ABSTRACTS

Isabella Camera d'Afflitto

Sapienza University of Rome

Yemeni Fiction - between Social-Political Claims and Literary Avant-garde

The history of Yemeni literature is obviously related to the history of the country. For years, Yemen has been totally isolated from the West and the rest of the Arab world and this surely has had an impact on its literary production, which on one hand has preserved more ties with tradition and on the other has been less contaminated by that more decadent phase of the Western and Arab literature and is more inclined to experiment new pathways. This contribution presents an overview of Yemeni contemporary fiction, starting from authors like Muḥammad 'Abd al-Walī and Zayd Muṭī' Dammāǧ, who deftly combined literature and political engagement. Among the pioneers of women's fiction, Ramziyyah 'Abbās al-Iryānī and 'Azīzah 'Abdallāh stand out, representing the first generation of women literati who were able to combine writing and civil engagement in favor of the women of their country. In the literary production of the past, as well as the present, the issues that emerge are migration, exile, *ġurbah* and, of course, the condition of women. As authors like Nabīlah al-Zubayr, Nādiyah al-Kawkabānī or the very young Hind Hayṯam strongly point out in their novels, the woman remains the weakest link of the society chain. Particular emphasis is given to writers like Samīr 'Abd al-Fattāḥ, Waǧdī al-Ahdal and 'Alī al-Muqrī who are literally upsetting the Yemeni contemporary literary scene.

Ḥabīb 'Abd al-Rabb Surūrī

University of Rouen (France)

'Aqīlāt *(Wives) and* Damalān*: Two Examples of the Tragedy in the Relationship between Man and Woman in Yemeni Novels*

The permanence of a patriarchal society in Yemen, where the decisions regarding the choice of a life partner are directly or indirectly dictated by disastrous customs, traditions and habits, causes constant failure of the relationships between men and women. This is clearly shown in the two novels analyzed here: *'Aqīlāt* by Nādiyah al-Kawkabānī and *Damalān* by Ḥabīb 'Abd al-Rabb Surūrī, author of this article. In *'Aqīlāt*, two disappointments mark the course of two emotionally barren, totally unhappy and tormented lives that are comforted only by memories of a love that never blossomed. Fiction here can be interpreted "as a form of rebellion to women's failures and defeats". In *Damalān*, the life of the main character is filled with displacements and unpredictable events as he searches for the woman of his dreams in the meanders of real life and fantastic virtual worlds. In summary, this novel can be defined as "the epic of the lost woman as told by a man".

Maria Avino

"L'Orientale" University of Naples

The Woman as the Foundation of Modernity in Yemeni Fiction between the Thirties and the Seventies

This contribution presents an *excursus* of Yemeni fiction between the Thirties and the Seventies, focusing on the representation of female characters and their changes. Since 1939, when the first Yemeni novel, *Sa'īd* by Muḥammad 'Alī Ibrāhīm Luqmān was published, the condition of the woman has often been the main concern of intellectuals. But it was only in the Sixties that two different streams of extremely interesting novels developed. The first depicts female characters with highly positive qualities that often become the most authentic symbol of the fight against the forces that delay change in the Yemeni society. The second describes

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women who adopt an attitude that is socially reprehensible for the standard canons and habits of the time. However, with greater frequency, women are now occupying a larger space within literary works and have obtained a place even in titles, as in some stories by Ṣāliḥ Bā ʻĀmir. It is also important to notice how female writers themselves speak about women, beginning with the first novel by Ramziyyah ʻAbbās al-Iryānī.

Renata Pepicelli

University of Bologna

Literature and Gender Claims

The attitude of art can be a decisive factor in contributing towards orienting public opinion and creating the dynamics of collective representation and perception. We can see that this statement is particularly true when we read *Perle dello Yemen* (Rome, Jouvence, 2009). In this rich collection of stories, various contemporary male and female writers touch upon issues that range from politics and social satire to the condition of women and childhood, offering a portrayal of a country that is still quite unknown to Italy. This study presents some genre stories that have been translated into Italian and then addresses the status of Yemeni women and the legal changes that have been made on personal status since 1992.

