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ANXIOUS ENTANGLEMENTS: GOTHIC MONSTROSITY, ABJECTION AND WORLD-SYSTEMS IN *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD* AND *THE JEWEL OF SEVEN STARS*

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Abstract

Gothic literature frequently employs monstrosity to reveal deep-seated cultural anxieties, symbolically confronting fears of cultural exchange, imperialism, and historical violence. This article examines how Bram Stoker's The Jewel of Seven Stars and Ahmed Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad utilize resurrected Gothic beings to interrogate East-West power dynamics and imperial tensions. Employing Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis, the article argues that Queen Tera and the Whatsitsname are abject entities who embody repressed historical traumas and challenge imperialist boundaries. Through detailed textual analysis, this paper demonstrates how both novels expose anxieties around cultural appropriation and the violent legacies of imperialism, highlighting the haunting entanglements between Europe and the Middle East.

Keywords: *Gothic; monstrosity; abjection; world-systems; imperialism*

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INTRODUCTION

Gothic literature has long used monstrosity to express cultural anxieties, often staging the return of repressed fears in monstrous form. In Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013, trans. 2018), Gothic resurrected beings become vehicles for examining exchanges between East and West. Stoker's novel follows British Egyptologists who attempt to revive an ancient Egyptian sorceress, Queen Tera, only to unleash a vengeful force from the colonial periphery into the heart of Edwardian England. Over a century later, Saadawi's novel relocates Mary Shelley's Frankenstein myth to U.S.-occupied Baghdad, where a patchwork corpse, the Whatsitsname, rises to avenge the dead. Both novels feature abject, resurrected figures that defy stable boundaries of life and death and blur distinctions between Orient and Occident. Through these monsters, each novel explores Western anxieties about cultural exchange and a historical reckoning with the East, interrogating imperial power dynamics in their respective eras.

This essay analyses how *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *The Jewel of Seven Stars* deploy Gothic monstrosity to reveal deep tensions around imperialism, cultural appropriation, and historical violence between East and West. Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory will provide a theoretical framework for understanding the monsters' symbolic role. Kristeva's theory illuminates how Queen Tera and the Whatsitsname function as abject beings that disturb identity and social order, while Wallerstein's core-periphery model helps situate the novels' East-West power reversals within a global historical context. Engaging equally with both novels, the essay will offer close readings – with direct citations from the texts – to show how Queen Tera and Whatsitsname challenge the boundaries between coloniser and colonised, self and other. In doing so, we see how *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* both use Gothic tropes to critique imperial hierarchies: one highlighting fin-de-siècle fears of an *"empire striking back"* (Corriou 6), the other depicting the chaotic aftermath of modern colonial intervention. Ultimately, both works suggest that European heritage is haunted by entanglements with the East – the ghosts of empire and war that refuse to remain buried.

ABJECTION AND THE GOTHIC WORLD-SYSTEM

Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, from *Powers of Horror* describes the visceral horror evoked by that which lies between the categories that define our sense of self. The abject is neither subject nor object but "that which does not respect borders, positions, or rules… that which disturbs identity, system and order" (Kristeva 4). It is a psychological and cultural reaction of revulsion to what is cast out to maintain clear boundaries of the self and society. Paradigmatic examples of the abject include corpses, bodily waste, or monstrous hybrids – things that defy the binary oppositions (such as life/death, human/non-human, self/other) that underpin meaning. The corpse in particular, "the utmost of abjection," horrifies because it is *"death infecting life"*, a reminder of mortality that blurs the line between a once-living person and inert matter (Kristeva in Jani 35). Confronted with the abject, the subject feels both loathing and fascination, a desire to expel the offending element and an uncanny recognition of something once part of oneself (Jani 35). Abjection thus *"beckons to us and ends up engulfing us"*, threatening to collapse the distinctions that uphold our identity (Jani 35). In literature, monsters often embody abjection: as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes, they are "disturbing hybrids" whose composite, incoherent bodies *"resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration"* (Cohen 6). By transgressing natural limits, the monster provokes both terror and a perverse attraction, revealing what society has repressed to define itself.

