

Only Monsters Evolve From Wars: An Analogical Reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

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Abstract—This article examines the absurdity of wars and grounds their intersecting contours of enormous death (physical and psychological), destruction, and trauma notwithstanding their location, grounds, pretext, or repercussions. It underlines the scathing critiques of their constituencies in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) and Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013, trans. 2018), two novels articulating a striking disdain for the ethics and myths of the so-called “just wars.” The researchers, sharing the novelists’ moral qualms about wars, bring these two novels together in a potent critique uncovering the cruelties of wars, which have led to the dislodgement and demise of millions of people all over the world, not to mention the psychological insecurities and anxieties instigated by war. To illustrate, the horrible car bomb explosions besetting Baghdad in the aftermath of the 2003-American invasion of Iraq are equated with the Allies’ firebombing and leveling of Dresden in Eastern Germany. Hence, Dresden and Baghdad lapse into waves of horror and massacres committed in the name of justice, and Vonnegut and Saadawi, whose awfully poignant firsthand war experiences enticed them to foreground the tragedies of war, interweave nonlinear antiwar narratives reminiscent of the mismatched body of Whatsitsname in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Billy Pilgrim’s disheveled appearance and lack of training as a soldier in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

Index Terms—*Frankenstein in Baghdad*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Baghdad, Dresden, war

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite belonging to different periods and cultures, Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*, or, *The Children’s Crusade* (hereafter *Slaughterhouse*) have much in common vis-à-vis their antiwar voices and the debilitating psychological aporia of war and death. With their anti-war impulses, they demythologize and de-glorify war by depicting its crippling effects on nature, city life, and family connections, but namely on the individual warrior, generally a young man whose wartime experience renders him psychologically troubled and physically marred. The researchers have not come by a single study collating or pairing these two novels to designate their subversive antiwar modes and undertones. At stake is utilizing “the supernatural, the uncanny, the monstrous, and the surreal to construct an aesthetic of horror that narrates unspeakable forms of violence” (Bahoora, 2015, p. 190). In particular, trauma has emerged as the most ubiquitous theme in any postwar literature, including the post-WWI, WWII, Vietnam, and Iraq wars, to mention but a few. In such traumas, “people lose touch with links to other humans, and to the sense of community or group so basic to human identity” (Kaplan, 1999, p. 148). Verging on this trend and to demonstrate the shocks of war, Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse* succinctly combine reality and fantasy to enmesh their readers in a portrayal of the myriad atrocities committed under the pretext of justice or heroism, disrupting any veneration of the war or pro-war attitudes. Thus, Vonnegut and Saadawi, provoked by the apotheosis of war, enact vigorous caveats of any rhetoric romanticizing or legitimizing war, reiterating, as Vonnegut puts it, that “there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything or want anything ever again” (p. 19).

Ashley Dawson and Malini Schuelleur open their article “Rethinking Imperialism Today” by introducing the United States as the world’s most imperial power colonizing nations with a new form of imperialism, one of “a particularly

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insidious kind” (2007, p. 1). This imperialism is described as “punitive, unilateral, militaristic,” and exceptional in the sense that its benevolent preaching is discrepant with its practices and violations worldwide. Such practices can be seen as “an open-door imperialism” (p. 7). In their view, political and economic imperialisms are inseparable, and they are the main cause of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. So, the whole war on Iraq has appeared like a Hollywood fantasy, and the American administration has used “a cowboy rhetoric” (Dawson & Schuelleur, 2007, p. 14) to justify war and to gain retribution. Dawson and Schuelleur conclude that the American administration was totally heedless to “the strategic efficacy and human costs of spectacular asymmetrical violence in Afghanistan and unilateralist preemptive warfare in Iraq” (p. 14). In the two novels, the researchers engage in this article, the United States stands as the imperial power that attacks Germany in WWII and Iraq in 2003, and this common denominator brings these two novels together in a dynamic tension.