Francesca M. Corrao

"L'Orientale" University of Naples

Between Melancholy and Rebellion. Poems by Yemeni Women

Although Yemeni poetry is permeated by the strength of the classical Arab tradition, it maintains an important peculiarity inherited from the local oral culture that distinguishes it from the more well-known Middle Eastern literature. This peculiarity is easily recognizable in the descriptive poetry, while in more recent poetry, bitter tones emerge, as the result of the existential difficulties and the complex cultural confrontation with more advanced societies. Issues relating to revolutionary changes, pervaded by feelings of anxiety and also strong hopes, are recurrent themes in Yemeni poetry and modern poetry is dominated not only by the theme of revolution but also by existential romanticism. Here we have quoted the works of the major Yemeni women poets, including Fāṭimah al-ʻUšbī, Maymūnah Abū Bakr, Fāṭimah al-Ṭayyib, Āmāl Muḥammad ʻAlī al-Šāmī, Bint al-Yaman, Nabīlah al-Zubayr, Āminah Yūsuf Muḥammad ʻAbduh, Ibtisām al-Mutawakkil, Hudà al-ʻAṭṭās e Hudà ʻAlī ʻAbduh Ablān.

Isadora D'Aimmo

SUM, Naples

Writing, Emancipation and Corporality

This article highlights the relationship between the use of autodiegetic or autobiographic narration in the first person singular, and the theme of emancipation also in reference to corporality. The objective is to verify whether the use of this particular narration technique is casual and merely stylistic or if, on the contrary, it is a more articulated and complex choice. Women writers don't write about themselves, but rather about the Self. Through autodiegetic narration they are not merely trying to create an autobiographic tradition, they are also trying to create a literary tradition that is authoritative, anti-autocratic and that allows them to express collective values and feelings through what appears to be the individualistic literary genre par excellence.

Paola Viviani

Second University of Naples

The Poetry of Nabīlah al-Zubayr's Fiction

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In 2003, the collections of poems, *Ṣu'ūd^an ilà fardat kibrīt*, and stories, *Raqaṣat fī 'l-ṣaḫr* by Nabīlah al-Zubayr were published. This author is one of the most important, interesting, influential and innovative voices of the Yemeni literary universe. Her originality, both as a poet and writer, is not only due to her style and the wise choice of images, but to the irony that pervades them as well. Nabīlah al-Zubayr has written much on the condition of women and on the relationship between genders in such highly traditional communities as the Yemeni ones. The themes of some of her works may appear revolutionary, like the search for harmony between man and woman or how together they face their only authentic antagonist, the world. Her rich and poetic language is unique and original.

Monica Ruocco

University of Palermo

Portraits of Women in the Theatrical Works of Muḥammad al-Šarafī

Al-Šarafī is the first playwright who has openly taken a position in favor of the women of his country. His works focus on women's issues, with themes like segregation, submission, education, the relationship between the sexes and marriage. In Muḥammad al-Šarafī's theatre, female characters represent real "issues", evident especially in his numerous works with a social setting. In view of the fights lead by Yemeni women to improve their situation, Muḥammad al-Šarafī's work makes statements that are still extremely relevant today.

Ada Barbaro

SUM, Naples and Sapienza University of Rome

Yemeni Popular Tradition Through Arwà 'Abduh 'Uṯmān 's Stories

Yemen, attributed with purity and prosperity by the entire Arab tradition, is probably one of the countries in the Arab world that has shown to be less inclined to modernity, maintaining a relatively unchanged folk heritage of fables, legends and folk tales that reveal a strong sense of identity. This article proposes *Yaḥduṯ fī Tankā, bilād al-nāmis* (2001), a collection of stories by Arwà 'Abduh 'Uṯmān, one of the most significant representatives of Yemeni contemporary fiction. In her works, old folk tales live again in the context of an easily recognizable present.

Patrizia Zanelli

"San Pio V" Free University of Rome

Women and Dreams in Muḥammad al-Ġarbī 'Amrān's Stories

This article focuses on the fiction of Muḥammad al-Ġarbī 'Amrān, a very well known Yemeni writer who dedicates most of his literary production to women, and who, without doubt, supports their emancipation. In 2001 he published the collection entitled *Ḥarīm a'azzakum Allāh* in which paradoxically, only very few female characters are presented, and never with a central role. In fact, the main characters are mostly bachelors who live alone in the urban or suburban area of Ṣan'ā, where they moved from the countryside. Their loneliness is due both to the old problem of sexual segregation and to the new social fragmentation caused by the extremely rapid urbanization of the Yemeni population. Thus, women only appear in the thoughts or dreams of these men.

