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ISIS and the Abuse of the Yazidi Women in Salim Barakat's Novel *The Captives of Sinjar*

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Salim Barakat is a Kurdish author, yet his works are highly regarded for their mastery of Arabic. To achieve his impossible goal of presenting a true picture of the dire condition of the Syrian Kurdish communities, specifically the Yazidis' genocide in his novel *The Captives of Sinjar*, he resorts to Latin American magical realism and a convoluted writing style. Characters are not what they seem and every natural thing is a sentient being. The narrative traces the ghostly lives and deaths of five captive Yazidi girls and their five ISIS fighter-masters. The protagonist, Sarat, a fictional image of Barakat, is a painter, who lives and works by a secluded lakeside in Sweden. His work is influenced by the horrific imaginations of famous European artists. This paper accents the novel's deep structure of collective memories of individuals and communities as addressed by the modern philosophers: Theodor Adorno, Maurice Blanchot, and Maurice Halbwachs.

Keywords: Yazidis, Salim Barakat, modern Arabic literature, Kurdish literature, ISIS/Da'ish

Literature Review: Magical realism in Arabic

In *The Experimental Arabic Novel*, Stephan Meyer states that "despite his Kurdish orientation, Salim Barakat[1] (banipal.co.uk, 2022) is perhaps the master prose stylist writing in Arabic today," [whose] "influence on the contemporary Arabic novel has almost been one of a 'neoclassicist' due to his complex style and his application of techniques taken from traditional Arabic literature." Meyer (2001, pp. 87-90) further notes that Barakat's works including poetry, novels, and essays deal extensively with the supernatural and the extraordinary, and he often makes use of words and expressions that are not part of the modern Arabic lexicon.

Meyer adds,

> Barakat's style is probably the closest of any Arab writer's to that of Latin American magical realism[2]. It not only represents reality by means of the mythic imagination, as does the work of Emile Habiby, but it also uses local culture as a

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[1] Salim Barakat, born in Qamishli in northern Syria in 1951, is a prolific, renowned novelist of Kurdish origin. In 1972 he began studying Arabic literature in Damascus. A year later he moved to Beirut, Lebanon, where he published several poetry collections, two novels and a two-part autobiography. In 1982, he relocated to Cyprus, where he wrote for the Palestinian *Al-Karmil* newspaper and continued to publish poetry and prose. Since 1999, he has lived in Sweden. His work embraces Arabic, Kurdish, Assyrian, and Armenian cultures and other communities of northern Syria.

[2] Magical realism, a chiefly Latin-American narrative strategy, is characterized by a blending of the magical and the mundane in fiction. See Astrid Ottosson al-Bitar, "A Challenging of Boundaries: The Use of Magical Realist Techniques in Three Iraqi Novels of Exile," in *Borders and Beyond, Crossing and Transitions in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. K. Eksell and S. Guth (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 63-66. Chanady concludes that magical realism is characterized by "two conflicting but autonomously coherent perspectives: one based on an 'enlightened' and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality." See Amaryll Beatrice Chanady, *Magical Realism and the Fantastic* (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1985), 16-22.

means of conveying a more universal condition. (Meyer, 2001, pp. 88-90)

The literary critic Subhi Hadidi (2002, pp. 34-35) notes that in the Arab world Barakat is often compared to Gabriel Garc á M árquez, because of his employment of fantasy in constructing new realities and reinterpreting history. Also pertinent is a comment by the Spanish poet Juan Goytisolo, who writes in the introduction to Barakat's novel *The Feathers*,

> Salim Barakat's prose, like that of José Lezama Lima, is a constant gift of inventions, inspired images, striking metaphors, unexpected turns, poetic sparks, winged flights. A prodigious mixture of reality and dream, of legend and bitter chronicle, it does not obey the laws of time, nor those of place.

The Spanish poet Juan Goytisolo believes that:

> Barakat's richness and texture owes nothing, as some all too easily say, to Faulkner or Garcia Marquez. His writing involves layers of myths, legends, memories, chronicles of past and present tragedies, under the surface of which lies the melancholy history of the town of his birth. (Barakat, 1992, p. 10)

Fadia Suyoufie comments on the blending of reality and magical realism:

> The narrative of Barakat's timely novel picks up the shattered pieces of the Yazidi women's traumatic experiences as sex-slaves by conjuring up their ghosts and offering them a platform to voice their testimonies. Here, Barakat's great capacity to respond to ethical issues with much fervor and commitment is demonstrated at its best. The combination of ethical, at times prophetic vision, with aesthetic, lyrical impulses ushers his readers into untrodden plateaus, where the real and the magical are intricately intertwined.
>
> Posing as an ethnographer, the implied author/narrator simultaneously reconstructs a subversive "enchanting" magical counter-discourse that reclaims Yazidi culture, myths, and ancient beliefs as a resistance to their disruption and violent rupture by medievalist regressive re-colonization. (Suyoufie, 2020, p. 525)

Even within the framework of realistic narrative, Barakat incorporates supernatural, uncanny, and fanciful elements, using the techniques of magic realism to create "mutations" of time and place that subvert the normal reality and play havoc with characters and situations (Meyer, 2001, p. 91).

Salim Barakat and the Yazidis

Of Barakat's dominant concerns, the dire condition of the Syrian Kurdish communities is paramount. Although they constitute five to ten percent of the population, the Syrian regime denies the Kurds any nationality status and forbids Kurdish language teaching in Syrian schools. This minority—especially those in the rural areas who preserve their language and culture—are treated as foreigners with no rights to own property, to hold identity cards or passports, or to travel legally abroad (Meyer, 2001, pp. 88-90).

In an interview, Barakat says,

> Every existence has its type of problem and its format. Kurdish existence represents a double dose of that format. I once told my Arabic teacher I was a Kurd and he stared at me in terror and murmured, "What are you doing here, then? Go back to Turkey." You learn to conceal who you are. Many are born, grow and age in the same place concealing their nationality. You carry on you a piece of paper, "Laissez-passer" written on its reverse. "Since when have you to become an Arab?" in order to make sure of your ethnic affiliation? You are unable, for example, to declare your love for your country if you are not an Arab. With your non-Arabic name—if you dare to name yourself in terms that relate to your ethnic roots—you will be deafened by humiliation. (Muʾnis & Laṭif, 2002, p. 46)

Kurdish culture is victimized by Arab nationalism, especially by the pan-Arabist ideology, which seeks to

impose ethnic uniformity, *inter alia*, by means of state education.[3] The Swedish translator Tetz Rooke writes that, as a member of the Kurdish minority, which is denied political and cultural rights, Barakat is especially sensitive to the constructed nature of history and identity, and to how the processes of memory and invention work. Many of his works interweave history and identity. This particularly plays out in the aforementioned novel *The Feathers*, which focuses on the Kurds' plight in facing an endless search for a stable identity, described as unattainable as grasping a mirage (Rooke, 2006).