Self-motivated, the American administration, diverting public attention from their real motives, included Iraq in “the Axis of Evil” and invaded it under the pretext of Iraq’s having weapons of mass destruction, but when they found no proof of their claims, the “Bush administration quickly seized on the notion of human, and, more specifically, women’s rights as a justification for the American military intervention around the world” (Dawson & Schuelleur, 2007, p. 25). Sponsoring such rhetoric, which veils the real economic-capitalist reasons for the invasion, complicates an already complex relationship between self and other or East and West. Because of its prevalence for two centuries, war (death) has become one of the most recurring themes in literature. In a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway described war as “the writer’s best subject. It groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you have to wait a lifetime to get” (qtd. in Khorrami, 2016, p. 217). Khapaeva (2017) articulates an alarming take on the commonness and normality of death in the last three decades. She questions: Why are grim reapers and skulls popular clothing designs for all ages, from infants to adults, while our personal interactions with the dead are extremely infrequent in comparison to prior epochs? “Why do vampires, zombies, and undead monsters enjoy such exceptional popularity? Why has watching movies or reading novels portraying violent death become part of our daily routine? (p. 24). She acknowledges that there were epochs of high mortality rates, and people have always been preoccupied with death as manifested in their literature and other art forms. However, death was never casually regarded as lighthearted amusement. Khapaeva argues that there has been a turn in the treatment of death and attributes this transformation to what she calls “gothic aesthetics” made popular by fiction and films.

The protagonist of *Slaughterhouse*, Billy Pilgrim, much like Vonnegut himself, is a personification of the folly and irony that characterized World War II because of his unpopularity and complacency as a soldier (as a joke). He is thrown into the Battle of the Bulge with little training, no weapons, and an inappropriate and ridiculous outfit. His mismatched garments, just like the body of the monster sewed up by Hadi in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, underscore the novel’s irony that such a scrawny soldier survives the war while so many stronger, braver, and better-trained soldiers perish. Traumatized, Billy first becomes “unstuck in time” in this shocking and weary state, bouncing between his past and future, an elision cementing the cyclical nature of the narrative of the novel. Billy’s abduction by the Tralfamadorians and Hadi’s creation of his monster can be viewed as surreal, traumatic disorders emitting from Vonnegut’s and Sadaawi’s direct exposure to bloodshed, as there is no definitive evidence to prove or disprove the existence of these far-fetched events.

Frankenstein in Baghdad launches a comparable critique of the irony of war where the eccentric scavenger who is also known as “Hadi the liar” creates the Whatsitsname (as it is often called in the novel), a mythical being, obsessed with death, that goes on a murderous rampage in the name of justice in a country already ripped apart by the American invasion and the ensuing mayhem of partisan violence. The claims of the Whatsitsname for justice line up with the American justifications for the invasion: the war was not fought for liberation, against WMDs, or against the Taliban, all of which have been disproven. Ironically enough, Hadi, mirroring Billy, “was always disheveled, with an untrimmed forked beard, a body that was wiry but hard and energetic, and a bony face with sunken cheeks” (p. 29). Given the current political climate, Whatsitsname wonders if justice and peace are even possible in such a violent society. Hadi explains how he has created Whatsitsname by piecing together parts from the corpses of victims of ongoing cycle of terrorist attacks. Just like Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) who claims that he aims to create beauty and improve human conditions, Hadi, critical of the government’s inability to curb the escalating rate of violence, explicates that he endeavors to patch a human-like body, “so it wouldn’t be treated as trash, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial” (Sadaawi, 2018, p. 32). Hadi’s motivation stems, in part, from his penchant to honor the lives of those lost in the civil war, including his friend Nahem Abdaki, who was killed in a vehicle bombing. Hadi entirely metamorphosed after the death of Nahem: “He became aggressive. He swore and cursed and threw stones after the American Hummers or the vehicles of the police and the National Guard. He got into arguments with anyone who mentioned Nahem and what had happened to him” (Sadaawi, 2018, p. 30). The American invasion is humiliating to Iraqis and is bound to engender resistance from all the components of Iraq regardless of their ethnicity and religion. In the narrative, the competing poles and power centers represent and speak for the majority of Iraqis who are usually absent from decision-making processes.

