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DOUBLE ESTRANGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENTS IN
ARABIC SCIENCE FICTION: AḤMAD SAʿDĀWI'S
FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD

Iraqi novelist Aḥmad Saʿdāwi's Arabic science fiction (SF) novel *Farānkshtāyin fī Baghdād*, published in 2013, was awarded the International Prize for Arabic Fiction [IPAF] for 2014. Saʿdāwi's *Farānkshtāyin fī Baghdād* is the first work of SF to be awarded the IPAF. Part of the prize award is to have the novel translated into English; the translation by Jonathan Wright was published early in 2018.[1] This makes Saʿdāwi's novel one of the very few works of Arabic SF available in Western languages. The prizes won by and attention given to *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (*FB*) are well deserved. The novel is a well-structured, scathing, and a very funny critique of Iraqi society; it depicts not only the violence wrought upon the country by the 2003 American invasion, but also the endemic fractiousness, corruption, and sectarianism that predated the war and that flourished after the destruction of the Saddam Hussein regime. Its central metaphor of a self-aware, constantly decaying monster, the *Shusmitu* or "Whatshisname," both philosophical and crudely violent, assembled from the victims of sectarian conflict by an addled drunkard, provides both justification for and counterpoint to the desires of every rational character in the novel to flee their home and migrate, internally or externally, to a place less riven by brutality and violence. *FB* uses the historically most common trope of Arabic SF (ASF), double estrangement, to critique both the acute crisis of sectarian violence and the long-term stagnation and decline of scientific and technological development in Iraq since its Golden Age a thousand years ago. The text also serves as a powerful illustration of how ASF has evolved beyond many of the tropes that predominated in its early decades in the latter half of the last century and which served to contain SF and render it less threatening to readers of literary fiction in Arabic. Saʿdāwi uses layered and three-dimensional, rather than "flattened," characters to portray the effects of rationalism and (imported) technology upon Iraqis. Nor does he "patch" its narrative in order to contain the threat

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to traditional society posed by science: *FB* frames traditional culture, rather than technology, as dehumanizing.

THE CREATOR AND THE MONSTER

At a very abstract level, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is similar to Shelley's original *Frankenstein*, first published in 1818. Nested narratives provide the story of a man who builds a hideous simulacrum of a human; the monster engages in a great deal of violence and speaks articulately about the liminal status of its own humanity. Yet the resemblance largely ends there: Sa'dāwi's text differs strongly in its portrayals of the creator, the monster, their relationship, the monster's education, and its conception of its own purpose or mission now that it has come to life. For Brian Aldiss, whose theory of SF is that it is "the search for a definition of man and his[2] status in the universe," Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the urtext of SF, in that it combines social criticism with new scientific ideas.[3] *FB* hews closer to Suvin's theory than to that of Aldiss: the characters have nothing like Victor Frankenstein's privilege and are too busy trying to survive to engage in existential pondering. Zoe Beenstock argues that the refusal of humans in *Frankenstein* to socialize with the monster "presents a sustained engagement with one of the major questions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political theory: whether individualism is compatible with sociability."[4] In *FB*, by contrast, the Whatshisname is quite social, but the political question is different: Sa'dāwi's text is asking whether meaningful sociability is even possible in the *sauve qui peut* atmosphere of the aftermath of the invasion. The novel poses migration and exile as the rational choice for anyone who can afford to leave. In an Iraq where the response to a wrecked and occupied country is to try to enforce a univocal national identity, exile is a matter of survival for religious and ethnic minorities.

Frankenstein gives us Victor as archetypal natural philosopher of his day and would-be Romantic hero: he uses the most modern techniques and knowledge at his disposal to wrest control of life and death from nature. His father's wealth and influence enable him to enter the scientific elite, and while he deplores the consequences of his hubris in creating the monster, he is certainly willing to send poor Justine Moritz to her death rather than risk his status by acknowledging his responsibility. For Bill Hughes, Victor Frankenstein is a figure of toxic and destructive individuality;[5] for David McNally, Victor's pursuit of knowledge at the expense of sociability is the problem.[6] Victor is *too much* the individual Romantic hero, *too much* a would-be Prometheus; he embodies an individual excess only available

to the privileged and ultimately destructive to a polity based on sociability.

Saʿdāwi's text provides a very different model of a creator. Hadi is introduced as "the liar"—this is the chapter title—from the perspective of a German journalist who "hadn't planned to listen to a long, complicated story told by a junk dealer with bulging eyes,[7] who reeked of alcohol and whose tattered clothes were dotted with cigarette burns" (18–19).[8] He is so well-known as a liar that he "would need witnesses to corroborate a claim of having had fried eggs for breakfast, let alone a story about a naked corpse made up of the body parts of people killed in explosions" (56). He lives in a house so ruined that even the greedy local realtor hasn't bothered to appropriate it; the locals refer to the house as "the Jewish ruin."[9] He and his partner Nahem, killed several months before the events of the text by a car bomb, drive around Baghdad in a horse-drawn cart as if it were still 1818, buying household junk, repairing and reselling it. Though Nahem spent the profits on his family, Hadi's main expense is *ʿaraq*, rendered in the translation as *arak*, the traditional distilled spirit of the region, derived from the Arabic word for "sweat" and usually flavored with anise. While Nahem's death caused Hadi to become belligerent, by the time the events of the text begin, he has subsided into an alcoholic haze. Once the story of the Whatshisname becomes generally known, he wishes to return to his default state:

> Buying stuff that people wanted to get rid of, restoring it, and selling it again, without thoughts of amassing a fortune or expanding his operations, because that would be too much trouble, like having a disease. He was interested in having cash in his pocket, nothing more, enough to sleep with women whenever he wanted and to buy a drink. To eat and drink what he wanted, to go to sleep and wake up without anyone watching over him and without responsibilities. (87)

Unlike Victor, who excels at his studies of natural philosophy because he is determined to show the world he is a genius,[10] Hadi is almost anti-ambitious, someone who just wants to live for the moment. His creation of the Whatshisname as a living being is anything but purposeful; in fact, he has nothing to do with its animation. Here, he tells the story of sewing the last piece—the nose, which he found lying on the ground after a suicide bomb—to the German journalist:

> It was a horrible job, one he had done without anyone's help, and somehow it didn't seem to make any sense despite all the arguments he used when trying to explain himself to his listeners.
>
> "I wanted to hand him over to the forensics department, because it was a complete corpse that had been left in the streets like trash. It's a human being, guys, a person," he told them.
>
> "But it wasn't a complete corpse. You made it complete," someone objected.
>
> "I made it complete so it wouldn't be treated as trash, so it would be respected like other dead people and given a proper burial," Hadi explained. (26–27)

