POST-APOCALYPTIC DYSTOPIAN FICTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MESSIANIC FIGURES IN CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *THE ROAD* AND AHMAD SADAAWI'S *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD*

RAHMA MOHAMMAD AHMAD ABEDALQADER

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2023

POST-APOCALYPTIC DYSTOPIAN FICTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MESSIANIC FIGURES IN CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *THE ROAD* AND AHMAD SADAAWI'S *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD*

by

RAHMA MOHAMMAD AHMAD ABEDALQADER

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

September 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Praise be to Allah the Almighty for his innumerable blessings, and it is by his grace that this thesis has been completed. I would like to express my foremost gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor Dr. Halima Mohamed Ali, and my co-supervisor Prof. Dato' Seri Dr. Md Salleh Yaapar. This thesis would not have been completed without their insightful academic knowledge, as well as their assistance, patience, and collaboration, I would not have been able to finish this thesis.

I would also like to convey my gratefulness to my loving parents without whom I would not have been able to complete my education. I extend my profound gratitude to my spouse, Dr. Haitham Al-Yousef, who has been my constant companion and source of inspiration. In closing, I want to express my gratitude to everyone who has encouraged me and provided me with ideas throughout the process of writing this thesis. May Allah bless us with prosperity and provide us with guidance towards the righteous course.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIKSYEN DISTOPIA PASCA-APOKALIPTIK: KAJIAN PERBANDINGAN TOKOH-TOKOH MESIANIK DALAM CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *THE ROAD* DAN AHMAD SADAAWI'S *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD*

ABSTRAK

Kebelakangan ini, kritikan terhadap fahaman mesianik telah mula mengambil hala tuju baharu yang lebih pelbagai dalam teori budaya sastera dan falsafah. Konsep tersebut dianggap sebagai kembali kepada, atau daripada agama atas fakta bahawa agama pada masa kini mempengaruhi pemikiran kritis. Walau bagaimanapun, kewujudan peralihan kepada paradigma falsalah mesianik menjadi salah satu cara bagi memahami situasi kontemporari walaupun dalam masyarakat beragama. Tujuan penulisan tesis ini adalah untuk meneroka bagaimana figura messiah digambarkan dalam novel kontemporari daripada pandangan mesianik falsafah yang berbeza dan teori pasca bencana. Untuk mencapai objektif asas ini, analisis perbandingan antara *The Road* karya Cormac McCarthy dan *Frankenstein in Baghdad* karya Ahmad Sadaawi akan dilaksanakan menggunakan pandangan falsafah Walter Benjamin dan Jacques Derrida tentang tokoh dan struktur mesianik yang samar. Selain itu, perspektif teori pasca bencana James Berger dianggap sebagai pendekatan khas untuk menganalisis pandangan tentang tokoh dan struktur mesianik. Kepentingan kajian ini ialah perbandingan pengarang Amerika dan Arab. Walaupun menggunakan tema dystopian pasca-apokaliptik yang sama dan, pada zahirnya, mempercayai kewujudan Mesias, penulis Amerika dan Arab menggambarkan penyelamat mereka secara berbeza kerana latar belakang mereka yang berbeza. Pembacaan secara teliti akan novel McCarthy dan Saadawi mendedahkan bahawa novel tersebut menggambarkan sebuah masa depan di mana teologi bencana tipikal gagal

mewujudkan dunia alternatif yang mesra. Analisis novel Dystopia pasca bencana menunjukkan bahawa kedua-dua penulis lebih suka menggambarkan tokoh mesianik yang samar, walaupun pada hakikatnya kedua-dua mereka merupakan penulis yang berlatar belakangkan agama. Latar belakang budaya mereka telah mempengaruhi penggambaran mereka terhadap tokoh mesianik dan pemahaman mereka tentang isu yang berkaitan dengan penyelamatan dan penebusan. McCarthy dan Sadaawi memperlihatkan tokoh mesianik yang tidak dikenal pasti yang terlepas daripada sebarang hubungan agama atau politik.

POST-APOCALYPTIC DYSTOPIAN FICTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MESSIANIC FIGURES IN CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *THE ROAD* AND AHMAD SADAAWI'S *FRANKENSTEIN IN BAGHDAD*

ABSTRACT

Recently, criticism of the messianic idea has begun to take another diverse approach within literary and philosophical cultural theory. Apparently, the concept is perceived as a return to or of religion due to the fact that religion currently influences critical thinking. However, there is a shift to a messianic philosophical paradigm that becomes a way of understanding the contemporary situation, even in religious societies. This thesis investigates post-apocalyptic dystopian narratives that address the identification of a unique world messiah for humanity. Throughout history, the concept of a messiah who will bring peace and harmony to the world has been present in a variety of religions and cultures, albeit under different names and with varying interpretations. The concept of the Messiah is fundamental to the three monotheistic religions. In Judaism, he is known as the Messiah, in Christianity as Jesus, and in Islam as Isa Ibn Maryam (peace be upon him). The purpose of this thesis is to explore how the messiah figure is portrayed in contemporary novels from different philosophical messianic views and the post-apocalyptic theory. To achieve this basic objective, a comparative cultural approach is followed to analyze Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Ahmad Sadaawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad,* employing Walter Benjamin's historical materialism theory and Jacques Derrida's poststructuralism philosophical views on indeterminate messianic figures and messianic structures. Additionally, to enhance the theoretical framework, James Berger's post-apocalyptic theoretical perspectives are considered a special approach

