

IDEOLOGICAL AND AESTHETIC EXPLORATION IN CONTEMPORARY REALIST SHORT STORIES (LATE 20TH - EARLY 21ST CENTURIES)

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ABSTRACT

This article is dedicated to the works of two prominent contemporary Saudi Arabian writers, Abdullah Bakhshwain and Yusuf Muhaymid. Their literary creations are reviewed and analyzed. In the last decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the modern Saudi short story has rapidly assimilated the diverse and rich experience of world literature. This has led to a blending of trends from various literary movements and schools. The content of the modern Saudi short story exhibits characteristics of both Enlightenment, Romantic, and Realistic literature, as well as elements of Modernism, which is a testament to the accelerated pace of literary development in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: conservative society, narrative form, artistic techniques of literary modernism, philosophy of existentialism, modernization, psychological experiences, traits of realism, symbolism, allegory/ allusions, classical realism, censorship

INTRODUCTION

In the development of the contemporary Saudi short story during the late 20th century, the evolution of a naturally renewed form of the realist method and the penetration of modernist means of artistic depiction are evident. Questions surrounding the philosophy of existentialism can be traced in the works of the contemporary writer Abdullah Bahshwain.

Abdullah Bahshwain is the author of the novel "Sultan, Sultana"¹, published by the Arab Cultural Center in Beirut and the Literary Club of Riyadh in 2013, as well as the author of the short story collection "Triumph." (الحفلة) published in 1985.

The characters in this collection are presented to us with their individual and personal characteristics, which every reader can relate to and experience their feelings and emotions firsthand, once and for all, generation after generation. Bahshwain is an artist who depicts the external appearance and inner spiritual world of his characters (who they are, how they look, etc.). The protagonists of his stories are diverse individuals because they are unique, yet each of them represents a particular archetype.

¹ عبد الله باجشويين. سلطان سلتانة. رواية. 2013

² عبد الله باجشويين. الحفلة. مجموعة من القصص القصيرة. الرياض. 1998 س

The characters in these stories aren't adapted to the arguments of reason, but rather to human nature, because the mind is only a part of human nature, not its entirety. Every symbol expresses these dilemmas and complexities. What makes the protagonists linger in the reader's memory is their unexpected behavior, driven by the motivation of feelings that suddenly surge, and the regret for a past constantly slipping by.

Each of Abdullah Bahshwain's characters aims to convey a problem or concept inherent in their ultimate goal. Two such concepts are loneliness and alienation, which aren't meant for life lived in isolation. Unity and estrangement are presented before the self.

Alienation is a prominent phenomenon clearly present in the literature of many well-known Arab writers, such as Naguib Mahfouz, Yusuf Idris, Zakaria Tamer, George Salim, and Yusuf Damra. These writers are part of an Arab world grappling with numerous contradictions that have led to social, intellectual, and psychological crises. This has resulted in a shock where the writer, reflecting on their literary experience, demonstrates their uncertainty about their own reality, suffering from multiple levels of alienation clearly manifested in their work.

In Bahshwain's stories, the philosophy of existentialism is reflected - the theme of alienation emerges in its numerous manifestations at the level of personality, thought, and vision.

The writer successfully embodies instances of alienation to reveal the nature of the relationship between the world of reality and the world of dreams within the story's characters. He achieves this through specific narrative techniques that allow him to unveil feelings of disappointment, loss, and alienation.

In Bahshwain's stories, alienation takes various forms, and the author's narrative clearly depicts pain, isolation, loneliness, anxiety, despair, and death through meticulously drawn characters who remarkably present their psychological problems and anxieties. This appears in three forms: self-alienation, physical alienation, and social alienation. For example, in the story "الأصدقاء" ("Friends") from this collection, the protagonist asks an officer to arrest him to find respite from his obsessive thoughts and ideas. In the story "الاستيقاظ المبكر" ("Early Awakening"), the protagonist gazes at his reflection in a glass display, where he is clad only in socks, shoes, and a head covering.

These stories contain alienation, suspicion, fear, terror, and remorse. The author makes it clear that it's not enough to dwell in the world of the obvious; one must look beyond its boundaries. Bahshwain focuses on the memories of his characters, which serve as a destructive force against the present. In the story "The World," his protagonist, Muhammad, recalls a prisoner, the ghost of his mother, the suffering of his wife, and the anger of his boss. In the story "A Song for Death," the spiritually devastated protagonist screams and talks to himself.

The theme of the story "Early Awakening" is the overturned consciousness of a character on the verge of a mental breakdown. The protagonist is a man who fears everything; upon arriving in the city, he falls victim to cruelty and remorse that envelop his heart. The protagonist simultaneously symbolizes all of humanity. Anyone could be embodied in the story's hero.

His self-control was shattered, and he became a ruin after realizing he was utterly alone, with no family, friends, or relatives. Strange... Strange... Gharib. The repetition of the word "gharib" (غريب) indicates the depth of his feeling of alienation, and his acknowledgment of his weakness, helplessness, and inability to tolerate alienation was revealed in his interview with the café waiter:

خير يا أخي.. ما الذي حل بك؟! شفق عندما حاول الكلام. غطى وجهه بغترته. خرج صوته متقطعاً
إني غريب يا أخي.. غريب.. غريب تماماً.. لا أعرف هاهنا أحداً. جئت.. جئت من مكان بعيد.. بعيد.. إني حائر يا أخي.. حائر.. لا أدري ماذا أفعل أو كيف
أنصرف

"Alright, brother... What happened to you?!" He choked as he tried to speak, burying his face in his jacket. His voice came out brokenly: "I'm a stranger, brother... A stranger... Completely strange... I don't know anyone here. I came... I came from far away... Far away. I'm confused, brother... Confused... I don't know what to do or how to act."¹

Faced with loneliness and alienation, he relied only on himself and refused to engage with the surrounding world, passively orbiting his empty life. Every morning, he arrived late for work. He would enter his office, greet his colleagues anxiously, and sit at his desk, staring into nothingness, waiting for work that might or might not come. He would listen to his boss's reprimands and spend more than half the day at his desk, doing nothing.

