

**Characterization of Death in Ahmad Saadawi's
Frankenstein in Baghdad and Margaret Edson's *Wit***

تشخيص الموت في فرانكشتاين في بغداد لأحمد سداوي وويت
لمارجريت ادسون

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**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Master's Degree in English Language and Literature**

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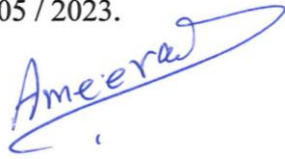
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to γιαγιά, my resilient grandmother.

May she rest in peace.

Characterization of Death in Ahmad Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Margaret Edson's *Wit*

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how Ahmad Saadawi and Margaret Edson characterize and represent a metaphysical concept such as death, through their varying styles of literary works, in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018) and *Wit* (1999). They both highlight the manifestation of our symbolic existence through the multi-dimensional characters they employed. The study also attempts to compare both writer's representations, as well as contrast the impact of their characterization on the main characters. This study is conducted using postmodernism theory. Thus, relying on postmodernist elements that are evident throughout analyzing the works. The topic this study tackles is significant because understanding death lies at the core of the human condition, but also due to the various expressions and experiences of it evident throughout the literary works. The definition of death, although universal, remains a mystery to man. This study concludes that Ahmad Saadawi focuses on the physical representation of death, which forces us to view death in its physical dimension and accept the fear of it as gruesomely as it exists. As for Margaret Edson, her abstract representation of death corners us to contemplate and accept it as we witness and experience its repercussions on our mental models.

Keywords: Characterization, Death, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, *Wit*.

تشخيص الموت في "فرانكشتاين في بغداد" لأحمد سعادوي و"بيت" لمارجريت إدسون

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إشراف

الدكتورة نسبية وليد عوجان

الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على كيفية تصوير أحمد سعادوي ومارجريت إدسون الموت كمفهوم ميتافيزيقي من خلال أنماط أعمالهما الأدبية في مسرحية بيت ورواية فرانكشتاين في بغداد. كلاهما يسלטان الضوء على تجليات وجودنا الرمزي من خلال شخصيات متعددة الأبعاد التي اختاروها لتمثل الموت. تقوم الدراسة أيضًا بمقارنة تمثيلات الكاتيبين، وكذلك مقارنة تأثير تمثل الموت على الشخصيات الرئيسية. أجريت هذه الدراسة باستخدام نظرية ما بعد الحداثة. وبالتالي، الاعتماد على العناصر المتعلقة بنظرية ما بعد الحداثة التي تتضح خلال تحليل الأعمال. إن الموضوع الذي تتناوله هذه الدراسة مهم ليس فقط لأن فهم الموت يكمن في صميم الحالة الإنسانية، أو لأنه جزء لا يتجزأ من دورة حياتنا كبشر، ولكن أيضًا بسبب اختلاف مفاهيمنا وتجاربنا في تقبل الموت أو رفضه. إن تعريف الموت، على الرغم من كونه حقيقة عالمية وواضحة تمامًا، إلا أنه يظل لغزًا للإنسان. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن أحمد سعادوي قام بالتركيز على التمثل الجسدي للموت فيجبرنا على النظر إلى الموت في بعده المادي وقبول الخوف منه كما يوجد بوحشية. أما بالنسبة لمارجريت إدسون، فإن تمثيلها التجريدي للموت يجعلنا نفكر في الموت ونتقبله كما نشهده ونختبر تداعياته على نماذجنا العقلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تشخيص الموت، "فرانكشتاين في بغداد"، "بيت".

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

It is life that we are gifted with, and the way we truly claim our life and make it ours by pursuing our dreams and nourishing the connections that we desire is a privilege. However, the essence of the human condition, and what it conflicts with consistently revolves around the concept of death. The effortless trials of comprehending mortality and what it means beyond its abstract definition have always been the enemy of man, or possibly friend. It is considered to be a vital element of our constitution as human beings, and yet this idea has been explored and interpreted not only by anthropologists, psychologists, and scientists, but also by artists and writers. In his book “The Denial of Death”, Ernest Becker, an American anthropologist, argues that the main driving force of humans is their fear of death, and that their efforts in understanding who they are, why they are here the purpose of their existence, their creations, beliefs, systems and even the relationships they build with one another, is merely another way of denying their one and only truth, that is death. This is exhibited in the following quote: “This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression - and with all this yet to die” (Becker 1973, p. 87).

To begin with, the idea of death by itself is only abstract until it actually happens. Even then, there are various religious beliefs and practices around the world, in which communities, societies, governments, and entire systems are built on that are argued to exist due to this subconscious crippling fear. It provides temporary relief from the fear of death and the destiny of mankind at the end of their time. Our understanding of the

metaphysical is unique and subjective, and it has been expressed ferociously throughout centuries and generations intending to leave their impact even after they perish. The acceptance of this fate is critical, but it only subconsciously provokes us to desire more out of this world.

The conscious or our cognitive thinking is limited when it comes to breaking down the concept of time or death, which means according to Becker, the conscious brain does not know what time is, how it moves and what death is, and how it happens. Our understanding of it is cultural, not natural. This dilemma is rooted in man, although it is almost non-existent in children. This indicates that the fear of death is nurtured and not in our nature, depending also on our own experiences with fear itself. It is logical to come to that conclusion when observing children's behaviors in general, they are carefree of the anxieties that are known to the adult. Although, the child's main struggle is adapting to life, its experiences, and coping with understanding the notion of danger, or of what societal expectations are, which dictate the accepted behavior through their teenage years.

Furthermore, Becker (1973), discusses that children in their narcissistic nature, used to getting their needs and wants met from their parents or caregivers, reflect man's tragic destiny, that is the child's struggle in comprehending their human powers, limitations and what is called "cosmic significance" (Becker 1973, p.3). The child's deeper unrealized concern is to comprehend their place in the world that they are exploring and adapting to, as well as exploring how to maneuver their own physical bodies and how that fits in with their emotions, thoughts, and spiritual entities. Hence, the conflict of the abstract and the physical. This leads us to the beginning of the never-ending dilemma of man in finding or creating meaning in what seems to be a meaningless world that will perish. This has been put in other more intricate words "The human animal is cursed with a fragile body

and a highly evolved brain that can comprehend its own annihilation. Humans are animals haunted by death” (Mortal Atheist 2021, p.1).

Ernest Becker’s Solutions to the Fear of Death

In his 2022 article entitled “The Denial of Death and the Practice of Dying” Glenn Hughes elaborates on Ernest Becker’s three interchangeable solutions, illusions or coping mechanisms that man adopts in dealing with this unrelentless reality that haunts him. He, in agreement with Socrates, invites man to confront mortality straight on, and to allow the awareness of this absurd concept to penetrate our daily lives, thus refining our motivations and behaviors, to break down and accept the fear instead of running away from it, this healthier response to death has been called “The practice of dying” (Hughes 2022, p.1).

One solution for the seemingly chaotic and turbulent suffering is a religious solution (MacKenzie 2022). The construction of religious belief systems worldwide, are essentially crucial to reduce the anxieties and terror of doom. Faith is a critical and sensitive component of how the world works, it provides relief and reassurance of an afterlife or a chance to be redeemed from the monstrosities that man is immersed in. It births hope for the chance of rebirth, resurrection, or reincarnation. In addition to that, it sets man’s ego aside and justifies all suffering, automatically giving it meaning, which is exactly what man craves.

Although the religious solution contradicts with science, it is increasingly becoming more controversial and complex with the passage of time, as we have seen throughout history the tugs of war between extremists, conservatives, and liberals, who argue with different religious ideologies, whether this results in exploiting religion for power or not. Yet, religion acts as a weapon against the fear of death, an abstract idea against another.

It promises the fulfillment of our symbolic existence, that it will not go to waste, that man is more than a body and immortality is possible.

The creative solution is more realistic and substantial than abstract. This resonates with artists, creators, scientists, and the ones who are eager to establish their existence in a perfected craft that they leave behind. It can be a book, a performance, a painting, a musical masterpiece, an innovation, it is a part of man that is personal, divine, powerful, creative, and full of life, soul and most importantly, meaning. This transcends their biological shackles on earth and live on, surviving death through craft. The translation of the metaphysical into a lasting somatic product that contains man's energy, purpose fulfilled, or legacy; one that will not decay.

Finally, the romantic solution, which is given by its name. The euphoric experience of unconditional love, passion, and lust has been expressed across centuries in various literary works. Similar to death, love is also a universal truth that unites mankind regardless of their differences. To live a purposeful life, man feels the need to share his joys, fears, anxieties, and mind with a lover or partner. As love is perceived to be holy, godly and perfect, it defies finite boundaries of reason and is free from human error, which gives the impression of lasting forever. In a way, the romantic solution is an idolization of love interest, an appreciation of the incomprehensible connections man finds himself in, a desire to preserve and extend those emotions eternally.

Romantics are rebels and radicals, who abandon themselves for the other. They identify with the abstract, and it most importantly eliminates fear, unlike death. It intensifies desire and the concept of desire is what opposes death itself, not life alone. This bravery and ecstasy are also experienced throughout the physical expression of love, in which man accepts his human nature and relishes in the zest of the physical as he is

already nourished in the infinite lasting energy of the celestial, which strikes a perfect balance. Thus, meaning is created, sustained, and is consistently sought through passion and unity.

An example of this romantic solution being deployed is naturally found in romantic literature. Romantic writers and artists are known to explore the depths of human emotions, delve into the sublime, emphasizing the mysterious, and the irrational aspects of life. They celebrated the beauty of nature, highlighting its spiritual and transformative qualities.