Both Vonnegut and Saadawi, stimulating an antiviolence juncture in American and international literature, proffer intriguing interpretations of the unspeakable reality through fiction and fantasy, particularly in how their characters perceive and react to violence, uncertainty, time, and existence. Vonnegut’s and Saadawi’s physical and spiritual war

experiences inform these perspectives. Turning away from the prominent trend of demonizing the enemies (the other) and stripping them of their humanity and hailing “national heroes,” Vonnegut and Saadawi offer no heroes, simply because the outcome of war is death and loss, not to mention minimizing and distorting human agencies. Rather, they depict all parties as victims of preordained nodes, itineraries, and hierarchies driven by greed and prejudice and deconstruct the complex hierarchical power modes that feed war processes and propaganda. Vonnegut, particularly at the onset of the novel, unequivocally epitomizes this sense: “I have told my sons that they are not under any circumstances to take part in massacres, and that the news of massacres of enemies is not to fill them with satisfaction or glee” (p. 18).

The above quote is based on Vonnegut's rebuff of the ownership of firearms for whatever reason. Instead, firearms are referred to as “massacre machinery,” and no party is permitted to acquire them because their use invariably leads to massacres. Analogously, Saadawi via the creature of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* reiterates a defiant message, strongly reverberating with the reader, that “there are no innocents who are completely innocent or criminals who are completely criminal” (p. 184). In other words, war, which robs people of recognition, esteem, and dignity, transforms all those involved into monstrous beings capable of plundering human and nonhuman entities in cold blood.

Billy and Hadi are the most perturbed since they, willingly and coercively, attend to a large number of bodies, a task that causes them to endure uncanny experiences incommensurable with logical human expression in which Hadi creates a being and Billy lives with extraterrestrials. For example, after the firebombing and utter annihilation of Dresden, Billy and other prisoners of war are required to rifle the ruins for corpses. After many attempts, the excavators reach a timber pile over a building containing “dozens of bodies” (Vonnegut, 1999, p. 147). At this juncture, Billy must aid in hauling the corpses from the hole, an abysmal chore that will forever color his perceptions of the world. Hadi, likewise, spends most of his time searching for body parts in the debris in the aftermath of any explosion, a grisly activity that has left him psychologically distraught.

II. VONNEGUT'S *SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE*: A WAR AGAINST WAR

Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut is a complex semiautobiographical nonlinear modern novel that raises questions about war, time, and morality and entangles the reader in its meaning due to its many twists, flashbacks, and intertwined mini-narratives. A number of readings of *Slaughterhouse* have, in fact, focused on the novel as a caution against warfare because it is uncommon to read a work of fiction with that pellucid morality and repudiation of violence, one that departs from previous practices and attitudes of negating or homogenizing the other but rather makes a leap into it. Instead, the novel's openness to the other transcends any reductionist thinking retaining valorizations that subordinate, dehumanize, or reduce the other. Overall, what is at stake in reading *Slaughterhouse* is not just the engendering of a nuanced reading, but, more essentially, how it can contribute to a deeper consideration of the consequences of warfare. Many literary commentators have difficulty locating the novel within a certain genre; they, however, have yielded valuable insights and come to a consensus that it is rife with antiwar sentiments. Still, they stress that it is not limited to the issue of war, which is why the novel has garnered so much criticism. In 1974, literary critic Arnold Edelstein, shining much light on “Billy's Tralfamadorian theory of time,” observed that *Slaughterhouse* is “consistent with the horror of Billy's experiences. The only way he can live with his memories of his past and his future and find meaning in both is to withdraw from reality into a pleasant but neurotic fantasy” (p. 138). This fantastic element, because of which Billy can discern all moments of life playing out simultaneously, complicates the novel and enriches its treatment of time. Unlike humans, Tralfamadorians understand time with a fourth dimension in which the past, present, and future all occur contemporaneously. Because of their multidimensional outlook on time, they submit to their fate, convinced that they cannot alter anything about it.

