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Monstrous Anxiety: Reinterpreting Mythical Beasts in Saadawi and Ishiguro's Post-Conflict Narratives

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Abstract

This paper analyses the reinterpretation of old monster archetypes now construed as sources of modern anxieties in Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018) and Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* (2015). Based on monster theory, myth transformation, and post-colonial criticism, this comparative study interrogates how both texts reimagine established monstrous figures to articulate trauma, fragmented identities, and conflict consequences. The analysis reveals that the composite Whatsitsname of Saadawi and the amnesia-inducing dragon Querig by Ishiguro act as complex allegories for social fragmentation and contested memory in post-conflict situations. Although both emerged from quite different cultural backgrounds—the post-2003 invasion of Iraq and post-Arthurian Britain—both demonstrate how classical monsters can be transformed from external threats into subtle indicators of internal and social fracture. The study illustrates

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how monster symbolism transcends culture while remaining responsive to different historical circumstances. Monsters persist across cultures because of their profound symbolism in "making sense of the inexplicable," especially in conflict and disorder contexts.

Keywords: Collective Memory, Contemporary Mythology, Cultural Hybridity, Literary Monsters, Monster Theory, Postcolonial Literature, Post-conflict Literature, Social Fragmentation, Symbolism, Trauma Narratives.

إعادة تفسير الوحوش التقليدية كرموز للقلق الحديث في رواية "فرانكشتاين في بغداد" للسعداوي و"العملاق المدفون" لإيشيجورو

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الـمستخلـص

تهدف الورقة البحثية الى تحليل عملية إعادة تفسير نماذج الوحوش القديمة والتي تفسر الآن على أنها مصادر للقلق الحديث كما ظهرت في رواية "فرانكشتاين في بغداد" للسعداوي (2018) و"العملاق المدفون" لإيشيجورو (2015). استنادًا إلى نظرية الوحوش، وتحول الأسطورة، والنقد ما بعد العهد الاستعماري، تتساءل هذه الدراسة المقارنة عن كيفية إعادة تصور كلا النصين لشخصيات وحشية راسخة للتعبير عن الصدمة، والهويات المجزأة، وعواقب الصراع. يكشف التحليل أن المركب "ما هو اسمه" للسعداوي والتنين المسبب لفقدان الذاكرة "كويرغ" لإشغيرو تم توظيفهم كاستعارات للتفتت الاجتماعي والذاكرة المتنازع عليها في حالات ما بعد الصراع. فعلى الرغم من كون كلتلا الورايتين تنحدران من خلفيات ثقافية مختلفة تماما – ما بعد غزو العراق في 2003 وبريطانيا ما بعد آرثر – إلا أن كلاهما يوضح كيفية تحويل الوحوش التقليدية من مصادر خطر خارجية إلى مؤشرات للانقسام الداخلي والاجتماعي. توضح الدراسة كيفية تتجاوز رمزية الوحوش للثقافة بينما تبقى مستجيبة للظروف التاريخية المختلفة. حيث تستمر الوحوش عبر الثقافات بسبب رمزيتها العميقة في "فهم ما لا يمكن تفسيره"، وخاصة في سياقات العنف والاضطراب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذاكرة الجماعية، الأساطير المعاصرة، التهجين الثقافي، الوحوش الأدبية، نظرية الوحوش، أدب ما بعد الاستعمار، أدب ما بعد الصراع، التفكك الاجتماعي، الرمزية، سرديات الصدمة.

1. INTRODUCTION

Monsters have long served as cultural repositories of collective fears and anxieties. In *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears*, Asma (2009) states that the monstrous exists as a "cultural category," transforming in response to social change; hence, monsters become "vehicles of uncertainty, danger, and doom" within the given historical moment. This malleability is reiterated by Mittman and Dendle (2012) in their introduction to *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, arguing that monsters are "meaning machines" capable of embodying the most urgent concerns of their time. Monsters the world over are now continually readapted with every shift in society and culture, evolving from plain embodiments of external dangers into a mirror of internal and social strife. The growth of monsters—from Asma's (2009) definition of the postmodern "return of the repressed" to manifestations of psychological marginalisation and fragmentation—is noted by Weinstock (2020) in his analysis of contemporary monster theory.

Such contemporary cultural redistribution sees monsters in literature being systematically represented to articulate an aura of anxieties that capture the quintessence of modern apprehensions about identity, memory, trauma, and the aftermath of conflict. Rightly identifying this trend in their discussion of Gothic fiction, Punter and Byron (2004) demonstrate how monsters in contemporary literature often embody the agonies of colonial violence and the fragmentation of cultural identity.

