

The theme of violence as depicted in both Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*."

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 09 Jun 2025; Received in revised form: 03 Jul 2025; Accepted: 08 Jul 2025; Available online: 11 Jul 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords— Violence, Postmodernism, <i>Frankenstein</i>, terrorism, Ahmed Saadawi</p>	<p>This study aims to explore how Ahmed Saadawi's work, an Iraqi adaptation of Mary Shelley's, portrays violence as abjectness, as outlined in the powers of terror. In this book, dismembered corpses obliterated by explosions are aggregated to constitute a complete body. Consequently, this image embodies its cultivated essence, instigating a confrontation to seek vengeance against the individual who murdered and dismembered its corporeal form. In research inquiries, the investigator assumes the role of the monster, symbolizing an abject that embodies moral corruption and the catalyst of mortality. Shelley and Saadawi distinctly reference the creature. While Shelly's <i>Frankenstein</i> creature is devoid of human characteristics, it elicits sympathy; in contrast, Saadawi's monster references terrorism and its destructive powers. Saadawi's <i>Frankenstein in Baghdad</i> employs the violence of war as a metaphor for the erosion of humanity, resulting in individuals merging with a non-human existence, akin to a monster. The employs a postmodern framework to analyze the works of Saadawi and Shelley, focusing on the effects of Western aggression and its dissemination objectives. The researcher will conclude that individuals must renounce terrorism and its consequences, along with all forms of hatred. Only then will violence and carnage come to an end. Furthermore, individuals must cease endorsing Western terrorism and brutality to reclaim their humanity.</p>

I. INTRODUCTION

Gothic literature enhances our understanding of life and self, offering insight into the world we inhabit. In his 2003 study "The Political Geography of Horror in Shelley's Novel," Randel addresses a gap concerning the historical significance of the *Frankenstein* perspectives. Randel observes that "modern

European novels" often commemorate historical events related to their respective settings (Randel, 2003, p. 465). While living near Geneva, the birthplace of *Frankenstein*, Shelley conceived the idea for her novel from a work entitled *Frankenstein*. She subsequently departed Geneva with Percy and visited Chamonix, where she observed the

confrontation between Frankenstein and his creature in Blanc. Shelley intermittently demonstrates the lack of facts in the book, which are also absent. Personally meaningful to the author. The researcher in this study will also investigate the context of the French Revolution and the revolutionary events of the English Civil War at Shelley's birthplace.

Shelley, as the daughter of prominent political philosophers, is considered part of a political lineage. Conversely, her husband and parents have persistently maintained the radical perspective in their writings. In her work, Shelley integrates these concepts with her divergent perspective (Bower Bank, 1979: p. 418), resulting in a significant independent evolution as a modern writer and political theorist from 1818 to 1831. Frankenstein in Baghdad was not a rephrasing of Mary Shelley, as asserted by Saadawi. Consequently, comparisons and contrasts between the two novels may be drawn. Saadawi stated in an interview that the book references Frankenstein only twice. In addition to these two references, the residents of Baghdad in the narrative refer to the peculiar being as "what's-its-name" or "the one without a name," suggesting they may be indifferent to its resemblance to a Frankenstein-like entity.

Najjar (2014) Baghdad's Frankenstein centers on the concept of "abjection." Human bodies are regarded as refuse, and human souls are squandered. Hadi al-Attag, an elderly, intoxicated junk dealer, is the protagonist of Saadawi's novel. He asserts that the theme is the principal difference between his book and Shelley's. The author asserts, "In this novel, Frankenstein epitomizes Iraq's contemporary issues." During the period when the novel is set in Iraq, it exudes a pronounced Frankenstein-like atmosphere of dread. (Najjar, 2014).

Hadi in the Iraqi adaptation lacks Victor Frankenstein's "lofty aspirations" and "grand ambitions," which are among their distinguishing features. Hadi seeks to employ the body for a constructive purpose, yet he is uncertain about the outcome of this "atrocious and irrational act." Najjar (2014). However, Hadi al-Attag and Victor Frankenstein have both made a classified discovery. I discovered "the life secret" alongside Victor. "I was astonished that I alone was destined to uncover such an extraordinary secret among numerous men of intellect who had focused their investigations on the

