

Representing Magical Realism as a Strategy for the Grotesque Narration in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

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ABSTRACT

Saadawi's novel Frankenstein in Baghdad vividly portrays the grotesque amidst the backdrop of war-torn Baghdad. The grotesque, in all its different dimensions, is a defining feature of Saadawi's novel. This paper will look at how magical realism works as a narrative strategy for portraying the horrors of conflict in a surreal way. Magical realist strategies and expression of the grotesque, when the line between reality and fantasy is blurred, are viewed and analysed in this study through a close reading of Saadawi's text. This paper investigates the utilisation of magical realism as a narrative strategy to depict the horrors of conflict in a surrealistic manner. Through a meticulous analysis of Saadawi's text, this study explores how magical realism serves as a conduit for the expression of the grotesque, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. By delving into the intricate interplay between magical elements and the harsh realities of war, this research aims to unravel the deeper thematic implications embedded within Saadawi's narrative. By incorporating elements of identity fragmentation, moral uncertainty, and societal disintegration, this investigation seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the profound impact of magical realism on the construction of narrative meaning in Frankenstein in Baghdad.

Keywords: Magical Realism; Predictions; Spirituality; Belief Legacy; Ahmed Saadawi; Frankenstein in Baghdad

INTRODUCTION

The concept of magical realism as a literary genre that combines magic with real settings has raised a lot of interest in the fields of literature. It was first introduced by a German art critic, Franz Roh (1925) in his book titled '*Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism*' he describes this concept as 'depicting an art movement capturing mystery and magic in tedium reality, presenting scenes from everyday life with sharpness of detail and clarity, giving them an almost otherworld-like dream quality'(Roh,1925,p 15-31).This kind of literary expression found the most prominent manifestation in Latin American literature through the works of Gabriel García Marquez and Isabelle Allende. Unlike traditional fiction literature, which seals magic into separate worlds or clearly recognises it as unusual, magical realism flows through and merges with the tissue of ordinary life. It provokes questions in a reader about what reality is and invites him to reconsider the limits of human perception and knowledge. In contrast to traditional fantasy literature, wherein magical elements exist in separate realms or are explicitly acknowledged as extraordinary, magic realism seamlessly integrates the magical into everyday life, challenging readers' perceptions of reality.

As a literary genre, this concept seamlessly blends elements of the fantastical with the mundane, creating a narrative space where extraordinary events occur in a setting that is otherwise grounded in reality. Originating in Latin America, it has since become a global phenomenon, influencing writers and artists across cultures. This concept defies a straightforward definition, as it encompasses a complex interplay between the ordinary and the extraordinary. However, at its core, the genre involves introducing fantastical elements into a realistic narrative without

disrupting the story's coherence or its setting 'the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it is an ordinary matter, an everyday occurrence- admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism' (Zamora & Fares, 1995, p. 3). Unlike traditional fantasy genres, magical realism does not rely on world-building or explicit rules governing its supernatural occurrences (Simpkins, 2012, p. 47). Several key elements distinguish this genre from other literary genres. One such element is the portrayal of the supernatural as an integral part of the characters' reality, accepted without question by the narrative voice and the story's inhabitants (Simpkins, 2012, p. 49). This acceptance allows magical realist authors to explore themes of cultural identity, history, and socio-political commentary through metaphorical and allegorical means (Zamora & Fares, 1995, p. 9). Another attribute is its incorporation of everyday details alongside fantastical events, grounding the narrative in a recognisable reality while simultaneously transcending it (Simpkins, 2012, p. 50). This juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary creates a sense of wonder and enchantment, inviting readers to reconsider their perceptions of the world around them (Zamora & Fares, 1995, p. 12).

Moreover, it frequently explores themes of cultural performativity and syncretism, reflecting the diverse cultural landscapes from which it emerges (Simpkins, 2012, p. 54). Through its fusion of diverse cultural traditions and belief systems, it celebrates the richness of human experience while challenging hegemonic narratives and power structures (Zamora & Fares, 1995, p. 19). This concept represents a unique and dynamic literary genre that transcends the conventional boundaries of reality and imagination. By blending the ordinary with the extraordinary, magical realism invites readers to explore the hidden depths of the human experience and embrace the magic that lies just beneath the surface.

This paper aims to explore the definition, elements, and characteristics of magical realism in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Saadawi's text is a critique of the violence and devaluation of human lives in Iraq following the 2003 American invasion. The novel explores existential dilemmas faced by the inhabitants, who oscillate between belief and denial. Saadawi's novel introduces a dichotomy between reality and fiction, infusing fantastical elements to enrich its narrative depth. The work is a hybrid of absurdist morality fable and horror fantasy, blending real and imagined elements, embracing supernatural phenomena, magical beliefs, and the mystical heritage of ancient Mesopotamia. The novel defies conventional logic, rationality, and sanity, gradually embracing elements of wonder and magic. The interplay between reality and the magical realm allows fantasy to contribute without distorting its essence. Saadawi employs magical realism with Mesopotamian undertones, presenting a particular attitude toward non-scientific and non-pragmatic beliefs in a world where science and pragmatism are dominant. In a world where science and pragmatism permeate every aspect of life, to characterize a specific stance towards ideas that do not stem from these fields (Bowers, 2004. P4).

