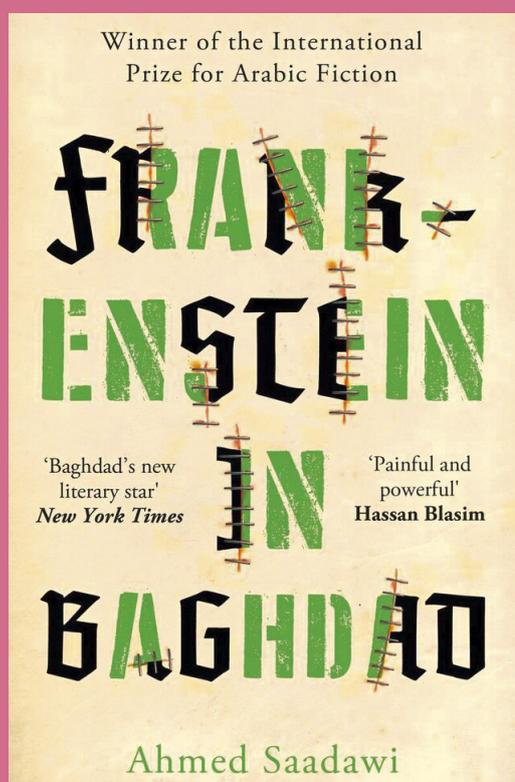




Reader's Guide



Frankenstein in Baghdad Ahmed Saadawi

Translated by Jonathan Wright

Oneworld

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About the author

Ahmed Saadawi was born in Baghdad, Iraq, in May 1973. He is a novelist, poet, screenwriter and documentary filmmaker. He is the first Iraqi to win the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, commonly called the Arabic Booker Prize, which he won in 2014 for *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. In 2010 he was selected for Beirut39, as one of the 39 best Arab authors under the age of 40. He lives in Baghdad.

About the translator

Jonathan Wright was born in Hampshire, UK, in December 1953. He studied Arabic at Oxford University. He is the translator of Hassan Blasim's *The Corpse Exhibition*, which won the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in 2014. He lives in London.

About the book

From the rubble-strewn streets of US-occupied Baghdad, the junk dealer Hadi collects human body parts and stitches them together to create a corpse. His goal, he claims, is for the government to recognize the parts as people and give them a proper burial. But when the corpse goes missing, a wave of eerie murders sweeps the city, and reports stream in of a horrendous-looking criminal who, though shot, cannot be killed. Hadi soon realizes he's created a monster, one that needs human flesh to survive – first from the guilty, and then from anyone who crosses his path. As the violence escalates and Hadi's acquaintances – a journalist, a government worker and a lonely old woman – become involved, the 'Whatsitsname' and the havoc it wreaks assume a magnitude far greater than anyone could have imagined.

Discussion points

Saadawi was a journalist before he wrote his first novel – does this come through in his writing?

The story begins with gritty realism, but soon takes a turn into fantasy/horror – what did you think of the change in direction?

The monster struggles with choosing whom to target, as it seems that everyone is both a criminal and a victim. Is this the case in all societies?

What responsibility does Hadi bear for what the monster becomes?

Themed reading

Kevin Powers *The Yellow Birds*

Rajiv Chandrasekaran *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Baghdad's Green Zone*

Sinan Antoon *The Corpse Washer*

Paolo Bacigalupi *The Windup Girl*

Useful links

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/feb/16/frankenstein-in-baghdad-by-ahmed-saadawi-review>

<https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2018/02/finding-horror-and-humour-ahmed-saadawi-s-frankenstein-baghdad>

<https://ruyafoundation.org/en/2014/10/ahmed-saadawi/>

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-novel-after-the-arab-spring>