same field," the man asserts—Frankenstein by Shelley. Hadi's discovery is more intimately associated with violence than with science. The crux of this revelation is to disregard human sanctity. He has discovered the essence of violence in waste or abjection. Employed at the coffee shop owned by his Egyptian friend Aziz El Masry, Hadi narrates to his audience the story of the entity he has assembled to provide it with a dignified burial. Although regarded as a pivotal Gothic novel of the Romantic period, Frankenstein also exemplifies the process of individualization and its impact on human identity by illustrating the significant role of language in the characters' development. Language presents the subject to the other, and as Botting (1996) states, "the other... constitutes the human subject in language through the effects of speech." In Frankenstein, Mary Shelley emphasizes "the interactions between a rejecting father and his rejected creature" to illustrate the relationship between Victor and the Creature (Miller, 1998: p. 59). Indeed, estrangement is the initial emotion the Creature encounters upon opening his eyes to the external world. He conveys his emotions to Victor by saying, "I struggle to recall the initial years of my life; everything appears indistinct and chaotic. (Miller, 1998: p. 79). Upon encountering the world for the first time, he experiences a sense of emptiness. Mellor asserts that from the creature's inception, Frankenstein has deemed it 'demoniacal' and subjected it to scorn (Frankenstein: p. 46). Consequently, following the Other's rejection of the Creature, Victor preempts the actual sequence and enters the imagined realm immediately upon opening his eyes. Victor reflects on his initial rejection: What terminology can I employ to articulate my sentiments regarding this calamity? The dream's allure vanished, leaving my heart engulfed in terror and revulsion. I could not endure the aspect of the being I had created. I exited the room abruptly and wandered into my bedroom for an extended period, unable to succumb to sleep. (Frankenstein: p. 45). The subject's renunciation of the Other is epitomized by this rejection, which holds considerable significance for Lacan. This abdication is typically expected to occur when Victor achieves completeness with his creature by accepting it. However, the Creature is categorically rejected. The

Creature is precluded from entering the symbolic order as a result of this rejection.

The Violence

The diversity of our world results in numerous representations of violence across literature, politics, and various social and cultural spheres. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Al-Saadawi is a novel that encapsulates the violence of a tumultuous period in Iraqi history. It illustrates violent acts and encapsulates the novel's principal theme. The somber novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is set in contemporary Iraq and diverges from the original narrative of the creature's creation by a scientist in his laboratory. Conversely, the creature is crafted by a waste-picker, who daily reconstructs human remains dismembered by bombings into a single entity atop a partially destroyed house in an impoverished neighbourhood of Baghdad. The term "shesma," signifying "what is its name" in Iraqi Arabic, is directed towards this sewn cadaver. The fundamental narrative of the novel is revealed through Saadawi's character, Farid, who works in the media sector. The Imam's Bridge Incident occurred in 2005, two years after the US invasion of Iraq, resulting in the deaths of over a thousand Shiite pilgrims on a bridge in Baghdad. A warning of a suicide bomber incited a stampede, prompting many to leap into the river. "The dread of mortality led to the demise of innocent individuals on the bridge" (Frankenstein: p. 98). This illustrates that fear, amplified and personified, is central to the conflict. Saadawi stated in an interview that this monster "embodies the entirety of the Iraqi individual" as it "consists of components derived from Iraqis of various races, sects, and ethnicities." In her book *Powers of Horror*, the Bulgarian-French intellectual Julia Kristeva asserts that the violence in Saadawi's novel exemplifies the concept of the Abject. She asserts that "abjection maintains what was present in the archaic pre-object relationship, reflecting the historical violence that occurs when one body detaches from another to assert its existence."

Kristeva, 1982. The human subject must strongly resist separation from the maternal body to facilitate birth. Kristeva posits that violence is an intrinsic element of human existence. Kristeva posits that each individual distinctly embodies monstrosity.

According to Kristeva, the Abject "disturbs identity, system, and order." Kristeva, 1982. *Frankenstein*, composed of multiple corpses, embodies this "turmoil" of an ongoing identity in both the original and the Iraqi adaptations. He was born out of violence. "Every crime is deplorable as it underscores the deficiencies of the law," asserts Kristeva (1982). In other words, violence is a manifestation of monstrosity, as the depressed individuals also embody monstrosity.

Saadawi's work serves as a poignant exemplification of the lamentable, akin to Shelley's.

Kristeva asserts that the body is the most explicit representation of the lamentable condition. "The corpse epitomises abjection when perceived devoid of God or science" (Kristeva, 1982). The corpse is regarded as a contaminant, an infection, and a significant threat to one's identity.

Saadawi's work is a notable exemplification of the lamentable, akin to Shelley's.

