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MUSIC, IDENTITY, AND NARRATIVE IN *SUMMER RAINS* BY AHMAD AL-QARMALAWI

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The object of the study is the novel *Summer Rains* by Ahmad al-Qarmalawi. The purpose of the article is to reveal the identity, cultural and religious heritage of the al-Mosuli Sufi order in the context of the problems of modern Egyptian society. The goal involves the following tasks: 1) conducting a comprehensive study of the thematic elements present in *Summer Rains*, including the role of music, the depiction of the dynamics of the formation of society, and the exploration of existential themes such as identity and spirituality; 2) an analysis of the narrative techniques used by al-Qarmalawi, with an emphasis on aspects such as character development, plot structure, and selection of stylistic devices; 3) the study of the cultural and historical context of the novel, taking into account its relevance in modern Arabic literature and resonance with social problems; 4) the perception and impact of *Summer Rains* on the literary community, including critical reviews, translations and awards; 5) assessment of the significance of the novel and narrative techniques for determining the role of literature in the formation of identity and promotion of intercultural dialogue.

Research methods are based on a critical reading of the text, which allows to reveal the features of the subject, style, narrative and the impact of the novel on the audience. In particular, the methods of descriptive scenes, dynamics of action and dialogues are analyzed, which help the author convey the authenticity of the Arab spiritual heritage and its contribution to the formation of individual and collective identity. The results of the study indicate the importance of the novel *Summer Rains* as a work that contributes to the understanding and deepening of interaction between civilizations, as well as prompts readers to reflect on post-globalization trends. The novel reflects the complexity and diversity of Arab society, giving readers the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of its essence. The study reveals the importance of music as an element of cultural identity and a means of expressing spiritual quests. The novel emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding and dialogue between East and West, as well as the relevance of issues of identity and religion in the modern world. The study of the reception and impact of the novel on the literary community determines its significance as an artistic phenomenon that prompts reflection on the global trends and challenges of today. The novel *Summer Rains* is defined as an important contribution to modern Arabic literature and supports the debate about the role of the artistic word in the formation of identity and the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

Keywords: Ahmad al-Qarmalawi; Arabic literature; cultural heritage; identity; intercultural dialogue; narrative techniques; religion; *Summer Rains*

Introduction

This article aims to examine the novel *Summer Rains* by Ahmad al-Qarmalawi within the broader context of contemporary Arabic literature, exploring its thematic richness and artistic complexity. By delving into the multifaceted portrayal of music in the novel, al-Qarmalawi provides readers with a lens through which to understand the intricacies of

Arab culture and society. Through the synthesis of music and literature, the author not only captures the essence of Arab identity but also invites readers to reflect on the role of culture in shaping individual and collective identities.

Drawing on recent studies and publications in the field [Qāsim 2013; Al-Sarwī 2022], this article analyzes the unique narrative style and thematic depth of *Summer Rains*. It examines how al-Qarmalawi's background as a professional architect influences his depiction of Egypt's architectural landscape, creating a vivid backdrop for the novel's events. Furthermore, the article explores the novel's treatment of social and existential themes, such as the search for identity and the quest for spiritual meaning, highlighting the ways in which music serves as a unifying force for the characters.

Through a close reading of the text, this article aims to shed light on the novel's exploration of identity, religion, and cultural heritage. It considers how al-Qarmalawi navigates complex social and philosophical issues, presenting readers with a nuanced portrayal of contemporary Arab society. Additionally, the article discusses the novel's reception and impact within the literary community, suggesting avenues for further research and exploration.

In the 21st century, in the period of post-globalization changes, the authors of Arabic literature are actively considering the problem of identity [‘Awwār 2018; Boulechfar 2020]. The subject of their interest is the imagological triad of “self”, “alien” and “other”. Writers and researchers are looking for answers to the question: what is the common denominator, the ground on which identity is based? Is it possible to consciously strengthen and build own identity, and if so, by what means? By affirming one's values, or denying that of others? These and other urgent questions are raised by the Egyptian writer Ahmad al-Qarmalawi in his novel *Summer Rains* [Al-Qarmalawi 2023].

Ahmad al-Qarmalawi was born in Cairo in 1978. As a child, he lived in Kuwait, where he graduated from school. Then he returned to his homeland to study architecture at the American University in Cairo. Al-Qarmalawi still designs buildings for his hometown as a professional architect, immersing in the literary work during the nighttime, when his family sleeps [Saeed 2018]. On the pages of the novel *Summer Rains*, the writer skillfully conveys his professional experience, bringing to life in vivid images the architectural monuments and locations of Egypt. Thus, the main setting of the work is the al-Mosuli Agency, within the walls of which a Sufi school is located. There, murids (Sufi disciples) learn to play the oud, a traditional musical instrument of the East.