His reasons for creating the corpse are simultaneously blasphemous and drawn from concern for traditional beliefs—proper burial in preparation for bodily resurrection. Though he's addled, and like every other major character in the novel except Elishva doesn't practice religion, Hadi is fundamentally humane. Much later, when Hadi, in fear that people will hold him responsible for the monster behind the killings in Baghdad, disavows the story, journalist Mahmoud asks Hadi's friend Aziz about it. Aziz explains that when Nahem was killed, Hadi went to the mortuary:

> Hadi was shocked to see that the bodies of explosion victims were all mixed up together and to hear the mortuary worker tell him to put a body together and carry it off—take this leg and this arm and so on. … Hadi was changed after that. He didn't speak for two weeks, after which he went back to laughing and telling stories. (221–22)

We can read Hadi as traumatized: someone who is compelled to repeat the circumstances of his trauma and who is eventually able to transform the trauma into narrative, in accordance with the standard models of trauma theory in literature.[11] In this manner, he does echo Victor, whose original inspiration for his studies of life is his mother's death. Yet *FB* presents us with a barely functional creator who has no clear idea what he's doing and who ultimately is not responsible for animating the Whatshisname: the text twice calls him "merely a

conduit" (108 and 128) for events. The Arabic text uses the word *mamarr*,[12] a "corridor" or "passageway",[13] but both languages have Hadi as channel rather than deliberate creator.

The spirit of Hasib, a hotel security guard, inhabits the corpse because the truck bomb that killed him disintegrated his body;[14] assembly and habitation are accomplished by two different people, neither of whom sets out to create the monster. Elishva, an addled woman still believing her long-dead son Daniel alive, is the animator:

> With her words the old woman had animated this extraordinary composite—made up of disparate body parts and the soul of the hotel guard who had lost his life. The old woman brought him out of anonymity with the name she gave him: Daniel. (53)

For the rest of the chapter, he refers to himself, and the text refers to him in third person *style indirect libre*, as Daniel, but the Whatshisname never refers to himself as Daniel, and by the end of the chapter is simply the Whatshisname. He acknowledges that Hasib's spirit inhabits him, but he doesn't think of himself as Hasib, either. He is oddly comfortable with his existence, his exclusion from polite society due to his frightful looks, his never-explained supernatural strength and his replaceable body parts. We might well perceive the difference in demeanor between Frankenstein's monster and the Whatshisname as a result of nurturing or lack thereof. Both Hadi and Elishva are sufficiently abject—she is suffering from dementia, nearly blind, a religious minority, a widow whose whole family has emigrated—that he can accept the Whatshisname's looks as hardly worse than his and she can simply overlay him with an image of Daniel. She makes him meals and lets him rest in "his" house;[15] Hadi listens to his stories and helps him formulate his mission; he enables the Whatshisname to tell his own story by procuring a digital recorder from journalist Mahmoud. In the conversations between Frankenstein and his monster, despite the monster's clear physical superiority, there is still an element of awe or respect of a creation for its creator. The Whatshisname, however, retains superiority over his creator: when he tells Hadi that Hadi is the living person most responsible for Hasib's death,[16] Hadi begs abjectly to be killed last: "I don't want to live anyway. What's living to someone like me? I'm nothing, whether I live or die. I'm nothing. Kill me at the

end" (133). Victor Frankenstein ultimately comes to a similar conclusion and the same fate, but only at the very end of his narrative; Hadi respects his creation rather than repudiating it.

Frankenstein's monster comes to being without language and educates himself first by eavesdropping on the de Lacey family, then by overhearing them reading to the Arab Christian character Safie notable books of the time, including Volney's *The Ruins: Or a Survey of the Revolutions of Empires*. For Ian Balfour, the use of Volney's text places *Frankenstein* at the imperial center; this is one of many ways in which the novel addresses questions relating to the individual in conflict with the social.[17] Sa'dāwi's text, however, depicts a land that while once having been the center of an empire, is now the victim of imperialism in its most direct and destructive form. The Whatshisname, by contrast, has language from the start; his education first takes the form of conversations with Hadi and Elishva that formulate his mission to avenge the deaths of his constituent body parts.[18] Once Mahmoud's magazine article begins to attract attention to the Whatshisname's deeds and mission, he begins to attract followers, all of whom are madmen or charlatans and whose mutual rivalries are so strong as ultimately to kill them all. The first follower is the Magician—*al-sāḥir* in Arabic, which has a negative connotation; "sorcerer" might be a more precise translation[19]—who "says that I represent vengeance against anyone who has wronged him," where the "him" here clearly denotes the Magician, not the Whatshisname. (145) The second follower is the Sophist (*al-safsaṭi*), i.e. someone who makes clever but unsound arguments.[20] He "doesn't fully believe in anything himself," and believes in the Whatshisname for "one reason: that others had no faith in me and didn't even believe I existed" (146). His mission is morale. Then we have the Enemy (*al-ʿadw*), an officer in the counterterrorism infrastructure, who was "convinced that the justice he was looking for wasn't being achieved on the ground at all" (146). He provides intelligence. Next are the young madman, the old madman, and the eldest madman.[21] The eldest madman thinks the Whatshisname is the Savior and wants the reflected glory; the old madman thinks the Whatshisname is the "instrument of mass destruction"[22] presaging the arrival of the Savior and wants to accelerate the process (147). The young madman's beliefs are rather more interesting:

> [He] thinks I'm the model citizen that the Iraqi state has failed to produce, at least since the days of King Faisal I.[23] I'm made

up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds—
ethnicities, tribes, races, and social classes—I represent the
impossible mix that was never achieved in the past. I'm the first
true Iraqi citizen, he thinks. (146–47)

Iraq is so diverse, so internally conflicted, such a nation created by
imperialist Europeans drawing lines on a map and thereby almost
guaranteed to be deliberately designed to fail, that Saddam Hussein's
tyranny was virtually the only thing holding it together before 2003.
The young madman's metaphor of assembly implies that only in
response to massive, endemic sectarian violence can some kind of
composite unity be created wherein people prioritize their identity as
Iraqis over group, clan, tribe, or sect. It is a vivid reflection upon
society, but it is also not carried through to the rest of the text: the
various madmen and their followers kill one another in civil war
shortly thereafter.

