

## **Transtextuality in a Postmodernist Frankenstein Story: Frankenstein in Baghdad**

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**Abstract:**

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2008) presents a unique take on the classic Frankenstein story through its portrayal of the city of Baghdad in the aftermath of the US invasion. The paper examines how Saadawi uses transtextuality to blur the boundaries between the original Frankenstein story and his own narrative, highlighting the interconnectedness of different literary works and cultural contexts. Drawing on the theories of postmodernism and transtextuality, this paper offers an in-depth analysis of Saadawi's novel and its contribution to the ongoing discussion about the role of transtextuality in contemporary literature.

**Key words:** (Postmodernism, Frankenstein in Baghdad, Ahmed Saadawi, Transtextuality).

المتعاليات النصية في قصة فرانكشتاين لما بعد الحداثة: فرانكشتاين في بغداد  
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### المخلص:

تقدم رواية *فرانكشتاين في بغداد* للكاتب احمد السعداوي نظرة فريدة من نوعها لقصة فرانكشتاين الكلاسيكية من خلال تصويرها لمدينة بغداد في أعقاب الغزو الأمريكي. تبحث هذه الدراسة في كيفية استخدام السعداوي للمتعاليات النصية لطمس الحدود بين قصة فرانكشتاين الأصلية وروايته الخاصة مع إبراز الترابط بين الأعمال الأدبية والسياقات الثقافية المختلفة. بالاعتماد على نظريات ما بعد الحداثة والمتعاليات النصية تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليل عميق لرواية السعداوي ومساهمتها في النقاش المستمر حول دور المتعاليات النصية في الأدب المعاصر. الكلمات المفتاحية: (ما بعد الحداثة، فرانكشتاين في بغداد، احمد السعداوي، المتعاليات النصية).

### Introduction:

Postmodernism is a complex term or concept that is difficult to define as a critical or intellectual concept and is often considered a criticism of modernity or a response to it (Diwan 167). Postmodernism is a postwar movement in Western literature, art, and other kinds of philosophy in which there is a profound shift in all forms of art, including literary traditions and norms. It is a protest against realism and modernist movements that celebrate the arrival of new forms of writing that include strange and odd conflicts; in which the world is seen from a new viewpoint otherwise from realist and modernist ideology (Mohsin 2). It is also more visible in America and France than in England. As a part of the socio-cultural and historical development, postmodern literature, can be seen at as a special way of illustrating postmodern life and culture) and its violent effort for

"legitimization in a hypocritical society" (Rezaei 16). Postmodernist writers tend to escape from all the regulations and look for "alternative principles of composition conforming to their content of existentialist thought" (17).

In the 1970s postmodernism took a poststructuralist bath after being influenced by Jacques Derrida's post-structuralism (deconstructionism). Both postmodernists and post-structuralists rejected the known notion of reality. According to them, reality cannot be represented through language for language did not reflect the world, it constituted it (Jameson 5). However, not everyone agreed with this postmodern perspective regarding language. Some postmodernists followed the argument of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857- 1913), a Swiss linguist, semiotician and philosopher, argument that language was independent and could function without the world. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, language was a system made of signs that were made of two components: the signifier (the word) and the signified (the thing that the word referred to). The theory of Ferdinand de Saussure formed the basis of many postmodernist theories including that of Jean Baudrillard (1929- 2007), a French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorist. Baudrillard argued that the world that people live in was virtual and detached from the real world. Bran Nicol quoted Baudrillard in his book, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction*, and stated that "the map precedes the territory". In other words, the simulated versions of reality started to determine what reality was. Thus, reality was constituted of multiple layers which made it temporary and transitional (7).

This poststructuralist path that postmodernism took led many postmodernists to adopt the idea of the "text" which was first stated

by Roland Barthes (1915- 1980), a French literary theorist, essayist, philosopher, critic, and semiotician, in his essay "From Work to Text". Similar to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory, Barthes argued that all texts were constituted of language and that one could not go out of the language. Thus, all texts were connected (60). He further explained the difference between the "work" and the "text" by presenting seven aspects of difference.