Such an approach to the literary vocation is common for the entire Arab world, and Egypt is no exception. Famous writers usually have an “official” place of work, they are often respected members of society, primarily due to their professional skills. It can be a field related to literature, such as teaching (Mohammed Choukri, Ghassan Kanafani, Waciny Laredj), translation (Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi, Khalil Mutran), scientific work (Jurji Zaydan, Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti), activity in the public sphere (Taha Hussein, Mohammed Hussein Heikal, Tawfiq al-Hakim), legal or medical practice (‘Alaa Al Aswany, Ghazi ‘Abdul Rahman Al Gosaibi). Therefore, the creative and professional path of Ahmad al-Qarmalawi fits well into this trend.

The Reception of Summer Rains

For the novel *Summer Rains*, the writer received the prestigious Sheikh Zayed Book Award in 2018. The author is not afraid to depict the current social challenges and problems of today – topics that are crucial not only for the Arab world: material and spiritual poverty, growing up in a single-parent family, unemployment, bad habits, misunderstandings between close people. All these problems are highlighted in the images, philosophy and actions of the heroes of the novel – characters of different ethnic, cultural and social origins. Al-Qarmalawi appears as a narrator who does not impose his opinion on the reader and avoids evaluative judgments regarding the actions of the heroes of the work or

the issues raised. Observing the development of storylines, and the evolution of characters, one can make certain generalizations about the author's position. It is, however, not direct, rather it is implicitly woven into the plot and stylistic decisions chosen by the writer.

Ahmad al-Qarmalawi's novel raises the topic of civilizational dialogue between the East and the West and emphasizes the difficulty in establishing relations between the older and younger generations. Separately, through the entire work, the line of searching for one's own "I" by the heroes of the work runs unobtrusively – that identity, the basis of which includes, among other things, the place of birth, the conditions of upbringing, and what is the main thing in the novel *Summer Rains* – music. Music is almost the main character in the work, it is, to some extent, a metaphor: in the attitude towards music in general and the Sufi heritage of the al-Mosuli School in particular, the perception of the characters of their own spiritual identity can be traced.

The story in the novel *Summer Rains* unfolds within the framework of the conditional present, although no dates or significant historical events that would allow one to determine it more precisely are mentioned. Such an impression is created due to the mention of everyday details – say, the characters use smartphones and the Internet, as well as appeal to famous cultural figures of the modern Arab world. The lack of temporal specificity increases the uncertainty and gives the reader the feeling that the plot is unfolding before our eyes, next to and with us. The narrative is mostly linear, but its composition is complicated by the author's use of *in medias res* – the narrator introduces the audience to the final scene at the beginning of the novel, and then leads to the main plot.

A specific feature of the work is the presence of several storylines and an open ending, which also enhances the feeling of incompleteness and the duration of the action, the unfolding of events in a moment. An important storyline is dedicated to Sheikh Ibad al-Mosuli and his family, who were forced to move from Iraq to Egypt in the Burji Mamluks era (1382–1517) during the Mongol invasion. Love for music, and playing the oud become the meaning of life and a way of earning money for al-Mosuli, and in the future – lay the foundations for the emergence of the Sufi order, leading to the events described in the main storyline of the novel.

The events mentioned in the "retrospective chapters" are echoed in the thoughts of the characters, in particular, the students of the music school at the al-Mosuli Agency, where the mini-museum of Sheikh Ibad is located. The museum preserves relics, including a mysterious apocryphal document believed to be one of the first attempts at musical notation in the Arab world. The efforts of one of the heroes to make sure of the authenticity of the story and the authenticity of the sheet lead to a conflict and bring the plot to a conclusion, strengthening the detective element in the novel.

Considerations regarding the future of Arab culture in the world – the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Middle East – are important for A. Al-Qarmalawi. Is it possible to combine the Sufi tradition with modern technology? Should one preserve own identity by conserving it, or should it be enriched by contact with the outside world? The author puts these considerations into the characters who are opposite in their outlook on life. Thus, Yusuf, following the advice of his teacher, Sheikh Zakir, prefers conservative approaches, while Zina proposes to turn the Agency into a music center for the youth. Both positions are supported by the best and noblest considerations, but a difference of opinion is inevitable: the point of view of each of the heroes on music, culture and their own identity was formed as a result of their individual life experiences and the environment of personality formation. For example, half-German, half-Egyptian Zina Dinari, who was brought up and grew up in Germany, does not understand Sheikh Zakir, just like her mother. According to them, "the people of the East have a counterclockwise direction" [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 101]. At the same time, for Zakir Rasalyan, the keeper of the traditions of the al-Mosuli Agency, it is important to preserve the peace and inviolability of the Sufi shrine.