Barakat stresses that the Kurds are like ghosts in the Syrian regime's eyes. To express this state of non-existence or transparency[4] (Morén, 2016), he uses magic realism, which as Amaryll Beatrice Chanady writes, is characterized by two conflicting, yet autonomously coherent perspectives. One is based on a rational view of reality, while the other accepts the supernatural as a function of everyday existence (Chanady, 1985, pp. 16-21).

The Captives of Sinjar, the Novel

The novel *The Captives of Sinjar* (*Sabaya Sinjar*) (Barakat, 2016), the topic of this paper, focuses on the Yazidis, a religious sub-group among the Kurdish people. In recent years, this community has been victimized by the Islamic State (ISIS) organization's atrocities[5] (Kreyenbroek, 2005). This article analyzes of Barakat's novel, particularly accenting his unique blend of surrealism and magical realism to create a high relief painting of history, dream, and myth, rife with vivid imagery and unusual metaphors. The novel revolves around the lives of five Yazidi girls who died after being enslaved by ISIS fighters, and of the five fighters who enslaved them who die also or take their own lives. Both the girls and the fighters in the novel appear as ghosts or "living dead". They appear to be real and tangible, but simultaneously they are spirits who wander from place to place, unable to find rest, not even in death. The story blurs the boundaries between "here" and "there", between sleep and waking and between the real and the fantastic. These techniques of dualistic contradiction build an all-encompassing literary world.

The Captives of Sinjar continues Barakat's previous usage of uniquely strange and miraculous literary elements. Fakhri Salih, a Jordanian scholar, writes that this narrative principle, especially conspicuous in *The Sages of Darkness,* is used in an exaggerated way to the extent that the strange, the miraculous, and the fantastic become the focal point around which the novel is constructed. Published in 1985, after Barakat's move to Cyprus, *The Sages of Darkness,* set in a poor Kurdish village on the Syrian-Turkish border, exhibits a flowing style that reflects a perfect command of the Arabic language, soaring high with imagination and a keen sensitivity for animals, plants, and inanimate objects. The most striking scenes present natural elements like snow, wind, and trees, and people who wander about as homeless ghosts. Salih (2009, 131) adds that Barakat's aim is to first captivate his readers and then shock them by drawing their attention to the tragic or appalling aspects of the

[3] Barakat, it is noted, aims to accomplish through literature what the Kurds have been unable to achieve by political means. His *The Sages of Darkness* (فقهاء الظلام) ranks among the greatest Arabic-language novels, despite its culturally non-Arabic theme. Though a Kurd, Barakat's command and use of Arabic is considered beyond masterful among his modern literary colleagues.

[4] Morén writes, "In Syria, repression against the Kurds has made them largely invisible in the official records, turned them, so to speak, into a ghost people: they are there, but you cannot see them."

[5] Estimates of the total number of Yazidis vary from 200,000 or fewer to over a million. The vast majority lives in Iraq, while other smaller populations live in Transcaucasia, Armenia, Georgia, Syria, Turkey, Iran, and in European countries (see note 8 below). The Yazidis are a mainly Kurdish-speaking group whose communal identity is defined by their distinctive monotheistic religious tradition. Their theology and mythology stem from ancient Persian traditions. A religious vocabulary and imagery is said to derive from Sufism. The Yazidis also have observances and obligations like pilgrimages arising from a complex social system that play important roles in their religious and social lives.

story.[6]

The Language of Violence and Art

Likewise, in *The Captives of Sinjar* Barakat employs his unique convoluted language, replete with metaphor and metonymy. His voice and style are so idiosyncratic that even Arabic speakers find his writing hard to comprehend, which makes translating his work very challenging[7] (Meyer, 2001, pp. 88-90). This is especially noticeable in the complex metaphors and diction reminiscent of classic Arabic poetry that accents this novel's lyrical introduction. In fact, Barakat seems to transmute traditional poetry into prose, which involves divesting words of their original meanings and using them in a completely novel way. The British Arabist Roger Allen points out that this technique is indicative of classical *maqama*s that plays on the meaning of words, resulting in texts that are deliberately hard to follow (Meyer, 2001, p. 89).

The Captives of Sinjar is built around 10 European master paintings, mostly depicting fantastical violence, horror, and madness that are echoed in the novel's mythical elements and magical realism. Violence also features in Barakat's autobiographical novel, the first part published as *The Iron Grasshopper* (1980) and the second as *Play the Trumpet, Play It High: An Autobiography of Youth* (1982). Like *The Sages of Darkness*, the first volume of this autobiography is set in a poor Kurdish village on the border between Syria and Turkey. Ariel Sheetrit comments:

> The narrative centers on violence, describing its "initial" infiltration, starting (at least, from the perspective of the boy) with the president's visit in the first chapter, stating that once it entered their lives it never left. The narrative depicts the spread of violence as though it were an infestation: his mother abuses the children at home; his teacher victimizes his father; the children torture animals; and even the snow is described as "attacking". (Sheetrit, 2020, p. 88)

The Captives of Sinjar likewise focuses on terror, suffering (of both people and animals), corruption, and collective oppression, and on the traumatic history of the Kurds. This widespread ethnic group living in a state of exile within their own homelands in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, are excluded, isolated, and marginalized, if not downright ostracized on both the political and the social levels. The novel's protagonist is Sarat (سارات), a Yazidi Kurdish artist from Syria who emigrated to Sweden. Sarat lives in an isolated house on the shore of the pastoral Lake Odin, whose shores teem with wildlife. Sarat cherishes the lake as an emblem of all that is beautiful and good, and as the antithesis of the evil and satanic nature of man. Sarat clearly mirrors Barakat in many ways. Both are Syrian artists in Sweden, whose personal suffering cannot be detached from the collective suffering of the Kurdish people (Sheetrit, 2020, p. 90).

