

Bodies Out of Place: Deviance, Monstrosity, and Middle Eastern Gothic in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi

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Abstract

*This article explores the intersection of monstrosity, abjection, and power in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi, set in post-2003 Iraq. It focuses on the monstrous central figure, the Whatsitsname, a creature that is made from the remains of bombing victims, and that is a symbol of political and social collapse. Drawing on the works of Cohen, Kristeva, Foucault, and Grumberg, the analysis shows how the novel reflects trauma, failed justice, and institutional breakdown. The Whatsitsname embodies repressed fears and disrupted identities, while the novel's Gothic framework exposes the necropolitical realities of war. Horror here becomes a critical tool for engaging with violence, grief, and marginalisation.*

Keywords: *monstrosity, abjection, necro-politics, Middle Eastern Gothic, trauma, deviance, Iraq*

Introduction

This article examines the themes of monstrosity, abjection, and power in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, a novel by Ahmed Saadawi set in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It focuses on the figure of the Whatsitsname, a creature constructed from the remains of bombing victims, which serves as a representation of both personal and collective trauma. The analysis considers how the novel uses the monstrous to reflect the fragmentation of social structures, the persistence of violence, and the breakdown of institutional authority. Monstrosity is approached here as a narrative strategy that articulates the effects of conflict and the limits of justice in a context shaped by instability and loss.

1. From Authoritarian Rule to Institutional Void

To understand the world depicted in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, it is necessary to consider the historical context of Iraq in 2003. In April of that year, the United States led a military invasion of Iraq, justified primarily by claims that the Iraqi regime possessed weapons of mass destruction. These weapons were

never found, yet the invasion proceeded, intending to remove Saddam Hussein from power. The fall of the regime was followed by a prolonged period of instability.

The dismantling of the Iraqi state occurred rapidly. The United States disbanded the Iraqi army and barred many former officials from public service, effectively eliminating the country's existing administrative and security structures. This created a power vacuum and led to widespread violence, both from internal factions and foreign actors. Insurgent groups emerged, and the conflict escalated. Civilian life in Baghdad became increasingly precarious, marked by bombings, insecurity, and a pervasive atmosphere of fear.

The sectarian conflict that escalated in post-2003 Iraq added a layer of internal fragmentation distinct from the external force of occupation. Domestic divisions deepened, enabling extremist groups and criminal networks to exploit the collapse of state authority.

Two interlinked problems drive instability in Iraq. The complete collapse of state capacity and the US disbanding of the Iraqi army created an acute security vacuum. This was seized upon by myriad groups deploying violence for their own gain/organised crime became a dominant source of insecurity for ordinary Iraqis. (Dodge 89)

Saadawi reflects these fractured dynamics through the diverse characters of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, where some characters attempt to profit from or sensationalise the monster's presence. In contrast, others struggle to preserve a sense of normality. The city's unstable political landscape and militarised atmosphere highlight a continuous state of crisis, resonating with the Gothic's traditional mood of dread. However, this sense of doom does not stem from myth or legend, but from contemporary realities, such as occupation, insurgency, and institutional breakdown. In this context, the monstrous is not the result of a singular supernatural event but a reflection of ongoing structural violence, where each death perpetuates the cycle of destruction. The novel occupies a distinctly postcolonial terrain, shaped less by classical imperialism than by modern interventions and their consequences. Through the *Whatsitsname*, Saadawi gives voice to the displaced and the forgotten, using Gothic form to explore the lingering trauma, unacknowledged losses, and collective yearning for justice.

Saadawi himself used to work as a reporter for the BBC Arabic channel in 2006, covering violence and war in occupied Iraq, which was violently destroying his country. "I saw many dead bodies," Saadawi reports, "not just dead bodies – body parts. Many body parts" (Hankir, 2018) (Alhashmi 92)

As someone who lived in Baghdad during this time, the author presents a setting shaped not only by violence but by the collapse of institutional order.