The Sufi theme plays an important role in the novel. For the followers of the al-Mosuli School, music is not only an instrument of play – it is a way of meditation and understanding the essence of God. Therefore, for many murids, as well as for their teacher – Ustaz Zakir, constancy in approaches to music is a fundamental point, regardless of historical perturbations or the demands of capricious modernity.

The theme of the novel *Summer Rains* covers a range of problems relevant to modern life, taking into account the specifics of Egyptian society. In addition to highlighting the economic or cultural troubles inherent in any country during its development, the story touches on the importance of understanding, preserving, strengthening and enriching one's identity, both for society as a whole and for an individual in particular. The concept of identity is revealed in the novel primarily from a cultural point of view – the book does not raise purely political issues, and the theme of religion, although it runs through *Summer Rains* as a red thread – is not considered as a problem, but rather as a component of the formation of society and personality. The confrontation is not between the innovative youth and the older, conservative generation, and not even between Eastern and Western civilizations: the only theme related to both politics and religion is the opposition between Sufis and Salafis (the Islamic purists). *Summer Rains* does not contain a detailed description of Salafist ideology, or references to historical events or real personalities. The characters presented in the book are allegorical bearers of the ideas they represent, and the contrast itself takes place against the background of different ideological perceptions of music. For Salafis, it is an empty pastime, not worthy of a Muslim believer (sometimes even more – a heresy and a sin), while Sufis see music as a way to Allah, a way to find, create and preserve one's own spiritual identity.

Even mentioned in passing, this topic is important for the Arab world, especially for Egyptian society itself. Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood are a significant political force: in 2011, representatives of the group managed to get up to 30–40 % of the seats in the lower house of the Egyptian parliament in some regions. In 2012, a member of the organization, Muhammad Morsi, was proclaimed President of Egypt, and on July 3, 2013, he was removed because of a military coup [Mura 2015]. In Ahmad al-Qarmalawi's novel, Muslim fundamentalists are not represented by specific groups or political parties, but rather by a collective image embodied in the Salafis, whose mosque is located across the street from the al-Mosuli Agency.

The purists of Islam are not very happy with the neighborhood of the Sufi order. Thus, “Salafis in their sermons disparagingly criticized the Sufi movement and cursed the musical instruments used by Sufis during mystical practices” [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 38]. Both branches of Islam postulate belief in one God, so it seems that there should be no problems. However, from the descriptions and the reaction of the characters to the music, one observes a different picture:

Over time, the Salafis got a copy of the key to the back gate of the Agency and began to enter and leave classes without permission, and those who came early wandered around the yard or sat leaning against the edge of the well and spied on the students of the music club and the murids who practiced zikr. Rahma was not pleased with their presence – she read malice in their eyes because a woman learns to recognize people's feelings even before she learns the alphabet. The strangers kept devouring her with their gazes, examining her forms, and then quickly lowered their eyes when they saw Rahma looking at them [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 39].

In both quotes, the germs of hostility can already be traced, but the conflict is only heating up – the theme of the confrontation between the Salafis and the Sufis of the al-Mosuli Agency throughout the work leads the reader to the final ending.

Rahma is the heroine of the novel, one of the main characters. She is the youngest daughter of Sheikh Zakir, the head of the Agency at the beginning of the story, a God-fearing and sincerely religious person who loves her father infinitely, respects elders,

follows traditions and sees music as a way to spiritual development. From the description of the girl and the way her character is presented by the narrator, one can assume that Rahma is the personification of a “true” Muslim woman – a daughter worthy of her father and that society, according to the unwritten rules of which she needs to live while being grown up in it. Rahma did not dare to openly criticize the Salafis and Sheikh Zakir’s decision to cooperate with them, but her silent position of rejection remains steadfast [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 39]. At the same time, Rahma’s father had completely valid reasons for forming an alliance with the Salafis – he knew that when they helped to install a new canopy for the al-Mosuli Agency, it would be an additional guarantee of protection against all kinds of “predators of the district” and ministerial bureaucrats [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 75]. The sheikh believed that he would be able to defend the position of the Agency and get some profit from such a solution: “He will ask the Salafis for a double price: not only to carry out repair work at their expense but also to stop the propaganda of the young sheikhs who spread slander against the al-Mosuli Tariqat and his Agency, cursing musical instruments in their sermons and undermining the authority of Sufi teaching” [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 76].

