

The Theme of Revenge in Saadawi's *Frankenstein* In Baghdad: A Postcolonial Reading Through Said's Perspective

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Abstract: This paper explores the theme of revenge in Ahmed Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein* in Baghdad and its implications from a postcolonial perspective. Saadawi's narrative tackles the consequences of revenge within a colonized society struggling with identity reconstruction. Revenge is not portrayed as a liberating and just act but rather as a vicious and futile cycle that only produces more oppression, darkness, and loss. Saadawi intertwines the notions of colonizer, colonized, oppression, and revenge to highlight how the oppressed can become oppressors in turn, and thus the cycle continues. Ultimately, Saadawi seems to warn against revenge in a postcolonial context, on both individual and national levels, as it only reproduces the colonial trauma. *Frankenstein* in Baghdad is situated within a discourse on trauma and (national) identity, and thus its postcoloniality extends also to notions of identity. In a contemporary landscape troubled by questions of identity and agency, *Frankenstein* in Baghdad is a highly relevant and necessary text. Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein* in Baghdad presents a narrative in which construction becomes creation, and creation becomes a monster. Hadi, the protagonist, stitches together dead body parts collected from the streets of post-war Baghdad, hoping to give the victims a kind of life after death. Instead, this new creature, dubbed Whatsitsname, takes vengeance on those responsible for his parts' deaths, leading the narrative into a horror story. On a closer reading, Whatsitsname's quest for revenge intertwines with the other characters' narratives, who also become monsters after seeking vengeance. The narrative expresses a concern with the consequences of revenge but knows a complexity of the necessity of revenge.

Keywords: Revenge, *Frankenstein* in Baghdad, A Postcolonial, Saadawi.

Introduction: Ahmed Saadawi's "*Frankenstein* in Baghdad," set against the backdrop of post-2003 Iraq, provides a poignant critique of the consequences of American occupation and sectarian conflict that followed the U.S. invasion. The novel's central character, Hadi al-Aasak, a scavenger and storyteller, becomes the creator of a creature assembled from the body parts of various bombing victims after the 2005 sectarian violence in Baghdad. This creature, initially intended as a means to peace, ultimately seeks revenge against those responsible for the deaths of its parts. Through this narrative, Saadawi deftly weaves themes of revenge and the consequences of U.S. colonization in Iraq, echoing Mary Shelley's concerns in her original text (for Translation & Literary Studies & Aziz

Mahmood 25).

The creature's insatiable desire for revenge takes center stage in Saadawi's novel, transforming it from an innocent being, as in Shelley's tale, into a relentless pursuer of vengeance. While Shelley's creature, wronged by its creator Victor Frankenstein, embarks on a quest for revenge against him, Saadawi's creature seeks retribution against its killers and all those who spread terror and death in Baghdad. This examination delves into the representation of revenge through Saadawi's creature—a reflection of the consequences of U.S. colonization and a critique of violence giving rise to further violence—through a postcolonial lens informed by (Abu Shehab 16).

Background of the Novel

"Frankenstein in Baghdad" is the second novel by the Iraqi novelist Ahmed Saadawi, originally written in Arabic in 2013 and later translated into English. The novel is set in Iraq after the 2003 U.S. invasion and combines elements of horror and dark comedy. It tells the story of Hadi al-Attag, a disabled scavenger who gathers body parts of bomb victims and has them stitched together by a madman named Wafaa al-Ninawi. When the creature comes to life, chaos ensues in post-invasion Baghdad as it seeks revenge on those who perpetrated violence. The novel touches on issues of colonialism, nationalism, violence, and identity in contemporary Iraq, ultimately presenting a critique of the U.S. invasion and a defense of Iraqi identity (Abu Shehab 22). In the novel, the character of Frankenstein (the monster) created by al-Ninawi represents the postcolonial subject, while Doctor Wafaa al-Ninawi is a figure of colonial discourse. The novel raises questions about the legitimacy of state-sponsored violence and the complicity of the oppressed in their oppression. It draws on the myth of Frankenstein to explore issues of colonialism and identity in contemporary Iraq.