The Whatshisname certainly doesn't follow through on the
idea: he is very aware how singular he is, and once nearly all the
followers are dead in the internecine conflict, he reformulates his
mission from one of simple vengeance upon the killers of his
constituent body parts to one of survival. "Whenever you kill someone,
that account is closed," the Magician said. "In other words, the person
who was seeking revenge has had his wish fulfilled, and the body part
that came from him starts to melt" (149). He begins to take "spare
parts," in Arabic *qiṭaʿ ghayār*, from whomever he finds.[24] This leads to
contemplation of whether and how his mission to avenge the innocent
will change if he takes parts from criminals, but the Sophist shrugs this
off by saying that Iraq is so riven by violence that essentially everyone
is both criminal and victim. Gradually, the Whatshisname finds
himself,

at a loss for what to do. He knew his mission was essentially to
kill, to kill new people every day, but he no longer had a clear
idea who should be killed or why … he thought he should
exploit [his] distinctive talent in the service of the innocent—in
the service of truth and justice. (200–1)

And indeed, most of the victims he kills are responsible for the endless
sectarian violence that marked Baghdad in 2005 and for many years
thereafter. Yet, he harvests just as many for spare parts, and by the end

of the text, his mission is pure self-interest:

> "I kill in order to keep going." This was his only justification. He didn't want to perish without understanding why he was dying and where he would go after death, so he clung to life, maybe even more than others, more than those who gave him their lives and parts of their bodies. (267–68)

Ordinary Iraqis come to regard him as a kind of superman who on balance slays criminals more than the innocent, but he is a figure of fear, nothing like a model citizen. Stephen Bertman argues that Frankenstein's monster is similar to the golem of Jewish mythology, but whereas Shelley's text transforms the monster from an opponent of persecution into an object thereof, Sa'dāwi's novel gives us a simple vector of violence.[25]

Western readers of the translation might well wonder why the Whatshisname does not attempt to attack the Americans, who are still occupying Baghdad in this period. After all, the United States is directly responsible for removing the very real safeguards that Hussein's tyranny created against sectarian violence. The most direct answer is that the Americans are an absent presence in the novel, hovering in the background as an implicit check on the ambitions of any sect or group to dominate the others. A more comprehensive answer, however, is that by focusing on violence upon Iraqis by Iraqis, and never confronting the Americans at all, *FB* is engaging in double estrangement, a trope that critiques its own society's failings, which existed long before the American invasion and which continue to exist even in the time the novel was written, after an Iraqi government replaced the Coalition Provisional Authority.

DOUBLE ESTRANGEMENT IN *FB*

Double estrangement is my own coinage in previous works on ASF for the means by which Arabic SF uses the modes and tropes of SF to critique its own society and history. An influential critical understanding of Western SF has its roots in Darko Suvin's theory of SF as facilitating "a dynamic transformation rather than a static mirroring of the author's environment."[26] Suvin, arguably the most influential Western theorist of SF, views the genre as functioning via *cognitive estrangement*, where the "cognitive" denotes scientific plausibility within the world of the particular work and

"estrangement" a means of rendering the familiar unfamiliar in order to facilitate a critical perspective on the familiar.[27] Suvin takes the word "estrangement" and the trope itself from German Expressionist theatre; specifically, the works of Brecht, who used this defamiliarization both for its own sake and for the purpose of social critique.[28] Suvin refers to estrangement in SF as providing "a shocking and distancing mirror above the all too familiar reality."[29]

Sa'dāwi uses the words and deeds of the Whatshisname and others' reaction to him to make a critique of political and social conditions in post-invasion Iraq: this is the first layer of estrangement. At the same time, in the second layer, the text reflects upon the gap in scientific literacy and production between the Iraq of the Islamic Golden Age, where it was the center of the world's most scientifically advanced empire, and the Iraq of today, where technology comes from without and from which rational people emigrate. These differences between Sa'dāwi's text and Shelley's original are not merely a matter of style or a different take on a classic story; rather, they embody a particularly Arabic perspective on SF, one whose roots lie in the concerns of canonical Arabic literature and in the lack of formal protections for freedom of expression in the Arabic-speaking world, including Iraq both before and after the US invasion:

> Along with its surface narrative, [ASF] also contains a level of political or social critique and another level where it examines the slow speed or lack of scientific/technological development or social/moral change within contemporary [Arab] societies.[30]

Arabic literature in general, especially the literary fiction that receives the bulk of critical attention, nearly always works via estrangement, whether through allegorical narrative or by more subtle means. This is partly the result of tradition, partly that of who decides what gets published,[31] and partly that of the often-extreme consequences of making a direct political critique under a despotic regime.

THE FIRST LAYER OF ESTRANGEMENT

To hold a distorting mirror up to society is not unique to SF in Arabic fiction; the first layer of double estrangement is fairly easy to tease out from the text of *FB*. The image of the monster as the first true Iraqi citizen is the most manifest aspect of this first layer: only in response to an occupation that both removed the existing order and failed to

replace it with anything approaching a functioning government, thereby enabling the constant cycle of sectarian violence, can Iraqis begin to coalesce around a national identity, be it one of victims of that very violence.[32] Throughout the text, we see examples of this sort of estrangement. The Americans are a distant but arbitrary and inscrutable threat, unable to speak the language but willing to open fire on cars that come too close, even in regular city traffic. Yet everyone jumps at the chance to work for them because they pay so well. The Tracking and Pursuit Department is an estrangement of the nascent institutions that would eventually become the postwar government: violent, ineffective, run by a self-interested clown, guided by mountebanks and charlatans. When it falls apart near the end of the text, its head astrologer trims his wild beard neat and exchanges his purple silk robes for the white ones of a cleric. It might be dangerous to directly critique a religious establishment, but estrangement distorts the critique enough to reduce the potential threat of retaliation upon the author or their publisher.

The critique this estrangement performs is itself twofold. Iraqi society in 2005 is the sun that hovers over and broils Baghdad, its new equilibrium sustained by the tension not between gravity and the energy liberated by fusion but rather by that between those seeking unity or at least relief from conflict and the sectarian violence they flee. Yet the violence that upended the old order, hideous as it was, never ends, because it is sustained by the traditional culture of fractiousness, power, and revenge rather than a concern for justice. The First Iraqi Citizen decayed rather quickly, to be replaced once again by the endless cycle of tribal retribution. Anyone seeking relief from conflict leaves the country; anyone with the wherewithal migrates to someplace safer, if not necessarily better. The migration, or desire to migrate, is an essential part of this first layer of estrangement, as well as the second. Characters with agency and wherewithal, such as the newspaper editor, flee the country for somewhere safer and less irrational. Characters with agency but without resources, such as Mahmoud, dream of fleeing in lieu of working to make Iraq a better place. Characters with no agency but with means are compelled to flee: in Elishva's case, she is too addled to understand that her home is unsafe, so her family in Australia fools her into thinking Daniel wants her to emigrate.

