of Qatar press media (Buzur as-Sahraa: nashat al-makala va tatavvuruha fi Qatar). — Doha, Dar Qatarii bin Fadjaa, 1984.
- [5] Nasser bin Abdallah al-Maliki. Short story in Qatar (al-Kissa al-kasira fi Qatar). — Alim al-fikr, Kuwait, № 28, 1999.
- [6] Nasser bin Abdallah al-Maliki. An Adviser and a Listener (an-Nasih va ar-Rabih). — Qatar, Matabia ar-Raya, 2008.
- [7] Nasser bin Abdallah al-Maliki. “The Curse of the Sea” (“Laana al-bahr”). — Doha, Dar al-kutub al-qatariyya, 2008.

## ПРОШЛОЕ И БУДУЩЕЕ В ПРОЗЕ КАТАРА

**Н.Б. Ковыршина, Е.В. Миссауи**

Кафедра иностранных языков  
Филологический факультет  
Кафедра иностранных языков  
Факультет гуманитарных и социальных наук  
Российский университет дружбы народов  
ул. Миклухо-Маклая, 6, Москва, Россия, 117198

Статья посвящена малоисследованной в российском востоковедении литературе Катара, перелетению полистадиальных форм в творчестве арабского прозаика Насера бен Абдаллы ал-Малики.

**Ключевые слова:** национальная литература Катара, особенности генезиса, персоналии, «симбиоз» традиций, художественные влияния, новеллистика.