The paper thus seeks to explore the reinterpretation of monster archetypes in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* (2015). While these novels arise from different cultural and historical contexts, both transmute monstrous images into powerful metaphors that illuminate post-conflict societies and the psychological toll violence inflicts upon them.

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Saadawi radicalises Mary Shelley's archetypal creature into the composite being of "Whatsitsname," assembled from the body parts of bombing victims from post-invasion Iraq. According to Atia and Moore (2024), this adaptation serves as a "literary mapping of Iraq's sectarian landscape" that transforms Shelley's meditation on scientific hubris into an examination of sectarian violence and fragmented national identity. The novel is firmly within the tradition of Iraqi trauma fiction, and its monstrous figure embodies the collective suffering of the Iraqi people in the aftermath of war. The same applies to Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*, which inverts the old dragon of Arthurian legend into Querig, whose breath inflicts collective amnesia.

The present comparative analysis sets out to explore how the two authors recast standard monster narratives to address modern issues of trauma, memory, and societal fracture.

Some of the critical research questions guiding this inquiry include:

- How do Saadawi and Ishiguro reinterpret established monster archetypes to articulate modern anxieties?
- In what manner do the monstrous figures in these narratives function as embodiments of collective trauma in post-conflict societies? In following Creed's (1993) deliberation on the "monstrous-feminine" and Kristeva's notion of the abject, in what manner do these reimagined monsters traverse morally coded boundaries to extend our understanding of justice and reconciliation?

As Botting (2013) identifies in his analysis of postmodern Gothic, monsters are becoming increasingly "ambivalent figures" that blur the lines of moral divergence, which is particularly useful in dissecting the tangled ethical terrain traversed by both novels.

Formulating an approach based on the notion of the "Gothic-postmodernist" novel, as articulated by Beville (2014)—which utilises monstrous figures to "articulate that which exceeds representation"—this study also places both texts within a wider tradition of literature in which the monstrous stands in confrontation with historical trauma.

The worth of this study lies in its contribution to contemporary theoretical discussions regarding the cultural work that monsters perform in recent literature. By analysing how traditional archetypes of monsters are being reconfigured to confront modern anxieties, this paper will elucidate the ongoing cultural relevance of the monstrous in addressing societal injuries and negotiating ethical dilemmas. Additionally, the comparative character of this study demonstrates that monster symbolism cuts across cultural boundaries while remaining attuned to specific historical and social contingencies—a dynamic denoted by Halberstam (1995) as the "technology of monsters."

This paper employs a theoretical framework that draws upon monster theory, myth transformation, and postcolonial criticism to analyse the complex symbolic function of monstrous figures in these narratives. Building on Shildrick's (2002) concept of "leaky distinctions" between the monstrous and the human, and Braidotti's (2013) posthumanist approach to monstrosity as a site of potential transformation, this analysis examines how both novels deploy monstrous figures to challenge conventional boundaries and identities. Additionally, this study engages with Butler's (2009) work on the "grievability" of different bodies in contexts of violence—a concept particularly relevant to Saadawi's corpse-assembled protagonist.

2. LITERTURE REVIEW

Cultural symbols have always had a dynamic portrayal in the realm of mythical creatures, which embody deeper human truths and values in various societies. Cohen (1996) states that these creatures influence not only the understanding of cultural identities but also, in an ever-so-complex manner, represent the emotional alternatives that human beings have developed when confronting existing threats. So-called original monsters are now being recast in contemporary narratives as embodiments of modern anxiety, having been cross-regulated with the spiritual and moral ethos of ancient cultures. A cultural transformation is taking place in which monsters are being equated with psychological, societal, and existential crises.

Mythological stories have been reinterpreted through complex processes over time, bringing forth new meanings. As Niles (2019) states, archetypes of social monsters in dissension are reawakened by modern writers to address pressing socioeconomic matters. For instance, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* could represent the cultural concern over untrammelled ambition and the exploration of science—concerns born from technological advancement and its effects on society. In much the same manner, Tolkien's depiction of creatures like orcs and dragons challenges rigid moral dichotomies, revealing that these characters tread the delicate line of ethical ambiguity, reflecting societal fear (Cohen, 1996).

As Cohen (1996) argues in his writing on monster theory, monsters embody the fears and anxieties of their time. Monsters found in literature serve as potent metaphors for various facets of contemporary anxiety, such as existential dread, environmental crises, and identity crises in an increasingly fractured society. The newly construed Minotaur found in recent literature reflects more personal crises related to identity and the societal pressures encountered in contemporary urban frameworks.

The canonical monsters of vampires, werewolves, and dragons retain their modern layers through extensive rewriting in contemporary literature and cinema—evolving from mythological threats into more complex representations of modern concerns. With their allegiance to multifaceted symbolic expression, these monsters serve as cultural gauges for measuring how societies confront and navigate the fluid anxieties they experience. The disturbing facts reflect cities where monsters have become far less external enemies and more overseers of internalised trauma, marginalisation, and suppressed truth.