An example is the poet William Wordsworth and his poem “We are Seven”, where a conversation takes place between the speaker and a child, and within this conversation is an inquiry type of discussion on the concept of death, and the strength of family bonds and connections, despite death. It unravels free expressions of the speaker, as it also tackles elements of nature, beauty, and family love, that which could be sustained even well after death. (Corfman 2023)

This battle between emotion and logic typically is what characterizes romantic writers, the poem leaves the reader with more questions to reflect upon, in relation to the nature of death.

Sigmund Freud’s Life and Death Drive

Those solutions can be summarized as methods of self-preservation, as they in their essence promote the Freudian theory of life drive (Lacy 2022). On the contrary of that spectrum is the death drive. According to Freud, life and death drive are intriguing perspectives on human instinct that explains one’s behaviors and approach to life. Life drive is in theory the instinct of man that is driven by logic and ego, it is one where

humans actively behave in certain manners that encourage life and are more optimistic outlooks to life itself. Examples on life drive such as procreation, hard work, or lifelong achievements. In other words, life drive is the force within that motivates and pushes humans to nurture and create life.

However, Freud also theorized the negating force which is the death drive. The death drive essentially is the instinct to be destructive, this aggressive behavior can be a result of the energy being directed away from the self and onto external targets. Although Freud discusses that humans possess both death and life drives, one is rather more apparent than the other. These concepts can be seen throughout the characters behaviors when analyzing their responses to death. (Cherry 2022)

Becker argues that consciousness knows neither time nor death and guides man into survival mode and even procreation. Likewise, Freud proposed that man's subconscious desire is to return to the state of prebirth, which is the state of not existing, that which coincides with death. It is justified through the self-destructive behaviors of man evident as well throughout history or death drive. This could be another approach to tackle the fear of death itself, to run towards the fear and take control of what cannot be controlled, or in other words, overcome the fear by binding with it.

Margaret Edson as a Playwright

Witnessing death is a common motif in the works of the novelist Ahmad Saadawi and playwright Margaret Edson. This experience in itself is capacious enough for self-reflection, as well as the exploration of the struggle of one's self against comprehending, accepting and coping with this inevitability. What is brilliantly striking in literature that tackles this universal truth, is the demeanor that each artist chooses to express, the attitude he conveys, and the approach adopted in his trials to incarnate a metaphysical idea into a

character with various dimensions. Thus, this study adopted two varying styles of literary works, the novel and the theatrical script. Margaret Edson is an American playwright, her one act-play titled *Wit* has received the 1999 Pulitzer Prize (Brown 1999), and New York Drama Critics' Circle award for "Best New Play" (New York Times 1999) despite it being the only play Edson ever wrote. The oracle for Edson's intricate work came from her experience in working in a hospital, where she dealt consistently with cancer patients in 1985 (Cengage 2018).

The indirect confrontation with death and being a first-hand witness of the consequences and ramifications of cancer on patients' mental and physical decline, truly served her literature. In addition to Edson's background in literature itself, she studied Renaissance history and continued to do an English Literature Master's degree, as she later also exercised her interest in drama (Purcell 2013). This provided the framework of her play, as the main character, Vivian Bearing is a professor in John Donne's metaphysical poetry, in which she speculates the concept of mortality as well, a reflection of Edson's contemplation. In David Rooney's review on Edson's work in 2012, he claims: "Margaret Edson's *Wit* is a work of delicately calibrated opposites. It pits detached clinical observation on one side against raw human emotion on the other, while somehow making dry humor and wrenching pathos travel hand in hand." (Rooney 2012, p.1)

Ahmad Saadawi as a Novelist

Ahmed Saadawi shares Edson's firsthand encounter with death, only in a different controversial form, which is under a political social scope. Saadawi is an Iraqi novelist, who is known for his novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* that received the 2014 International Prize for Arabic Fiction (Devi 2018). His novel was also chosen as one of 13 books for the Man Booker International Longlist (Campbell 2018).

This novel pulls the reader into the horrific day to day details of the Iraqi people amidst and post war, where the stench of death overrides and creates the atmosphere of the plot itself. The absurdity and grotesque physicality of Saadawi's dystopian representation of death in a man-made corpse that arose from the dead is an interesting depiction of his own personal reflection and experience.

The American invasion of Iraq by the United States began 2003 and lasted until 2011. This invasion was based on the premise that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and posed a threat to international security. However, no substantial evidence of was found, leading to significant controversy and criticism surrounding the invasion. The impact of this American invasion on the Iraqi people was profound and multifaceted. While the invasion initially resulted in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, it also unleashed a series of complex and interconnected consequences. Those include a considerable loss of life and injuries among Iraqis. Additionally, the conflict triggered a significant wave of internal and external displacement, with millions of Iraqis fleeing their homes to seek safety. (Laub 2017)

The invasion has also led to a humanitarian crisis in which basic services such as water, electricity, and healthcare were severely disrupted, affecting the daily lives of Iraqis. The lack of security hindered access to education and employment opportunities. This further contributed to fragmentation, in which the post-invasion period faced challenges in establishing an inclusive government.

Saadawi worked previously as a reporter covering this war in his own country, and as heart wrenching this could be, the muse for his own version of Frankenstein happened in a morgue. Dismembered limbs, mutilated human parts, and an insensate worker, Saadawi says: "I saw many dead bodies," "Not just dead bodies—body parts. Many body

parts.” (Hankir 2018, p.1). Saadawi’s craft of *Frankenstein* was born throughout his recount of the manager in charge of the morgue, in which he instructed a young man who came looking for his loved one to “take what you want, and make yourself a body” (Hankir 2018, p.1).

In his review in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* in 2018, Adam Fales describes Saadawi’s novel as “a story about how matter moves between states of life and death.” (Fales 2018, p.1) and continues to claim that “Saadawi’s monster illustrates the redemptive power of even the most ephemeral material. No matter how far down it is 'buried,' it has the potential to rise from the dead and assert its own story” (Fales 2018, p.1). The experience of war in itself can be desensitizing, but to witness such visual traumas most certainly shocks man’s constant quest of meaning, to pull him back to the most basic notion that we tend to stray away from or forget, which is the demeaning truth of how fragile, simple and insignificant the human body or our earthly existence is in comparison to our symbolic existence.

Postmodernism in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and in *Wit*

According to Mambrol (2016), the uncertainties, confusion, and fragmentation of the 20th-century Western world are given voice through modernism and postmodernism. The devastation of two major World Wars, the impact of new social theories and developments like Marxism and Postcolonial migrations, new technologies, and the transfer of power from Europe to the United States, the Western world began to experience this profound sense of security in the 20th century.

Postmodernism uses fragmentation, discontinuity in topic and style; this very distinction conceals the fundamental differences between it and Modernism. The fragmentation and unevenness of the modern world are seen by modernism as sorrowful.

It laments the loss of life's center and unity, and reflects the idea that art may restore the coherence, continuity, and significance that have been lost in contemporary living. However, postmodernism promotes dissolution and decay. It does not attempt to escape from fragmentation since it sees these as the only viable forms of life. It does not state or acknowledge that some aspects of society represent order and others represent disorder. In its critique of the binary opposition, postmodernism even cynically asserts that all that there is, is disorder, and this is exactly what the comprehension of death and the human condition lies under (Duignan 2022).

Postmodern literature can be viewed as a wide term for post-war advancements in literature such as the theater of the absurd. Postmodern literature as expressed in Beckett's writings explores the complex nature and roles of reality, experience, time and memory in human perception, the self and the world as historical structures (Mambrol 2016).

The postmodern era is characterized by the development of nuclear and electronic technologies as well as consumer capitalism, in which consumption and marketing are prioritized over production. Individual and national identities are destroyed in the dehumanized, globalized society in favor of international marketing. This constant toxic productivity leads to burn out individuals who are faced with questions of meaning and significance. In addition, it is used as an illusion to escape truth. Truth is relative, yet there consists of an objective and subjective one. Objective truth is characterized by its structure, the intent of the author in the writing process, as for subjective truth, it mainly relies on the truth derived from the reader or interpreter of the text. The construction of man's own truth, in other words, individualizing truth, which is applicable to postmodernism and is crucial in breaking down the concept of death as a universal truth (Antony 2020).

When tackling the purpose of literary work itself, reasons such as to evoke thoughts and feelings of the reader, in postmodernism, the purpose itself lacks certainty, and clarity, which indulges man in agony and truth seeking. This naturally applies to the notion of death and explores its repercussions.

Death has been characterized by postmodern or contemporary writers. In her 2016 article in the Guardian, Rophie discusses the attitude of many modern writers and artists towards death. She elaborates on the journeys and realities of contemporary writers that are characterized as being confrontational in the face of death. The state of the human condition post the Second World War, not only intensified the anxieties and fears, but also gave space for self-reflection and deeper contemplation on the creation of meaning itself. The traumatic response in the postmodern era is considered a gap in the understanding of the contemporary experience of trauma. This leads to struggles within postmodern literature, which much like death, is alienating the individual experience, the postmodern society and indefinitely its literature.

Postmodern debates have turned contemporary reality into alternative perceptions of space, time, and subjectivity, in other words, the interpretation and representation of death has become individualized experience with its own unique revelations. In conclusion, postmodernism addresses the need to rethink and evaluate the question of death as an examination of contemporary existence that prevents us from accessing alternate realities (Lee 2016).

Margaret Edson does not quite acknowledge or recognize herself as a writer, or at least with the intention of pursuing writing as a career. Even though *Wit* is considered an elite production that challenges philosophical perceptions of death, and examines the human response and deterioration from cancer, which is considered an important absent

character in the plot. However, Edson is a schoolteacher, and an academician, which is obvious and evident as it set the tone of her play. Specifically, as the character Vivian Bearing ponders on her life throughout the poetry of John Donne. Nonetheless, Edson states, “If ‘Wit’ works, it’s ‘cause it’s the one thing that I had in my heart” (Pressley 2000, p.1).

