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# *Adab Al-Rafidayn Journal*

**A refereed journal concerned with the publishing of scientific researches  
in the field of arts and humanities both in Arabic and English**

**Vol. Ninety / year Fifty- Second / Safar - 1444 AH / September 2022 AD**

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### **Editor-in-chief**

## CONTENTS

Title	Page
<p><i>An Analytical Study of Verbal Interaction in EFL Linguistics and Literature Online Classes With Reference to Learners' Gender</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Raghad Essam Mohammed Ali Hussein Ali Ahmed</b></p>	1 - 32
<p><i>erb-like Particles in Arabic Language with Reference to English</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Radwan Nafie Hamid Abdul Rahman Ahmed Abdul Rahman</b></p>	33 - 44
<p><i>Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American Societies in Kevin Powers' The Yellow Birds: A Critical Stylistic Analysis</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Asan Hashem Al-Hasson Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali</b></p>	45 - 62
<p><i>Borrowing and Grammatical Gender in Arabic</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mahfoodh Khalaf Mahmood Marwan Najib Tawfiq</b></p>	63 – 74
<p><i>Ergonomics of Mental Spaces Theory to the Analysis of Translated Tropes in Some Qur'anic Texts</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mohammed Nihad Ahmad</b></p>	75 – 98
<p><i>A Syntactic Study of the Postpositive, Exclamative and Supplementive Functions of Adjectives in Two Selected Novels of Hemingway's</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Riyadh Abbas Al-Zubaidy Iman Hamid Mohammed</b></p>	99 – 120
<p><i>Réseaux sociaux et applications numériques au service de l'enseignement /apprentissage de FLE</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rawaa Basman al-hamdani Ahmed Hassan Gerges</b></p>	121 – 142
<p><i>Implicational Impoliteness Strategies Used by Tweepers against Trump</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Salar Qasim Rashid Ashraf Riyadh Abdullah</b></p>	143 – 172

***Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American  
:Societies in Kevin Powers' The Yellow Birds  
A Critical Stylistic Analysis***

**Asan Hashem Al-Hasson \***

**Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali \*\***

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**Abstract:**

The paper attempts to present a critical stylistic analysis of ideology in selected extracts from Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* (2012), a novel that talks about an American soldier's experience in Iraq through the (2003) American invasion of Iraq. The aim is to examine critically its language and investigate the conceptual meaning of the terms in use. In such analysis, the ideology under investigation can be explored by analyzing nominal group (NG). A tool of naming and describing is one of the ten tools from Jeffries' approach (2010) is used. The meanings of the terms are not examined just as having denotative meanings, but they also have connotative meanings which are either positive or negative. The results expose the political, social, and psychological impact of such description on the Iraqi readers and how this description may change their minds about their society. Such approach explores the ideology behind the words .

**Keywords:** Textual, conceptual, function, nominal, group.

**1-1 Introduction**

Iraqi society has gone through numerous changes after the American invasion such as the increase of the number of Iraqi immigrants, the loss of security, social chaos, disorder among so many other things. The occupation of Iraq in 2003 is an event that is described as a brutal war. After the mass destruction and killing of thousands of innocent people in Iraq, America has been criticized for its action, which led it to allow its novelists to describe what happened as a strategy to justify its act. In fact, writing a literary text is one of the strategies of politics to seek justifications for such deeds. Powers, in his novel *The Yellow Birds*, is one of the novelists

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## **Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American Societies in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* : A Critical Stylistic Analysis**

**Asan Hashem Al-Hasson & Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali**

who talk about the brutality of the war describing both Iraqi and American societies in a way that may reflect ideologies for justifying the war choice (Bailes, 2003).

Through its language, the readers of the novel under investigation know that it is a record of daily events and facts that the author has experienced personally during his actual service as a fighting soldier within the American occupation forces in (Talafar) in Nineveh during 2004-2005. It is a narrative work that mixes fictional events and characters with real personalities experienced by the author and real facts that actually occurred and witnessed first-hand. Powers, through his narration, describes the society of (Talafar) and its inhabitants. He also uses his own terms to describe the Americans in their society. An extract from the novel is intentionally selected in order to analyze the terms chosen by the writer to describe both societies and their inhabitants.

