The Text Worlds of Umayma Al-Khamis's "Waiting for Hayla" and "Restoration"

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Abstract

In light of the rapid development and changes that are becoming prevalent in the region, revisiting short stories written by the Saudi author Umayma Al-Khamis in the anthology *Arab Women Writers* (2005; trans. Cohen-Mor) provides a point of contrast and discussion of the societal role of the Arab woman in the post-modern world. The texts chosen for analysis are part of an anthology that aims to "introduce the English reader to the Arab Woman's ways of life" (Cohen-Mor 2). This paper utilises Text World Theory as a cognitive poetic framework to analyse the two short stories, "Waiting for Hayla" and "Restoration." Whereas the short stories in the collection were translated into English for a Western audience, the world-building triggered by the text depends on some knowledge and recognition of the cultural assumptions of the Saudi society. This analysis shows that the texts can also be read as absurdist due to the shared themes of existentialism and futility of existence in them, which rely on the world-building elements more than the limited cultural knowledge provided by the text.

Keywords

Saudi Arabian literature, short stories, Umayma Al-Khamis, Text World Theory, cognitive poetics, absurdism

Introduction

Arab Women Writers: An Anthology of Short Stories ambitiously touches on various themes related to women's lives, and the editor and translator of the collection, Dalya Cohen-Mor, indicates that it "offers a rich cultural encounter in which the complex world of Arab women, as seen by these women themselves, is unveiled" (Cohen-Mor 2). Although the stated goal is to provide insight into the world of the Arab women, with what Booth describes as a "… concern with informing a western audience about Arab women's lives" (99), there is a problematic generalisation that groups together experiences from different parts of the Arab world that have different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, by using the word "unveiled" these stories are still coveted and eroticised within the lens of the orientalised gaze of the "other," which leads it to suspenseful reveal, much as the

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veil can be a barrier to the mystical Arab and Middle Eastern woman. This focus on the hijab may be part of the Western media's view of Arab issues (Alghatani 30) and perhaps the statement is an attempt to somewhat sensationalise the book. Nonetheless, the collection provides a venue for the authors, which, at the time of publication, was a bold venture into the private lives of women, but received little analysis of the stories, except for general reviews of the collection as a whole (Allen; Booth). In this paper, two short stories from the collection written by a Saudi writer are analysed using the Text World Theory (Werth; Gavins) to indicate how the worlds of the stories may require some contextual knowledge of Saudi society in order to fully undersand and appreciate the absurdist futility that is portrayed in the texts.

The Short Story and Saudi Women Writers
The short story is widely viewed as a form of expression that allowed these women writers to express their concerns and viewpoints at a time when some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, practiced strict gender segregation. As a Muslim country, this segregation is both cultural and religious. The separation of gender creates boundaries that become physical, as noted below:

> Gendered boundaries of space divide the Muslim social order into two parts: the universe of men, consisting of public spaces, and the universe of women, comprising the domestic sphere of the family. This gender-based spatial division reflects the society's hierarchy and power allocation, or more simply, the subordination of women to men. Male-female relations are further governed by strict rules and regulations, including sexual segregation, female seclusion, and veiling. These measures are employed to ensure non-communication and non-interaction between members of the opposite sex. (Abudi 10)

Gender segregation in Saudi society, influenced by tradition and religion, creates what Abudi describes as "two distinct and separate societies, male and female, each with its own rights and obligations, roles and rewards, customs and practices" (10). Saudi women society therefore traditionally takes up the domestic sphere and their narratives take place indoors within their houses, whereas Saudi men would dominate outside the house. Some of the themes prevalent in Saudi women writers' works therefore focus on domestic affairs, including family duty, marriage and divorce, regardless of the protagonist's economic or social status (Hezam). Publicly discussing or criticising the socio-cultural norms of the society can be viewed as taboo, especially when touching upon sensitive topics such as sexuality and social institutions of marriage and family duty that are traditionally perpetuated through a religious code. These aspects of "… the patriarchal social order, the Islamic belief system, Arab values, customs and traditions, as well as psychodynamic forces within the family all play a role in shaping" narratives by

Saudi women (Abudi 10). As such, literature, and particularly the short story as a literary form, furnish Saudi women with a "choice [that] provides the mask for women authors to hide behind, and express freely their opinions or what they long for" (Al-Sudairy 70). This is because short stories are more easily accessible than novels, and publishable in newspapers or anthologies under pseudonyms or pen names that ensure the privacy of the author. Although there is this emphasis on the importance of the short story form as a literary space for women, most criticism of these short stories are more general in nature, discussing overarching themes (e.g., Hezam) or focusing on novels rather than shorter narratives (Abudi; Algahtani), with little focus on detailed stylistic analysis of the individual works.