to analyzing the views on messianic figures and messianic structures. This study's significance is derived from a comparison of American and Arab authors. Despite employing the same post-apocalyptic dystopian themes and, on the surface, believing in the existence of a Messiah, American and Arab writers portray their saviors differently due to their divergent backgrounds. Reading McCarthy's and Saadawi's novels closely reveals that they depict a post-apocalyptic dystopian world in which the typical apocalyptic theology fails to provide an amicable alternative world. The analysis of these two novels shows that both writers prefer to portray an indeterminate messianic figure, despite the fact that both writers are of a religious background. Their cultural backgrounds have impacted their portrayal of the messianic figures and their understanding of issues related to salvation and redemption. Both McCarthy and Sadaawi present de-identified messianic figures divested of any religious or political ties.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

This thesis is an examination of current post-apocalyptic dystopian narratives. These narratives address a variety of contemporary issues, including communal disintegration, economic crises, environmental disasters, and the collapse of civilizations. Post-apocalyptic dystopian narratives take place in a world upended by catastrophe. They often portray the aftermath of a catastrophic event that alters the course of human history. The chosen post-apocalyptic dystopian novels deal with the collapse of civilization due to warfare calamities, natural disasters, or political conflicts. Through looking at these contemporary post-apocalyptic dystopian novels, new themes have emerged in connection with the identification of a unique world savior for humankind. Messianic figures and apocalyptic thoughts are not only vital subjects of religious debates but are also essential themes in post-apocalyptic dystopian literary narratives, notably in recent American and Arabic literary corpuses.

The anticipated messianic figure who will save humanity and establish justice is not a newly conceived idea. It has been present in various religions and cultures throughout history, with different names and interpretations. The concept of a savior who will bring peace and harmony to the world has been central to belief systems, is deeply rooted in human consciousness, and continues to inspire hope and faith in many people today. Such beliefs have perpetuated ancient religious beliefs and cultures in ancient Mesopotamian, Indian and Chinese civilizations and continue to shape the beliefs and practices of modern religions. These beliefs have been passed

down through generations and have had a profound impact on the way they view the world. While some may view these beliefs as outdated or superstitious, they remain an important part of human history and culture. For example, the concept was found in the early Egyptian writings about a holy figure who will appear at the end of time to restore justice and peace on earth. This holy figure will bring prosperity and splendor after the earth is filled with injustices, atrocities, and dictatorships. Another example is from Indian Hinduism, in which the god-like figure and savior Vishnu will appear at the end of the dark age in the form of a man riding a white horse and holding in his hand a shining sword. Vishnu will appear for the tenth and last time to judge sinners and reward good doers. Another example of a savior is the Maitreya in Buddhist tradition. Maitreya is believed to be a future Buddha who will appear on earth when the teachings of Gautama Buddha have been forgotten and humanity is in moral decline. Maitreya will spread compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment, leading humanity to a new era of peace and harmony. Additionally, it appears in religious apocalyptic traditions, such as Islamic, Jewish, or Christian, that share the very basic apocalyptic predictions about the messianic figure and the end of the world. Some known messianic figures, either eschatologically related or not, are Saoshyant in Zoroastrian eschatology, Chakravartin in Hinduism, and the Messiah, who, for the Jews, is the anointed king from the Davidic line; Jesus for the Christians; and Al-Masih (Isa Ibn Maryam) for Muslims[1].

---

[1] See: Norman Cohn (2001) chapters:2,3,10,11, for further information on the savior figure in Mesopotamia civilization, Saoshyant figure and the Messiah in Judaism and Christianity. For further information on these figures in different world religions, see the religious encyclopedias such as *Britannica Encyclopaedia of World Religions* (2006) and Ellwood & Alles (2007), *The Encyclopaedia of World Religions*. Also, see a study by Sarbatoare (2004). *Messianic Ideas: Historical Sources, and some Contemporary Expectations of Fulfilment*.

Regardless of the differences among the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian apocalypse, the future appearance of a messiah figure is a fundamental, shared conviction for the three monotheistic religions. This figure's arrival at the end of time – a time of tribulations – involves salvation and redemption by rooting out the evil and reinstating peace and prosperity. So as for the Jewish, the messianic figure, who has not yet come, will be a human being, not a god or demi-god. He is a paragon of an ideal human being. He will be the anointed king from the Davidic line and often referred to as *mashiach* or as *mashiach ben David* 'son of David'. The *mashiach* figure will be a political and military leader who will lead the Jewish people to redemption and salvation and restore the religious and Jewish law as the law of the land (Rich, 2011)[2]. While the messianic figure in Judaism is a human being, he is the divine figure, a god, or the Son of God for Christians. He has come once, and he will unexpectedly return for the second time to establish his kingdom. This time is called *The Second Coming* or *Parousia,* which is associated with the end of the age or the Judgement Day. So, Jesus Christ is the messiah figure, and his second coming is for judgement and to kill the anti-Christ, the false messiah. He will save the Christians and will judge the nations and reward each according to his deeds (Al-Bash, 2001, pp. 126-134)[3].

As for Muslims, the Messiah or Al-Masih [4] is Isa Ibn Maryam. It is established in the Holy Quran and the Hadith that Isa Ibn Maryam (peace be upon him) has been ascended into heaven by Allah the Almighty until the end of times.