The author shows how the protagonist can fall into a state of loneliness and detachment from people, a tendency towards introversion as a manifestation of the anxiety and internal conflict experienced by the character. His feeling of alienation and loneliness negates everything that connects him to others. This feeling applies to many characters in Bahshwain's various stories.

The reason for the shift in the character's consciousness is his absolute rejection of life in the city, and the logical, discernible connections between the external world and the character's disturbed mind are absent. The detailed description of the feelings of fear, confusion, and terror, which are vividly portrayed throughout the story, make the narrative truly intense and empathetic.

مظ شفتيه بحيرة، مستغرباً استيقاظه في مثل تلك الساعة. انتابه سكر في دقة توقيت المنبه. مد يده تحت الوسادة. تناول ساعة معصمه. حرق فيها. كان يشعر
بنشاط و حيوية لم يعهدهما فيتغ نفسه من قبل.

"He twisted his lips in bewilderment, surprised to be awake at such an hour. He reached his hand under the pillow and took his wristwatch. He looked at it and confirmed that he had indeed woken up early. He felt an energy and vitality he had never experienced before."¹

¹ عبد الله باجشويين (موسوعة الأدب العربي السعودي الحديث) الرياض. 2001 م، ص 485

¹ عبد الله باجشويين (موسوعة الأدب العربي السعودي الحديث) الرياض. 2001 م، ص 473

The story begins with the protagonist narrating how he woke up much earlier than usual on weekdays. سنين طويلة مضت لم ينعم خلالها بمثل ذلك النوم الهنيء، أو استيقظ هذه الحال التي أصبح عليه. اقتصد الندم حلاوة أيامه و أحاله في لحظة إلى حطام. فقدت الحياة برقيها، و سكنته وحدة و غررية لا حدود لها. عندما ترك بلدته الصغيرة و جاء الى هذه المدينة ، كان يسير على ضفاف حلم جميل.

"Many years had passed since he had enjoyed such a pleasant sleep or at least woken up in such a state. Remorse had spoiled the sweetness of his days and led him to the moment of collapse. Life had lost its luster, and he lived in a foreign land in loneliness that knew no bounds. When he left his small town, he came to this city. He walked along the shores of a beautiful dream."¹

From the very beginning of his arrival in the city, the story's protagonist found it difficult. He wandered for a long time, unsure exactly where he was going. Tired and disoriented, he stepped into a café to distract himself and rest. Various thoughts consumed him at that moment.

عصر الندم قلبه. فتت اعصاه و أحاله إلى حطام بعد أن تأكد وحيد تماما، لا أهل و لا صديق أو قريب. طفر إلى عينيه دمع لم يقو على حبسه... فيكي. فقد توازنه. فقد قدرته على التفكير أو التصريف بشكل منطقي. سلاسل من الوحدة و الغربة و الندم أحكمت طوقها على عنقه. حاول جاهدا أن يفلت منها. اراد أن يذهب بعيدا. غير ان خطاه تعثرت فأيقن ان لا سبيل الى الفكاك او الذهاب ابعده من طول حبس القيد.

"Remorse squeezed his heart. It had shredded his nerves and reduced them to rubble after he became convinced that he was utterly alone, with no parents, no friends, no loved ones nearby. Tears welled in his eyes, and he didn't resist them; he wept. He lost his balance. He lost the ability to think or act logically. The threads of loneliness, alienation, and remorse tightened like a collar around his neck, and despite all his efforts to escape them, he yearned to go far away. But his steps faltered, and he realized there was no way to break free or step beyond the rope's confines."² The feeling of loneliness was stronger than him, and he was powerless to cope with it; the break from his family and home weighed heavily on him.

و يصرف ما تبقى يذهب إلى عمله متأخرا كل صباح. يستمع إلى توبيخ رئيس عمله، ويمضي أكثر من نصف النهار على مكتبه دون أن يعمل شيئا يذكر، في التسكع في الشوارع و الأسواق دون أدنى متعة أو فضول يعود إلى منزله ولديه ذكريات الماضي ، والأفكار المزعجة والكوابيس. الليل ليس ليلا بالنسبة له ، واليوم ليس نهارا.

"Every morning he goes to work late. He listens to his boss's reproaches, spending more than half his time at his desk doing nothing, and spends the rest of the day wandering the streets and markets without the slightest enjoyment or curiosity. He returns home, and memories, troubling thoughts, and nightmares surface. Night is not night for him, nor is day day."¹

The author shows that neither work nor walks save him from alienation and loneliness.

He doesn't even interact with his colleagues; he simply waves to them when they meet, without waiting for a response. His life is a routine consisting of work and home. Years pass, and nothing changes. During his time living in the city, he doesn't even know the names of the streets, beyond his work district and place of residence. Fear, terror, and nightmares never leave him.

يفتح باب منزله ويتنهد مع الأسف. يتعب من خلع ملابسه بعد تشغيل الأضواء في كل مكان لتعزية وحدته وإبعاد الظلام والأشباح. كانت هذه الليلة الغريبة ليلا لإثارة الأفكار والأوهام والكوابيس. لا يوجد عزاء والآن لا يوجد سلام... كيف تقضي الليل؟!... كيف؟! لا يزال خائفا طوال الليل ، ويشعر أن شخصا ما يراقبه في أحد أركان المنزل. جلس على السرير يفكر ، نظر حوله ، محاولا تحديد الزاوية التي كانت العين الملتزمة قادمة منها ، وزاد خوفه وارتباكه وقلقه.