This dramatic scenario seems to unfold when modern authors simultaneously choose their mythic beasts as a means to explore and expound upon contemporary anxieties. Critics pay special attention to the works of authors like Neil Gaiman and Junot Díaz, who create ambiguous monsters that disrupt the dichotomies of good and evil. Gaiman's *American Gods* presents folklore that, even at its limits, transforms familiar creatures into incarnations of subconscious fears and modern existential quandaries (Gaiman, 2001). These beings express the fracturing of identity and psychological dislocation in modern existence (Rizaq & Nurcahyani, 2022).

Sylvia Plath's poetry offers a compelling example of mythological reappropriation. Plath takes figures such as Medusa, Electra, and Persephone to symbolise the intersection between her private distress and a feminist critique of patriarchy. These inherited myths

become vehicles for the expression of suicide, parental trauma, and existential despair (Hasan, 2023).

In fantasy literature, traditional creatures are cast in speculative settings as a means of examining questions of psychology and existence. Laszkiewicz (2014) illustrates how the evolving unicorns of Peter S. Beagle become less pure symbols of innocence and more complex beings of loss, memory, and transformation—an indictment of the sacrosanctity of old myths and a reflection of the fragility of postmodern life.

The novel *When the Mountains Are Served* by Chingiz Aitmatov represents the postmodern reworking of mythological motifs to articulate ecological and existential crises. The symbolic monsters from Kyrgyz folklore, instead of acting as horrible foes, represent the disintegration of the spirit and the natural world in present times (Maulenov & Matbek, 2022). In a similar context, Central Asian neo-mythological literature represents a blending of traditional mythic creatures with references to human-environment interactions and socio-political critique, demonstrating how monsters become narrative instruments to confront contemporary values (Kadirova & Madrakhimova, 2024).

Gothic literature has always served as a space for the exploration of the uncanny and the repressed, wherein monsters, instead of being cast as evil beings, reflect psychological disturbances and societal anxieties as extensions of the self and its relationship to fractured worlds (Ortiz Tueba, 2016). Modern media reinforces this trend through body horror and speculative fiction, where bodily monstrosity becomes a site for grappling with technological, environmental, and existential anxieties—questioning the limits of humanity and confronting fears of bodily vulnerability and the dissolution of identity (Reyes, 2024).

Within the Francoist and transitional periods, Spanish horror cinema dissects tensions surrounding transformation, modernisation, consumerism, and, not least, the latent authoritarianism of Spanish culture through its monsters—werewolves, vampires, and cannibals. The repressions and contradictions of a rapidly transforming society served as metaphors for these monsters (Hartson, 2015). In the same vein, Israeli zombie films *Poisoned* and *Cannon Fodder* internalise the undead, marking an unravelling national identity and offering a critique of militarised nationalism (Gershenson, 2021).

In children's and young adult literature, ancient monsters are employed to represent issues such as identity crises, alienation, and social upheaval, thus allowing the young audience to wrestle with complex emotions through familiar archetypes (Marciniak, 2020). This adaptation of traditional monsters for modern readers illustrates that their symbolism is culturally maintained, yet they become more direct instruments for exploring contemporary problems.

The revisionist activities involving monsters move beyond the Western context into broader cultural landscapes. Connor Mabry examines how post-1960s disillusionment and imperial anxieties in America transform the Irish mythological hero Cú Chulainn in

T.C. Boyle's *Water Music*. The mythic past, then, becomes a reflection of cultural destabilisation and a critique of imperialist ideologies (Mabry, 2018).

Cultural rethinking is also evident in Jewish art from Eastern Galicia; symbols such as Leviathan are reimagined not to frighten, but to speak of hope, messianic expectations, and the soul's journey—thus transforming the traditional sea monster into a symbol of spiritual awaiting (Levkovych, 2023). Aquatic monsters, therefore, draw from ancient traditions; however, they find new manifestations as liminal figures of humanity confronting change and chaos (Beggiora, 2022). In Circassian myths, the transformation of ancient deities and protectors through modernised rituals becomes a cultural response to globalisation and the erosion of sacred traditions (Gucheva, 2019).

The cycles of cultural anxiety in the past have found expression in the ever-changing symbolism of such traditional creatures as owls in Greece. Owls, once symbols of wisdom and divine favour, eventually became symbols of doom, signalling a change in attitudes toward knowledge, fear, and death. This duality exemplifies how monsters and symbolic animals shift their roles in response to collective emotional and cultural states (Bontzorlos, Johnson, Poirazidis, & Roulin, 2023).