First, the "work" can be held. It is a tangible object; something that is concrete and complete. It is "a fragment of substance, it occupies a portion of the spaces of books (for example, in a library)" (57). However, while the "work" is held in hands the "text" is held in language and it is "experienced only in an activity of production". Thus, the text does not have a stopping point, because the process of language does not have one. Meaning is always discontinued, something delayed or still to come. Second, the "work" can be classified and put into specific genres, while the text cannot (58). Third, the "work" is complete and comprehensive; it is signified. There is no arbitrariness in the literal understanding or interpretation of the "work". Therefore, it can function and be classified as a symbolic sign to any subject it signifies. However, the "text" is incomplete. Meaning that its words or phrases may be exchanged for others with equal implications or connections. Contrary to the "work" which has closure and can be analyzed literally and is explanatory and is a sign in itself, the "text" is opened-ended, has a multitude of associations, and is deeply symbolic. Thus, the "text" has a plurality of meanings which is the fourth difference between the "text" and "work" (59). Fifth, the "work" is characterized by a process of affiliation or authorship. It becomes interconnected and identified with its author, in addition to the reader's acquaintance of previous works. Thus, the reader may use this knowledge and identification as a key to understanding the

writing. If writing is looked at as a text, then it is not limited and restricted to a genre and the reader does not anticipate it to conform into a category of type since it is part of a grid and free to be interpreted outside the author's signification. Sixth, the "work" is a commodity, a thing to be consumed. Thus, the reader learns to be passive and is anticipated to be fed and entertained when reading. However, if the reader approaches writing as a "text" then the reading experience becomes interactive. Finally, unlike "work", the "text" gives pleasure in the reader because there is no separation between the reader and the writer. The reader can add to the writing and not just consume it (61-63). This idea of the "text" and how all texts are connected lead to one of the core features of postmodern writings which is transtextuality.

Although the phenomenon of intertextuality dates back to the first recorded human history and the beginning of discourses about texts, however, intertextuality as a literary theory emerged in the twentieth century. Many theories contributed to the development of this theory; including the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure; Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895- 1975), a Russian philosopher, literary critic and scholar who wrote or worked on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language; Julia Kristeva (1941-), a Bulgarian-French philosopher, literary critic, semiotician, psychoanalyst, feminist, and, most recently, novelist; Roland Barthes, and the poet-critic T. S. Eliot (1888- 1965) (Zengin 300).

A text is ... a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations ... The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix

writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them (Barthes 146)

The term “intertextuality” was first coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966 who used it to refer to the relationship between different texts. Thus, the identity of text expanded leading to the notion that “no text is self-born, and every text of the present is an inter-text with something happening between it and a text of the past” (qtd in Mirenayat 533). Gérard Genette (1930-2018), a French literary theorist, was one of the researchers who defined “transtextuality” and listed its five categories which include intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality (Mirenayat 533). According to Genette, transtextuality was “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (83-84).

Genette in 1997 widened Kristeva’s idea of intertextuality with the term transtextuality, but he also limited her term of intertextuality. According to Genette, intertextuality has a limited dimension and it only exists if part of one text exists in another and this includes; quotations, plagiarism, and allusions. A perfect example of Genette's idea of intertextuality is *The Waste Land* by T.S Eliot. Furthermore, he divides intertextuality into three divisions: implicit or explicit; covert or overt; hidden or open. In the first type, the author does not try to hide the references that he uses to other texts. An example of this case of intertextuality is quotations. In the second case, the author tries to hide these references due to literary necessities and other literary reasons. An example of this case is plagiarism. In the last case, the author uses signs that the reader can recognize intertextuality from. An example of that is allusions, allegories, and metaphors. The last type according to Genette is the most difficult

one because it needs intelligence and attention to recognize it (Mirenayat 534).