"He opens the door of his house and sighs with regret. He wearily takes off his clothes after turning on all the lights to comfort his loneliness and drive away the darkness and ghosts. This strange night was a night for troubling thoughts, illusions, and nightmares. There is no comfort, and now no peace... how to spend the night?!...how?! He continues to be afraid all night, feeling that someone is watching him from one of the corners of the house. He sat on the bed, thinking, looking around, trying to pinpoint the corner from which the watchful eye was emanating, and his fear, confusion, and anxiety grew."²

The protagonist has already begun to experience psychological disorders. He constantly feels like someone is watching him in his own home, even though the story makes no mention of anyone visiting him or him having friends who would come to his house, which would provide a reason to watch him. He had no one, and no one needed him; he was like an abandoned person. He was even afraid to walk around his workplace so he wouldn't notice anyone familiar, and if he did, he would just wave with a sour face, as usual.

The story "Early Awakening" begins with the protagonist moving to the city, which he found extremely difficult and couldn't cope with alone. He has no friends, no loved ones, no relatives. For some reason, he doesn't intend to initiate any relationships with those around him or with his neighbors. He is unhappy with this lifestyle, but he is powerless to do anything to improve his pathetic existence. He has a job, he has a home, but there's no one with whom he can share his sorrows and joys.

Loneliness is understood as a state representing the experience of a "rupture" in one's relationship with the world - a state where an individual feels isolated from their surroundings. In understanding "loneliness" as a state, two aspects are distinguished: firstly, as a subjective state associated with feelings of longing, inadequacy, abandonment, and misunderstanding, rooted in deprivation, meaning a lack of trust and understanding; secondly, as an objective state of

¹ عبد الله باجشويين (موسوعة الأدب العربي السعودي الحديث) 2001 م، ص 477

² in the same place

¹ عبد الله باجشويين (موسوعة الأدب العربي السعودي الحديث) 2001 م، ص 480

² in the same place

forced physical or social isolation, that is, a state of being excluded from interaction with people or with socially significant categories of people.

The protagonist doesn't even realize his loneliness, which leads to him making catastrophic mistakes in life. He creates an illusion for himself, not truly understanding that he is a solitary recluse. Writers often portray individuals for whom the desire for personal freedom is alien. In literary works, the blame for a person's loneliness is primarily placed on society, which provoked it through its influence. However, in this case, the protagonist of the story himself is the cause of his own loneliness. He is constantly afraid of something; the specific reasons aren't mentioned, through which the author intends to convey to the reader that a perfectly normal person, without particular reasons, can drastically change their state once and for all, and the catalyst for this is merely a feeling of detachment. How important it is to be needed and useful to someone, because if you benefit no one, then what is the meaning of your entire existence? Loneliness kills a person, especially if it is forced. It seemed to him that this was not his choice, why he was here, and for what purpose. Before, he lived in a large family in a small town, unable to express his ambitions; there, he had everything except his unfulfilled dreams and expectations. And now he has come to a big city, but from the very first day, he feels out of place. After all, a big city separates people, it doesn't bring them closer. A person quickly gets used to being constantly surrounded by people, constant evenings, and life buzzing... And when he is left alone and life gives him time to rest, he begins to experience something like withdrawal, because he doesn't know how to occupy himself. He doesn't use his free time productively, for example, to simply reflect on his life, to re-evaluate his mistakes; he simply doesn't want to, because he's not used to doing it. It seems to him that time flows slowly, that he is alone and lonely... Perhaps this is indeed the case. Loneliness is dangerous because it often goes unnoticed until you are alone with yourself at night in an empty apartment. The protagonist of the story is constantly afraid of the dark; he hears banging and sees ghosts.

Nothing around him interested him. He didn't know the names of the streets or areas where he wandered aimlessly, nor the names of his colleagues. At work, he did almost nothing, sitting for six hours, staring into space. His boss constantly scolded and reprimanded him, giving him warnings and deducting from his salary, but even this didn't bother him. He was so utterly indifferent to everything and everyone that he didn't even try to pass the time by interacting with anyone at work. If he bumped into someone on the street and received an angry retort, he would pretend it wasn't addressed to him at all, and might even smile foolishly before walking away as if nothing had happened.

Not once during his stay in the city did he enjoy a restful night's sleep, except for one single day when he had a nervous breakdown. Even in the bathroom, he felt as if someone was watching him, or that a snake would crawl out of the drain and bite him. He reached the peak of madness without even realizing it, which is incredibly frightening and terrible for the protagonist himself. His last action speaks volumes about his utterly disturbed mind; the line between reality and illusion blurred for him, and he was no longer able to restore it. The author portrays the surrounding world through the eyes of a lonely and alienated person, highlighting how everything becomes suspicious and strange. It would seem the protagonist is young and healthy, so why is he so lonely that he's almost gone mad? The answer is difficult to find, but in the modern world, many people are lonely, especially in large cities. However, loneliness isn't always accompanied by madness and doesn't always end with a shift in a person's consciousness.

This story allows the reader to deeply empathize with the state of a person who is truly alone. How difficult a relocation can be if a person is weak-spirited or accustomed to a large family. He couldn't withstand the hardships and adversities of harsh reality, and his only outlet became self-flagellation. The protagonist began committing acts that defy explanation or justification.

The central problem of the entire story is primarily the protagonist's loneliness, his renunciation and withdrawal from everything around him.

The story features only one character and his inner world, with no description of his personal qualities, appearance, or age. He has no friends with whom he could spend time entertaining himself and having fun; perhaps he had them in his hometown, but nothing is said about it. There are no secondary plotlines; the main storyline features only the main character, whose name we don't even know.