---

[2] See: Sharqawi (2006) pp. 12-14, Al-Khatib, M. (2009) pp.171-182. See also (Isaiah 2, 11, 42; 59:20; Jeremiah 23, 30, 33; 48:47; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Hosea 3:4-3:5; Micah 4; Zephaniah 3:9; Zechariah 14:9; Daniel 10:14)

[3] See Al-Khatib, M. (2009) pp.322-334. Also, see the entries *Second Coming, Millennialism* in *Britannica Encyclopaedia of World religions*. For deep readings see: The Gospels of *Mark*, *Luke*, *Matthew*, and *the Book of Revelation*.

[4] It will be discussed later Sharqawi's (2006) differentiation between the two terms messiah (مِسِّيّا) and Al- Masih (المسيح)

Then, Isa Ibn Maryam (peace be upon him) will descend from heaven as a prophet to rule by the Islamic law, kill Al-Dajjal[5], kill the pig, break the cross, and call to Islam. For Muslims, his descent is one of the greater signs, which signifies that Judgement Day is imminent. It is called the time of Al-Masih descent or the period in which al-Masih will descend. This time will be the time of peace and prosperity until the death of Al-Masih (peace be upon him) (Habashneh,1994, p. 209-211, pp. 220-223). The verses from Surat Al-e- 'Imran, Al-Nisa', Al-Ma'idah and other verses indicate that Isa Ibn Maryam was infallible from being murdered by the Jews and that he would be raised to heaven. The verses also indicate that he will descend at the end of time to the earth and die in it. In addition to the Qur'anic verses, in Hadith also many authentic sayings of Muhammad (peace be upon him) about the descension of the prophet Al-Masih Isa Ibn Maryam (peace be upon him)[6]. Some Muslim scholars believe that one of the important figures who will appear before the coming of Issa Ibn Maryam is Al-Mahdi. Some Muslims believe that Al-Mahdi is the messiah figure, but some others believe that he is only a military leader who will rule before the descent of Issa Ibn Maryam (peace be upon him) and he will form armies preparing for the great holy war under Al-Masih (Issa Ibn Maryam) Leadership[7].

---

[5] See Habashneh (1994), pp.212-216.

[6] The Qur'anic verses are in Surat Al-e- 'Imran: (45-46, 54-55), Surat Al-Nisa' (157-159), Surat Al-Ma'idah (110,117) and Surat Al-Zukhruf (57-61). The Hadith sayings that talked about the descent of Al-Masih Isa Ibn Maryam (peace be upon him) and what will happen after his descent are found in Sahih Al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. In Sahih Al- Bukhari, Book 60: Prophets, sayings number 657and 658. In Sahih Muslim, Siddiqui, A.H. (trns.), Book 1: Kitab Al-Iman (The Book of Faith), Chapter 72: Hadith number (0287, 0289-0293); Chapter 76: Hadith number (0323-0325, 0327-0328) The previous hadith about Al-Masih Isa Ibn Maryam and the false Masih: Al-Masih Ad-Dajjal. Book 41: Kitab Al-Fitan (Pertaining to the Turmoil and Portents of the Last Hour, Chapter 9, Hadith number: 6924; Chapter 13, Hadith number 6931-6934; Chapter 18, Hadith number: 7015; Chapter 21, Hadith number:7023)

[7] The name, Al-Mahdi, has not been mentioned in Sahih Al-Bukhari and Muslim, but that Al-Mahdi will appear before the coming of Isa Ibn Maryam (peace be upon him). It has been mentioned in Sunan Abu Dawud, the Book of Al-Mahdi (4282). Also, it is mentioned in Jami` at-Tirmidhi (2230, 2231), and in Ibn Majah, the Book of Tribulations (4039, 4058, 4086). Also, Al-Hakem has verified it (4/557,558). The Hadith which mentions the name of Al-Mahdi were not categorized as authentic

The Islamic tradition acknowledges one prominent messianic figure Al-Masih Isa Ibn and Al-Mahdi as a leader appears before Isa Ibn Maryam descension. Al-Mahdi is believed to be a future Muslim leader who will rule before the end of times, will rid the world of wrongdoing, injustice, and tyranny. Different Islamic schools of thought may have variations in their beliefs about these figures. For example, Shia Muslims believe in the idea of the Twelfth Imam, their version of Al-Mahdi, who is believed to be in occultation and will return as the ultimate savior of mankind. Overall, Islamic theology positions these messianic figures as integral to the culmination of history and the establishment of an era of global peace, justice, and righteousness. They serve as symbols of hope for ultimate salvation and deliverance from evil. However, it's important to note that while these figures play significant roles in eschatological events, the Islamic view maintains that all salvation and redemption ultimately come from God.

The metaphorical use of apocalypse in literature is commonly used as a conceptual device that forecasts an imaginative catastrophic event onto reality, allowing contemporary political, economic, social, and cultural problems to be discussed. In other words, apocalypse in literary narratives operates simultaneously as three distinct revelation phases: decline, warning, and salvation. Thus, the readers of literary texts perceive that the apocalypse is a message or a call for action in the face of inevitable and unavoidable events. Heffernan (2008) propounds that the positive conception of the end and the apocalypse as culmination and resolution has been diminished, leaving societies in a difficult position (p. 5). Accordingly, the catastrophic events that recent history has witnessed on a global scale have been

---

Hadith, but they were categorized as a good and authentic Hadith (Hadith Hasan). In Sahih Al-Bukhari and Muslim – Hadith (Sahih Muslim 155f, 155d), it is only mentioned that when Isa Ibn Maryam descends there will be "Your leader amongst you". See Habashneh (1994), pp.211-212.

interpreted as apocalyptic portents that suggest the end of the world and thus the arrival of a messianic figure. People have been driven to look for a world savior who will bring about salvation and redemption owing to this tendency toward the fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecies. These events have provided fertile ground for apocalyptic, futuristic thoughts and visions that many writers convey in their writing. As they are influenced by social, economic, political, and cultural shifts, contemporary American and Arab writers reinforce in their novels the notion of "terminus post quem" catastrophes, i.e., the post-apocalypse and dystopian themes.