Kristeva asserts that the body exemplifies the most lamentable aspect. "The cadaver epitomises abjection when perceived devoid of divinity or scientific understanding" (Kristeva, 1982). The corpse is regarded as a contaminant, an infection, and a significant threat to one's identity. Moreover, due to its characterisation as "the most sickening of wastes," Kristeva associates it with aversion (Kristeva, 1982). The demarcation that distinguishes humans from non-humans has been transgressed. The corpse's connection to violence renders it highly significant. Living organisms employ violence to eliminate waste. All human functions are inherently lamentable, especially those related to waste or decomposition. The waste persists in being expelled until the body ultimately decomposes into a cadaver. Besides its implications for sexual violence, incestuous familial and sexual relationships represent another significant facet of the violence depicted in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The sexual and familial relationships shape the characters' subjectivity and sexual identities. In *Making Monstrous*, Botting argues that the issue of gender, specifically how *Frankenstein* delineates distinctions between male and female, as well as the implications of these representations, has become a significant concern in the novel's critical analysis. *Frankenstein*: p. 100. The study examines the impacts of virility and representations of

excessive masculinity and femininity in sexualities. One of these representations is the cruelty, horror, and bias articulated in *Frankenstein* in a complex and disquieting manner (Johnson, 1982: p. 57). Lacan's critique of sexual identity stems from the notion that the symbolic supersedes the real. Lacan asserts: In the Oedipus complex, the gendered child evolves from a gendered phantasm to a sexual human child by undergoing the symbolic test. Provided that everything proceeds as intended, he will ultimately embrace his identity as a young boy among adults, fully entitled to aspire to become "like daddy," signifying a masculine individual with a spouse. This allows for a discussion of Victor Frankenstein's sexual identity regarding his mother. As Elizabeth's relationship with Victor develops, she increasingly appeals to him as a sexual object, influenced by the dynamics between her mother, Caroline, and father, Alphonso. Victor's father has offered to safeguard his bereaved mother. The study also focuses on the pressures inherent in specific sexual communications, including heterosexuality and same-gender relationships, as well as the connections between sexual meaning, knowledge, truth, and authority. Moreover, these sites of Gothic imagination crises are of significant interest in postmodernist discourse. This study illustrates how individuals whose gender or sexual orientation diverges from societal norms have, in effect, become the "monsters" of modern sexual discourse. Gothic literature has justifiably emphasised the image of the monster, as monstrosity in Western culture has historically been linked to sexism and gender nonconformity. Critics have asserted the peculiar power of Gothic monsters, strategically attempting to re-appropriate and disseminate this strength in support of postmodern critique. Critics have recently reinterpreted numerous Gothic works from the nineteenth century as illustrating the turbulent ascent and cultural supremacy of a middle-class, heterosexual, white, Western identity.

The Terror

A defining feature of postmodernism is the dissolution of boundaries in Saadawi's writing, distinguishing it from Shelley's. Eliminating criminals also results in the demise of victims; thus, victims and criminals are interconnected. Saadawi

subtly posits that "each individual possesses a degree of criminality... there are no innocents who are entirely innocent or criminals who are wholly criminal" (Saadawi's: pp.156, 214) when the (What 's-it 's-name) opts for the dramatic conclusion. Saadawi articulates that every individual in Iraq embodies both criminality and victimhood. Consequently, the organism has developed into:

A metaphor for an interminable cycle of retribution that is inextricable. A commendable initiative to deliver justice to victims of the post-2003 anarchy swiftly devolves into criminality as the distinctions between guilt and innocence become blurred. Electrastreet.com, Hassan. Saadawi conveys his message clearly in his novel that we have all contributed to the creation of this entity, in various ways, as he states, "played a turn in creating this creature" (Saadawi: p.217), and that "this evil we all have inside us ... because we are all criminals to some extent" (p.227). In his interview, Sadaawi asserts, "If there is a lesson to be learnt and a moral juncture to reflect upon today as Iraqis, it is to recognise that we are not solely victims and that we have all contributed to the creation of victims in various ways" (Najjar, arabicliterature.com). In Saadawi's novel, Baghdad serves as the abject. Baghdad embodies abjection, characterised by its tormented spirits, pervasive violence and gloom, "ominous clouds" (p.277), and the corpses that "littered the streets like rubbish" (p.153). If Baghdad is an object in Saadawi's book, then it is. Baghdad epitomises desolation, marked by haunting spectres, pervasive violence and despair, ominous skies (p. 277), and lifeless bodies strewn across the streets like refuse (p. 153). Characters depicted as vampires, demons, or aliens in Gothic-postmodernist literature exemplify Freudian self-abatements, wherein the otherness within the self is repressed and vilified. The monster's initial manifestation prompts a dialogue between the self and the other, subsequently enveloped by the lingering dread that facilitates transcendence from the self into the realm of unfamiliar otherness. This illustrates the essential requirement for fear to reveal the suppressed and initiate a discourse on self-understanding and societal comprehension. Saadawi sought to establish an internal "dialogue" that transcended his literary works. Therefore, as per Lyotard (1984), on page 82,

we can discern the murmurs of a longing for the resurgence of terror, for the actualization of the fantasy to grasp reality.