The word *para* means “beside”, thus a “paratext” refers to the relationship between the text and everything that surrounds it. An example of that is the title of the text or its prefaces, acknowledgments, footnotes, illustrations, and etc. According to Genette paratextuality includes; peritextuality and epitextuality. The first type indicates all of that which surrounds the text or beside it. For example, the preface to “Kubla Khan” by Coleridge is a peritext. The second type refers to everything that is associated with the main text indirectly. For example, newspapers, journals, and reviews are considered epitexts. With regard to paratextuality, Genette takes a different approach than poststructuralists who disregard the authorial intention. These two types help the reader to “understand when the text was published, who published it, for what purpose, and how it should or should not be read” (qtd in Mirenayat 534).

Metatextuality means the existence of direct or indirect references in one text regarding another text. For example, when one text criticizes or interprets another text, the relationship between them will be a metatextual relationship. In Genette's own words, “it unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it” (1997, 4).

Architextuality is linked to the classification of a text as part of a genre. The architextual characteristics of texts also include thematic and figurative expectations about texts. Additionally, architextuality is the culture or pool of texts out of which a text of the present develops. This is similar to the fact that the utterance is simply a realization (*parole*) of the code of a language (*langue*). Genette states that a

very important factor of this type is “the reader’s expectations, and thus their reception of the work” (qtd in Mirenyat 536).

In his book *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, Genette defines hypertextuality as “any relationship uniting a text B (*hypertext*) to an earlier text A (*hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (5). Furthermore, it is represented by the connection between the text and a text on which it is based. However, this text is transformed, adapted, and modified. The core aim of this type is to examine the effect of one text over the other and not the presence of that text. This type of transtextuality includes; parody, pastiche, retelling, etc. Parody copies the style, characteristics or manner of a specific literary work/genre/author. According to Linda Hutcheon: “postmodern parody is a kind of a contesting revision or rereading of the past that both confirms and subverts the power of the representations of history (106). Pastiche is closely related to parody. According to Barry Lewis in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, pastiche is the result of the frustration that the author feels arising from the fact that everything has been done before (20). However, while parody is used as a way to mock an author or a text pastiche is used as flattery. Thus, pastiche is positive while parody is negative (Fenclová 13). Lastly, retelling is used when describing the same event in different ways or from a different perspective. Thus, a writer can retell the same story many times but always highlighting a different part of it or a different character (10).

*Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi

Ahmed Saadawi is an Iraqi novelist, poet, and screenwriter who is born in Baghdad in 1973. He has worked in several local newspapers and magazines, and local press institutions. Saadawi also has worked as a reporter for the BBC in Baghdad from 2005-



2007. He is currently working on producing and writing documentaries, preparing TV programs, and writing scripts. He has worked as a reporter for the German agency (MICT), based in Berlin. Al-Saadawi still publishes in *Al Sabaah*, *Assabah Aljadeed*, and *Al Mada* newspapers, and weekly magazines such as *Al Shabaka* and *Tawasul*, all of which are published in Baghdad. Saadawi has won the first prize in the Iraqi Press Festival, Reportage Branch 2004, and among his most prominent works of fiction is the novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, which is published in 2013 and won the Arab Booker Prize in 2014, and has been short-listed for the British Man Booker Prize. Saadawi is the first Iraqi novelist and the fifth Arab novelist to be nominated for the British Man Booker Prize after the Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz (1911), the Lebanese Amin Maalouf (1949), Hoda Barakat (1952), and the Libyan Ibrahim Al-Koni (1948). The novel has been translated into thirty-two languages, including English, Chinese, French and Korean, and will be turned into a movie (“Ahmed Saadawi: Iraqi Writer”)