Saadawi's novel creatively appropriates and reworks the themes and characters of Shelley's original novel to convey his postcolonial concerns. He takes the original story of Frankenstein and places it in the context of Baghdad after the American invasion. Through this appropriation, Saadawi critiques the American conception of democracy and freedom imposed on Iraq. The novel addresses important issues such as the futility of revenge and the need for co-existence and acceptance of the other in a deeply divided society (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 28). Saadawi explores the theme of monstrosity, questioning who the real monster is. He depicts a society where violence breeds more violence, with the occupied becoming the occupiers. In "Frankenstein in Baghdad," Saadawi's critique of American colonialism and its disastrous consequences in Iraq reverberates in his postcolonial retelling of the Frankenstein myth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In an attempt to deal with violent colonial encounters, Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad deals with a patchwork monster comprised of blown-up body parts collected by the Iraqi scavenger H. N. M. in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. This novel scrutinizes the colonial monstrous and the ruptured colonial bodies and offers an aesthetic political response to the postcolonial context of monstrous becomings. H. N. M., in an attempt to piece together the body parts of victims of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the subsequent violence, becomes a maker of a monster. He brings together a series of body parts blown apart by bombings and transgressively stitches

them together. This creature, like the colonial figures in these classic texts, seeks revenge against his maker and violently kills anyone who had a hand in his previous life as a part of the colonized's quest for vengeance against the colonial settlers. Saadawi's appropriation of Shelley's Frankenstein tale situates monstrous postcoloniality in the context of 21st century U.S. invasion of Iraq with the emergence of a patchwork monster as a means to explore the colonial unfinishedness of Saadawi's Baghdad. The textual representations of the patchwork monster in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, as depicted in Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad, interrogates the historical violence's of colonial beheading, ruptured bodies, and monstrous becoming (Abu Shehab 12). The notion of innocence is repeated in the creators and the creatures in Shelley's Frankenstein and Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 8). Shelley's Frankenstein major characters, according to common scholarly opinion, for instance, is guilty. Based on absolute and universal judgments, creating or animating the dead is against the natural laws, which eventually will lead to disastrous consequences. The Iraqi Frankenstein's creator and creature are adapted from Shelley's work, but in a way that could be interpreted in the same fashion.

Postcolonial Theory and Literature

Post-colonialism by definition is an era that came into existence post independence from colonizers. It can also be understood as the effects and aftermath of colonialism on the colonized. Nations like India, Africa, Iraq, etc. shed the yoke of colonialism but had to deal with the neo-colonial forces which manipulated them by indirect ways and means. In fact with the neo-colonialism the erstwhile colonizers and imperial powers found themselves in a more comfortable position to manipulate and control the colonized nations. post-colonialism is taken as the aftermath and effects of colonialism on the colonized countries and peoples. Ahmed Saadawi's novel "Frankenstein in Baghdad" satirizes and creates awareness regarding the colonial manipulation by the west through the eyes of a post-colonial Iraqi in Baghdad (Abu Shehab 27).

Colonialism is taken as the overlapping of one power's dominion over another power's territory and peoples. The lust for power made the European nations colonize Asia, Africa and Latin America, which were rich in natural resources. They manipulated the native peoples and turned them into second rated beings and imposed their culture, language and religion on them. But the colonized nations revolted against colonialism and were successful in overthrowing the western powers post World War II. But even after independence

the colonized nations had to suffer the indirect manipulations of colonialism in the form of neo-colonialism. The famous quote of Fanon “the nation is free but the character of oppression has changed” is relevant in understanding neo-colonialism. The erstwhile imperial powers colonized nations but now have become their advisers. They created institutions like IMF, World Bank, UNO, etc. and manipulated the economies and sovereignty of the bordering nations (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 19).

Edward Said's Contribution to Postcolonial Studies

Post colonialism is now a well-established critical school with a well-defined agenda, methodology, and canon. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, the world's colonial past, and native societies' attempts to grapple with it, became a common concern of many nations. At the forefront of this interest, in large part due to his global influence as a public intellectual, was Edward Said (Muhaidat and Waleed 25). In 1978 Said published *Orientalism*, a brilliant reading of the Western subjugation of the East through culture, representation, and imagination. Said argued that Western imperialism created a static, fantasy version of the East as “the Other,” portrayed as irrational, violent, exotic, and feminized. This supported the West's material exploitation and domination, justifying a civilizing mission to enlighten and reform these backward nations through economic development, military intervention, education, and the imposition of democracy (Abu Shehab 23). In fictional and literary discourse, the East was framed as a dangerous territory in need of control. It was an imagined geography built on Western anxieties and fears. The colonial encounter was embedded with binary oppositions of power, progress, masculinity, and civility versus subjugation, backwardness, femininity, and barbarism. This discourse created a moral narrative of empire as a heroic mission to uplift the savages and tame the wildlands. Speaking for the Other became a means of exercising power over the colonized. The East was denied the right to represent itself.

