

POETICS OF MODERN EMIRATE PROSE IN THE STORIES OF MUHAMMAD MURR AND AHMAD ABDULHAMID: AESTHETICS OF REALISM, MODERNISM AND MAGIC REALISM

Ahmedova Shahlo Irgashbaevna

Associate professor, Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies

+99890 3167071

Kamolotsari2020@mail.ru

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1080-8252>

Abstract. This article analyzes the work of two prominent representatives of the contemporary short story genre in the United Arab Emirates, Muhammad Murr and Ahmed Abdulhamid. Muhammad Murr's stories realistically and satirically cover the social and domestic life of modern Dubai, the process of urbanization, the formation of the middle class, and the clash of traditional marriage thinking with modern life. Ahmed Abdulhamid's stories, on the other hand, are dominated by the styles of modernism and magical realism, and the themes of the loss of a person's "I" under the influence of globalization, migration, and social inequality are expressed through spiritual and symbolic images. In the works of the two writers, realistic facts, modernist artistic style, and folklore poetics are combined with each other, forming a new aesthetic paradigm in modern Arab prose. The authors' works are analyzed based on the theme, plot structure, system of images, and features of artistic style.

Keywords: UAE literature, Muhammad Murr, Ahmad Abdulhamid, realism, modernism, magic realism, modern Dubai, narrative genre.

Introduction: A broad picture of contemporary Emirati life is depicted in the stories of Muhammad Murr (born 1954 in Dubai), the most prominent Emirati short story writer of the 20th century. Educated in the US, the author began his career at the United Arab Emirates Publishing House Media in the second half of the 1970s, and published a collection of short stories in the early 1990s. "A different kind of love"(Khubb min nau ahar, 1978), "Last chance"(al-Fursa al-akhira, 1981), Friendship(Almsgiving, 1981), "Some sympathy"(Shay min al-khanan, 1985), "Unexpectedness"(al-Mufadja, 1985), "Jasmin"(Yasmin, 1986), "Habbuba"(1986) "Destiny" (Nasib, 1986), "Space in the heart" (Makan fi-l-qalb, 1988), "Apple of the eye" (Kurrat al-ain, 1988), "Delicate, elegant voice" (as-Saut an-naim, 1989).

Muhammad Murr describes the life, that is, the domestic side of modern Dubai has acquired the status of a writer: most of his plots are real life events based on various episodes of the fate of real Dubai residents. Of course, not all of these plots rise to the level of broad generalizations (the situations and characters described are, otherwise, extremely individual, unusually paradoxical), but together they form a broad panorama of the social and private life of the middle class of modern Dubai Arabs. Muhammad Murr's authorial style is distinguished by its extreme simplicity and clarity. In general, the linguistic "decorations" characteristic of Arabic prose, as well as modernist experiments with the structure and imagery of the story, are alien to him. The writer's inherent observation is clearly expressed in the very reliable description of various life situations that the reader can easily recognize. The dialogues in his stories are always lively and natural, they correspond to the moment. A large number of local-historical, cultural and topographical details, which paint a realistic picture of modern Dubai, are used is also formed due to the reliable image of reality.

Of course, Murr's stories, which satirically reflect the socio-cultural problems typical of modern Dubai society, have the greatest artistic value. This is especially true of plots such as the archaic



tradition of family marriage, that is, marriage based on the choice of parents based on the idea of the bride's family.

The hero of the story "Fate" is a young, self-confident officer who decides to get married and asks his mother and aunts to choose a bride. The women make a list of candidates for the bride, analyze their origin, family traditions, customs and financial aspects, and go to court. However, one by one, the parents of the selected, planned candidate refuse. The officer, who has lost confidence in himself and despairs, accidentally meets a girl. He does not know anything about this girl's family, and after a while they become happy and enter into a family union, that is, marriage.