As the subsequent events will show, Rahma was not in vain wary of such a union. Germs of obstinacy pierced the soil of cooperation between the two Muslim societies from the very beginning, and even Sheikh Zakir was aware of this. He was convinced that the sidewalk near the Agency, which they wanted to use for their own purposes, was not enough for the Salafis, and they were already looking at warehouses. Sheikh Ayman of the fundamentalists explained this with only good intentions: “Why shouldn’t more Muslims take advantage of these benefits? The district needs a medical center to serve the people who are refused admission at al-Hussain University Hospital” [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 93].

The complexity of the situation is also understood by other key characters of the novel, whose lives relate to the al-Mosuli Agency – Yusuf and Ziyad. Yusuf, appointed by Sheikh Zakir to lead the Agency, is now forced to personally solve problems with the Salafis. His childhood friend Ziyad, whom Yusuf chose as his assistant, insists that inviting the fanatics is a stupid idea: “The Salafis want to control the Agency because in doing so they kill two birds with one stone: they get a place to expand their activities in a crowded area where the needle has nowhere to fall and gain a favorable opportunity to reduce our presence and influence” [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 130].

From *Summer Rains* one can see that not only the protagonists are wary of Muslim fundamentalists. In one of the scenes, when Yusuf visited his teacher – Zakir Rasalyan, the sheikh was watching TV: “His attention was focused on student protests in al-Azhar and banners with slogans to remove from the leadership of Sheikh of al-Azhar. The news channel described the protestors as belonging to Salafi currents seeking political dividends by inciting the residents of the university campus” [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 141]. Al-Azhar is an ancient Egyptian educational and religious center, and its head is one of the most respected people not only in Egypt but also in the entire Muslim world. Scholars-theologians, theologians, and specialists in Muslim sciences, who studied and received a diploma of al-Azhar, occupy the most prestigious positions in religious, political, and cultural institutions of the Middle East.

The mentioned scenes, as well as other plot points in the novel, allow one to assert that the narrator is deliberately focusing the reader’s attention on the problems related to Salafis. Without expressing his own assessment, through the characters and cursory scene sketches, the narrator suggests that danger is lurking at the al-Mosuli Agency. It is a good technique that allows to preserve and slowly increase the emotional tension of the reader, so when at the end of the work “the gun fires” – the shock of the unexpected denouement and the “rough” open ending is somewhat softened – after all, the storyline of the Salafis ends along with the novel itself.

The Sufi Heritage of al-Mosuli

In general, in *Summer Rains* it is possible to single out one real protagonist – the al-Mosuli Agency. The degree of participation of the key characters whose fate relates to the Sufi order in the events of the work is relatively equal – these are Zakir, Rahma, Zina, Yusuf and Ziyad. Secondary characters include the parents, given that they do not play a significant role in the events of the book. However, the overall analysis of their images – parents and children, allows one to single out another important layer of problems in the work: misunderstanding between generations; a spiritual gap in the relationships of close people; the tragedy of individuals who grew up in incomplete or dysfunctional families, and the result of this influence on the further life of the individual and society.

The most striking illustration is the path of Ziyad, his philosophy and outlook on life. Ziyad is a friend of Yusuf from the days of music college, who, in fact, led the latter to the al-Mosuli Tariqat – a society of Sufis with their music school. Ziyad himself, doing dubious things with musical instruments, was able to go to the workshop located at the Agency, and then got used to it among the murids and became a regular guest there. However, at the music school of the Sufi order, Ziyad was not interested in meditation at all:

Ziyad gained fame in limited circles as a successful broker, offering customers a quality instrument at a reasonable price. Things got even better when, after several failed attempts with other makers, Ziyad went to the workshop of Uncle Ubayd, the most senior oud maker in the al-Mosuli Agency. Zakir Rasalyan soon became acquainted with him, so afterwards Ziyad became one of the workshop's biggest clients in the summer eve [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 141].

Ziyad is a deeply psychological character who understands people well and often reveals himself not only in his actions and remarks but also through his inner monologue. The author often uses this technique in scenes with Ziyad.