The novels to be investigated for this thesis are *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018) by Ahmad Saadawi. These two novels revolve around the themes of post-apocalyptic dystopia and messianic figures. However, because the cultural, political, and religious foundations of these novels differ, both writers create different messianic figures. While Saadawi is concerned about political and religious difficulties, McCarthy is not concerned about the reason of the apocalyptic event rather than the consequences of the catastrophe. Because of the current political and social situations, post-apocalyptic dystopian themes have recently become more prevalent in Arabic literature. Indeed, they have been reinvigorated and become prominent in American literature. However, the political and social situations have a less impact on American writings than the technological advancements in various fields. Some of these fatal advancements are the invention of a biological weapon, an environmental disaster, new epidemics, and more. Accordingly, the American writers have utilized the post-apocalypse dystopian themes to provide diverse portrayals of the messianic figures. They have presented different prognostications about the mortal consequences of unsuccessful inventions. The Arab writers have also employed the same post-apocalypse dystopian themes,

but they are stimulated by the consequences of the Arab Spring uprisings and the devastation and death that affect Arab societies. Arab authors have provided different depictions of the savior figure, to some extent related to their cultural and religious backgrounds.

Mainly, the American and Arab post-apocalyptic dystopian narratives reveal a transformation from utopian hope to dystopian loss and destruction upon the fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecies[8]. On this account, the portrayal of the messianic figures in the selected novels has also been influenced by this transformation, which has produced various ambiguous representations that are secularized and modified in relation to the various backgrounds.

There are many messianic or godlike figures in post-apocalyptic dystopian American fiction. However, these figures have not been extensively explored by many Arab authors due to cultural conceptions and religious doctrines. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the Arab world's recent revolutions, many authors have decided to go beyond cultural and religious boundaries, questioning the causes and consequences of wars and other disasters. Hence, they have ascribed to the protagonists in their novels a messianic role, aiming to offer hope and resolution for the prevailing situation.

There are several American novels that have post-apocalyptic dystopian themes, such as, to name a few, M. T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002), Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2005), and Stephen King's *Under the Dome* (2009), to name a few. Other

---

[8] To trace the transformation from utopian to dystopian thinking, see Seed (2011). *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction*. (Chapter 4). Sargent, T. L. (2010). *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*. (Chapter 1). Also, Fitting, P. (2010). Utopia, Dystopia and Science fiction. For Apocalyptic literature and dystopia, see *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2009), part 2: Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Fiction, and Dystopian Science Fiction.

novels have been adapted into films like *The Hunger Games* (2012), *The Maze Runner* (2014), and *The Divergent Series* (2014–2016). Besides those American writers, there are some Arab writers who have employed post-apocalyptic dystopian themes, such as Ahmed Khaled Tawfiq's *Utopia* (2008), Nael Eltoukhy's *Women of Karantina* (2014), Ahmed Al-Zaatari's *Bending Over the Corpse of Amman* (2014), Basma Abdel Aziz's *The Queue* (2016), Ibrahim Nasrallah's *The Second Dog War* (2016) and many others. Interestingly, one of the initiative Arabic films dealing with post-apocalyptic dystopian themes is *The Worthy* (2016). This dystopian action thriller takes place in a post-apocalyptic world where contamination has spread through the water supply, making survival difficult. Interestingly, the main characters are named by prophets' names: Issa, Musa, Daoud, and the main female character is named Maryam.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

By the onset of the 21st century, many controversial thoughts and theories had been promulgated with the deconstruction of religion, including the disenchantment of the world or the death of God, skepticism, nihilism, and many other ideas. Bouma (2006) states that religion was supposed to cease to exist with the rise of the modern and secular worlds. However, there has been a surprising rise in new philosophies and world views "alongside a discernible reawakening of more traditional forms of the religious life" (p. xiii). Therefore, in the twenty-first-century postmodern and secular world, "spiritualities are rife and religious diversity is an accepted feature of a seriously multicultural society" (Bouma, 2006, p. 1). As Bouma states that "this reawakening is taking place in a different sociocultural environment" (p. xiii), twenty-first-century narratives would receive the apocalypse predictions and

the coming of a messianic figure differently. Although the apocalypse is purely a religious concept, the new socio-cultural environment influences the perception of the apocalypse subject, prompting authors to imagine the apocalypse and the messianic figures in different spatial forms and temporal varieties.