Kristeva's concept of abjection will be instrumental in analysing Queen Tera and the Whatsitsname. Both are literally reanimated corpses, figures that collapse the boundary between life and death and arouse visceral horror in other characters. The abject nature of these monsters is evident: Queen Tera's preserved mummy body and the Whatsitsname's assemblage of decaying body parts are sights and smells that repel yet mesmerise onlookers. Moreover, each monster also challenges cultural boundaries, destabilising the identity of those who encounter them. As we will see, the British characters' orderly worldview is shaken by the living mummy's uncanny presence, just as Baghdad's war-torn social order is upended by the patchwork corpse roaming its streets. (Hamdar 4)

Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis offers a perspective on global power relations that is illuminating for the East-West dynamics in these novels. Wallerstein describes the world as a unified economic system structured

by a hierarchy of core, semi-periphery, and periphery region. The core consists of dominant, developed nations with strong economies and state structures, which produce high-skill, capital-intensive goods. The periphery comprises less developed regions, often former colonies, which are relegated to producing raw materials and low-skill goods. Crucially, wealth and resources flow from the periphery to the core, enabling the core's prosperity at the direct expense of the periphery. Core countries *"have dominant, often unbalanced economic relationships"* with peripheral nations and *"exploit periphery…for cheap labour, agricultural products, and raw materials"* (Periphery Countries 2025). This creates a dependency dynamic: periphery countries are kept in a state of underdevelopment and instability, often through direct or indirect control by core powers (Periphery Countries 2025). In short, world-systems theory explains imperialism and global inequality as a structured system in which the *core* continuously enriches itself by extracting value from the *periphery*. While an economic theory, it has profound cultural and political implications: it positions Western imperial powers at the "centre" of modern history and colonised regions as the "margins," with a flow of not only resources but also knowledge and culture typically moving outward from Europe to the rest of the world.

Using Wallerstein's framework in a literary analysis allows us to see how Gothic tales reflect or subvert these core/periphery hierarchies. Late-Victorian imperial Gothic like *The Jewel of Seven Stars* emerged precisely when the British Empire's dominance (as a world-system core) was being questioned by rising challenges and anxieties about colonial unrest. Stoker's novel, we will argue, encodes fears of the periphery striking back – the colonised (Egyptian) reclaiming power from the coloniser (British) – which is essentially a reversal of the normal core-periphery flow of power. Similarly, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is set in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, a stark example of a core power imposing itself on a periphery region. The novel's depiction of chaos in Baghdad and the creation of a monster from war's casualties can be read as a critique of that imperial intervention and its fallout. By applying world-systems concepts, we can examine how each novel portrays the flow of violence, treasure, and knowledge between East and West. Do these Gothic stories reinforce the notion of Western superiority (the core firmly in control), or do they dramatize a reversal where the periphery's agency and anger disrupt the centre? We will see that *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* both ultimately highlight

a destabilising entanglement: the West cannot extract from the East or trespass on it without facing consequences. In Wallerstein's terms, the periphery's influence, whether an ancient curse or a modern monster, penetrates the core, unsettling the assumed hierarchy.

By combining Kristeva and Wallerstein, we set the stage to interpret Queen Tera and the Whatsitsname as abject returnees of the repressed who also embody the "world-system" tensions of their eras. These monsters are not random horrors; they are products of concrete historical and cultural transgressions (colonial tomb-raiding, military occupation) and they reflect the imbalance between an imperial centre and its margins. We now turn to each novel to analyse in detail how Gothic monstrosity is used to confront the anxieties of cultural exchange and historical reckoning between East and West.

QUEEN TERA: THE ABJECT MUMMY IN *THE JEWEL OF SEVEN STARS*

In *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, Bram Stoker capitalises on the late 19th-century fascination with Egyptology and the accompanying colonial anxieties. The novel's premise is steeped in the Imperial Gothic mode, where colonial artifacts and knowledge unsettle the metropole. It follows Malcolm Ross, a young Englishman, who becomes involved in the efforts of Abel Trelawny, a scholar, to resurrect Queen Tera, who is a beautiful sorceress-queen of ancient Egypt whose mummy and tomb treasures Trelawny has brought to England. From the moment Queen Tera's mummified body is unveiled, the text establishes her as an uncanny blend of alluring woman and abject corpse. Malcolm is struck by her lifelikeness: *"this woman – I could not think of her as a mummy or a corpse"* (Stoker ch. 16). His words underscore the abject ambiguity of Tera's state. She may be a 5,000-year-old embalmed body, but her appearance is so intact and compelling that he calls her this woman, as though she were merely asleep. The boundaries between life and death, past and present, subject (human) and object (artifact) blur in this moment. Queen Tera's corpse, though supposedly dead, disturbs identity and order by presenting itself as vibrantly alive – a corpse that is not matter out of place but eerily in the shape of a living human, beckoning the onlookers' gaze rather than simply horrifying. Malcolm's inability to categorize her (mummy or woman?) is precisely the response to the abject: Tera's body is *"something rejected from which one does not part"* (Kristeva in Jani 3) in Kristeva's

terms. She should belong to the world of the dead and the museum, yet here she is in a domestic parlour in Britain, a foreign and ancient presence impossible to assimilate into the normal order of things.