The Yazidis. As noted, the novel features five Yazidi girls who died after being captured by five ISIS fighters who enslave them and they too die in violent and tragic circumstances. After their deaths, the girls and the fighters' souls travel to Sweden to find Sarat and ask him to immortalize them in his paintings. He refuses.

Apparently, Barkhat seeks to emphasize that the artist/painter is affected by traumatic events, such as the Yazidi genocide and the ISIS atrocities; therefore, inspiration and creativity are taken from him.

Also prominent in the novel is the town of Sinjar in Kurdistan, and the Lalish Valley that is the site of the

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[6] In this context, it is noted that Barakat said in an interview, "I am difficult, my destiny is a difficult one. My writing attempts to work it out." Nāṣir and ʿAbdel Laṭīf, "Interview with Salīm Barakāt," 46.

[7] Barakat resembles other post-structuralist writers who employ an unclear, blurred style that incorporates poetic and philosophical language to create paradoxes and a sense of claustrophobia—a style possibly regarded as a symptom stemming from cultural post-trauma.

main Yazidi temple, where Sheikh Adi ʿbin Musafir, a central figure of the Yazidi religion, is buried[8, 9] (Zoonen & Wirya, 2017, pp. 7-8; Tritton, 2005)

Painting and its ability (or inability) to capture the horrors of suffering and war is a major theme of the novel. Sarat's studio is said to look like a painting by an abstract expressionist like Jackson Pollock's whose "drip" paintings were produced by splattering paint onto large canvases he spread out on the floor (423). Sarat tries to portray the violence in Syria by creating artworks "inspired by the harmful wounds" of his country, which show "dismembered bodies, torn streets, torn buildings, torn gardens, torn skies, and torn processions of people, exhausted and hopeless, with bundles upon their shoulders" (17). But Sarat is dissatisfied with his attempts.

Pictures of Horror

Each of the novel's 10 chapters is titled after a great European classic masterpiece. The influential paintings are selected from Sarat's thick album of 300 artistic plates. Each night before going to sleep, he leans the book on the wall next to his bed opened to one of the paintings. He then embarks on a intellectual journey to seek out

> the roots of the primary certainty of the creatures: "I mean obscurity, the disintegration of vacuum within a vacuum and a return to what was preceded by nothing and is followed by nothing except for a loosening that has not yet written the history of any wakefulness." (8)

The pictures cause him to dream of the frightening creatures in them. When he wakes up in the morning, he sees fragments of a dreamt painting traced on his chest, or in a mirror he sees them on his back and shoulders. He says, "In the night I already know what I shall see in the morning on my skin, which will be decorated with fragments of a very clear picture that was etched upon the screen of my imagination" (7). He adds, "My back tells the history of the murder by the Syrian state, due to this state's delusions about a people homogenous in its hopes and destiny, and due to its lies […] Syria is full of lies and coercion." (221).

"The Nightmare"

Barakat's novel opens with Henry Fuseli's painting "The Nightmare"[10], which captures Sarat's description of the massacre in Syria: "Over 300,000 killed, hundreds of thousands imprisoned or missing and millions of refugees who fled from the massacres in Syria. Butchery, devastation and destruction do not require a permit in the east" (158). He continues,

> But, since the engineers and their pyromaniac artisans finished constructing their cathedrals in Hell, which are taken from the privileged, an intimidating edifice in my country, Syria, I understood that I have many hearts, more than there are dead, while death has settled in its heralds and its temples and in the aid centers, whose storerooms are full of food and supplies, on soil that resembles the soil of my homeland […]. Every building that collapsed took with it one of my hearts. Every boat of refugees that sank to meet the Sea Goddess took with it one of my hearts. Every procession of refugee children dragging blankets, of fathers with wandering eyes and of open-mouthed, frightened and bewildered mothers—every such

[8] The Yazidi majority population lives in northwestern Iraq in the Sinjar Mountains and the Shekhan district. Other Yazidi villages and towns are located in Talkeef and Bashiqa Districts, and in the Duhok Governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Reliable statistics on Yazidi demography are sparse, but estimates range between 550,000-600,000 Yazidis residing in Iraq. Yazidis are the second largest religious minority in Muslim Iraq, after the Christians [...]. Yazidis are deeply connected to their land and its geographic location, and especially to their central temple in Lalesh, believed by the Yazidis to be the place where creation began after the Great Flood.

[9] ʿAdī b. Musāfir al-Hakkārī , Shaykh. ʿAdī (b. 1070s? d. 1162). An Arab Ṣūfī leader, he was born near Baalbek (Lebanon). His travels brought him to Laylash (Lalēsh) valley near Mosul (c. 1111), where he built a shrine and founded the ʿAdawiyya order. According to Christian legend, he was a Kurd.

[10] Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), a Swiss artist painted "The Nightmare" of a sleeping woman with an incubus on her belly who kills women.

> procession dragged one of my hearts behind it. (13-14)

The novel repeatedly mentions the names of the "tyrants". One is the "ill-omened" (المشؤوم) American President Barak Obama, who

> was the first to put morality aside in his heart […] regarding a people destroyed by occupiers from within and without […]. He left millions to drown in the despair of history, which lost any hope of curbing immorality the day children were murdered in the city of Deraa. (18)

Other tyrants are the Iranian leader, "the herald of destruction" (المبشر بالخراب) (14): Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who handed his country to the occupiers after apparently coming to the conclusion that "the shortest way to eternal rule is the destruction of his country" (18), and Russian President Vladimir Putin, who "flipped the borders of my country over the heads of the Syrians by opening its gates to the savages of jihad" (14-15).

According to Barakat, the history of human morality ended with WWII, and that is why Sarat is so full of rage and bitterness. The crisis in his homeland causes him to hate the whole universe because Assad has robbed the Syrians of their dream of living without fear (20). His hatred is also directed at other leaders and countries, and at the Syrian collaborators, "some of whom rushed to [Assad's] aid in order to defend the stronghold of slavery, while others rushed to declare the appearance of hell on earth in the name of the sovereign [Assad]" (20).

Sarat. The only light in Sarat's life comes from the natural world—the rain, the clouds, the wind—which he feels is the sole source of beauty and calm. He describes the loveliness of a deer resting in the shade of some noble cedars, the bulrushes growing on the shores of the lake and the birds that fly around the lakeside (62), and the beauty of the flowering shrubs and the apple trees in bloom. The liveliness of nature contrasts with everything that brings harm to humankind such as poison, disease, disasters, violence, murder, and tyranny (270-271).

