

## The Myth of Empty Iraq in Kevin Powers's *The Yellow Birds*

Sarah A. Majeed, Omar Mohammed Abdullah\*  
College of Education for Women, University of Anbar, Iraq  
\* [omar.moh@uoanbar.edu.iq](mailto:omar.moh@uoanbar.edu.iq)

### ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the myth of empty Iraq in Kevin Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012). The study accentuates the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq as pseudo-fact i.e., the war was waged on the grounds of bogus claims. That is, there had been no justified allegation upon which the invasion would be initiated. Therefore, the study will examine the narrative reliability that tells the story from an objective perspective. The American protagonist narrator discovers the deception of the American government when he repatriates. He becomes convinced that his military experience reinforced his belief that the war was waged for nihilistic purposes when he was deployed in Iraq; and there was no real reason for invading it since it does not have mass destruction weapons. The study, accordingly, will unravel this experience as a conspicuous proof of the empty Iraq; and the invasion was fabricated on imperial ideologies. Through the protagonist's omniscient narrative perspective, Iraq will be scrutinized as a heavenly arcadia for peace and universal coexistence. As such, the discussion will prove the mythical fraudulent contemporary western mass media's depiction of Iraq as a hellish abyss inferno. Instead, the study will identify it as a perfect place of unprecedented hospitality and empty of malicious feud towards the west, which is meticulously portrayed by the novel's American narrator. To achieve this objective, the study will apply the butterfly effect theory to identify how the protagonist's experience is the lurking "cause" of mature awareness of the American campaign against Iraq, which will be interpreted as the "effect" resulting in a profound recognition of Iraq as a prime influential Middle Eastern state.

**Keywords:** Butterfly Effect; Invasion; Iraq; Narrative Perspective; Omniscient Narrator

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Amid the early 2000s, with the help of computer-generated simulations, researchers distinguished deterministic chaos, a state that has made a modern worldview in scientific modelling, agreeing to four of the originators of the Butterfly Effect within the wide setting of chaos theory. The Butterfly Effect empowers us to see the physical world in better approaches and to look anew at writings that are called "chaotic." By seeing such texts through a chaos-theory perspective, we are able connect narrative structure with narrative content and connect the formalism of conventional narratology with the reader's production of narrative meaning.

The Butterfly Effect is a non-specialist, catchall term that we utilize to cover the study of chaotic practices in various disciplines including literature among other sciences. Here, the focus is on the Butterfly Effect as practiced in writing, wherein it involves a specific sub discipline called dynamical systems theory. In spite of the fact that dynamical systems theory more precisely assigns the scientific modelling the study hereafter portrays, it in any case employs chaos theory to recognize the phrase's huge social resonance.

The Butterfly Effect has modified the style in which we conceptualize so-called chaotic structures in the field of literature. Once considered as “poor in order,” chaos is regarded as rich in information. Once seen as aberrant, the nonlinear and the random are recently perceived as prevalent, and literary conducts once disregarded and rejected are now considered legitimate scopes of inquiry. The most far-reaching insights that the Butterfly Effect presents to us are that patterns of order appear spontaneously out of random conducts, that deterministic systems can generate random conducts when tiny uncertainties are amplified as the system develops through time, and that time itself can work differently at local levels. Models of chaotic systems show the entanglement of system and systematizer in generating meaning, a feedback loop thus running between the subjective observer and the object under observation.

By looking through the Butterfly Effect perspective, one may have new comprehension into narratives whose structures offer chaotic features. Such a reading makes us able to understand how they form their meaning, which emerges from the particular cultural, social, and historical circumstances, and how their meaning is dynamical, entangling the reader in the interpretive process. One can infer the disorderly order - the complicated yet easy elegance of these narrative through the chaos theory perspective.

## 2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The world has changed drastically after the first decade of the twenty-first century. During the decade, the American novel was gradually transforming into a new perception of life. That is, modernism's relative view of life was almost repealed by American authors. They began to perceive life on the basis of postmodernism. The atrocities of war demolished their hope to conceptualize the stable meaning of human life. War aftermath resulted in the feeling of fragmentation. People felt the deep alienation in their societies due to the political practices in their lives. Fragmentation prevailed the entire literary modes, and authors responded to this through literature. As a result, fragmentation had been the key element of postmodernism. American authors limited the concept of fragmentation to the decline of the American empire. They addressed the critical changes in the American imperial territories and how they dismantled from the American hegemony. Powers tackles such intricate issues in *The Yellow Birds* (2012). This happens when the narrator describes his frenzy experience in Iraq: “I remember feeling relief in basic while everyone else was frantic with fear” (32).