The hero of the story "How Hamad Gavi Got Married", on the contrary, does not yet think about getting married. However, his mother, worried about her son's continued bachelorhood, obtains his consent to marriage while he is half-conscious and goes to betroth a neighbor's daughter. The young man is forced to marry, because if he does not marry, he will face quarrels and dishonor at home. In the story "Jasmine", a young man breaks Muslim traditions and falls in love with a girl he meets by chance in the market who smiles at him openly. He follows her and her mother for several days, during which time she always smiles at him, and finally learns the address of the place where the women live. The young man sends his relatives to betroth the girl to the girl's house, but the neighbors tell him the strange news that the girl he has chosen is mentally retarded. Such an unexpected ending to stories written in the spirit of O.Gandhi is typical for the stories of the writer-Murr.

Some of Al-Murr's stories are devoted to the life of UAE students in the USA, about which the writer not only heard, but also lived such a life himself. These stories very interestingly depict the experience of Emiratis getting acquainted with Western culture. Many humorous moments are found in these situations. The writer demonstrates an excellent knowledge of Western culture, including pop culture, and the mentality of the Western person. In the story "Notes (Letters) of an English Wife" the mentality of the Western person is especially vividly demonstrated: in the language of an English woman living in Dubai with her Emirati husband, the writer expresses the impressions that a Western person receives from Arab society, which are extremely clear for an Arab. Below are quotes that convey this external view of Arab society. "The Arabs are generous even in their feelings. When they love, it is passionate, boundless love. When they hate, it is a very strong hatred. It is very strange that their strong love can turn very quickly into a strong hatred, and this hatred into an unexpectedly strong love [1:256].

"Yesterday I went to the wedding of one of Ahmad's sisters, Fatima, and one of his friends." The wedding was very beautiful, Fatima told the bride about the wealth of her family, her father being a dealer for Japanese manufacturers in Dubai, and the bride being an old maid, meaning she was 28 years old. Fatima told the bride that her father had forced her to marry him, that the groom was her nephew, and that he was a year younger than her, and that her father-in-law had appointed her as the director of one of his companies. Don't be surprised by such conversations and gossip: Arab women (and men too) love to gossip. The women who came to the wedding had a lot of expensive things - bracelets, rings, earrings, various chains, all kinds of small and large. There were a lot of diamonds, but there were also a lot of sapphires, turquoises, and rubies. The jewels from this wedding were enough to fill several London jewellers' shops." [2:253-254]

"Watching TV here is very boring. The English-language channel starts working after 5pm, and they show cultural programmes and old English soap operas. The news is very boring. By the way, I watch some Arab soap operas and TV shows, in which the actors speak very loudly, as if they were talking to the deaf. These are all melodramas about love and sacrifice, most of which, as Fatima said, are unbelievable even for the Arab audience. But all Arabs, especially women, love them: there are a lot of tears in these soap operas, and Arabs love tears, and they cry even in



scenes that are not so sad and emotional. But it is strange to see a person immediately after crying laughing and being happy, as if he had not just cried. And not only young children, but also adults behave in this way.” [2:255]

“Arabs apply a lot of mascara to their eyelashes, paint their lips in bright colors, and apply powder. Many of them use white lipstick as a plaster to hide their dark skin (in the Arab idea of beauty, a fair body and skin are considered preferable). In addition, they use various types of antimony to paint their eyes. Most of them have beautiful large eyes that do not require antimony. In addition, they spray several perfumes on their bodies and clothes at the same time. They do not limit themselves to Western-made perfumes (French perfumes in Dubai are cheaper than in London, but may not be authentic). They may add to it various types of Indian or other oriental perfumes and cosmetic powders. This strange and diverse mixture of fragrances turns a woman into a walking perfume shop.” [2: 253-256]

In addition, it is worth noting that the writer is tolerant of the consumption of alcoholic beverages, which are prohibited by Islam, and of extramarital affairs. According to his plot, extramarital affairs are a characteristic aspect of the life of the middle-class UAE.