In unexpected contexts such as medical education, monsters appear in student-generated comics that metaphorically express the psychological strain of clinical training. Very much in the spirit of narrative engagement, the horror figures—vampires, zombies, and ghosts—function as symbols for deeper anxieties of death, alienation, and ethical uncertainty in medical practice (George & Green, 2015). This suggests just how flexible monster symbolism can be in varied professional and educational contexts. Underlying all these examples is a recognition that monsters act as mirrors to societies perceiving themselves in flux. They are not only emblems of primal fears but also reflections of a range of psychological conditions relevant to shifting cultural climates. Myths, as Bowman et al. (2017) have argued, are born from anxiety and curiosity—two enduring impulses that continue to shape contemporary adaptations of monstrous figures.

Hence, the reinterpretation of traditional beasts into symbols of modern-day anxiety does not mark a departure from their origins but, rather, a continuation of their role as cultural signifiers. The relevance of monsters lies in their transformation—from external dangers into personal representations of our most profound fears. The review of the literature suggested that traditional monsters have been reconceptualised to shed light on current anxieties across a range of literature and cultural contexts, confirming their potency as manifestations of our ongoing fears and cultural anxieties.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework of monster theory, myth transformation, and postcolonial criticism in analysing the new meanings that contemporary authors give to the traditional beasts. Especially in Cohen (1996), monster theory, particularly the seven theses, holds the grounding for considering monsters as cultural bodies, embodying societal anxieties, and resisting established categories. Cohen's contention that "the monster's body is a cultural body" directs a critical lens to

analyse Whatsitsname and Querig as examples of the represented collective trauma and fractured identities in their specific contexts.

The myth transformation framework relies on Warner's theories of myths and their reinterpretations in different cultures and historical moments. This angle allows Saadawi and Ishiguro to turn the Frankenstein tale and the Arthurian dragon myth, respectively, into modern media that reflect contemporary anxieties. This approach is applied to explore how, in these mythic adaptations, specific struggles in post-conflict settings find their source of illumination.

The postcolonial theoretical foundation utilises Said's concepts of Orientalism; this is used to interpret to representation of the "Other", Spivak's notion of the subaltern voice drawing attention to silenced marginalised perspectives, and thus Bhabha's theories of hybridity and mimicry for unravelling complex identity formations in postcolonial contexts. All these ideas fit well into analysing Saadawi's Whatsitsname as the embodiment of fragmented Iraqi identity because of foreign incursion.

The framework is complemented by Shildrick's (2002) leaky distinctions between monstrous and human, Braidotti's (2013) posthumanistic approach towards monstrosity as a zone of transformation, along with Butler's (2009) research on "grievability" of different bodies due to violent contexts. All these theories together drive nuanced analysis on how monster symbolism goes beyond cultural boundaries but remains attentive to specific historical situations and, therefore, fulfils necessary symbolic functions to "make sense of the inexplicable" in post-conflict contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

Using a comparative literary analysis allows the investigation of how Ahmed Saadawi and Kazuo Ishiguro each reinterpret monster archetypes in Frankenstein in Baghdad and The Buried Giant, respectively. The methods of investigation include a close reading of each novel that employs textual evidence to support an argument that every monstrous figure in each narrative functions as a representative and complex metaphor for trauma, fractured communities, and the multifaceted relationship between memory and forgetting in post-conflict societies.

These selections are deliberate. Whereas both Frankenstein in Baghdad and The Buried Giant are set in different cultural contexts—namely, post-invasion Iraq and post-Arthurian Britain—they share concern with the monstrous as a means of confronting lingering legacies of conflict and the anguishes that overshadow societies dealing with their aftermath. This concern provides a thematic foundation that allows analysing the literary works comparatively while illuminating the different methods that authors use to reinterpret established archetypes and engage with contemporary concerns.

Which sorts the analysis properly under three headings: monster theory, myth transformation, and postcolonial theory. Cohen's "Monster Theory: Reading Culture" influences the theories on the monster, which is then used to study how the monster persons in each of these novels represent cultural anxieties, violate sociocultural norms

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and challenge established categories. The discourse examines how Whatsitsname and Querig articulate fears from society, moral greyness, and confusion of habitual lines. The entire section is articulated around Cohen's seven theses of monster theory. The said myth transformation will consider the work of Marina Warner on myths and their reinterpretations across cultures and historical moments in analysing the adaptations and subversions of myths—the Frankenstein story and the Arthurian dragon archetype—by Saadawi and Ishiguro, who call upon present anxieties.

