

Between Reality and Dystopia: A Study of George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

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ABSTRACT

Dystopian literature portrays a world where things are imperfect, messy, and distorted. It displays a horrible picture, yet it is real in some irritating places. It essentially handles subjects like wartime, oppressive factors, and miserable conditions. Dystopian fiction contains elements of reality particular to the period in which it was written, with imaginative factors that depict our gloomy direction. Past and contemporary writers write a fictional text as an allegory of political events. This study aims to look at *Nineteen eighty-four* written by George Orwell, and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi as dystopian fiction, as a satire of the political systems, and specify

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what makes these texts dystopian supernatural elements or in their terrible reality. In Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four*, the citizens of Oceania are under the control of the ruling party. Orwell's dystopia of fear, surveillance, and perpetual war is present in the current democracies, and it can be mirrored after decades in Saadawi's text. In Saadawi's writing, the elements of dystopian literature are genuine, and these elements are present in the spot where the events occur and are presented in people's fear of the ruling system, the terrorist attacks, and the American armed forces. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* reversed the standard equation; the dystopian features in the text are not displayed in its legendary traits but in the real violence that Iraq, generally, and Baghdad, in particular, passed through in and after 2005. Then Orwell's prophesy proves itself to be accurate.

Keywords: Dystopia; Dystopian Literature; imaginative and reality.

INTRODUCTION

Dystopia in the literary tradition produces uneasy and disturbing pictures. It provokes readers to think about the prehistoric myths of the Flood, the apocalypse of Judgment Day and the divine wrath. Fear, death, and destruction are common in dystopian literary writings. It also foretells the downfall of civilization (Claeys, 2017, p.3). Such visions of the apocalypse are ancient; they returned to around 1000 B.C. The Egyptians define the triumph of disorder on order throughout Nefertiti's prophesies, which state the total breakdown of society. Many magnificent people are expelled from power, and robbery, crime, and murder are regarded more highly. The Nile became red because of the dead bodies thrown in it (p.4).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nineteen eighty-four by George Orwell and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi are considered writings that belong to dystopian literature. This literature review presents some researchers' interpretations of these two novels.

In this context, James M. Decker states that Orwell's novel is considered: "a stinging indictment of totalitarian ideology" (Decker, 2007, p.133). Then he adds, "In 1984, Orwell depicts not only Stalinist brutality pursued to its vicious extreme" (p. 163). Decker quotes the critics' views, Richard Lowenthal and Tosco R. Fyvel, who comments on Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: "Orwell provides a transparent_ but powerful_ condemnation of Stalinism and prescient warning against the proliferation of totalitarian methods" (p. 133). In the same article, Decker quotes Erich's Fromm assessment of the novel: "Orwell's dual-purpose seems apt, for a while Big Brothers and Emmanuel Goldstein certainly resemble Stalin and Trotsky... using the geographic logic of the novel, the setting is awry, for the disguised Soviet Union would appear to suggest Eurasia rather than Oceania". (p. 134).

In his introduction to *Animal Farm* and *1984*, Christopher Hitchens (2003) states that books like *Nineteen Eight Four* were banned in countries with Communist rule, then Hitchens adds that Orwell used his own secret knowledge of crudeness repeatedly and even melodramatically. During his time as a police officer in colonial Burma, he witnessed nasty and authoritarian execute among young men attending English boarding schools. Every nightmare of dreadful imprisonment and impotence to which the average human brain is sensitive is double-distilled in this book (Harcourt, Inc., 2003, p. x).

Views on *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi are not far from reality but rather dystopian. Ola Abdalkafor, in her paper “Frankenstein and Frankenstein in Baghdad: The Sovereign, Homo Sacer and Violence”, demonstrates that both Shelly’s and Saadawi’s texts “can be interpreted depending on one of the prominent political theories of the twentieth century”. (Abdalkafor, 2018, p.1). Then Abdalkafor states that even if the dystopian text was intended to be a ghost story, at one point in time, readers might interpret the text according to the prevailing political issues. (p.1). Commenting on Saadawi’s novel, Abdalkafor mentions that the novel deals with themes like “tension between lawful and lawless violence in the context of Iraq after the American invasion of 2003” (p.9). Although Saadawi uses the exact name of the monster in Shelly’s text, Saadawi deals with Whatsitsname differently. (p.9)