The concept of the messiah is one that has been present in various religions and cultures throughout history and still prevalent today. While there are differences in the prophecies about this figure, one common thread is that the messiah is often seen as a savior who will come to redeem humanity. In some religions, the messiah is seen as a man who will bring about the end of time and establish a new era of peace and justice. (Ellwood & Alles, 2007). However, a shifting socio-cultural, political, and religious environment calls for new messianic figures linked to different circumstances, conditions, and characteristics. Frank Kermode (2000) has also previously introduced Bouma's new sociocultural environment, where spiritualities and religion have been reawakened. Kermode posited that the apocalypse is the source for our thinking and understanding of the end of the world, but it is changed "by our special pressures" (p. 28) or "subdued by our skepticism" (p. 28). These pressures and skepticism are determined by our age, i.e., the new socio-cultural environment, which is "the age of perpetual transition in technological and artistic matters is understandably an age of perpetual crisis in morals and politics" (p. 28). In this sense, modern representations of messianic figures are also affected by the new socio-cultural environment or "special pressures" (p. 28) on the authors, philosophers, etc. The phenomenon of divergent depictions of messianic figures, involving female messiahs, cyber-punks, black, extraterrestrial, and even mad messiahs, among others, arises as a result of fluctuations in socio-cultural, political, or religious contexts. (Kermode, 2000). Moreover, the emergence of these diverse

messianic figures reflects the changing values and beliefs of contemporary society. For example, the rise of female messiahs can be seen as a response to the increasing demand for gender equality and the empowerment of women. Similarly, the depiction of cyber-punk messiahs can be viewed as a reflection of the growing influence of technology and the digital age on our lives. These new representations of messianic figures not only challenge traditional beliefs and norms but also offer new ways of thinking about the messiah in this changing world.

Speaking of socio-cultural, political, or religious changes, Heffernan is also of the view that those shifting factors would affect social, political, or religious norms. For instance, if there were to be a significant change in the political landscape, it could lead to the formation of new policies and laws that would affect the way people interact with each other. Similarly, a change in religious beliefs could lead to the adoption of new practices or the abandonment of old ones. These changes can have a profound impact on society, and it is important to understand how they come about and how they are likely to affect us. Therefore, Heffernan argues that since the publication of Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Western societies have lost faith in any sort of providential plan, whereby "Man" has become a rational creature and "an end in himself" (Kant, as cited in Heffernan, p. 4). Apparently, existence has become senseless and meaningless. Therefore, the idea of a chaotic and meaningless existence has become a significant cause of pervasive despair and nihilism in contemporary narratives. Concurring with this view, Heffernan (2008) observed that these narratives represent the current world "as exhausted," whereby their advocates "refuse to offer up a new beginning or any hope of rebirth or renewal" (p. 5). She explained that faith in the end and apocalypse as culmination and resolution recedes and is replaced with the belief that the end is "senseless and

arbitrary" (p. 5). Heffernan used the term post-apocalypse to propose that the contemporary world is already in the post-apocalyptic stage, "after the faith in a radically new world, of revelation, of unveiling" has been lost (p. 6). As faith in the apocalypse is losing its meaning, it is increasingly being linked to "disaster and a sense of exhaustion" (p. 7) rather than "revelation and renewal" (p. 7). Therefore, the gloomy tone echoes in these narratives: "no resolution, no salvation" (pp. 5-7). This pessimistic outlook is reflected in many contemporary works of literature and film, which often depict a world that has already experienced some kind of catastrophic event, leaving the survivors to struggle in a harsh, unforgiving landscape. These narratives often focus on common themes about the gritty realities of life in a post-apocalyptic dystopian world, such as the struggle for resources, the breakdown of social order, and the constant threat of violence. However, they also frequently explore other deeper themes related to human nature, such as the search for meaning in a world without clear purpose, the struggle to maintain hope in the face of overwhelming odds, and the potential for both good and evil within individuals and society as a whole. Overall, the post-apocalyptic genre serves as a reflection of our current societal anxieties and fears, as well as a means of exploring deeper philosophical questions about the human condition.

The identification of such recurrent motifs in post-apocalyptic dystopian accounts enables the discernment of underlying socio-cultural, political, and religious transformations that may signify profound end-of-the-world concerns within our communities. In recent post-apocalyptic dystopian narratives either American or Arabic, the most recurring theme is the appearance or the advent of a messiah figure – the savior. Regardless of the difference in the socio-cultural, political, or religious backgrounds, these two cultures share the same basic convictions or concepts of the

messianic figure who will appear at the end of time. However, the sense of despair and nihilism reflected in McCarthy's *The Road*, and Sadaawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* show a desire for something new and different, a different messiah or savior facing the disillusionment of the modern world. Some critics or readers would see McCarthy's and Saadawi's messianic figures can be traced back to religious texts, such as the Bible and Quran, and this figure takes on a similar role, serving as a symbol of hope and salvation in the face of overwhelming devastation. However, the portrayal of the messiah in these two accounts is more complex and nuanced than in religious texts, reflecting the changing attitudes and beliefs of the two societies towards some religious perspectives.

Moreover, the Arab region has experienced numerous crises, particularly in the context of its colonial and recent post-colonial struggles with the United States and Israel. These struggles have resulted in a multitude of catastrophes, wars, genocides, marginalization, the proliferation of terrorism to an unparalleled degree, sectarianism, and extremism. In this particular context, there existed a pressing and genuine requirement for a qualitative savior or messiah who could effectuate the restoration of the world, facilitate the attainment of justice, and bring about salvation and redemption. The portrayal of a messiah that differs from conventional religious or secular heroes has been a response by writers, such as McCarthy and Sadaawi, who come from religious backgrounds to the world's catastrophes, in addition to political, religious, and sectarian conflicts.