The story is most likely titled "Early Awakening" precisely because on that very day, when the protagonist woke up early and felt incredible energy and vitality, he also experienced a nervous breakdown, the most significant event of which he is completely unaware of and content with everything happening.

Throughout the story, the author describes his state, giving vivid and clear characteristics of his strange and uneasy feelings, which evoke a storm of terrifying feelings and emotions within him. There are no monologues or even dialogues in the story by which we could judge his sanity and education. Only once at the beginning of the entire story does he speak to a waiter who noticed his sadness and approached him to ask how he was.

غريب.. غريب... غريب..

صدمته الحقيقية

أوزعته حد الرعب، وأشعرته باليتم.

طفر إلى عينيه دمع لم يقو على حبسه... فبكى.

عامل المقهى تنبه للحال التي هو عليها. اقترب منه. ربت على كتفه متفه متسانلا بدشهة:

- خير يا أخي.. ما الذي حل بك..؟

- شهق عندما حاول الكلام. غطى وجهه بغترته. خرج صوته متقطعا:

- اني غريب يا أخي.. غريب.. غريب تماما.. لا أعرب هاهنا أحدا. حئت..

- جئت من مكان بعيد.. بعيد.. إني حائر يا أخي.. حائر.. لأدري ماذا أفعل أو كيف أتصرف. ساعدني يا أخي أربوك.. ساعدني فإني..

- ثم لم يقو على المزيد. ربت العامل على كتفه و قال مواسيا:
- هون عليك يا أخي.. هون عليك فكلنا هاهنا غرباء.

"A stranger... A stranger... A stranger..."

This revealed truth struck him profoundly.

He experienced such a terror of **loneliness** that he felt like an orphan. Tears welled up, and unable to hold them back, he began to weep.

The waiter noticed his state and approached him, patting him on the shoulder: "Hello! What happened?"

Tears choked his words. He wiped his face with the edge of his headscarf and, in a broken voice, said: "I'm a stranger here, brother, completely strange. I don't know anyone here..."

"I came from afar and got lost. Brother, I don't know what to do. Please, help me! I..."

He couldn't continue... The waiter patted his shoulder again and said: "Calm down, brother... don't worry about it! We are all strangers here!"¹

This single dialogue reveals the entire essence of the story. In this dialogue, the author laid out his idea. As mentioned above, the protagonist of the story is a symbol of every individual, meaning, in fact, the solitary one. The waiter's response is a reflection of philosophical observations. "We are all strangers" as if this thought belongs to all humanity. In a symbolic sense, every person is indeed a stranger to another.

The story's exposition begins with him wandering the streets and coasts upon his arrival in the city, where he starts to be overwhelmed by a feeling of loneliness.

In the story, the author reflects the national ideas of existentialist philosophy raised in Western literature.

In this writer's style, one can see a combination of modern trends with national literature. This state can be observed through the hero's efforts to escape loneliness and alienation.

Through the description of the protagonist reading Surah An-Nas from the Quran, Bahshwain attempts to show a stark difference in his style from Western existentialist writers. In the story, through this motif, a clear individual, distinctive feature of Saudi literature can be observed.

This story makes one reflect on the problem of loneliness in this world, how difficult it is to bear, and what the consequences are for a person not adapted to such a lifestyle. Outcomes can vary, even leading to suicide. Perhaps there are many such people among us whom we simply don't notice, and to stand out in some way, they commit such strange and inappropriate acts.

In conclusion, it can be said that the current state of Saudi society, the confrontation between deeply rooted traditions and the unavoidable challenges of modernity, stimulates the creative explorations of Saudi writers. They are driven by a desire to develop societal consciousness, introduce new concepts and understandings of life through artistic works, and clarify the true value of the human personality and the necessity of its spiritual development.

By the early 21st century, the further development of "experimental writing" in the Saudi realist short story began to acquire characteristic features of Western modernism, most clearly manifested in the works of Yusuf Muhaymid (born in 1961).

Yusuf Muhaymid is one of the most prominent and critically acclaimed representatives of contemporary Saudi Arabian literature abroad.

Yusuf Muhaymid's first significant literary work was the short story collection "Noon Without Pedestrians" (ظهيرة لا مشا لها), published in 1989 in Riyadh. Shortly after its publication, the book was withdrawn from sale at the request of a well-known theologian in the country, who perceived tendencies within it that did not conform to the moral foundations of Saudi society².

Yusuf Muhaymid published his subsequent works outside of Saudi Arabia. In 1993, his second collection of short stories, "The Tremor of Their White Garments" («رجفة أثوبهم البيض»), was published in Cairo. In 1996, his book titled "Someone Must Move the Notebook" («لا بد أنا حدا حرك الكراسة») was released in Beirut.

In 2000, Yusuf Muhaymid's collection with the symbolic title "The Rattle of the Dead" («لغظ موتى») was published in Damascus by the Union of Arab Writers.

The writer believes that representatives of the conservative part of Saudi society, who are zealous guardians of a traditional way of life based on ignorance, prejudice, and cultural backwardness, belong to a long-obsolete past world and hinder the emergence of new, progressive development trends. But their end is approaching; their actions are the dying "rattles of the dead."

Yusuf Muhaymid is widely known as a novelist. His first novel, "The Trap of Scents" ("فخاخ الرائحة"), was published in Beirut in 2003. In 2004, the author's second novel, "The Bottle" («الغارورة»), also published in Beirut, came out.