There is a rich streak of redemption and soliloquies that run through *Wit* as Vivian Bearing confronts her own compound personality, illness, the anxieties, fears, isolation, and the implications of John Donne’s holy sonnets, in which it influenced Edson as a Christian herself, as she claims that categorizing the play as a Christian one is not bizarre and acceptable. The features that Edson uses as a dramatist is often related to Metatheater, which according to Pressley in a Washington Post had explained that it is a theatrical technique in which the playwright experiments with the boundaries or art, breaking what is called the fourth wall. This is the elimination of the lines between fantasy and reality. Some of the Greek dramatists, including Shakespeare, have used this technique. In Edson’s play, the main character builds an intimate relationship with the audience from the moment she introduces herself directly to the audience. This style of writing through meta-theater allows Edson to reveal the true wit of her literary work.

Edson also uses flashbacks consistently. This literary technique fills in the gaps of the play’s present moment and provides relevant details from Vivian’s life to help the audience have a better understanding of her state and her own mental deconstruction of meaning and purpose.

Critical reviews that Edson received were not entirely positive. Opinions vary about the play, with many critics arguing that the first-time playwright’s awkwardness and trial stands out. Overall, most critics have praised this work. Marks (1998), a New York Times

reviewed the work and called it a “brutally human and beautifully layered new play”, saying “you feel both enlightened and, in a strange way, enormously comforted” (p.1). Lyons (2015) also claimed “Edson uses a tricky structure, full of metatheatrical interjections,” and this is justified as to symbolize the tenacity of suffering (p.1).

Ahmad Saadawi’s novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* functions not only as fascinating retellings, but also as darkly comic and moving story of war, loss and vengeful corpses. The concept of a man-made-monster is coherent as a representation of evil and a characterization of death. Alongside many characters and different points of views fused together, it evokes a multitude of human voices screaming for personal justice, but it also magnifies the chaos of time and space during war and the intensity and normality of death at the same time.

Saadawi’s style of writing includes the addition of astrologers, jinn, tarot readers and the common people as part of gothic literature. This mysticism creates the vision of Baghdad that is known for its alluring magical realism. This tone speaks to the sense that old traditions are, in the wake of tragedy, valued far beyond long-standing, bureaucratic governments. We are introduced once more to the concept of disorder and disorientation. Only the city’s remaining hope and desensitized response to death (Crawford 2021).

The concept of monsters in literary works and adaptations is considered a gothic fiction genre, and despite the imagination and dystopias it can bear, but the creation of Frankenstein in Ahmad Sadawi’s novel has many realistic dimensions to human nature that is dark. It exposes and explores the nature of the human state. This character is significant as it is the idea of a man-made monster that is nameless, stripped from an identity which in many ways hints to various and serious political and social issues that are evident today in real life.

Victor Frankenstein loses himself in the dreams of glory and ambition and conveys a God complex as he is immersed in the idea that he can be a creator, which has only proved to fail. The monster represents the corruption that man creates for himself or for humankind unknowingly regardless of their intentions. An example of a similar adaptation in which society creates a 'monster' is the joker. He is argued to be a product of societal disappointments and a failed system. The Frankenstein in Sadawi's novel is malignant and cruel but it is closer to reality.

Although the main character of Hadi begins with the noble intention of making a political statement about the regard and value of human life, the creation of the monster quickly goes into a manic killing spree and carries out revengeful acts which is also found in Mary Shelly's version.

The significance of the monster poses questions about life, death, war, and destruction. It is important to point out that under dire circumstances of war, instability, violence, and unsafe environment, it is only natural that desensitization due to witnessing death in such manners, only creates a society or a community that is monstrous in a way that is imbedded in their subconscious. Unpeaceful, consistent and rigorous deaths haunt the streets and memories of the people, and as it goes down as a crucial part of history, the monster is created under those most vile circumstances.

Saadawi's Frankenstein as a representation of death and destruction is considered significant driver of action during events unraveling, as well as a wakeup call or reminder that these nameless monsters were created by man, and the atrocities they committed only mirrors who the society really is, its principles and moral or immoral compass. This monster resides in the inhumane and rotten parts of us that are bred through war, famine,

and destruction, and Saadawi's language and description has aided in this characterization.

1.2 Statement of the Study

This study explores the characterization and representation of death as a metaphysical concept through varying styles of literary works, in a play and a novel, and the manifestation of our symbolic existence through the multi-dimensional characters. Vivian Bearing and her tumor in *Wit*, and Hadi and Frankenstein in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The study tackles the unique yet grotesque portrayal of death, for it is the main catalyst of events in both literary works. This exploration unravels existentialist details about the human state and the subjective understanding of mortality, regardless that it is factual and inevitable.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The topic that this study tackles is significant not only because understanding death lies at the core of the human condition, or it being an integral part of our lifecycle as humans, but also due to the various expressions and experiences of it evident throughout literary works across history. The definition of death, although universal and quite clear, remains a mystery to man. This study focuses on the representation of death as a metaphysical concept and how it intersects with our interpretation of it in the physical realm that we live in.

This mystery unites humanity in their shared destiny of decay and doom. It strips away from man the societal constructions relied on for most of his life, and most importantly their choice. In a way, man at the end of his life returns to his childish nature of resistance, defiance, rebellion, and narcissism. As fear accompanies man throughout

his adult life in one form or another, it can be fiercely stressed as he approaches death. That is because death is a constant reminder of man's true fragility, vulnerability and all the anxieties and fears that comes within it at its core, is a fuel to live a more purposeful life. This precisely is where artists come into play in their process of decoding meaning or creating it. The exploration of this abstract representation in literature is creative and inspiring, that it almost leads to groundbreaking discoveries about human nature, regardless of the subjectivity of experience. Most of the studies conducted on the current literary works discuss the works separately, while this study joins both the novel and play and explores the representation of the common theme of death and its ramifications on individuals despite the differences.

1.4 Questions of the Study

The current study answers the following questions:

1. How is death represented in *Wit* by Margaret Edson?
2. How is death represented in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmad Saadawi?
3. What are the effects of the characterization of death, on Hadi Al-Attag in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and on Vivian Bearing in *Wit*?
4. What are the differences and similarities between the characterization of death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and that in *Wit*?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Explore the representation of death and its significance in developing the plot of the play *Wit* by Margaret Edson.
2. Explore the representation of death and its significance in developing the plot of the novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmad Saadawi.

3. Show the representation of death as the physical character of Frankenstein and its significance in developing the plot of *Ahmad Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad* and the representation of death as an abstract character and its significance in developing the plot of *Wit* by Margaret Edson.
4. Compare and contrast the impact of the individualized characterization on the main characters in the novel and the play, Hadi in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, and Vivian in *Wit*.

1.6 Definition of Terms

There are three significant definitions in the paper:

Death and Human Death: “death as the irreversible cessation of organismic functioning and human death as the irreversible loss of personhood” (DeGrazia 2007, p.1)

Postmodernism: “a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning” (Aylesworth 2022, p.1)

Metaphysical: “Derived from the Greek *meta ta physika* ("after the things of nature"); referring to an idea, doctrine, or posited reality outside of human sense perception. In modern philosophical terminology, metaphysics refers to the studies of what cannot be reached through objective studies of material reality” (PBS Glossary 2022, p. 1)

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study is limited due to the subjectivity of the authors in their representation and understanding. There are multiple and various interpretations of the theme of death in the novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and the play *Wit*. Moreover, Margaret Edson has only one literary work which limits the research on her style of writing. The research and the concluding statements cannot be generalized.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW of RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

When considering similar or related literature, an important study is carried out by Murphy (2018), entitled “Frankenstein in Baghdad: Human Conditions, or Conditions of Being Human” where he examines *Frankenstein in Baghdad* using the theory of biopolitics by Judith Butler and Isabell Lorey. Butler argues that biopolitics involves regulating the norms and values that shape our understanding of what it means to be human. She offers a critical perspective on the ways in which power operates in contemporary society, shedding light on the complex and often hidden mechanisms through which our bodies and lives are regulated and controlled. Isabell Lorey has more specifically explored the relationship between precarity, biopolitics, and resistance. They both argue that precarity is a crucial place of struggle, as it reveals the ways in which power operates at the level of the body and life course. They suggest that resistance to biopolitical power must begin with a recognition of the precarity or uncertainty of our lives, and a refusal to accept the norms and values that reinforce it. Precarity is a political issue, as it is often the result of broader economic and social structures that prioritize the interests of corporations and the wealthy over those marginalized communities. This is easily related to the conditions of war in Baghdad, as such, precarity is often linked to struggles for social justice, including demands for better working conditions, stronger social welfare systems, and more equitable economic policies.

In his 2018 study, Murphy examines *Frankenstein in Baghdad's* representations of unbearable and difficult living circumstances, due to instable and threatening political situation which led to war in Baghdad. The theory of biopolitics that he used allows him to examine the values of the culture in Baghdad based on the instable relationship between the political structure of that community and its effect on the people of Baghdad. The political structure organizes and controls knowledge in a society as a method to manage human lifestyle, this in turn impacts the core values of this community.

Witnessing and incorporating trauma and death as part of the day to day life, due to the instability of the political structure and the invasion of Iraq, the study focuses on the novel's depiction of forms of unlivable life and living through death, concluding that Saadawi's use of Mary Shelley's original man-made monster is a metaphor of the collective idea due to the fear of death. In other words, we are in turn dying psychologically as we experience war, witness graphic violent images, voices, constant feelings of danger, threat, and loss of loved ones, depicted in the novel.