The analysis of Messianic figures is commonly approached from religious or theological perspectives in both American and Arab cultures, sometimes with a particular emphasis on symbolic depictions found in the religious books. Even though monotheistic cultures have definite messiah figures, interestingly, there is

also a growing interest in examining messianic figures from other perspectives. Some may argue that examining messianic figures from other perspectives, secular or philosophical, may undermine the religious significance and beliefs associated with these figures. However, this approach may allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the role and influence of messianic figures in shaping cultural and political movements and offer insights into how religious beliefs intersect with historical events and social movements at the end of the day. Ultimately, whether approached from a religious or secular perspective, the study of messianic figures is an important aspect of understanding the complexities of human belief, experience, and systems. Regardless of the approach, the study of messianic figures continues to fascinate scholars and believers alike as they seek to understand the enduring appeal and significance of these figures throughout human history. In view of the dynamic interplay of socio-cultural, political, and religious factors, the figuration of messianic figures is not limited to religious perspectives; other figurations and representations may also be explored for the study of messianic figures, such as fiction and philosophy.

These shifting depictions and historical uses of the messianic figures have contributed to nebulous pictures and concepts of the 'Messiah' in modern post-apocalyptic dystopian fiction. To address this issue, this study will analyze how McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018) present distinct messianic figures that are different from the traditional religious figures with varying roles to bring salvation and redemption. This research will fill a gap in the current literature by examining messianic characters from philosophical and literary perspectives. So, the researcher chose the subject of this thesis based on the difference in the figurations of this messiah that appeared in the contemporary

post-apocalyptic dystopian narrative discourse. Then, this study comes with a new reading of both novels to reveal the reasons that prompted the novelists to employ new figurations of the messiah character who is not sent or supported by a divine power. Additionally, this study will analyze the historical circumstances that led them to seek a new messiah or savior to be the hero in their narratives.

1.3   Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the portrayals of messianic figures in two chosen post-apocalypse dystopian narratives, with the intention of shedding light on the authors' respective depictions and approaches towards the subject of the end of time. To achieve this objective, the study will employ a descriptive comparative analysis approach, examining the similarities and differences between the two contemporary American and Arabic novels by Cormac McCarthy's (2006) *The Road* and Ahmed Saadawi's (2018) *Frankenstein in Baghdad* in terms of their representation of messianic figures. Additionally, the study will also explore the historical and cultural contexts in which the novels were written, as well as the authors' backgrounds, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of their approach to the messianism subject. Most importantly, this study aims to contribute to the broader scholarly discourse on messianic figures in literature and their role in achieving redemption and salvation. Following the discussion and development of the theoretical framework for this study in chapter two, the following objectives will be addressed in chapter in chapter five:

1) To elucidate the link between the post-apocalyptic dystopian landscape and the arrival of the messiah figure as depicted in the selected novels.

2) To explore the characteristics of the messianic figures portrayed in the two selected American and Arabic post-apocalypse dystopian novels with a view to distinguish these figures from other characters in McCarthy's (2006) *The Road*, and Saadawi's (2018) *Frankenstein in Baghdad*.

3) To explore and analyze how McCarthy and Saadawi use in their novels religious and irreligious references to portray the messianic figure.

4) To compare the socio-cultural, political, and religious contexts in which McCarthy's (2006) *The Road*, and Saadawi's (2018) *Frankenstein in Baghdad* present their protagonists as messianic figures within their respective societies.

These objectives will be addressed with an examination of messianic figures and their place in philosophy and literature. Through a comprehensive analysis of these figures from diverse perspectives, it is expected that a deeper understanding of their influence on shaping our cultural and spiritual beliefs can be achieved. Through this exploration, specific assumptions will be considered about how messianic figures have evolved from their religious origins to become symbols of hope and transcendent figures, and whether they are seen as saviors, prophets, or simply as archetypes of superhuman individuals. The enduring influence of messianic figures can be better understood by analyzing their effect on their influence on the collective

consciousness. This descriptive comparative analysis will establish connections between literary works produced in diverse cultural and religious contexts.

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study is clearly limited as it is a descriptive comparative analysis that concentrates on messianic figures in two chosen post-apocalyptic dystopian novels. As previously noted, the work of the American author — Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), will be analyzed and compared with Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2018). The two selected novels highlight the different transformations of the messianic figures and accentuate the two different cultures' fear and anxiety about the contemporary concerns of each country.

The focus of this proposed study is limited to the messianic figures featured in the two selected post-apocalypse dystopian fictional works. It is important to note that this study is not a theological or a religious study of the messianic figures found in different cultural and religious contexts (especially monotheistic ones). Religious references, besides some mythological references, will be used to explain the writers' approach to portray messianic figures in their literary works. Therefore, in the Literature Review section a discussion of messianic figures from religious perspectives will be introduced, and then an investigation of the messianic figures in the literary canon. This approach will provide insight into how socio-cultural, political and religious values have influenced the portrayal of messianic figures in literature. Additionally, it will highlight the similarities and differences between the messianic figures in different religious traditions and how they have been adapted in literary works.

Pertaining to the study's scope and objectives, theories that will be discussed and examined in the theoretical framework in relation to the study field will be used in analyzing those two novels. Since it is not a religious or theological study, and the Arabic literary canon is limited in such theoretical frameworks, the theories proposed are Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, and James Berger whose theories will be the theoretical scope that this study will lead its argument and analysis forward. However, it is important to note that these theories are hermeneutic and heuristic sources to analyze novels from a literary perspective to show how McCarthy and Sadaawi present and represent messianic figures in post-apocalyptic dystopian contexts, particularly during end of time scenarios.