The abject power of Queen Tera manifests not only in her liminal physical state but also in the atmosphere of horror and dread that surrounds her. Trelawny's household, filled with Egyptian relics, becomes a space of uncanny happenings. Early in the novel, Trelawny is found inexplicably comatose, his arm wounded amid signs of a struggle, as if attacked by an unseen assailant. The only clues are the disarray of his study – home to Tera's coffin and artifacts – and the recurring mystery of a severed mummy hand with seven fingers. Stoker infuses the narrative with the classic "mummy's curse" motif: those who violated Tera's tomb begin to die under strange circumstances. In a flashback, Trelawny recounts how, during the excavation, a group of his local Egyptian workers met a ghastly fate in the sealed tomb: they were found dead with expressions of terror, *"their faces…black, and their hands and necks…smeared with blood which had burst from mouth and nose and eyes"* (Stoker ch. 5). The implication is that Queen Tera's struck them down in an abjectly violent manner, a gruesome suffocation or haemorrhage, for desecrating her resting place. This graphic image of bodies leaking blood from every orifice is abject horror par excellence, "moral pollution" made manifest as bodily corruption (Jani x). It suggests that the foreign dead can literally spill into and contaminate living bodies. For the surviving British characters, such events instil a *"bewildering sense of some power outside ourselves"* that they cannot comprehend or control (Stoker ch.5). The rational limits of Western science are tested by the intrusion of an ancient magic tied to the mummy. Doctor Winchester, the pragmatic physician, for instance, is baffled and repulsed by the "assemblage of horrors" in Trelawny's room and scoffs that *"the day has hardly come…when the British Museum and St. Thomas's Hospital have exchanged their functions"* (Stoker ch. 5), in other words, refusing to treat a patient surrounded by mummies. His observation ironically foreshadows what the novel dramatizes: the incursion of the mystical (the museum's mummies) into the medical realm (the hospital/house), emblematic of the East's uncanny presence disrupting Western norms of health, science and domestic order.

Queen Tera's agency amplifies as the narrative progresses, revealing Stoker's critique of imperial hubris. Through deciphered hieroglyphs and Trelawny's studies, we learn that Tera was no passive Egyptian princess but a

formidable sorceress who planned her own resurrection. Notably, she intended for it to occur *"after a long time and in a more northern land, under the constellation whose seven stars had ruled her birth"* (Stoker ch. 16). In other words, Queen Tera deliberately set the stage for her return outside of Egypt – effectively in Europe. This detail is crucial: it implies that Tera anticipated her tomb would be opened by foreigners and that her rebirth would take place far from home, where her power might catch her enemies (the ancient priests who opposed her, and by extension the modern invaders of her tomb) off guard. She left instructions that her hand be unwrapped holding the *Jewel of Seven Stars* to facilitate her soul's mobility and even provided a mystic "Magic Coffer" of seven sides presumably containing her potent spells and the force of her Ka, meaning spirit. Trelawny interprets that *"her body could become astral at command, and so move, particle by particle, and become whole again when and where required"* (Stoker ch. 16). Queen Tera thus embodies a kind of ultimate abjection: a dispersed being who can disintegrate and reconstitute at will, transcending the bounds of physical containment. She literally denies the finality of death and geography. This directly subverts the colonial project of appropriation: the British may think they have *possessed* her body and treasures by bringing them to London, but in fact Tera has orchestrated this *cultural exchange* to her own advantage. Far from a plundered object, she remains an actor with her own will.

Stoker uses this plot to tap into late-Victorian imperial anxiety. The returning mummy is *"a creature of colonial origin"* whose resurrection *"constitutes a threat for the main characters"*, dramatizing *"the late-Victorian anxiety about the decline of the British Empire, the empowerment of the colonised and… the empire striking back"* (Corriou 6). Queen Tera is indeed an *"empowered native"* figuratively *"hungry for revenge"* (Corriou 1). The novel's suspense and horror derive from the prospect that this ancient Eastern queen might invade and overturn the comfortable world of her English resurrectors. She exists as a living rebuke to imperial hubris: Trelawny's desire to master Egypt's secrets results instead in a situation where he, the coloniser, becomes helpless, even comatose, under the influence of the colonised.