Sarat is obsessed with the idea of painting the Yazidis' sacred Mount Sinjar, which he regards as an emblem of natural beauty, a place where the sounds of the wind blend in with the whispers of the trees and the calls of the birds. The Yazidis also identify Mount Sinjar as the place where Noah's Ark came to rest after the flood, and for that reason the area around this holy site became one of the oldest and largest Yazidi communities, from which the girls in the novel come. Sarat realizes that the source of his obsession with the mountain is his need to address the disaster of the Yazidi Kurds of that region[11] (Taha, Nguyen, & Slewa-Younan, 2021, p. 918). He wants to start his painting, but cannot decide which colors to use first and where to begin, with the ground or the sky (150). He sometimes imagines the mountain as towering and sometimes as small, and sometimes even sees it upside down, buried beneath the soil. He knows that its people have suffered persecution throughout history: the region was controlled by the Byzantines and before them by the Persians, who exiled its residents to Persia.

The Girls. The five girls that appear to Sarat are Yazidis from the village of Khana Sor, west of Sinjar. At first, they seem to be living, breathing women, although their behavior is oddly mechanical: they move their arms like automatons, gesturing and signaling (200). Over time, Sarat realizes that they are ghosts.

The first girl to arrive is Shahika (شاهيكا). Dressed in strange, tattered clothes—a red headscarf and a long reddish-brown coat over a wide-cut dark brown robe[12]—she emerges from the woods outside Sarat's home. She

[11] Throughout Saddam Hussein's regime (1979-2003), the Yazidis were marginalized. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) unleashed a period of racial discrimination and forced relocation on all Yazidis. In August 2014, ISIS attacked the Yazidis in Sinjar City and the surrounding villages, killing some 3,100 Yazidis and kidnapping a further 6,800. ISIS fighters enslaved and systematically raped women and especially girls. A majority of over 300,000 Yazidis were internally displaced or sought refugee status elsewhere in northern Iraq and a further 30,000 migrated to Turkey.

[12] The color red features prominently in the novel.

knocks on his door, and when he opens it, she says to him in Kurdish, "You are Sarat. I spotted you among the trees, but wasn't sure it was really you (لم احسم انك انت)" (20). Confounded but suspecting that the situation is more than meets the eye, Sarat asks the girl how she found him and knows his name. Instead of replying, she tells him that she is 17 years old and confides that Shahika is not her real name. "We who are here prefer to use fake names," she explains. Puzzled that such a young girl would need to resort to an alias, Sarat asks, "Who are you so afraid of that you took another name? Perhaps you would prefer an artistic name to a false one?" She replies that she is not afraid, because she is dead, prompting Sarat to remark, "This is the first time I have ever spoken face to face with a dead person" (22).

The novel is in fact populated with characters and things that can only be described as the "living dead" with whom Sarat has a telepathic connection, which is a typical feature of magical realism. Jonathan Morén notes that in Barakat's works everything, including inanimate objects, is alive and sentient:

> These are works that cover a wide range of styles and topics, but if one had to boil it all down to one single sentence, summarizing and expressing the core and the underlying assumption of Barakat's entire oeuvre, it would probably be this one: Everything is alive. And not only is everything alive, but everything is endowed with imagination, will, and—perhaps, in a way—with a language of its own. This is a world view that permeates virtually all of Barakat's works, both in their general outlook and in the minutiae. (Moren, 2016, p. 120)

Morén adds,

> Throughout all of Barakat's works, prose and poetry alike, trees observe people, fruits and oils have good or bad intentions, they are angry, voluptuous or greedy. Even kisses have an inner life of their own, and an agenda that may differ considerably from the agenda of the people exchanging these kisses in the best of faith. (Moren, 2016, p. 119)

The perception of death as the continuation of life is central to Barakat's worldview, and Shahika's character embodies this notion. On discovering that she is not a living girl, Sarat understands that he is in fact surrounded by ghosts. He mentions that a group of ghosts smuggle dead refugees to heaven in boats (34). He asks Shahika who smuggled her to Sweden, and she answers that it was one of the servants of the Angel Ta'us[13] (Kreyenbroek, 2005) (34-35). Looking at Lake Odin near Sarat's home, Shahika says, "This is the Sea of Lalish" (23). As stated, Lalish is an arid mountain valley in Kurdistan where the main Yazidi temple, the shrine of Sheikh ʿAdi bin Musafir, is located[14] (Kreyenbroek, 2005). Sarat holds that all the various religions' holy sites, including Lalish, existed in heaven before the religions themselves were founded, and were "inside and outside of the divine knowledge" (24). Shahika adds that Lalish Valley appeared even before Mount Sinjar, because God prepared it for the Sheikh (27). The connection drawn between the Sea of Lalish and Lake Odin suggests that the traumatic past continues to exist in the present: Sarat and Shahika both feel that no difference exists between the present and the past. Lake Odin itself is named after the father of the gods in Norse mythology, Odin, who is the god of wisdom, poetry, and also of war, thus he is associated with death.[15] Shahika pronounced that Lake Odin and the

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[13] Most modern Yazidis reject any connection between their religion and Islam. For Yazidis, one God created the world but entrusted it to seven archangels, the "Seven Mysteries", whose leader is the Peacock Angel (*Ṭāʾūs-ē Malak*). Yazidis do not recognize the existence of good and evil, but rather whatever befalls the world—including what others might call evil—is attributed to the Peacock Angel. While Yazidis reject claims that their greatest Archangel is identical with the devil (*Shayṭān*), the strict taboo on using words associated with the latter suggests an awareness of some connection between the two. Some Yazidis say that Iblīs, the devils' leader in Islam, is forgiven and once more close to God.

[14] The Lālish or Lalesh Valley is some 50 km northeast of Mawṣil in Iraq in the ḳaḍāʾ of Shaykhan in a largely Kurdish mountain area, famed as the principal pilgrimage destination of the Yazidis. The Yazidis' djamāʿiyya pilgrimage is held yearly between September 23-30 at the Shaykh ʿAdī b. Musāfir shrine (see note 9 above) and the tombs of other early saints of the sect.