Belonging to the [Sufi] movement became an ideal way for Ziyad to whitewash the reputation formed by a life of night musician. The aura of piety added reliability in the eyes of potential clients and strengthened the foundation for Ziyad's activities. People received clear evidence that the musician was forced to resort to an immoral lifestyle due to predicament and now found himself in service and art [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 141].

In addition, thanks to the Agency, Ziyad got to know a wide circle of fans of oud and connoisseurs of traditional music – among the latter, he was especially attentive to those who might be interested in his service as a broker – “a real connoisseur” of musical instruments and a seller of unique, even elite goods. In the end, although it had less meaning for him, at the school at the Agency, Ziyad could practice unlimitedly in improving his own skills as a musician, which allowed him to grow simultaneously in two directions of his “career” – as a musical performer who earned his living by playing in a nightclub, and as a speculator – this side of his character he hid from his colleagues from the al-Mosuli Agency especially diligently.

Hence, if Ziyad's story ends for the reader with the main part of the novel, then Zina – another important character – continues her narrative after the main narrator. It turns out that she is not just an active person in the plot, but in general acts as the publisher of the original work in Arabic, as well as the initiator of the writing of the book *Summer Rains* as such. The breaking of the “fourth wall” occurs gradually, to the extent of how periodically, during the most controversial moments, Zina intervenes in the main narrative of the novel, commenting on this or that situation from her own point of view, which is often different from the one proposed by the narrator. If in the process of getting to know the novel, such a course causes slight dissatisfaction due to the broken narrative, then at the end of the work, when the reader has already familiarized himself with all the characters

and the al-Mosuli Agency, the open ending only ignited further curiosity, final comment from Zina is taken with relief:

So, dear reader, I have brought you to the “closed” end of the work, with which you can rest easy for the al-Mosuli Agency. Given the very nature of time, the flow of which never stops, after the events depicted in the novel, of course, a lot more happened. As part of the preparation of the ancient building for the new future, the “East-West Center” was founded, as soon as the project began to be implemented. But this is a completely different story, unrelated to the novel [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 191].

Such a move, although controversial, ultimately fulfills its function: after reading the novel, it is difficult not to care about the fate of the Agency and its inhabitants. The open ending only increases interest, and the final comment of the publisher-character gives the impression that the story is not just unfolding in the “conditional present”, it is happening right next to us, and will continue to happen in the future. This impression is strengthened by the general “timelessness” of the story, without specifying the exact dates, as well as the figure of Zina herself, who, both as a character and as a publisher, acts as a kind of trickster until the very end of the work. As a publisher – openly disputing in her comments with the narrator and interfering in the composition of the work, as a character – embodying the stormy combination of the pragmatic West with the emotional East and all the while offering to disrupt the status quo and rebuild the current configurations of reality.

The title of the novel *Summer Rains* can hardly be called informative. Only after carefully studying this literary work, the reader will understand that it is an allusion to the life story of al-Mosuli himself, and more precisely, to his unrequited love for a girl, which the sky witnessed. Impressed by the feelings of the young lover, the clouds shared their sadness with the boy, pouring it out in raindrops. The metaphor is touching and understandable, but, apparently, the title of the work lacks a mention of its main theme – music.

Music performs several functions in the work. First, it is the uniting of storylines. Given the complex composition of the novel, several equal characters with their own stories, and the dynamic evolution of their characters in interaction – it is music that serves as the foundation on which the al-Mosuli Agency and the fate of those related to it are built. Secondly, the different attitude to the music of the novel’s characters raises a whole layer of related topics and problems – culture, religion, and social relations. For Sheikh Zakir, music is – to put it mildly – a museum exhibit, which is better not to be touched and left unchanged. For Zina, it is a space for the realization of her trickster psychological type. Ziyad earns a pittance from it, losing not only the sense of wider prospects but also the remnants of human dignity in the pursuit of small sinecures. Yusuf and Rahma – young representatives of the Egyptian intelligentsia – are fascinated by the charms of music, but due to some personal naivety and the limitation of obvious options for creative self-realization – they cannot decide what is more important to them: music as a Sufi way of knowing God, or music as a tool for the promotion of Arab culture in an ever-evolving world. The novel does not answer this question, even indirectly – leaving the reader to wonder how the destinies of the heroes and their relationship with music will develop.