This discussion will consider how this mythic effect becomes a source of illumination for the particular horrors and dilemmas confronting each writer in his chosen setting. The dynamism of myth, about issues of contemporary concern, is key to Warner's approach. The postcolonial theoretical understanding draws on the postcolonial field of inquiry to retrieve the colonial and postcolonial fears and the lingering legacy of historical conflict incarnated by the monstrous figures in each work of fiction. The analysis will also tackle issues related to power dynamics, historical erasure, and identity formation along the spectrum of colonial and postcolonial societies. The ideas of significant postcolonial theorists informing this work will include Edward Said, with his perspective on Orientalism as a framework for apprehending the representation of the "Other"; Gayatri Spivak, concerning the subaltern voice, which draws our attention to the silencing of marginalized perspectives; and Homi Bhabha, about hybridity and mimicry as a way to unravel the complexity of identity formation in postcolonial contexts.

Textual passages selected for analysis were based on the following criteria: relevance to the theme- the passages chosen were directly related to key themes of trauma, social fragmentation, memory, forgetting, and the reinterpretation of monster archetypes; illustrative capacity- the passages were selected on their capacity to illustrate most effectively complicated symbolism of the monstrous figures allied with the broader socio-political context; critical importance-passages considered by prior scholars to be central to grasping the novels and their thematic concerns were preferred, as found in existing critical texts.

Through this approach, a nuanced and comprehensive analysis will reveal the nuanced ways in which Saadawi and Ishiguro manipulate monstrosity to mediate the psychological, social, and political terrains of countries contending with the consequences of conflict. Ultimately, this article aims to expose new insights into the far-reaching ability of literature to confront and interrogate the most excruciating aspects of our shared human experience through the lens of monster theory, myth transformation, and postcolonial theory.

3.1 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Some of the methodological limitations in this comparative literary analysis need to be acknowledged. The first major limitation is that this study is limited to only two novels from very different cultural traditions, with result in limited cross-cultural insights. Although the selected texts allow for an intense analysis, a more extensive corpus could include other works from other cultural contexts, granting a much wider comparative scope and thereby possibly revealing broader patterns of monster symbolism in contemporary literature.

Secondly, the comparative analysis makes extensive use of translations of Saadawi's work from Arabic into English. Even with well-qualified translators, some cultural nuances and linguistic subtleties may have been lost in translation, thereby jeopardising the interpretative accuracy of the translations considered. Such limitations become significant in the present analysis with regard to culturally specific representations of monsters and their symbolism.

Thirdly, the researcher's positionality outside the Iraqi cultural context needs to be weighed in interpreting the cultural specificity of Saadawi's monster representation. Such an exterior perspective may act as a hindrance to grasping, with any depth, culturally embedded meanings and allusions of Frankenstein in Baghdad.

This comparison and cultural analysis remains sensitive to accusations of oversimplification or misrepresentation of complex cultural narratives. Consciously resisting the imposition of Western theoretical frameworks that may favour Eurocentric interpretations in analysing Arabic literary traditions with Western ones, the study instead maintains cultural specificity while attempting to establish meaningful cross-cultural links in monster symbolism.

The study is also ethically bound to weigh trauma narratives with appropriate sensitivity, especially within the work of literature engaged with real historical conflicts and collective suffering. It seeks to engage critically with narratives of trauma and to dignify them without appropriating the traumatic content of the novels in service of academic critique.

Finally, this comparative methodology is built to guarantee that an equal balance of focus exists for both sets of texts-understating neither cultural tradition nor theoretical approach. The ethical concern of treating both sets of texts as equally important has shaped the selection of methods and has influenced how the proportion of attention devoted to each is.

4. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETIVE FINDINGS

4.1 Morphological Analysis of Monstrous Entities

Both Ahmed Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad and Kazuo Ishiguro's The Buried Giant borrow monstrous figures in allegories of trauma, the fragmentation of societies, and the complex relationships with memories and forgetting them in post-conflict spaces. Saadawi himself Whatsitsname, a hybrid creature constructed out of the dismembered parts of victims of sectarian violence in Baghdad, becomes the very embodiment of fragmented Iraqi identity and also the raw realities of that society colliding with what has become an impact of war. This composite, being created as he explains, was for granting dignity to the disqualified dead: "so it wouldn't be treated as rubbish, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial" (Saadawi, 2018, p. 28). Ironically, the process of bringing the creature to life results in a monster that contributes further to the ultimate violence of the city. Contrastingly, in Ishiguro's The Buried Giant, the dragon Querig, whose very breath conditions forgetfulness, is a metaphor constructed for the Deliberate obliteration of historical memory and the resulting moral quandaries of

building peace upon a foundation of forced oblivion. As the narrative voice questions, "Without this she-dragon's breath, would peace ever have come? Look how we live now, sir! Old foes as cousins, village by village," (Ishiguro, 2015, p.259), denoting the ambiguity inherent in the dragon-esque influence on stability.