The statement of the problem

Although the chosen novels were written over two centuries apart, Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* both addressed the same subject, as this study will demonstrate comprehensively. This study aims to investigate how a fractured identity can be expressed via the reading and analysis of two novels: *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Al-Saadawi. By supporting terrorism in all Islamic countries overall and in Arab countries specifically, Western colonial powers exploited all of their resources to splinter the identity of Islam. Their methods involve taking advantage of some of their clients inside these nations in order to infiltrate the violence and terror. Furthermore, the monster idea employed by the researcher illustrates the extent to which colonization powers persist in eradicating all social and cultural norms within these nations. To analyze Saadawi's and Shelley's chosen works and investigate the impact of Western violence and its propagation, the researcher employs postmodern theory as a framework for analysis. It is understood that until people reject all manifestations of hatred as well as terrorism and its effects, terror and bloodshed will not end. In addition, the people must stop supporting Western terrorism and brutality in order to regain their humanity. According to the researcher's findings, identity is created by and projected onto individuals, and it can be reconciled from a negative to a positive.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

David Punter's book, *The Literature of Terror*, asserts that the Gothic genre was created to elicit a chilling ambiance within historical settings, exemplified by haunted castles occupied by vampires, ghosts, and monsters. The utilisation of the paranormal to manipulate psychological obsessions in distorted environments reflects themes of mortality. Enigmas, cemeteries, sombre settings, and unwavering emotions, coupled with the melancholic themes found in literary works (Punter, 1996: pp. 1-20).

Punter (1996: p. 18) contends that "exploring Gothic is synonymous with exploring fear." The Gothic's passive connotation implied a quality that seemed "dark and barbarous" (Varma, 1957: p. 10). The term developed to denote "a precious imaginative liberty," resulting in a gradual alteration of its traditional meaning (Kilgour, 1995: p. 14). Robert Hume contends that "the atmosphere of the Gothic novel – defined by malevolence and ominous dread – is its essential characteristic, rather than its techniques" (Robert Hume, 2002: p. 286). In her examination of Gothic-Postmodernism, Maria Beville offers innovative perspectives on the genre. Beville (2009: p. 8) contends that the "gothic" is the most overt literary mode for expressing the anxieties of postmodernity. Despite the Gothic style being regarded as outdated and fatigued, Beville presents a novel concept, claiming that "terror" is intrinsic to postmodernity. Gothic-postmodernism is a literary genre that exists at the convergence of multiple literary forms, exploring the contrasts between past and present, reality and illusion, and fear and desire, among others. Nonetheless, it sporadically surpasses these limitations in literary depictions (Beville, 2009: p. 96). Furthermore, Beville (2009: p. 33) contends that the Gothic has traditionally served as an "outlet" for expressing anxieties provoked by terror and has "played a significant role in the genesis of terror itself." Stephen King distinguishes between three types of fear: disgust, terror, and dread. King (1986: p. 21) asserts that dread arises when readers are urged to envision terrifying aspects that remain concealed, rather than facing the origin of their fear. Fred Botting posits that "horror signifies the moment of contraction and recoil when terror incites an imaginative expansion of one's sense of self" (Botting, 1996: p. 10). Furthermore, Beville contends that the graphic depiction of horrific events in horror films constitutes terror, a "constraining experience." In other words, "the distinction between the odour of death and the encounter with a corpse" differentiates panic from horror (Varma, 1957: p. 130). From a postmodern perspective, these feelings of horror and panic are paradoxically intertwined with curiosity, as Punter articulates, representing "the dreadful pleasure" (Punter, 1996, p. 7). Botting (1996: p. 6) posits that these horrors may also elicit pleasure, as they "stimulated excitements which blurred