Al-Qarmalawi skillfully demonstrates the changing, unstable nature of music and society. For the Sufis of al-Mosuli Agency, music is an inseparable part of their identity – spiritual, cultural, religious, it is their everyday life and, at the same time, the end point of their journey. For the Salafis depicted in the novel, music is a heresy and nonsense that distracts an orthodox Muslim from real thoughts and actions. For Arabs from other countries who come to Egypt for leisure or business, music often appears in the form of nightclub dancers, alongside alcohol and the dubious trappings of businessmen like Ziyad. This moment is directly depicted in scenes where residents of different Arab countries discuss their own musical preferences and views on art: “You call what you sell in Egypt

‘instruments’!? An Iraqi or Syrian oud is far superior to your lute. – Who said!? This is the word of the uninitiated. The best ouds are sold in Egypt. – So, you are an expert! – mocked the Kuwaiti. – Of course, Ziyad preceded him. – Most of my clients are from the best musicians of Kuwait and Iraq” [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 77]. Therefore, the third function performed by music is being a mirror of identity. In the case of the mentioned main characters of the novel, it is mostly about moral and spiritual identity. In situations where secondary characters, representatives of other Arab countries, express themselves in relation to certain aspects of music, the issue of national and cultural identity can be traced.

The Arab world, despite its language and religion, is not a model of monolithicity. It is a very colorful environment, and its mosaic pattern is skilfully captured in Ahmad al-Qarmalawi’s novel. In the scenes where Ziyad is alone and brooding, his silent reflection is the most eloquent: “Isn’t Ziyad entitled to proper compensation today!? His peers, sons of workers abroad, compete with football stars in clothes and cars and take their women to five-star hotel rooms, while he fears any slight increase in the price of hashish and wastes the best years of his life in a filthy, moldy little room in the district of Talibia!” [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 53]. Communication with the Lebanese photographer and his perception of Ziyad is also colorful [Al-Qarmalawi 2023, 112].

Separately, it is noteworthy to mention the difficulties in translating the novel. Fragments related to music theory and tangential terms such as “solfeggio”, “octave”, etc. are found in the work to a limited extent. The difficulty lay in the translation of terms directly related to the Sufi musical tradition. Say, *maqam* can be considered a word-reality, so one must look for descriptive equivalents in the translation, such as “harmonic-tonic size”. The same situation with the names of the maqams themselves practiced in the tariqat – al-Mosuli Sufi school: al-Siba, al-Hijaz, al-Bayati, al-Kurd, al-Rasit, al-Nagawand, al-Ajam. Fortunately, this lacuna is partially closed within the frames of the novel, where in the process of the story, new students of the school are introduced to the basics of music theory. Such descriptions avoid the need to create artificial neologisms or use other ways to convey terms-realities.

Ahmad al-Qarmalawi’s novel continues to be the focus of attention of literary critics and translators. For example, the author of the article “Summer rains... The world on the wings of music!” Igab al-Mallah notes the writer’s photographic talents, his ability to feel people and skillfully embody their images in characters. The critic also speaks favorably of the techniques used by the author of *Summer Rains* and the language of the work, noting that A. Al-Qarmalawi knows how to maintain plot intrigue, how to introduce descriptive scenes so that they strengthen the text, etc. [Al-Mallāḥ 2018]. In May 2022, an Italian translation of the work, entitled *Pioggia d’Estate*, was also published by Round Robin Editrice.

Narrative Techniques and Characters

The novel *Summer Rains* employs a range of narrative techniques that contribute to character development, plot structure, and the use of stylistic devices. The author skillfully weaves multiple storylines, creating a complex narrative that explores themes of love, spirituality, and the search for identity in modern Egyptian society. One of the most striking aspects of Al-Qarmalawi’s novel is his use of multiple narrators and perspectives. The story unfolds through the eyes of several characters, including Yusuf, a young oud player; Zina Dinari, a musician with multicultural identity; and Ziyad, Yusuf’s friend and fellow student at the music institute. This multi-perspective approach allows the author to delve deep into the psyche of each character, revealing their motivations, desires, and internal conflicts. As the narrative progresses, the reader gains a comprehensive understanding of the characters’ growth and development.

The plot structure of *Summer Rains* is non-linear, with frequent shifts in time and perspective. Al-Qarmalawi employs flashbacks and dream sequences to provide insight into

the characters' pasts and their inner worlds. This fragmented narrative style reflects the characters' own sense of disorientation and search for meaning in a rapidly changing society. The author also uses foreshadowing and symbolism to create a sense of unity and coherence throughout the novel. For example, the recurring motif of the oud, a traditional Arabic musical instrument, serves as a symbol of the characters' connection to their cultural heritage and their struggle to find their place in the modern world.

