

ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЕНИЕ

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**MODERN ARABIC FICTION:
A STUDY OF THE IRAQI WRITER LUTFIYA AL-DULAYMI**

The article provides a brief overview of the status of women's literature in modern Iraq. The author pays attention to the biography and analysis of the literary works of the famous modern Iraqi woman-writer Lutfiya al-Dulaymi, who currently lives in Jordan. Lutfiya al-Dulaymi offers the reader new and relevant topics. Thanks to her works we get an opportunity to look at modern Iraq through the eyes of a woman. Refs 9. Figs 6.

Keywords: Arabic literature, Iraqi literature, modern literature, woman-writers, Iraqi woman-writer.

**ОСОБЕННОСТИ СОВРЕМЕННОЙ ЖЕНСКОЙ АРАБСКОЙ ПРОЗЫ
НА ПРИМЕРЕ ТВОРЧЕСТВА ИРАКСКОЙ ПИСАТЕЛЬНИЦЫ
ЛУТФИЙИ АЛ-ДУЛАЙМИ***А. А. Мокрушина*

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Сегодня интерес к современной арабской литературе, в том числе к женской литературе отдельных арабских стран, постепенно возрастает. Если совсем недавно существовало лишь ограниченное количество работ, освещающих процессы, происходящие в арабской литературе, то теперь ситуация постепенно меняется. В статье представлен краткий обзор положения женской литературы на территории современного Ирака. Подробное внимание автор уделяет биографии и анализу творчества известной современной иракской писательницы Лутфийи ал-Дулайми, которая живет в Иордании. Лутфийа ал-Дулайми предлагает читателю новые актуальные темы, благодаря ее произведениям мы получаем возможность взглянуть на современный Ирак глазами женщины. Библиогр. 9 назв. Ил. 6.

Ключевые слова: арабская литература, иракская литература, современная литература, женщины-писательницы, иракская писательница.

There is an increasing interest in modern Arabic literature including women writers. The situation when just a few studies covered the evolution of Arabic literature is gradually changing. Despite the fact that for various reasons very few literary works written by Arab authors have been translated into Russian researchers are starting to express an increasing

interest in the field. The Internet is playing a major disseminating role exposing the global readership to modern Arab authors.

Scholars believe that the history of feminist literature in Iraq can be traced back to the early Islamic period. The first authors included poets Salma b. Malik bint Huzayfa or Umm Zamal (أم زمل / سلمى بن مالك بنت حذيفة); Layla al-Ahyaliya (ليلى الأخيلية) whose talent was so famous that she clashed with the ruler of Iraq al-Hajjaj al-Saqafi (الحجاج الثقافي) in a literary contest; and Zubayda bint Jafar (زبيدة بنت جعفر), the wife of Caliph Harun al-Rašid (هارون الرشيد) who also was famous for his literary exploits.

Nevertheless, Arab feminist literature had been little known for the most part of its history until it all but disappeared during the Turkish rule in Iraq.

In the early 20th century, the situation was still quite complicated due to the fact that few women were involved in education. However, it was then that wealthy parents became conscious of the importance of educating their daughters and cultivating their literary tastes. A large number of Arab women writers were born in the first decades of the 20th century. They include Salma Abd al-Razzaq Malika (سلمى الرزاق ملكة) known as Umm Nizar (أم نزار) Fatina Naib (فاتنة نايب) writing under the pen name of Saduf al-Amiriya (سدوف الأميرية); Maqbula al-Hilli or Afra (عفراء/مقبولة الحلي) and others. Thus, women writers' role in society changes alongside major political, economic and social transformations taking place in the country. New names enter the Iraqi literary stage to become leading Arab authors [1, p. 179].

1937 saw publication of the first Iraqi short story written by a woman writer when Dalal Halil Safadi (دلال خليل صفدي) published the collection of short stories, *Events and Incidents*. According to many critics the pieces did not totally conform to the concept of short stories but rather presented rhetorical essays. Their message was a call to observe moral norms of society.

Roughly ten years later in 1948, Mališa Ishak (مليشة إسحاق) published her novel, *My Mind Is My Guide*. A more mature work in terms of content, it follows the main character developing her personality over a period of several decades.

It must be noted that morality and the woman's role in society were two favorite themes in Arabic feminist fiction. Later authors also approached these themes from different angles in their writing.

The 1950s-1960s novels focus on another topic: relationships within the family involving betrayal, and the woman's struggle against unfair treatment, cruelty and violence towards the woman. The literary critic Umar Talib (عمر طالب) highlighted these story lines in the works of Safira Jamal (سفيرة جمال), Samira al-Mana (سميرة المنى), Suhayla al-Husayni (سهيلة الحسيني) and Lutfiya al-Dulaymi (لطيفة الدليمي).

In this paper, we will provide a detailed analysis of Lutfiya al-Dulaymi's writings. Her name is known all over the world.