Critics such as Yassin-Kassab, Cordasco, and Alford have made passing references to Magical Realism as an influence on the story since the novel's 2018 English translation. Alkabir Aldadisi praised the 2014 International Prize for Arab Literature winner's work, hailing it as the pinnacle of the magical-realistic Arabic book, even early in his evaluation. Also, several academic studies delve into the complex world of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Saadawi, focusing on the violence and/or the many symbols of Whatsitsname. A number of these analyses have singled out the book's enthralling mystical elements. Webster (2018), Mahmudah (2016), Hasan (2018), and Lilo (2019) all investigate the text's magical realism weave less directly. However, academic works on Saadawi's Magical Realism do not go into the regional details and complexities that are unique to his work. The researcher has also not yet shown the more interesting, albeit indirect,

cases of the magical whose primary tools are people other than the monster. Thus, this research aims to fill that void and reveal, among other things, where Saadawi gets the inspiration for his particular brand of Magical Realism. According to the results of this study, a Frankenstein-like creature takes control of the story when we look at religious mysticism, superstitions, and magical beliefs from different periods.

In the world of literature, magical realism and carnivalesque lie as muddled mirrors, reflecting a world of eccentricity and contradictions, where reality rebels on its borders, breaking familiar norms.

Mirmusa (2014) in her article title “Bakhtinian”s Carnavalesque in Angela Carter”s the Magic Toyshop, Several Perceptions, Nights at the Circus and Wise Children notes that Angela Carter cleverly uses these tools to dismantle traditional power structures, flirting with glamorous worlds in which the wonder overlaps with the ordinary, scattering anecdotes as lost night stars. Similarly, Frankenstein in Baghdad takes us to the alleys of a moaning city under a war that knows no logic; Saadawi uses magical realism as a window overlooking the absurdity of violence, to see Baghdad breathe with its fragments scattered across every corner. This convergence of Carter and Saadwi works gives us new insights into the magical realism's ability to be a sharp, literary weapon that cuts the star of darkness and reveals the depth of social and human wounds.

The concept of magical realism, in the hands of Angela Carter and Ahmed Saadawi, comes across as a robust tool of deconstruction to traverse and tear apart the edifices of societies within distinct cultural contexts. Mirmusa (2014) documents that Carter's imagination through the perspective of the Bakhtinian carnival confuses traditional categorizations and undermines conventional hierarchies in injecting imagination in reality's scenes through a practice that tries to expose the contradictions inherent in such structures. Similarly, Frankenstein in Baghdad by Ahmed Saadawi well capitalizes on the character of Whatsitsname as the epitome of the disintegrated reality of post-invasion Baghdad. In this text, surrealism is well enjoyed not only in serving the depictions of absurdity in the war but also as a critical tool in blowing up the crumbling social order. In this carnival use of imagination, in which distinctions between life and death melt into each other, it reflects the chaotic and confused state of society in general, just as Carter brings to light in her work a world that is disjointed and puts first and foremost all questions about authority and identity. It is a compare and contrast of how the use of magical realism in the works by Carter and Saadwi successfully plays the role of social criticism in literature—to bring down existing structures—while mapping the complex cultural and political realities.

In their article “*Magic Realism and its European Essence*”, Asayesh and Arargüç (2017) trace the roots of magic realism and its European influence, debunking that ever-simplistic reduction that links this literary genre only to Latin American literature. In such a way, the authors are able to show that magic realism—having the most vivid manifestations in Latin literature—has roots deeply intersected with European literary traditions. They show the possibility of this literary genre corresponding to European philosophical and literary currents because of the harmonious interlacement between magical and realistic elements. Thus, it digs deep into the roots of magic realism in earlier literary forms that tried to expound the boundary between reality and fiction.

Warnes (2005) discusses in his article “*The Hermeneutics of Vagueness: Magical Realism in Current Literary Critical Discourse*” how magical realism challenges the efforts of literary criticism. Warnes reviews how the intrinsic mystery of the genre, in which magical elements are a part of everyday reality, complicates analysis and processes of interpretation. He points out that blending the extraordinary with the ordinary opens multiple meanings and disrupts traditional

hermeneutical approaches. Warnes, therefore, argues that critics should deftly navigate the intersection between reality and fantasy in magic realism.

In his essay, "*Magic Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence*", Warnes 2009 goes on to elaborate on the application of magic realism in postcolonial literature. It is from this understanding that Warnes brings out the fact that this literary genre does offer an exclusive platform through which themes such as faith and disrespect are well explored within the postcolonial context. He feels that magical realism offers a chance for postcolonial authors to make attempts at dealing with matters of culture and history through that balanced mix of magic and realism, thus allowing critique of colonial legacies and offering alternative narratives.

Exploring the magical elements in Saidi's personality as one of the characters is crucial for understanding corruption and opportunism in modern Iraqi politics. Elishva, a saint in both Christianity and Islam, is a saint due to her maternal pain. Understanding the political, religious, and ideological context of Whatsitsname helps shed light on its enigmas. The research aims to discover how reality and fiction blend together, leading to the acceptance of mystical, fanciful, and occult aspects.

MYSTICAL VISIONS: A JOURNEY INTO THE REALM OF DIVINATION AND WITCHCRAFT

According to Ouyang (2010), "empiricism, including religious beliefs, superstitions, myths, legends, and voodoo," includes magic as a form of resistance (p. 14). The story "unloads a freight of black magic" (Ouyang, 2010, p.14), as pointed out by Dwight Garner, who said that magic and sorcery in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* try to find empirical support. Although Ouyang's viewpoint might be relevant to other cultures, it fails to fully portray the current situation in Iraq. The traditional religious upbringing of Iraqis has given rise to a new wave of interest in witchcraft, occultism, and ideas about the afterlife since 2003. These stories are everywhere in Iraqi society; people use them to make an argument and hold them up as examples of right and wrong. Ceremony, preaching, pilgrimage, and ritual are all examples of religious activities that have a substantial impact on the public and how they see the world (Ouyang, 2010). It is worth noting that the Quran and the Bible both admit the reality of black magic, sorcery, dream interpretation, and clairvoyance (Ouyang, 2010).