In “Violence as the Abject in Iraqi Literature: Ahmed Saadawi’s *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*”, Bushra Juhi Jani (2015) argues that Saadawi’s novel is all about Abject, violence and “is centred around the word waste or abjection. Human lives are wasted, and human bodies are treated like waste”. (p.3)

DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE

Dystopian literature tends to result from socio-political conjuncture rather than a speculative one like utopian literary texts. John Stuart Mill coins dystopia as the opposite word to “utopia” in Sir Thomas Moore’s book *Utopia* in 1516. Opposite to dystopia, utopia introduces a flawless society, while dystopia portrays an imaginative place “in which everything is as bad as possible.” (Little, 2007, p.14). Dystopian texts have the quality of weaving a texture with pressing political issues that engage the readers, such as self-determination and liberty, looming catastrophe and environmental, identity crises, and the feckless boundaries between self and technology. (Basu,

2014). Most critics, such as Karen F. Stein, Peter Fitting, and Jocelyn Harris, believe that dystopian and utopian elements are shared in satire based on their observations in literary texts. Each of these two genres criticizes the irrationality and injustice of the prevailing social structure. Both are keen on justice and its implementations in society. (Gottlieb, 2001, p. 27). Though dystopian fiction describes an imaginative or fictional society planned to look at as even more terrible than even the reader's society, as in the case of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-One* and his prophecies about the future; however, one can find exactly the opposite, that the reader's society is even worse than the dystopian fiction as in Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*.

Alphabetically, it looks like the opposite of a utopia, the imaginative society, which is more refined than the contemporary world. Nevertheless, the dystopia serves as a verbal reduction of the philosophy of utopia, expanding a utopia to its utmost edges to warn against the damaging culture and politics of the author's current life. In general, it varies from the utopia in its negative projection; moreover, it does not offer us an exit to establish a better world. (Basu, 2014). Although traditional and usual dystopias, like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by Orwell, were an "extrapolation from the present that involved a warning" (Basu, 2014). latest examples, from young people such as Saadawi, their concern is to tackle such caution to present new chances for a utopian ray of hope within the fiction.

Dystopian literature generally deals with environmental issues, such as the world's destruction by environmental factors. Moreover, world-changing circumstances contribute to creating a dystopian atmosphere, like a plague, asteroids, World War, or the existence of zombies. As a result of such apocalyptic disasters is the destruction of civilization, with people struggling to exist, making them into dystopias characterized by fear and control. This results from the violence and repression of those in power to maintain what little social structure remains.

Frankenstein in Baghdad Between Reality and Dystoia

The Iraqi novelist Ahmed Saadawi is the author of *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The book was initially written in Arabic and then translated into several languages, including English. Saadawi's novel won the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2014. Nearly every element of dystopian writing in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi Such elements are considered tangible and confirmed in the novel's incidents. These elements are shown in Iraq's terror from the government, terrorist attacks and the American armed forces, as well as the unsteady life that they forcibly have to cope with. The absence of independence and freedom also produces a massive rift between the government and the citizens. Cruel details, such as the American armed forces and inept government high officials, crushed all the cities in Iraq and Baghdad. Moreover, terrorists' explosions and militias' sectarian strikes.

The first paragraph of *Frankenstein in Baghdad* gives the impression of terror and fear for the rest of the novel. Saadawi begins the story with the authentic scenes, explosion, death, and panic that Iraqis used in their everyday life in 2005. It manifests the evil and horror which surrounded the Iraqis at that time. An explosion happened two minutes after Elishva and an older woman called Umm Daniel got on the bus; the passengers on the bus looked to see what was going on. A vast and black smoke rose above the masses from a garage centrally in Baghdad. People rushed to the location of the detonation, where the vehicles impacted in the middle. The car drivers were terrified because of the noise of automobile horns and human yelling (p.5). Saadawi, in his novel, skillfully describes the actual dystopian reality, where disorder is everywhere. He describes Baghdad as a war territory, "death stalked the city like the plague" (p.6). The reoccurred scene after any detonation is the scattered parts of the exploded bodies; throughout his description and the horrible images of the explosion, Saadawi demonstrates the thriftiness of the human blood.