The publication of Yusuf Muhaymid's new collection, "My Brother Searches for Rimbaud" («أخي يفتش ريمبو»), in Beirut in 2005 caused a sharp upheaval in Saudi society and led to increased censorship of young authors' works. The impossibility of combining medieval traditions with the innovations and ideas of the Western lifestyle, with which Yusuf Muhaymid had the opportunity to become closely acquainted during his studies in Great Britain, gave rise to a feeling of rebellion in him, manifesting in his works. The complete absence of plot, events, and narrative sequence led to a misunderstanding of the author's ideological and aesthetic intent and caused a barrage of negative critical literature. Many stories in the collection were characterized by unjustified nihilism and excessive pessimism, typical

¹ عبد الله باجشوين (موسوعة الأدب العربي السعودي الحديث) 2001 م، ص 482

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yousef_Al-Mohaimed

of Western modernism, whose negative influence on the works of young authors is noted by the famous Uzbek writer and literary critic Pirmuqol Qodirov (1928–2010)¹.

The theme of the father's death, and the main character's thoughts and experiences related to his burial, appear in many of Yusuf Muhaymid's stories. The story "The Dead Scatter" («شَتَاتِ الموتى») from the collection "The Rattle of the Dead" is dedicated to scenes of the main character's father's funeral. The narrative of the story is built on three levels of spatiotemporal certainty. The first level - the present - is modeled using a realistic picture depicting the protagonist in a hearse surrounded by people close to his father.

لقد كنا قبلاً ثمانية، محشورين بكثافة داخل مقصورة السيارة الكبيرة، إذ نتقابل، ملصقين بذلك ظهورنا لزجاجات السيارة الباردة، المطلة على شوارع هادئة، في ظهيرة مكتظة بغيمات رمادية، تتحرك بطيئة في سماء الرياض.

"Before this, there were eight of us, crammed inside the cabin of a large hearse, so that we sat facing each other, our backs touching the cold glass of the car window, looking out onto a quiet street in the early afternoon with grey clouds that slowly drifted across the Riyadh sky."¹

The deceased's body is brought into the car, and the first level harmoniously integrates into the second. Its details are aimed at creating a picture of the interconnectedness of past and present, the continuous movement of human time from beginning to end: living people, and with them in a confined space, the body of the deceased. To intensify the mournful atmosphere of gradual decay, the transience of human life, and its departure into oblivion, Yusuf Muhaymid draws the reader's attention to the roses, specifically their yellow color, symbolizing grief and loss, and accepted in many countries around the world as a sign of mourning.

و برغم أننا ثمانية، و أبي مسجى بيننا، بجسده المظمور ببطانية صوف بنيّة في وسطها و ردتان ضخمتان صفراوان.

"There were eight of us, and with us, the deceased - my father. His body was wrapped in a brown woolen blanket, in the center of which two enormous yellow roses were woven."²

The recurring, stable symbols in the story's content, such as the sky - سماء - grey clouds - اسحاب رمادية - green bushes: - شجيرات خضراء - They model the third level - eternity, within which past and present coexist and become equal to each other.

And this entire three-tiered picture of time is accompanied by endless rain.

و لم تتوقف قطرات المطر عن السقوط من الغيوم. و بدأت قطرات مطر صغيرة تعانق رأس الزجاجاة الأمامية للسيارة، ثم تنزل في خيوط دقيقة، فجأة، بعدها اشتعال الماسح الاتوماتيكي، و هو يقذف بحبات المطر على الجانبين، و قد كبرت، و تكاثفت.

"From them (the clouds), raindrops incessantly fell. Small raindrops began to hit the car's windshield, then rolled down in thin streaks, and I was struck by the rhythmic work of the car's wipers, which evenly dispersed the increasingly larger and faster-falling raindrops to both sides."¹

On one hand, this rain, being a symbol of constant renewal, lends dynamism to the story and materializes the cyclical movement of daily life. On the other hand, the continuous streams of rain, washing away everything in their path, acquire the significance of a river of time, carrying human endeavors into oblivion.

In 2011, Yusuf Muhaymid's latest collection, "It Seems Trees Don't Hear Me" («الأشجار لم تعد تسمعي»), was published in Beirut. It comprised what the writer considered his best short stories, created at various stages of his novella writing.

The story "Just Not a Cheap Box" («مجرد علبة ليست رخيصة»), first published in 2003, is entirely presented in the form of a stream of consciousness. The story's content, oriented towards multiple interpretations of the text, is burdened by an abundance of symbolism, often requiring rereading. Delving into the artistic world of the story's symbolic imagery, it's hard to disagree with the opinion of Uzbek literary critic Suvon Meli: "That the literature of symbolic depiction possesses great possibilities for perceiving and comprehending the world is an undeniable truth. But excessive fascination with it is inappropriate."² (193)

The narrative is built on a plotless principle, with Yusuf Muhaymid acting as the narrator, presenting his thoughts and sensations to the presumed reader without any logical sequence. The artistic image he creates is based on the "stream of consciousness" technique, widely used in the works of both Western modernist writers and artists of realistic perception. This technique allows for an extremely detailed depiction of the psychic process, with precise fixation of thoughts, feelings, and unconscious impulses. The narrative does not adhere to rules of chronology or logic; it is presented as a string of purely subjective human associations that can be triggered by various external circumstances. The story contains autobiographical details: the main character's name, "Yusuf," is identical to the author's, and like Yusuf Muhaymid, he is born after seven sisters. Such a coincidence suggests that this story expresses the writer's personally motivated perspective on himself and his place in the world, the understanding of which requires an interpretation of the story's artistic symbols.

The protagonist, Yusuf, cannot retrieve his deceased father's body from the hospital for burial without first paying for the care and treatment provided. The hospital director advises him to petition a noble person or ask a journalist he knows, if any, to publish a newspaper advertisement requesting charitable assistance. However, Yusuf does nothing. Consumed by anxiety and remorse, he aimlessly drives around the city, engrossed in his sorrowful thoughts. Yusuf's

¹ P. Kadyrov. "Ozod Vatan Saodati" (The Happiness of a Free Homeland). Volume 5: Spirituality, Modernism, and Absurdity. Tashkent: Adib Nashriyoti, 2013. p. 53.