"Waiting for Hayla" and "Restoration" are short stories in the collection of *Arab Women Writers* by Umayma Al-Khamis, a prominent Saudi novelist who writes novels that depict the female protagonist and her struggle within her society. Her novels (e.g., *The Leafy Tree* and *Sea Wafted Women*) highlight how the rules of the society affect the generation of Saudi women who are growing up with a culture that is rapidly changing with the developments of the world surrounding it, and typically include female protagonists and their individual struggles against the tides of society around them.

The stories chosen for analysis here touch upon the lives of women within the domestic sphere: both in "Waiting for Hayla" and "Restoration" the setting is a gathering or party where only women are attending. The communication in the stories lacks any connection, and reflects futility and superficial existences that revolve around gossip and reputation. The editor of *Arab Women Writers* describes the two short stories as follows:

> . . . the boredom and emptiness of a life of leisure of women from the upper classes lead to apathy and depression. The characters' narrow existence centres around social gatherings, dinners, and gossip, all of which dulls their minds and personalities. That the external trappings of success do not necessarily bring emotional satisfaction and psychological equilibrium is depicted in Umayma al-Khamis's 'Restoration.' In this ultrashort text, the heroine's loss of her sense of self brings her to the verge of a mental breakdown. (Cohen-Mor 2)

The themes of loss of self and meaning, or futility of existence, are some of the prevalent themes in Absurdist literature. These two texts can also read as realist absurd fiction, in which the cyclicality of the events depicts themes of loss and futility of existence: the lack of physical action in the stories. This "recognition that the world appears to be meaningless, yet one continues to live on as if it were not so" (Baker 3), is one of the motifs of absurd fiction. The apathy mentioned above reveals itself in the language in "Waiting for Hayla," in which the narrator participates in the act of waiting throughout the story, which in transitivity terms (Halliday) is not a material process with a goal. Likewise, the protagonist in

"Restoration" struggles against inner mental collapse and existence through material and superficial advances, through repeated sentence structures that highlight a sense of cyclicality. For the Saudi author, the absurd allows for the voice of the woman to have agency, this analysis thus focuses on the linguistic world-building processes and choices that help create the existentialist themes in the stories.

The Text World Theory
As the texts chosen in this analysis are short stories, which by definition would require concentrated world-building over a small space of text in order to create the fictional world, this analysis makes use of the Text World Theory (Werth). According to Werth, "uses of language presuppose occurrence in a context of situation," therefore the Text World Theory analyses the text as a literary discourse that takes place in a real world, and is a text-driven method of analysis that takes into consideration author, reader and context (17). Werth's framework proposes a more "human" Linguistics, partly due to his dissatisfaction with the "tunnel-vision" focus on syntax in Generative Grammar with little attention given to other cognitive resources that language users refer to in the interpretative process (18-19). This led to the consideration of the context of discourse as a whole, including the frame knowledge of the participants of this discourse, based on cognitive frameworks such as Fillmore's Frame Semantics (Werth 83). This consideration of the knowledge of the participants as part of the interpretative process is useful when discussing culturally significant topics and themes presented in the two texts chosen here. "The principle of text-drivenness" helps specify which knowledge frames are necessarily accessed by the participants to interpret discourse (Gavins, *Text World Theory* 29). This theory, therefore, provides a systematic method of accounting for discourse participants' knowledge by referring to the linguistic cues of the text that require the activation of certain knowledge frames.

Text World Theory considers any type of discourse as a mental representation that divides into three conceptual spaces: the discourse world, the text world and any subsequent sub-worlds that are created by various world switches triggered by the text (Werth 17). Propositions in this model are analysed as "function advancing processes" that fulfil the discourse by describing and advancing the plot and action, or by presenting arguments (Werth 57). These processes consist of either "modifications," which add descriptions to entities already mentioned in the text, or "path expressions," actions which indicate either a steady or change of state (Werth 196-202). This model is explained in detail and expanded upon by Gavins in her book *Text World Theory* and has been utilised in various texts and mediums, in which the framework proves useful to analyse different forms of discourse ranging from poetry (Mcloughlin) and film (Lugea) to advertisements (Hidalgo-Downing).