Importantly, Stoker casts Queen Tera in a dual light of attraction and danger, especially through gender. As a female monster, she is portrayed not as a decaying ghoul but as a beauty – a femme fatale who can seduce and destroy. When her body is revealed during the climactic "Great Experiment" to revive her,

Malcolm remarks on her intense presence; even in death she exudes vitality and sexuality, as he observes the "faint sweet smell" of her body and her radiant appearance. This aligns with a trend noted by critics that in many fin-de-siècle mummy tales, the female mummy is eroticised and personified as a woman rather than a mere corpse. Such characterization adds a layer of cultural metaphor: the colonised land (Egypt) is feminised and exoticized, an object of desire as well as fear for the coloniser. The British characters' impulse is to possess Queen Tera, much as Britain sought to possess the riches of the Orient. Trelawny himself is partly motivated by awe and possibly worship of Tera's power. Yet the narrative shows that this desire to possess the Oriental woman/artifact is inherently perilous. As Corriou observes, *"the antique and Oriental woman is constructed as the object of desire that one must discover and unveil in order to possess her"* (Corriou 6), reflecting a dynamic of imperial conquest and subjugation. Trelawny has literally unveiled Tera, removing her funerary wrappings, a symbolic deflowering of the colonial treasure. However, the result is that Tera's hand (with its lethal magic) immediately becomes *"the instrument of her revenge and a constant threat for the men who hold the body"* (Corriou 6). The unveiling is reversed; she turns from object to subject. In one sense, this storyline encodes what postcolonial critics describe as the coloniser's nightmare of the avenging colonial woman. The power dynamic shifts: Tera's revival would mean Britain's scientific patriarchy loses control to a foreign female authority.

By the novel's conclusion, Stoker leaves readers with a vivid impression that the boundary between East and West has collapsed in ghostly fashion. In the original 1903 edition's ending (the more thematically powerful ending), the "Great Experiment" to resurrect Tera ends in mysterious disaster: the lights go out, and when restored, Tera's mummy has vanished without a trace. Margaret lies unconscious, and it is implied that Queen Tera's spirit may have transmigrated into Margaret's body. Malcolm is left unsure whether his beloved Margaret is still entirely herself or now partly the ancient queen. This ambiguous finale represents a complete reversal of core/periphery roles – the Egyptian queen has literally taken over the body (and future, through marriage) of an Englishwoman, penetrating the heart of the British domestic sphere. The colonised effectively usurps the coloniser, fulfilling the fear of "the empire striking back." The revised 1912 edition of the novel (published after Stoker's death) notably toned this down, offering a more reassuring conclusion where

Margaret survives intact, and Tera's threat is nullified. The very need for a safer ending suggests how radical the original scenario was: Stoker dared to show an outcome where the periphery's revenge is successful, and the imperial order is subverted. This speaks to the depth of anxiety about imperial power and guilt – the notion that Britain's extraction of other cultures' riches might result in haunting or possession. In the 1903 version *"the mummy disappears mysteriously and escapes appropriation"* (Corriou 6), symbolically eluding the British collectors, whereas the second ending reasserts possession by having the hero win the girl (Margaret) in marriage, re-establishing patriarchal colonial order.

WHATSITSNAME: WAR'S MONSTROSITY IN *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD*

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* relocates the Gothic monster to a 21st century Middle Eastern context, transforming Mary Shelley's classic creature into a symbol of Iraq's traumatic entanglement with Western intervention. Set in Baghdad in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, the novel centres on the creation of the Whatsitsname, a patchwork corpse animated by a vengeful spirit. Unlike Queen Tera, who is an ancient being revived, the Whatsitsname is born from contemporary violence: he is literally stitched together from the dismembered body parts of Iraqi civilians killed by bombs and attacks. This gruesome body, initially assembled by a local junk-dealer, Hadi, as a makeshift attempt to give the anonymous dead a proper burial, becomes infused with life when a restless soul (that of a recently killed security guard) enters it. The result is a creature that immediately unsettles Baghdad's already fragile order. Saadawi wastes no time in establishing the Whatsitsname as an abject figure. Witness descriptions speak of *"a horrible face, stitches across the forehead and down the cheeks, a big nose… not a pretty picture."* (Saadawi 55). The monster's body is a walking collage of death – decaying flesh crudely sewn into human form, with visible wounds and a "big mouth-like gash" where his jaw was rent (Saadawi 54). People react to him with terror and disgust; authorities label him *"Criminal X"* and find that bullets cannot kill him. In Kristevan terms, the Whatsitsname epitomizes the abject: he is composed of the very remains society seeks to expel and forget (corpses, gore), and by rising up, he disturbs identity and order in a most literal

way – the boundary between the living and the dead in Baghdad has been breached.