Lutfiya al-Dulaymi was born in 1939 in Baghdad. In 1966, she earned a Bachelor's degree in Arabic literature. Additionally, the future author studies English literature in Goldsmiths College, London. Lutfiya al-Dulaymi worked as



لطيفة الدليمي

Fig. 1. Iraqi writer Lutfiya al-Dulaymi [2]

a teacher and secretary to the editor in chief of the Foreign Culture publication. She also served as President of the Women's Cultural Forum in Baghdad, which she had founded.

1969 saw the publication of her first collection of short stories, *A Passage to the Sadness of Men*. In 1975, the author publishes another book, *Good Tidings*, in 1977 she publishes the short story, *Statue*, and in 1980 the collection, *I Wish You Loved*.

In 1984, Lutfiya al-Dulaymi decides to devote herself to writing. In 1986, she publishes *The World of Lonely Women*, which included a novel and a series of short stories. In 1987 and 1988, she publishes two novels: *Who Inherited the Heavens* and *Seeds of Fire*.

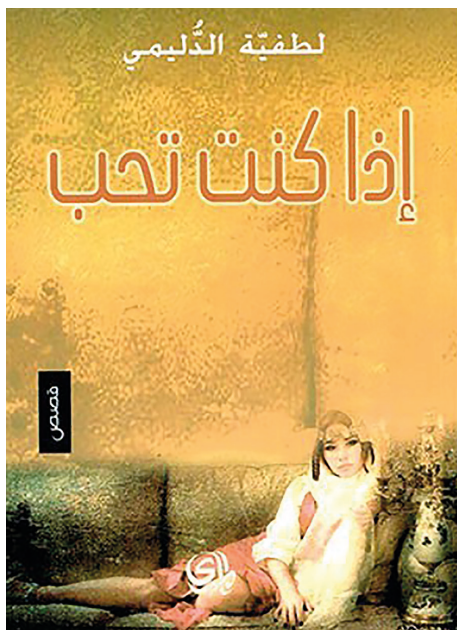


Fig. 2. Cover of the Collection (*I Wish You Loved* [3])

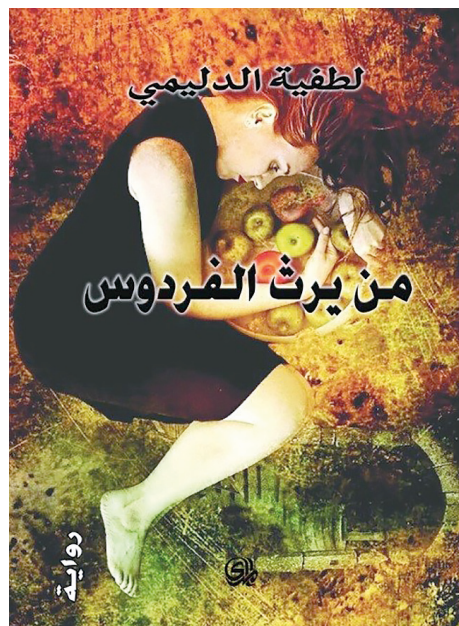


Fig. 3. Cover of the Novel (*Who Inherited the Heavens* [3])

In 1993, she writes a column for *al-Qaddisiya al-saqafiya* (القاديسية الثقافية), and in 1994 for *Al-Quds al-Arabi* (القدس العربي). In the same period, Lutfiya al-Dulaymi publishes several translations from English including the novel, *Snow Country* (1985)¹, by the Japanese writer *Yasunari Kawabata* whose name is quite well known to Russian readers, as well as the novel, *Clear Light of Day* (1989) by the Indian writer *Anita Desai*. Lutfiya al-Dulaymi translated from English a total of eight pieces of literature.

In 1999, Lutfiya al-Dulaymi wrote a research book, *Participants of Eternal Destiny*, that addressed the literary heritage of women writers in ancient Iraq.

The author's writings have been translated into European and Asian languages. The 1994 collection, *Sufi Music*, was awarded a prize for best literary work of the year. Unfortunately, there has been only one published Russian translation of Lutfiya al-Dulaymi. The short sketch, *Survive in a Land of Death*, was included in the anthology of contemporary Iraqi prose, *Pearls of the East*, in 2015. The short story should be considered a jour-

¹ The novel has been translated into Russian.

nalistic piece rather than a piece of fiction. Lutfiya al-Dulaymi recounts her normal day in native Baghdad with anguish and despair. The once peaceful city had suddenly become a battle ground. Such everyday things as making breakfast, reading a book or watching TV became luxuries people could not afford any more. The author's terrifying words echo in a reader's mind: At eight o'clock in the morning I normally talk to my artist friend Hanna. At designated times in the morning and in the evening we call each other to make sure we were both alive. ... This is our usual routine: to notify each other about where we are going that day to safeguard ourselves from surprises or accidental death [4, p. 286–287].