¹ يوسف المحيّميد لغط موتى قصص من منشورات اتحاد الكتاب العرب 2000 ، ص 93 .

² يوسف المحيّميد لغط موتى قصص من منشورات اتحاد الكتاب العرب 2000 ، ص 93 .

¹ in the same place

² S. Meli. "Ozod Vatan Saodati" (The Happiness of a Free Homeland). Volume 5: Literature, Criticism, Spirituality. Tashkent: Adib Nashriyoti, 2013. p. 63.

anxiety, caused by his painfully experienced inability to cope with the situation, actually implies a fear of destroying his inner spiritual world and losing the meaning of existence. His father's body in the story is a significant symbol of adherence to patriarchal foundations, customs, rituals, traditions, and ceremonies that sustain an environment preventing the establishment of new, modern norms of life in Saudi society. Yusuf faces a dilemma: to bury or to preserve his own "self," which resonates with the advanced views and ideas of the contemporary world.

لكنني لا أملك أن أصنع شيئاً! ماذا قلت يا أبي؟ أنا أملك الكثير؟ كيف؟ لم أسمعك جيداً، فارفع صوتك حيث أصوات الموتى عادة مليئة بالخنة، وأصواتهم تخرج من أنوفهم المقلدة! نعم الآن أسمعك بوضوح، تريدني أن أقف في الطوابير أحمل معروضا بطاب السداد عن إقامتك في مستشفى! أن أقف على بوابات الوجهاء، أتأمل سحنة الحراس ووجوههم الباردة! كيف تريدني يا أبي أن اتحول إلى شحا و أنت تسقي الكرامة في عروقي منذ الطفولة؟

"But I am powerless to do anything! What did you say, father? I am capable of much? But how? I don't hear you well. Raise your voice, the voices of the dead usually nasalize. Their voices come from closed noses. Yes, now I hear you clearly. You want me to stand in line, holding a petition asking for payment for your stay in the hospital! For me to stand at the doors of noble lords, scrutinizing the expressions on the guards' faces, their cold faces! How can you, father, want to turn me into a beggar when from childhood you instilled honor and dignity in my veins?"¹

As in "The Rattle of the Dead," the writer uses the image of the dead as a symbol of obsolete traditions and customs that hinder the progressive movement of life. And although their nasal voices belong to an irrevocably vanished past, they possess enough power to influence a person's life or invade their personal space. Yusuf Muhaymid knew this well from an early age. As a schoolboy, Yusuf Muhaymid received an international prize established by Japan for children's creativity, for his drawing "Mother's Day," which depicted a mother embracing her child. The boy had a talent for drawing, but he had to abandon painting under family pressure, as the religion of Islam prohibits depicting living beings. Perhaps in memory of this biographical fact, the writer introduces the image of the mother into the story, demanding that a way be found to bury the father's body by any means necessary.

"إكرام الميت دفنه!" قالت أمي.

أعرف ذلك، وأحب أبي كثيراً، ولكن كيف لي أن أكرمه، وأدفنه و هو سجين في تلاجة ضخمة، محروسة بأقفال عنيذة لا تنام ليلاً ولا نهاراً.

"Reverence for the deceased is their burial!" Mother said. I know this, and I love my father very much, but how can I show him reverence and bury him if he's confined in a huge refrigerator, guarded by strong locks that never sleep, neither day nor night?"²

The sight of a frozen juice box bought at the supermarket triggers a series of associations for Yusuf. He compares the juice box, placed in the supermarket refrigerator, to his father's body, enclosed in the hospital morgue's cold storage.

فالعلبة أرخص منك سعراً، ثمنها ريال واحد، أما أنت فتجني كرامتي! أرايت الفرق؟ العلبة يا أبي حررتها من وطأة صقيع التلاجة في ثوان. أما أنت فلا بد أن أقف مهزوماً و مجروحاً فيطبور الانتظار الطويل! أن أمد ورقة موتي بخنوع. كي أخلص موتك! هل رأيت أبي؟ خلاصك من الموت وحياتك الجديدة في التربة يعادلها موتي في الحياة! لا عليك، ستولي يا أبي! سأبحث عن خن يقودني إلى طوابير الموت، وسأسحقها مثل حشرة عند بوابة ضخمة! ماذا؟ تسألني من التي سأسحقها كحشرة؟ إنها كرامتي يا أبي!

"The box is cheaper than you, its price is one riyal, but as for you, your price is my dignity. Do you see the difference?

The box, father, I freed from the icy oppression of the refrigerator in a fraction of a second, but as for you, I must stand broken and defeated in a long waiting line! To submissively hand over a paper about my death, in order to save you from death! Do you see, father? Your salvation from death and your new life in the earth equals my death in life! Not you, but I must make the decision, father! I will find someone to lead me to the queue for death. And I will destroy it, like an insect, at the huge gates! What? You ask who I will destroy like an insect? My dignity, father!"³

This metaphorical comparison: a frozen juice box and the cold body of the deceased, holds a deep, hidden meaning, allowing insight into Yusuf Muhaymid's spiritual world. The writer is under continuous pressure from family and society, who demand "dignified behavior" from him, but the loss of his own spiritual world is equivalent to death for him. He does not renounce his national identity and the rich cultural past of his ancestors. However, all the best that the Arab nation could be proud of is hidden behind medieval traditions and prejudices, bound by the icy shell of high-flown words about patriotism and loyalty to duty.