In some stories, Al-Murr reveals the theme of immigrants in the Emirates. In these stories, the fate of Asian immigrants is mostly sad. For example, the hero of the story “Advertisement in the Newspaper” mercilessly kills a Pakistani immigrant because he refuses to work in the drug trade in the Emirates. In this case, they know that the murder will remain hidden, since the identity of the deceased is of no interest to anyone. In the story “Under the Fan,” another Pakistani commits suicide because his long-time Emirati “employers” refuse to give him the money he needs to marry the daughter he loves. The author, of course, does not blame ordinary Emirati employers; he shows how Asian immigrants in the UAE are treated as “second-class” people.

The stories of Muhammad Murr can be called a real guide to the new life of the United Arab Emirates. Perhaps this is why this collection of stories has attracted foreigners. Both collections of stories have been translated into English and published. [3]

Ahmad Abdulhamid (born in Dubai in 1957) vividly portrays the socio-economic and cultural problems of modern Emirates in his works. This author combines various artistic directions and different narrative styles in his work and has received great attention from art critics. In the writer's first collection of stories, entitled "Swimming in the Eyes of the Furious Gulf" (as-Sibaha fi aynay khalij yatawahhash, 1982), one can see the dominance of two interrelated themes in the writer's work: this is a description of the inner world of a person who is exhausted by life, unable to adapt to the system of socio-economic relations that is new to the United Arab Emirates, and a criticism of social inequality in the UAE.

The theme of longing for a simple life in the past and the rejection of the consumer values of the oil era is echoed in the first story of the collection of stories called “The Palm Tree Said to the Sea”. These stories combine elements of romanticism and magical realism. In the spirit of a folk tale, a lonely palm tree tells the story of two lovers in the sea, the history of the relationship and death of a simple fisherman and the captain's wife. From this love a child named Said was born. He is depicted as the hero of the story. Living in a modern multinational metropolis, Said remembers his grandmother's stories about the fear of the palm tree in front of oil and the eventual death of the palm tree. The next story, “The Thirst of Palm Trees”, the hero of the rich businessmen and a poor servant who is disgusted with his fate, almost turns into a murderer when he angrily strangles a foreigner who hit a little Arab girl in his company car. The hero of the story “Arzan al-Maghhdub” tells about himself in the second person. He is a petroleum engineer, a graduate of a British university, who has been looking for a suitable job in the UAE for several years, but cannot find it and because of this he loses his beloved wife. He loses hope for the future and eventually becomes a drinker.



The hero of the story "Fish" is an old former fisherman. Unable to adapt to the conditions of the oil industry, he works as a seller in the fish market. One day a buyer stops at his stall - this is his former fishing friend, who has now become a rich man. He offers Rashdan a job as a guard on his land. However, Rashdan rejects this offer out of pride, because this land once belonged to him and he sold it when he needed it. In the story "A Ray of Light," two sons from a poor family are searching for something useful in a garbage dump near modern skyscrapers. One of them finds a pair of dirty pants and, after washing them in the sea, is happy to finally get the new underwear his father had promised him long ago.

The hero of the story "The Thirst Song" is a rich young man who accidentally finds himself in an old village in Dubai, where Asian immigrants live. There, he ends up in the bed of a woman who is engaged in prostitution in order not to die of hunger. The impression of such physical and mental poverty and filth makes the young man look at natural and human joys with different eyes, which at first seemed boring to him.

In his story called "The Man from Benghazi", a Pakistani migrant worker watches two European women lying on a mountainside. And he reflects on his ten years of life in the United Arab Emirates, where he was deprived of attention and love. His life with prostitutes among the immigrants did not improve his life and caused him to suffer because he violated the rights of his honorable father, who was respected in his village. As he returns to his rented apartment, where he lives with nine other Pakistani immigrants, the protagonist unexpectedly makes the decision to return home. However, the ending of the story remains open.

The mental state of the central characters of some stories is reflected by the internal monologue that flows into the writer's stream of consciousness. In this case, objective reality recedes into the background and becomes vague, which is especially noticeable in psychological stories such as "Other Works" and "The White Bird in the Dark Night". Such stories should be considered works of modernist direction.