Saadawi also has received several other awards for his novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* like the Golden Tentacle award (2019), the French Clear Choice Award (2017) from The Glass Packaging Institute, and Italian Translation Award (2016). One of Saadawi's most famous texts is *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Saadawi was not particularly influenced by Shelley's novel, but by “the vast cultural space that is called ‘Frankenstein’,” which enclosed movies, comics, and more (Jani 322). Given the fact that the original novel by Shelley was itself a reaction to the turbulent atmosphere of its own time; the shadow of the French Revolution, and the rise of high-spirited Enlightenment; it is fitting that Saadawi chose Frankenstein as the prototype for his novel because the atmosphere of Iraq was turbulent as well due to the American intervention, the sectarian war, and the

sudden change or regime ("The Nightmare of History"). Regardless of his strangeness as an English character in an Arabic novel, Frankenstein served a significant part in mirroring the social circumstances of the Iraqi citizens during the first years of the American intervention (Rawia 32). By borrowing a violent character, Frankenstein, from Mary Shelley's text and several characteristics from Gothic and Postcolonial texts; Saadawi was able to reflect the disorderly and chaotic conditions and the sense of despair and misery the Iraqi people suffered during the American intervention (2). However, reflecting on the environment of his country was not the only reason behind choosing the character of Frankenstein. Saadawi thought that people tend to believe more in what was concrete than what was abstract. That was why choosing a concrete character to reflect the abstract concept of violence and the country's conditions seemed ideal to Saadawi. Saadawi depended on *Frankenstein* the English version to outstretch the essential idea of his text. Moreover, Saadawi tried to "make the unknown known by the well-known" (34).

*Frankenstein in Baghdad* is a story about a creature who is created from the remains of bombed victims, which are often treated as garbage. The story begins with a "final report" from the Tracking and Pursuit Department, a bureau that employs astrologers to predict the locations of future terrorist attacks. According to this report, the Tracking and Pursuit Department has been closed recently, for one of the representatives of the department was caught passing official and secret documents to an outsider. After that, the reader gets flashbacks that date back several weeks, focusing on the Al-Bataween neighborhood in Baghdad. The reader gets introduced to more than one character in the novel, one of whom is Elisha, an old lady who lives alone in the hope that her lost son Daniel, who was lost while serving in the military during the Iran-Iraq war, might return

one day. In addition to this character, one meets Hadi, a junk dealer and storyteller, and Mahmoud, a young journalist. Hadi suffers from the loss of his best friend in an explosion, and instead of finding his body at the morgue, he has found a pile of body parts that belonged to more than one person. Seeing that Hadi could not do anything except take some different body parts that he thought might belong to his friend and stitch them together in order to take the corpse back to his friend's family to give him a proper burial, However, the body is missing a nose which later Hadi finds littered in the streets. After the body is collected, Hadi witnesses another explosion, one that changes everything.

After the late explosion, Hadi finds that the corpse is gone. One of the victim's souls, after dying in an explosion, has inhabited the corpse, and it has become sentient. Frankenstein or the corpse, "whatever it was called," has a mission that he seeks to accomplish, which is to take revenge for all the innocent people who died in the explosions and whose parts now form his body. After he starts his mission, Hadi realizes that he has created a creature that will play a dynamic role in spreading violence and killings in Baghdad. By time, the creature realizes the need to replace his body parts, for they start falling to symbolize either the completion of his revenge or parts that he takes too long to avenge. With this constant need for new body parts, the creature goes from taking revenge on the victims to being a murderer, killing innocent people for their body parts to nourish his own being. The use of illegible parts confuses ideas and forfeits the real purpose of the creature. One of his assistants, who has followers to aid him in his mission and see him as a prophet, states, "There are no innocents who are completely innocent or criminals who are completely criminals" (174). With the passage of time, the creature loses sight of the real purpose behind his mission, and instead of

stopping the destruction, he becomes part of it. In the absence of all types of justice in Iraq, Frankenstein in this story seeks to accomplish one of the three types of justice (justice of God, law, and society).