In such a context, traditional notions of justice become useless, and survival becomes the primary concern. The Whatsitsname, the monstrous figure at the centre of the narrative, emerges from this environment; a society traumatised by occupation, and searching for meaning or retribution in a world where official mechanisms have failed.

2. Theoretical Frameworks and Analysis

2.1. The Borders of the Human: Power, Filth, and the Monstrous

To understand what the monster represents in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, it is helpful to draw on the work of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. In *Monster Theory* (1996), Cohen argues that monsters are not arbitrary; instead, they are shaped by the fears, desires, and anxieties of the societies that produce them. He outlines seven theses that describe how monsters function across literature, art, and media. He proposes seven theses to help categorize them.

Cohen's first thesis is that *the monster's body is cultural* (Cohen 4). In this view, monsters symbolise what a society cannot openly confront. They represent the repressed, meaning what is cast to the margins because it evokes guilt, fear, taboo, or loss. Cohen's second thesis, *The Monster Always Escapes* (Cohen 4-6), is evident in the creature's resistance to control, symbolising the persistent impact of violence and the haunting legacy of war. The fourth thesis, *The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference*, (Cohen 7), applies to the monster's status as a figure of marginalisation, representing those excluded and forgotten by society. Lastly, *The Monster Stands at the Threshold...of Becoming* (Cohen 20-21) highlights the creature's potential to signify transformation, confronting past trauma while signalling both the danger and possibility of change.

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the Whatsitsname embodies the trauma of war and the breakdown of moral order. Constructed from the unclaimed remains of civilians killed in bombings, the creature reflects a community struggling to make sense of ongoing violence and social disintegration. It emerges in a moment when institutional justice has collapsed, suggesting that monsters appear when societies can no longer uphold ethical or legal frameworks. As Cohen proposes, we create the monsters we need, monsters that articulate what cannot otherwise be said.

Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, developed in *Powers of Horror* (1982), is grounded in psychoanalytic and semiotic theory. According to Kristeva, the formation of a coherent identity, whether individual or collective, requires the expulsion of anything that threatens unity, stability, or order. This act of symbolic or psychological rejection is what she terms abjection. However, abjection is not limited to feelings of disgust. It refers to the deep

unease caused by what disturbs the boundaries between life and death, subject and object, self and other. Examples include corpses, bodily fluids, and other reminders of human fragility, of what could bring on the end in an unpleasant manner, as well as social taboos and marginalised identities. These are elements that resist categorisation and cannot be fully assimilated into the symbolic order, so they are expelled in an effort to preserve identity and coherence.

The Whatsitsname can be read as an embodiment of the abject. As a creature assembled from decomposing human remains, it symbolises precisely what society seeks to reject, which is the physical reality of death, the collapse of moral binaries, and the failure of social systems to account for loss and violence. The monster is neither fully alive nor entirely dead, neither wholly good nor evil. It occupies an unstable position that makes it deeply unsettling. Through the figure of the Whatsitsname, the novel confronts what the social order would prefer to repress or ignore. The monster declares itself as such:

Because I'm made up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds - ethnicities, tribes, races and social classes - I represent the impossible mix that never was achieved in the past. I'm the first true Iraqi citizen [...] (Saadawi 52)

This declaration positions the Whatsitsname not only as a figure of abjection but also as a politically charged symbol of fragmented national identity. In asserting that it is composed of “diverse backgrounds – ethnicities, tribes, races and social classes,” (Saadawi 52) the monster reveals the artificiality and incompleteness of previous attempts at forging a unified Iraqi identity. It brings to the surface the tensions and exclusions that have historically defined the Iraqi state, particularly in the aftermath of colonial partition, authoritarian rule, and sectarian conflict. The claim to being “the first true Iraqi citizen” (Saadawi 52) is therefore profoundly ironic: the monster achieves national unity only through the literal assemblage of dismembered bodies, each one representing a failure of social cohesion and political solidarity.