ANALYZING REVENGE IN FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD

Revenge is a desire that can lead to the destruction of a person. It is a reaction to a feeling of helplessness in the face of bad treatment or injury from others. In other words, revenge arises from the feeling of being wronged. Over time, revenge can turn into obsession and lead to self-destruction. Both individuals and groups seek revenge. In today's world, terrorism and wars – and any number of past wrongs – arise from a desire for revenge. (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 16) depicts personal vengeance,

but, more importantly, societal vengeance. It shows how the mass vengeance of a people can destroy not only the perpetrator but also the whole society and how efforts to escape from vengeance can turn into even greater devastation. Peace can only be found outside the realm of vengeance. Fantasy creatures have been a vehicle for social criticism since the time of (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 23)'s original literary inspiration, and they have played a crucial role in her body of work. Frankenstein's fantasy creatures reflect the wounded modernity of their world and provide a perspective from which to observe its persistence.

(for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 29) can be read as a postcolonial Frankenstein's creator in that he conceives a creature out of the atrocities of the American invasion and its aftermath. However, instead of creating, he attempts to cleanse the vengeance spawned by his brutalized world and end its own monstrosity. Hadi's cleansing vengeance shapes the horror of a becoming-monster encounter between (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 14)'s Baghdad and Shelley's Geneva. Hadi Frankensteins a monster out of exhumed body parts in an effort to reconstitute a loved one lost to the past-trained vengeance of a bomb blast. The creature becomes a vengeance machine and chooses to detonate the vengeance it was animated to escape. Vengeance detonates the creature's volatile monstrosity and unleashes an uncontrollable societal vengeance horror that transforms Baghdad into a hell of ever-escalating suicidal monstrosity (Abu Shehab 10).

Definition and Significance of Revenge in Literature

Revenge is a common theme in literature around the world. It could be said that any theme that deals with human feelings and emotions is a universal theme. Revenge deals with a person's feelings and emotions when they garner hate towards another person due to some wrongdoing that person has inflicted upon them. When literature portrays revenge, it typically portrays the extreme bounds of humanity and how far someone can go to get even. Revenge can be as simple as a child getting back at another child for stealing a toy, or as complex as a nation going to war with another nation to get retribution for the death of its leaders. No matter the situation surrounding it, revenge is an instinct that all living beings share (Abu Shehab 3). Universal themes are important because they help give literature meaning. Without meaning, literature would hold no significance on either a personal or social level. Literature with themes that go beyond the confines of a culture help readers from different backgrounds understand and empathize with that literature. This, in turn, fosters an appreciation for the culture from which

the literature stems. Revenge is significant across cultures because almost every culture has developed a set of rules regarding revenge and how it should be carried out (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 21). Cultures fiercely uphold the rights of their members to take revenge against outsiders, yet restrict the actions of their own members when they wish to take revenge on one another. Thus, revenge depicts the fragility and complexity of cultural boundaries.

Revenge in the Context of Postcolonial Themes

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Ahmed Saadawi fictionalizes the plight of the War-torn Baghdad through the major character Hadi al-Attar, who builds a creature out of body parts salvaged from numerous bomb explosions in the city. As Hadi's creature comes to life, he begins his revenge against the people who made him the monster by killing them one after another. In much broader view Saadawi also depicts the creature as the representation of America, and the very monster as an irony and satire on the very notion of liberation that bring more deaths and catastrophes in the city. Where the postcolonial theorist highlighted the Western notion of Orient as the sign of backwardness and barbarism, Ahmed Saadawi's *Baghdad* also represents the so called civilized place turned savage under colonial intervention. Looking from the lens of theorization, this chapter seeks to examine the very theme of revenge in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. While the monster itself comes back in revenge against his creator in the canonical text, Saadawi takes revenge to a broader level in the context of the postcolonial and neo-colonial intervention by America in Iraq; hence, through the very notion of revenge, this chapter examines the plight and misrepresentation of the colonized Baghdad under colonial intervention.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The theme of revenge in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* goes through a meticulous character analysis of the Hadi al-Athari character. This character is the postcolonial creature who is created by the collective colonial monstrosity in a fragmented and dead body character. In the utilization of Hadi al-Athari in a creature character, the revenge theme proliferates and continually grows against the domination of the other monstrosity. Avoicing the revenge theme in a postcolonial reading, Hadi al-Athari's character is crippling through the effects of colonialism, and it becomes derailed from its original goal of revenge to a more monstrous one (Abu Shehab 18). On the other hand, alongside the recommendation of how to deal with revenge in postcolonial situations, an analysis of