Francesco De Angelis

"Aldo Moro" University of Bari

The Struggle of Women in Yemeni Contemporary Novels. Ḥimār bayna al-aġānī *by Waǧdī al-Ahdal*

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Wağdī al-Ahdal is one of the most interesting intellectuals in the Yemeni literary world. He is a multifaceted writer: the author of collections of short stories, novels, a play and a screenplay for which he has won a number of literary awards. His writing is sharp, caustic, refined, scholarly and attentive to details. The audacious expression of his ideas on society, and Arab and particularly Yemeni conventions makes Wağdī al-Ahdal a revolutionary author, "*the enfant terrible*" of Yemen literature. This article attempts to interpret the writer's thoughts on women, especially in relation to the opposite sex, as revealed in his second novel, *Ḥimār bayna al-aġānī* (2004), where he courageously denounces the authoritarian and sexist behavior of certain characters, manifested through various kinds of abuses and crimes.

Elvira Diana

"G. d'Annunzio" University of Chieti-Pescara

Zayd Muṭīʿ Dammāğ's Writing as a Tool for Social-Political Revolt

Zayd Muṭīʿ Dammāğ, considered to be one of the most important contemporary Arab writers, has alternated between literary and political activity. In his works he denounces the abuses of Yemeni leaders on the population in the period preceding the foundation of the Republic. This is also the theme of the only novel he has published, *al-Rahīnah* (1984), in which the writer does not merely denounce the fate of coercion and exploitation assigned to the "sons of sheiks and princes of the tribes", but goes further, trying to unveil the promiscuous relationships that exist among representatives of the political power. The novel also aims to reveal the innocence and inner fragility of young slaves, totally lacking in any kind of experience and cruelly isolated from the rest of the world.

Simone Sibilio

"L'Orientale" University of Naples

Developments in Yemeni Contemporary Poetry from the '40s to Today

Few studies on Yemeni contemporary poetry have been made in the context of scientific research in our country, and more generally in the West. With the exception of sporadic contributions made several decades ago, there is a bibliographic gap regarding the literature produced in Yemen. This article aims to trace the evolution of content and style of Yemeni poetry from the works of Zayd al-Mawšikī to the two most representative Yemeni poets of the twentieth century, ʻAbdallah al-Baraddūnī and ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz al-Maqāliḥ.

Sara Forcella

The Tragedy of Modern Man in the Theater of Samīr ʻAbd al-Fattāḥ

This paper aims to grasp the crucial points of Yemeni contemporary dramaturgy through an original Yemeni version of the theater of the Absurd. Specifically, it analyzes a collection of four plays by writer Samīr ʻAbd al-Fattāḥ, edited in 2007. His work depicts the great fears, loneliness and sense of confusion in today's man through dynamic dialogues, a structurally modern text and unique scenic solutions that are typical of experimental theater.

Erminia Calabrese

University of Tarragona, Spain

The Female Universe in Hudà al-ʻAṭṭās' Writing

Hudà al-ʻAṭṭās' writing is a testimonial of women's literature that developed in Yemen in the early Nineties. It offers a rich and composite representation of contemporary Yemeni society with particular focus on the social circumstances and constraints that women are exposed to. This article aims to briefly analyze the description

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of the female universe in Hudà al-'Aṭṭās' work, trying to highlight her interaction with the male world. Dream and rebellion are the *leitmotif* of this work: fresh, original and full of hope.

Hussein Mahmoud

University of Helwan, Egypt

Arab Critics and Women's Writing: the Case of Yemen

Women's writing in Yemen, as in all Arab countries, raises many controversies in literary criticism where there are two main theories. The first makes no distinction between male and female writing in general. The second, on the contrary, proposes a clear separation between women and men's literature, giving the former specific characteristics that differentiate it greatly from the latter. So, how should one "treat" this women's literature? That is, from what perspective can one study it? The uniqueness of issues regarding women in the East leads Arab critics to discuss the concept of femininity, once again wondering whether it is right to make such distinctions or not.