Additionally, Tralfamadorians believe that free will is an illusion held only by humans on Earth because of their linear perception of time and death. In “Mixing Fantasy with Fact,” Moody Jennifer (2009) highlights Vonnegut's use of several literary devices to achieve his goal of merging truth and fiction. To this end, Vonnegut uses the fictional character Billy to portray everyday events with a healthy dose of fantasy and imagination. Although Vonnegut dismisses *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a “lousy little book,” T.J. Matheson (1984) hails the novel for its structure, noting that it is intended to echo the irrationality and chaos of its subject matter—war. Thomas Marvin (2002) cogently remarks that “[c]reating the character of Billy Pilgrim allows Vonnegut to present his experiences indirectly, as if they had happened to someone else” (p. 131). Marvin regards Billy, in this manner, as an author surrogate mirroring Vonnegut's wartime experiences and aiding him in expressing his political and philosophical views about the war. Moreover, Roston (2021) musters evidence that Vonnegut and his buddy O'Hare, in an act of indignation and vengeance, “hunted down one of their sadistic German prison guards. Then they killed him” (p. 10). He even calls this chapter “Kurt Vonnegut: Nazi Slayer,” (p. 1), arguing that Vonnegut's stimulus for the novel emerges from his involvement in the war violence. However, since the novel's initial publication, the vast bulk of scholarly research has seen it through the lens of psychological trauma.

Clearly, Billy is traumatized and agonized by the carnage and vast murder he witnesses during the war, and thus, he has disconnected or unmoored himself from the constraints of time. Vonnegut included the time travel with aliens to highlight Billy's traumatic conditions and psychological pressure. Billy, in contrast to Hadi, doesn't make a monster; instead, he flies high above this globe ruled by humans and reaches another world where monsters and humans coexist

together. Billy appears in the novel's second chapter and rapidly becomes unstuck in time. Billy, a senile widower, woke up on his wedding day. He entered and exited doors in 1955 and 1941. He returned through that door to 1963. He claims to have seen his birth and death numerous times and randomly visited everything in between (p. 21). Billy has little control over his time, and his adventures aren't always pleasant. He claims to have stage fright since he never knows what part of his life he will play next.

War makes life transient and, thus, tantamount to death. Billy has witnessed unspeakable carnages and high fatalities to the point he internalizes an indifferent Tralfamadorian approach to death, elucidating that war-related death, because of its rifeness, has become a normal phenomenon. Simply put, death, which pervades the novel, becomes part of his daily routine to the point where he becomes accustomed to scenes of piles of bodies. The Tralfamadorians' indiscriminate philosophical response to death—"so it goes"—appears 108 times in the novel, and it recurs after any mortality, be it a single loss or the extermination of thousands of people. Critics interpret this frequent refrain (So it goes) in two incongruent ways. First, as a harbinger of death, it is used when

135,000 people died as a result of an air attack with conventional weapons. On the night of March 9th, 1945, an air attack on Tokyo by American heavy bombers, using incendiary and high explosive bombs, caused the death of 83,793 people. The atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima killed 71,379 people. So it goes. (Vonnegut, 1999, p. 130)

Some scholars believe that this inane observation foregrounds the novel's fatalistic tone, for it glosses over and evens out all mortalities, making them appear equally dreadful or rather ordinary. They retain this stance because Billy adopts this phrase from the Tralfamadorians who consider death as a smooth momentary occurrence.