Lutfiya al-Dulaymi is also a playwright. Her play, *Sumerian Nights*, received an award as a play that successfully integrates Iraqi traditions.

In 1997, Lutfiya al-Dulaymi publishes a collection of essays entitled *The Hidden and Revealed*. The *Berega* Magazine dedicated its entire 5th issue to the writer in 2000, in which it published the article, *Lutfiya al-Dulaymi through the Prism of Novel Writing and Literary Theory*.

Lutfiya al-Dulaymi is a member of numerous literary unions and Editor-in-Chief of the monthly journal *Hala* (هالا), launched in 2005, which covers arts and culture.

To date, Lutfiya al-Dulaymi has published over twenty collections of short stories and novels, five plays, several film scripts and three collections of essays. She lives in Jordan.

The writer focuses on the life of an Arab woman with all its worries, problems and ideas. Who could describe this better than an Arab woman? In his preface to the collection of contemporary Iraqi short stories (1971), literary critic Fadhil Samir (فاضل سامر) referred to Lutfiya al-Dulaymi as the founder of a new realistic genre of literature [5].

The second central theme of the author is the current reality in Iraq. Over several years, Iraq has been suffering from war and destruction. Living in fear for one's life and for the lives of one's family has become part of the tragedy of existence in Iraq. Many Iraqis had to leave their country. Just as Lutfiya al-Dulaymi, who had for a long time refused to leave her native Baghdad despite insistent pleas of her relatives, had to move to Jordan in the end. She expresses her grief, which embraces the grief of the whole nation, as poignant and terrifying revelations of life during a war. The *al-Mada* (المدى) Magazine published an article highlighting the urgency and significance of Lutfiya al-Dulaymi's recent works [3].

The Arab woman writer's novel, *The Disappearance of Burkhan al-Kutubi*, talks about the hardships of an intellectual living in Iraq. In her rich language full of images and metaphors. She describes the suffering of man who has to sell his most precious possessions — his books. For him books mean everything, they are all his life. Critics point out that the author intentionally combines different styles in this novel. Poetry is followed by apocalyptic dialogues but the text remains completely realistic.

The author's more recent works include the novel, *Ladies of Saturn*, which came out in 2012. It has 9 chapters written as a diary. Diary entries are collected by the journalist Hanan al-Babili (حنان البابلي) who comes from one of the famous and respected families in Iraq [6]. The novel describes events that shook the country following the American invasion in 2003. The author starts her novel with questions answers to which she tries to find throughout the whole book. Lutfiya al-Dulaymi describes pictures resembling film footage: the horror ordinary people experienced after the first strikes on Baghdad through the witness's eyes [7]. The novel was so popular that it has been printed three times.

Her literary peers also praise Lutfiya al-Dulaymi's work very highly. Iraqi poet Dunya Mikhail, (born in 1965), who currently resides in the U.S.A., dedicated a poem to her.



Fig. 4. Ladies of Saturn (First edition [8])



Fig. 5. Ladies of Saturn (Second edition [9])

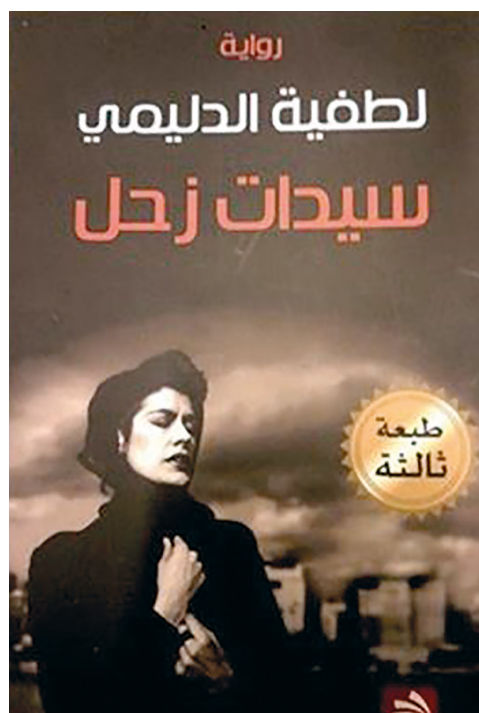


Fig. 6. Ladies of Saturn, Third edition [8]

The poem, *Not me... M*, resembles a lullaby a mother sings to her baby. It plants the reader's mind back in the time of his or her childhood. Critics believe that the mother's character represents Lutfiya al-Dulaymi [1, p. 190].

Despite anything, Iraqi feminist literature is developing. Starting with traditional poetry and simple novellas, Iraqi women writers have found new forms and genres to cover themes that would be relevant and interesting to readers. Literary scholars argue that Iraqi women writers produce works that differ them from the literature of other Arab countries. The distinct feature of Iraqi women's literature is that it has never put itself in opposition to Iraqi men's literature; rather it complemented the latter forming a single, multidimensional picture of the world.

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