What makes the Whatsitsname especially complex as an abject monster is that he is not a singular identity but a collective one. He contains multitudes as in the body parts, and by extension, the memories or unsettled spirits of people from different backgrounds. In a sense, he is a corporeal map of Baghdad's sectarian and wartime dead. This patchwork nature means that the monster's very existence challenges the sectarian narratives tearing Baghdad apart. He is Shia and Sunni, Christian and Muslim, civilian and soldier, all in one – an uncanny embodiment of an integral wholeness that the real Baghdad is lacking. Saadawi uses this concept to explore issues of justice and revenge in a society broken by occupation and civil strife. Upon gaining consciousness, the Whatsitsname believes he has a mission: he seeks revenge for each part of his body, hunting down those responsible for those individuals' deaths. As the novel puts it, *"He was a composite of victims seeking to avenge their deaths so they could rest in peace."* (Saadawi 130). In other words, the monster sees himself as an agent of justice for the marginalized dead. This initially casts him in a somewhat sympathetic light, reminiscent of Shelley's creature who sought vengeance for his own suffering, Saadawi's monster avenges others. Each successful kill he carries out supposedly brings closure to one of the souls incorporated in him, which is a poignant concept: the dead literally cannot rest until their wrongful deaths are avenged, reflecting a cultural context where so many murders and killings have gone unpunished amid the chaos. This mission, however, quickly grows problematic, and it is here that *Frankenstein in Baghdad* delves into the moral ambiguity of vengeance and the cycle of violence, making the Whatsitsname not just a symbol of justice but of perpetuated horror.

The abject nature of the Whatsitsname's form has a corrosive effect: as soon as he avenges one part's death, that body part begins to rot and fall off. The monster finds that to continue his existence and mission, he must replace these decayed parts with new ones – which he harvests from freshly killed people. This creates a ghastly paradox: initially he only targets those he deems guilty (for example a Baathist officer who killed a victim whose finger is in the monster's body, or a jihadi militant responsible for another part's death (Ravat). But as he replaces parts, he inevitably incorporates pieces of new victims, some of whom may have been perpetrators themselves or innocents caught in crossfire. In

effect, the Whatsitsname's identity is always shifting with each new body part, and so do the vendettas he must prosecute. He himself starts to lose track of who is truly innocent or guilty. In one crucial chapter narrated from the monster's perspective, he undergoes a moral crisis. Guided by his cloaked companion known as the "Magician," the Whatsitsname comes to a stark realization: *"There are no innocents who are completely innocent, and no criminals who are completely criminal."* (Saadawi 214). This statement is repeated like a grim mantra in the novel. It encapsulates the murky reality of Baghdad, where victim and perpetrator blur. Everyone, including the monster himself, has blood on their hands in some measure. This awareness forces the monster to rationalize ever more dubious killings: since pure innocence is nowhere to be found, he can justify choosing practically anyone as a source for replacement parts, deeming that person not completely innocent. The Whatsitsname thus begins as an avenger of the oppressed but morphs into a perpetuator of violence – he becomes both victim and villain. By the latter half of the novel, the monster has acquired a large team of followers a kind of cult of misfits who help him or look to him as a saviour – but eventually infighting and a civil war among these followers breaks out. The monster's presence, rather than uniting people, creates new factions and bloodshed. In a moment of bitter self-reflection, the Whatsitsname acknowledges that instead of reducing violence he has *"sown greater divisions"* and *"generated new forms of brutality in the city."* (Saadawi 268). This trajectory is Saadawi's commentary on the futility of vengeance and the way violence inevitably spirals out of control, engulfing those who unleash it – a clear parallel to the nightmare of post-2003 Iraq, where each act of reprisal bred further atrocities.