### Transtextuality in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

Following Gérard Genette's transtextuality sub-divisions, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* contains all five types of transtextuality. The first type is Paratextuality which contains Preitextuality and Epitextuality. The former is related to the title of the novel (*Frankenstein in Baghdad*) which connects it directly to Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Just from the title, the reader expects a creature that is made of different body parts and that the creature will have a mission to be accomplished. The latter is related to everything that is associated with the text. The book cover of Saadawi's novel also makes the reader connect his novel to Shelley's. The book cover contains parts ripped from different papers. The papers contain the word "Frankenstein", a picture of an eye, of a mouth, and of an ear. These scattered facial parts indicate a relationship to Shelley's creature which is made of different body parts. One of the papers has the rest of the novel's name "in Baghdad" and an Arabic sentence that connects the novel further to Shelley's. The sentence is "كان موضع الانف مشوها بالكامل" which means "the location of the nose was fully deformed". This idea of deformation makes the readers link the creature further to Shelley's just from the cover of the novel. Moreover, similar colors to the ones used Shelley are used in the Arabic version of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The Arabic version contains the color red and blue in addition to the picture of a man while the English one uses the color green. These three colors and the figure of a man are used by Shelley. Moreover, Saadawi puts a quotation relating the Story of St. George, the Great Martyr in the

epigraph; "the king ordered that the saint be placed in the olive press until his flesh was torn to pieces and he died. They then threw him out of the city, but the Lord Jesus gathered the pieces together and brought him back to life, and he went back into the city". This quotation makes Hadi a resurrector like Lord Jesus for he also gathers pieces of flesh and makes them a complete body which ends up roaming the city of Baghdad. In addition to that, Saadawi places a quotation taken from Shelley's novel in the epigraph, "Yet I ask you not to spare me: listen to me; and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands." (4). This indicates clearly that there is a connection between the two novels.

Book reviews are another case of Epitextuality because they help the reader to comprehend the text better. In an interview with Al-Mustafa Najjar, Saadawi explains how his novel is different from Shelley's and how little is the link between them. Saadawi says that Frankenstein is only mentioned twice in the book—once by Bahir Al-Saeedi

<sup>1</sup> and once by a German journalist. With the exception of these two allusions, the inhabitants of Baghdad refer to the weird creature as "Whatsitsname" or "the one who does not have a name," so perhaps it makes no difference to them whether it resembles Frankenstein's creation or not. He further asserts that "*Frankenstein in Baghdad* deals with a different theme from that of Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Frankenstein in this novel is a condensed symbol of Iraq's current problems. The Frankenstein-esque atmosphere of horror was strongly prevalent in Iraq during the period covered by the novel".

The second type of transtextuality that can be detected in Saadawi's novel is Metatextuality. When a text interprets or criticizes

another text the relationship between them will be metatextual. Following Genette's statement that transposition unavoidably has an axiological bearing on a text, in an English literary context, the dead body in Saadawi's narrative grows into critique of Shelley's creature. Frankenstein in Shelley's novel is created by a conceited scientist and privileged member of society who has aspirations to change history. Frankenstein then becomes evil when his creator and everyone else rejects him. His quest for retribution is therefore selfish. Although a mass killer, Victor is always the object of his personal vendetta. On the other side, the Saadawi's creature is made by a junk dealer who embarks on his huge project as a result of tragedy and despair. After his companion is murdered in an explosion, he gathers all of the body parts of the deceased and joins them together to form a single corpse in order to prevent their disposal as trash. In an effort to protect the dignity of the deceased, the conceited and prideful scientist in Shelley's becomes a helpless victim of war in Saadawi's. When the body reanimates, he goes out to get revenge on those who have been wronged. He fights Baghdad's injustices to improve society by acting on behalf of people and with a social conscience. Scale and philosophy make a difference in this case. Frankenstein's monster commits horrifying atrocities, yet they are seldom because he acts on his own plan and for himself. The Whatsitsname, on the other hand, launches a series of violent acts with the assistance of a religious cult and his messianic self-image. Shelley's scientist and his monster appear petty and indulgent when the two novels are juxtaposed (Phillips 8).