A Tralfamadorian sees a corpse and thinks the deceased person is in a horrible shape at that moment but fine at other times. If I learn someone is dead, I shrug and say, 'So it goes.' (p. 23) as the Tralfamadorians do. The above position on death is consistent with the view of the first group of equating all deaths. Second, other critics presume that "So it goes" aggrandizes and accentuates each fatality in the text, requiring the reader to take heed of each one—killing one individual is equivalent to killing the entire human race. According to this perspective, the statement exemplifies a refutation of the Tralfamadorians' mellow, resinous acceptance of death. The researchers embrace the former exposition and raise questions similar to the ones raised by it because it adheres more to the events of the story and Billy's metamorphosis after encountering the Tralfamadorians and adopting their multidimensional acumen about time and death. Marvin (2002) postulates that "while it is true that the novel adopts the Tralfamadorian custom of saying 'so it goes' every time a death occurs, this relentless repetition shows that the fatalistic attitude behind the saying is ridiculous" (p. 128). Billy is not exemplary; rather, he is an illustration of how humanity should not react to war. He debates death as if it were inconsequential and without any repercussions, yet in actuality, death torments people and causes immense grief and suffering. This contradiction is used by Vonnegut to explain to the people that "death is inevitable, but some deaths are preventable, and the novel consistently demonstrates that human beings have the power to shape the present and the future" (Marvin, 2002, p. 128). In his turn, Simpson (2004) finds that Vonnegut "created Tralfamadore as a way of escaping his troubled past. In that light, his Tralfamadorian existence must be approached as an escape mechanism grounded in mental instability" (p. 267). Billy tries to escape the effects of post-war traumatic stress by traveling to Tralfamadore, where Tralfamadorians deny the reality of death.

In this sense, Vonnegut's novel can be seen as a strong statement that renounces war by all means. Warfare wreaks havoc on individuals and nations, killing more people than any other disease. Wars debase and disintegrate communities and families and affect national, social, and economic development and well-being. Warfare damages people physically and psychologically and reduces material and human capital. People typically take heed of the number of people killed (death toll) in armed conflicts and disregard other repercussions of conflicts. These effects constitute natural destruction, poverty, malnutrition, disability, economic/social deterioration, and psychosocial disorders to mention but a few. For example, Billy recaps the dialogue of the German guards as follows: "There was a fire-storm out there. Dresden was one big flame. The one flame ate everything *organic*, everything that would burn" (emphasis is ours, p. 123). Billy, who witnessed the burning of Dresden, recalls the time he and other soldiers hid in a meat locker. The conflagration's obliteration of all organic matter highlights the breach caused by war, where organic, delicate, beautiful, and living things are the easiest to destroy. Emotionally and physically dehumanized, Billy and the other prisoners are stranded in a slaughterhouse where they witness bloody scenes of slaughtered animals and even a sense of being less than human beings.

III. AHMAD SADAAWI'S *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD*: MONSTROSITY OF WAR

Most criticism of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* renders it as merely a parody or a replica of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. There is some truth to this assertion vis-à-vis the title and the cobbled monster, but *Frankenstein in Baghdad* has its own intrinsic merit, setting, cultural and social mechanisms, and vistas; thus, the researchers believe that it should be extolled and evaluated without only drawing on cultural icons. Shelley's (or Victor's) original *Frankenstein* is a quintessential example of utter macabre in the place of intended beauty, so no wonder one of the best Iraqi authors opts for it as the subject matter of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, a revolutionary work in Arabic literature, both in its style and in its daring approach to reality and society's repressed fears, worries, and wants. Saadawi's fantasy-reality story combines good and evil, perpetrators and victims, and life and death. Hence, the novel's unambiguous antiwar

sentiments bring it closer to antiwar novels, exposing the reality of living in a war-torn city (a hub for greedy people) that is steadily disintegrating before one's eyes and divulging the everyday struggle of Baghdad's citizens as a result of the war. For example, the opportunist hotel owner "Faraj had taken advantage of the chaos and lawlessness in the city to get his hands on several houses of unknown ownership (Sadaawi, 2018, p. 21).