In response to this growing obsession with witchcraft and inspired by anecdotes about politicians' involvement in the occult, Ahmed Saadawi introduces Brigadier Sorour Mohamed Majid in his narrative prior to the birth of the monster. Saadawi's portrayal of Majid appears almost flippant, initially foregrounding the magical, only to challenge its legitimacy subsequently. Through Majid, Saadawi underscores the continuity between the two ostensibly opposing regimes, suggesting that the machinery of the present regime differs little from its predecessor. Majid serves as a tangible embodiment of this continuity, highlighting the indispensable role played by figures like him in post-2003 Iraq.

The portrayal of Majid, a character in Ahmed Saadawi's "*Frankenstein*," emphasises his ability to endure and persevere throughout the de-Baathification period in Iraq after 2003. Although Majid still has some Baathist ideology, he functions as an interrogator in a way that resembles the methods used before the invasion. Saadawi depicts Majid as symbolising perseverance throughout political turmoil. Majid's agency, which employs magicians and soothsayers, demonstrates his effort to maintain sophistication while dealing with imaginative themes. Although met with doubt, Majid encounters instances when the reliability of his sources

seems confirmed, causing a blending of the boundaries between actuality and imagination inside the story.

Majid, perhaps overestimating his own abilities, develops a philosophy that ostensibly leans towards scientific reasoning while blending elements of mysticism and psychiatric theories. However, Saadawi subtly introduces seeds of doubt into the narrative, causing it to deviate slightly from the conventions of its genre. As Majid harbours suspicions about the authenticity of his department's methods, the magical elements remain unverified, and their empirical aspects are hardly validated. The reader's suspension of disbelief is further challenged as they witness Majid himself wavering over the genuineness of the magic performed by his subordinates.

Brigadier Majid serves as Ahmed Saadawi's conduit for exploring the essence of magic and serves as a spokesperson for the cultural and scriptural dimensions of the magical realm. In his quest to apprehend the monster, Majid sets aside his moral qualms and resorts to clairvoyance and ancient magical practices, commanding "the djinn and familiar spirits and made use... Babylonian" (p. 107). He harnesses the power of "Babylonian astrological secrets and the sciences of the Sabeans and the Mandeans to find the aura of the name surrounding the body of the criminal" (p. 107). On a broader societal level, ordinary people are cognizant of the reputed prowess of Sabean and Mandaean sorcery, which Saadawi characterises as "sciences," and they often seek its aid to resolve issues, predict the future, or glean information about missing persons. The historical significance of Babylon, specifically Hirta or Hirah as it is known locally, as the ancestral homeland of the Sabeans, adds to the mystique. Moreover, Babylon is where the two angels, Harut and Marut, purportedly practised sorcery in ancient times, imparting knowledge of enchanting and disenchanting. The local culture simultaneously reveres and fears the expertise of the Sabeans and Mandeans, particularly in the realms of necromancy and djinn summoning.

While Ahmed Saadawi's narrative does not overtly endorse a steadfast belief in witchcraft or divination, it is Brigadier Majid's team of seers that ultimately identifies the killer, proclaiming, "'It's... it's the One Who Has No Name,' the senior astrologer said," and even claims to communicate telepathically with him (p.107). Majid himself vacillates between faith in and fear of the supernatural. His anxiety leads to worry and alarm, fearing he may become a target as his enemies could potentially mobilise underworld powers against him or at least have succeeded in instilling deep-seated fears within him (p.108). While Majid perceives magic as a potential threat, the narrative does not assert that magic is solely an empirical indulgence. Saadawi is portrayed as ambivalent about magic, yet his hesitation never prevents him from utilising it to his advantage.

As Saadawi delves into Majid's fears, the narrative takes on a cryptic tone. Detailing Majid's mystical preoccupations, Saadawi nods to the cultural roots of magic operative within the narrative. Majid, possessing firsthand knowledge of instilling fear in others, recognises fear as his most formidable adversary, one he must conquer. Saadawi introduces the notion of "tawabie alkhouf" or "familiar of fear," suggesting a different aspect of the magical realm. In the local culture, tales abound of people suffering harm at the hands of such "tawabie," though few openly profess belief in their existence. These spirits are commonly believed to be malevolent entities that shadow individuals, sabotaging their endeavours and bringing misfortune upon their lives. Majid's interpretation of "tawabie" in Saadawi's narrative is somewhat conflated with that of "qareen," another mystical concept wherein each person has an evil counterpart. Sorcerers caution against invoking the qareen, as doing so may lead to mental anguish or even madness. Majid recognises that succumbing to paranoia may result in being possessed by these malevolent forces. In his state of confusion, Majid becomes fixated on the idea that only fearful individuals surrender their will to the "tawabie," allowing them to wreak havoc on their lives.