the Hadi al-Athari character in how it proliferates the revenge beyond the harder and more suction-monster level.

The story of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* ultimately revolves around the concept of revenge depicted through the eye of a postcolonial reading methodology. This revenge becomes the final resolution that ends the story. The revenge frenetically proliferates uncontrollably and aberrantly to the beyond monstrosity degree. The discussion of revenge in the postcolonial realm, on the other hand, hints at and implies a more appropriate and moderated revenge implementation to lessen the monstrosity and still uphold humanity (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 20). Hence, this character analysis of Hadi al-Athari would unravel the character's arc of revenge progression, which begins with a character that is crippled due to an imperialism effect and derails it to uncontrollable revenge. Meanwhile, this character analysis would depict how this revenge theme goes through the different implications of monstrosity in colonialism, the other's monstrosity, and the revenge itself throughout the character adjustment progression.

Hadi

Hadi is the character who is inspired by the situation in Iraq to work as a frankenstein and bring the dead back as a monster. In the very beginning of the novel it says, "The world has changed. So I became a Frankenstein. A creator of monsters..." Hadi lives in post-invasion Iraq, destroyed by bombs and killings. He is one of the thousands of innocent victims who have died without any justification due to the violence and aggressions of the US army. Like in Mary Shelley's novel, Hadi acts out of love and concern for a society torn apart by war, and for the innocent victims who have been killed and remain lifeless on the streets. In addition, it reflects the postcolonial context as colonized subjects were often denied in Western discourses.

Hadi's words; "When a body is torn into pieces by a bomb, the soul can't find a refuge anywhere. Even if it wanders in the air for a while, it will eventually be lost," point to this belief. The dead must be gathered and given the necessary care so that their souls may find peace. Hadi's motivation for this work is the liberation of the tortured souls of the dead, not revenge. Through Hadi, Saadawi expresses the absurdity of one society creating monsters in order to destroy another society (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 21). One might think that the creation of the monster by Hadi would be more justified in light of the "natural" and "divine" right to revenge. Despite this, Hadi's action is still condemned as it creates an even greater

monster.

Elishva

The next day, she visits the destroyed historic al-Mutanabbi book market and laments the loss of books and civilization. She encounters the creature, whom she sees as a victim rather than a monster, not only because of his scars and contorted body but because his existence is a sad reminder of the destruction of culture and language in Iraq (Abu Shehab 14). Her vision resembles the Creature's in *Frankenstein*: "She saw all things as they had been at first — the world beautiful and radiant, the rivers rushing through trees and flowers and temples." The creature's desire for comfort and beauty drives Elishva to mourn literature and the loss of her people's humanity. She urges him to kill the men responsible for the destruction of culture and civilization in Iraq: "They are not human beings. They are devils. Don't you want to kill them? Don't you want revenge?" The question of whether revenge will bring peace recalls the discussion of vengeance between the Creature and *Frankenstein*. Although the creature yearns for compassion, he realizes that revenge is the only way to freedom (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 26). As she speaks, Elishva's voice quakes with bitterness and hatred, distorting her beauty and grace. The language and imagery used to depict her suggest that she is succumbing to rage rather than seeking vengeance on behalf of the innocent. Paradoxically, the discourse of vengeance, like a virus, infects the creature, suggesting that the text does not advocate vengeance as the only means to achieve peace but rather wishes to illuminate its destructive nature, even in the case of the innocent seeking vengeance.