Sin éad Murphy (2018) scrutinizes *Frankenstein in Baghdad* as one of Mary Shelley's most recent reinterpretations or adaptations of studying "Frankenstein's legacy and longevity." She proposes that "Saadawi's Whatsitsname allegorizes a collective feeling that 'every day we're dying from the same fear of dying' in Iraq under conditions of [. . .] a dystopian pronouncement on the unequal distribution of vulnerability within a post-war environment of sociopolitical instability" (p. 273). Hala Amin (2022) centers on the prevalence of death in Iraq, especially after the American invasion, adding that normalizing death has become a global phenomenon. For her, "the novel resonates with the sound of the sirens of police cars, ambulances, and fire engines as well as of piercing screams and groans of pain and it reeks of the smell of 'the smoke, the burning of plastic and seat cushions, the roasting of human flesh' (p. 216). The boundary between Hadi (humanity) and his creature (monstrosity) is called into question, especially after Hadi's face is disfigured. Hadi, like Victor Frankenstein, turns into a monster himself. Saadawi adopts the concept of the creature from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, but we should not be tempted to scrutinize it merely as a replica of Shelley's, as Saadawi's has gained much acclaim because of its compelling story echoing the dilemma of random violence and the ephemerality of life in post-invasion Iraq.

Rawad Alhashmi (2020) attests to the grotesque manifestations in the novel and juts down a repertoire of parallels between it and Shelley's, listing points of divergence and at the same time acknowledging the spots of convergence between them. Webster (2018) contends that the plot "confronts readers with the body parts of Iraqi civilians who did not survive the violence that permeated post-2003 Iraq and whose remains, left unidentified and unburied on the streets of Baghdad, do not seem to be valued" (p. 445). Saadawi gives the world a work of art that captures how violence spreads through Baghdad, "a place of murder and gratuitous violence, after 2003 (p. 279). According to Teggart (2019), the novel verges heavily on gothic tropes to describe 2005 US-occupied Baghdad and the war and its aftermath. Saadawi deploys a blatant Frankenstein motif to scrutinize the worries, behaviors, lifestyles, and beliefs of postwar Baghdadis. The list of studies dealing with *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is extensive; however, our current research paper pairs two novels never studied together in a single project. The similar tropes of fantasy-reality, trauma, and death that both novels employ reflect a monotonous ideology that testifies to and proves the proposition that there are no winners in wars.

In the same vein as *Slaughterhouse*, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* interweaves fantasy and reality in order to pass on an antiwar dissent or opposition. According to David Hogsette (2022), "writers of fantasy must themselves explore the very limits of their imaginations and then create marvelous realms and fantastical plots that lead readers to vicarious transcendence" (Hogsette, 2022, p. 6). Such writers embolden their "readers to stretch their imaginations, challenging the limits of their willingness to suspend reductive disbelief" (Hogsette, 2022, p. 6). Rosemary Jackson (1981) dwells on the "fantastic traces" of culture's hushed, "invisible," "covered," and "absent" elements. For her, it is a fantastic work, "produced within, and determined by its social context," depicts the impossible struggle to realize desire, make the unseen visible, and find absence by moving from expression as a manifestation to expression as ejection (Jackson, 1981, p. 20). She adds that telling entails using the language of the dominant order and accepting its norms and dark zones. Since it originates from within the dominant cultural order, literary fantasy unearths its strictures. By adding the "unreal," the fantastic questions reality, and the fantastic fiction is perceived as a form of opposition to the established social order. As wonderful supplements, Saadawi's creature and Vonnegut's Tralfamadorians unveil the brutality of war on physical and psychological levels.

The phrases that occur most frequently in both works are associated with death and loss. Vonnegut employs the term "so it goes" as a sign of death, while Saadawi's most frequently used word in the novel is death itself; therefore, both novels prioritize the issue of death as prompted by conflicts. In all instances, the ubiquity and recurrence of death turned into a part of daily routine. To Alhashmi (2020), "[d]eath is roving the streets of Baghdad, hunting people randomly and tearing families apart. Due to the spiraling cycle of violence, people's deaths have become mere statistics" (90). In reality, the first word of Saadawi's work is an explosion, a daily fact of life in Iraq, which implies the loss of many lives. The phrase "So it goes" by Vonnegut can be utilized fittingly in Saadawi's novel. Due to the war, we can also observe the complete breakdown of the Iraqi family and the social fabric: "But then when the Americans invaded Baghdad, their missiles destroyed the telephone exchange, and the phones were cut off for many months. Death stalked the city like the plague, and Elishva's daughters felt the need to check every week that the old woman was okay" (p. 16). Thus, they wind up suffering more than they did under the Saddam regime.