4.2 Symbolic Function of Monstrous Figures in Post-Conflict Contexts

While Whatsitsname is termed as "the first true Iraqi citizen" (Saadawi, 2018, p. 124). In the declaration, the striking paradox of such a national identity prevails in post-invasion times, formed from different body parts that speak of different ethnicities and backgrounds. The monstrous form stands above such constructions, disclosing the impossibility of a single national identity amid deep divisions. The book may therefore bring into question the whole notion of one Iraq in this atmosphere of violence and mistrust. Querig's role in The Buried Giant, as with the onset of amnesia, has hope of bringing peace between the Britons and the Saxons, but is ultimately only a fragile peace, unstable at best, posing serious questions about the long-term effects of masking historical truths.

Both novels exhibit a sophisticated engagement with cultural traditions and existing mythologies to highlight their monstrous representations. Frankenstein in Baghdad intricately mixes the Western Frankenstein myth into Arab folklore, such as the jinn, and Islamic ones, such as the principle of qisas (retribution). That makes it a mosaic-cultural hybrid that demonstrates Iraqi identity as it is today, complex and multifaceted. The Buried Giant is thus based on Arthurian legends and Anglo-Saxon dragon myths. It challenges the universal claim of the hero in destroying dragons and leads to a discussion on the ethical ramifications of selective memory and the burden of the past.

4.3 Comparative Textual Evidence: Memory and Identity Fragmentation

Saadawi's reinvented Frankenstein analysis thus contrasts with Shelley's on motivation and moral ambivalence. Victor Frankenstein's creation is born of scientific ambition and a desire to conquer mortality. Hadi's act, on the contrary, is performed without the weight of personal gain. Hadi acts in memory of the dead while consuming violence in post-invasion Baghdad. This different motivation corresponds to the immediate human cost that the novel underscores to place clear moral boundaries in question. As Whatsitsname states, there are no innocents who are completely innocent or criminals who are completely criminal.

In The Buried Giant, on the other hand, Ishiguro pushes the envelope of traditional heroism with Gawain's task of protecting Querig lest the peace remain so tenuous as to invite a rethinking of ethical implications vis-à-vis remembering or forgetting the violence of war. Axl reflects: "For I suppose there's some would hear my words and think our love flawed and broken. But God will know the slow tread of an old couple's love for each other, and understand how black shadows make part of its whole."(Ishiguro, 2015, p.285), highlighting the subjective and complex nature of love, memory, and reconciliation.

According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's assertion that "the monster's body is a cultural body", wherein it can be interpreted that both monstrous figures in these two novels comprise or are made representations of collective trauma and societal anxieties as well. Whatsitsname in Frankenstein in Baghdad represents the reality of pervasive fear towards further violence and social deconstruction, which it explores through the uncertainty and moral ambiguity of its rebuilding society. This is echoed in The Buried Giant under the dragon Querig and the fear regarding the lifting of the mist, symbolic of the anxiety tied to the recalling of painful truths and the possibility of renewed conflict. While imposed amnesia gives the impression of temporary refuge, it comes with a disquiet and the fear of what it might reveal. As Beatrice lamentably expresses, "It's queer the way the world's forgetting people and things from only yesterday and the day before that. Like a sickness come over us all."."(Ishiguro, 2015, p.22) Both novels use monstrosity in a way that is a significant metaphorical representation of deep and complicated wounds of conflict in societies and the human psyche, and a journey through the difficulties of trauma, memory, and an elusive path toward healing and reconciliation.

5. DISCUSSION

The traditional imagery of monsters in literature has undergone reimagining in Ahmed Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad and Kazuo Ishiguro's The Buried Giant, particularly about contemporary anxieties such as trauma, fragmented identities, and post-colonialism. This comparison raises several notable ideas about how monster symbolism in contemporary literature has transformed and remains relevant in the processing of collective trauma and as a literary device. Cohen (1996) argues that monsters can be understood as symbols of anxiety and/or tension, in other words, a cultural barometer, and monsters serve the purpose of visualising certain horrors in cultures. Both the Whatsitsname in Frankenstein in Baghdad and Querig in The Buried Giant heighten metaphorically relevant fears within their contemporaneous and cultural spaces. The Whatsitsname is a monster made from the remains of bombing victims, depicting sectarian rupture in post-invasion Iraq and highlighting how violent representation fractures an experience of national identity. Querig's breath, signalling amnesia, relates to worries about historicized memory and reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