Torn between practicality and mystical speculation, Majid attempts to rationally comprehend the enigmatic being that proves impervious to bullets and unfazed by gunfire. He grapples with unanswerable questions about the creature's supposed extraordinary powers, such as breathing fire or possessing hidden wings for flight. However, these fantastical occurrences remain mere conjecture or expressions of frustration on Majid's part, as no such events transpire in the novel. In Majid's bureau, magic operates empirically, with hired magicians performing what could be considered miracles. Apart from the monster's miraculous creation, its perceived magic relies on its physical prowess and the strategic machinations of its followers. Saadawi's narrative neither unequivocally endorses magic as a tangible reality nor dismisses it as mere illusion, leaving readers unable to discern truth from falsehood. Camayd-Freixas (1996) argues that for "the real-marvelous" to transition into magical realism, a form of "primitivism" must be incorporated (p. 585). Saadawi's narrative confirms the Brigadier's sophistication deficiency, if not primitiveness. However, Majid's average intellect, which has served him adequately thus far, falls short of providing an explanation for himself, let alone his superiors. Notably adept at undermining morale and breaking spirits through physical or psychological means, Majid finds himself overwhelmed by despair and irritation, leading to a flurry of inquiries, such as questioning the era and geographical location they inhabit: "I would not believe Where are we living and ...what age? Ogres and succubi, in this day and age?" (Saadawi, 2018 p.209). At this moment, Majid undermines the very pillars of his profession, reflecting on his personal confusion and openly admitting his ignorance. Similarly primitive are the tools assigned to Majid's assistants, such as bags of sand from the Empty Quarter of Arabia, evoking the magic and mysticism of ancient times. Although such paraphernalia may not be prevalent in modern Iraq, they harken back to period dramas and historical films depicting pre-Islamic eras when magic and soothsaying were still widely practised. Saadawi introduces astrologers capable of telepathising with the monster, blurring the line between magic and parapsychology. Despite the questionable nature of telepathy, the narrative lends it more credence than expected, thus amplifying the fantastical elements in contrast to scientific empiricism.

MYSTICAL METROPOLIS: THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF ENCHANTMENT

Saadawi, through the character of Ali Baher Al-Saidi, infuses magical realism with a pragmatic twist. Saidi, portrayed as a wealthy and charming newspaper tycoon reminiscent of historical caliphs, blends secular elements with the fantastical. Despite his sophisticated demeanour and secular beliefs, his association with the number of six hundred sixty-six and close ties to Majid hint at a lingering superstition. Mahmoud Al-Sawadi, drawn to Saidi's mystical allure, finds himself gradually ensnared in a world where romance and mystique intertwine, akin to the allure of the mythical "beast from the sea in the Book of Revelation" (Saadawi, 2018, P.95). Saidi astutely recognises Mahmoud's romantic inclinations, leveraging them to mould the young journalist to his advantage.

Saidi's introduction of Mahmoud to his fantastical realms amplifies the already enchanting atmosphere, immersing Mahmoud in a world born from a vivid imagination. The juxtaposition of Arabian Nights-esque landscapes teeming with djinns and magicians against a backdrop of gothic secrecy and clandestine activities heightens the allure. Amidst the nebulous settings and encounters with enigmatic figures like "Bloody Mary," Mahmoud finds himself entranced in a magical trance (Saadawi, P.97). Mahmoud is easily captivated by Saidi's fantastical allure, oblivious to the complexities of urban pleasures. Saidi, seemingly moulding reality to his whims like clay,

embodies a sybaritic existence where magic intertwines with seductive yet elusive realities. Despite the inherent dangers lurking in Baghdad, individuals of Saidi's stature navigate through life unscathed, their wealth and connections serving as protective shields in the face of adversity.

Saadawi crafts Saidi as a captivating antagonist straight out of a romantic adventure or a tale from *One Thousand and One Nights*. Saidi's character is layered with hidden depths, shrouded in mystery from Mahmoud's perspective, and likely to remain so indefinitely. Within the narrative's surreal ambience of clandestine realms and mundane ecstasy, Saidi assumes the role of a demon-like figure composed of human flesh but exudes an aura of intrigue, "Mahmud gaped in amazement" (Saadawi, p. 99). Despite lacking overt magical abilities, Saidi bewitches others with his persuasive rhetoric, capable of convincing even against one's better judgment, promising to materialise Mahmoud's "impossible dream" with a mere flourish of words (Saadawi, p. 99).

Even upon his later exposure as a false idol, Saidi retains an enigmatic allure, embodying a blend of real-world charisma and fictional mystique (Saadawi, 2018 p.173). His self-imposed exile from Baghdad sees him deploying a disorienting charm offensive, effectively utilising clairvoyance to manipulate situations to his advantage. Earlier in the narrative, Saidi's apparent scepticism towards Majid's mystical proclivities may merely serve as a facade, masking his own belief in fortune-telling and penchant for seeking such insights from Majid "the djinn and the fortune-telling" (Saadawi, 2018, p.75). Despite initially feigning scepticism, Saidi's purported surprise and curiosity regarding Mahmoud's prophesied future as a prime minister suggests a deeper involvement with mystical concepts. Whether Saidi genuinely believes in soothsaying or employs it as a tool to ensnare Mahmoud further remains ambiguous, his motivations undisclosed.

In Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein*, the focus is on the complex interplay of character dynamics between Saidi and Mahmoud, with an emphasis on Saidi's cunning strategies and Mahmoud's vulnerability to his persuasion. Saidi's attempts to maintain genuineness in Mahmoud's perception prompt inquiries into his genuine convictions and objectives. Saadawi draws a comparison between Saidi's activities and the actual political dynamics in post-invasion Iraq. In this context, political mentors guide individuals into positions of power and then abandon them once corruption is exposed. This cycle of manipulation and betrayal continues to persist. Saidi's grooming of Mahmoud exemplifies this recurring trend, strategically placing him as a protégé within a broader political agenda. Nevertheless, Saadawi intentionally keeps the outcome of Saidi's assertions uncertain, enabling readers to ponder whether Mahmoud succumbs to the temptation or retains his understanding, thus avoiding any more involvement with Saidi.