[15] Odin, also called Wodan, Woden, or Wotan, is a principal Norse god. His exact role, however, is undetermined because of the

Sea of Lalish are one and the same inspires Sarat to think of the concept of reincarnation, which the Yazidi faith recognizes as many other religions do. These faiths hold that a person can be reborn as another person or even as an animal, and in this case as a place "reincarnated" in another country. According to Shahika, Lalish has been reincarnated as Lake Odin in Sweden. The five murdered Yazidi girls arrive in Sweden to hide at the lakeshore (375). Only after the appearance of the fourth girl does Sarat inform them that he too is a Yazidi (368).

Reincarnation and Memory. The theme of reincarnation is prominent in the novel and takes several forms:

1. Works of art can be reincarnated on a man's skin, covering various parts of his body, as happens to Sarat every morning.

2. Sarat believes that even winds and clouds can be reincarnated, and that, according to gnostic philosophy, Lake Odin and the Lalish Valley can be reincarnations of the wind.

3. Reincarnation is a form of exile, and both these concepts apply not only to people but also to places.

All the various souls or ghosts Sarat encounters ask him to paint them. What is the significance of a painters' output? Is it an act of recording events in order to preserve them in the individual and/or collective memory? The nature and significance of memory are shrouded in mystery and uncertainty. John Locke (2018, p. 18) contended that human beings are born without thoughts or memories; their minds are like a blank page, and we "derive all the materials of thinking from observations that we make of external objects that can be perceived through the senses, and of the internal operations of our minds, which we perceive by looking in at ourselves." Jung called memories "buried images":

> Many images are buried which would be sufficient to put the consciousness on guard; associated classes of ideas are lost and go on spinning their web in the unconscious, thanks to the psychic dissociation; this is a process which we meet again in the genesis of our dreams. (Jung, 2015, p. 73)

For Barakat, memory is not just a record of past events but forms the basis of identity of both the individual and the collective. Maurice Halbwachs labeled the collective memory a "living deposit" that is distinct from written history:

> General history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up. Likewise the need to write the history of a period, a society or even a person is only aroused when the subject is already too distant in the past to allow for the testimony of those who preserve some remembrance of it. (Halbwachs, 1980, pp. 78-79)

Halbwachs also claimed that no memory is purely individual, because all memory requires the existence of an "effective community" that shares it[16] (Jung, 1976, p. 103). In other words, he believed that, unless documented and shared, events are prone to evaporating.

Images of Humanity's Inhumanity. Sarat—who represents and expresses Barakat's worldview in the novel—feels the need to record his memories through the practice of his art, thereby adding them to the collective Yazidi memory. Weighed down by his individual memories, he paints to shift the burden to humanity as a whole—for the individual and collective unconscious is like an archive documenting humankinds' wars, terror, and holocausts. The other characters share his conviction regarding the importance of documentation, as evident from their obsessive pleas for Sarat to depict them and the places they love. But he is unable to do so, because he

complex picture of him drawn in literary, mythical sources. Odin was a war god, the protector of heroes and the god of poets (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

[16] Jung also addressed this issue: "Since the individual is not only a single entity, but also, by his very existence, presupposes a collective relationship, the process of individuation does not lead to isolation, but to an intense and more universal collective solidarity."

has no peace of mind.

The artistic masterpieces Barakat evokes in the novel echo the fears and anxieties he and the Kurdish and Yazidi communities experience. The bloody record of human history has imbued all individuals and groups with intense fear of disasters that could bring about the destruction of our world. Unable and unwilling to forget the horrors he has witnessed, Barakat holds that art—whether in the form of literature or painting—is the best way to preserve and communicate his memories. He joins forces with other painters, who regard visual art as the most powerful means of reflecting the violence, brutality, and destruction endemic in human nature. Poetry, literature, and art are the means of raising awareness to the recurring horrors in the world.[17]

In *The Writing of the Disaster*, the French philosopher Maurice Blanchot addresses the significance of a deadly disaster that brings total destruction, which gives rise to the catastrophist thinking that dominates the human psyche (Blanchot, 1986, p. 1). Many paintings and other artworks of the twentieth century reflect human anxiety, and represent the desire and need to record individual and collective memory. But this begs the question: Can catastrophes really be captured through painting, literature, or even photography? Theodor Adorno (1981, p. 34) believes that a catastrophe like the Jewish Holocaust cannot be captured either cerebrally/conceptually or by aesthetic/artistic means, and that writing poetry after the atrocities of Auschwitz is "barbaric". It may also be argued that the function of memory is to eternalize humanity's mistakes, so that future generations will not repeat them. Apparently, this is one of Barakat's objectives in *The Captives of Sinjar*. Embarking on a journey of memory, he encounters works of art that echo images from the archive of his suppressed fears and anxieties[18] (Cicero, 2001, p. 60).

Shahika is the first ghostly girl that asks Sarat to paint her, in the following exchange:

> -Have you not begun your painting?
> -What painting?
> -"The Captives of Sinjar."
> -Did I imagine this girl? Is she a figment of my imagination resembling a ghost? […]
> -I have not yet begun to paint Sinjar […] How do you suppose I could paint Sinjar?
> -It is not a supposition. I am in the painting (25-26).

Sarat objects, saying that he has not even started the painting and that she cannot be a figure in a painting that does not yet exist. But Shahika insists, "I am one of the captives of Sinjar" (25-26). Later she says again, "Do you not mean to paint the captives of Sinjar? I am from Sinjar. I am one of the captives of Sinjar, and I am here to give you details about my place and shape in your painting" (35). She tells him about the day ISIS fighters stormed her village. They loaded every girl and woman between the ages of nine and 30 on trucks and took most of them to Al-Raqqah in Syria. They were gathered in a schoolhouse and divided into groups according to various criteria. Then they were sold in the market "like living meat", and many were forced to marry much older men and were abused (142).

Shahika was sold in the Al-Raqqah market for $400 to an Iraqi man, Abu Dihya, who gave her a new name, telling her, "Your name is Saʿada. You are lucky that I have brought you back to Islam from the camp of the Devil" (41). They lived in an abandoned house, and Shahika became pregnant but miscarried. Several months

[17] Art as a vehicle of protest is especially prominent on the eve of WWI and before the rise of Nazi Germany. Prescient artists of the time heralded the disasters awaiting the world and warned against them, describing absurdity, anarchism, social decadence, and the deterioration of moral values they foresaw around them.