This cognitive stylistic framework is particularly useful in the context of stories translated for an audience that is interested in the Arab world and, therefore, may require more effort on the part of the reader to "repair" and resituate herself in the world created by the text (Gavins, *Text World Theory* 141-43; Emmott 162). In order for a reader to interpret a text, s/he must have the necessary general, cultural and linguistic "knowledge" to create a "common ground" with the discourse participants, i.e., the reader must understand the cultural implications rendered by the text and the author (Werth 98). The time of reading certain fiction may also alter the reading of a text, due to the significant changes that occur in language, culture and society. For example, a post-2018 audience looking at these two texts from the perspective of the current rapid changes in Saudi society in light of Vision 2030 would have a different worldview of Saudi Arabia than that presented in the two stories published in 2005. One main point of analysis is to determine the ambiguity of the world builders in the text. If the world-building process is too complicated, this might require "repair" on the part of the reader who is not familiar with the Arab woman context (Gavins, *Text World Theory* 141). This act of "repairing" the text worlds interpreted from the text requires the reader to restructure the frames. This would hinder the interpretation of the themes of loss and miscommunication that are the result of women being trapped in the domestic sphere. As Gavins utilises Text World Theory to discuss absurd texts (*Reading the Absurd*), this framework seems suitable for the stories at hand because they exhibit similar themes of existential crisis and loss of meaning. This study aims to shed light on these two Saudi short stories that seem to have received little critical attention in the field of stylistics by adopting a Text World Theory-based description.

Analysis of "Waiting for Hayla"

"Waiting for Hayla" is reminiscent of the post-modern play set in a females-only social gathering. This story begins with an unnamed first person singular narrator's voice describing the maid's announcement of the upcoming arrival of Hayla, the titular character, to a gathering in the living room of an unnamed hostess. This leads to excitement as the women anticipate the new arrival, gossiping about her before she arrives. Hayla arrives, and the women meet her excitedly. The narrator, having listened to all the gossip, feels as though she is now acquainted with Hayla and attempts to greet her warmly, but fails to do so because Hayla replies formally to her since she does not know much about the narrator. The narrator retreats into silence, but the maid brings news that another guest, Latifa, is also arriving shortly. This leads the women to another surge of excitement as they gossip about the new arrival, but are thwarted by her swift appearance; so they only manage to exchange "tidbits" (207). As soon as they exchange all the news they have, a silence takes over the gathering and there is stillness that is cut by the sound of a fan in the room. The women are still waiting,

this time for Al-Jawhara, whose arrival allows the women to have their dinner finally served, which signals the purpose of the gathering. The narrative ends with a shift to the first person plural contemplation:

> We rose in relief. We were no longer waiting for anyone – or perhaps we had not been waiting for anyone after all.
>   We had been merely amusing ourselves by tossing names into the jaws of Time – lest it assail and devour us. (Al-Khamis 208)

The ending of this short story indicates the awareness of the narrators regarding their situation, where their waiting does not depend on Hayla's arrival but is instead a cyclical act that repeats throughout time.

When analysing this short text in terms of the Text World Theory, the interpretation requires the construction of three different conceptual levels of domains, with each consisting of specific world-building elements of time, location, objects and enactors (Werth 187; Gavins *Text World Theory* 36-38*)*. The first of these levels is the discourse world, which is the situational context where the discourse takes place, and in the case of the literary discourse, this includes what the reader and her senses can perceive. The discourse world for both the stories discussed in this paper thus consists of the enactors: the reader and the author Umayma Al-Khamis, and the object, which is the text itself. Because this is written discourse, the world building elements of time and location are necessarily "split" and thus the language used in this communication becomes more salient and important for interpretation (Gavins, *Text World Theory* 26).

The second level of domain is the text world, and this is the level created through the interpretative process of reading the text. In this story, the main text world takes place in the living room of an unnamed hostess, the time is at night, and the enactors include the narrator, the hostess, the guests, the maid and the children. This text world also contains certain objects: the living room itself, the fan, the door and the telephone. As for the third level of cognitive domain, the "sub-world," there seems to be no major world switch that occurs in the narrative, related to modality or shifts in deixis. World switches occur when there are distinct time or location shifts in the narrative, such as a flashback (Gavins, *Text World Theory* 48). In this short story, all the actions take place within the original text world, with some minor departures due to the direct speech of the characters, which can be argued as creating a sub-world with a different time due to the deictic terms used in the utterance such as tense, location and time (see Gavins, *Text World Theory* 50); however, these departures are not the main concerns of this analysis.