This adapted characterisation of monster symbolism is exactly what Asma (2009) argues about monsters being "cultural categories" that change depending on the needs of society. Both novels shift the cultural category of traditional monsters, which signify an embodiment of an outside "threat," into a symbol of internal, societal, or community struggle. The Whatsitsname's statement that it is "the first true Iraqi citizen" expresses a paradox of national identity in a fractured state, as Querig, through a kind of collective amnesia, is the source of peacekeeping, which raises difficult questions about the ethical implications of reuniting. Both novels demonstrate an ambiguous, therefore, a more nuanced engagement with what Bowman et al. (2017) name the emotions of fear and curiosity, which drive the creation of mythical narratives. Saadawi was able to prove the aforementioned cultural hybrid that Rizaq and Nurcahyani (2022) refer to in their analysis of Neil Gaiman's works. Saadawi melds the Western Frankenstein with Arab Folklore and Islamic terminology to construct a monster that is cross-cultural, while also

tending to the immediate, as well as historical, social, and contextual position of post-invasion Iraq.

This mixture conforms with what Laszkiewicz (2014) describes in the transformation of Peter S. Beagle's unicorns: transforming how traditional creatures evolved into more complex hybrids indicative of the loss of memory and change. In Saadawi's text, the narrative of Frankenstein is morphed along the same lines as outlined above in the transmutation of Shelley's contemplation of a scientist's hubris in the first Frankenstein novel into a discussion of sectarian violence and a disordered national identity. The Whatsitsname reflects the physical and moral indeterminacy of a place that has experienced war—when the creature observes, there are "no innocents, who are completely innocent, or people who are completely criminals."

Morally, both novelists engage in the depiction of monsters in a manner that fits Reyes's (2024) definition of the function of body horror in speculative fiction, which creates sites of technological, environmental, and existential anxiety regarding the boundaries of the human. The Whatsitsname continues to physically deteriorate, which requires constant replenishment from new victims. This vividly represents the violence cycle perpetuated within the precincts of Baghdad. Similarly, Querig's breath generates an ethical quandary that transcends the normal scope of both justice and reconciliation.

Trueba (2016), therefore, states that Gothic monsters are entities that do not easily abide by clear moral definitions, but rather serve as extensions of the self and that self's fractured relationship with the world. Far from being easily categorised into simply good or bad, the monstrous figures in both novels occupy liminal spaces that compel readers to wrestle with uncomfortable questions regarding justice, memory, and collective responsibility.

Both texts highlight the significance of the theme of memory and forgetting that Maulenov and Matbek (2022) address in their analysis of Aitmatov. Memory and forgetting demonstrate mythological elements being used to express existential crises and spiritual decay. Querig's breath, which induces amnesia, serves as an allegory for intentional forgetfulness of historical memory in the context of *The Buried Giant*: will peace that is built on forgetting ever be real? That tension with remembering and forgetting reveals deeper anxieties of historical trauma and possible reconciliation.

Furthermore, Whatsitsname in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* embodies what George and Green (2015) observe in their analysis of medical students' comics, which is similar to the way monster archetypes portray deeper fears of mortality, alienation, and ethical ambiguity. The creature's vengeance, which at first seems justifiable, becomes indiscriminate and ultimately destructive, mirroring the cycle of violence in Iraq and the moral compromises made for the sake of justice.

These monster portraits align with Mabry's (2018) appropriation of how Irish mythic heroes are reconfigured to mirror imperial anxieties. From such perspectives, the Whatsitsname in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* can be regarded as an expression of the

colonising and postcolonial anxieties coursing through contemporary Iraqi society following the foreign invasion. The hybridism of the creature, being made out of body parts from several ethnic and religious backgrounds, symbolises the complex and subjective legacy of colonial intrusion into national identity.

Ishiguro's dragon in *The Buried Giant* can be read through Gershenson's (2021) analysis of Israeli films about zombies: the dragon embodies the image of a dying national identity and critiques militarised nationalism. Imposed amnesia in post-Arthur Britain thus serves as a metaphor for politically constructed historical narratives often emerging at the closure of war in societies torn by colonial legacies.

Both novels showcase what Niles (2019) points out as adaptations of mythology in contemporary literature to transform familiar monster archetypes into vehicles with which to discuss problems of today. Saadawi's reinterpretation of Shelley's original *Frankenstein* and Ishiguro's subversion of the Arthurian dragon myth represent this transformation, modifying the age-old narratives to address present-day issues.

This transformation follows what Kadirova and Madrakhimova (2024) said about neo-mythological literature by mixing traditional mythical beings with human-nature interaction and socio-political critique. Both novels exploit their monstrous figures not just as antagonists but as allegories for societal fragmentation, historical trauma, and moral dilemmas inherent in post-conflict reconciliation.