Outwardly, for a superficial reading, the story has an open ending: the writer leaves the resolution of the posed problem to the reader's discretion. The reader can speculate independently on what steps Yusuf will take: whether he will appeal for help through a newspaper to wealthy Saudi clans, or directly to charitable organizations, or something else. However, regarding the meaning of the story hidden behind its symbolic narrative, understanding comes to the attentive reader in the final scene: Yusuf Muhaymid's civic stance is unshakeable. The writer is ready to part with life but not to abandon his views or betray his spiritual world. Yusuf Muhaymid understands the complexity of the situation, as he has repeatedly faced negative public opinion and had to answer to censorship committee members for the "inappropriate" content of his works. Therefore, in the story's finale, one can discern the protagonist's fears for his life:

وخرجت من بوابة المستشفى لا الوي على شيء، وقد طار غراب أسحم قرب شجرة البنسيان التي تظلل عربة الاسعاف. فبكيت.

¹ <http://www.asp.com.lb>

² <http://www.asp.com.lb>

³ in the same place

"I exited the hospital gates, paying no attention to anything. A bluish-black raven flew near the pension tree, its shadow covering the ambulance. I wept."¹

In this final scene of the story, seemingly insignificant, sparse images of the external world create an atmosphere of impending doom. The bluish-black raven, according to folk beliefs, foretells a long separation or death; pansies are typically planted in cemeteries; the ambulance signifies a desperate cry for help. And the protagonist's unrestrained tears are a logical culmination of this bleak final picture. However, the author doesn't leave the reader without hope, symbolized by a lush red rose that Yusuf places on the nurse's desk on the floor where his father stayed before his passing:

أضع وردة على المنضدة أمامها ، قائلة إن والدي لم يعد بحاجة إلى وردة ، ويمكنها أن تعطيها لمن تريد (تختار)

"I place the rose on the counter in front of her, saying that my father no longer needs the rose, and she can give it to whomever she chooses."²

And so, despite the protagonist's unrestrained tears, the reader doesn't feel his defeat. For no matter how strong the binding shackles may be, they are made of ice, and therefore, they will melt one day.

The narration in Yusuf Muhaymid's next story, "The Man Whom Sadness Devours" («الحنن الذي أكله الرجل»), from the aforementioned collection, is built on the main character's inner monologue and presented as a string of his purely subjective associations. The desire to enhance emotional impact leads the author to use the technique of a "blurred plot," where the focus for the writer is not the storyline, but the character's personality and his inner world. The perception of existing reality, compared to the story discussed above, here has a more pronounced pessimistic character. The main character's state of despair and hopeless anguish resembles the images of the restless, broken characters in the novellas of the renowned Syrian writer Zakaria Tamer, who actively uses artistic techniques of literary modernism in his work. The characters are in a situation of "stable conflict"², irresolvable within the framework of their lived situations. Such conflicts, lacking a clearly defined beginning and end, are invariably present in the characters' lives, forming a basic backdrop against which actions unfold. The only difference lies in the political concept of the two authors. While the characters created by Zakaria Tamer affirm the writer's idea of the necessity of fighting against social violence and striving to create living conditions worthy for all citizens of society, without exception, Muhaymid's works are devoid of a social subtext. His characters' protest is directed against the dominance of the unchanging, centuries-old way of life in Saudi society; his characters are outcasts not because of low social status, but by virtue of their disagreement with the laws and order of this society.

The main character of the story is close to realizing the futility of attempts to find inner peace and reconcile with the surrounding world. Finding no support or understanding from anyone, he plunges into silence, from which even a certified psychologist cannot draw him out.

قال لي: إذا لم تشرح لي حالتك لن أتمكن من مساعدتك، لن أخرجك من حالتك هذه أبداً، ربما سيحدث لك يوماً أنتكاسة، لاحظتها لن نتمكن من مساعدتك! قلت في نفسي وأنا أنظر صوب مربلته البيضاء، لماذا يملكون هذا القدر الضخم من الثروة المجانية، وأنا كالأخرس، لا أملك أن أعبر عن حالتي. فقط أحتاج إلى وحدة وعزلة دافنتين، وقلم فحسب.

"He told me, 'If you don't explain your condition to me, I won't be able to help you, and I'll never get you out of it. And if, one day, you have a relapse, we won't be able to help you at that moment!' I thought to myself, looking at his white coat, 'Where do they get such an endless capacity for incessant chatter, while I, like a mute, am unable to express my condition. All I need is distant peace, solitude, and a pencil.'"³

The protagonist's spiritual loneliness is boundless. He cannot let anyone into his inner world or share his views on life, which society considers seditious. With nostalgic sadness, the hero recalls two school friends with whom he was once close in his distant childhood years: Khalid, but now he has become a police officer, a defender of the very society whose laws suppress and oppress him. As for Said, he is now a famous football player and lives by the interests of the sports world. Unlike him, all his school friends live happily in accordance with the generally accepted rules and norms of Saudi society.

همس بوداعة: لم أنت كتوم؟ و لم جنت هنا؟ لماذا لا تعتبرني أماً أو صديقاً؟ لم أقل له لا أخوة لي، ولا أصدقاء، ولا أعداء، لاشيء يحرضني على الكلام في هذا العالم كله.

"He (the doctor) spoke sympathetically: 'Why are you so secretive? And why did you come here? Why don't you consider me a brother or a friend?' I didn't tell him that I had no brothers, no friends, no enemies, nothing in the whole world that could make me talk."⁴ (201)

The protagonist carries his doubts and reflections, which he fears sharing with others, deep within his soul, mentally locking them away in imaginary chests.

في الشارع تركض حولي صناديق احزاني المغلقة، كانماهم أطفال المخلصون الأشقياء، هذا صندوق الحنين إلى ما ليست أعرف، وهذا صندوق الألم. وذاك البعيد الذي يجر جر أقدامه صندوق الذكريات، وأما ذلك الصندوق الطويل الذي يشبه النعش فقد كان صندوق البكاء! كنت أبكي بحرقه وجهي تضربه شمس يونيو اللاهبة دون أن تجفف دمعته!