The third type of transtextuality found in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is Architextuality which is related to the classification of a text as part of a genre. Saadawi blends several genres like detective narratives, postcolonial narratives, and Gothic narratives, and uses

them in his novel's creation. Knowing that the reader will have a preconceived idea about the text from the title and before even reading it, the genres will give some expectations of what might be found in the novel. For instance, knowing that it includes elements found in detective novels, the reader will know that *Frankenstein in Baghdad* contains an investigation for the discovery of a mystery. The same goes for the Gothic genre because the reader will expect a supernatural event that is related to a ghost or a monster of some kind. Furthermore, the reader will expect that the novel deals with the occupation of a country by another from knowing that it belongs to the postcolonial genre.

The fourth type of transtextuality is Hypertextuality. The two kinds of hypertextuality, imitation, and transformation, both focus on adaptation. By imitating or transforming the pretext, the hypertext preserves or changes the original text. Imitation and transformation differ from each other in the fact that "transformation means changing something differently, while imitation is saying something similar. Transformation leads to transposition, which is a severe change in the hype" (Hoseini and etal 146). *Frankenstein in* Shelley's classic by introducing changes in the plot, the location, and the structure of the original novel. Saadawi changes *Frankenstein* almost completely. Starting with the setting, Saadawi places his novel in Iraq which is completely different from Shelley's place of choice culturally, politically, and religiously. This makes the reader also notice the differences and similarities between both western and middle eastern societies. For example, both societies are facing chaos religiously and politically. Saadawi transforms the characters too. The creature of Shelley which is created from stolen parts of the dead in Saadawi is created from pieces scattered on the streets due to explosions. The creator is also

different, for in Shelley's novel he is a respected scientist and not a drunken junk dealer. The structure of the novels is similar. Both novels are fragmented and written in the form of a story that does not belong to the writer, but to another individual. Walton writes the story of Victor in Shelley and a character named the Writer writes the story of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* after listening to the recording of the creature and Mahmoud's story.

Saadawi imitates parts of Shelley's novel too. For example, Hadi tells Mahmoud when talking about the creature that "If you don't believe it, that's your choice" (24). The senior astrologer also tells the brigadier "No, sir. He existed. You're entitled not to believe me" (160) after the brigadier tells him that he does not think such a creature exists. Victor in Shelley also thinks that no one will believe him and that they may see him as a crazy scientist. "was I really as mad as the whole world would believe me to be, if I disclosed the object of my suspicions?" (111). Saadawi also imitates part of Elizabeth in the character of Nawal al-Wazir. Victor's object of desire is Elizebeth and all he wants is to be married to her. The object of desire in *Fransnsein in Baghdad* is Nawal. She is desired by many men including Mahmoud whose only wish is to be with her. This imitation and transformation lead to a palimpsestuous<sup>2</sup> relationship between the three texts.

The last type of transtextuality located in Saadawi's novel is Intertextuality. Saadawi's text is filled with hidden or open intertextuality. In chapter ten, it is mentioned that some of the followers of the creature think of him as being the Angel of Death (the Great Azraeel) who will "swallow up the whole world under the protection of divine grace" (113). Nevertheless, the creature's fall grace reminds the readers of the fallen angel Satan. This innately



recalls the moral descent of Victor in Shelley's and Ackroyd's novel and his creature, as well as, the close connection between them and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In addition to that, in chapter twelve Saadawi refers to Shelley's novel by referring to a movie called "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein". Two journalists, including a blond German lady and a young man with dark complexion named Mahmoud Al-Suwadi from southern Iraq, are listening to Hadi's account of the creature he has created at the coffee shop. She informs Al-Suwadi that Hadi is narrating from a movie and a well-known one as well starring Robert De Niro before leaving because she is bored. She is likely alluding to Kenneth Branagh's 1994 adaptation of Frankenstein. Even though this implies that the movie is more well-known than Shelley's book which is also a criticism of Shelley. Here again, Saadawi uses this incident to inform the reader that his novel is fictitious (Jani 326).