The American invasion of Iraq transformed the country into a center of violence, particularly against minority voices. Principally, Iraqi Christians were shattered, and many of them were forced to escape the country, which had been a haven before the war because religious fanaticism and sectarianism had not been mentioned before the attack. Saadawi alarms us about the de-Christianization of Iraq's Assyrian community and urges Christians to stick to Iraq: "Things had been just as bad for the Assyrians in previous centuries, but they had stayed in Iraq and had survived. None of us should think only of ourselves" (p. 27). Prior to the invasion, Iraq existed as a mosaic, a miniature correlating with the country's constituent parts. After the invasion, however, widespread depression, broken homes, dejected individuals,

death, abandoned homes and hotels, and explosions ensue. Each group essentializes the other as inherently incompatible, and as such, they polarize and seek to alienate one another. Immediately after the invasion, Iraq was becoming a theocracy:

Ten minutes after Abu Anmar had left, Faraj removed the Orouba Hotel sign. He threw it on the ground and trod on it, then called on one of his young workers to take it to the sign writer and have him remove the name Orouba, or ‘Arabness,’ and rewrite it with the name Grand Prophet Hotel. He was confident he would succeed where Abu Anmar had failed. (p. 199)

There is considerable symbolism in the above provocative description of the transformation of Iraq, where “Arabness” propagates secularism and equality, yet the Grand Prophet Hotel signifies polarization and that Iraq is turning into a theocracy dominated by the biggest cult.

Saturated with symbolism, the new creature prowls the streets of Baghdad and strikes dread into the hearts of all people. Ironically, the government through the Tracking and Pursuit Department recruits a gang of magicians, astrologers, and fortunetellers to assist in locating and arresting the culprit responsible for the countless murders in Baghdad. In a sense, Whatsitsname is also viewed as a latent Anglo-American intruder conquering Iraq and deciding on its behalf in coercive and custodial capacities. Whatsitsname becomes an emblem of people’s edginess and vulnerability, especially with the numerous myths and images they construct about him depending on their whims and level of fear: “The definitive image of him was whatever lurked in people’s heads, fed by fear and despair. It was an image that had as many forms as there were people to conjure it” (Vonnegut, 1999, p. 131). Here, the so-called irrationality or reactionary of the natives, a key tenant underpinning Western metaphysics, legitimizes the intervention of the rational (Western) subject over the (Eastern) object of knowledge. The jumbled, fragmented, and chaotic body of the creature constitutes the image in which the United States and the United Kingdom envision and conceptualize Iraq. The creature is composed of various unharmonious parts, and, thus, such a superimposed coalescence begins to crumble at the threshold of this new era. The fabrication of the monster and the planning that went into it both provide further evidence that there is a dominant force that is controlling and maintaining this cycle of violence in order to ensure that these groups will consume and destroy one another. That is, the occupiers reduce Iraq into a mutant whose parts are always breaking off and which needs constant patronage by a superpower. This way, they guarantee not only their superiority but also a meddling hand in the affairs of this clumsily designed other.

The frequent explosions in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, paralleling the Dresden firebombing, affect all life forms. They “cut electricity wires and killed birds. Windows were shattered and doors blown. Cracks appeared in the walls of the nearby houses, and some old ceilings collapsed. There was unseen damage too, all inflicted in a single moment” (Sadaawi, 2018, p. 27). In the aftermath of an attack, people start counting the human casualties, but they pay no heed to what happens to other organisms which constitute the invisible damage that goes unnoticed. Such monstrous conditions in post-war Iraq produced the unnamed (social, political, multi-ethnic, and nontraditional) monster Shesma/Whatsitsname. Whatsitsname is created from dismembered bodies and souls, different social backgrounds and classes, diverse ethnicities and races, and varied religions and sects. This monster claims that he represents “the impossible mix that never was achieved in the past. I’m the first true Iraqi citizen” (Saadawi, p. 129). The true Iraqi post-war citizen, innocent or criminal, is shattered by the atrocious circumstances that contribute to enhancing this monstrosity and confirm that wars create only devastated monstrous humans. The novel closes with a pessimistic note where all the characters are involved in the compilation of whatsitsname, and thus all play a role in ransacking Baghdad.