[18] According to Cicero, the fifth-century BCE Athenian general Themistocles said, "I remember even what I would prefer not to, and cannot forget what I would like to."

later, following a battle between ISIS and the international forces, the ISIS fighters withdrew to the east, planting landmines along the roads and in the doorways to the houses (42). Shahika and a group of other women tried to escape amid the chaos, but she stepped on a mine and was blown to pieces. "The landmine took me to Lake Lalish," she tells Sarat. "Do paint the lake, Sarat, and on its western shore paint Mount Sinjar. […] My fate now rests on this painting that you have not yet painted. Finish the painting, so I can be free" (43). She adds that she and the other captives came to Sweden the moment Sarat decided to paint the holocaust of Sinjar, and that other girls may also be in left in limbo if Sarat does not paint the picture.

That the artist Sarat has access to the spiritual world of the dead is no coincidence. He is a medium between the terrestrial and spiritual worlds, and his paintings do not merely record worldly events but also the presence of the supernatural. For the ghosts, denizens of the land of the dead, he is a bridge between the two worlds.

Sarat has known the pain and loss borne of destruction, violence, exile, and loneliness. As an artist he identifies with the figures who appear in his paintings, oppressed beings clad in "clothes from the warehouses of the generations, hidden or visible in the tattoos on their faces that reflect their situation" (54). These figures are wanderers, incomplete and alien to their surroundings; they exist half in his imagination and half on his canvas. His paintings feature wounded figures and with blank eyes that are "bleed[ing] wounds"[19] (55).

Sarat begins a painting called "The Babylonian Exile", which links the exile of the Jews to Babylon with the exile of the people from Sinjar. He considers representing the massacre of Sinjar by picturing piles of bodies, but he also wants to capture the wails and screams of the victims, and wonders how this can be done in the same painting (60). He has painted many grim sites of the disasters that crushed his homeland, yet he feels he has never achieved rendering "death as it really is" (60-61).

"The Great Red Dragon and the Beast From the Sea"

William Blake's painting "The Great Red Dragon and the Beast from the Sea"[20] appears one morning etched on Sarat's chest. The dragon in Blake's painting representing Satan figures in many fairytales and myths, generally represents power, savageness, and destruction (62).

Here, Sarat meets an unfamiliar young man who addresses him by name. He is the ISIS fighter Abu Dihya[21], who was Shahika's master. He tells Sarat that ISIS executed him for saying that he loved the organization's leader Caliph Abu Bakr, so much that he would marry him (79). Like Shahika, he begs Sarat to paint him. He asks to be painted dressed like ISIS leader Abu Bakr. Why? Because this, he says, will liberate him from his present situation of being "suspended" (عالق) between this world and the next, waiting to be admitted into Paradise[22] (71). Abu Dihya refuses to reject ISIS ideology. The Yazidis, he states, are Satan worshippers who deny Allah, therefore, they deserve persecution. He hopes Allah will demolish Mount Sinjar. The Yazidis who live there, he

[19] The people's pain and sorrow are attributed to Mount Sinjar, because for Sarat people, plants, animals, objects, and features of the landscape are all one. He asks himself, which color best expresses this mountain's sorrow. Should he paint it as a bleeding heart or give it cracks looking like wounds? (48; see note 12 above, "the color red").

[20] This painting by William Blake (1757-1827) belongs to the Great Red Dragon series inspired by the Book of Revelation. It depicts the seven-headed and ten-horned dragon standing over the beast, also with seven heads and ten horns that holds a sword in one hand and a beacon in the other. Both the dragon and the beast take on a human-like form.

[21] Abu Dihya al-Kalbi, mentioned in Muslim *sira* literature as one of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, is very handsome and some sources claim that the angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet taking Abu Dihya's form. Abu Dihya is also granted divine inspiration along with the first Islamic caliph Abu Bakr. The ISIS leader dubbed himself Abu Bakr as an alias, and Shahika's former master, the ISIS fighter Abu Dihya also uses an alias (70).

[22] This recalls the Islamic concept of *barzakh* (برزخ), an intermediate state between this life and the next. Abu Dihya implies that the souls of killed or murdered ISIS fighters are channeled in this intermediate stage, but artists can deliver them from it.

claims, worship fire, tombs, and birds, believe in superstitions, and use amulets and witchcraft to plague the Muslims. In fact, he believes they are plotting to seize Muslim lands and undermine the foundations of Islam (87).

"The Flaying of Marsyas"

A pastoral scene of a shepherdess grazing her flock on Mount Sinjar's slopes is suddenly broken by sounds of explosions and gunfire in the distance. In shock and fear the girl leads her goats away (100). This scene is reflected in Italian painter Titian's (1490-1576) vision entitled "The Flaying of Marsyas", which depicts a gruesome mythological scene: the Satyr Marsyas is being flayed alive by the god Apollo after challenging the god to a contest of music and losing. Like the painting, the dark pastoral reality in the novel echoes mythological and horrific elements. The skinning alive of a human portrays ISIS at its worst. Just as Apollo punishes Marsyas for challenging him, ISIS, purporting to represent God's will, executes its victims and displays the executions on the internet to terrorize anyone who refuses to accept its ways and swear allegiance to its caliph (111). And just as the violin trills accompany the flaying of Marsyas, ISIS's cruelties are equally sadistic, public, and often forcibly witnessed, including by children. Barakat alludes to this aspect of ISIS's violence by mentioning Lawhat al-Jihad, a "picture" drawn by ISIS soldiers, which depicts a child looking over at a field strewn with severed limbs.

The shepherdess named Ninas is the second girl to visit Sarat. Dressed in yellow, she follows Shahika out of the rushes one day and addresses the artist. She recounts that she was captured by ISIS and sold in Mosul to a 40 year-old man. Later, a *qadi* (Islamic judge) bought her from her first master. Four months later, the *qadi* choked her to death and claimed she had fallen off a ladder to conceal his crime. The *qadi* was also a *daʿi* (proselytizer), who brainwashed 84 Yazidi children between six and ten years old, and converted them to Islam. He dressed them in black and covered their eyes with cloths bearing pictures of the Prophet's battles. He showed them brutal scenes, and read to them Quranic verses describing the punishments awaiting infidels in Hell (137-138). By way of contrast, he described the pleasures in Paradise awaiting the believers. Then, he asked them what they must do to be admitted into Paradise, and the children answered dutifully "kill the infidels and chop off their heads"[23].