The reader is reminded of Shelley's novels in several incidents including that in chapter nine. When the creature comes in order to end Hadi's life, Saadawi mentions the fact that Hadi is the "father" of the creature for "he had brought him into the world" (93). Thus, Saadawi connects the novels through the idea of fatherhood. Moreover, in both of the novels the creature seems to be superior to his creator and shows that very clearly. Furthermore, the two novels share a reference to the Prometheus myth. In chapter three, Saadawi states that "the soul is like the fuel in a car. It takes a spark to ignite it" (28). This is similar to the event when Prometheus produces humans and Athena likes them, so she breathes on them and gives them life. Athena ignites the creatures by giving them the spark of life and Prometheus ignites their lives by giving them fire which is the spark of civilization.

In chapter seven Saadawi makes a reference to the story of the lapdog which is also referred to in Shelley's. Farid Shawwaf, a journalist at *Al-Haqiqa* magazine, warns Mahmoud "about being too deferential toward Saidi. "Don't be his lapdog" was the phrase that stuck in his mind, but Farid never actually said that. Mahmoud just worried that he might say it." (74). Because Mahmoud is being dragged by Saidi everywhere and appears like he wants to be him in all aspects, he is scared that others will see him just like they see the ass who tries to be a lap dog. This makes it clear how important people's perception is and how individuals are affected by it. The creature in Shelley's is affected by how people are seeing him due to his physical appearance and that changes him into a murderer at the end. In chapter nineteen Saadawi uses the story of John the Baptist<sup>3</sup> to describe the relationship between Mahmoud al-Sawadi and Saidi from the latter perspective. In a letter, Saidi tells Mahmoud that "you will be Prime Minister Mahmoud al-Sawadi. And I, ever since I heard this and believed it, have made you my project, and I have given myself a specific role in this project. I will be John the Baptist, and you will be Christ" (205). Just like John is seen in the Christian church as the forerunner of Lord Jesus Saidi considers himself the forerunner of Mahmoud and the one who will make him accomplish everything he desires.

A direct quote from the Bible is found in chapter seven which can also be seen as a reference to Shelley's novel. Saadawi mentions the "beast from the sea" (71) which is found in the book of Revelation. This refers to the beast in chapters thirteen and seventeen of the book of Revelation. His full description is given by John in chapter thirteen. John says that he has saw it "rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy." (Revelation

13:1). Furthermore, the phrase "beast from the sea" makes the think of *Frankenstein* and the creature who has been the beast that Walton's crew first see when they are in the sea. Another biblical quotation is located on the final page of chapter thirteen. Saadawi uses the verse "Fear not those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul." from Matthew 10:28 to indicate the idea that the souls people who are killed all over Iraq are not dead and still roaming around because no one can kill the soul. Thus, the idea of the lost souls at the beginning of the novel is not mere fiction and the soul which inhabits the creature is evident of the souls which cannot be killed. Furthermore, a direct reference to the Midas<sup>4</sup> touch is made in chapter fifteen of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The Midas touch is mentioned when Mahmoud dreams that he is holding Nawal al-Wazir's hands and walking lazily past the Sheraton Hotel and toward Abu Nuwas Street. The atmosphere around them is brighter, less gloomy, and melancholic, and the future does not seem to be utterly uncertain. There is a sense that something better is on the way, that it will make things less burdensome or, like the Midas touch, convert them into gold. Moreover, Nawal al-Wazir is Mahmoud's ultimate desire just like turning everything into gold is Midas's.

Due to the fact that Saadawi's novel aims at reflecting the conditions of Iraq in which the majority of people are Muslims, Saadawi refers to a story from the Quran as well. In chapter five, the story of Abraham's guests is mentioned. The creature has no name until the elderly woman Elishva gives him the name Daniel. Despite her best efforts to prepare excellent food, her Danie refuses to eat. Therefore, she compares her son to Abraham's guests. "She wasn't bothered that her son, or his ghost, hadn't eaten a bite. Perhaps he was like Abraham's guests in the Quranic version of their visit, or perhaps he didn't have an appetite" (Saadawi 44). The law of

hospitality states that anyone staying under your house is protected by you. However, when the guests refuse to eat, they dissociate themselves from any ties of hospitality and can even be trying to hurt you. When visiting Abraham, the angels turn down his invitation and refuse to eat. Abraham, the prophet, become afraid of these visitors. However, later they reveal to the prophet that they are angels, that angels never eat, and that they have two reasons for coming. The first is informing him that his son Isaac is going to be born, and the second is the Lut village's punishment (Rawia 58).