In his next two collections, entitled "The worker" (al-Bidar, 1987) and "At the Edge of the Sun" (Ala Hafat al-Nahar, 1992), the writer presented a number of characteristic images of everyday life in Jumeirah, one of the areas of Dubai where the rich live. These images show the events of the transition of the emirates from the old way of life to the new, that is, the time when the heroes of these stories belong to the "wonderful times" (zaman ajaib). The changing lifestyles of Jumeirah form the backdrop against which individual human destinies are depicted. These destinies are sometimes tragic, such as the stories "Chopki" or "Halola-SEL", but in most cases they are dramatic or cause sadness. These include stories such as "Sunset Situation", "Worker", "Unfinished Business", "The Lazy Bird". All these destinies, to one degree or another, describe the painful processes of the breakdown of traditional mentality and the change in the nature of socio-economic relations that took place in the Emirates in the 1960s and 1970s.

The protagonist of the story "Halola-SEL", Halal, used to carry loads with the help of his donkey named Masud throughout his life. He loved this donkey "like his own son and cared for it more than his wife, Hatin". [4:96]. Halal became poor when his own cars appeared in the Emirates. He was forced to work as a school guard. Halal could not live without his donkey, because he would only part with it at night. Therefore, for the first time, he rode a donkey and began to travel to and from his new job on a donkey, and the couple, who had come from the "past world", amazed passengers and drivers. [5:102]

The new event that changed Halal's life was an offer from one of the banks to buy his house and land for a large sum of money. With this money, Halal could build a big house in another area, buy a car and cover other expenses. Halal Masood, who owned a white Mercedes 500-SEL and a house, could not find any other occupation, and as a result he became a glutton. His master, Halal, drove his car to school for Indian immigrants.



In the mornings, Halal would get up and “go down from the top floor of his house and into his beautiful walled courtyard, which was decorated with beautiful flowers and planted with trees, and he would take a dry cloth from his car, heat water and wipe his car as if it were a toy.” [5:108] That is, he would do the same thing as he looked at Masood.

“Halal’s days were monotonous and boring. He did not notice the passage of time, he only felt the presence of these unexpected and strange situations. He knew that there was something magical - from this new world Halal would leave for the depths of silence, for the depths of doubts, for the thoughts that filled his mind.” [5:108] When the dead body of a donkey was found stuck between the walls of the buildings under construction near his house, Halal recalled his own familiar words: “The era of donkeys is over.” [5:110] “But Halal, who kept the silence like death, sat with the submission of a bird, like a corpse falling on the ground of a grave or a wounded bird caught by a skillful hunter, could only look with amazement” [5:110].

The fate of the Omani immigrant Murish, the hero of the story "The worker", is also tragic. For 30 years, he cultivated date palms and slaughtered livestock for the people of Jumeirah. Murish, who could not marry due to poverty, lived alone. After the oil era, no one needed his labor, and he returned to Oman. However, since he did not have any documents, the Omani government did not allow him to cross the border. He could not find a new job in the emirate either, because he did not have an Emirati citizenship document, and as a result, poverty forced him to commit suicide.

"The Bird Left Behind" is about the tragedy of Gharib, the hero of the story. As a teenager, he lived in the Al-Buraimi oasis of Oman without the care of his parents, who had emigrated with the advent of the oil era. In his youth, he began to sniff the fuel that was found in cars in Jumeirah. He was lonely, no one needed him. Unlike most of his peers, he did not even have a school education. At the age of 20, he was already a taxi driver and died on a fishing boat.