The third girl is the 14 year-old Anisha. She holds a blue flower she picked in Lalish Valley near Mount Sinjar. When Sarat asks her if she is a ghost, she first says, "yes," but then adds hesitantly, "I don't know" (202). Sarat learns her story from her former master, Ali, when he arrives in Sweden as a spirit. Ali tells Sarat that he did not kill Anisha. He suspected his brother of wanting Anisha for himself and shot him, after which his brother's wife killed both him and the Yazidi girl out of revenge. Shahika asks Sarat to draw Anisha, because he is a Kurdish artist who was planning to paint Mount Sinjar (202).

The fourth girl, 15-year old Yada, was taken to Syria where an ISIS fighter from Libya bought her. Her master carried out a suicide bombing together with her. Paradoxically, she was killed (373), while her master survived only to be later executed. The dead know these things, she explains.

"Dante and Virgil in Hell"

"Dante and Virgil in Hell" by the French artist William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905)[24] portrays two

[23] Perhaps the novel's most brutal scenes, recounted by the ISIS fighter Abu Dihya, describe children in Al-Raqqah city who participated in executions by stoning, and two other children he saw filming themselves toying with severed heads.

[24] The painting depicts a scene from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Two damned souls, an alchemist and a heretic, struggle with the

men fighting to the death, while a bat-winged demon looks on, smiling. In the background, the sky is filled with murky blood-red flames. This work reminds Sarat of Mount Sinjar and he says, "This artist thought of Mount Sinjar before me, already in the late nineteenth century. He put this mountain in Hell" (181). Sarat adds that the background brushstroke on this canvas, which is full of ghosts and tortured bodies, belongs to Mount Sinjar (181).

ISIS fighter Abu Dihya introduces Sarat to another ghost, his friend Ihsan Mujahid, who was an ISIS proselytizer. Ihsan also wishes to be painted. Sarat asks him whether he, like Abu Dihya, is also "in limbo", waiting to "fall into Paradise". Ihsan replies, "I am walking slowly to Paradise, following the right path. I shall not fall, mine is only a slight purgatory" (171). Ihsan's faith in Islam and in ISIS remains intact. The coming of Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, he states, is prophesied in all holy books, and Islam is the final and eternal religion (320). He adds that one day all the leaders of the world will bow down to the ISIS caliph (346). He also believes that Europe is approaching its end, for the Muslims are fighting the Europeans in their own territories, and the Europeans will not be able to repel the Muslims.

Ihsan's nickname is Ghar Hira, after the cave in which the angel Gabriel appeared to the Prophet Muhammad, and in which the Prophet and his companion, Abu Bakr al-Sadiq, later hid during their migration to Medina. Ihsan tells Sarat that he taught children religion and prayer, but was executed for comparing the caliph to a rooster. All the boys he taught attended his execution (192). Sarat remarks bitterly that the ISIS caliphate state is a gift from heaven for the Iranian leader who causes disasters, the Russian president, the Alawite president of Syria and the American president Obama, who all use it to promote their interests (178).

"The Death of Marat"

"The Death of Marat" rendered by Norwegian painter Edvard Munch[25] (1863-1944) pays homage to the famous painting of Marat by the French artist Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825) that shows the assassinated victim holding a written note in his hand. In Sarat's imagination the writing on the note represents the numbers that count the dead, wounded, imprisoned, and the refugee Syrians in the civil war (220).

The fifth and youngest Yazidi girl, 13-year old Kidima, now appears and begs Sarat to paint her, repeating her plea eight times, which equals the number of instances she was bought and sold as a slave. The last person to buy her was a black man who abused her and then tried to kill her, but she shot him and then herself (292-293).

Sarat asks Kidima who is responsible for what happened in Sinjar, and she replies, "We are." Sarat responds that he blames no one, neither the Devil nor fate (294). He decides to paint Kidima in a grape vineyard in Sinjar, near the tomb of Sheikh ʿAdi.

Sarat compares Syria to the Yazidi girls. Like them, the country was sold and is now a sort of ghost. It managed to expel French colonialism, only to fall victim to other occupiers and later to the ruling Alawite family and its cronies, and to the Iranians. Today the country is in ruins. Its president, who will do anything to cling on to power, essentially rules over "the remains of a country" and "the ruins of a people". The Syrian nation has been expunged (295-296). Sarat himself fled Syria after living there like a ghost, resembling the spirits of those

fraudster. The naked men fight in a puddle of blood, while a demon hovers above and a dead body is sprawled at their feet. Under a painted flaming sky, the contorted bodies arouse a horrible swirl that is at once alarming and hypnotic.

[25] Munch's childhood reeked with illness, death, and disasters, which shaped his personality and his bleak style. His works use colored shapes of long brushstrokes to reflect insights of psychological inner states. His life's work boiled down to finding an artistic means toward expressing the naked human soul. His "Death of Marat" imagines the assassination of Jean-Paul Marat, a leader of the Jacobin faction of French Revolutionaries. Marat, a newspaper publisher, spent much of his time bathing to assuage a skin disease. Charlotte Corday, a rival revolutionary, assassinated him in his bathtub. The French painter Jacques-Louis David, Marat's friend and fellow Jacobin, "recorded" the scene.

who appear to him in his exile in Sweden. Art is his only source of hope and salvation (299).

Another painting that appears on Sarat's skin is "The Temptation of St. Anthony" (304) by the German painter Matthias Grünewald (1470-1528), which depicts the saint being attacked by demons. This saint, an Egyptian monk known as Anthony the Great and as "the Father of all Monks", is considered to be one of the first Christian ascetics who sought solitude in the wilderness. It is said that, while this hermit was alone in the Egyptian desert, he was beset by demons who tormented him and tried to tempt him away from his faith.[26] Sarat finds it hard to know whether or not these demons are only figments of the artists' imagination (305). He adds that a contemporary version of this painting might include, in addition to the demons, also Putin, Khamenei, Assad, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Erdoğan, and Obama (306).

Sarat also speaks to ʿAbdallah's ghost, the Libyan ISIS fighter who bought Kidima. He grew up in Britain, the son of an immigrant from Libya. Sarat asks ʿAbdallah why he hates Britain, the country that sheltered his father and in which he was born and raised. ʿAbdallah answers, "Britain harmed me and my faith, and I want to mend that distortion" (408). "I was born in Europe," he adds. "I carried jihad against Europe under my skin. You were born elsewhere. I struggled hard to become who I am. Do not rebel. You were raised to be who you are now" (403). ʿAbdallah is the most sadistic of the ISIS fighters, and suggests horrific methods of killing (407).