The application of a Western-oriented theoretical framework in this study is based on the theory of post-apocalyptic dystopian literature that originated in the Western literary tradition and subsequently spread to Arabic literature. The choice of Western-oriented theoretical framework in relation to Arabic post-apocalyptic dystopian novels is based on two factors. Firstly, post-apocalyptic dystopian fiction originated as a genre within the Western literary tradition. Secondly, the limited research and corresponding absence of a comparable categorization within the domain of Arabic literary criticism (Bakker, 2018). Also, it is important to note that the presence of religious regulations in the Arab world has had an impact on the lack of secular philosophies similar to those found in Western societies. Accordingly, the topic of the messianic figures has predominantly been approached from religious perspectives.

With the knowledge that the Messiah is primarily a religious figure within monotheistic faiths, this study will draw upon authoritative sources such as the Quran and the Sunnah to examine the Islamic Messiah (Isa Ibn Maryam), as well as the Old

and New Testaments of the Bible, to offer valuable insights and information on this topic. It is imperative to acknowledge that these literary works possess substantial significance for adherents of these faiths and necessitate a considerate and tactful approach.

The choice to focus on only two novels, namely *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy and *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Ahmed Saadawi, is primarily for the purpose of conducting an in-depth comparative analysis. Analyzing more novels could potentially dilute the focus and limit the depth of analysis due to the need to divide attention and discussion among multiple works. Additionally, these two novels are seen as representative and significant within the genre of post-apocalyptic dystopian narratives and depict messianic figures in intriguing ways. They are also written by authors from different cultural contexts – American and Arabic – allowing for a cross-cultural comparison that enriches the understanding of how different societies perceive and portray messianic figures. Finally, limiting the analysis to two novels helps manage the scope of the study, making it more feasible and focused. This approach ensures that each novel receives a detailed, comprehensive analysis, contributing to a nuanced and robust understanding of the portrayal of messianic figures in each narrative.

1.5   Significance of the Study

In order to underscore the significance of this study, it is imperative to comprehend the American viewpoint on messianic figures and their function in effecting salvation and redemption for humanity. The notion of a messiah holds significant cultural significance in American society and has served as a motivating force for numerous religious and political movements. Throughout American history,

messianic figures have played a significant role in shaping the country's identity and development. Beginning with the early Puritan settlers who believed in their divine mission to establish a new Jerusalem, a city upon a hill in the New World, to the Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., these figures have left an indelible mark on the nation's history. John Gray (2007) postulates that the concept of a messianic savior, or a redeemer, which was a fundamental belief in the Christian faith evolves into an "idea of a Redeemer Nation" (p. 109). Gray argues that America is given a "redemptive role" (p. 109), and it becomes the promised land, or the New Jerusalem of the chosen people (pp. 109-110). He refers to Herman Melville's White Jacket (1850), in which he states:

> We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are the pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours. In our youth is our strength; in our inexperience, our wisdom. At a period when other nations have but lisped, our deep voice is heard afar. Long enough, have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us, if we would but give utterance to his promptings. (p. 202)

Melville authoritatively claims that Americans have a providential role to bring redemption and salvation to the world. His messianic prophetical view defines the American political history, and it prevails America's contemporary political attitudes. Melville's idea promotes the singularity of the Americans' redemptive role in the sense that its "national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we cannot do a good to America but we give alms to the world" (p. 202). His ideas become a potent concept in America's political culture. As James Berger maintains, American

leaders, namely Ronald Reagan, have made their statements heralding apocalypse has already happened, and America is the "apocalyptic break with the past, the unveiling of a new social order and a new relationship with nature" (1999, p. 133). They ascribed to themselves a messianic role in a universal mission in the name of bringing salvation and redemption to the world under numerous disingenuous missions such as War on Terror. As Gray discusses, this concept influences the American leaders by self-legitimizing themselves to have "an exceptional role in history [to give] themselves a world-redeeming role" (2007, p. 111). This messianic belief consistently shapes their culture. Gray (2007) adds that this American mentality "anticipates an unprecedented change in human affairs – the end of history, the passing of the sovereign state, universal acceptance of democracy and the defeat of evil" (p. 175) which is, of course, "the central myth of apocalyptic religion framed in political terms" (p. 175). Accordingly, in Gray's view, the religious apocalyptic narratives become a secular metanarrative of post-apocalyptic world that will be saved by the American messiah.

What signifies this study is the contrastive comparison between the American and the Arab writers who have to some extent shared beliefs about the arrival of the messiah figure and his time. Islam, Christianity, and Judaism share the same basic belief about the arrival of a messiah figure at the end of times. However, the two writers, McCarthy as a Christian and Ahmad Sadaawi as a Muslim are from different cultural, historical, and political backgrounds where the former is from a hegemonic country, and the latter is from a dominated country ravaged by terrorism, religious extremism, sectarian divisions, wars, constant political and economic crises, and superstitious and primitive beliefs spread widely after the American invasion in 2003.