The location of the text world is "the living room," as indicated by the maid's appearance at the door. According to Ryan's principle of minimal departure, each reader will "reconstrue the central world of a textual universe," in a way that

"conforms as far as possible to [their] representation of [the actual world]" (Ryan 151). Thus, mentioning "the door of the living room" ("Waiting for Hayla" 206) will necessarily require the reader to create a representation of the living room familiar to them based on their own frame knowledge of "living room." Although there are no explicit modification processes to indicate the size of the room, this location undergoes a process of "repair" on the part of the reader as he or she continues to read the text and comprehend that the number of guests increases with each passage.

Through the story, the reader gradually notices that the number of people arriving to join the dinner party continues to increase, with each guest bringing their children in tow scattered amongst the women. This also triggers the notion of the women being from the "upper middle class" as mentioned by the editor (Cohen-Mor 2), even though there is no linguistic indication of income. The "repair" that occurs here provides the reader with the indication that the hostess of the gathering is from an upper middle class and thus socialises with women who teach or whose husbands travel for business, but the text lacks the necessary linguistic cues, relying instead on the readers' background knowledge of the society that is depicted in the text.

When situating the second world-building element, the time of the text world, the reader must also undergo a process of "repair." Time is not indicated until the middle of the narrative, when the hostess whispers to her daughter that she "cannot serve dinner before Al-Jawhara arrives" ("Waiting for Hayla" 207). When Al-Jawhara finally arrives, the time is specified even further as being: "At ten minutes to eleven" ("Waiting for Hayla" 207). This is also culturally-situated frame knowledge, as in Middle Eastern cultures, it is quite possible to have dinner at a late hour due to the hot climate; socialising takes place later at night. Other sociocultural reasons as mentioned in the text could be due to convenience of transportation: Al-Jawhara's arrival depends upon the time her husband closes his shop and has time to drop her off at the gathering. Their dinner could not start until his job is done. When a guest suggests sending a driver to bring Al-Jawhara to the gathering, the hostess objects: "'My married daughter does not ride in a car unless she is accompanied by a close male relative,' she said emphatically" ("Waiting for Hayla" 208). Due to the cultural negative implications of having the married daughter ride in a car with an unrelated male driver, the only acceptable solution is to wait for the husband. This exchange highlights the patriarchal influence on the female space, where the waiting is affected by the unnamed husband. Although Al-Jawhara's husband is situated outside of the main text world, he becomes an enactor that affects the progression of the narrative due to his ability to drive.

The narrator is nameless and speaking in the plural at the end to encompass those who are waiting in the living room and welcoming the arrivals, and these arrivals also, in turn, merge into the group of nameless women without

individuality. Once they arrive and join the party, they are no longer individuals, and this may be a comment on the urge to conform to society's rules and regulations. When the characters are outside the living room, they have distinct lives and stories and are the topic of gossip, but once they join the female space, they are no longer the topic of conversation and are welcomed into the group as a merged entity. It is clear that the narrative is not about the arrival of Hayla at all, but the cyclical futility and helplessness of the characters stuck in the living room space. The enactors "We" are not active participants of the action, and thus all the function-advancing processes in the text are not actions but repeated modifications. Indeed, the object, "the fan," is characterised more than the women at some points, where the sound of the fan is louder than the silence of the women. The fan is also described with the adverb "tirelessly" which is in direct contrast with the tired ladies waiting for the arrival of the final guests.

The cultural assumptions are also portrayed in this same matter-of-fact way; in Islam, polygamy is allowed and one husband is suspected to have a second wife, for example, due to his travels abroad. The final guests are delayed due to societal circumstances: they need to wait for drivers to provide them with transportation and bring their children with them since the mothers in the family do most of the child rearing. At the time of publication, women were not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia and therefore depended upon their male relatives for transportation.