Beyond its exploration of moral ambiguity, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is a starkly political novel, and the Whatsitsname is a postcolonial monster inextricably linked to East-West cultural exchange and conflict. The novel explicitly anchors his creation to the conditions created by the American occupation and subsequent power vacuum. As one Iraqi Brigadier in the story speculates, *"It was the Americans who were behind this monster,"* (Saadawi 268), suspecting that perhaps the chaos is part of some American military experiment or plot his belief, though conspiratorial, highlights a crucial perception: the monster is ultimately a by-product of Western intervention. Indeed, in a metaphoric sense, the Americans are behind the monster – without the invasion,

there might not have been the sectarian violence and endless bombings that provided Hadi with so many dismembered corpses to sew together. Saadawi underscores the American role by depicting the occupiers as an inscrutable force operating above the law: *"they operated with considerable independence, and no one could hold them to account…they could throw you down a dark hole"* (Saadawi 69). This description of the U.S. forces (likely alluding to arbitrary detentions or abuses) paints them as a sort of unseen horror themselves in the Iraqi imagination – unpredictable and unanswerable. The novel thus ties the core-periphery dynamic into its Gothic framework: the core power (the U.S.) invades and destabilises the periphery (Iraq), creating a vacuum of justice and an overflow of abject suffering (literally, body parts strewn in the streets) from which the Whatsitsname emerges.

If Queen Tera signified the spirit of a colonised culture returning to trouble the coloniser, the Whatsitsname represents the monstrosity produced by the collision of East and West. He is not a foreign invader in the West; rather, he is a home-grown monstrosity born of Iraq's internal wounds, yet those wounds have been greatly aggravated by Western imperialism. In this sense, the Whatsitsname is the dark mirror of Western violence. We can interpret him as the embodiment of collective trauma – what one critic calls *"a macabre analogy for the thousands of civilian Iraqi deaths during the US 2003 invasion and the Iraqi civil war that followed"* (Murphy 273). This analogy is supported by the novel's relentless layout of death and despair: the creature is composed of civilian casualties, and his rampage forces everyone in Baghdad to remember those lost lives. He literally carries the history of violence on (and in) his body. In one passage, the monster describes Baghdad as a battleground for the Iraqi National Army and America on one side, versus the Sunni and Shia militias, enumerating the factions that tear the city apart (Ravat). Through his eyes, we see Baghdad as a patchwork like himself – divided and fighting itself, with ordinary people caught in between. The Whatsitsname's initial attempt to impose a form of rough justice can be seen as an effort to bring moral order to a world where the official legal system, which is under occupation, has failed to do so. However, the collapse of his mission into further killing underscores the novel's bleak verdict on the situation: there is no simple restoration of order possible in a world broken by occupation and sectarian hatred.

Kristeva's concept of abjection helps illuminate how *Frankenstein in Baghdad* portrays the psychological impact of this chaos. The Whatsitsname's presence forces characters to confront what they desperately want to ignore, the piling bodies and so-called collateral damage that have become mundane. Interestingly, some characters see him differently: Elishva, an elderly Christian woman, believes the Whatsitsname is her long-lost son Daniel returned from the dead. Her grief and yearning make her *"see only what she wanted to see"* (Saadawi 47), embracing the abject creature as a beloved son rather than a horror. This poignant subplot shows how human desperation can momentarily domesticate the abject – Elishva combs the monster's hair and cares for him, calling him Daniel, the name of her sone. Yet even she finally realizes he is not truly her son. Her acceptance and subsequent rejection of the creature echo the push-pull of abjection: an attempt to incorporate the trauma (to give it meaning as her son's return) followed by the recognition that it is the Other that cannot be assimilated into normal life.

Wallerstein's world-systems lens further reveals how *Frankenstein in Baghdad* engages with core/periphery dynamics, albeit in a different manner from Stoker's work. Iraq during the U.S. occupation is a clear example of a periphery country under the domination of a core power: politically and militarily, Iraq's sovereignty was compromised, and its economy and stability were shattered, conditions typical of a periphery nation exploited by a core nation (Periphery Countries 2025). The novel conveys resentment of this in moments like the quote above regarding Americans' unaccountability: "It was the Americans who were behind this monster" (Saadawi 268). Yet, instead of the periphery striking back directly at the core (there is no scene of the monster attacking Americans in their homeland, for instance), Saadawi shows a more internalised consequence: the periphery devouring itself in the void left by failing imperial experiments. The Whatsitsname's rampage happens on Iraqi soil, mostly claiming Iraqi victims. The global core (the U.S.) is only indirectly haunted in that the story (and its titular invocation of Frankenstein) sends a message back to Western audiences. It forces Western readers to confront the monstrosity born from a war prosecuted by Western powers. In that regard, the periphery does speak back to the core: through literature and metaphor, making the core witness the consequences of its policies. This fulfils the idea of European (or American) heritage being haunted by entanglement with the East. The

Frankenstein myth is resurrected in Baghdad to critique a Western experiment in nation-building that has gone horrifically wrong.