In addition to the individual novels at hand, the scope of this study touches on the continuing significance of the monster metaphor in literature today. According to the Introduction of The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous by Mittman and Dendle (2012), monsters are "meaning machines" that represent the anxieties of any given period. These monsters provide a complex re-examination of the archetypical monster in Frankenstein in Baghdad and The Buried Giant, illustrating that the monstrous power to redress social trauma and negotiate ethical ambiguity remains a powerful narrative device.

Furthermore, the comparative perspective illustrates how monsters as symbols travel across cultures and remain responsive to specific historical and social occasions. This is what Halberstam (1995) would call a "technology of monsters," that produces meaning across cultural thresholds, emphasises the universal sides of human anxieties, and does not forget to acknowledge the cultural particular avatars of that anxiety. In sum, the reinterpreting of traditional monsters into modern manifestations of anxiety in Frankenstein in Baghdad and The Buried Giant builds a trend in contemporary literature that seeks to use familiar monster representations to articulate the complexities that accompany postmodern existence. In successfully reformulating these traditional figures into contemporary exists of trauma, fragmented identity, historical memory, and moral ambiguity, Saadawi and Ishiguro demonstrate that the implication of the monstrous as a cultural category that reflects our deepest fears and anxieties continues to be relevant.

6. CONCLUSION

Through this study, the re-envisioning of traditional monster archetypes in Ahmed Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad and Kazuo Ishiguro's The Buried Giant has been assessed, highlighting how these contemporary writers rework well-known monstrous figures to become potent conduits for revealing modern anxieties. This comparative analysis has revealed that both novels seize on monstrous beings—the hybrid Whatsitsname and Querig, the dragon whose breath enforces collective amnesia—as nuanced allegories of trauma, social fragmentation, and the moral questions surrounding post-war reconciliation. The findings suggest a few notable trends, presenting the contemporary reconceptualisation of monster symbolism.

First, both authors have adapted established monster archetypes to speak to the particular concerns of their cultural and historical contexts simultaneously -- and respond to and reference universal themes connected to memory, justice, and collective responsibility. The prototypical nature of monsters must always validate Cohen's (1996) idea that monsters encompass cultural barometers, reflecting the relevant fears of the time, but remain liquid to changing social fears.

About that, both monstrosities occupy moral liminal spaces that unsettle preordained moral boundary lines. Unlike their traditional counterparts, which were often models for easy external threats, Whatsitsname and Querig defy easy categorisation as heroes or villains; both exist in morally ambiguous territory, compelling readers to grapple with the real-life and uneasy questions of justice, memory ethics, and healing in a violence-affected environment. It is in this moral complexity that Botting (2013) observes how postmodern monsters are assuming the shape of "ambivalent figures" that unsettle the spatial dichotomies that delineate moral equivalence.

A third aspect is that the two novels provide evidence of strong interaction with cultural hybridity, using Western literary traditions with local mythologies to fashion monsters that go beyond cultural barriers. Saadawi has integrated the Frankenstein narrative with Arab folklore and Islamic concepts, which serves as a prime example of what Bhabha's concept of hybridity identifies: the potential to challenge established categories and create new possibilities for understanding. Similarly, Ishiguro's subversion of the Arthurian dragon myth transforms a traditional symbol of external threat into a complex metaphor for collective amnesia and historical erasure.

Apart from literary theorising, the implications found here suggest a wider cultural concern. The enduring resonance of monsters in contemporary literature implies that, concerning processing collective traumas and negotiating complex moral quandaries, societies might still require symbolic vehicles. Moreover, the turn of classical monsters into avatars of internal and societal fragmentation speaks to Weinstock's (2020) identification of a lucid trend taking shape toward monsters representing "the return of the repressed" and thus metaphors for social marginalisation and psychological fragmentation.

This study is in some ways limited to only these two novels from separate cultural traditions. Much broader works that collectively reimagine the properties of traditional monsters in multiple cultural contexts could come between these two different texts in future research. The reception among readers in other cultural settings of these newly imagined monsters would also assist in shedding light on the transcultural appeal of monster symbols.

In summary, a far more sophisticated reinterpretation of traditional beasts has again been demonstrated in Frankenstein in Baghdad and The Buried Giant, the continued might of the monstrous, as a cultural category, capable of reflecting our deepest fears and anxieties. By turning familiar monster archetypes into complex allegories for modern concerns, Saadawi and Ishiguro continue the long tradition of monsters as cultural signifiers while adapting them to address the very concerns that characterise this historical moment. Their research indicates that monsters have significance for us because they develop from external dangers to content that amounts to the most urgent social and existential concerns that we continue to face—this process of development is what Halberstam (1995) calls the "technology of monsters" that produces meaning across cultural boundaries.

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