We can see this argument in the gradual shift in the monster's mission, but it is still more vivid in the arc of Mahmoud the journalist. Insofar as *FB* has a Romantic hero, it is Mahmoud as he tries

throughout the text to make himself the protagonist of a story, though the story is closer to *The Great Gatsby* than to Shelley's original *Frankenstein*. His story is one of constant migration: physically, socially, and even conceptually in the form of his relationship to his name. The first thing we learn about Mahmoud is his last name, al-Sawadi, but the story of how he acquired this name is not told until much later in the text. It sounds like a typical Arabic surname; readers of the translation might think it an analogue of the very similar looking Sa'dawi and Mahmoud thus some kind of author avatar. To an Arabic speaker, however, it rings false from the start. It is quite common for Arabs to have surnames that denote their (ancestors') place of origin; e.g., Saddam Hussein's actual surname was al-Tikriti, after the town of Tikrit an hour's drive north of Baghdad on the Tigris. Sawadi, however, is clearly an invention. The *Sawād* ["Black Land"] is the old Abbasid name for the fertile alluvial plain of southern Iraq: it marks Mahmoud off as different right from the start, though this is not clear in the translation.

Mahmoud comes to Baghdad only partly to better himself: migration is as much a matter of safety as one of ambition. We learn that "for reasons he was still secretive about," he came to the capital "to escape Amara" (45), though precisely why is not explained. Amara is a provincial town in what the Abbasids called the *Sawād*, the sort of place an ambitious person would likely want to leave, so readers of both the translation and the Arabic original might well imagine someone who has reinvented himself more out of ambition than out of the need for anonymity. But all of this is tabled as the text gives us Mahmoud's arc, most of which consists of his quick rise to fame as understudy for and representative of his increasingly absent editor Ali Baher al-Saidi at the *al-Haqiqa* newspaper.[33] Saidi is rich, connected, and elegant, and while Mahmoud can't be either of the first two, he can certainly emulate the third. Saidi tells him to take constant care with his appearance:

> "And don't be too oriental."
>
> "And what does 'too oriental' mean?"
>
> "Being oriental can be summed up in a line of poetry by Antara ibn Shaddad: 'Are you surprised, Abla, that I haven't washed or anointed myself with oil for two years?'"
>
> Mahmoud … realized that on that day, that morning, he was a true disciple of the poet Antara. (47)[34]

Antara [fl. late sixth century CE] was a warrior-poet, a slave who freed himself through prowess in battle; Abla was the cousin his low birth prevented him from marrying until he earned true renown.[35] His story often serves as a "paradigmatic example for the superiority of personal virtue over noble descent,"[36] so the well-read Mahmoud might well be predisposed to think of Antara as a model. Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry often emphasized the rough-and-ready nature of the poet,[37] so the line Saidi quotes sounds like something Antara would say. Yet it is not in his most widely quoted poems: Saidi is either mixing Antara up with a different poet or, more likely, making it up entirely. The exchange makes Mahmoud's model someone who adheres to a toxic, and entirely false, stereotype of "oriental" as "unclean," implicitly favoring a Western, foreign paradigm.[38] Mahmoud is seduced by this reflected glory, moves into better digs, and dresses better; he can even afford to pay a sex worker who looks like Saidi's paramour. But an astute friend[39] who counsels Mahmoud has Saidi's measure, for ultimately Saidi skips the country with thirteen million dollars he embezzled from the Americans, leaving Mahmoud holding the bag as titular editor of the newspaper.

By now, we have learned why Mahmoud had to leave Amara in the first place. In order to get the full story of the Whatshisname out of Hadi, he agrees to share his secrets. The first is that he believes his family was originally neither Arab nor Muslim:

> I think my great-grandfather or my great-great-grandfather was a Sabean who converted to Islam for the woman he loved. My father wrote it all down in his diaries, but my brothers and my mother burned them after he died (114).

Sabean is the English translation of the Arabic name for a minority religion, Mandeanism, practiced by a group of non-Arab speakers of Aramaic in southern Iraq: their gnostic, pacifistic faith shares roots with Judaism and Christianity.[40] They coexisted for two millennia with other groups, but in the immediate aftermath of the 2003 invasion were victimized; ninety percent of them were driven from the country as refugees.[41] Mahmoud compares his digital recorder to his father's notebooks as an "evolutionary advantage." The recorder, an import, needs imported batteries, but the notebooks can be burned, as Mahmoud's mother does after he gets only a short glimpse:

> His father … had written the naked truth.… There were passages about the times his father had masturbated when he was married.… [This] couldn't be squared with the way people saw him in the Jidayda district of Amara. He was highly respected and revered, but … it was an image that had been imposed on him and that he had finally managed to live with, but only by expressing his real self in his secret confessions.… One [piece of now-burned text] was the family name Sawadi, which Mahmoud's father, an Arabic teacher,[42] had invented, completely ignoring the usual name that indicated tribal affiliation. But Mahmoud's father's death meant death for the invented family name as well, because Mahmoud's brothers reverted to their tribal name, which they were proud of. But Mahmoud, outraged by the ruthless way they had tried to expunge their father's life story, retained the Sawadi name [in his publications]. (119–20)

There are a number of layers of false, assumed, mistaken identities at work in this passage. Who is the real impostor here? The ancestor who may have converted, the father with his inner and outer lives, the relatives who quickly burn the truth (and bake bread atop the ashes), or the man who chooses the now-rejected name as his *nom de plume* and who then tries to become the mirror image of a con artist? Mahmoud, despite his cluelessness (and rampant misogyny), tries to escape tribal[43] culture and become a modern man, something of a Romantic hero,[44] but just as in *Frankenstein*, nearly all works of Romantic literature, and the proto-SF of Verne and Wells that Aldiss would place as direct descendants of Shelley's text, only the outrageously privileged can break the bonds of tradition and chart their own path. Mahmoud is just a kid from a small town whose reach exceeds his grasp, but while he doesn't end up floating facedown in a hotel pool, this is only because he renounces his ambition and returns to the family home for lack of other options. He has the agency to understand that there is no safe place for him in Iraq to be the person he wants to be but cannot migrate outside the country due to his lack of funds.