From the perspective of Kristeva’s theory, the monster’s hybridity exemplifies the return of the repressed. That which society has abjected, like death, violence, sectarian division, and bodily decay, returns in grotesque and material form, forcing public confrontation with unresolved historical traumas. The Whatsitsname cannot be integrated into existing categories of justice or even humanity, and so it threatens to destabilise them. It is precisely this resistance to classification that makes the creature abject; it marks the point at which boundaries collapse, where symbolic structures fail to produce coherence or closure.

Furthermore, the monster’s self-identification as “the first true Iraqi citizen” (Saadawi 52) complicates normative understandings of identity and belonging. While it is rejected by most characters in the novel, its existence

embodies a truth that others cannot articulate: the fact that Iraq, as a political and social project, has been fractured and reconstructed through cycles of violence. The Whatsitsname makes this condition visible and legible. It does not offer reconciliation or resolution; instead, it materialises the cost of failed statehood and collective denial. In this way, the novel enacts what Kristeva describes as a confrontation with the abject not to purge it, but to reveal the instability of the systems that attempt to suppress it.

Thus, the Whatsitsname functions as both a literal and symbolic disruption. It challenges the legitimacy of dominant narratives about identity, morality, and authority in a post-war landscape. By embodying the abject, it exposes the limits of the symbolic order and the violence required to maintain it.

Michel Foucault offers a valuable framework for understanding how power operates in the world depicted in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault argues that power is not solely imposed from above by institutions or state authorities. Instead, it is diffuse and pervasive, functioning through social norms, institutional structures, and internalised forms of self-regulation. Individuals do not merely obey external commands; they are also conditioned to monitor and discipline themselves according to dominant expectations. Following the invasion of Iraq, formal institutions such as the police and judiciary ceased to function effectively. In this vacuum, informal actors began to assert authority. One such figure is the Whatsitsname. Although it claims to enact justice by punishing those it deems responsible for violence, it operates outside any legal or institutional framework. Initially, its mission is to avenge the victims from whom its body is composed, allowing their souls to rest. However, once vengeance is enacted, parts of its body begin to decay, forcing it to kill again in order to replace them and preserve itself. Justice becomes inseparable from a cycle of violence.

Foucault also challenges essentialist understandings of deviance. He suggests that categories such as “criminal” or “dangerous” are not inherent traits but socially constructed through the enforcement of norms. When those norms collapse, as they do in the novel’s war-torn setting, the distinction between justice and violence becomes unstable. Hence, the Whatsitsname exemplifies the breakdown of institutional power and the dangerous ambiguity that arises when extrajudicial forces attempt to fill that void. Its pursuit of justice is driven by vengeance and necessity rather than law, revealing how fragile and contingent systems of authority can be. These two ideas are seen clearly in the monster’s declarations throughout the novel:

There are no innocents who are completely innocent or criminals who are completely criminal. (Saadawi 207);

Each of us has a measure of criminality (Saadawi 56);

“What’s worse is that people have been giving me a bad reputation. They’re accusing me of committing crimes, but what they don’t understand is that I’m the only justice there is in this country.” (Saadawi 49)

The three previous quotations articulated by the Whatsitsname provide a sustained critique of normative assumptions regarding criminality, justice, and authority in a context marked by the collapse of the state. Each quotation undermines the belief in fixed moral categories and illustrates the fragility of legal distinctions in post-invasion Baghdad. The novel thus engages with Michel Foucault’s theory that concepts such as “criminal” or “dangerous” are not inherent or universal but are constructed through specific discursive and institutional practices.

The first statement, “There are no innocents who are completely innocent or criminals who are completely criminal” (Saadawi 207), rejects binary moral frameworks. It points to a condition in which all individuals are to some extent complicit in the violence and breakdown of order that characterise the setting of the novel. In functioning legal systems, guilt and innocence are defined by reference to laws, procedures, and institutional authority. In the context of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, where such structures have collapsed, those categories become meaningless. This aligns with Foucault’s view that deviance is a socially constructed category, enforced through the normalisation of behaviour and the surveillance of bodies. When normative control is absent, the ability to draw clear lines between innocence and guilt becomes impossible.