SYMBOLISM AND IMAGERY

Throughout the narrative, Saadawi employs a range of symbols and images with multiple interpretations. The imagery of corpses is prominent in the novel, often evoking thoughts of destruction and death. However, within the cauldron, the body's remains gradually transform from something repugnant into a symbol of hope, light, and life. As the old bodies dissolve in the acid, a space emerges for new realities to take shape and evolve. The reconstructed body of the Monster, which incorporates parts from diverse backgrounds, symbolizes national unification, transcending ethnic and sectarian divisions. This becomes particularly urgent in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, a time when the country is depicted as a fragmented entity, torn apart by the brutality of war, sectarianism, and the quest for power. Saadawi expresses a belief in the possibility of coexistence and harmony through unification (Abu Shehab 29).

Saadawi's "Frankenstein in Baghdad" tackles the postcolonial condition of Iraq and the colonial desires of the United States in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion. It criticizes American colonialism directly and ironically, exposing its hidden nightmares and unintended consequences. The Babylonian Monster embodies the desire for revenge and retribution against the oppressor, ultimately turning upon its creator, Hadi al-Atham. This appropriation of Shelley's scientist is deeply political and aligns with Said's definition of postcolonial literature as a response to the colonial encounter. Saadawi's narrative features a going-deadness, being-trap, and addiction, where both the creator and Monster are entrapped by the revenge-myth, mirroring Iraq's entrapment in the colonial-myth and the Monster's double-myth (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 30).

The Monster

Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* shows the anxieties of postcolonial societies haunted by violence, fear, and illusions of diaspora through a new creature, the monster, trodden by and challenging a colonial/imperial hegemony. A junk dealer in post-war Baghdad stitches together body parts of deceased victims of violence to create the monster as a private transgressive act against the colonial/provincial dismemberment inspired by the Western enlightenment reason. The monster comes alive and declares a mission to seek his murdered creator (Abu Shehab 27). The postcolonial monster, instead of instilling fear, mediates anxieties in a traumatized society through the colonial/imperial monstrosity logic. The monster's growth into a vengeful murderer mirrors the unfortunate creatures of a catastrophized postcolonial society, questioned under the enlightenment cruelty of reason. The beheading of Saadawi's creature is a misreading of the monstrous vengeance, a supposed fidelity to the Great Narrative of Freedom and Democracy in the colonial/provincial dissemination of enlightenment reason. The postcolonial providence of a doomed monster ideal emerges from Saadawi's co-textuality with Shelley's enlightenment quest intertext. Still, salvation lies in transgression from the Eurocentric framing outside the primal monstrosity. The creature's vengeance assumes an imperial monstrosity interrogating the enlightenment reason's universality into a Eurocentric culture that only ferments its obsession, denial, and fear at the outside's mimicry of the inside. The postcolonial monster takes revenge not on its creator but the Eurocentric culture at the primal Wellington of the ruin and greed, in keeping with the transgressively monstrous enlightenment that reconstructs the primordial outside as the raw other.

SETTING AND ATMOSPHERE

The setting of *Frankenstein* in Baghdad can be viewed on both geographical and temporal levels. On geographical level, it is in Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, and this setting is significant as the narrative events emerge from the socio-political milieu of Iraq. The city of Baghdad bears witness to horrific bomb blasts during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which give birth to the creature of *Frankenstein*. The protagonist of the novel, Hadi al-Attag, also becomes a victim of such bomb blast as he loses his friend, Ellis. Hadi is an Iraqi newspaper reporter who exposes the cruelty and violation of human rights by the US army in Baghdad. He has seen all that is despicable in world and wants to expose and ridicule the inhuman acts of the occupiers in his writings. However, spirits of the dead rise from grave to take revenge on the occupiers and the creature wants Hadi to become its creator. This entire chain of events and the postcolonial predicament of the colonized nation is projected through the creature's journey from death to life, innocence to consciousness, creation to rebellion, and being monster to becoming the redeemer.