As a comparative study explores the messiah figure in both American and Arabic literature, this study offers a comparative analysis that shed light on how cultural, historical, and societal factors shape this portrayal. The importance of this study stems from its interdisciplinary relevance to several scientific fields including comparative religion, sociology, philosophy, ancient history, and literature, gaining insights from these disciplines to enrich literary analysis. Moreover, by examining and comparing two different cultural interpretations of the messiah figure, the study underscores its universal human appeal, while also highlighting how it reflects the specific values and beliefs of different societies. The global resonance of local narratives underscores that though literature may originate in specific cultural and national contexts, the themes it explores can resonate globally. The novels, while rooted in their respective cultural contexts— post-apocalyptic America and war-torn Iraq— both present universally relatable themes: survival in the midst of catastrophe, the need for salvation, and the moral dilemmas that arise in desperate circumstances. Also, comparing two novels from different cultural backgrounds empowers marginalized voices such as Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. It also provides a perspective on the Iraq war that is often marginalized or overlooked. This comparative analysis enhances its visibility in global literary discourse, showing how critical narratives can emerge from areas experiencing conflict. Moreover, this comparison reinforces Damrosch's approach to literature as a dialogue across national boundaries. His perspective encourages readers to not only consider novels as expressions of their individual cultural contexts but also as vehicles for discussion about broader human conditions and experiences. Indeed, both novels offer unconventional portrayals of messianic figures, challenging traditional notions of divine intervention and salvation. This aspect calls for a broader understanding of

such figures and their roles in literature, serving to provide deeper insight into a narrative's thematic exploration.

The fundamental criterion employed in the selection of the two novels for this comparative analysis is predicated on the presence of the notion of anticipating the arrival of a messianic figure and the temporal framework of the events depicted in both literary works. Both novels were written after the American invasion on Iraq in 2003 whereas McCarthy's novel was published in 2006 and Saadawi's novel goes back to the same period in 2005-2006 after three years of the invasion. After 9/11 event, war on Iraq and terrorism, it can be inferred that McCarthy wrote his novel as a prognostication of what might come after such catastrophic events, and its effect on his country. On the other hand, Sadaawi wrote his novel conveying the real-life of his country after such events. Within this context, the researcher chose these two novels as the two novels in which the character of the messiah figure is present and contributes to their construction in a major way. So, the significance choice of these two novels is the reflection of historical events as both novels were written post-Iraq invasion providing a platform to examine how such significant historical events are reflected in literature, both in the directly affected region (Arabic) and beyond (American).

The choice to compare an Arabic novel with an American one in this context serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it provides an opportunity to explore how different cultural contexts interpret and portray similar themes, such as the anticipation of a messianic figure, in this case. Each author's unique cultural and societal backgrounds would understandably influence their work, and comparing the two offers valuable insight into these distinctions. Secondly, it implies a dialogue between Eastern and Western literary traditions. Although they are geographically and culturally distant,

these novels may share thematic or narrative connections. Such a comparison is significant in establishing universality in the literary exploration of certain themes, transgressing cultural boundaries. Thirdly, each of these novels contains characters who can be interpreted as messianic figures in their respective contexts; thus, they provide ample material for analyzing the concept. Fourthly, both novels are set in distinctly post-apocalyptic dystopian environments, allowing for an exploration of how the archetype of a messiah adapts to deal with extreme adversity and societal breakdown. Lastly, considering that both novels were written in the post-Iraq invasion period, it provides a platform for studying how such a significant historical event was reflected in the world of literature, both in the region directly affected (Arabic) and beyond (American). Comparing the works of an American author and an Arab one enriches the analysis by providing different cultural perspectives. This juxtaposition allows for a wider discussion not only of messianic figures but also of how authors from diverse backgrounds and cultures imagine and depict these figures. Together, these factors make a comparative study of these two novels a compelling choice for investigating portrayals of messianic figures.

In summary, comparing these two novels could help depict the breadth of interpretations of shared themes, examine cross-cultural literary interactions, and analyze the impact of historical events on vital themes as messianic figures. So, these divergent backgrounds reveal the causes and motivations that trigger American and Arab writers to portray their saviors differently despite the fact that they employ the same post-apocalypse dystopian themes and, to some extent, on the surface, believe in the existence of the Messiah. This discrepancy creates a comparison between the novels in terms of the messianic beliefs of the different countries as a means of bringing to the surface the significant distinctions between the two different

representations of the messianic figures. Also, the selected novels have been chosen as they allow contrasting American and Arab perspectives on the post-apocalypse dystopian themes since the latter has been considerably influenced by the former. Such a comparison of two different cultural contexts is considered quite rare and challenging. It would be a compelling comparison of these two cultures that will help to fill gaps in knowledge and analysis within salvation concepts, namely that both cultures, so to say, have a definite Messiah figure.

Overall, this comparison is significant for its contribution to a more diverse, inclusive, and nuanced understanding of world literature, emphasizing the universality of human experiences even while appreciating distinct cultural perspectives. This study highlights the significance of the messiah figure in both American and Arabic literature, and how it is shaped by various cultural and historical factors. By examining the portrayal of the messiah figure in literature, we can gain a deeper understanding of the values and beliefs of different societies, as well as the universal human desire for a savior or hero. Furthermore, the study of the messiah figure in American and Arabic literature sheds light on the socio-cultural and political, values of the respective societies. Additionally, studying the messiah figure in literature can provide insight into the ways in which religious and spiritual themes are incorporated into literary works and how they are used to convey deeper meanings and messages. These fields provided the American and Arabic novels with many ideas and information necessary to reveal the character of the messianic figure, analyze his personality, and identify the most important elements that contributed to the formation of his image in the literary field.