In other related literature, Khapaeva's book entitled *The Celebration of Death in Contemporary Culture* (2017), she discusses the concept of the cult of death can be seen in various aspects of contemporary Russian culture, including literature, film, and visual art. She argues that this singularity is a response to the trauma and instability of post-Soviet Russia and it reflects a desire to find meaning and significance in a world that is often chaotic and uncertain. As a cultural theorist and scholar who has written extensively about death and mourning in contemporary culture, the concept of cult of death refers to a cultural phenomenon where death is celebrated and perhaps desired at times.

Khapaeva (2017) has been criticized by some for her views, with some arguing that she glorifies death and promotes a nihilistic worldview. However, she has defended her work, stating that her goal is not to promote death, but rather to encourage a more honest and open dialogue about mortality and the human experience. She explores the various ways in which death is celebrated and memorialized in contemporary culture by examining a wide range of cultural artifacts to show how death has become a central theme in many aspects of contemporary life.

The idea that the celebration of death is not necessarily a morbid singularity, but rather reflects a desire to confront and understand mortality in a meaningful way. She also explores the cultural and historical context of death, examining the role that Soviet-era trauma and post-Soviet instability have played in shaping contemporary attitudes towards death. Those changing attitudes and responses to death are also witnessed in postmodernism.

The thesis in a way also exposes the changing responses to death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by offering a detailed decomposition and breaking down of factors in the novel revolved around the corruption of the city, the decay of physical bodies, and the slow collapse of the narrative itself. This trinity of decay highlights the idea that the physical body when broken down, is simply ingredients of social, political, biological spectrums, due to the war in Baghdad, restructured into the monster that is Frankenstein.

While their approaches to the theme of death are different, both *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and Khapaeva's work explore the complex and often contradictory ways in which death is understood and represented in contemporary postmodernist culture, and thus provides insight.

2.2 Death in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

Frankenstein in Baghdad explicitly contains a variety of gruesome descriptions and gothic veil of death and its expressions and effects on citizens. Death is the important element that overshadows the experiences and dilemmas of the characters and their conflicts, whether it be with the rotten governmental system, the stench of war, and the consistent loss of lives which creates a chain of mourning, grief and psychological trauma. This atmosphere and setting that gives the novel its style emphasizes the demise and diminishing of meaning, identity, confusion and with all of that, it feeds the loss of abstract meaning of existence and empowers the physical creation of Frankenstein.

In "Frankenstein's Monster, Past and Present: Writing Against Death in Frankenstein in Baghdad" written by Amin (2022), Amin explores the theme of death in Ahmed Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and how it relates to the larger context of contemporary Iraqi culture. Amin argues that the novel reflects the pervasive sense of loss and trauma that many Iraqis have experienced in the aftermath of years of war and violence. Amin also examines the novel's use of the Frankenstein story as a metaphor for the violence and destruction that has ravaged Iraq, as well as the novel's critique of the corrupt and ineffective institutions that have contributed to the country's instability.

Overall, "Frankenstein's Monster, Past and Present: Writing Against Death in Frankenstein in Baghdad" is a thoughtful and insightful analysis of the themes and significance of Saadawi's novel, particularly as it relates to the experience of death and mourning in contemporary Iraq. Amin argues that the novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad* engages with the theme of death in multiple ways, and that it can be seen as a form of "writing against death." (Amin 2022, p.1) as it says in the title. Amin suggests that the

novel is not only about death, but also about the ways in which people respond to death and the aftermath of violence.

According to Amin, the novel uses the Frankenstein story to explore the experience of trauma and loss in contemporary Iraq, where violence has become a pervasive part of everyday life. Amin suggests that the character of the monster, created from the remains of victims of violence, embodies the collective trauma of the Iraqi people. Amin also argues that the novel critiques the ineffective institutions and corrupt officials that have contributed to the instability and violence in Iraq. By using the story of Frankenstein to highlight the failures of the state and its inability to address the root causes of violence, the novel suggests that a new approach is needed in order to move beyond the cycle of death and destruction.

Overall, Amin suggests that *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is a powerful and important work of literature that engages with the complex and difficult realities of contemporary Iraq, and that it offers a nuanced and thoughtful exploration of the ways in which people respond to death and trauma in the outcome of violence. The concept of “writing against death” provides meaningful framework in decoding and understanding both literary works tackled for this thesis, specifically that not only death is a prevailing theme in the novel and the play, but that the timeline of the plot seems to continue despite death. Regardless of how death is portrayed, and how it keeps on resurfacing, whether as the beast of Frankenstein, represented through war, explosions, or through a plague, or other manifestations that bring death to question constantly.

2.3 Margaret Edson's *Wit*

In Edson's *Wit*, the concept of the physical body being inferior to the spiritual body is highlighted. According to the paper entitled "The "Ironic Significance" of the Body in Margaret Edson's *Wit*" of Soon (2022), he unveils the decay of the intellect and mind through the process of breaking down the body through a terminal disease, which is cancer. A physical manifestation of death, unlike *Frankenstein*, more internal. The fight of death while trying to preserve intellectual value gets difficult with time, this creates a duality and is shown through the play with the use of wittiness.

Soon argues that Margaret Edson's play *Wit* challenges the traditional western notion of the superiority of the soul over the body by highlighting the significance and irony of the female body. The play showcases the dysfunction of the mind and the deterioration of memory, reducing the lines between reality and fantasy, all this through the condition of a body afflicted with a terminal disease.

This emphasizes the body's embodiment of immortality, subverting the dualism of mind and body. The duplication of the protagonist Vivian's body represents the dysfunctional wittiness, symbolizing the metaphysical yearning for immortality. The play suggests that genuine and appropriate wit must be flexible in retrospect, embracing humanity and humility, and discard blind arrogance and the robust of ego. Through exposing the nature of malfunctioning wits and questioning the nature of it, the play highlights the inevitable limits of the author as well as the reader or audience. Furthermore, it implies that in postmodern society, mind and body are not separate, emphasizing the importance of seeking redemption for Vivian.

Moreover, in Fayadh's 2010 study entitled "The aesthetics of death in Margaret Edson's *Wit*", she tackles the methods in which one responds to the fear of death when facing it. Fayadh's purpose is to explore how Margaret Edson tackles the topic of death in her play *Wit*. Typically, death is depicted as a terrifying and distasteful aspect of life when portrayed on stage. However, the paper highlights how Edson manages to transform this grim reality into a valuable educational experience that should not be feared, as it represents a transition towards eternal life. This new approach and response to death is vital in the play, as it is suggested to be needed in life.

The study shows how Edson turned the unpleasant reality of facing death into an exceedingly instructive experience. She also focuses on the vital scholarly role in the play, as a method to manifest the fear of death into a fruitful transformative experience. As the main character Vivian resorts to academic eternal value that constitutes her identity, as this by its own simplifies death and makes it less terrifying. This contribution is important to relate to Socrates' concept of "the practice of dying" in which the emphasis is shifted to the experience of dying being more important than facing the inevitable itself. The awareness resulting from the experience can decompose the fear of death into simpler elements to portray it as only a portal towards the next step of our celestial existence, a form of transcendence.

Furthermore, in "On the Threshold of Death Liminality and Transformation in Margaret Edson's *Wit*" (2012), Ramadan examines Edson's play as trials in creating meaning and reconstructing identity exactly during the process of decay, whether from cancer or not. This gray area between life and death is a glorious opportunity that hints to the life drive, as mentioned earlier according to Freud. The play explores the paradoxes

of mortality and immortality through intellectual transformation, it provides personal notions in which Edson succeeded to reflect.

The concept of liminal space used to show how meaning is created and identity is reconstructed in the transitional zone between life and death. The article presents dying in the play as not merely a source of grief but as a space of possibility for personal and communal transformations, both for the main character Vivian which allows the audience to experience in a way.

It is also interesting to mention Elliot's study "it is not wit, it is truth"- transcending the narrative bounds of professional and personal identity in life and in art" (2014). Right from the title, one notices the postmodernist understanding of truth being relative or defined and explored differently. His analysis shows how Edson framed the idea of death and its constant hollow existence to be magnified through the experience of befriending death as it approaches. Eliminating fear or getting close to the rampage of death. The use of metaphor, irony, wit, and intellectual journey embodied as an existential confrontation with death. It is important to note that the article draws inspiration from the movie adaptation of the play itself, to examine the distinctions and tones of watching a cancer narrative on screen while also having a personal experience with the disease. The author's analysis exposes the delicate boundary between death and dying, sickness and health, existence, and life, and how they shape the identities that emerge from the process of comprehending these concepts through both personal and professional perspectives and transformations. By placing these depictions of the experience of illness within the narrative structures of drama, time, metaphor, and morality, the article reveals how the fusion of intellectual knowledge and intimate, embodied understanding creates personal stories, which is evident throughout Vivian's subjective experience.

This reinstates the development of the thesis in which not only truth is subjective, but the experience and response to death is as well, drawing from the script itself showcases the power of this experience and how the portrayal of death is significant in literature. As what could be derived from the script in the first place is more intricate and contains literary rigor which feeds any adaptation.

A case analysis entitled “Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernity in Symbolism of Death” carried out by Collier (2003), shows that burial patterns and traditions in a 150 - year -old public cemetery have proved an evident decline in relating it to any social institutions which would help the deceased and the family. While showing an acceleration in creating personal individualized expressions of identity or simple symbols, those observed on gravestones among the buried. The focus on the deceased physical body, and the importance of its spiritual transition, through the changing and personalizing of burial traditions; postmodernist evidence of shift in thought and attitude towards death.

Cemeteries, according to the article, serves as replicas of social structures, they provide insight into cultural patterns and historical records of communities. In today’s culture, there appears to be a disregard for the past, even in death, as social institutions no longer provide the same guidance and meaning they once did. These findings support theoretical descriptions of a larger drift that places greater emphasis on the self in the present for recent generations, but do not suggest a radical break with the past. While tradition continues to be observed in most aspects of burial, the treatment of the dead in America specifically reflects cultural processes that emphasize individualization. This is also observed to changes in burial practices in other nations.