Mahmoud's family tradition of self-invention is not, however, the primary reason he comes to Baghdad. He was forced to leave Amara after an influential man filed a complaint against him for inciting murder. Mahmoud had written in his local newspaper about the arrest of a gang leader from an influential family:

> [He] wrote a newspaper article about the need to enforce the law against this criminal. He philosophized a little in the article, saying there were three types of justice—legal justice, divine justice and street justice—and that however long it takes, criminals must face one of them.
>
> Publishing the article won Mahmoud points for courage and for embodying the journalistic ideal of enlightenment[45] in service of the public interest. (173)

To no one's surprise but Mahmoud's, the criminal is freed, only to be gunned down days later. The criminal's brother, the Mantis, takes over the gang and wants vengeance for the man he falsely claims had only helped protect the city in the anarchic aftermath of the invasion:

> The case immediately became a dispute between clans.… In the presence of his brothers and uncles, Mahmoud swore he would never work again as a journalist in that province.… Some time later Mahmoud's friends told him that the Mantis was accusing him of being a Baathist and his father, an Arabic teacher, an atheist. Mahmoud lay low at home, fearing what this madman might do (175).

His real reason for leaving for Baghdad was from a desire not so much to better himself, but rather to escape a vengeance murder; he takes up the last name Sawadi again in order to hide from the Mantis, who believes that neither legal nor tribal justice has been served and plans to try street justice. When Mahmoud needs to return home, his brother urges him not to, as the Mantis has become a big wheel in the local occupation government and has adopted Mahmoud's ideas about justice in his speeches. Mahmoud has no other choice, however, and has to hide out in his family home until the Mantis dies when "a group of men" ambush his motorcade. Street justice turns out to save him, after all.

Naïve Mahmoud at the opening of the story may have believed in legal, or divine, or even tribal justice. The Whatshisname may have started out with something approaching a mission. Yet in the end, there is nothing but street justice. Legal justice is nothing but fiction in occupied Iraq: the Americans may have handed power over a new, democratic government of Iraq, complete with parliamentarians and

ministers with impressive titles, but chaos and violence consume the country while the Americans remain in Baghdad, holding off traffic with machine guns. A gangster called the Mantis can gain legitimate political power; Mahmoud's family can change their names and possibly their faith; Mahmoud can emulate Saidi and even have it work for a while; Saidi can use the newspaper as a means to steal millions and escape Iraq. Brigadier Sorour Majid can create his own governmental department out of whole cloth and have his astrologers and other expenses paid for by the government. Agents from a newly created historic preservation unit can mark houses in Hadi's neighborhood as part of Baghdad's heritage, infuriating Faraj the greedy realtor. The interchangeability of names and identities in *FB* is the estrangement of the absolute fictionality of legal justice in Iraqi society. Saddam Hussein was a murderous tyrant, but his regime had functioning institutions, including a legal system. Iraq's new government is entirely fictional, installed by fiat: it has essentially no control over the country.

As for divine justice, it is also entirely absent. Elishva is the only major character who practices religion, and she is neither Muslim nor Arab: she is an Assyrian Christian who speaks Syriac, a branch of Aramaic. Her pastor's cell phone is her link to her daughters in Australia; in the gloom of her house empty but for a cat, she peers myopically at her painting of St. George and prays for her son, dead these fifteen years, to return. When the Whatshisname comes to stay with her, she thinks it a form of divine justice, but the text has already made it clear that she's cognitively impaired. The Whatshisname is *not* divine justice; some of his followers may think so, but they are clearly labelled as disciples of one of the madmen, and at any rate they murder one another in a schism. He himself abandons the idea as time passes. The text's attitude toward faith can be most neatly encapsulated in the astrologer's reinventing himself as a cleric.

In the absence of the first two forms of justice, Iraq has fallen back onto tribal justice, but even that barely functions: the Mantis has enough firepower at his disposal, even before covering it with a fig leaf of legality, that he can feel free to challenge the settlement with Mahmoud's family. The tribe that gathers around the Whatshisname is unable to maintain power and falls apart in internal strife. Members of religious minorities such as Sabeans or Assyrian Christians change their identities or flee the country.[46] The chaos of 2003 and the brutal sectarian violence of the ensuing years can be seen not merely as evidence of US war crimes, but also as an attempt to impose a system

of tribal justice in the ongoing absence of legal (or divine) justice. The only thing left in the period estranged by the novel, however, is street justice. A provincial administrator nicknamed the Mantis can die with his entourage when his motorcade is machine-gunned; Mahmoud's family has to hide him lest he be killed in turn; Mahmoud is driven from Baghdad by disgruntled coworkers; Saidi gets away with millions, but his own family's car is machine-gunned as they travel to join him. Brigadier Sorour Majid can become the subject of an inquiry by "representatives of the Iraqi security and intelligence agencies and observers from U.S. military intelligence" (1) and feel lucky to be demoted to security officer in a rural police station (269). Faraj the greedy realtor can beat up the historic preservation agent and compel the others to leave alone the houses he covets. The text leaves us with the Whatshisname waiting for dark so he can kill again. Nobody has a stable name or identity in this text because the Iraq it estranges has no functioning system that can provide legitimacy.

SF and estrangement enable Saʿdāwi to make this critique without subjecting himself to the dangers of making it directly and thus inviting reprisal in the form of street justice—or even legal justice, as Baghdad and at least the southern half of Iraq had a (mostly) functioning government by the 2013 in which he published *FB*. Iraq's new constitution does have formal protections for freedom of speech, but the constant if lower-level threat of street or tribal justice persists. Mahmoud cannot be a Romantic hero because to be a Romantic hero implies that there exists a system to rebel against. Any character with a shred of self-awareness understands that migration is the only long-term solution—and this is itself part of the estrangement *FB* undertakes.