Elishva emerges as a phantasmagorical figure straddling the realms of reality and fantasy, appearing more as a chimera than a tangible being. Though imbued with sobriety and wisdom, her prolonged solitude and yearning for her son, Daniel, have left her teetering on the brink of madness, prone to illusions and daydreams reminiscent of medieval sanctuaries. Despite her torment, Elishva remains a central pillar in Saadawi's narrative, a tormented soul enduring amidst earthly turmoil. When Elishva seemingly resurrects Hadi's corpse, the "metamorphosis" emblematic of Magical Realism, as discussed by Zamora and Fares, comes to fruition. Given Elishva's religious background, the notion of the soul escaping purgatory as "Whatsitsname" hardly seems far-fetched, akin to the biblical Lazarus being summoned from the dead. Elishva's unwavering prayers for her son's return yield an unexpected result, as the traumatized soul of Hadi's corpse responds, embodying a different kind of miracle. Though her actions may be deemed sacrilegious, madness serves as a shield, preserving the narrative's mystical integrity.

Saadawi intricately weaves together themes of faith, madness, and the supernatural, inviting readers on a journey exploring the boundaries between reality and the marvellous. Elishva's story epitomises the intertwining of reality and mythology, reflecting a narrative deeply rooted in Iraqi feminine culture where madness and mysticism intersect. She symbolises the plight of countless Iraqi mothers, irrespective of religious affiliation, whose sons disappeared during the Gulf Wars, illustrating the profound influence of religion on Iraqi society. These mothers fervently pray, make vows, and seek solace in religious rituals, yearning for divine intervention and miracles to bring back their loved ones, straddling the realms of belief and fantasy. In their quest for answers, these mothers seek anything—a person, an object, or a "Baraka"—with supernatural abilities. Within the local milieu, where belief in mysticism is steadfast, women claiming extraordinary powers or "Barakas" are not uncommon. Evading capture, they establish shrines and holy sites, revered by believers who share stories of miracles and retribution against doubters. Elishva, unaware of her own Baraka, seeks solace in her patron saint despite Christian teachings against making vows, ironically using her power to curse rather than bless.

Elishva's rationale combines scriptural references with personal steadfastness, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. Saadawi neither confirms nor disproves the mystical, leaving the monster's creation by the story's seemingly insane characters open to interpretation. Though rooted in madness, their actions find support in theological and cultural history, lending credence to the argument for miracles. In the narrative of Elishva, a convergence of insanity and mysticism unfolds, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy—an experience emblematic of Iraqi feminine culture. Elishva represents the multitude of Iraqi women from diverse faith backgrounds who grapple with the anguish of sons lost in the Gulf Wars. These mothers, for years, have turned to prayers, vows, and candle-lit vigils in churches, shrines, and holy tombs, clinging to hope for the return of their loved ones. Their existence is suspended between the tangible and the ethereal, yearning for miracles not just out of expectation but out of an innate longing for divine recognition. In their quest for solace, these mothers seek out individuals or objects believed to possess special powers or "Barakas" to amplify their prayers. Elishva herself is said to possess such a Baraka, a phenomenon not uncommon in the local subculture where faith in mysticism is unwavering. Despite Christian advice against vows, Elishva seeks spiritual direction from her patron saint, unaware of her function as a conduit of Baraka. Ironically, Abu Zaidon's horrible death at the hands of Elishva's Baraka shows how her power curses rather than blesses. Saadawi emphasises Elishva's patron saint, anticipating the miraculous's demise. The monster St. George sends is a symbol of the mythological deity, who was false. After an opponent impersonates a donor, Elishva sees the appearance as a miracle to restore her faith. Elishva's intransigence and biblical references contrast reality with enchantment. Saadawi neither acknowledges nor rejects the story's magic, leaving the monster's creation to characters on the brink of lunacy.

Saadawi painstakingly explores Elishva's patron saint, creating the groundwork for the miracle's inevitable decline. In particular, the "horrible ghoul," recounted by Saadawi, slain by St. George, is a prime illustration of the legendary divine, which is false. Elishva faces a faith test when this hideous beast, whom St. George fights, appears after years of praying. Her first idea that this entity is an answer to her prayers is wrong; it destroys and damns. However, Saadawi shows Elishva knowing the creature's actual nature. She deliberately ignores the illusion's evil. Elishva wears her spectacles to honour her oath to St. George. She realises this creature is not Daniel. Its strange appearance mixes realism and magic, suggesting magical origins. The apparition comes to save Elishva's faith, preventing her from falling into doubt. This timely act reinforces her idea that

celestial entities must follow their dedicated followers. Elishva's rationale encapsulates a blend of realism and magic, intertwining personal resilience with biblical allusions.

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Ahmed al-Saadawi deploys magic realism to the smallest nuances in the book, creating the social and political fabric now fused in modern-day Iraq. As he infused magic with reality, al-Saadawi developed the macabre elements in the novel and drew deeper questions on the fragmentation of identity, moral ambiguity, and social disintegration. Such a thing predisposes the academic public to explore how magic realism has complicated those themes, pushing them toward new levels of insight. The grotesque nature of the novel also ignites the moral ambiguity that prevails within the characters. The involvement of Baghdad in the war in Iraq creates a setting of chaos that does little to deny the setting of moral frameworks. Instead, it puts the characters in a state of ordeal punctuated by questions of morality and justice regarding their actions. The actions of the creature, which are incited by his quest for justice for the victims, lead the characters and readers to face moral issues and their complexities. In this respect, moral ambiguity is actually the core of this novel, where minutely composed magical realism in al-Saadawi affords an opportunity to pose these kinds of issues outside the remit of historical context, making readers stay put and ponder questions of morality and justice generally. This ambiguity can be interrogated with the help of moral philosophy and literary theory to understand how al-Saadawi presents the erosion of moral certainty in the shadow of war. On the other hand, magic realism contributes to clarity on the issue of broader social disintegration. In this aspect, the fall of the social order in Baghdad is actually mirrored within the events of the novel, which are really chaotic and surreal. The creature was actually meant to depict the fall of community association and social norms.