The Iraqi war, for example, paved the way for a new change in American society other than the social classes. It witnessed the appearance of multiculturalism (Chow, 1998, p. 4). Multiculturalism involved several ethnicities that interacted with the American troops. People from different parts of Iraq chose to settle in safe places for the sake of family stability. The American hegemony spread its colonial impact in many locations in the entire Iraq. People of Iraq migrated to safe places to gain national identity because homelands were still suffering from both American colonialism and the military invasion. These migratory minorities intermingled with the American troops. As a sequence, multiculturalism took its authentic cultural shape i.e., it included many world people within the American national demarcation. Such military experience exemplifies the essence of escapist fiction. Powers indicts this fact in *The Yellow Birds* (2012) as the narrator (Bartle) begins gradually to recognize the American passive hegemony on Iraqi lands: “It had dawned on me that I'd never have to make a decision again. That seemed freeing, but it gnawed at some part of me even then” (32).

Escapist fiction is a kind of narrative that deals with the psychological complication of people who have disturbed thoughts. In everyday life, people confront some incidents that make them psychically turbulent. Escapist fiction portrays these thoughts and provides the reader with bizarre literary situations in order to have the reader extremely immersed in the narrative events. In this sense, escapist fiction offers the reader, or the reception audience, with an “escape” from the thoughts of everyday life. It has entertaining elements as psychic alternatives to thwart the reader’s problems. Being so, it provides therapeutic and didactic themes by making the reader absorb the function of the escapist fictional text. Furthermore, it approaches real life through simulating reality but in an exotic manner (Zants, 1996, p. 3). As such, it serves as a corrective means exposing the defects of, for example, a certain society. Consequently, the word “escape” is a key factor of escapist fiction projected in many literary genres, especially satire, fantasy fiction and science fiction. Powers, in *The Yellow Birds* (2012), deals with such escapist truth through the narrative eyes of the protagonist who now perceives Iraq as a place of peace rather than military abyss: “eventually, I had to learn that freedom is not the same thing as the absence of accountability” (34). On the grounds of this recognition, consequently, the butterfly effect begins to take shape as it orients the protagonist’s experience in Iraq in harsh escapades. That is, who wants to escape from the fake reality of the American unjustified claims of invading Iraq for the sake of resorting to peace and freedom which, according to his experience, are available in Iraq is an ideal place, or arcadia, for its people as well as other world citizens. This is the essence of cultural escapism portrayed in the novel.

Through the use of narrative elements, escapist fiction denotes the collective desire for escapism from psychic problems, which are the core of the chaos or butterfly effect per se. Literary fantasy exemplifies the mass desire for escapism where people could find psychic remedial reliefs. Furthermore, fantasy is the first imaginative tool used by fictional authors and escapism is secondary since both of them incarnate the sense of literary imagination: “fantastic elements suggest the dangers of the unfettered imagination, where escapism is in the ascendancy” (Ward, 2002, p. 148). Such elements embody the author’s depiction of chaotic events, like wars, military confrontations and so forth. Escapist fiction has also other purposes. One of the most significant purposes is entertainment. It arouses some activities and events that serve as alternatives to reality. In this sense, escapism conforms to the notion of “guilty pleasure” (Ward, 2002, p. 1). The meaning of guilty pleasure, accordingly, is that escapist fiction portrays episodes of romance adventures that do not occur in reality through chaotic events. However, they represent the human defects, virtues or vices and critique them via fantastic fictional descriptions. Military realism, for example, is a category of escapist sub-genre. The author subtly uses his/her implied voice in the course of the events and exposes reality through the literary text’s marvellous pot. Powers’s *The Yellow Birds* (2012) is an obtrusive example of escapism. It involves a canonical description of human and encounters that are categorical of human virtues and vices in reality. In this way, escapist fiction parades satiric modes concerning the reality of people and their relations. This is meticulously done by dint of the protagonist, Private John Bartle, who begins to realize the viciousness of the American destructive mission in Iraq. He explores his naivety when he accepted going to Iraq which is a good place: in the following lines, he disagrees with the American claims of invading Iraq: “It’s lovely to think that snow can be special. We’re always told it is. Of all those million million flakes that fall, no two are alike, forever and ever, amen” (40).