Al-Qarmalawi's language is rich and evocative, drawing on a range of stylistic devices to create a vivid and immersive reading experience. He frequently employs metaphors and similes to describe the characters' emotional states and the world around them. For instance, when describing Yusuf's feelings for Rahma, the author writes: "He felt as if he were drowning in a sea of her love, each wave crashing over him with a force that left him breathless" [Al-Qarmalawi 2023]. The use of such figurative language adds depth and texture to the narrative, allowing the reader to connect with the characters on a visceral level. *Summer Rains* is a masterful example of contemporary Arabic literature, showcasing Al-Qarmalawi's skill as a storyteller and his ability to craft complex, multi-layered narratives. Through his use of multiple perspectives, non-linear plot structure, and evocative language, the author creates a powerful and engaging story that explores the challenges and triumphs of life in modern Egypt.

Al-Qarmalawi employs a unique blend of realism and mysticism in *Summer Rains*. The novel is firmly grounded in the realities of contemporary Egyptian society, with detailed descriptions of Cairo's streets, cafes, and music halls. At the same time, the author incorporates elements of Sufism, a mystical tradition within Islam, to explore the characters' spiritual journeys. This juxtaposition of the mundane and the transcendent adds a layer of depth and complexity to the narrative, inviting the reader to consider the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual worlds.

Another notable aspect of Al-Qarmalawi's narrative technique is his use of intertextuality. Throughout the novel, the author makes references to classical Arabic literature, music, and poetry. For example, the character of Sheikh Al-Mosuli, a legendary oud player and spiritual guide, is based on the historical figure of Ziryab, a 9th-century musician who is credited with introducing the oud to Andalusia. By drawing on these cultural and historical references, Al-Qarmalawi situates his story within a broader context of Arabic artistic and intellectual traditions, adding richness and resonance to the narrative.

The author also employs a range of narrative devices to create tension and suspense throughout the novel. One such device is the use of cliffhangers at the end of chapters, leaving the reader eager to discover what happens next. Additionally, Al-Qarmalawi often withholds crucial information from the reader, revealing it gradually through the characters' interactions and internal monologues. This technique keeps the reader engaged and invested in the story, as they work to piece together the various threads of the narrative.

Summer Rains is a highly visual novel, with detailed descriptions of settings, characters, and objects. Al-Qarmalawi's prose is almost cinematic in its ability to conjure vivid images in the reader's mind. This visual quality is particularly evident in the scenes set in the music institute, where the author describes the intricate details of the ouds, the movements of the musicians' fingers, and the expressions on their faces as they play. By engaging the reader's senses in this way, Al-Qarmalawi creates a fully immersive reading experience, one that transports the reader into the world of the novel.

Summer Rains is a testament to Al-Qarmalawi's mastery of the craft of fiction. Through his use of multiple narrators, non-linear plot structure, evocative language, and a range of other narrative techniques, the author has created a rich and multi-layered novel that explores the complexities of life, love, and spirituality in modern Egypt. The novel's unique blend of realism and mysticism, its incorporation of cultural and historical references, and its highly visual prose all contribute to its power and resonance.

Conclusion

Among the variety of literary works constantly appearing on the modern book market, *Summer Rains* by Ahmad al-Qarmalawi is a unique artistic phenomenon. Through the multidimensional interpretation of music in the novel, A. Al-Qarmalawi conveys the intricacies of Arab culture and society, emphasizing their internal dynamics and diversity. At the same time, the author does not simply demonstrate differences but emphasizes their role in understanding culture as a component of personal and collective identity. The synthesis of music and literature allows al-Qarmalawi to recreate an authentic cultural background, which the reader is free to observe and interpret in the dynamics of its formation.

Although *Summer Rains* is not purely a social and everyday novel, rather it tells a mystical story, it does so sometimes in everyday tones. Al-Qarmalawi masterfully combines extensive descriptive scenes with dynamic action, and philosophical dialogues with ambiguous maxims. Therefore, the “everyday tones” of the story do not harm the work, but on the contrary – strengthen the impression that all the events are unfolding in our time, somewhere nearby – almost here and now. A subtle sense of people, their emotions and life experiences allowed the writer to create complete images of characters that are memorable and easy to believe in – you sympathize with the heroes, because the author managed to make them alive, and their experiences – which are close and understandable.