The second statement, “Each of us has a measure of criminality” (Saadawi 56), reinforces the notion that criminality is not limited to specific individuals or acts. Instead, it is understood as a shared condition, produced by the environment of war, insecurity, and the erosion of institutional norms. This quotation moves the focus from individual transgression to collective responsibility. It suggests that all members of society are entangled in a system that has normalised violence and has blurred ethical boundaries. The implication is that the Whatsitsname is not an exception but a product of a broader context in which improvised mechanisms of survival and retribution have replaced state authority.

The third quotation, “What is worse is that people have been giving me a bad reputation. They are accusing me of committing crimes, but what they do not understand is that I am the only justice there is in this country” (Saadawi 49), reveals the extent to which extrajudicial forces have displaced formal justice. The Whatsitsname does not deny the violent acts it commits. Instead, it positions itself as the sole agent capable of restoring a sense of order. In doing so, it assumes the functions of judge and executioner without any external mandate or institutional legitimacy. This reflects a necropolitical logic in which the power to decide over life and death no longer resides with the

state but with actors operating outside formal structures. The creature's claim to represent justice is therefore not based on legal authority but on the perceived necessity of action in the absence of institutional capacity.

Together, these quotations construct the Whatsitsname as a figure that exposes the limits of legal, ethical, and political frameworks under conditions of systemic collapse. It functions both as a consequence of failed governance and as a challenge to traditional notions of justice and criminality. By giving voice to the monster, Saadawi highlights the instability of normative categories and illustrates how easily systems of law and morality can be replaced by violence and improvisation. The novel, therefore, not only critiques the failures of state power but also explores the dangerous potential of alternative authorities that emerge in its absence.

Karen Grumberg's *Middle Eastern Gothics* (2022) marks a significant intervention in literary studies, as it is the first volume to define "Middle Eastern Gothic" as a formal critical framework. Prior to this collection, scholars had identified Gothic elements in Arabic and Middle Eastern literature. However, these were often treated as isolated instances rather than as part of a coherent literary tradition. Grumberg brings these disparate readings together and argues that the Gothic is not confined to European settings or Victorian tropes. Instead, in the Middle Eastern context, it becomes a mode through which writers engage with war, occupation, exile, repression and unresolved historical trauma.

Grumberg identifies several recurring features within Middle Eastern Gothic texts: haunting, fragmentation, temporal disorientation, unreliable narration, and what she terms necro-politics, which refers to the hold that political power has over life and death, as in deciding whose life is worthy and whose is not. All of these elements are present in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The Whatsitsname functions as a literal haunting, a being composed of the dead who cannot find peace. The narrative is deliberately fragmented, structured around conflicting accounts and disorienting shifts in time and perspective. Baghdad itself is rendered as a haunted space, marked by the physical and psychological scars of war and institutional collapse. The novel's Gothicism is not a matter of aesthetic decoration but of function because it uses the spectral to force a confrontation with repressed violence and collective trauma.

2.2. Stitching the theory together

These theoretical frameworks collectively reveal that the Whatsitsname is not merely a symbolic monster, but the product of overlapping social, political, and psychological failures. Each perspective illuminates a distinct dimension of this collapse. Cohen's concept of cultural monstrosity highlights how the

creature embodies repressed fears and anxieties. Kristeva's theory of abjection deepens the analysis by framing the monster as that which must be expelled to preserve identity. Foucault's account of power explains how the breakdown of norms gives rise to extrajudicial violence. At the same time, Grumberg's demarcation of what he names Middle Eastern Gothic situates the narrative within a regional context shaped by war, necro-politics, and unresolved trauma.

What *Frankenstein in Baghdad* ultimately reveals is that the logic of necro-politics is not extinguished with the collapse of the state but instead mutates and persists through other forms of control, violence, and moral arbitration. Achille Mbembe's theorisation of necro-politics identifies sovereignty with the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die, a power traditionally held by the state but increasingly exercised by diffuse actors in contexts of crisis. In Saadawi's novel, this function is appropriated by the Whatsitsname, who fills the vacuum left by institutional failure not by restoring justice through legal norms but by enacting a personalised regime of punishment and retribution. The creature's killings are justified internally through a logic of moral equivalence: death is exchanged for death, guilt is retroactively assigned, and bodies are sacrificed to prolong its own survival. In effect, the Whatsitsname enforces a shifting economy of life and death, replicating the state's necropolitical authority while eliding any accountability.