Escapist fiction deals with reality through another literary genre, namely, dark realism. Peter Mackey claims that science fiction is an integral “variant” of escapism (1999, p. 3). Mackey pursues the historical development of escapism which led to the emergence of dark realism. He contends that humanity encounters devastating perils that endanger the human race. Therefore, escapism stirs the importance of dealing with the future of humanity in terms of dark realism. Authors should approach

the most critical problems that find proper substitutions for their future. The world is threatened by ecological catastrophes that should be halted in order to ensure a good life for humanity. In this regard, Mackey demonstrates the dystopian characteristic of escapist dark realism. Escapism, as such, plays a surrogate role in providing a viable solution to the environmental problems. Realistic authors tackle these problems to raise public awareness about the eminent troubles and the possibility of avoiding them. Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012) aptly provides a precise picture of this realism in an erudite literary manner. Therefore, he describes Iraq in peaceful terms: "I've spent some time looking out the window of my cabin watching snowflakes fall like a shot dove's feathers fluttering slowly down to the ground. They all look the same to me" (41).

Andy attributes the necessity of escapism to the adventures exploration (2011, p. 2). Andrews argues that escapism provides a fantastic world in epic forms. Superhuman heroes fight with each other to find order in a seemingly chaotic world. Being so, each combatant tries to launch perilous adventures to discover regions to settle down. This discovery is an empowerment because it is a kind of universal hegemony. In other words, the discovery of other region sustains any combatant's ability to conquer the majority of the world. The exploration adventures, then, becomes a type of power to defeat enemies. In the course of the military fight, the world gets full of chaos. Victory is the key tool to restore order amidst such chaos. Powers asserts that supernatural heroes are the stereotypical characters of escapism in the novel. They do not exist in reality, but they are archetypal images of real American political regimes the fight with each other to harness the world for their relevant benefits. Powers depicts the peaceful experience of the protagonist to accentuate the fact of ideal Iraq and to refute the American bogus propaganda for military invasion: "we rode in silence, without pleasantries, and the radio stayed off. I leaned my head against the window and watched as my breath condensed on it" (64). At this point, the butterfly effect intensifies. The protagonist almost believes in the perfect Iraq instead of its inherited image as a place of terrorism and mass destruction weaponry.

Richard Vytzniorgu says that escapism formulates exit from life monotony via chaotic effect which is commonly known as the butterfly effect. Life is abundant with monotonous actions that make people bored. When people seriously feel the void of their life, they begin to be fed up with it. They might develop depression or other forms of behavioral complications. Vytzniorgu defines escapism as follows: "The term escapism, as one who seeks distraction from reality or from routine" (2019, p. 1). He traces the evolution of escapism in the 1930s when it was used to refer to two kinds of persons. The escapist people might be "either a person who escapes from captivity or, as in this case, a person who indulges in a mental process of emotional diversion by means of entertainment or other kinds of leisure activities to avoid or retreat from what is considered an unpleasant or unacceptable reality" (2019, p. 1). In escapist fiction, the second person is more suitable than the first. This is due to the fact that the reader mentally "indulges" in the actions of escapist texts to find entertaining leisure as form bitter reality surrounding him/her. Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012) approaches this escapist reality. As a token of the butterfly effect, he is stoutly convinced with the necessity of stopping war in Iraq. Therefore, he seriously stops fighting since Iraq is a splendid country. As a result, he decides to stop using his rifle:

My fingers closed around a rifle that was not there. I told them the rifle was not supposed to be there, but my fingers would not listen, and they kept closing around the space where my rifle was supposed to be and I continued to sweat and my heart was beating much faster than I thought reasonable. (65)

Accordingly, repudiating the rifle is a symbol of his belief that he no longer belongs to the American hegemony that sent him to fight innocent people on Iraqi territories. In essence, his response is imitated by the butterfly effect in a gradual narrative manner utilized by Power to convey his indictment of the unjustified invasion of Iraq and killing people there.

Literary realism came into prominence in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century till it is sustained in the twenty-first century. Scholars argue that the term fits the literary works that approach reality as it is. This means that realistic literary works do not incorporate fantastic elements in their plots. They perceive reality from precise fictional perspectives. That is, they depict, people, events and places as they exist in reality. However, they approach reality through symbolism in order to comment or amend a certain issue in life. The characters and setting, in realistic fiction, resemble those in reality. They do not have additional or supernatural traits. They approach the problems of everyday life as they occur to people in their actual societies. John Whitman studies the circumstances that led to the appearance of realism as a literary movement. He discusses the World Wars, the advancement of industry, modernity and economics as the main motivations of literary realism. Realism, Whitman proceeds, reflects humanity's obsessions with these motivations in literary forms, especially the chaotic butterfly effect (2007). Powers' *The Yellow Birds* (2012) pursues this effect via Bartle's military experience in an Iraqi place called Al Tafari where he really recognizes the American oppressive invasion of Iraq: "Maybe if things had happened a little differently in Al Tafari it could have been like that" (72).