Sarat becomes vexed on discovering that ISIS actually transgresses the commandments of the Islamic faith. Sa'doun, who was in charge of an ISIS prison, shows him a golden dinar minted by ISIS, which bears a portrait of the caliph. Sarat says to him, "But Islamic law forbids depicting human figures" (336).

"Judith Beheading Holofernes"

The Italian painter Caravaggio's (1571-1610) "Judith Beheading Holofernes" pictures the story of the Jewish widow narrated in the deuterocanonical Book of Judith who lops off Assyrian general Holofernes' head. After first seducing Holofernes, the invader of her country, she gets him drunk and then kills him to save her people. Her act of beheading clearly evokes ISIS's favored method of execution.

Sarat sees yet another painting on his skin one morning. Francisco Goya's (1746-1828) "Saturn Devouring His Son" evokes the mythological tale of Saturn who ate his children in order to foil a prophecy that one of them would overthrow him. This work is one of the 14 Black Paintings decorating the walls of Goya's house. These murals all depict the dark and apocalyptic visions of death and violence inspired by the horrors and chaos of war Goya witnessed during Napoleon's 1808 conquest of Spain.

Sarat also describes the French artist Théodore Géricault's (1791-1824) "The Raft of the Medusa". This painting recollects the aftermath of a disaster at sea—the shipwreck of the French naval frigate *Méduse* that ran aground in 1816. The sailors are desperately hanging onto a small raft in a roiling sea and others seem to be dead or dying. The work expresses political criticism involving the frigate's captain who had been appointed based on his connections, despite his having had little inexperience in commanding a ship.

Another mention is "The Garden of Earthly Delights" by the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch (c. 1450-1516), in which a two-legged dog appears in the left-hand panel. This image causes Sarat to feel anxiety, and he sinks into a labyrinthine magical-realist vision. In a market the five ISIS fighters meet, each of them leading a dog with an elongated body and a large head. A stranger appears and orders them to release the animals. They all escape except for one strange dog with the head of a salmon that follows Sarat, growling "like cavemen around a fire". The beast has the fangs of a boar, "its eyes gleam with malice, and hostility glints at the corners of its

[26] Michelangelo's earliest known painting is of this scene.

mouth" (389). When Sarat comes home, the beast hurls itself at the window of his studio, shatters the glass, and lands inside, destroying the painting Sarat has begun. Then jumping back through the window, it runs into the lake, looking like a hybrid of dog, fish, and serpent (417). The girls who witness this scene are dismayed by the destruction of the studio and the painting. He asks them, "Did you ever see a dog-fish like that one in Sinjar?" Shahika answers with questions of her own: "Did you draw the dog that drowned? Did it emerge from your painting?" He replies, "This dog can only be painted with human blood" (417).

The monstrous dogs are magical realistic features. They symbolize the evil that prevails in the world and threatens all that is good, represented by artists like Sarat (as reflected in the dog's destruction of Sarat's studio). The artist is reminded of a conversation he once had with his Armenian friend Khatch ḳ. Sarat said that the world was about to end at any moment, and his friend wondered how people would spend their last hours if they indeed knew of their approaching termination. Sarat speculates that "they would take to the streets and be softer and more compassionate, tolerant and generous" (417-418). His friend disagrees, and claims they would arm themselves and take revenge on anyone who was unkind to them. Sarat suggests a third option: that they would commit suicide en masse (424).

The Novel's Ending

The novel ends with Sarat painting a ship and telling the Yazidi girls, who are standing around him, that he will board it and sail back to Syria (428). The work is inspired by the Polish artist Zdzisław Beksiński's (1929-2005) painting of a ship's hulk done in his dystopian surrealist and utopian realist styles. Beksiński's frightening and apocalyptic rusted, sunken vessel floats on stormy seas, yet Shahika and Sarat claim they see it sailing in the lake every night (433). Sarat and the Yazidi girls walk down to the lake, and then carry on, suddenly realizing that they are walking on water.[27] Amazingly, their eyes take in lights all around them by which they see the lake's surface is covered in tents. Before each tent a person is sitting at an easel illuminated by a lamp, and they are painting the tents with people inside them. Sarat continues to wander around the lake, ignoring the strange noises emanating from its depths (438-440).

This ending is an optimistic note. The water, the lights, the tents, and the painters combine to create a utopian reality, which is associatively linked to the magic realism that pervades the novel.

Conclusion

In conclusion Salim Barakat's *The Captives of Sinjar* combines form and content that are unique and complex both linguistically and stylistically. He uses his secretive, encrypted language to blur the boundaries between realism and fantasy to create a comprehensive conceptual world. The structuring of the novel around well-known paintings is likewise unique, and serves to enhance the dark mythical-mystical elements that merge with and echo the harsh reality of the Yazidi Kurdish people who are central to the novel. Despite the focus on this singular people, the victims of a genocidal attempt to eradicate them from the earth, Barakat's message is also timeless and universal. His magical-realistic style constructs a new realism of a supernatural world that changes daily life, making it possible for the dead and the living to meet and interact. His aim is not only to

[27] The walking-on-water theme curiously appears in other Arabic novels, as in Mahmoud al-Bayyati's Dancing on Water: Difficult Dreams. The story's narrator is at sea, surrounded by strange creatures, when he discovers he can dance on the water—a messianic attribute. He speaks with Jesus and Moses about his newfound ability. Johanna Barbro Sellman observes that for Bayyati dancing on water represents instability, loss, and an attempt to reshape life.

highlight the tragedy of the victims, but also to convey the idea that death is not final. He genuinely deems that there is life after death, and that victims of murder continue to carry the suffering they experienced in life into the realm of death.

A spiritually sensitive man like the novel's protagonist Sarat is able to see murder victims. They appear to him in the form of ghosts and beseech him to resurrect them by means of his art. However, throughout the novel he feels his hands are tied and he is unable to paint well enough to save innocent victims. Yet, Barakat perceives that art is a noble, spiritual realm. The artist of the written word and the image-maker on canvas are here to play a meaningful role in delivering the world from murderous, violent people and organizations like ISIS.

To conclude, despite the horrific descriptions and the dark nature of the masterpieces that populate the pages of his novel, his ending leaves an opening for the future deliverance of humankind in which the artist plays a leading role.

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