THE SECOND LAYER OF ESTRANGEMENT
The second level of estrangement in Arabic SF novels generally compares modern Arab societies' near-total lack of scientific and technological development with the region's status as the world leader a thousand years ago; what is estranged is not so much the gap itself but the reasons for the gap. *FB* focuses this layer of estrangement on the characters' and their society's indifference to the diversity of belief and culture that underpinned that dominance. Mahmoud's father's burned notebooks are only the most obvious example of this: his family prefers to burn decades of learning because it doesn't conform to religious and social propriety. Another salient example falls through the cracks in the translation but is evident in the Arabic original. When

we first meet Hadi, the English text has him "with bulging eyes," but the Arabic uses the word *jāḥiẓ*, which does literally mean "exophthalmic" or "popeyed."[47] To any native speaker of Arabic, however, al-Jāḥiẓ (c. 776–868/9 CE) is the *nom de plume* of one of the best-known literary figures of the long-ago Golden Age. He wrote dozens of books, most of which are lost, on a broad variety of topics, including some that are protoscientific; he is one of the most important figures in the development of Arabic prose literature, yet he retained his connections to his plebian origins.[48] One of his most quoted works is *Kitāb al-Bukhalā'*, "The Book of Misers," which gives many anecdotes about the cheapness of urban people: the effect is to illustrate the gap between Arab tribal traditions of hospitality and life in the big city. Yet *The Book of Misers* also partakes in estrangement: the gap between city and country is a distorted version of the sociopolitical conflicts between Arabs and Persians in Jāḥiẓ's day.[49] Jāḥiẓ's book is also, like *FB*, quite humorous: it describes landlord/tenant conflicts and bad blood that apply directly to twenty-first century life in both Iraq and the West.[50] No Iraqi well-educated enough to read a novel in the literary dialect in which all but the dialogue of *FB* is written would miss this reference, or the contrast between the original, encyclopedic Jāḥiẓ and the dissolute, drunken Hadi, who is labelled as "the liar" before we even meet him. Hadi's ruined house and Faraj the greedy realtor/landlord only solidifies the contrast between Hadi telling lies and fanciful stories and Jāḥiẓ's eloquent curiosity about the world as an estrangement of Iraq's having lost the qualities that let it lead the world in science and technology in Jāḥiẓ's time.

Hadi's house, the "Jewish ruin," is itself another example of the second layer of estrangement. Early in the text, we see a hole in one of the walls; Hadi's now dead partner Nahem taped over the hole a piece of cardboard with the Throne Verse of the Qur'an (2:255) written on it. The verse is one of the most commonly quoted bits of scripture: it speaks of the uniqueness and power of the same god worshipped by Sunnis, Shia, other Muslims, Christians, Jews, Sabeans/Mandeans, and the whole mosaic of religious believers in preoccupation Iraq. The Whatshisname rips the cardboard off the wall, ostensibly because it has come partially unglued but also as a further estrangement of the lack of divine justice or respect for diversity in Sa'dāwi's world. Inside the wall behind the hole is a niche containing a statue of the Virgin Mary, but when agents from the Tracking and Pursuit Department come to Hadi's house and beat him half to death for having circulated the story of the elusive Whatshisname, one agent steals a box of plates painted

with notable people and places from the pre-Saddam days and another tells Hadi, falsely, that the statue is *haram* and smashes its head (191–92). Behind the statue's niche is a piece of wood with a carving of a candelabrum and Hebrew writing; Hadi wants to preserve it, but mostly for resale value since the agents have smashed or stolen most of his valuable junk. However, the object is destroyed along with the rest of his house in a car bomb explosion. This particular subplot estranges contemporary Iraq in the same manner as do Mahmoud's father's notebooks: a headlong rush toward a sort of faux modernity characterized mostly by the sort of religious/cultural intolerance that leads Elishva's daughters to use subterfuge to extract her from the country, and that will lead to the Manicheanism[51] of sectarian warfare between the Sunni and Shia who had previously lived together in comparative harmony. The text goes on to state that the car bomb explosion was another form of violence that revealed a history subsequently to be ignored:

> The NGOs and archaeological authorities had asked for work to be suspended on filling in the crater that the explosion had left, because of the wall that had appeared in the middle of the pool of water from the burst sewage and drinking water pipes. Some claimed it was part of the wall of Abbasid Baghdad and was the most important discovery in Islamic archaeology in Baghdad for many decades.… But the Baghdad city authorities ignored all this and took everyone by surprise by filling the large hole with soil … "for now, we have to repave the street." (265–66)

The early Abbasid rulers were usurpers; partly out of a desire to acquire legitimacy, they invited scholars from all over their polyglot, multicultural empire to come to Baghdad and have their knowledge translated into Arabic.[52] This deliberate policy of translation and dissemination led to an environment in which scholars like Jāḥiẓ could thrive and which laid the groundwork for most of the modern sciences of chemistry, biology, physics, and astronomy, as well as the social sciences. An essential feature of the Abbasid Golden Age was migration: any halfway ambitious young man from nearly any ethnic or religious group could work his way through scholarship to Baghdad, where his plebian origins would matter much less than his skill with words. But in Sa'dāwi's estrangement of Iraq, this excellent

if not entirely unproblematic historical model is literally paved over, in favor of preserving a veneer of modernity: the Baghdad he describes is a place that ambitious people migrate *from* rather than *to*, because diversity of belief is now no longer respected but rather suppressed with violence.

Technology itself comes not from Baghdad, as it did in the days of that twice-buried wall, but from without cell phones, digital recorders, the batteries that power them both, television, automobiles, the printing press Saidi dithers over buying, and automatic weapons. Science and technology are entirely absent from Hadi's creation of the Whatshisname; he has no idea what he is doing. The sheer implausibility of Iraqi scientists generating life, and the mystic tale of the Whatshisname's animation, is part and parcel of the second layer of estrangement in moving the *Frankenstein* story to Baghdad. The Tracking and Pursuit Department uses astrologers with purple silk robes to try to predict crimes; something akin to the transmigration of souls exists. All this portrays modern Iraq as too suffused with superstition to develop technology, let alone pure science. The best Iraqis can do is car bombs, IEDs, and the one real technological innovation we do see: (imported) generators are too expensive, so artisans have taken to using a Kia bus engine (also imported) as a generator to make the air conditioner (also imported) work in the absence of reliable electric service. Houses in Abbasid Baghdad were designed to be comparatively comfortable without air-conditioning, but the Brigadier never leaves an air-conditioned space, and the first thing Mahmoud does when he rises in status is to move from his rundown hotel to one designed upon modern lines and which is uninhabitable without air-conditioning. If Iraqis honored their history instead of burning it or paving it over, they might produce instead of merely consume; but as things stand, this is impossible—and not only because of the invasion itself. Technological and scientific development has itself emigrated. What makes Arabic SF particularly relevant to a caustic political critique such as *FB* is that its tropes of estrangement enable the double critique of both current political conditions and the overall decline in scientific achievement to be made without the author forced into exile. Though Sa'dāwi's text has no spaceships, and its critique more direct than most examples of ASF, the fantastical nature of the Whatshisname enables him to make the critique without fearing he will have to flee his native land and continue to critique his native society only from without, like so many writers of Arabic literary fiction have been compelled to do.