The inclusion of such elements gives al-Saadawi the opportunity to not only describe life in Baghdad firsthand but also provide deep insight into the humanitarian situation during times of crisis. Magic realism always offers the bridge between the socio-political reality of the Middle East and the universal themes reflecting identity, morality, and community cohesion. This approach has the novel resonate with readers from the region and all over the world, which shows the depth of the grotesque as a reflection of complexity in the real world. For an academic audience, the novel provides rich areas for interdisciplinary analysis, taking advantage of studies in literature, psychoanalysis, ethics, sociology, and political science in order to reveal the layers of meaning in Saadawi's work.

THE SECT: BRIDGING PRIMAL INSTINCTS AND ANCIENT WORSHIP

In contrast to Mary Shelley's protagonist, who is a recluse and outcast, Saadawi surrounds his Frankenstein-like character with magicians, madmen, and zealous enthusiasts, convincing him of his divine role as a harbinger of justice. Ultimately, the narrative evolves into a realm of the mystical where deification is preached, with Whatsitsname being "ordained" as "the image of God" (Saadawi, P.148), transforming from a tormented soul to a deity. In this god-like state, his ego is unrestrained, and even his malevolence is sanctified as an answer to the prayers and calls for justice and vengeance from victims and their families (Saadawi, PP.136–137). This fantastical aspect of Whatsitsname is rooted in immediate reality, particularly following the American invasion and the rise of new power structures in contrast to the fallen regime's totalitarianism. Saadawi's narrative highlights the exploitation of religious and mystical imagery for political gain, paralleling Saddam Hussein's manipulation of such themes to portray himself as a national saviour and, later, a messianic figure. This reliance on religious mysticism perpetuates fraud and mocks public naivety.

Whatsitsname operates under an umbrella of folk and mystical illusions, where his childish mind chimes with his primitive woolly tendencies in a symphony of contradictions. The documents he left over to Mahmoud's Digital Registrar record incidents that reveal the complex nature of his personality, and reveal the synergies of the worlds of spirit and primitive feelings. His encounter with his Creator, Hadi, refers the balance to magic, or rather, to sacred texts, in a scene that reflects the radical shifts in their understanding of holiness. Conversations between the creator and the creator are based on repeating scenes from the Holy Quran, where dialogue is similar to repeated Quranic scenes between God and the devil, when the latter rebels against God's will. Here, the roles change. Hadi, representing the father and creator, pleads in vain to the beast to keep his life, sympathetic to the devil, saying: "Leave me until the end. Kill me, but make me the last one to be killed." (Saadawi, 2018, p.127) In this dynamic, Whatsitsname gives Hadi a temporary reprieve from death, but he remains stalked by his days and nights. In this context, the Muslim reader can only indulge in the depth of the narrative's symbolism. Saadawi weaves strands of prehistoric mysteries and the mysticism of the universe, revives Koranic narratives in a framework that enhances the credibility of myths and lends the novel a dimension of splendour and meditation.

The agitated tendency of revenge in the character of "The Beast" has emerged as further evidence of the hellish atmosphere of contemporary reality, where the boundaries of hell are cloaked in everyday manifestations. Today we live modern horrors that seep into the details of our lives, horrors that cannot be extinguished. Instead of the legendary multi-headed dog, Baghdad, transformed into a growing hell square, gave birth to a multi-bodied serpiros, roaming the streets day and night, terrifying citizens and filling the city's atmosphere with tension and anxiety. Nevertheless, the so-called "justice" finds a way out of the burden of guilt through tight fallacies, claiming to be "the only justice... in this country" (Saadawi, 2018, p.130). In this context, the real dimension remains present, albeit tinged with a dramatic touch; The novel drafted by Saadawi is gaining reasonable momentum, although modest, as the allegations of the so-called "so-called" are actually rooted in an interesting way. In terrorist rhetoric, such an argument is used to justify arbitrary killing, whereby all parties involved, including the American side, both before and after the invasion, benefit from this twisted justice speech. While Whatsitsname of this person" does not constitute an exception, but also declares his defense of justice, Sam Metz (2018) summarizes this absurdity with his reflections: "If there is a lesson to be learned from the ambiguity of what is the name of this person vis-à-vis his mission, it is that any attempt to unilaterally impose justice, whether human, monster or superpower in North America, will eventually fail." Although "monster" claims of justice may seem realistic at first glance, they remain experimentally controversial, because they remain an unproven theory, vague and empty of any tangible content. Ultimately, theory and practice unite in condemning the fallacy of justice, where great promises turn into a mirage in a world full of shadows and illusions.

Fascinatingly, fact and fantasy overlap in this story, whereby a mystic primacy regarding the character of Whatsitsname and his assistants or provocateurs unveils fundamental tensions reflective of the stormy political and social realities. Whereas Whatsitsname was born out of desperate fiction and a nightmare repeated often, his assistants or provocateurs are realistic portrayals of war-torn areas with brutal anger at the forefront and unrest fomenting in all directions. The personas of the three lunatics signal an extraordinary embodiment of slang and satanic, in a time when crazy people in different cultural contexts are regarded as surrounded by evil spirits. The highlighting of these assistants will make it crystal clear to the reader the assistant's vital importance in keeping the deadly torch and the legend of the dead ghost alive.