This transformation of power reflects a broader condition in which the sovereign decision over death is no longer centralised but becomes distributed across unofficial or improvised actors. The Whatsitsname becomes a mobile site of sovereign power, exercising lethal judgment in a context where formal authority has lost coherence. It does not seek legitimacy through law but through necessity, embodying what Mbembe refers to as a death-world, which is a space in which specific populations are rendered disposable and where violence is no longer exceptional but embedded in the everyday (Mbembe 35-40). In such a world, the capacity to kill is naturalised, no longer tethered to institutional structures but to narratives of justice shaped by trauma, anger, and the impossibility of closure. The Whatsitsname does not transcend necro-politics because it reveals how deeply embedded this logic is in post-conflict societies where the boundaries between state and non-state violence, justice and vengeance, governance and anarchy have collapsed.

Through this figure, Saadawi stages a powerful critique not only of state violence but also of the conditions that allow its logic to endure beyond the state itself. The monster's role is not subversive but symptomatic. It does not resist necropolitical governance but becomes one of its most potent expressions. What emerges, then, is not a rupture with sovereign power but its spectral continuation, which is violence without law, death without mourning, power without responsibility. The novel captures the afterlife of sovereignty in

spaces where the state has formally receded but where its most violent functions remain operative through new, often monstrous, proxies.

The Whatsitsname ultimately mirrors the state's necropolitical authority by assuming the sovereign right to determine life and death. In the absence of functioning institutions, the creature constructs its own moral code, selecting targets it deems responsible for the deaths of the innocent and enacting retribution without oversight or due process. This practice reflects Mbembe's argument that necro-politics operates not only through the spectacle of state violence but also by diffusing lethal authority into non-state actors when state legitimacy collapses. The Whatsitsname kills not indiscriminately but according to a shifting logic of guilt and debt, establishing a hierarchy of lives in which some are deemed worthy of protection while others are reduced to collateral. By taking on the role of arbiter, judge, and executioner, the creature mimics the sovereign function that the Iraqi state has abdicated. Its actions expose how, in contexts of prolonged conflict, the power to kill is no longer restricted to formalised structures but is internalised by those shaped by violence. In this way, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* dramatizes the frightening ease with which the necropolitical logic of the state is reproduced and naturalised even in its absence.

When examining the creation of the monster in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, it becomes clear that the relationship between Hadi al-Attag and the Whatsitsname consciously mirrors the dynamic between Victor Frankenstein and his unnamed creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Hadi, a junk dealer and storyteller, occupies the role of the creator, yet he lacks the scientific ambition and intentionality that define Victor's project. His act of creation is accidental, driven not by a desire to conquer death or expand human knowledge, but by an emotional response to the unburied dead and the disintegration of his city. Nevertheless, he sets in motion a process that quickly escapes his control, echoing Victor's loss of agency in Shelley's novel. Like Victor, Hadi becomes a reluctant witness to the consequences of his actions, unable to contain the moral and political implications of the being he has brought into existence.

The Whatsitsname, much like Shelley's creature, is nameless and unstable, both physically and ontologically. It is defined by absence and contradiction; it is made up of the dead yet animated by a desire for justice; it is composed of many identities yet claims none; it seeks moral purpose yet enacts violence. Both monsters are assembled from fragments, bodily in Shelley, socially and politically in Saadawi, and both are rejected by their creators and the societies into which they are introduced. This rejection serves as a central engine of their development. In both texts, the creature becomes a vehicle for interrogating broader structures of power, exclusion, and responsibility. While Shelley's monster is a critique of Enlightenment hubris

and the abandonment of ethical responsibility, Saadawi's *Whatsitsname* embodies the failures of the postcolonial state, the fragmentation of national identity, and the aftershocks of war.