On temporal level, the novel is set between the years 2005-2007 when a new wave of violence took over Baghdad as the aftermath of US invasion. The narrative tracks the time span between 2005, the year when creature is brought to life to 2007, the year when it is confronted face-to-face with Hadi. *Frankenstein* in Baghdad is largely depicting the conditions, events and repercussions of this particular time period in Iraq. The creature becomes the embodiment of the dead buried in the time span of the narrative, who needed justice for their souls to rest in peace (Abu Shehab 26). The narrative discourse of creature's chain of events reflect the brutality of occupation, retaliation, revenge and postcolonial gaze in the quest for justice. This need of justice and therefore describing the events from death to life creature's perspective has justified the destruction of places and people in Baghdad in the narrative. In order to expose the locale and atmosphere of destruction, prejudice and monstrosity, the narrative begins with the description of a bomb blast in the city of Baghdad. A bomb blast is the point of view from which the narrative unfolds its settings over the period of twenty-two months. The narrative can be read through the temporal sequences of bomb blasts that take place in Baghdad. The creature is created from the dismembered body of victim of a bomb blast and creature's first encounter with the world is also a bomb blast. Creature's journey from death to life unfolds after a narrative description of a bomb blast where it sees beyond chaos and wreckage, the "city."

Baghdad as a Postcolonial Space

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein* in Baghdad explores the theme of revenge. Taking a postcolonial approach, this study argues that Saadawi's novel is a commentary on revenge as a cyclical and self-defeating act for the individual and the society in postcolonial spaces. The narrative in Saadawi's novel illuminates the futility of revenge on both the individual and the collective levels. It embarks on a quest for explaining the emptiness of revenge and the necessity to replace it with co-existence. Through the character of the Monster, victims of colonial violence in Baghdad turn into vengeful subjects seeking to kill their aggressors. However, Saadawi displays how vengeance begets more violence and chaos. The Monster's revenge fails to bring justice, instead falsely recreating binaghdadian atrocities. In binaghdad, revenge only leads to its own self-defeat, chaos, and emptiness.

Frankenstein in Baghdad clearly depicts a society in chaos where colonial violence has propelled its victims into a state of vengeance. Taking revenge against the colonial aggressors, however, leads only to disillusionment and despair. This savage cycle of colonial violence and revenge defies linearity; the postcolony riddled with vengeance descends into an abyss of chaos. The Monster is a patchwork corpse composed of bodies found in the rubble of a bombed building. All of these bodies were victims of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. *Frankenstein*'s Monster attempts to recreate its father's horror in the binaghdadian space, where the imposed imperial order brings nothing but decimation. The Monster resurrects the fallen souls murdered by the invaders and reconstructs them into one body, blurring the line between life and death (Abu Shehab 22). When their dismembered bodies are patched together, the Monster gives it life in order to grant agency to its victims and bestow them with an ability to speak. However, the only speech it grants them is the language of vengeance.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

The fictional narrative of *Frankenstein* in Baghdad is handled through an interior monologue, letters, and dialogues between characters. The novel opens with an interior monologue by an old man, who watches the chaotic scenes in Baghdad after the bombings. In the chaos of the streets, he tries to find meaning in the destruction and death caused by the bombs. These interior monologues reflect his despair and frustration with the current situation in Iraq post-invasion. The selection of an old man's perspective in *Frankenstein* in Baghdad is significant. The old man's character represents the intellectuals in Iraq who grapple to make sense of the events, history, and the land. It illustrates that they could be highly educated yet fail to

comprehend the prevailing madness that takes hold of Iraq (Abu Shehab 29). The inability of an educated mind to unravel the knots of madness speaks to the deep-rooted insanity that envelops Iraq. Moreover, the old man expresses his concerns about the impact of time and death on memories and the storytelling tradition in Baghdad. He laments that memories may vanish entirely if they fail to be shared and recounted. In this sense, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is a narrative account that reflects on the brutality that transpired in Baghdad.

The narrative also comprises letters and dialogues between characters. The novel includes event dialogues, which capture in detail the scenes of bombing, death, and dismemberment. These scenes allow readers to envision the burden of death, madness, and horror carried by the streets of Baghdad. Death is a recurring theme in these scenes, instilling fear in the characters and readers alike. An illustration of this is a character's response to hearing about a bombing incident in the streets: "Fear returned, a fear more stupid than the previous one." In another scene, a character listens to the news of a bombing incident, attempting to guess the location of the explosion. The character reflects, "If it wasn't al-Mustafa mosque, it was al-Sadr, then Karada, or..." highlighting how the probability of a bombing in a Shiite area exceeds that of a bombing in a Sunni area, given the ongoing sectarian violence.