Literary realism presents events that are familiar to the reader's reception. Realistic authors' style is relatively banal. It does not have innovative styles or subject matter. Instead, they deal with the experiences of people as they happen in reality. Consequently, the reader does not find exciting entertainment in reading them. The essential purpose of literary realism is to obliterate the romantic and fanatic elements in literary works i.e., realism is a literary response to fantasy and romanticism. They focus on characterization, setting, themes and narrative point of view. They scarcely use decorative language devices, such as figures of speech and imagery. In this sense, the term realism is the opposite of idealism which is long desired by romantic and fantastic authors. Harriett Hawkins claims that literary realism accompanied the Victorian Age until it reached its contemporary form (1995, p. 1). At the end of the nineteenth century, authors began to repudiate the imaginary impression inherited from the romantic authors. They started to adopt a new kind of aesthetic writing. Such aestheticism is the initial premise for realism. Authors began to look at life around them without regard to nature and its inspiring power. Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012) approaches this matter but in the twenty-first century literary modes. The narrator describes it in this quotation: "But things happened the way they happened without regard to our desire for them to have happened another way" (73).

The changes in society were very much influenced by the changes brought by war, and so the war context in America is highly considered when tackling American literature and its evolution after the Iraqi war. In the post war period topics, such as multiculturalism, national identity, and gender identity were brought forth by American literature. Therefore, the political influence and the war had a great impact on literature, not just because of the changes in society and structure, but most of all, because it affected people so much, and having a great effect upon perception which one can even see in the cinematographic scene as well. Because the war age offered a dominative topic, the novels, therefore, would either recreate the world or, rather, create a world which is different, far from a good life, with a different evolution towards mature perception and imagination in the process of creation, and also the novels building a particular reality, whereby some having mostly the predilection to focus on the awareness of contemporary politics or on politics as a whole (Phelan, 2017, p. 54). The

emergence of other novels was related to realism, and true to this, fantasy started off offering an objective view rather than a subjective one more than often. The evolution of the American novels offers us a hint that the war age themes seem to dominate literature from modernism to the postmodernism period, which had either political or ideological implications, evoking a particular social or intellectual responsibility towards the readers (Phelan, 2017, p. 55). Powers, in *The Yellow Birds* (2012), utilizes the protagonist's perception of the American persecutory hegemony through the feeling of confusion that leads to his true discovery of devastating military persecution: "despite an age-old instinct to provide an explanation more complex than that, something with a level of profundity and depth which would seem commensurate with the confusion I felt, it really was that simple" (74).

This experience exemplifies the myth of empty Iraq. War period and postwar period left a substantial effect on the authors of their time and the later generations, because of the powerful impact and clash of culture that the situation brought. During the war, people were inclined to be less open, more restrictive, second guessing each information, and questioning others and the world that surrounded them, leaving an atmosphere of nostalgia, need for progress, a bad review of the world, and a different view on how the world is supposed to work and might be in the future (Nijs, 2014, p. 63). The postwar period left memories, people would be either angry or left longing for what was in the past; here the generations also have changed, together with other matters of life. It came either as a shock or as a strong need with the quest of freedom and need for individuality. The overview is this: like any other art form, artists have focused on something to pass on, or to express the nihilistic sense of life in terms of the butterfly effect. Yet, nihilism was almost the dominating mode of postwar era. Some literary aspects of postmodernism depended on Kierkegaard's nihilistic trend which was totally religious. It depended on the theological appropriations of the meaning of human life and how it should be lived. In this regard, he depended on the religious scriptures to prove his theological insights. On the contrary, Sartre argued that human existence is objective. It is devoid of any religious truth. Therefore, human beings should live their lives regardless of any religious authority. Consequently, they have free will to decide and determine their existence. He refers to this existence as "being" that formulates the essence of human existence. As such, both Kierkegaard and Sartre have two discrepant points of view of human life (Restucci, 2015, p. 48). Powers, in *The Yellow Birds* (2012), shed s light on that existence when Bartle does not feel proud of his American grandfathers' wars against innocent people, like native Indians. Now, the American military hegemony repeats these wars but in Iraq. They want to exterminate Iraqi people as they did to the native Indians: "I thought of my grandfather's war. How they had destinations and purpose. How the next day we'd march out under a sun hanging low over the plains in the east" (86). Again, this is another indication of the butterfly effect that makes the protagonist feel fed up with the American hegemony, and, simultaneously; it reinforces his feeling of ideal Iraq which is empty of negative issues fabricated by the American leadership in the Middle East.