The creature's designation as the "Whatsitsname" further reinforces its abject and liminal status, both within the narrative and within the symbolic order. Similar to Shelley's creature, who is never given a name and is instead referred to through negation or monstrosity, Saadawi's monster exists outside the bounds of fixed identity. Its refusal of a proper name functions as a marker of exclusion because it is not granted the linguistic stability that would anchor it within social or political recognition. The name "Whatsitsname" is deliberately vague and dehumanising, indicating that no category can fully contain or define the creature. This, again, reflects Kristeva's notion of the abject as that which resists classification and must be expelled to preserve order. In the absence of a stable name, the monster becomes a repository for collective anxieties and unresolved guilt, much like the nameless dead from which it is composed. Moreover, the failure to name the creature parallels the failure to account for the lives lost in the chaos of post-invasion Iraq. The unnamed in this context are not simply forgotten; they are denied subjectivity. In calling the monster "Whatsitsname", the novel underscores the erasure of individual identity in necropolitical regimes and the inability of language or state structures to acknowledge the dead properly. It becomes not only a figure of horror but also a witness to what remains unspoken and unmourned.

However, Saadawi significantly localises and politicises the Gothic framework inherited from Shelley. Whereas Victor's motivations are deeply individual and philosophical, Hadi's actions emerge from a specific socio-political context, the violence of post-2003 Baghdad, the failure of state institutions, and the routine denial of dignity to the dead. In this sense, the *Whatsitsname* is not only a Gothic echo of Shelley's creature, but a distinctly regional reimagining of the figure: a product of necropolitical collapse, assembled from the detritus of a broken nation, and animated not by electricity but by collective trauma. Through this doubling, Saadawi offers both homage and critique, transforming Shelley's foundational myth into a vehicle for exploring the ethics of creation, the consequences of abandonment, and the politics of mourning in the context of modern Iraq.

The nose was all the corpse needed to be complete, so now Hadi was finishing the job. It was a horrible job, one he had done without anyone's help, and somehow it didn't seem to make any sense despite all the arguments he used when trying to explain himself to his listeners.

"I wanted to hand him over to the forensics department, because it was a complete corpse that had been left in the streets like trash. It's a human being, guys, a person," he told them.

"But it wasn't a complete corpse. You made it complete," someone objected.

“I made it complete so it wouldn’t be treated as trash, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial,” Hadi explained. (Saadawi 11)

Hadi is one of the most morally complex characters. The previous passage in which Hadi explains his motivations for completing the corpse, by attaching a missing nose, sheds light on his psychological state and the broader symbolic function he serves in the novel’s landscape. Through this act, Hadi is portrayed as both a grieving humanist and an inadvertent agent of horror, shaped by the chaos of his environment. His justification for completing the corpse, so that it would not be treated as trash, but instead receive a proper burial, reveals his deep concern with dignity and human worth. In a city that is ravaged by violence, where corpses are left on the streets, Hadi attempts to restore some measure of respect to the dead. His insistence that it is a human being underscores a desperate moral stance: even in the midst of systemic collapse, humanity must be preserved. This act of stitching together body parts is therefore not initially meant to be monstrous; it is, paradoxically, an act of care.

However, the dialogue also reveals the ethical ambiguity of Hadi’s actions. When someone counters him with “It was not a complete corpse” (Saadawi 11), the reader is forced to confront the grotesque nature of the actual creature. His actions blur the boundary between mourning and transgression. In his attempt to give dignity to the dead, Hadi becomes complicit in creating something unnatural, a body assembled from many, carrying the latent possibility of horror. This paradox illustrates how well-intentioned acts can be corrupted in extreme contexts, and how moral clarity is often a luxury in a war-torn society.

Symbolically, Hadi represents the thin line between grief and madness, creation and destruction. In completing the corpse, he not only gives birth to the Whatsitsname, the novel’s protagonist, but also to a new kind of mythos, one that reflects the abject reality of a city under siege. His character functions as a tragic artisan, someone whose desire to honour the dead becomes the catalyst for living horror.