Roberta Denaro

"L'Orientale" University of Naples

Malikat al-Yaman*: the Ambiguous Nature of Bilqīs*

The Queen of Sheba, called Bilqīs by Arab sources, and the texts that concern her in the different traditions of the area have been the subject of a long history of studies: rich and meaningful for the diversity of approaches and perspectives. In this article we examine some elements of the stories that focus on the figure of Bilqīs, trying to identify how these issues, which are an integral part of a *plot* that precedes Islamic history, fit in the Koranic exegesis.

Laura Guazzone

Sapienza University of Rome

A Note on the Studies of the Political and Social History of Contemporary Yemen (1990-2009)

This note analyzes the main study perspectives on Yemen's contemporary political and social history that have emerged from scientific literature of the last two decades, in order to investigate Yemen's role in the context of the contemporary Arab world. As we know, 1990 marks the year North and South Yemen were unified and the birth of the Unified Republic of Yemen in its actual institutional and spatial configuration. From the Arab regional perspective, this date marks rather the reconfiguration of local and international policies that were made following the Kuwait war (1990-91) and at the end of the Cold War. In addition, these two decades are also considered to be particularly significant for the methodological developments that gradually spread in the studies of the political and social history of the contemporary Arab world.

TESTIMONIES

Hudà al-'Aṭṭās

(Yemeni writer – University of Aden)

The Stories of my Life ...

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In her testimony, Hudà al-'Aṭṭās recalls her education and experiences, placing particular emphasis on her childhood days spent in the village and on the people and events that most affected her growth and evolution as a woman and writer. Of particular interest, for example, is the portrayal of "spinster relatives" or of "abandoned women" due to the emigration of men. There are also many references to early love troubles and the discovery of the "distance" that too often separates men and women's universes. This has been substantially metabolized by the author, considered by many a rebel, who confesses that she started to write to do justice to those in society who have suffered wrongs, and as an attempt to "rehabilitate" people that have marked her world, often suffering in silence and indifference.

Nādiyah al–Kawkabānī

(Yemeni writer – University of Ṣan'ā')

Towards a more Comprehensive Vision

Early on, Nādiyah al-Kawkabānī felt the need to devote herself to writing. More than once she had been forced to leave it, until she rebelled and since then her tenacious work in the literary field has earned the appreciation of critics and public. Writing can sometimes be considered a very dangerous and inconvenient art, especially when undertaken by a woman. From the very beginning Nādiyah al-Kawkabānī, as well as her colleagues, had to face these obstacles and the need, imposed by others, to "always justify and clarify" herself because in a very natural way, a seemingly inseparable link is created between what the author narrates and her experience. However, this difficulty can be cleverly overcome and it certainly does not prevent Nādiyah al-Kawkabānī from writing and continuing to create stories, because writing allows her to live.

Ibtisām al-Mutawakkil

(Yemeni Writer- University of Ṣan'ā')

The Word Took me on its Wings to a Different Sky

The existence of Ibtisām al-Mutawakkil and her art cannot be separated from Yemen, its culture and its traditions that are sometimes harsh and cruel towards women. Yet this Arab country is certainly more than what the Western world knows, which is often only a negative picture of it. Yemen is a diverse world where, for example, in ancient times enlightened Queens ruled. These were intelligent and strong women, the memories of whom were deliberately obscured by the men who took over. The existential parable of Ibtisām al-Mutawakkil is the testimony of a gradual emergence to life, slowly but steadily floating on the wings of poetry, a metaphor for freedom.

Nabīlah al –Zubayr

(Yemeni writer)

White Holes. Analysis of the Literary Production Movement in Yemen

The testimony of Nabīlah al-Zubayr is meant to be a contribution and a tribute to the Yemeni women's literary production. On the basis of Antelak al-Mutawakel's study, *Gender and the Writing of Yemeni Women Writers* (2005), the author proposes a number of thorny issues related to the position of Yemeni women who wanted, and who want to devote themselves to literature. Nabīlah al-Zubayr emphasizes a truly enlightening paradox: if a man is

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imprisoned for political reasons, it is considered a sign of honor, but if it is a woman, this generates shame for the whole family. Since ancient times there have been many women writers who brought fame to Arab literature in general, yet in contemporary times there seem to be few. Nevertheless, in Yemen today we are witnessing an increase in the production of women's literature.

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