The author created the images of Murish in the story "Mardikor" and Gharib in the story "The Leftover Bird" in a style that was new to him, that is, characteristic of the postmodernist genre of literature. Both images are formed from memories that come from time to time, with no clearly defined time, and therefore they are incomprehensible and improbable. Perhaps this is precisely where the author's desire, on the one hand, to present these images as embodied in a real "collective memory". There is no "omnipotent voice" in this. But there is a contradictory multiplicity of voices. On the other hand, the desire of the mass consciousness, conditioned by the lifestyle and traditional forms of the Emiratis of that time, found expression. This new approach of the writer is most clearly manifested in the story “The Unexpected Story”: the image of Muhammad Salih, a poor man living in Jumeirah, who is either insane, divine, or more bizarre, is formed from various considerations - realistic memories, childhood fears, gossip, religious fantasies, miraculous things from folklore. The skillfully inserted folklore events into the story, which is based on the author’s real childhood memories, bring this story topologically closer to the direction called “magical realism” that has spread in Arabic literature since the 1980s [6:265-276].

According to some critics, [7:58-59] a specific example of magical realism is another story of the writer - “A Momentary Blow of the Wind”. The protagonist of the story, the “narrator” Nahil ibn Rajil Ari, a poor man named, wanders the city at night, and the wind brings him the smell of meat that he has not eaten for many years, forcing him to enter a butcher shop. Knowing that the price of meat has increased fourfold in a few years, Nahil understands that he cannot buy meat. However, in his imagination, he sees his wife Mashuka and children eating various meat dishes. Unable to get rid of the fat, Nahil grabs the butcher’s knife. The butcher, laughing, first cuts off his fingers, then cuts him into pieces and hangs him in the shop. He throws Nahil’s head and entrails into the garbage, and after a while, ants come out of this garbage can. The water buffalo



enters the sewer and waits for dawn to come out again, but in the morning the city cleaners spray it with medicine, and it flows dead down the sewage pipe into the sea. There, it is swallowed by a fish. "Thus, they used to tell about Nakheel ibn Ari, whose nickname was Abu Jai Mathun," the author concludes his story. "One night, he was wandering around, and suddenly a wind blew over him, but no one told him that Abu Jai had become a water buffalo, and no one told his wife Mashuka and his children" [8:34-35].

Conclusion: In addition to this new writing style, Abdulhamid Ahmed used other styles in his two collections of stories: realistic (the stories "Underground Things" and "Arab Bridges" are dedicated to the difficult life of immigrants in the UAE), modernist (the stories "Garbage Can" and "Echo" depict the "stream of consciousness of an alienated person", and allegorical surrealism in the story "Passion"). It is also worth noting the variability of the writer's language style - sometimes the writer writes extremely briefly, almost in a "telegraphic" style, and sometimes in a style free from discreteness, giving a continuous flow of thought, but in both cases his language is extremely figurative, full of vivid comparisons and metaphors.

Since the early 1980s, the complex language of the story, saturated with highly decorative lexical-syntactic constructions of comparisons and metaphors characteristic of Arabic poetry, has become a popular literary tool for many Arab, including Arabist, writers. became the main feature of the style. The distinctive style that emerged in the work of the modernist Egyptian short story writers of the 1960s [9:165] combined the "poeticization" of the narrative language with modernist aesthetics, and was especially popular among women writers. [6:253-257] G. Ramsay describes this style as follows: "Using this style, the modernist writers of the Persian Gulf countries try to restore the image that traditionally occupied a central place in Arabic literature, and this image was the question of "how to write", which was considered more important than the question of "what to write about?" In other words, based on the traditional condition of Arabic literature, the primacy of form over content, including the language of the work, they simultaneously use the phenomenal realism adopted from Western literature. Like the perception of poetry, this style requires active interaction between the reader and the text in the process of understanding the meaning of the text. In addition, the works of these writers adhere to the principles of modernism, such as the complexity of form and the liberation of the story from the established framework of the plot. [10:374] And: "a distinctive feature of their works is the poetic style, in which the authors use the rich vocabulary and rhetorical techniques of the Arabic literary language. Their literary prose is distinguished by the features characteristic of lyricism, namely rhetorical devices, metaphor, other forms of speech, double and multiple meanings, indirect reference to one thing or another." [10:382] In conclusion, it can be said that the linguistic style of such a story requires the reader to collect, combine and interpret in detail the fragmentary and metaphorical information about the characters and plot, which leads to an understanding of the meaning of the text.

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