¹ <http://www.asp.com.lb>

² <http://www.asp.com.lb>

² V.E. Khalizev. Theory of Literature. Moscow: "Vysshaya Shkola." 1999. p. 285.

³ <http://www.asp.com.lb>

⁴ in the same place

«На улице вокруг меня кружились закрытые сундуки моих печалей. Как будто они были моими дорогими родными детьми. Вот этот сундук моей нежности, я сам не знаю к чему. Этот – сундук боли. А вон тот дальний, гроыхающий за мной сундук, это сундук моих воспоминаний. Что касается вон того длинного сундука, похожего на катафалк, то это сундук слёз! Я горько плакал, моё лицо опаляло обжигающее солнце июня, но оно не высушивало слёзы!»¹

The doctor, attempting to draw the protagonist out of his depressive silence, embodies the conservative segment of Saudi society. Yusuf Muhaymid resorts to using his favorite symbol - the image of the dead - which in his work personifies archaism and retrograde traditions. At one point, the intrusive doctor reminds the hero of a dead person.

و حدق بي، فرأت في عينيه البغضيتين غشاوة تشبه غشاوة الموتى!

"He stared at me, and I saw in his repulsive eyes a film, similar to the film over the eyes of the dead!"²

The protagonist's fear and his apprehensions for his life take on a more concrete nature in this story compared to the previous one. They are embodied in the doctor's words to him, which carry a hidden threat:

قام بغدنة من كرسيه الدوار، و التقط من رف المكتبة خلفه شيئاً ما لم ألحظه، ووضع على الطاولة: هذا تمثال زجاجي، أنظر إليه! انت مثل هذا التمثال سهل الكسر، قد يسقط من على الطاولة ويرطم في البلاط و يتهشم!

"He (the doctor) sprang up from his swivel chair and took an object from the shelf behind his desk, which I didn't manage to glimpse. He placed it on the table: 'This is a glass figurine. Look at it! You are like this easily breakable figurine, which can fall from the table and shatter upon hitting the paving tiles!'"³

The word البلاط - "paving tiles" appears repeatedly in the story's text. It is a symbol of Saudi society, personifying the immutability of its customs and traditions. The protagonist encounters these "tiles" everywhere; they surround him on all sides, suffocating him, not allowing him to breathe freely.

The story has an open ending, leaving the reader with no hope for a change in the protagonist's life situation. Hard stone slabs now cover the places where flourishing gardens and sprawling trees once stood.

كم اربك نيانا جداول الحرسوف بعناية يحلأ المكاتبأكملة، تهاوي على البلاط، وأناألهث: اللعنة، لمكل هذا البلاط؟ صرتأشخاليلكله، وأنا محدّد على البلاط الأبيض الحننقّط بالسواد محدّد مثل قتيل، مثل جناز أكلها الحزن!

"How distraught I was when I saw that the tightly laid tiles meticulously covered the entire space. I collapsed onto the tiles, exclaiming: 'Damn it!' But why all these tiles? I sobbed all night, sprawled on the white tiles dotted with black spots, sprawled like a dead man, as at a funeral engulfed in sorrow!"⁴

The story portrays a reflective Saudi intellectual living in a closed society and experiencing a spiritual crisis due to the inability to openly express his thoughts and apply his creative abilities to critically depict the realities of a world filled with hard, immutable "tiles" - prohibitions, censorship, and outdated traditions. The very appearance of novelistic works like Yusuf Muhaymid's provides an impetus for creativity to push aside these old "tiles" so that fresh green grass can grow in their place.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, the findings of the research can be summarized as follows:

1. Over the past few decades of the 20th and into the early 21st century, the short story genre in Saudi literature has undergone significant changes. This period, which Saudi literary critics have dubbed the "stage of experimental writing" or "modernization," saw a fundamental shift in the very concept of realistic narrative.
2. Modern writers like Muhammad Ulwan, Yusuf Muhaymid, Hussein Ali Hussein, and Bakhashwain have infused the traditional narrative with new meaning. For them, the external world is no longer limited to an artistic exploration of direct reality. Instead, it encompasses memories, reflections, and the psychological experiences of individuals. Their works often portray the profound loneliness of creative intellectuals and critique a social order where the creative spirit is stifled. The intellectual individual, unable to create anything new, can only express a growing, tragic sense of alienation. This is set against a backdrop of societal materialism, leading to a spiritual crisis characterized by the alienation of the enlightened person from society and the rise of a generation incapable of empathy or compassion.
3. Many writers of this modernization period, such as Sharifa Shamlan and Hussein Ali Hussein, have moved away from the verbosity and lengthiness of earlier stories. They now strive for emotional intensity and narrative conciseness. These authors intentionally modify the narrative form, using artistic techniques that disrupt chronological order, blending past with present. They introduce theatrical elements and fragmentation, and they frequently use flashbacks, skillfully connecting "scenes of life" built like film frames into a single, short, realistic canvas. The protagonist in their stories is often a "little man" - an indifferent character living for trivial concerns, lacking inner substance and human dignity. This "littleness" is not due to a social system but to the narrowness of their spiritual world.
4. Abdullah Bakhashwain and Yusuf Muhaymid actively employ the artistic techniques of literary modernism, abandoning traditional ideas of a complete and finished work of art. They use the stream of consciousness technique,

¹ <http://www.asp.com.lb>

² in the same place

³ <http://www.asp.com.lb>

⁴ in the same place

replacing a plot-driven narrative with a non-plot-based one. Their work reflects the philosophy of existentialism, with a focus on the theme of alienation. This alienation manifests in numerous ways across the levels of personality, thought, and vision. The narrative texts vividly convey pain, isolation, loneliness, anxiety, despair, and death through characters who compellingly present their psychological problems and anxieties. This is explored through three main types of alienation: self-alienation, physical alienation, and social alienation.

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