Multiple Perspectives

Saadawi wrote *"Frankenstein in Baghdad"* as a response to the effects of colonialism and the War on Terror in Iraq. The story features a watchman named Hadi who scavenges body parts from bombings to create a corpse that comes to life. This creature seeks revenge on its creators and the novel explores themes of revenge, identity, ethnicity, and the consequences of the War on Terror. The intent behind the creature's creation differs from previous *Frankenstein* tales and postcolonial implications are revealed through the lens of (Abu Shehab 17).

Ahmed Saadawi's *"Frankenstein in Baghdad"* functions as a postcolonial text that interrogates the consequences of colonialism and its aftermath through multiple perspectives. It takes place in Baghdad and tells the tale of a creature who seeks revenge on those who created him and subsequently abandoned him. This narrative is interwoven with the perspectives of Hadi, a watchman scavenging for body parts, and the journalists and politicians shaping public perception of the War on Terror. On the surface, the tale of this creature resembles past tales of revenge, but upon further inspection, profound differences become

apparent. While these past *Frankensteins* became monstrous and sought vengeance against their creators, the intent behind this creature's creation is not to enact devastation (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 13). The postcolonial implications of this difference are revealed through Saadawi's imagined text and the concept of Othering and the Occident's gaze upon the Orient. Rather than a nameless victim, Saadawi's creature embodies the desire to reconstruct a fragmented identity and challenges the Occident's perceptions in a dilapidated Baghdad, brimming with monstrosities.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The theme of revenge is salient in *"Frankenstein in Baghdad,"* and it plays a significant role in shaping the characters' motivations and actions. The narrative, set against the backdrop of post-invasion Iraq, depicts a society fractured by bombings and violence. The protagonist, Hadi, witnesses the dismemberment of a man by an unexploded bomb, and this event sets off a chain of retaliatory actions. Hadi creates an artificial creature from the victim's body parts, hoping to give it life and a sense of revenge against the perpetrators of violence. However, the creature, dubbed "the Ghost," instead seeks revenge indiscriminately, killing anyone it perceives as connected to its creator. This chain of revenge ultimately leads to Hadi's death and the continuation of violence in society.

The portrayal of revenge as a social dynamic expanding beyond individuals is reminiscent of views on postcolonial societies. In postcolonial environments, social dynamics turned to revenge, leading to brutality and the ultimate destruction of the society itself (Abu Shehab 25). In *"Frankenstein in Baghdad,"* the failed and misguided revenge perpetuates violence, echoing the vision of social revenge as a self-destructive act in postcolonial contexts. The Ghost's rampage raises questions about the nature of life and existence itself, rather than redressing the grievances of the dead. In this sense, the creature diverges from Shelley's, as the Ghost becomes an agent of chaos, akin to a demon summoned from hell rather than a misplaced human being. This divergence solidifies the message that revenge, once initiated, spirals out of control, ultimately annihilating the vengeful actors themselves (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 19).

Comparing with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

In Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, there is a clear connection to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in terms of the theme of revenge. Shelley's monster seeks revenge against Victor Frankenstein for creating him and then abandoning him. Similarly, Saadawi's

creature, Hadi's monster, seeks revenge against those who have wronged him and the victims of the bombings in Baghdad. Both characters experience deep emotional pain and loss, which drives them to seek vengeance (Abu Shehab 24).

However, it is important to note that Hadi's intentions in creating the monster are vastly different from Victor's. While Victor's ambition stems from a desire for glory and recognition, Hadi's creation comes from a place of grief and a desire to give the victims of the bombings a voice. This distinction raises questions about the true nature of monstrosity. Despite Hadi's good intentions, the consequences of his actions lead to chaos and revenge in Baghdad, echoing the tragic outcomes of Victor's creation in Geneva (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 6). Ultimately, both novels serve as cautionary tales about the potential dangers of creation and the uncontrollable nature of revenge.

CONCLUSION

A critical examination of Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* reveals the deeper understanding of the theme of revenge in the novel through a careful postcolonial reading. The novel, set against the backdrop of the 2006 Iraq War, follows Hadi al-Attag, an eccentric bar owner, as he collects body parts of bomb victims to create a creature that seeks revenge on its killers. Saadawi's novel highlights the absurdity of revenge in postcolonial societies, where colonial powers perpetuate violence despite promises of peace and healing. Analyzing the narrative, characters, and setting reveals how revenge haunts both the victim and the perpetrator, ultimately portraying it as a fruitless endeavor. While seeking justice through revenge is human nature, the novel questions the effectiveness of revenge as a means of redress (Abu Shehab 27). Ahmed Saadawi introduces the theme of revenge in postcolonial societies plagued by cycles of violence. As the colonizer departs, violence escalates among the colonized, who are left traumatized and desperate for healing. Yet colonial powers, through new forms of imperialism, persistently ignite violence. This pattern is evident in the characters of Saadawi's novel, who suffer under a dictator's rule and seek vengeance, only to unleash greater havoc following his downfall.