IV. CONCLUSION

Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, not limited to a single point of view, break down the center/margins dichotomies, and thus generate vigorous fantasy-reality responses to the ethics, premises, and legitimacy of wars, presenting two dissident approaches to any tenet or doctrine celebrating war. Both novels engage with weighty predicaments about morality and time to cope with the tragedy of death and the trauma of war. Both problematize warfare as an ethical failure of establishing equal self-other relations, where the self is not superior to the other. In the place of such a morality, the other is, unfortunately relegated to the level of the inferior, irrational savage that should be suppressed and subjected to unprecedented onslaught. In both cases, the death toll of human and non-human entities is reduced to numbers engendering the same reaction, whether it is the death of one person or tens of thousands of people. Even when the number of casualties is reported, the majority of people just cast light on the quantity, paying little attention to the specific anguish that each victim of war endures. In the same fashion as Billy, Hadi treats all the corpses of the victims of the explosions as mere parts that can be compiled in order to form a full corpse. Both rely on overarching black irony to highlight the irrationality of the outcomes of war: Billy, notwithstanding being ill-fitted for a life of danger and hardship, survives the war and an aircraft crash. Another stark example pertains to the forty-year-old vagrant who was taken alongside the American soldiers. He repeatedly reassures his companions that he has “been hungrier than this” and “in worse places than this. This ain’t so bad” (p. 50), but after nine days of incarceration, he dies. Nahem, Hadi’s friend, “had already been dead for several months” (p. 35).

To paraphrase, traumatized by this gruesome scene of not being able to separate the flesh of his friend Nahem from the meat of the horse he was riding before the explosion, Hadi endeavors to build a complete body, one that would be treated as belonging to a human being. The mixture of human flesh and horse meat oversteps the line between animal

and human, suggesting that all life forms suffer as a result of war. The coffin contained only Hasib's "burned black shoes; his shredded, bloodstained clothes; and small charred parts of his body" (p. 38). After several attempts of finding a body where it can reside, his soul comes across the lifeless corpse in the house of Hadi. Hadi's soul and the body of the creature complement one another: "he touched the pale, naked body and saw his spirit sink into it. His whole arm sank in, then his head and the rest of his body. Overwhelmed by heaviness and torpor, he lodged inside the corpse, filling it from head to toe, because probably, he realized then, it didn't have a soul, while he was a soul without a body" (Sadaawi, p. 41). Still in denial of her son's death in the Iraq-Iran war, Elishva, the old Christian woman, desperate, "animated this extraordinary composite—made up of disparate body parts and the soul of the hotel guard who had lost his life. The old woman brought him out of anonymity with the name she gave him: Daniel" (Sadaawi, p. 51). She celebrates his "coming back" with a special meal and prayers. Hugely moved by Elshiva's loneliness and torment, Whatsitsname is adamant about relentless revenge on the perpetrators of such heinous crimes.

The notion that the security services in Baghdad plan to confront Hadi's monster by enlisting magicians and sorcerers to watch, trace, and arrest the creature intensifies the political, economic, and social chaos in post-invasion Baghdad, exposing the underlying causes behind the invasion. The Tralfamadorians and Whatsitsname are invested with supernatural qualities. The Tralfamadorians have power over time, and Whatsitsname, people wonder, "could take bullets without dying or bleeding,"—how hideous would he be? How could he be arrested without fear of death or gunfire? Was he superhuman?" (p. 111). This supernatural power problematizes the whole situation of war and chaos.

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