John McCarthy (2006) discusses the historical insights of the butterfly effect. He claims that as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, modern consciousness is caught in an intensely contradictory process of simultaneous expansion and contraction. Exceptional mental and psychological complication was accompanied by a weakening sense of anomie and discomfort. A phenomenal broadening of horizons and introduction to the experience of others coincided with a private distance of no less spectacular arrangements.

An awesome amount of data has become accessible about all perspectives of life however there was less ordering vision, less coherence and comprehension, less certainty. The extraordinary superseding drive characterizing Western man since Renaissance - the journey for independence, self-determination, and individualism - had undoubtedly brought those beliefs to reality in numerous lives;

however it had too ended in a world where personal spontaneity and liberty were increasingly smothered, not just in theory by a reductionist scientism, but in practice by the omnipresent collectively and conformism of mass social orders. The great revolutionary political projects of modern time, heralding personal and social liberation, had gradually led conditions in which the modern individual's fate was ever more controlled by a bureaucratic commercial and political superstructure. Just as man had become a meaningless speck within the modern universe, so the individual persons ended up insignificant ciphers in modern states, to be controlled or coerced by the millions. These issues are depicted in the novel. In a similar way, all these conceptions are reflected in Powers's *The Yellow Birds*. Bartle perceives American invasion as this: "We'd go back into a city that had fought this battle yearly; a slow, bloody parade in fall to mark the change of season" (85). However, he resents this fight since it causes destruction and it leads to the killing of many innocent people.

Albert Stetz says that the quality of chaotic life appeared ever dubious in writing. Fabulous empowerment was countered by a broad sense of anxious helplessness. Significant ethical and aesthetic sensitivity gone up against terrible pitilessness and squander. The cost of the military accelerating progress developed ever higher. And within the foundation of each delight and each accomplishment lingered humanity's exceptional vulnerability. Beneath the West's course and driving force, a postmodern man had burst forward and outward, with colossal centrifugal drive, complexity, assortment, and speed. And however it showed up that he had driven himself into an earthly bad dream and a spiritual wasteland, a furious constriction, an apparently irresolvable predicament (2016). In *The Yellow Birds* (2012), Bartle narrates this predicament by recalling his atrocious attack against innocent civilians: "we'd drive them out. We always had. We'd kill them. They'd shoot us and blow off our limbs and run into the hills and wadis, back into the alleys and dusty villages" (86). These attacks are an inevitable indication of the American persecution of the Iraqi people who are now casualties of the war. As such, the butterfly effect reaches its epiphany since it leads Bartle to truly sense the unjustified killings of Iraqi people on their own homeland.

Nowhere was problematic modern condition more precisely embodied than in the phenomenon of existentialism, a mood and philosophy expressed in the writings of Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus, among others, but ultimately reflecting a pervasive spiritual crisis in postmodern culture. The anguish and alienation of twenty-first century life were brought to full articulation as the existentialist addressed the most fundamental, naked concerns of human existence-suffering and death, loneliness and dread. Man was condemned to be free. He faced the necessity of choice and thus knew the continual burden of error. He lived in constant ignorance of his future, thrown into a finite existence bounded at each end by nothingness. The infinity of human aspiration was defeated before the finitude of human possibility. The Man possessed no determining essence: only his existence was given, an existence engulfed by morality, risk, fear, ennui, contradiction, uncertainty. No transcendent absolute guaranteed the fulfilment of human life or history. There was no eternal design or providential purpose. Things existed simply because they existed, and not for some "higher" or "deeper" reason. Chaos controls the whole living matters, and the universe was blind to human concerns, devoid of meaning or purpose. The Man was abandoned, on his own. All was contingent. To be authentic one had to admit, and choose freely to encounter, the stark reality of life's meaninglessness. The struggle alone gave meaning (Cambel, 1993, p. 8). Powers, in *The Yellow Birds* (2012), tackles these chaotic elements in the light of the butterfly effect by depicting the narrator's peaceful treatment of the Iraqi children after attacking them:

then they'd come back, and we'd start over by waving to them as they leaned against lampposts and unfurled green awnings while drinking tea in front of their shops. While we patrolled the streets, we'd throw candy to their children with whom we'd fight in the fall a few more years from now. (86)

At this point, Bartle develops a sense of sympathy with the native people's children. He realizes the reality of their kindness and hospitality. Therefore, he gives them candy as a kind of appreciation and sympathy. Consequently, he begins to develop a strong belief in Iraq as in an ideal place empty of vicious matters. His feeling is motivated by virtue of the chaotic butterfly effect occurring in his surrounding milieus.