definitions of reason and morality." Botting illustrates that the emotions predominantly associated with Gothic novels are ambiguous; they stimulate readers' curiosity rather than eliciting feelings such as terror and horror (Botting, 1996, p. 9). As previously stated, Gothic postmodernists illuminate the ominous and disquieting viewpoints of individuals and society that emerge from our repressed fears and illicit desires, or "the language of terror" (Foucault 65). Beville (2009) characterises their narratives as "literary monsters" (p. 16). Gothic postmodernist narratives are perceived as counter-narratives, and Gothic postmodernism is regarded as a transformative discourse that alters reality by compelling us to confront our unconsciousness. In his psychological study "The Uncanny," Sigmund Freud elucidates a specific form of fear he designates as the "uncanny," characterised as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (p. 20). Consequently, the uncanny in Gothic narratives appears not as something "new" or "foreign," but rather as that which has been repressed for an extended period and is "known and deeply rooted in memory" (Freud, 1998: p. 241). Moreover, it posits that Mary Shelley's novel exhibits considerable versatility, functioning as a metaphor for both civil wars and various instances of violent political upheaval broadly. British critic Baldick observes that government is a "monstrosity" that asserts itself upon its creators, and he asserts that "the monsters both of poetic fancy and political organisation are made not by nature but by fallible human arts." He uniquely connects the "uneasy feeling of human responsibility involved in the conception" of political organization with *Frankenstein* (Baldick, 1987: p. 15). *Frankenstein* exemplifies the disquieting sensation that humanity has surpassed its limitations and generated a force beyond its control in popular culture. Baldick links the French Revolution to the "politico-philosophical novels" of Jacobinism and the extensive influence of "Gothic" novels, which triggered a surge of literature and pamphlets in response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) (p. 16). The Gothic, characterised by its focus on feudal structures of unrestrained personal authority and its oppressive misuse, as well as its association with the haunting remnants of Britain's archaic, superstitious,

corrupt, and tyrannical Catholic history, constitutes one of the two distinct categories of horror that Baldick skilfully delineates within this literary genre.

III. METHODOLOGY

The interplay between "recognition and remembrance" of existing literary works is a fundamental aspect of postmodernism, as previously noted. In literary studies, postmodernism introduced novel methods of articulating concepts to elucidate, using Gerard Genette's terminology, the relationship between source texts and their derivatives. Numerous authors and commentators contest the notion of reviving and revisiting ancient literature. Ronald Barthes notes that all text is inherently a new fabric of prior citations that permeate and are reallocated within the text, as language always precedes and surrounds it. The optimal method to examine the nature of interpersonal violence is through a postmodernist perspective, which endorses a multitude of diverse and occasionally conflicting interpretations of the issue. Postmodernism promotes the acceptance of various conceptions of violence, which are more prevalent than others. (Maureen, 2005). Shelley and Saadawi both illustrate the atrocities of their respective cultures in their writings. Punter characterises terror as "an excessive force for the fears, desires, and anxieties that afflicted society as it progressed towards capitalism" and asserts that it is a fundamental component of Gothic literature from the eighteenth century (Punter, 1996: p. 23). According to Punter (1996), "Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* expressed anxieties regarding the power of science, atheism, social chaos, and deprivation." Since the advent of postmodernism, these issues have "re-emerged" as fear has become predominant in political discourse (Punter, 1996: p. 23). Shelley cautions about the "emergence of industry" and the "swiftly evolving world" of scientific discoveries (Punter, 1996: pp. 112, 23). Schimmel (2012) asserts that Saadawi conveys "the horrors of war, its brutality, and how it distorts the psyche both ethically and emotionally." According to Sam Metz, the novel's dystopian characteristics stem from the real, harrowing violence that occurred in Baghdad in 2005, rather than from its fantastical, supernatural elements. (Metz, review.com; Los Angeles). By

revealing long-suppressed content, Saadawi's "literary monster" urges readers to face their fears and acknowledge that all "abnormalities we seek to separate from ourselves are intrinsically and profoundly part of our identity" (Hogle, 2002: p. 12). Beville's amalgamation of Gothic and Postmodernist influences has produced a "literary monster," characterised by an obsession with horror, negativity, and irrationality, as well as a hostility towards conventional reality, firmly positioning it within the revolutionary. Encampment. This revolution's opposition to humanity as a whole is frequently disconcerting.

IV. CONCLUSION

David Oakes posits that gothic literature is destabilising as it compels readers to contemplate their own lives, their communities, and the broader universe. The work serves as a cultural artefact, encapsulating the anxieties and concerns of both the writing and reading epochs. Shelley and Saadawi employ violence—its depictions, rationalisations, and ultimate eradication—to elicit a sense of horror in their works. Consequently, violence epitomises the intrinsic chaos of human nature and the propensity for destruction. The study indicated that fear and aggression are perpetual, necessitating individuals to consciously reject all forms of hatred and the repercussions of terrorism. Furthermore, individuals must cease endorsing Western terrorism and brutality to reclaim their humanity.

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