The character of Frankenstein embodies this cycle, initially created for justice but transformed into an instrument of revenge. Through the lens of postcolonial discourse, Saadawi's novel confronts the absurdity of revenge. Although postcolonialism finds common ground with the desire for vengeance, it ultimately derides its futility. This sentiment is echoed in both

Saadawi and Shelley, where the revenge that initially consumed the creature leads only to despair and annihilation (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 23). The theoretical framework of this criticism draws on the assertion that all texts must remain open to examination and reinterpretation, delving into how characters and events engage with and address historical realities.

Summary of Findings

A post-colonial reading of Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* examines how revenge operates in the context of postcolonialism and how it is exploited by the colonizers and then by the colonized themselves to develop into an obsessive or systematic process. Through the character of Frankenstein, who is created to take revenge on the brutal killing of innocents, it dramatically shows that revenge results in more killings, chaos, and destruction despite its initial justification. The reading also argues about the futility of revenge, especially in the context of colonization and re-colonization. Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* seeks sympathy for the victims rather than the executioners, despite taking revenge on Colonel McNulty. In opposition, it argues revenge is an obsession fixated on colonizers as if it were the only way to free the victim. Frankenstein takes revenge on the colonizer's creature, but it keeps killing even after liberating itself (Abu Shehab 21). Hence colonized's attempt to take revenge and liberate itself would only develop into more chaos and killings as the text shows the creature is uncontrollable and leads to the destruction of Baghdad.

Frankenstein in Baghdad critiques this obsessive process of revenge, taking the point of view of the victim in post-invasion Iraq. Though concerned with the victims of a crazed colonial zeal, it also critiques the systematic revenge killings by the newly formed Islamic courts in the aftermath (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 22). The reading situates Saadawi's novel in the context of post-invasion Iraq considering its imperial past, the earlier Ottoman rule, and the subsequent invasion and re-colonization by the U.S. To explore the theme of revenge, its justification as a right or natural need to reunite the victims and colonized against the colonizer is also discussed. The subject might justify bringing vengeance on those executioners of the innocents as the newly formed Islamic court in Baghdad seek, however, it would question the obsessive approach as in Frankenstein's case, the revenge with the purpose to liberate acts as a systematic massacre and chaos.

Implications for Postcolonial Studies

Frankenstein in Baghdad is a post-colonial novel that

sheds light on the impact of the neo-colonial era on the colonized nation and the repercussions of the 2003 war on Iraq. The novel critiques the so-called liberators of Iraq and their widespread destruction rather than liberation. Despite the passing of time, the wounds and suffering of Iraqis have yet to heal as they continue to struggle for safety and normalcy in a ruined nation. The characterization of the hybrid creature stands in stark contrast to the pompous character of the American giant transplanted with high-tech weapons, depicting the chaos and absurdity of a land torn apart by bombs and bereft of humanity (Abu Shehab 19). This monster, reconstructed from the body parts of victims, brings to light the stories of the dead and seeks revenge against the heartless killers. It embodies the collective trauma and anguish of a nation, as well as its yearning for justice, resonating with the post-colonial voice of the other.

This paper analyzed the theme of revenge in the hybrid creature against the American soldiers, diabolical Frankenstein figures, through the lens of Said's Other. The appropriation of the Euro-American Frankenstein tale in the post-colonial setting of Baghdad highlights the perverse monstrosity of the colonizers in contrast to the newly created monster as the Natives. The rage against injustice, inferiority, and humiliation transforms into a collective desire for revenge, struggling to reclaim dignity and humanity (for Translation & Literary Studies and Aziz Mahmood 28). Through the post-colonial appropriation of a spectral intertext, the author opposes the hegemony of the colonial discourse and empire and is intricately woven with the monstrous, dehumanizing, heartless machine of oppression in the now immortal tale.

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