The novel reveals the type of modern narratives increasingly depicted people caught in a bewilderingly troubled military chaotic milieu, vainly endeavoring to produce meaning and value in a context void of importance. Confronted with the persistent generic quality of the advanced world-whether mechanized mass society or callous cosmos-the military as it were remaining response showed up to be hopeless or self-annihilating defiance. Existentialisms in a multitude of inflections presently entered social life with developing insistence. The prior Romantic passion to blend with the boundless started to be turned against itself, modified, and changed into a compulsion to refute that enthusiasm. Postmodernism's disenfranchised spirit progressively communicated itself in fragmentation, separation, and self-parody, its only possible facts those of irony and dark paradox (Parker, 2007, p. 94). Some proposed that the whole culture was psychotic in its disorientation, and that people who are labelled frantic were actually closer to real sanity. The revolt against conventional reality started to have new forms through emphasizing butterfly effect in literature. Authentic postmodern reactions of realism helped forming the absurd and surreal, the disintegration of all constructed foundations and strong categories. The search for liberty started to be more radical, its cost is the annihilation of any standard or stability. So, as the physical sciences also dismantled long-held certainties and structures, so art met science in the throes of the twenty-first century's epistemological relativism (Meisel, 2016, p. 9). Powers, in *The Yellow Birds* (2012), highlights Bartle's' experience to demonstrate the effect of war on his personality. He wants to have rest because he strongly loved Iraq and its people. The rest occurs when he stops fighting these people: "I wanted to go to sleep and stay there, that's all. A passive wish, one I didn't push" (90).

Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012) addresses the contemporary military existential modes in the twenty-first century through the notions of the butterfly effect. With the dawn of the century, the West's traditional artistic canon, rooted in the forms and ideals of classical Greece and the Renaissance, has started to disappear. While the human identity type reflected in the fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries carried a sense of human selfhood outlined against large coherent backgrounds of linear narrative logic and historical sequence. The characteristic chaotic novel was famous for a continual inquisition of its own concepts, an incessant disruption of narrative and historical coherence, a confusing of horizons, a sophisticated and convoluted self-doubt that left characters, authors, and reader in a state of irreducible suspension. Reality and identity, as Hume had intelligently perceived two hundred years earlier, were neither humanly ascertainable nor ontologically supreme. They were fictive customs of psychological and practical convenience, and within the intensely contemplative, attentive, relativist awareness of the modern Western mind, they may not be unquestionably assumed. For many, they were moreover fake jails, to be seen through and transcended: for where there was uncertainty, there was also liberty (Meisel, 2016, p. 10). All these allegations come true in Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012). Bartle exemplifies the illogical invasion for Iraq because he has several argumentative questions about the American spurious allegations attacking Iraq:

“sure, there is a fine line between not wanting to wake up and actually wanting to kill yourself, and while I discovered you can walk that line for a long while without even noticing, anybody who is around you surely will, and then of course all kinds of unanswerable questions will not be far behind” (91).

Powers’s *The Yellow Birds* (2012) deals with radical change and ceaseless development that lent themselves to unaesthetic chaos, to incomprehensibility and fruitless estrangement. The late postmodern narrative experiment threatened to shred out into insignificant solipsism. The outcomes of ceaseless originality were inventive but at times persevering. Incoherence was true but at times fulfilling. Subjectivism was probably magnificent but mostly irrelevant. The insistent elevation of the abstract over the representational at times tried to reveal a bit more than the increasing incapacity of the postmodern writer to relate to nature. With the lack of established aesthetic forms or culturally sustained modes of vision, the arts in 21<sup>st</sup> century came to be notable for a some quality of graceless transiency, an undisguised self-consciousness regarding their own ephemeral substance and style (Guastello & Pincus, 2008, p. 138). Powers’s *The Yellow Birds* (2012) approaches the radical cultural changes through the eyes of the protagonist. Powers uses the protagonist limited omniscience narrative perspective to sustain his recognise of the American passive oppression of Iraqi citizens. In the following quotation, Bartle recounts a story of a native Iraqi man who loses his life during the military conformation with the American soldiers: “the ground was stained rust brown where the man died. The last tremors of his legs and arms left a strange impression in the earth” (103).