On the other hand, the monster is a symbol of both victimhood and vengeance. It kills in the name of justice, believing itself to be a moral actor. It initially wishes to bring to rest the souls of the body parts it is made of. However, whenever a body part is amputated, it starts to rot, making the monster incomplete and desperate to keep living. “I kill in order to keep going” (Saadawi 95), it states later in the novel. However, its mission becomes corrupted as the cycle of violence escalates. In this way, the monster mirrors the real-world breakdown of moral clarity during wartime, where acts of revenge blur with acts of resistance.

Moreover, the monster’s body reflects the fragmentation of Iraq itself. Each of its parts comes from a different sect, neighbourhood, or social

background, echoing the fractured national identity of Baghdad. The monster thus becomes a metaphor for a failed state; it is a patchwork of incompatible pieces held together by force and grief. It speaks to the failure of institutions to protect their citizens, leaving them to be picked up, quite literally, by scavengers like Hadi. The fact that this being is completed as an act of compassion, but comes alive through supernatural horror, reinforces Saadawi's Gothic critique that monstrous violence is born not only from madness or evil, but from systemic neglect and abandonment.

Additionally, the Whatsitsname embodies the uncanny and the abject, drawing on Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject as something that disturbs identity, system, and order. It is simultaneously alive and dead, self and other, sacred and profane. As a result, it destabilizes notions of personhood and citizenship, who gets to be mourned, who gets to be buried, and who counts as human. The Whatsitsname's grotesque form forces characters and readers to confront the suppressed horrors of war: bodies unclaimed, names forgotten, and justice deferred.

Taken together, these approaches clarify how monstrosity emerges when systems designed to ensure meaning, order and justice cease to function. The Whatsitsname's grotesque form, ambiguous moral status and shifting social role reflect the instability of categories such as victim and perpetrator, justice and violence, memory and repression. What one theory leaves unresolved, another addresses: abjection accounts for the visceral response to cultural contamination; power theory explains the translation of fear into control; the regional Gothic framework anchors these dynamics in a specific historical and political landscape. In combination, they demonstrate that the Whatsitsname is not a metaphor for a singular concept, but a convergence point for all that society cannot assimilate, such as trauma, guilt, exclusion, and failed governance.

The Whatsitsname can be understood as a monster born of crisis. It emerges not solely from physical fragmentation, but from the collapse of social, political and symbolic structures. It represents the disintegration of coherence on multiple levels: of the body, of meaning, and of institutional order.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the Whatsitsname is more than a fictional creature. It functions as a reflection of failed institutions, suppressed histories, and collective trauma. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* reimagines the Gothic not as a vehicle for escapism, but as a mode of political commentary. The novel employs horror as a critical framework through which it explores the breakdown of justice, the limits of state power, and the consequences of violence. The figure of the monster is

central to this process, embodying the fragmented realities of post-invasion Iraq and the moral ambiguity produced by war.

By constructing the monster from the remains of victims left unacknowledged by society, Saadawi foregrounds the dehumanising effects of conflict. The Whatsitsname is not an isolated aberration, but a product of systemic collapse and institutional neglect. Its actions raise questions about accountability, memory and the ethics of retribution. Rather than presenting a clear binary between good and evil, the novel demonstrates how violence becomes normalised in a society where legal and moral structures have ceased to function effectively.

The monster's composite body symbolises the fractured national identity of Iraq, shaped by sectarian divisions and ongoing political instability. Its existence challenges conventional definitions of personhood, justice and mourning. Through the Whatsitsname, Saadawi addresses the failure to account for the dead, the marginalised and the disappeared. The novel suggests that the refusal to confront these absences perpetuates cycles of violence and further undermines the possibility of reconciliation.

Ultimately, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* shows that the Gothic can be repurposed to engage with contemporary political realities. The novel uses horror to expose the long-term consequences of war, particularly the erosion of meaning, the distortion of justice and the denial of collective memory. In doing so, it positions the monster not only as a site of fear, but also as a figure through which the structural failures of the modern state can be critically examined.

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