Those changing practices are important to reference for this thesis as it elevates and proves the subconscious determined desires of preservation against death. Since the physical component is what we are left with from death, our postmodernist changing response to death in physical buried practices continues to be more of a subjective experience. This aids the thesis specifically in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, as even with post war circumstances, burial of loved ones has become increasingly more difficult due to the gruesome reality of the situation, and this changes how trauma is translated and transformed.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Method

The theory deployed for this paper is postmodernism, which is applied to *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmad Saadawi and *Wit* by Margaret Edson. Postmodernism is an acute response to innovation and creativity within the late twentieth century. Modernism tends to show divided human subjectivity and history, but presents that as something appalling, something to be deplored and grieved as a misfortune. On the contrary, and according to Mohammad Nuri's article (1970) on postmodernism, he argues that postmodernism doesn't regret or reject the thought of fracture, temporality, or confusion, but actually celebrates it and holds on to it.

Postmodernism frequently dismisses rigid concepts, beliefs, cultures, and norms, viewing Western beliefs as simply a minor portion of the human experience, and thus, more needs to be explored and tackled. There is no one conceivable reality since human experience is unstable, internally inconsistent, ambiguous, indeterminate, fractured, discontinuous. As a result, it centers on the chaotic reality of our existence. What is interesting is that postmodernist authors demand that the reader creates his or her own connections, conclusions, and interpretations. (Aylesworth 2015)

In addition, intertextuality and fairy tale allusions are an important characteristic for postmodernist writing. A quest for order and stability is considered foolish and pointless (Antony 2020). Magical realism, arguably the most significant tactic, is the inclusion of extraordinary or impossible aspects into a story such that they appear genuine or normal. It is used in Ahmad Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*.

In conclusion, postmodernism argues with truth and error; they are equivalent. Our realities are constantly evolving and changing, which dictates and proves that truth and error are relative and can change, which is inevitable. In addition, accomplishing self-actualization and rationalization is bizarre as it cannot be reached, thus rejected. The traditional known ethical components of societies will disintegrate. Postmodernists mourn the unfulfilled promises of science, government, and religion. It is crucial to note that morality is individualized, which means it is also relative.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

4.1 The Characterization of Death in *Wit*

The representation of death as an abstract character in *Wit* by Margaret Edson is a significant aspect for the development of the plot. As the character of death serves as a symbol of the inevitable end that awaits all, it helps shape the central themes of the play: mortality, acceptance, and compassion. The way that the leading character Vivian Bearing struggles with understanding and accepting her fate is an intriguing transformational experience that led to personal revelations and growth. Even though, ironically that growth is towards accepting death.

Throughout the play, death is characterized internally as the terminal illness that resides in Vivian's body, which is cancer. The metaphysical representation in this form serves to reinforce the themes by creating an eerie, otherworldly atmosphere that habituates the existential questions accompanied with the fear of death, contemplating the meaning of life and so on. Those which are the core of the play itself.

The protagonist Vivian Bearing is a scholar of metaphysical poetry, in specific the poetry of John Donne, who in real life is one of the most prominent metaphysical poets in history. This relation in the play helps to strike a closer sense of reality as the play adopts this academic background that Vivian possesses to examine and restructure her understanding of mortality as she confronts her demise. This is evident in the following line: "I know all about life and death. I am, after all, a scholar of Donne's holy sonnets, which explore mortality in greater depth than any other body of work in the English Language" (Edson 1999, p.12).

This employment of academia and using literature to comprehend mortality is also further highlighted and evident in the following line: "Nothing but a breath--a comma--separates life from life everlasting. It is very simple, really. With the original punctuation restored, death is no longer something to act out on a stage, with exclamation marks...but a comma, a pause." (Edson

1999, p.14). In this monologue, Vivian reflects on the significance of punctuation in John Donne's poetry. She uses this literary analysis to come to a deeper understanding of death, and how it is not a sudden unexpected danger, or a surprising end, but only a pause in the larger narrative of life, perhaps leading to an afterlife. This scene demonstrates the significance of literature in helping Vivian come to terms with her mortality, and how it can provide a framework for understanding the human experience.

In close resemblance, this agrees with Khapaeva's ideas in her book "*The Celebration of Death in Contemporary Culture* (2017)", in which she introduces the concept of "the cult of death" where it is encouraged to have an open confrontational dialogue with death. Much like what Vivian is doing throughout her employment of her academia, as she analyzes John Donne's poetry relating it to her current terminal conditions. The time that she has left can only be dedicated towards accepting death by desiring it and welcoming it the way it exists, through cancer.

Moreover, the character of death as it takes the physical form of cancer, specifically ovarian cancer, has triggered the importance of compassion and empathy needed towards those who are terminally ill. Despite the awareness that death is inevitable and certain, yet in *Wit*, death is portrayed as the final stage of cancer. The mystery is unveiled from the start of the play, in other words, the play already gives out the ending right from the start. This is evident in the introductory scenes of the play through this following line delivered by the doctor who gave the diagnosis: "This treatment is the strongest thing we have to offer you. And, as research, it will make a significant contribution to knowledge" (Edson 1999, p.11). This directly pushes the reader to realize that the importance is in the experience of dying itself and it eliminates any human efforts in changing the narrative or looking for different possibilities that are more hopeful. Thus, Vivian is forced with the fact that she needs to confront death until her time is up. The denial of death is immediately shaken and brought out to the surface to break. In a way or another, the reader is forced to confront death just as Vivian is, making room for compassion and connection.

The notion of experiencing death as it approaches or as it is predicted corresponds with Socrates' concept of "the practice of dying" and is brought into exploration by Glenn Hughes in his 2022 article entitled "The Denial of Death and the Practice of Dying". This reaffirms that Vivian is in fact practicing death through her very own way of confronting it.

As Vivian struggles to understand medical jargon and begins her deconstruction of death, one can also notice her rejection to the religious solution as suggested by Becker. Vivian being a professor herself, adopts a more creative approach in analyzing the ramifications of death on herself, her mind, her life work, and accomplishments. She looks back at them to derive the strength that her life did not go to waste, and that the creative value she will be leaving equips her with the comfort she needs as she faces death. This is specifically seen in the following line: "My book, entitled *Made Cunningly*, remains an immense success, in paper as well as cloth. My second article, a classic explication of Donne's sonnet "Death be not proud," was published in *Critical Discourse*." (Edson 1999, p.19). This evidently shows how Vivian is holding on to her accomplishments in life to emphasize her intellectual value, this is attributed to the creative solution to the fear of death, as mentioned earlier.

The change in Vivian's use of language as she struggles with her disease is also an important detail in which it emphasizes her demise and the impact of death on her mental models. She also recalls the importance and significance of her intellect, ego, and contribution to knowledge, this is evident in the following line: "To the scholar, to the mind comprehensively trained in the subtleties of seventeenth-century vocabulary, versification, and theological, historical, geographical, political, and mythological allusions. Donne's wit is... a way to see how good you really are. After twenty years, I can say with confidence, no one is quite as good as I." (Edson 1999, p.20).

This monologue reveals how Vivian is evaluating her life achievements as a method of self-preservation and reassuring herself of her symbolic cosmic significance in a world where she is humanly fragile, which is explicitly demonstrated in the following line: "So to honor my memory

they would put together a collection of their essays about John Donne.” “Published and Perished” (Edson 1999, p.32).

Moreover, Vivian reflects on how the power of death, of her cancer transcends the physical damage it is causing, and it is much more impactful and painful on her mind, emotions, and spirit. She suggests that the illness has challenged her sense of self and identity, and that it has forced her to confront the realities of her mortality, this is evident through the flashbacks she experiences. This technique of employing flashbacks is vital as well, as she reevaluates her choices and decisions in life. She remembers her time as a student in university, conversing with her professor, in which she recalls a part of the conversation: “Life, death... I see. It’s a metaphysical conceit. Its wit!” “It is not wit, Miss Bearing. It is truth” (Edson 1999, p.15).

This specific flashback also can be correlated to the previously mentioned study by Elliot entitled “it is not wit, it is truth”- transcending the narrative bounds of professional and personal identity in life and in art” (2014) where the question of identity shaken by the fear of death and the importance of subjectivity of experience is shown. Even though the study was inspired by the adaptation of the script into a movie, it is evident in the play itself and through the use of language and intricate words that Edson used for Vivian, the identity crisis that Vivian faces due to her close contact to death.

Throughout the play, Vivian experiences delirium as the treatment becomes more intense, she imagines herself giving a lecture as she contemplates her existence meanwhile. Even though this interjects with the reality of her situation, as she is playing out one of her fantasies as a professor, she exclaims to the nurse: “I am in the middle of- this. I have this planned for now, not ultrasound. No more tests. We’ve covered that” (Edson 1999, p.51). This scene highlights the psychological and emotional toll of cancer or death that is taking place, and how it serves as a metaphor for the larger existential questions at the heart of the play. Death makes us go squabble

with our core memories that can provide us with either comfort, or answers to the dilemma of death.

Edson has succeeded to evade the reader from their efforts in focusing on what could be done or what could happen to Vivian, she highlighted the significance of our human insignificance, as not only Vivian's body is trying to survive under intense chemotherapy, and will most definitely perish, but Vivian's intellect is also being challenged by the burden of the inevitable. That reassured sense of doom that Edson guarantees for Vivian from the start of her play, opens to the reader new doors in coping with the deep-rooted fear of death.