Bartle is fortified by sympathetic feeling with the native Iraqi citizens is an embodiment of the influence of the butterfly effect on his personality in the historical confrontation between Iraq and America. It is commonly argued that each great epochal transformation in the history of the American military mentality appears to have been initiated by a kind of archetypal sacrifice, which is inherently dealt in Powers’s *The Yellow Birds* (2012). As if to consecrate the birth of a fundamental new cultural vision, in each case a symbolically resonant trial and martyrdom of some sort were suffered by its central prophet: thus the trial and execution of Socrates, the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, and the trial and condemnation of Galileo. By all accounts the central prophet of the postmodern mind was Friedrich Nietzsche, with his radical perspectivism, his sovereign critical sensibility, and his powerful, poignantly ambivalent anticipation of the emerging nihilism in western culture (Merricle, 2013, p. 78). And we see curious, perhaps aptly postmodern analogy of this theme of archetypal sacrifice and martyrdom with the extraordinary inner trial and imprisonment-the intense intellectual ordeal, the extreme psychological isolation, and the eventually paralyzing madness-suffered at the birth of the postmodern by erudite literary styles (Helnwein, 2017, p.134). *The Yellow Birds* (2012) orients this by virtue of Bartle’s assistance injured Iraqi man before he dies: “I got down on one knee for a closer look, but turned away, fighting convulsions of dry heaves and bile” (104). Again, this is a blatant incarnation of the butterfly effect that directs Bartle to fully recognize the truth of the American fake invasion of Iraq.

Gordon Slethaug argues that the concept of chaotic hegemony involves two discrepant cultures, namely, the superiors and the inferiors. The inferiors’ existence depends on the formation of their identity and the way they search to achieve and establish this identity (2012, p. 36). There is no factual methodology to construct the national identity since there is no real threat behind the ability to formulate any kind of identity autonomy. Slethaug says that the superiors, therefore, are looked upon from the negative aspect of the hegemonic perspective (2012, p. 37). They do not cope with any necessary change as the surroundings around them change and transform rapidly. The superiors also have the potential to present themselves on the position of a powerful entity which can forge their

hegemonic existence and presence in the world as powerful leaders. Accordingly, the concept of hegemony is associated with the superiors' ability to control the inferiors (Slethaug, 2012, p. 38). In Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012), the butterfly effect reaches its critical acme when Bartle is utterly convinced with the American counterfeit invasion of Iraq. Furthermore, he firmly believes in the myth of empty Iraq.

Powers's omniscient narrative perspective conveys this reality as he conceptualizes and image of a "perfect" Iraq which is spoiled and destructed by American oppressive invasion. He meticulously refers to the destruction of Iraq as a ravaged country that is "made of dust" due to the arbitrary American attacks during the unjustified invasion: "The image burned into my mind like a landscape altered by erosive weather. Even as I walked away, I saw it, a perfect bloody angel made of dust" (105). Here, he says that his image has been altered. Presumably, this personal transformation emanates from his own witness of the American heinous military crimes against innocent people. In doing so, moreover, the American political nefariousness deprives Iraq of its property and civil welfare. The novel provides a vivid picture of the bizarre American utilization of power to sabotage Iraq and bring horrid death to its people. As such, Powers delivers an implicit message about the heavenly perfection of Iraq as a state, which is globally weekend by the American military propaganda to invade Iraq as a sole enemy of America, which is rebuffed by the protagonist. The rejection of that hegemony is created by the butterfly effect and its drastic influence upon his recognition of the American military pseudo-fact. Thus, Powers, through the protagonist's narrative limited omniscience, reveals this fact to prove the myth of empty Iraq; and this emptiness relates to the integrity of Iraq as an epitome arcadia of social stability and multicultural flexibility.

### 3. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the myth of empty Iraq in Kevin Powers's *The Yellow Birds* (2012). The study's main argumentation has been on the oriental meanings and insights produced by the invasion of Iraq. One of these meanings is the inferiority. It means that the hegemonic powers encounter two archetypes, namely, the superior and the inferior. The superior practices his power over the inferior. Once the inferior becomes aware of this inferiority, a struggle between the superior and the inferior comes out. The result is that the superior imposes confines over the inferior. Here, inferiority has nothing to do with the oriental powers. There should be a compliance with the new power to admit any new change in the inferior's culture or religious affairs. As a sequence, this leads the protagonist to recognize the fakeness of the American unjustified invasion of Iraq.