The continuous supply of body parts, like a transplantation stream, and the perpetual repair of the monster make the novel more captivating and unsettlingly horrifying. On the level of reality, the brutal hostilities and reprisal hatred ideologies fuel and reinforce the atavistic instincts, a mirror of profound and multi-composite conflicts dramatizing the social and political reality. So, Whatsitsname is an incarnation of the dreams of those who think murder must continue, as a new terror myth is installed whenever its predecessor collapses.

In his novel, Saadawi seeks to embody Frankenstein not as a fictional symbol, but as a symbol that pulsates with local reality, in line with the contemporary political scene in Iraq. After the invasion, a battle for power erupts in the streets of Baghdad, where the old, poor neighborhoods explode with militias that claim to be resistant to the American invasion. In the midst of this chaos, new leadership figures emerge, recruit their supporters and continue to push the political struggle forward. These leaders, who vary from senior commanders, expelled clerics, dissident militia members, or former convicts, have diverse and mysterious backgrounds. Their assistants, who often belong to fanatical pressure groups, are no less mysterious. What Is It Called immerses the reader in a world of chaos and corruption, where crime and lawlessness are disguised as legality. This world is depicted in a surreal and absurd way, but it is balanced with a touch of miserable reality. The presence of Whatsitsname is not just a fantasy, but a real place in the heart of the city, not an invincible land but a vital and influential place. Thanks to the madmen, the Frankenstein base takes the form of a fortified and armed “mini-garrison” or “virtual military barracks” (Saadawi, 2018, p.147). Through this, Saadawi shows his respect for the pragmatic nature of the madmen, and pays tribute to the veterans who suffered from psychological and physical disorders as a result of the successive wars that ravaged Iraq.

Saadawi's novel draws its depth not only from the military experience of the three crazy men, but also from the ideological methodologies they adopt that pressure politics and religion to play their roles in the service of their own purposes. It turns out that the religion that Frankenstein espouses, if it originally had a religion, is Christianity, and is supposed to be metaphorically deliberated by a figure similar to Elishva. And with the relay of events and reveal the strands of the novel, Bushra Jani (2015) observes that Whatsitsname becomes deluded into seeing himself as a "leader," a "saint," and even as Jesus, "the savior and the awaited" sent by "my Father in Heavens" (Jani, 2015, P.330). While Satan does not refrain from acting the part of God in this game of mystery, it is his three crazy followers who catapult him to this heavenly abode. Ideologically, Saadawi invests in the dogmatic turmoil stirred by war. Methods range from the secular, where crazy youth are used in the language of modern politics, to the sacred in heightening the presence of the "unknown" as an idea that can provoke deep reflection and thought. The cult of the older madman shows a chaos of ideologies where secrets of modern physics, something like a “black hole”, intermingle in one fabric with the mystery of religious mysticism and the invocation of the angel of death in the name of Azrael hints at the Islamic orientation of this faith, which carries a nihilistic undertone of death and annihilation of the three madmen; the eldest preaches a form of paganism, guided by a strict holy book that proclaims Whatsitsname as the “image of God, incarnate on Earth,” with the madman himself as the “gate” to this image. This belief and /or doctrinal system is based on mysticism and paganism, and may also include devil's flag. The actions taken by a madman to protect and prevent the devil's disappearance are a trope that reflects the ideological blindness of reality. Several dangers and primitive principles envelop this reality, fostering connections among the group members.

Although on the face of the sect they seem vintage and unattractive, in fact, they possess wide influence over the general public through publications and brochures regularly distributed to promote religious authority based on a pivotal character that may be real or fictional. In the narrative, the mad elder is given the title of piety in order to enshrine "Whatsitsname" as a separate religious symbol. As pseudo-prophets, these lunatics are fully aware that their faith is nothing but a masquerading celebration, so they take careful measures so that followers cannot reveal their falsity and disguise, preventing the detection of the divinity of "Whatsitsname." Nevertheless, their teachings appear to be increasingly popular, with more followers joining them who devour Whatsitsname or at least see it as "God's Face on Earth." (Saadawi, 2018, P.152)

In his relentless quest to embody the image of the Prophet he claims, the elder madman boasts an orange turban that shimmers under the sunlight, and a "long beard" spins in the colors of time. Despite this remarkable presentation, the ambiguity surrounding the character "Whatsitsname" debunks his claims, as the profound contradictions in his followers' interpretations reveal the bitter truth: neither he nor his followers seriously believe in the divinity of this object. This ambiguity seems to be nothing but a cunning ploy, used by Saadawi to craft his own version of magic, reintroducing "Whatsitsname" in the same way Majid had previously presented. If direct practitioners of witchcraft question its seriousness, external observers are not expected to place their trust in this volatile ritual. In the outcome, the other two religions build their foundations on the supernatural, investing in religious myths and manipulations that reinforce their narrative.

Whereas ideological currents seek to promote mystical and magic sects, the reality is that those allegations, although extremely exaggerated and with an ironic texture at times, are not just a mirage. From 2003 until today, falsity and extremist beliefs have spread, and many religious groups have sprouted around an axis of axiom-like figures, gods selling to the public a vision of salvation and redemption and calling for the martyrdom of those who suffer from a rupture between fear and suspicion. This narrative attempt to create a faithless spectacle amidst chaos, where people manufacture and market beliefs, not to mirror spiritual truths, but to further the hidden agendas of unidentified beneficiaries, manipulating religious concepts as if they set traps for unsuspecting individuals. or every fetish that falls, other sprouts from nowhere, enticing worshippers who are ready to lay down their lives for a supernatural savior, most of whom may never have seen it. In this mosaic of beliefs, truth and magic collide, resulting in a combination of farce and evil. In this chaos, the clear boundary between progress and the shadow imposition of the dark ages becomes blurred. Today's political landscape unexpectedly traps reality in a blend of ancient magic and pushes the narrative beyond conventional magical realism boundaries, unveiling fresh aspects of this fictional world.