The metaphor of death for *Wit* is the cancerous tumor itself and the medical pursuits to fight it is ultimately powerless. The play essentially depends on the characterization of death in the physical form of cancer, and it is significant driver of events as without it, there is no plot. Vivian comes to the final realization that her intricate work as a scholar is insignificant in facing death, despite it being her most acknowledged life's work and mission. This creative solution has worked for her temporarily, but when one faces death, one is stripped away from all of that and realizes the importance of compassion, kindness, and human connection to alleviate the lonely pains of experiencing death. The ramifications and the realization of how lonely the experience of death really is, are evident through this line: "You cannot imagine how time... can be... so still. It hangs. It weighs. And yet there is so little of it. Not to worry. Brevity is the soul of wit" (Edson 1999, p.35).

4.2 The Characterization of Death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

The character of Frankenstein is central to the plot and themes of the novel. It revolves around the idea of a monster created from the body parts of victims of violence in war-torn Baghdad, and it shows the consequences of this creation on the city and its inhabitants. The characterization of death was not only given physical characteristics such as feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, but a physical body embodied through Frankenstein. It is vital to note that without

Frankenstein or Whatsitsname as mentioned in the novel would not exist in its current form, as it is the driving force behind the plot and exploration of themes.

As the character of death takes on a tangible, physical form in the novel, but throughout his acts of killing innocent lives to feed, he serves to highlight the pervasive nature of violence and the price that humans pay due to conflict. In Murphy's 2018 study entitled "Frankenstein in Baghdad: Human Conditions, or Conditions of Being Human", he comments on the concept of uncertainty or precarity, in which the instable conflicted relationship between the power structure and the people of Baghdad impacts their values as it changes them, as it is the case with the definition and meaning of death. The price of this conflict leads to the normalization of death, and this is highlighted furthermore through this creature, that is Frankenstein. It haunts the city and takes lives to its own, a metaphor for death itself. Death here is translated into our physical realm, represented as a horrifying disgusting beast that spreads terror.

The protagonist of the novel, Hadi Al-Attag, throughout his experience with grief and trauma with war and with himself, creates the body of Frankenstein as he challenges the idea of creation to establish his own power against the injustices of the world. However, as Hadi encounters the physical embodiment of death personally, he goes through a narcissistic yet confusing journey to endure his own creation. The description of death as having weight and toughness also emphasizes the importance of physicality and tangibility in the novel. This contrasts the abstract concept of death, evident in this following quote: "There were serious things happening, and Hadi was merely a conduit, like a simple father or mother who produces a son who is a prophet, a savior, or an evil leader. They didn't exactly create the storm that followed. They were just the channel for something that was more powerful and significant than themselves." (Saadawi 2018, p.81)

It is important to emphasize that Hadi himself stitches together body parts from victims of violence in Baghdad. The fact that Frankenstein is made up of these body parts reinforces the idea that not only death is prevailing, but Hadi is taking control of what couldn't or shouldn't be

controlled. This is also a fierce probably traumatic response to the fear of death. Hadi subconsciously is adopting the “death drive” theory by Freud which was previously tackled. To seek destruction and seize control of the inevitable, but this has consequences and poses ethical dilemmas in the mind of Hadi that can be seen in this line: “He wanted to cry, but all he could do was stare. As he looked closer, he detected something deeper: This wasn’t the face of Hadi the junk dealer; it was the face of someone he had convinced himself was merely a figment of his fertile imagination. It was the face of the Whatsitsname.” (Saadawi 2018, p.191)

In Ramadan’s study “On the Threshold of Death Liminality and Transformation in Margaret Edson’s *Wit*” (2022), he examines how identity can be reconstructed when facing death or decay in Edson’s work, yet it can also be implemented in how Hadi reconstructs his identity and questions it as he witnessed traumatic experiences of death and have seen it numerous, up till the point of creating Frankenstein himself. The psychological impact war and injustice have driven Hadi to seize an opportunity of controlling death, which in turn meddles with his understanding of who he really is. It can be deduced that death and identity are opposing to one another, experiencing, or witnessing death because it has no clear face or identity and scatters one’s understanding of himself, thus pushing Hadi into constructing identity to death itself, through Frankenstein.

Frankenstein’s physical existence in the novel is what develops and motivates the plot of the novel, he is an embodiment of death on earth, he collects souls, and this reaffirms his role as a manifestation of death. It is seen in the novel with the following quotation: “The Whatsitsname was now 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 if he took too long avenging the victims in whose name he was acting, the body parts he had taken from them would decompose in situ. It would be the end of him, and he would be free of this world” (Saadawi 2018, p.145).

Even though Frankenstein in the novel is referred to as someone who has no clear name, this fits perfectly with placing an identity and defining the physicality of death as close to humanly possible, to further aid in understanding and accepting death.

Ironically in the novel, the character of Frankenstein is portrayed as both a monster and a victim. This mirrors Hadi's perception of death, where he fears this hungry monster yet at the same time, Frankenstein's status as a victim highlights his role of collecting souls, which is merely the cost that humans must pay for their destructive behaviors in the world. Therefore, Hadi's need for justice justifies his creation of the monster that would end the pain and trauma that the people of Baghdad are saturated in.

Furthermore, as death took the physical role of Frankenstein, he interacts with one of the novel's characters, such as the journalist Mahmoud. The fact that death is portrayed as having human qualities, such as making himself comfortable in a human body, and having interactions with others, reinforces the idea that death is a tangible presence in the lives of the characters, yet is hard to understand how it is real at the same time, as seen in the following line: "As for the story the journalist had written about him, it hadn't done him much good: it had portrayed him as a figment of Hadi's sick imagination." (Saadawi 2018, p.134). This highlights the inevitability of death and the way in which it is an ever-present force in the novel and life, however still unbelievable to exist.

Frankenstein's presence in the novel is felt throughout, as it wreaks havoc and causes fear and confusion among the people of Baghdad. This act of creation sets in motion the events that follow and establishes the novel's central conflict: what to do with this monstrous being that has been brought to life. The novel's themes of identity, agency, and responsibility are all closely tied to the character of Frankenstein. The novel dares to ask existential questions about who has the power to create and destroy life, and who bears responsibility for the consequences of these actions. This also conflicts Hadi immensely, it also explores the idea of agency and identity in a

context of violence and conflict, as Frankenstein struggles to define his own identity and purpose in a world that rejects it, this is mirroring death in its core.

The physical representation of death in Frankenstein in Baghdad is grotesque in capturing the true horrors of our physical death, which functions as a storage for the mind and spirit. This manifestation allows us to face and humanize death, easing us into accepting the physical component of death, not only our symbolic death. It helps us understand mortality in the physical realm, no matter how horrifying. This, in turn lessens our deep-seated denial of death that exists as unseen and untouched. Saadawi's use of the physical embodiment of death, challenges the boundaries between the metaphysical and the natural, yet combining them to further develop our understanding.

4.3 The Effects of the Characterization of Death on Vivian Bearing in *Wit*

The unique characterization of death in *Wit* has a profound effect on Vivian Bearing in several ways. Firstly, the physical presence of death through Vivian's diagnosis of advanced ovarian cancer forces her to confront her mortality in a more immediate and urgent way. She undergoes severe medical treatments and experiences the physical deterioration of her body. This sent her into deep contemplation and comprehension of the meaning of life as she awaits her fate.

In the play, Vivian frequently breaks the fourth wall to address the audience directly to comment on the actions of the play, and the events that are unfolding. Alongside with the theoretical presence of death that simply is hovering over her. This further emphasizes Vivian's own morbid fear of mortality and the ways in which death is an inescapable part of the human experience, in addition to understanding the universality of death and our duty to surrender to it, in acceptance. Vivian reveals her innermost feelings and fears. For example, when she is undergoing a painful medical procedure, she says, "Oh, God. I have never been so...alone." "I'm scared" "I don't feel sure of myself anymore" (Edson 1999, p.65) By breaking the fourth wall she invites the audience to empathize with her.

In one of the play's most memorable moments, Vivian directly addresses the audience after her death, saying: "Now is not the time for verbal swordplay, for unlikely flights of imagination and wildly shifting perspectives, for metaphysical conceit, for wit. Now is a time for simplicity. Now is a time for, dare I say it, kindness" (Edson 1999, p.69). By speaking to the audience, Vivian reminds the audience of her presence and continuing to engage with them even after her death. This adds intimacy and reinforces the immediacy of the play's message.

The main effect of this characterization ultimately leads Vivian to a deeper understanding of what it means to be alive, and the ways in which her own pursuit of knowledge and intellectual achievement has left her feeling disconnected and isolated from others. This is evident in the directions given in the script: "(Vivian concentrates with all her might, and she attempts, a grand summation, as if trying to conjure her own ending.) And Death- Capital D- Shall be no more- Semi colon. Death- Capital D- thou shalt die- ex-cla-mation point!" (Edson 1999, p.72). Furthermore, this is evident in the description prior to Vivian's lines: "(She looks down at herself, looks out at the audience, and sees that the line doesn't work. She shakes her head and exhales with resignation)" (Edson 1999, p.73).

Throughout the play, Vivian has a strained relationship with Jason Posner, one of her doctors and surprisingly a former student who took her course as an elective class. Vivian views Jason as callous and insensitive, particularly in his approach to her cancer treatment as she claims in the line: "So. The young doctor, like the senior scholar, prefers research to humanity. At the same time the senior scholar, in her pathetic state as a simpering victim, wishes the young doctor would take more interest in personal contact." (Edson 1999, p.58). This also begins to demonstrate Vivian's yearning to compassion and kindness.

As she nears the end of her life, she accepts the idea that death is a natural and inevitable part of the human experience, and that it can be approached with grace and dignity. This affirms the transformative effect that the characterization of death has had on Vivian's perspective on life

and the value of human existence. She refers to her studies in one of her flashbacks as she is instructing and claims in regard to a poem she reflects on: “We want to correct the speaker, to remind him of the assurance of salvation. But it is too late. We are left to our own consciousness. Have we outwitted Donne? Or have we been outwitted?” (Edson 1999, p.50). This reference Vivian ponders on the meaning of salvation as she connects and applies what she used to teach in her lectures to her current conditions.