The myth of empty Iraq, in this manner, illuminates new cultural and social traditions which could be hard to be adopted by the inferior or the hegemonic. Therefore, the American dominance forces the suppressed people to adapt to the new traditions in order to get rid of any clash or struggle which could limit the Iraqi people's superiority. As such, the invasion exposes two kinds of oriental powers i.e., the native suppressed culture and the invading troops. These powers formulate the oriental powers of opposition studied in the novel. The study, furthermore, stems from the fact that it critiques the reality of the persecuted identities of the oppressed Iraqi people and their newly acquired attitudes.

Additionally, the study has demonstrated the quest for reality which is found in a continual relationship between the "Self" and the "Other." There is an inclusive premise where their conflicting ideologies try to come into terms and reconciliation. Notwithstanding this, there is a cultural resistance of hegemony in all its aspects. The suppressed Iraqi people aspire to affirm their authentic identity in

spite of the fact that the oppressor could exert efficacious ideology. Consequently, the ongoing interplay between them will go through a vicious circle without any genuine reconciliation. However, this cultural change conforms to a long time-span struggle between the oppressive American unjustified invasion which is discovered by the protagonist who comes to the conclusion that Iraq is an ideal place for living despite the American political propaganda of it as a dystopian place.

The primal finding of this study is the discovery of the myth of empty Iraq and how the protagonist comes to know it through chaotic political trepidations. Such turbulent political changes are discussed in the novel to delve deep into the essence of the butterfly effect and its role in reinforcing the protagonist's realization of this fact. Accordingly, the study sustained the analysis by tracing the narrative omniscient perspective to accentuate the gradual process by which the protagonist could prove the bogus American justifications of invading Iraq without any reasonable allegations. The narratives perspective has been scrutinized to convey Powers's authentic obsession with the American over-utilization of political and military arsenals to devastate the lives of innocent people, like the Iraqis. Thus, the study has explored the myth of an empty Iraq through the literary voice of an American author who genuinely indicts the American atrocities in Iraq which must be perceived as an ideal peaceful arcadia for its people and the entire region.

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## أسطورة العراق الخالي في "الطيور الصفراء" لكيفن باورز

سارة مجيد، د. عمر محمد عبدالله\*

كلية التربية للبنات، جامعة الأنبار – العراق

\* [omar.moh@uoanbar.edu.iq](mailto:omar.moh@uoanbar.edu.iq)

### الملخص

ستكشف هذه الورقة أسطورة العراق الفارغ في كتاب كيفن باورز "الطيور الصفراء" (٢٠١٢). تبرز الدراسة الغزو الأنجلو أمريكي للعراق كحقيقة زائفة ، أي أن الحرب كانت على أساس ادعاءات زائفة. أي أنه لم يكن هناك ادعاء مبرر لبدء الغزو. لذلك ، سوف تدرس الدراسة الموثوقة السردية التي تحكي القصة من منظور موضوعي. يكتشف الراوي الأمريكي بطل الرواية خداع الحكومة الأمريكية عندما يعود. يصبح مقتنعا بأن تجربته العسكرية عززت إيمانه بأن الحرب كانت تشن لأغراض عدمية عندما تم نشره في العراق ؛ ولم يكن هناك سبب حقيقي لغزوها لأنها لا تملك أسلحة دمار شامل. بناءً على ذلك ، ستكشف الدراسة عن هذه التجربة كدليل واضح على العراق الفارغ ؛ والغزو ملفق على أيديولوجيات إمبريالية. من خلال منظور الرواية كلي العلم ، سيتم التدقيق في العراق باعتباره أروقة سماوية للسلام والتعايش العالمي. على هذا النحو ، فإن المناقشة سوف تثبت تصوير وسائل الإعلام الغربية المعاصرة الاحتمالية الخادعة للعراق على أنه جحيم جهنمي. بدلاً من ذلك ، ستعرف الدراسة أنها مكان مثالي من الضيافة غير المسبوقة وخالية من العداء الخبيث تجاه الغرب ، والذي يصوره بدقة الراوي الأمريكي للرواية. لتحقيق هذا الهدف ، ستطبق الدراسة نظرية تأثير الفراشة لتحديد كيف تكون تجربة بطل الرواية هي "السبب" الكامن وراء الوعي الناضج للحملة الأمريكية ضد العراق ، والتي سيتم تفسيرها على أنها "التأثير" مما يؤدي إلى إدراك عميق للعراق كدولة الشرق الأوسط المؤثرة.