In the list of followers of "Whatsitsname", two people of particular interest stand out: the enemy, which adds another dimension to the symbolism of the narrative, and the mystic, which itself is a wondrous irony. With Sophist and Sophist's presence, Sophist portrays a coterie of mystics that, on its face, seems ideal, although the Sophist tends to argue more than he chimes with the spirit of mysticism. The conflict between the members of this group is evident in the way in which each tries to manipulate the ignorant nickname "Whatsitsname", in pursuit of their own ideological interests, reflecting a state of contradiction and division ravaging their mediators.

The sophisticated tackle the witch with bitter irony, revealing his arguments about the concept of criminality, "Each of us has a measure of criminality" (Saadawi, 2018, p.149), while Whatsitsname continues to doubt the nobility of his case, blaming others for trying to shirk responsibility. The conflict culminates when the magician and the African compete for his satisfaction, becoming Whatsitsname as the focus of a power struggle, further dividing members

of the alien group due to competition and relentless jealousy. Like many of those on the throne of power, Whatsitsname ends up aligned to the side that feels the least isolated and even feeds its ego. In this conflict, the Sophist loses to the machinations of the magician. And despite the irony of this scene, it has a stark equation in political reality. Saadawi enables the hostilities to do among the followers of Whatsitsname, eventually becoming opponents and enemies, and their destiny leads to loss and defeat, as with armed groups in Iraq after 2003.

It is ironic that his followers remain loyal to him even after they have been dispersed for so long, feeling that they are nothing but a visual illusion in his eyes. When running into "Citizen 341 walking down the street in the Waziriya district" (Saadawi, 2018, p 194) we realize that the mirage-like aura surrounded by worshippers is not just pure fantasy. The myth continues to live, although worshippers are feuding between themselves, grappling with and even reporting to fighting, they maintain an unwavering loyalty to Whatsitsname, who in their eyes seems to be a mere abstract idea, not a tangible material reality. Saadawi enhances the magical character of Whatsitsname by giving him the ability to adapt to a changing reality with amazing speed. He wears masks and subtly removes them, while his essence remains the same, or less. So, Whatsitsname refuses to reveal his face to the mine before killing him, saying, "What's the point? It's changing. I don't have a permanent face" (Saadawi, 2018, p 249). With the constant transformations he is undergoing, his face changes "constantly", to the extent that "nothing inside me lasts long, except my desire to continue" (Saadawi, 2018, p 259).

The change in the face of Whatsitsname can only be an elaborate charm, but it carries with it a profound factual dimension, reflecting the fragility of the country's rapidly changing political, religious and social reality. Every day we have new faces, and innovative ideologies are promoted through factions racing to support their interests. Even old faces, memories of repeated failures, are recycled in an attempt to appease angry audiences, either by changing their loyalty or by joining the opposition ranks. In this context, Saadawi reflects this phenomenon through the character of the mine, which changes its appearance after he left his job and announced his withdrawal from the scandal-ridden "track and pursuit" circle. He pruned his beard "to match the appearance of a religious man" (Saadawi, 2018, p.247), giving himself a "new image" that represents a clear shift in his identity. Through these modifications, Saadawi re-paints a scene that brings us back to the times of medieval scholars, where the contemporary Iraqi reality is surprisingly renewed, making people more inclined to adopt primitive systems of faith. In the shadow of this intertwined scene, Saadawi emerges as a cart of magical realism, revealing a reality in which magic intersects with politics in a puzzling and absurd game. Everyone still manipulates masks and illusions, in a play full of irony and volatile players, where everything changes and the only constant remains the constant shift.

CONCLUSION

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Saadawi presents a fantastical reality characterised by ideological chaos and political instability, seemingly beyond remedy. Along with the blurred boundaries between the magical and the real, the narrative delves into the depths of despair following the 2003 war and the subsequent American invasion. Saadawi employs elements of magical realism to evoke wonder and pathos in this context.

Nevertheless, the aftermath of the 2003 war left moral and spiritual turmoil in its wake. Saadawi sets explicitly the novel in Baghdad, resonating with its historical significance as the heart of the Abbasid civilisation. However, this once glorious past has devolved into a present marred

by horror and disgrace, much like the appearance of the novel's monster, ironically referred to as citizen number one among its followers. Once a beacon of Abrahamic wonders, Baghdad now languishes in blood, fear, and primitivism. Saadawi mourns this contemporary Baghdad, plagued by human wickedness and remorselessness, where faith has been displaced by chaos, anarchy, and bloodlust. Secular manifestations of magic, driven by political ambition, are portrayed as manipulative and opportunistic. Even the divine aspect of magic, rooted in spirituality and religious righteousness, is depicted as vulnerable to implosion. Ultimately, Saadawi dismantles any hope of salvation through magical or mystical means, leaving Baghdadis to fend for themselves in a world devoid of supernatural or secular assistance. Through allegorical characters and nightmarish scenarios, the novel serves as a parable of a world teetering on the brink of apocalyptic collapse. Saadawi's experiment with the magical achieves its goals by creating a world that is both fantastical and alarmingly realistic. It navigates the fine line between the nightmarish, the hallucinatory, and the actual, carving out a space for itself within the realm of Magical Realism. What makes this novel more distinct and captivating is that it does not handle domestic and national issues only, but it also addresses universal themes, archetypes, and situations that are shared by different cultures and societies all over the world.

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