In the play's final scene, Vivian accepts the inevitable, quoting John Donne’s poetry, which suggests a newfound acceptance of death, regardless that her prior existing knowledge she gained through her studies and work on death has not been useful, but she had to have the willingness to face it.

As mentioned in the study of Soon in the 2022 article entitled: “The “Ironic Significance” of the Body in Margaret Edson’s *Wit*”, he introduces the concept of the superiority of the soul on the ramifications of death, in which Vivian uses her wit and intellect to fight her fear of death. The acceptance of Vivian to her detrimental end has also been evident through the choice she has been given in the end by her nurse, which is in case her heart stops beating, Vivian can choose whether to let the medical team resuscitate or to keep it flat lined. The power she gains from this choice is considered a win against the inevitable.

4.4 The Effects of the Characterization on Hadi Al-Attag in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

Throughout the novel, Hadi's response to Frankenstein, which is the physical manifestation of death in which he created, is complex and multifaceted. Despite the monstrous appearance, Hadi shows sympathy and empathy towards it. He recognizes the pain and suffering that Frankenstein has endured, and he wants to help it. This is seen in the following quote: “Hadi went back home. He felt around on the floor of the courtyard for blood or bits of the body parts he knew he had held in his hands when he was cutting them up or stitching them together to get the body into a reasonably finished state.” (Saadawi 2018, p.48).

At the same time and pace, Hadi feels a sense of responsibility towards Frankenstein. He sees himself as its parent and wants to protect it from harm. This is also evident through what Frankenstein communicated to him: "You were just a conduit, Hadi," the Whatsitsname replied. "Think how many stupid mothers and fathers have produced geniuses and great men in history. The credit isn't due to them but to circumstances and other things beyond their control." Furthermore, he continues: "You're just an instrument, or a surgical glove that Fate put on its hand to move pawns on the chessboard of life." (Saadawi 2018, p.94). This sends Hadi into ethical doubts and a struggle in defining who Hadi truly is, and whether he is the true evil instead of death itself.

Ironically, Hadi with his trials to control and parent Frankenstein, he is afraid of what it represents. He knows that it is a dangerous and unpredictable force, and he worries about the consequences of its actions. Even when he takes the blame and fall for Frankenstein's actions. This can be seen in the following quote: "Whatsitsname was made up of the body parts of people who had been killed, plus the soul of another victim, and had been given the name of yet another victim. He was a composite of victims seeking to avenge their deaths so they could rest in peace. He was created to obtain revenge on their behalf." (Saadawi 2018, p.97) This shows Saadawi's emphasis on the physicality and description of Frankenstein to providing a gruesome image of this creature.

Overall, Frankenstein challenges Hadi's deep-seated fear of death as the physical being of death as Frankenstein reflects the complex and contradictory but truthful nature of death. Hadi feels both sympathy and fear recognizing the humanity and inevitable idea that death is only natural yet being repulsed by the monstrous appearance. This is evident in the following quote: "Leave me till the end," he said. "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, but at the end. Make me the last one." (Saadawi 2018, p.97) This impact is emblematic of the novel's larger themes, which explore the impact of violence and death on the human psyche.

Through the character of Frankenstein, Hadi undergoes psychological and emotional turmoil in witnessing death on those who experience it, and the urgency to face the fear himself. Frankenstein is a manifestation of the trauma and violence that have plagued Baghdad, and its presence evokes a range of emotions in the characters who encounter it. Death is thus expressed through a variety of physical horrifying representations such as in the following line: “Death stalked the city like the plague” (Saadawi 2018, p.9)

Furthermore, the physical representation of death leads Hadi’s life to personal transformation and growth. He becomes more reflective and introspective, and begins to question his role in the violence that has plagued his city. He also forms a close bond with Elishva, an elderly Christian woman who is searching for the body parts of her son, and this relationship provides a sense of purpose and meaning for him.

As Hadi becomes more involved with the various factions vying for control of the city, he becomes more aware of the constant presence of death in his world. This heightened awareness of death serves to underscore the impact that Frankenstein has had on his life. Ultimately, Hadi's obsession with Frankenstein and his own mortality leads him to take increasingly desperate actions. He contemplates suicide and becomes increasingly reckless in his pursuit of the truth about Frankenstein, about death as raw as it really is. This stresses the way in which the characterization of death through Frankenstein has fundamentally changed Hadi's perspective on life and the value of human existence. This is evident in the following line: “Hadi never again saw his creation after that. He knew the big criminal the Americans and the Iraqi police were looking for, and who was always mentioned on television, was the Whatsitsname. He and the Whatsitsname were linked only in his mind.” (Saadawi 2018, p.134)

Throughout this turmoil and chaos, Hadi eventually surrenders to take the blame for Frankenstein’s actions, as seen in this quote: “On February 21, 2006, the supreme security commanders in Baghdad announced they had finally arrested the dangerous

criminal that official reports called Criminal X, and that the public called the Whatsitsname, along with many other names. They projected a large picture of him on a big screen and announced his name: Hadi Hassani Aidros, a resident of Bataween and commonly known as Hadi al-Attag, the junk dealer.” (Saadawi 2018, p.199). This hints to the surrender of Hadi towards understanding that he cannot control death, and that which is already rotten and gone; the bodies, the victims, and life itself, cannot be rebirthed in its abstract holiness that Hadi initially wanted.

In “Frankenstein’s Monster, Past and Present: Writing Against Death in Frankenstein in Baghdad” written by Amin (2022), Amin suggests how writing against death needs to also address the ways in which people respond or react to the inevitable doom that awaits. Hadi’s creation of Frankenstein is a method of fighting the fear and normalization of death, which goes along the lines of writing against death, or fighting death itself by either having control over Frankenstein or taking the blame eventually. Yet the psychological turmoil and identity crisis that he faces was also inevitable consequence.

4.5 The Differences and Similarities between the Characterization of Death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *Wit*

It is imperative to say that the difference between the characterization of death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *Wit* is that death is physically embodied as a creature, while in the latter, death is portrayed as an inner tumor that portrays the abstract.

The physical manifestation of death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in its tangible presence in the novel, interacting with other characters plays an active role in the plot. The physical nature of death highlights its true visceral and destructive qualities, as well as the ways in which it can be feared and harnessed by those who seek power or revenge.

On the other hand, in *Wit*, death’s abstract characterization emphasizes its universal and intangible qualities, as well as highlighting its impact on human consciousness and how it distorts

our human perceptions. The abstract nature of death in the play allows for a more philosophical exploration of significance and meaning, as well as its relationship to broader and expand on themes such as faith, spirituality, and human connection.

Portraying death differently in two varying styles of literary works can be detected throughout the use of language, tone, and imagery. The language used to describe Frankenstein's appearance and actions is often distorted and monstrous as seen in the following description: "The big mouth like a gash right across the jaw, the horrible face, the stitches across the forehead and down the cheeks, the big nose" (Saadawi 2018, p.67) In contrast, the language used to convey the presence of death in *Wit* is more metaphorical as seen in this line by Vivian: "I'm scared. Oh, God. I want... I want.. no. I want to hide. I just want to curl up in a little ball." (Edson 1999, p70). This creates a sense of otherworldliness and mystery regarding what the character is facing and feeling.

The tone in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is also often dark and foreboding, reflecting accurately the violent and chaotic world in which the story takes place in. The presence of the creature adds to the sense of unease, as the characters grapple with the implications of its existence and the role it plays in the ongoing violence, which is seen again in this line: "Death stalked the city like the plague" (Saadawi 2018, p.9). It is important to note how death is given different symbols in the novel itself, it begins as a plague, turns into Frankenstein the monster. However, the tone in *Wit* is more reflective and introspective, with the main character contemplating the meaning of life and death.

Furthermore, the imagery used to convey death is darker in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and often centers around physical destruction and body decay. When Frankenstein starts his killing spree, it leaves a trail of destruction in its wake, with the stench and presence of bodies torn apart and left to rot. This is seen in the following quote: "The smell suddenly hit his nostrils—the

smoke, the burning of plastic and seat cushions, the roasting of human flesh. You wouldn't have smelled anything like it in your life and would never forget it." (Saadawi 2018, p.21).

In *Wit*, imagery associated with death is often more symbolic, such as the use of the word *cycle* to represent the certainty of life and death, highlighting that it is inescapable. In addition to that, the play frequently uses rich medical jargon, which succeeded in emphasizing the clinical and impersonal nature of death in contemporary society. This is evident in Vivian's diagnosis by her doctor: "You present with a growth that, unfortunately, went undetected in stages one, two, and three. Now it is an insidious adenocarcinoma- The first week of each cycle you'll be hospitalized for chemotherapy; the next week you may feel a little tired; the next two weeks'll be fine, relatively. This *cycle* will repeat eight times, as I said before." (Edson 1999, p.4-5)

Moreover, the character's recollections and flashbacks, whether it was when she was giving a class or with her father, are woven throughout the play to provide a framework for understanding her own approach to death. In one poignant moment, Vivian recites Donne's "Death be not proud" as she faces her mortality.

There are also some similarities when tackling the characterization of death, in its abstract or physical manifestation in both literary works. Starting with the presence of death itself as an important vital character, that without it, the events would not unfold. The concept of death is presented as an ever-ubiquitous force and threat in human life.

Both works also show the impact that death has on individuals and society. In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the constant presence of death is chaotic, as people struggle to come to terms with the violence around them and are seeking their own ways to cope with death, even post war. In *Wit*, the impact of death is shown through Vivian's journey towards acceptance instead of denial.