By the novel's end, the Whatsitsname disappears as mysteriously as he arose, leaving behind only the tales told by those who encountered him. His legacy within the story is ambiguous, the violence continues in Baghdad through other hands, and no lasting justice is achieved for the war's countless victims. This bleak conclusion – the monster fades, but the monstrosity persists – reinforces Saadawi's point about the cyclical nature of violence and the difficulty of true reckoning. Yet, the fact that his tale exists at all is significant. As one character, a journalist, writes an article titled *"Frankenstein in Baghdad"* (providing the novel's own title in a metafictional twist), the narrative of the Whatsitsname becomes a way to process trauma and assign meaning to senseless events (Ravat). In a land where formal justice and historical accountability are absent, the Gothic tale itself becomes an outlet for a kind of cultural catharsis or at least an acknowledgement of suffering. The monster's mantra, that no one is completely innocent or guilty, stands as a grim wisdom that indicts everyone – Iraqi militias, Saddam loyalists, American occupiers – in the collective nightmare. This directly engages with the idea of historical reckoning: *Frankenstein in Baghdad* demands that readers accept a more complex moral landscape where easy binaries (occupier vs. liberator, terrorist vs. victim) collapse. In doing so, it mirrors the monster's own abject hybridity, mixing categories just as war has mixed and entangled the fates of its participants and victims.

In summary, the Whatsitsname in Saadawi's novel is a modern Gothic embodiment of Iraq's historical wounds and its entwining with Western imperial actions. Through abjection, we understand him as the return of the repressed, the literally dismembered and ignored casualties of war that rise up to confront society with its sins. Through world-systems, we see him as an outcome of core-periphery violence, an indictment of how the "centre's" interference can shatter a "periphery" nation, giving birth to uncontrollable consequences. While Queen Tera in Stoker's tale brought the East's vengeance into the West, the Whatsitsname brings Western-induced chaos into an Eastern city, which then must exorcise this demon on its own. Both monsters, however, end up highlighting that East and West are fatally intertwined: neither can pretend to stand apart from the other's history. The East (Iraq, Egypt) cannot

escape the imprint of Western imperialism and narratives, and the West cannot escape the responsibility and blowback of its incursions East.

GOTHIC MONSTROSITY AS RECKONING BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Across these two novels, Gothic monstrosity emerges as a potent metaphor for the haunting legacy of East-West interactions. Both *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* convey that the cultural and historical relationship between Europe and the Middle East is not a one-way narrative of domination or enlightenment, but a tangled web marked by violence, appropriation, and mutual influence that often resurfaces in horrific ways. The idea of heritage – what is passed down through history – is complicated by these texts. European imperial heritage includes not only pride in collecting and studying the world's cultures (as Trelawny exemplifies with Egyptology, or as Western powers claim in "rebuilding" Iraq) but also the dark legacy of what those actions cost the people and cultures subjected to them. Gothic ghosts and monsters force a confrontation with that dark side of heritage.

Queen Tera is literally a heritage item (a mummy) that *refuses to stay a possession*. She asserts her own narrative against the imperial narrative that tried to subsume her. In doing so, she symbolizes how European identity is haunted by the very Others it sought to catalogue and dominate. The British Museum, evoked in the novel, can be seen as a haunted house: behind every artifact lies a story of acquisition that might not be entirely heroic. Stoker's novel hints at this by making the museum piece come alive with a vengeance. The cultural exchange here – Britain taking in Egypt's past – becomes a means for historical reckoning when that past comes alive to judge the present. Notably, Tera's magic includes mastery over the *"Upper and Lower worlds"*, and she had engraved on her talisman the *"Master Words to compel all the Gods"* (Stoker ch. 16). She embodies a kind of ultimate knowledge and power that surpasses that of modern Europe, implying that the colonisers are dabbling in forces beyond their knowledge.

The Whatsitsname, on the other hand, is not an ancient ghost but a very new one, yet he too represents unresolved history. If Tera is a ghost of ancient colonial entanglement, the Whatsitsname is a ghost of contemporary neo-imperial entanglement. Both show that violence across cultures breeds monsters

that ultimately affect all sides. In Saadawi's Baghdad, people circulate rumours about the Whatsitsname and assign meaning to him in line with their beliefs – some think he's a lost soul, some a divine punishment, others an American scheme. This interpretation of the monster is a projection screen for the community's fears and hopes, much like monsters in folklore. And central to those fears is the sense that their suffering is linked to larger forces (sectarian leaders, foreign occupiers, even cosmic justice). The Whatsitsname forces characters, at least briefly, to acknowledge the totality of the violence. The entanglement is complete: Iraqi violence and Western violence are stitched together as intimately as the corpse's parts.