DEVELOPMENTS IN ARABIC SF

FB also demonstrates evolution, or at least change, in terms of some of the tropes established in early Arabic SF and the response among Arab critics to the then unfamiliar genre. Double estrangement remains just as present in 2013 as it did in 1965[53] but many of the aspects of works of early Arabic SF, which served to insulate advanced science and technology and its consequences from permanent effects on their societies, have largely disappeared as the genre has matured.

One of the earliest Arab critics of Arabic SF, Muḥammad Najīb al-Talāwi, argues extensively in 1990 that Arabic SF from the sixties and seventies uses *musaṭṭaḥ* or "flattened" characters, a term he borrows without attribution from E.M. Forster.[54] In Arabic literary fiction, characters tend to be flattened because of the estrangement that literary fiction generally undertakes as a means of social criticism in societies where freedom of expression remains unprotected: the characters are intended not so much to represent psychologically realistic individual humans as demographic groups within the society being critiqued.[55] In Arabic SF, in Talāwi's formation, characters are flattened not for the above reason, but rather because of "the pressure of scientific development and technological advancement that has transformed humankind into mechanism and objectification."[56] The threat that technology, which in the modern Arab world comes from without, poses to traditional human relationships manifests in the flattened characters of early Arabic SF. Sa'dāwi's text, by contrast, gives us fully human, psychologically realistic characters; it is their society that dehumanizes them because of the endemic corruption and violence unleashed by the US invasion and occupation.

Early Arabic SF novels also often portray a world where Arabs are once again the world's preeminent scientists; this is nearly always the result of some kind of conflict, usually nuclear war, that levels the playing field or simply destroys everyone else. The second level of estrangement in these novels lies in the improbability or catastrophic nature of any chain of events that would lead to Arabs once again dominating in science and technology. As time passed, authors became increasingly comfortable with portraying the Arab world as comparatively backward in technology: for example, Ṭayyiba ʾAḥmad Ibrāhīm's trilogy centered upon human reproduction, published between 1986 and 1992, depicts not only a Kuwait where most technology comes from the West, but also the war launched upon Iraq by the first President Bush. In these novels, the second layer of

estrangement centers upon Kuwaiti culture as too dependent on belief in the fundamentally irrational as natural to undertake the sort of research in which their long-ago ancestors engaged.[57] *FB* continues this trend: it poses technology from without as the natural state of affairs, so consumed are Iraqis with astrology, tribal culture, and street justice. Iraqis aren't *incapable* of invention: they can make generators out of bus engines. Their society, however, is so atomized from without and crippled from within that engaging in real innovation is essentially impossible. To portray Hadi's creation of the Whatshisname and its animation as fundamentally mystical and unscientific only reinforces this.

Early critics like Talāwi also pointed out that ASF engaged in what Talāwi calls *al-tarqī'* or "patching," as in a garment.[58] Whatever technological innovation disrupts traditional Arab society is removed before the end of the novel: the cryogenics lab is buried under an avalanche, the recipe for the secret serum is lost, etc. This trope also tends to diminish as time passes: Ibrāhīm's first novel undertakes it by having the protagonists move from an estranged US back to Kuwait, where the disruptive technology has yet to appear, but the final novel in the trilogy leaves the situation open-ended, and much bleaker.[59] *FB* continues and accelerates this trend: nothing is patched, nobody is saved, street justice continues to pertain, and the novel ends with a murderous monster as the only remaining incarnation of justice. Yet the novel remains very human—especially in its depiction of the Whatshisname—poignant, multilayered, and quite funny. It is to be hoped that having won the "Arabic Booker Prize" will only encourage further development in and attention from both the Arab world and the West toward ASF. While double estrangement remains in place since the genre's origins as self-conscious SF in the 1960s, these other elements—flattened characters, improbable catastrophes that make Arabs the leaders in technology, and "patching" narratives—have gradually dwindled. A novel like *FB* can make an extended and trenchant two-level critique of its society while retaining psychologically realistic characters, acknowledging that progress comes almost entirely from without, and leaving the problematic consequences of technology for its ordinary people to cope with rather than insulating people from development. As such, the absence of these tropes demonstrates the full maturity of Arabic SF, and its status as the first ASF novel to win the IPAF prize only confirms this.

NOTES

[1] "IPAF Award: *Frankenstein in Baghdad* Wins Arab Fiction Prize," *BBC News*, 30 April 2014, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27216239 Accessed 19 November 2019.

[2] i.e, "humanity and its." Aldiss is using language standard for his time.

[3] Brian Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree,* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 8, 23.

[4] Zoe Beenstock, "Lyrical Sociability: The Social Contract and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Philosophy and Literature* 39, no. 2 (October 2015), 406–7.

[5] Bill Hughes, "'A Devout but Nearly Silent Listener': Dialogue, Sociability and Promethean Individualism in Marry Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)," *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Stories* 16 (Autumn 2017), 11.

[6] David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 93.

[7] The Arabic text uses the word *jāḥiẓ* for "with bulging eyes;" this is essential to the novel's second layer of estrangement and will be addressed below in the section "-----."

[8] Aḥmad Saʻdāwī [as Ahmad Saadawi], *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (New York: Penguin, 2018), 18–19. All citations from *FB* are taken from the English translation unless otherwise noted.

[9] No one offers an opinion as to why it has this name; much later in the text, however, knocking a hole in a wall reveals a plank of wood with Hebrew letters carved into it. No one knows that the neighborhood was once inhabited by Jews; this is also part of the novel's second layer of estrangement.

[10] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. J. Paul Hunter, Second Norton Critical Edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), 30–32.

[11] Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), 71–75.

[12] ʼAḥmad Saʻdāwi, *Farānkshtāyin fī Baghdād* (Freiburg, Germany: al-Kamel Verlag, 2013), 121 & 141.

[13] J. Milton Cowan, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (New York: Snowball Publishing, 2012), 1056-57.

[14] Hasib's spirit floats to the cemetery, where he encounters the spirit of a boy, who informs him that he had better find a body soon. There are several passages in the book alluding to a doctrine of the transmigration of souls, but these are inchoate and appear to be markers of a character's willingness to prefer a mystical explanation for a strange phenomenon over a scientific one. They are thus part of the novel's estrangement function.