As the angels in the beginning are not a threat for Abraham, the creature or Daniel, in fact, is not a threat to the elderly Elishva but rather a symbol of her memories. However, his quietness causes her to experience her fear of loneliness once more. In the same way that Gabriel, Mikael, and Israfil are unable to eat in Abraham's home because they are angels, the creature refuses to eat since the tales Elishva tell him have left him in awe. She tell him about the superstitions that revolve around her like her neighbor accusing her of casting black magic on her two sons to prevent them from speaking until the age of six, and the cats that revolve around her house which some people thought that they are human turned into cats by Elishva and how she can speak to them. Frankenstein is astounded by his body's composition as well as his ugly appearance in addition to these strange tales. While the angels begin carrying out God's instructions after delivering Abraham their message, the creature chose to begin his equivalent work, to the angels, covertly in order to avoid conflict and opposition. He starts by killing Abou Zaidoun. For Abraham, the angels first pose a significant threat and the catalyst for bloodshed. The punishment of those who are deeply sinful would then reveal the true scene of violence (59). Lastly, Saadawi refers to the story of Muhammad al-Mahdi in chapter ten of

his novel. According to the Twelver Shi'a concept known as the Occultation, the Mahdi is born, disappeared, and will stay hidden from humankind until he rises to restore justice to the world at the end of time. The Mahdi is born at Samarra, according to the Twelvers, somewhere about 868, but his birth is kept a secret from the general people. He is cared for by his father till his murder by the Abbasids in 874 ("Muhammad al-Mahdi"). In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the creature is thought of by one of his followers as:

an instrument of mass destruction that presages the coming of the savior that all the world's religions have predicted. [that he is] the one who will annihilate people who have lost their way and gone astray. By helping [him] in [his] mission, [his followers are] accelerating the arrival of the long-awaited savior (107).

Thus, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* makes the reader see clearly how it is exactly that kind of thinking in addition to the bad conditions in Iraq, the American invasion, the sectarian war, and the division of Iraqis that not only have supported and maintained the creature but also have created him.

## Conclusion

Ahmed Saadawi's postmodernist novel, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* utilizes transtextuality as a means to blur the boundaries between different literary texts and cultural contexts, creating a narrative that reflects the postmodern condition of uncertainty and fragmentation. Through intertextuality and paratextuality, Saadawi subverts traditional notions of authorship and originality, challenging the reader to engage with the text in a new and dynamic way. Moreover, by exploring the socio-political context of the novel, the reader can see how transtextuality provides a means of coping with

trauma and making sense of the world. Overall, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* represents a significant contribution to the ongoing discussion about the role of transtextuality in shaping contemporary literature and postmodern culture.



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<sup>1</sup> Ali Baher Al-Said: A prominent writer, and the owner and editor of Al-Haqiqa magazine

<sup>2</sup> Any adaptation in which the layers of the original text can be seen in the adapted text is referred to as a palimpsest in the field of hypertextuality. (Hoseini)

<sup>3</sup> St. John the Baptist was a Jewish prophet of priestly descent who preached the approaching of God's Final Judgment and baptized those who repented in order to prepare themselves for it; he is revered in the Christian church as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. St. John the Baptist was born in the first decade BCE in Judaea, Palestine, close to Jerusalem; he died between 28 and 36 CE; his feast day is June 24. After some time spent alone in the wilderness, John the Baptist appeared in the lower Jordan River valley as a prophet. Jesus was a member of his inner group of followers and was baptized by him ("Strugnell")

<sup>4</sup> The story talks about a man named Midas who desired that everything he touched turn to gold. He had not considered, however, that this request was actually a burden rather than a blessing for he ended up turning his only daughter whom he loved so dearly into gold ("King Midas and his touch").