Moreover, both novels employ Gothic tropes – revenants, uncanny doubles, secret knowledge, curses – to dramatize historical burdens. Gothic fiction often deals with the idea that *the past is not dead*; here the past (whether 4,000-year-old or the just-yesterday dead) is very much alive and tormenting the present. This speaks to a broader theme in postcolonial contexts: the past of colonization or conflict *must be confronted* rather than suppressed. Stoker's Britons try to control the past by resurrecting it on their terms and fail. Saadawi's Iraqis, lacking control over their present, see the past literally cobbled together and walking among them, a past that demands moral accounting. In both, the Gothic monster serves as the agent of reckoning. Tera asks implicitly: "What right had you to me, and what now will you do when I assert my own will?" The Whatsitsname asks: "What is justice in a world where everyone has harmed everyone? Who will speak for the nameless dead?" These are uncomfortable questions that transcend the boundaries of the novel and challenge readers from the cultures implicated.

CONCLUSION

Frankenstein in Baghdad and *The Jewel of Seven Stars* are, despite the century separating them, kindred literary works in how they harness the Gothic to interrogate East-West relations. Through close analysis informed by Kristeva's abjection and Wallerstein's world-systems theory, we have seen that both novels use their monsters – the Whatsitsname and Queen Tera – as catalysts for exposing the anxieties and injustices of cultural exchange between East and West. These abject, resurrected figures violate the boundary between life and

death, evoking horror and fascination, and simultaneously violate the presumed boundary between Orient and Occident, forcing a confrontation with the consequences of imperialism and conflict.

In Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars*, the Gothic tale of a mummy's revival becomes a parable of imperial hubris and its comeuppance. Queen Tera, as an abject monstrous-feminine figure, destabilises the Victorians' sense of superiority and control, embodying the idea that the colonised East can and will "haunt" the coloniser. The novel grapples with Britain's complicity in disturbing other cultures' graves (literally and figuratively) and suggests that those transgressions carry a deadly spiritual cost. In Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the Frankenstein motif is transformed into a commentary on contemporary imperial entanglement: the monster born of Baghdad's rubble is the unplanned offspring of American occupation and Iraqi sectarianism. He is at once the product of Western-inflicted chaos and the accuser of all sides in the conflict, a gruesome personification of historical trauma that resists any simplistic framing of villainy or victimhood.

Applying world-systems theory illuminated how each text handles the flow of power: Stoker's narrative dares to invert core and periphery, depicting an Egyptian "other" who challenges the British centre, whereas Saadawi's narrative shows the periphery (Iraq) in utter turmoil due to core interference, with the only retaliation being a narrative one – using a Western monster story to shock and edify. Both approaches converge on a message that imbalances of power and acts of domination will yield monstrous echoes. No act of cultural theft or military invasion remains neatly buried in the past; it re-emerges, demanding recognition. Kristeva's notion of abjection helped us understand why the monsters are so viscerally disturbing to characters: they are composed of what society tries to cast out – dead bodies, foreign bodies, unwanted truths – but cannot fully expel. In confronting these monsters, characters are really confronting their own repressed guilt, fear, and complicity. That is why the horror in these novels feels so profound: it is not just the shock of the supernatural, but the shock of introspection forced by the supernatural.

Both novels, ultimately, use Gothic tropes to criticise the idea of a clear centre and a marginal other. Instead, they show a more intertwined world where East and West continually infiltrate each other's narratives. The European heritage – whether in scholarship, empire, or literature – is shown to

be deeply entangled with Eastern histories and peoples. The spectre of Queen Tera in an English home and the spectacle of Frankenstein's creature roaming Baghdad's streets each attest that the "East" is not a distant, controllable realm; it is in the very texture of Western experience (through colonial history or cultural memory), just as the "West" is woven into the fate of Eastern societies. The Gothic exaggeration of these encounters serves to highlight truths that realist fiction might gloss over: it externalises the "ghosts" in these relationships so they cannot be ignored. They remind us that the past is never truly past – the crimes and connections of history live on, sometimes in monstrous forms, and that confronting those monstrosities is a necessary step in any reckoning between East and West. The ghosts of empires, these novels suggest, will continue to walk among us until we acknowledge and address the wounds that summoned them.

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