The theme of the futility of existence, however, can still be understood through the text outside of cultural knowledge. "Substantial world repair" is required when the titular character Hayla arrives but the narrative does not end. The title "Waiting for Hayla" primes the reader to expect Hayla's arrival, but she is the first of the last three guests to arrive. This very title of the work leads the reader to "repair" the text world created due to the readers' anticipation and expectation of the event of Hayla's arrival. However, "after confirming that the initial world constructed is not the correct or suitable one for the context," the reader revises the text world and continues to read understanding that the story does not end with Hayla's arrival, nor was it an important event in the narrative (Gavins, *Text World Theory* 31). In a way, the reader is implicated here in the waiting, and is placed in the proximity of the participants of the text world: the narrator and the dinner guests, where the arrival of Hayla is primed by the title but the story does not provide a fulfilling ending that the reader expects. This may help readers understand the pointlessness of "waiting" in the title, as much as the participants in the text understand that they were not "waiting for anyone at all" ("Waiting for Hayla" 208).

The title can also create an intertextual world switch for the Western reader, with the allusion to the existentialist play by Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*. In the play, Gogo and Didi are waiting for the titular character Godot, but this character does not appear in the course of the action of the play. "Waiting for Hayla" has a

similar depiction of a futile existence for its enactors, even as the repetitions and cycles continue in the story. The cycle can be indicated as: 1) a silent party, 2) the mention of the upcoming arrival of the guest, 3) gossip about the guest, 4) arrival of a guest; 1) a silent party and so on, to repeat the cycle. In the narrative, this sequence occurs three times, first with the arrival of Hayla, then with the arrival of Latifa and finally with the arrival of Al-Jawhara. The use of the definite articles referring to the objects and entities in the text world, such as "the door," "the living room" and "the fan," indicate the familiarity of the environment for the narrator. This further establishes the cyclicality of these events: the gatherings are not special but regular occurrences. Whereas Mercier says of *Waiting for Godot* that it is a play in which "nothing happens twice" (Mercier 6), in "Waiting for Hayla" nothing happens three times within the text, with the implication that it has been continuing throughout time.

The waiting as an act is difficult to conceptualise. Calderwood notes that waiting is a kind of "erasing" of identity, of non-activity and he discusses how the word "waiting" in the title *Waiting for Godot* has grammatical as well as semantic ambiguity:

> . . . as an activity, waiting is negative by virtue of having no fixed identity and hence of being impossible to recognise…. waiting is… well, what is it? If I point to a man sitting on a bench at a bus stop and say 'He's waiting,' you will think waiting means sitting on a bench – or whittling or break dancing or throwing sticks for a dog. I am repeatedly obliged to say 'No, that's not it. It's not what he's doing but what he's not doing that constitutes waiting.' (Calderwood 366)

Because Godot never appears in the play, the very act of waiting by Gogo and Didi in this case is considered by Calderwood as a type of "self-erasing activity" (266), an "inaction" as mentioned above and a situation of stasis. In contrast, while Hayla does make an appearance towards the beginning of the short story, there is little comment on the character herself and the same vagueness and futility of meaning is present in both the short story and the play. The arrival of Hayla is not a climax of the story. Contrarily, more people arrive after her and there is still no clear conflict or resolution. The final lines of the story indicate this lack of closure, and indeed, the "waiting" in "Waiting for Hayla" may also indicate this self-erasing activity: by conforming to the same patterns, the women are effectively removing their own identity, which is reflected in the nameless "we" of the narrator at the end. Furthermore, the word "waiting" necessarily negates the possibility of action in exchange for inaction, and that is what occurs in the short story. Finally, the name "Hayla" in the title may derive from the Arabic word "Hayl" which means "sliding sands," which fits in with the themes of collapse and loss of meaningful communication in post-modern works.

Analysis of "Restoration"

The feeling of the post-modern view of futile meaning is also shown in "Restoration" where material achievements and outward appearances mark the success of the main character. This is also a comment on how success is measured in the Arab woman's society: via the number of suitors, type of employment, etc. This is the only measure due to the limited role women have within their domestic space. The main character in this short narrative gazes at herself in the mirror and cannot see any worth beyond the material surface. She cannot hide the internal collapse from herself. The mirror therefore symbolises this transition from external success to internal collapse. Again, here are some sociocultural influences on the world-building elements that require clarification and elaboration, but this creates an effect of not an outsider looking in, but as part of that space that the characters reside in. This leads to a sense of "in media res" of the action, or the cyclicality and "familiarity" of routine.

The narrative of "Restoration" portrays a protagonist who attends a party and catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror. Continuing the themes of the futility of existence in a post-modern world, there is an internal collapse in the same manner as the "waiting" in the first story. Although this text is a third person focalised narrative, there is little to no evaluation that indicates a certain viewpoint. The narrative process functions as a checklist that she needs to fulfil regarding her presence and appearance. Her internal state is not revealed until the end of the story, where the "scene of inner collapse again…" appears to her once she is isolated from the group ("Restoration" 209).

