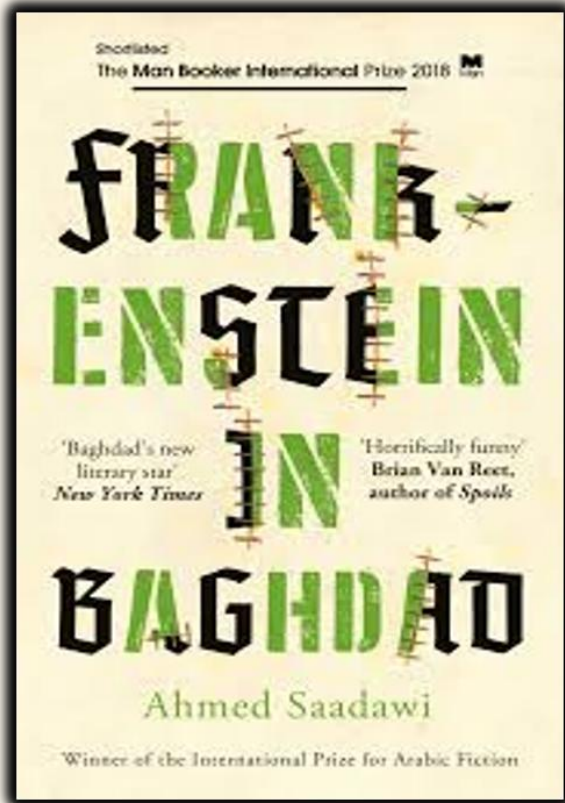


The Face of the Hybrid: Alterity and Ontological Disruption in Contemporary Fiction

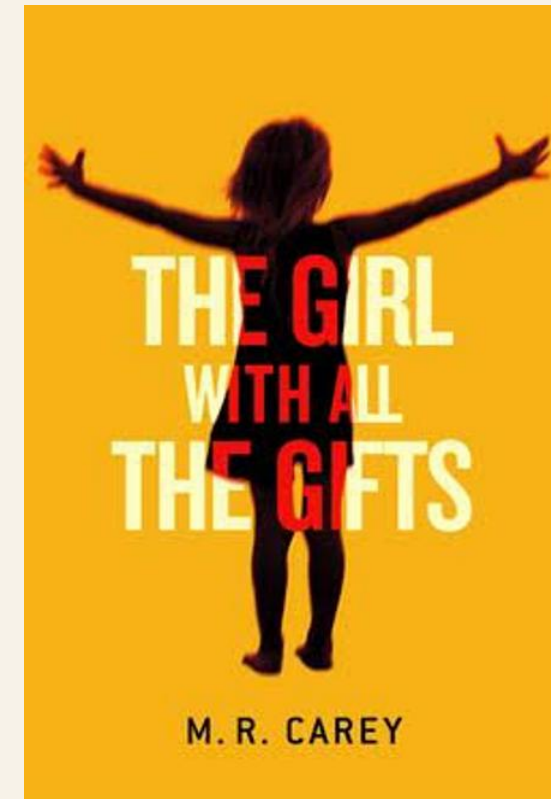
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УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ
ГОЦЕ ДЕЛЧЕВ
Избери мудро, делувај храбро



Ahmed Saadawi,
Frankenstein in Baghdad, 2013 (trans. in
English by Jonathan Wright, 2018)