According to Collier's 2003 case study analysis entitled "Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernity in Symbolism of Death". The change of burial traditions in the postmodernist world is vital and proven to be constantly changing as mentioned. Yet, with the normalization and

uncontrollable increase of gruesome deaths due to war in cases such as Baghdad, burial traditions are thrown out of the window. It is very difficult to even consider subjective personal methods of burial when the situation or circumstance on land is this severe and hard to perform actual spiritual burial traditions suitable to the culture. This hints to the possibility of conducting mass burials and the importance of them spiritually or religiously according to different cultures, which strips the subjective experience of burial traditions.

The literary works share universality, they address the experience of death and the importance of coming in terms with it. *Frankenstein in Baghdad* portrays the significance that death comes for all of us, regardless of one's social or political status, and even if it was invoked by another entity, which is unfair and unjust. Death is a cape that swallows us whole and there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. Yet in a contradicting manner, the people of Baghdad needed a physical entity to blame for war and destruction, which furthermore supports their denial of death and somehow aids them in accepting it, as long as there is someone to blame. This is evident in this quote: "Aziz saw the spontaneous celebrations but still wasn't convinced that Hadi was the criminal. It was impossible. But he went to dance outside the coffee shop anyway." (Saadawi 2018, p.201).

In *Wit*, Vivian's deteriorating physical condition is a constant reminder of her impending death, from her baldness to her vomiting as expressed in her line: "God, I'm going to barf my brains out. If I actually did barf my brains out, it would be a great loss to my discipline." (Edson 1999, p.32). In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the various body parts used to create Frankenstein represent the physical remnants of those who have died, which suggests that death is active, hunting, and is constituted by the human souls that have died.

While the characterization of death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *Wit* is similar in concept and different in how they portrayed death, it is important to tackle some similarities in the way Hadi and Vivian responded to death as well. Both characters are initially unprepared for their encounters with death. Hadi is not ready to confront the reality of the deaths in his community,

already facing loss and grief, he is still unable to cope with the already existing injustices due to war, death doesn't seem fair. His creation of Frankenstein also scares him, as he transcends into an ethical dilemma of creation. It seems that death as Frankenstein isn't as horrifying as the people we become if we choose, this is seen in the change in Hadi's character as is described in the following line: "Hadi was permanently scatterbrained. He didn't have any of the eloquence or composure apparent in the digital recordings of the Whatsitsname's strange long monologues. It was impossible that Hadi was the Whatsitsname. monologues. It was impossible that Hadi was the Whatsitsname." (Saadawi 2018, p.200).

As for Vivian, she is unprepared for the intensity of her treatment for cancer. Despite that, they both on a subconscious level understand the urgency of death. As the plot unfolds in both literary works, Hadi and Vivian ultimately return to a childlike state of fear to accept their own mortality. Hadi realizes he must give up the illusionary sense of control over death through Frankenstein, as his mental state deteriorates and worsens, he lives with the crushing ramifications. This only poses the question of: is he alive and where did his death drive lead him to? However, Vivian comes to accept death, even if it isn't clear if she understood it, as she fades with a sense of peace as she walks into the light, and perhaps the effort in understanding the metaphysical is void.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the concluding statements for the questions of the study. It also includes recommendations on what more could be explored of the representations of death and the response to death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmad Saadawi and *Wit* by Margaret Edson in relation to Postmodernism.

5.1 Conclusion

1. How is Death represented in *Wit* by Margaret Edson?

Margaret Edson has a unique perspective on death and how it effects individuals. She depicts death as a powerful abstract force that cannot be reckoned with. Her approach in characterizing it is subjective, rejects coherence and focuses on the enlightenment and experience of the human consciousness and memory, as the main character deteriorates. This approach in essence is what postmodernism is.

The representation of death is significant, as without the diagnosis that Vivian receives at the beginning of the play, the course of events would simply not happen. The representation is enriched with the use of irony, disorientation of time and memory, self-reflection, and breaking the fourth wall. Those are vital techniques used, that aided the character in approaching understanding death and accepting it.

The abstract character of death as an inner illness or tumor suggests how death manifests itself in the human body, as shown through the decline on Vivian's body and mental state. Furthermore, the efforts by the medical staff to treat it, mirrors the efforts to escape death as it is.

The play utilizes the imagery of holy sonnets and religious symbolism to examine the relationship between science and faith. However, towards the end, Vivian returns to a state of

childlessness as her fear and yearning for kindness, love and protection prevails over her fear of death.

The existence of death as an abstract character is the main catalyst of events, yet it had no physical form in which one can communicate with. An absent character, if you will, yet with a powerful haunting presence.

2. How is death represented in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmad Saadawi?

Ahmad Saadawi's representation of death as a physical entity present in the novel is a significant medium as it pushes forward the plot into its climax. He also depicts death as a vigorous force that cannot and shouldn't be meddled with. His approach in characterizing it also rejects coherence and focuses on existing chaos and disorder in the world, but with a touch of magical realism. Those are characteristics of postmodernism existent profusely throughout the novel.

Saadawi's use of self-reflection, brutal imagery, and magical realism in creating Frankenstein were unique techniques to employ as his characters battle the understanding of death and allowing themselves to accept that they do not have power over it, which in turn forces them to accept it. Even if this isn't clear towards the end of the novel.

The physical representation of death in the form of Frankenstein gives a sense of distance between the abstract concept of death and its physical existence. Thus, it is represented as an entity that is coming after us, instead of an inner manifestation or a doomed destiny. The interactions between Frankenstein and the people of Baghdad is proof of this significant representation, this is to demonstrate the ramifications and methods in which humans deal or cope with the monster of Frankenstein; the monster of death. Similarly, to Edson, Frankenstein is also a major catalyst of events that the novel revolved around, this also suggests that death is ever haunting and traumatic, but we must find our way to deal with it.

3. What are the effects of the characterization of death, on Hadi Al-Attag in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and on Vivian Bearing in *Wit*?

In *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Hadi's experience with understanding death differed as he humanized the abstract concept of death into a physical breathing creature, this blurs the lines between life and death. It allows the exploration of the psychological impact of war as well. His relationship with Frankenstein is complex and nuanced. Hadi recognizes that Frankenstein is his own product of violence and chaos, but also understands that it poses a danger. This encourages readers to question their assumptions of death, of what is real and possible and what is not. This creation of surrealism and fantastical wonder can be attributed to the denial of death and can be considered as a method of control over the uncontrollable or self-preservation against the truth of death.

As Frankenstein himself struggles to understand his own purpose, his actions spark a series of ethical debates among the characters in the novel. This physical creation of death in a human-like form with its own struggles gives space to further contemplate our treatment and approach to death. Hence, it is fair to say our comprehension of death is an individualized experience, fused with our own representations and perspectives. It is important to note that without those representations, there would be no plot, in addition, the main driving force for those transformational journeys that they embarked on is the fear of death.

As for *Wit*, the main character Vivian experienced a profound sense of loss, in her understanding that she has only little time to live. She questioned the meaning of life, delving into her own memories and pondering on her achievements, trying to strike a balance between the value of her life and the end in which she had to face.

The effect of this inner manifestation of death as an abstract concept, sends Vivian in deep turmoil that starts to deteriorate as her physical state gets worse. To elaborate, although she is a highly recognized professor in the poetry of John Donne, her language starts professionally as she

is intricate in using her words, and decoding medical jargon that she is surrounded by. Yet, the illness pushes her towards focusing on more simple human needs, such as kindness. Her language use changes, and her thought processes become darker yet more childlike, as she craves human kindness and a loving supporting hand.

This has been the effect of this abstract characterization on Vivian, in which her mental and physical pains develop throughout the plot, so does her confrontation with death's implications and confronting her true fear and denial of death, however her illness forces her to strip this denial and face it courageously.

4. What are the differences and similarities between the characterization of death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *Wit*?

The main difference between *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *Wit* is the perception of death, as it is portrayed as a physical, tangible entity that can be seen and interacted with, whereas in the latter, it is abstract and conceptual, a force that cannot be seen or interacted with.

As for the narrative structure of both literary works, despite the obvious differences between what constitutes a novel and a play, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* follows the story of several characters as they interact with the main character of Hadi and Frankenstein, meanwhile *Wit* is a play that follows the story of one single main character, Vivian, as she confronts her own transience.

However, both literary works share similar philosophical exploration of the character of death. The literary works at study trigger the readers into asking the important questions on the nature of our humanly bound existence, its meaning, and the significance of human connection. Furthermore, both works also examine the impact of confronting death on its victims, as it also explores grief, loss, pain, and going through that in a whirl of confusion.

Understanding metaphysical concepts in the universe has always been challenging and will remain so, since it is difficult to materialize the abstract ideas with our limited abilities. Yet we are aware that the significance of our existence is constantly threatened amidst the havoc and chaos in the world. This threat embedded in the fear of death creates a portal in life and literature which not only do we reflect and ponder but urges us to fight and create. “This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression - and with all this yet to die” (Becker, p. 87, 1973).

5.2 Recommendations

1. More studies should be done on how Frankenstein in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* functions as a character of death in human dimensions, his interactions, feelings, and behaviors as dystopian literature.
2. More studies should be done on the response to death in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by other specific characters such as Elishva and Mahmoud,
3. More studies should be done on Hadi Al-Attag’s response to grief from a psychoanalysis perspective.
4. More studies should be done on both literary works from a historical perspective.
5. More studies should be done on the response of Vivian Bearing’s doctor Jason Posner to death from a psychoanalysis perspective.
5. More studies should be done on the importance of religion and doubt in combatting death in *Wit*.
6. More studies should be done on the character of Vivian Bearing from a feminist perspective.

7. More linguistic studies should be done on the varying language use of Margaret Edson's *Wit* in the university and hospital.

8. More studies should be done on the contrast between the power structures evident in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* and *Wit*.

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