Similar to "Waiting for Hayla," world-building elements are also definite in this short story which comprises of only 153 words, using the determiner "the" to introduce the world-building elements of the text world, e.g. "the mirror," "the price," "the names," and "the dinner table" (209). As mentioned earlier, this creates a sense of familiarity with the settings around the protagonist. This short story also takes place within one text world, with no major world switches. "Restoration" is cyclical as well; even for a short text it begins and ends with the scene of inner collapse in the mirror. The protagonist's achievements are all described in terms of indicators of material wealth, such as a "diamond studded gold watch" or her "promotion at work" or holidays abroad. She dances "spontaneously and flirtatiously" and this can also be read as part of the previously calculated methods of flaunting her wealth and good fortune. The reader is primed to view this dancing as also part of her act to portray herself in a way that the society in the story will view as positive and commendable. This is also a commentary on materialism and the portrayal of self-worth in terms of travel and expensive jewellery.

Similar to the first story, then, the sense of loss of identity magnifies once the women are in solitude and not communicating with others. This shows how limited the women are, imprisoned by their society and how they are viewed and

how they perpetuate their roles by living fully in them. The protagonist of "Restoration," if she can be described as such, being the main enactor of the text, is unnamed, similarly to the protagonist of the first story. Both stories include gatherings, gossip and dinner. Both stories end abruptly after the dinner. The narrator in the first story is reflective about their situation as women passing time, merely waiting instead of acting as static observers, whereas the woman in "Restoration" is trapped by her own realisation of her own internal collapse when in isolation in front of a mirror. It is where she sees a true reflection of her identity, which without the adornments and achievements is left hollow and nonsensical. It does not matter who the protagonist of "Restoration" is, similar to how the narrators of "Waiting for Hayla" are also nameless since their names are being "tossed into the jaws of time." It also does not matter what happens in the narrative, because relatively, there is no main plot or conflict resolved in the narrative, and all the processes in the text only serve as modifications of the protagonist's material worth and description.

Conclusion
Just as "Kafka expresses tragedy by the everyday and the absurd by the logical" (Camus 115) so does Al-Khamis portray the tragedy of a meaningless existence behind the *veil*. The limited spaces of the women in the narratives are highlighted; a confinement of walls and the action – or lack of it – that occurs within the walls. The two narratives "Waiting for Hayla" and "Restoration" mirror each other in terms of the narrative themes of futility and meaningless existence. Readers constantly repair the world-building elements of the text world, and because of how the world-building elements are structured and layered, they become implicated in the narrative both as an outsider viewing the "other" but also updating their frame knowledge of Arab women's life at the same time. The absurdist telling of everyday actions foregrounds these recurrent events in the lives of the Saudi woman living in a patriarchal society with little freedom of movement and mobility. Her options are limited, as shown by the positions she can achieve and her role in the household as a mother and housewife. Both narratives have at the centre a yearning for release from the cyclicality of their world. These works presented in the English language portray culturally ingrained world-building processes as well as the fatalistic ends of the protagonists. Behind the closed doors, behind the Saudi veil, the concerns are the same: a post-modern outlook of life and meaninglessness that follows the post-modern sensitivities. We cannot ignore the effects of the social, economic and cultural influences on these stories, especially due to the patriarchal social order that is maintained in the texts. These women are not only women in Saudi Arabia, but also women out of place in a post-modern world.

"Waiting for Hayla" and "Restoration" are two short stories that reflect a specific worldview that is not only Saudi but also absurdist in its depiction of the

cyclical existence of women within the closed doors of their societies. Although the target audience of these texts may require extensive knowledge to build the text worlds of these narratives, especially when related to cultural associations, the intertextual links with the post-modern play and between the two texts can allow the reader to glean some of the hopelessness experienced by these women. Detailed reader responses to these stories may shed further light on this analysis, especially from a target audience of Western readers, as well as readers within the Saudi community that has vastly changed in the past few years. The cultural context in which these stories take place is slowly changing, and may be unrecognisable to a new generation of Saudi women. The existentialist concerns, however, may remain as a newer Saudi generation struggles to keep up with the pace of an increasingly interconnected globalised society, while questioning their sense of self and cultural identity.

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