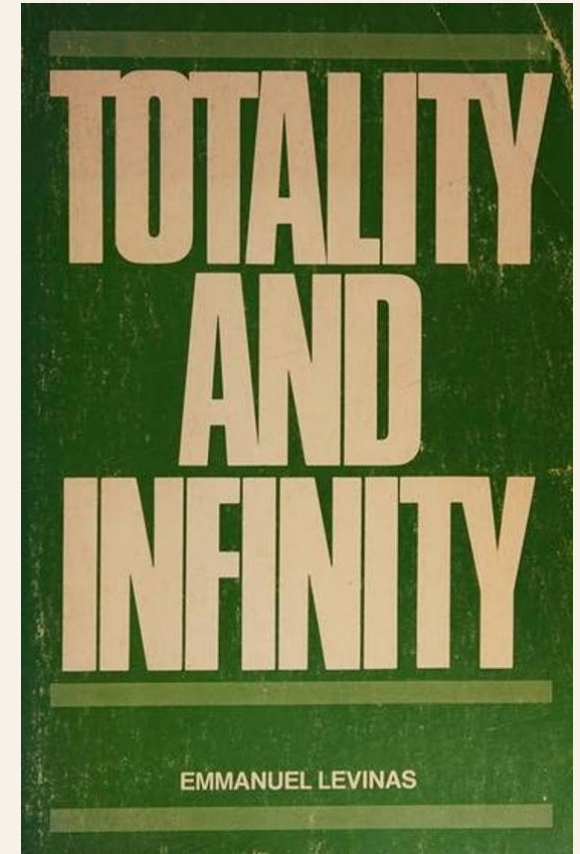


M. R. Carey,
The Girl with All the Gifts, 2014

Levinas: Responsibility Before Classification

03

- The Other exceeds the categories through which the self tries to know and contain them.
- The “face” - an ethical encounter, not merely a physical feature: “*The face resists possession, resists my powers*” (Levinas, 1969, p. 197).
- Responsibility precedes judgement: “*the essential, primary, and fundamental structure of subjectivity*” (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 1985, p. 95).
- Levinas’s account is principally framed around a human Other.



Emmanuel Levinas,
Totality and Infinity, 1969

Carey: Recognition Before Classification

05

- Melanie's first environment is a locked cell: observed, numbered, restrained and treated as a scientific subject.

"Melanie made Miss Justineau laugh! ... what she most likes to hear, and to remember, is Miss Justineau's voice saying her name, Melanie, in that way that makes her feel like the most important person in the world" (p. 13).



- Caldwell's scientific apparatus treats the children as infected bodies, research subjects and potential medical resources.
- Justineau is part of the institution: ethical relation begins before biological or institutional classification.

Carey: The Human–Nonhuman Body

06

- Caldwell: the second-generation fungus becomes “a *true symbiote rather than a parasite*”(p. 423).
- The shift is from contamination to entanglement: Melanie is a human–fungal organism materially constituted through interspecies relations.
- Druzak’s (2022) trans-corporeal reading connects organism and environment, human and nonhuman, individual and species.



Carey: Posthuman Continuity

07



- The ending unsettles anthropocentric ideas of progress.
- Melanie and the new hybrids may be better adapted to the altered environment than the existing human population.
- Melanie: *“I’m coming back. I’ll take care of you”* (Carey, 2014, p. 449).
- The hybrid - capable of care and agency, not only an object of responsibility.
- Posthuman continuity: life continues in another form.

Saadawi: Fragments, Care and Assembly

08

- Hadi assembles the Whatsitsname from fragments of people killed in bombings and other attacks.
- He insists, “*It’s a human being, guys, a person,*” and wants the body to receive “*a proper burial*” rather than be treated as rubbish (p. 25).
- The remains demand care before they can be assigned a single identity.
- The result cannot be reduced to Hasib or any single victim: it is both an individual body and a collective archive.



Saadawi: Naming and Political Unity



- Elishva identifies the creature with her son Daniel and gives him his name.

“With her words the old woman had animated this extraordinary composite — made up of disparate body parts and the soul of the hotel guard who had lost his life. The old woman brought him out of anonymity with the name she gave him: Daniel.” (p. 51).

- Naming moves the hybrid towards personhood but does not settle his ontology.
- The Whatsitsname: *“I’m made up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds”* and *“I’m the first true Iraqi citizen”* (p. 140).
- The body gathers ethnic, religious, class and political divisions, but its symbolic unity remains unstable.

Saadawi: The Failure of Classification



- The Whatsitsname sees himself as an instrument of justice, but his deteriorating body requires replacement parts.
- Daniel, criminal, “Frankenstein”, monster, threat, hero and avenger: each label identifies an aspect, but none contains the whole being.
- State officials identify Hadi as the criminal, although people who know him cannot recognise the disfigured televised image as Hadi.
- Personal recognition fails; institutional misclassification succeeds politically.

Discussion: Ontology and Responsibility

11

- Resist exhaustive knowledge and settled ontology: the issue is not only who they are, but what they are.
- Melanie: human–fungal entanglement. What's its name: one/many, living/dead, victim/perpetrator, individual/collective.
- If responsibility precedes knowledge, uncertainty should not cancel ethical obligation.
- Following Calarco (2008), the novels test the human-centred limits of Levinasian ethics without simply declaring the hybrids human.
- Ontological disruption is an ethical challenge: responsibility need not require a settled ontology.

- Responsibility precedes classification: neither hybrid can be contained by specimen, monster, criminal or threat.
- Carey turns disruption towards a possible new form of life; Saadawi leaves it unresolved within the afterlife of war.
- Make responsibility most demanding when the Other cannot be securely identified as fully human, innocent or individually bounded.
- The hybrid does not invalidate Levinas's ethics; it tests the reach of responsibility before categorisation beyond the stable human subject.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!