The shaken city had a significant effect on all Iraqis, whether they were religious or ethnic groups, like Christians in Iraq. Dark groups threatened them to take over their houses as well as their possessions. The deficiency of law and the messy situation at that time paved the way for the wrongdoers to dominate people's lives. The Christian woman, Um Daniel, has not lived comfortably and peacefully either in the Saddam regime or after it. Um Danial lives alone after losing her son in a battle against Iran, "He was the Baathist who had taken her son... and dragged him off into the unknown" (p.11). she lost her husband out of his sadness after his son. Her two daughters have chosen to leave the unsafe country with their husbands, and their mother stayed with the hope that her son would come back one day.

The familiar scenes in the city were shattered parts of burning bodies; not even a day without any explosion at someplace. But, ridiculously, if someone dies a natural death and receives a normal bury would be considered as lucky. The rubbish dealer, Hadi, who resides in Baghdad in the Bataween area, notices that the separated limbs are worthless of the dead. He used to see the scattered limbs being washed out by the fire brigades without value or respect. The death of Hadi's friend, Nahem, pushed him to make something special, "After a car bomb detonated in front of the workplace, Nahem had been dead for several months... also killing some other passerby... It had been impossible to distinguish between the horse's and Nahem's flesh. ..." (p.23). It was a harrowing experience for Hadi, who is no longer the same person. Hadi started to collect the left body parts from any nearby explosion and sew these parts to form a full body, then be buried respectfully. Hadi envisions a conversation with the forensics employee section:

Since it was an entire corpse that had been abandoned in the street like garbage, I wanted to hand him over to the forensics department. "It's a human being, guys, a person," he told them. It hadn't been a full corpse, though. Someone complained,

but you made it complete. I finished it so it would be buried correctly and given the same care as other murdered folks. (p.25)

This full corpse, sewn by Hadi, is called Whatsitsname. Many dead people's corpses have vanished without finding any part of their bodies except some of their possessions like rings or clothes. Hasib, a guard at a hotel, is one of those whose corpse has not been found. Hasib's soul is uncomfortable as it cannot see its body. Thus, it will be in the body of Whatsitsname. Whatsitsname sketches the place he lives in:

I am living in an unfinished building close to the Assyrian quarter ... It is an area that's become a battleground between three forces: the Iraqi National Guard and the American army ..., and the Sunni militias and the Shiite militias ... I could describe the building I live in No Man's Land because..., have never been completely governed by any of the three troops, and because it is an uninhabited combat zone. Thus, it's the ideal location for me. (p.138)

Hasib's spirit becomes similar to a trigger for Hadi's body, which is sewn together from different human parts. This ruined spirit results in disorder and death. The Whatsitsname begins to question the responsibility for the individual deaths; then, The political issues were expanded to include sectarianism and blame, sectarianism, and salvation in Baghdad at that time. Whatsitsname seeks revenge for people with low incomes. Whatsitsname confirms that:

I am aware that things have not been going my way lately. not interfering with my work until I've completed it and departed from your realm.... Numerous predecessors of mine have arrived here, completed their tasks during difficult times, and then departed. (p.149)

This hybrid creature transformed into a killing machine cannot be stopped or defeated. After failing to catch it, the government's high-security members rely on magicians and fortune-tellers. Whatsitsname accords itself the power to bring about concord and retribution for the victims. "I am the answer to the call of the poor. I am a saviour" (p.136). In the beginning, he decided To seek justice for those who killed and slashed innocent persons who constitute its body, and he feels himself to be a peacemaker. Unfortunately, the opposite happened; he found horror and bloodshedding everywhere. (p.103)

The inception of Whatsitsname is the only inventive element used by Saadawi in his dystopian writings. He exerts an attempt to draw out an authentic and interesting world for his readers. The other occurrences were real and pertinent to Iraqi daily life in 2005, such as the dissolving of family members, unsafe capital, and the shattered limbs of victims. Saadawi effectively portrays the gloomy period in Baghdad. The torture, the bloodshed and the massive killing were immense in the city. Dystopian literary text links factors of truth that are particular when written with fantastical, fictional or science elements representing the terror-stricken destination we are heading to. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* reveals these traditional principles: The text's famous and speculations lack the basis of its dark core, but it is actual, authentic, terrifying horror that Baghdad happened in 2005.

NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR, BETWEEN FUTURE, PROPHECIES AND SATIRE

Nineteen Eight-Four was written by the English novelist George Orwell in 1949. The novel's events were intended to be in the imagined future of 1984. The book traces the life of Winston Smith, an employee of Big Brothers, the only party in Oceania; living in a dystopian London, the protagonist Winston Smith has recently renamed Oceania. Though Winston works for the ruling

Party, Winston is continually under the party's eye and other citizens, as they have been informed that Big Brother is eyeing all of them. He is fed up with the hidden eyes of the ruler. Even though the party has a full grasp of the people, the risk of rebellion is still there, and therefore, something to be done, obliging everybody to acquire a new language, Newspeak, to stop any thought of rebellion. Thought criminals have been invented by the party to prevent people from any rebellious thoughts; they even choose what kind of reading the people can read, and in case of any disobedience, the people will be sent to 101 Room as a looming punishment. Unfortunately, the new language has no words associated with any political rebellion that coexists with the posture on thoughtcrime, for example, rebellion's ideas. At the novel's start, the protagonist, Winston, is infuriated with the regime as it has forbidden sex, free thought, and other things that make people feel like individuals. This provokes him to start a rebellion opposing the rules of Big Brothers by writing his secret thoughts, although he knows that writing a diary is considered a deadly thoughtcrime.

Moreover, he is keen on and fights against oppression, willing to know about a group of rebels called the Brotherhood, trying to secretly get rid of the party and seek freedom and justice. By the time Winston falls in love with Julia, they both desire to rebel against the party, believing in O'Brien, a party agent and letting him be part of the Brotherhood. However, they were wrong, and instead, they were driven to the Ministry of Love by O'Brien for brainwashing and investigation. At the Ministry of Love, Winston opposes the party's brainwashing until they let him demonstrate his fear of rats; finally, he loses Winston's heart, falls in love with Big Brother, and joins the party.

Affected by its apocalyptic time, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was a dark story when it was written. It influenced and ruined Europe after the world wars and people who have been killed. With obvious connections to fascism, state control, and communism, it is also clearly political. The viewers of

that generation understood and digested all of those difficulties. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is often viewed as a "nightmare vision of the future." (Meyers, 1978, p.144)

Meyers considers dystopia a concrete and naturalistic manifestation of the past and future. Meyers asserts that Orwell did not look imaginative and looked for materials elsewhere to get inspiration for his text. (p.18). Nevertheless, it seems more rooted in reality; looking at the atmosphere of the events, one can compare the condition of his country to the novel. To some extent, the Big Brothers resemble the behaviours of the ruling party during the 1990s to 2002. It is acceptable to say that Orwell did not consider *Nineteen Eighty-Four* a work of conjecture. Yet, it can be seen as a rearrangement of factors from incidents not far from his present and history, like the two World Wars, the Cold War and the Great Depression, that gathered in his work. He has affirmed that though the setting was in a future, it was more authentic and realistic than imaginative, "deliberately intensifying the actuality of the present." (p.144). According to Irving Howe, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depicts the real, "unfamiliar political terrorism of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia" towards London rather than totalitarianism, as is often acknowledged. (p.145). The narration shows a terrible vision of the results of adapting and absorbing an ideology thoroughly and unimpeachably. The absence of different ideologies Orwell was a big fear, a terrible ambience, an unhealthy society without any debate, as if they lived in a valley of amnesia, as Oceania has no history, beginning or even ending.

CONCLUSION

While George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* both include almost all the components of dystopian literature, they can be seen as a manifestation of the actual conditions of the people living at the time of the events. Instead, one can name dystopian

reality because sometimes the exact and objective conditions of some countries or people are darker and more terrifying than the texts themselves. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, considered an imaginative literary text, looks more rooted in reality; looking at the atmosphere of the events, one can compare the condition of his country to the novel. Orwell did not prophecy about the future, but rather the representation of the actual political terrorism of Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany; Orwell foreshadows the control of Mass Media and how those in power can write history and control the people's life and thoughts. Things with Saadawi are the same; it is dystopian because of its terrible reality, the destruction, corruption, explosions, scattered limbs, and bombing that come under the umbrella term Democracy, rather than in the fictional creature.

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