[15] He doesn't eat, but she doesn't mind. She speculates that "perhaps he was like Abraham's guests in the Qur'anic version of their visit;" i.e., the angels who came to announce that his wife Sarah would have a son. In the story, Abraham finds the angels strange, but as they are guests, he brings out his best food and gives them the opportunity to eat rather than demanding they eat. The story is often used as the paradigm of proper Islamic hospitality. Qur'an 51: 24–27 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text, Translation and Commentary*, [Brentwood, MD: Amana Corp., 1983], 102–3.).

[16] Hadi had been walking in front of the hotel and distracted Hasib such that he moved into the truck bomber's path. Note that the Whatshisname here clearly regards Hasib as a separate entity.

[17] Ian Balfour, "Allegories of Origins: *Frankenstein* after the Enlightenment," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 56, no. 4 (Autumn 2016), 783–85.

[18] No information is ever provided as to how the Whatshisname knows the identities of its parts, how they died, or who is responsible.

[19] Cowan, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 465–66.

[20] He is more obviously phony in Arabic, where *safsaṭi* sounds a great deal like *safsafi*, meaning "absurd, ridiculous."

[21] The Arabic text uses the word *majnūn*, which is the standard word for "mad/crazy," but literally means "djinned." Premodern Arab cultures, like their Western counterparts, often framed mental illness as possession by spirits. Given the Magician's direct interest in spirits, and the spirits here and there in the novel, this bears mentioning.

[22] In Arabic, *al-kharāb al-ʿaẓīm*, "great/awesome ruin," where the same "ruin" is the one that Hadi inhabits. This is not the weapons of "mass destruction," [*al-damār al-shāmil*, "complete destruction"] that the second Bush administration persuasively argued clearly necessitated the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

[23] i.e., between 1922 and 1933. He was the first modern king of Iraq, a country formed by British fiat after World War I from three Ottoman provinces that had little in common with respect to ethnicity, language, or sect. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8–39. For reasons largely related to his own desire to maintain and expand his power base, he was a booster of pan-Arab identity. Phebe Marr and Ibrahim al-Marashi, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 4th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2017), 20–21.

[24] Saʿdāwi, *Farānkshtāyin fī Baghdād*, 164. The use of the phrase also links Saʿdāwi's text to the history of Arabic SF, specifically Ṭayyiba ʾAḥmad Ibrāhīm's *al-Insān al-Mutaʿaddad* ["The Multiple Person," 1990], whose protagonist is a clone struggling for legal rights against his original, who

considers him nothing more than a source of spare parts. Ian Campbell, *Arabic Science Fiction*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 289–95.

[25] Stephen Bertman, "The Role of the Golem in the Making of *Frankenstein*," *The Keats-Shelley Review* 29, no. 1 (April 2015), 46.

[26] Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 10.

[27] Ibid., 4, 7-8.

[28] John Willet, ed., *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1964), 112.

[29] Suvin, *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1988), 34.

[30] Ian Campbell, *Arabic Science Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 114.

[31] Established writers tend to have more control over whether new writers are published than is the case in the West, for complex reasons relating to the relative absence of the profit motive in the publication of literature in Arabic, the existence of quasi-governmental publishers, writers' unions, the dominance of canonical literary fiction, and others.

[32] In the immediate aftermath of the 2003 invasion, the Coalition Provisional Authority disbanded the Iraqi army and barred members of the ruling Baath party from serving in the government. It is unclear precisely why this decision was made; its result was to ensure that Iraq in 2005 was left without a leadership class (the Hussein regime was a one-party state) and with hundreds of thousands of armed men desperate for employment.

[33] It is an odd choice in the translation to keep the newspaper names in transliterated Arabic when everything else is translated into English. *al-Haqiqa* is "The Truth;" the other two newspapers mentioned are *al-Hadaf* ["The Goal/Target"] and *Sada al-Ahwar* ["The Echo of the Marshes," i.e., those of southern Iraq].

[34] The Arabic text uses the word *sharqi*, literally "eastern," and used as a counter to "[culturally] Western."

[35] Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 115.

[36] Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, eds. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*. (London: Routledge, 1998), v. 1, 94.

[37] Abdulla el-Tayyib, "Pre-Islamic Poetry," in A.F.L. Beeston, et. al., eds. *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 35–37.

[38] He also tells Mahmoud to shave off his beard and mustache in the Western manner; both of them eschew the traditional long, light robe that the more downscale male characters wear.

[39] Whose last name means "seer." Cowan, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 576–77.

[40] Mircea Eliade, ed, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), v. 9, 150–153.

[41] Nathaniel Deutsch. "Save the Gnostics," *New York Times*, 05 October 2007, [Accessed 19 November 2019].

[42] That is, a teacher of the formal dialect of *fuṣḥā*, used in literature, journalism, and theology and essentially never in everyday conversation.

[43] "Tribal" in the Arab context means not separate ethnolinguistic groups as in Native American tribes, but rather alliances of clans.

[44] Despite, or perhaps because of, the rampant misogyny.

[45] *al-tanwīr* in Arabic, the same word used for the (European) Enlightenment.

[46] Insofar as any character in the novel has a happy ending, it is Elishva, whose family uses the resemblance between Daniel and Elishva's grandson Daniel, who resembles his dead uncle, to bamboozle Elishva into emigrating to Australia, away from the violence and into the care of her family.

[47] Cowan, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 135.

[48] C. Pellat, "al-Jāḥiẓ," in `*Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, eds. Julia Ashtiany *et. al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 80–84.

[49] Ibid., 87–88.

[50] Robert Irwin, *Night and Horses and the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 94–99.

[51] "You're either with us or against us," as George W. Bush memorably stated.

[52] Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998), 28–30.

[53] Ian Campbell, *Arabic Science Fiction*, 162–78.

[54] Muhammad Najīb al-Talāwi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Khayāl al-ʻIlmi fī-l-ʼAdab al-ʻArabi* ["SF Stories in Arabic Literature"] (Beirut: Dār al-Mutanabbi, 1990), 8.

[55] This is a general trend in Arabic literary fiction but there are many exceptions. It is more precise to say that characters in the median work of Arabic literary fiction are more flattened than those in the median work of its English-language counterpart.

[56] Al-Talawi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Khayāl al-ʻIlmi fī-l-ʼAdab al-ʻArabi*, 9.

57 Ian Campbell, *Arabic Science Fiction*, 283.

58 Al-Talawi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Khayāl al-ʿIlmi fī-l-ʾAdab al-ʿArabi*, 16–14.

59 Ian Campbell, *Arabic Science Fiction*, 307–8.