The search for one’s identity and life path by the protagonists of the novel and the mystical search for God by the Sufis of the al-Mosuli Agency also have a common sound thanks to music. Knowing architecture, literature, and various types of art, Ahmad al-Qarmalawi created a synthetic masterpiece, which can be perceived both through the prism of literature – assessing the philological perfection of the text, and through music. The novel contains many references to specific performers, genres and styles – if desired, the reader can familiarize himself or herself with the relevant compositions in order to better understand the characters of the work and feel the environment in which the action takes place. One can also read *Summer Rains* as a hymn to architecture – to the hot streets of Cairo, the peace of the age-old Agency with its stone walls and the “Well of Secrets” in the courtyard.

“The Well of Secrets” is a favorite place of Sheikh Ibad al-Mosuli, the founder of the Sufi order and the Agency. After all, the book *Summer Rains*, whose title is an allusion to the life of the aforementioned apocryphal Sufi genius, can be discussed in religious discourse – considering the role of Salafis in Egyptian society or the understanding by the murids of the Sufi Tariqat of the essence of God. However, the topic of Islam is not the key in the novel – religion is considered here as a component of a person’s social existence, and one’s understanding of spiritual values. This understanding affects the perception of own identity, and judgments about “self”, “alien” and “other”. The author does not express his position directly, creating such characters and situations, thanks to which the readers decide for themselves: do art and religion, music and faith – contribute to uniting people around common values and establish dialogue, or on the contrary – turn them against each other even more? Both positions are convincingly supported by the respective characters of the novel, their philosophy and actions.

Today’s pace of development of literature and literary criticism in the Arab world does not always allow one to evaluate a specific work objectively. Thus, *Summer Rains* was written in 2016, the novel won the Sheikh Zayed Book Award in 2018, its translation into Italian appeared in 2022, and into Ukrainian in 2023. Each of the events was accompanied by a certain information resonance, which increased interest in the writer and his creative output. From the mentioned facts, one can make a cautious assumption: the connoisseur of modern Arabic literature will still hear about the book *Summer Rains* in particular and the literary work of Ahmad al-Qarmalawi in general.

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C. B. Рибалкін

Музика, ідентичність і наратив у романі Ахмада аль-Кармалаві “Літні дощі”

Об’єктом дослідження є роман “Літні дощі” Ахмада аль-Кармалаві, мета статті – розкриття теми ідентичності, культурної та релігійної спадщини суфійського ордену аль-Моусулі в контексті проблем сучасного єгипетського суспільства. Мета передбачає виконання таких завдань: 1) проведення комплексного вивчення тематичних елементів, наявних у “Літніх дощах”, включаючи роль музики, зображення динаміки становлення суспільства та дослідження екзистенціальних тем, таких як ідентичність і духовність; 2) аналіз наративних технік, використаних аль-Кармалаві, з акцентом на таких аспектах, як розвиток персонажа, структура сюжету та підбір стилістичних засобів; 3) дослідження культурного та історичного контексту роману, враховуючи його актуальність у сучасній арабській літературі та резонанс із суспільними проблемами; 4) зріз сприйняття та впливу “Літніх дощів” на літературну спільноту, включаючи критичні відгуки, переклади та нагороди; 5) оцінка значущості роману та наративних технік для визначення ролі літератури у формуванні ідентичності та сприянні міжкультурному діалогу.

Методи дослідження базуються на критичному читанні тексту, що дозволяє розкрити особливості тематики, стилю, наративу та вплив роману на аудиторію. Аналізуються, зокрема, прийоми описових сцен, динаміка дії та діалоги, котрі допомагають автору передати автентичність арабської духовної спадщини та її внесок у формування індивідуальної та колективної ідентичності. Результати дослідження вказують на важливість роману “Літні дощі” як твору, що сприяє розумінню та поглибленню взаємодії між цивілізаціями, а також спонукає читачів до рефлексії над пост-глобалізаційними тенденціями. Роман відображає складність та розмаїття арабського суспільства, надаючи читачам можливість глибше осягнути його сутність. Дослідження розкриває значущість музики як елемента культурної ідентичності та засобу вираження духовних пошуків. Роман підкреслює важливість взаєморозуміння та діалогу між Сходом і Заходом, а також актуальність питань ідентичності та релігії в сучасному світі. Вивчення рецепції та впливу роману на літературну спільноту обумовлює його значимість як художнього феномена, що спонукає до рефлексії над глобальними тенденціями та викликами сьогодення. Роман “Літні дощі” визначається як важливий внесок у сучасну арабську літературу та підтримує дискусію щодо ролі художнього слова у формуванні ідентичності та сприянні міжкультурному діалогу.

Ключові слова: Ахмад аль-Кармалаві; арабська література; ідентичність; культурна спадщина; “Літні дощі”; міжкультурний діалог; наративні техніки; релігія

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