Van Dijk (2006) argues that the creation and interpretation of texts can unearth the ideology that nurtures or reinforces a specific way of thinking about the world. Ideological representation is very complex since it might be implicit, hidden, or even disguised rather than explicit. Therefore, these texts entail a close examination of the context and its social background in addition to all linguistic levels of the text in order to interpret ideology in discourse. Language and ideology go hand in hand as far as sign system is concerned. Van Dijk (2000) defines ideology neutrally as “socially shared beliefs that are associated with the characteristic properties of a group, such as their identity, their position in society, their interests and aims, their relations to other groups, their reproduction, and their natural environment.” Yanay (2013) declares that ideology is seen through the relations between two sides which have unequal powers. It can be seen through the relations between marked and unmarked subjects, between the colonized and the colonizers, and between the ruled and the rulers. Nonetheless, recent (academic and popular) writings on violence and hatred, as a biased discourse, focus on the violence of the ruled, of the colonized, or of the oppressed. That is not necessarily true, because the violence of the oppressed is more

visible, but because state violence is often masked by “narcotic” terminologies of peace, order, security or even the claim of democracy. It is not hard to imagine how resentment against occupation, colonization, and exclusion takes the form of hatred and how this hatred becomes projected onto those in powers and the privileged who, in the eyes of the oppressed, are responsible for their exploitation and the discrimination against them. Similarly, poverty, imprisonment, hunger, unemployment, humiliation, and loss become fertile grounds of the ideology of hatred. The discourse of ideology works today as both a defense mechanism and as political fantasy whose purpose is to annihilate the desires of others. There are claims that the reading of a novel may change the readers' hearts and minds. It is also asserted that the novel separates the readers from ordinary life, transforming them into a fictional world. In such cases, a liberal and democratic society may be thought to be developed (Vuyk, 2015). Attention has been given to the qualities a text has in a novel in order to reach this immersion. Ryan concludes that when a text is a “textual world” then the readers get immersed him/herself in this text. This means that a text must be rich and complex at the same time thus interpreted and ordered that it can be an alternative to the actual world. "Reading becomes a temporary sojourn in a different world, it can be compared to travelling, but in a very compelling way, such that the reader experiences his travel as being captured, taken prisoner, being lost, then hate his environment if it is not suit his desire, seeks affiliation with liberal country." (Ryan, 2015).

The target of the current research is to analyze critically the way of describing both Iraqi and American societies. In other words, the aim is to examine the terms and the linguistic structures being chosen to such description. The attempt is to investigate the way Powers achieved the impact of *The Yellow Birds* on the Iraqi and American readers and to find whether the novel is innocently written or ideologically loaded.

### **2-1 Critical Stylistics**

Critical stylistics focuses on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) that investigates the ideology behind a text. Social construction is an essential issue, and style has a significant function in the social

## **Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American Societies in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* : A Critical Stylistic Analysis**

**Asan Hashem Al-Hasson & Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali**

process. The language used in a context is the target of such discipline. It shows how settings and language have a historical and cultural manifestation of meaning. SFL concentrates on the functional part of the initial communication process, and the way the language functions in a different context (Young & Harrison, 2004). In addition, critical stylistics combines critical discourse analysis (CDA) where general theories are provided considering the social, psychological, and political contexts in which texts are produced and read, and stylistics that provides detailed tools of analysis for understanding how texts work. In this case, critical stylistics is an approach that can highlight the ideology and power in language. Scholars in this field try to provide a general, comprehensive and applicable framework to all literary texts to stand on the power in their language and reveal the deep-structured ideology. Lesley Jeffries (2009) adopts the well-known Halliday's three metafunctions to analyze texts culturally and educationally as well as conscious or unconscious domination. Therefore, the whole story is about a choice taken in building the text and the readers' recognition of meaning consciously or not of the ideologies that underpin the ideational meaning of the text. This could be the basis of literary stylistic interpretation as well as a clue to ideological content. Therefore, critical stylistics has a framework drawn together from a number of models, but is unified at the broadest level of metafunctions.

Halliday (1994) categorizes these models into ideational and interpersonal, which lead to the textual function that paves the way for the former two metafunctions. Ideational meaning indicates world experience, and it expresses actions, events, processes of consciousness, and relations. Interpersonal sense happens in the language used by a speaker or writer to perform something. The act of the clause represents the process of interaction, such as offers, commands, etc. The third metafunction represents the textual meaning that is related to the preceding and the following context as well as the context of the situation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). Thus, all of the textual-conceptual functions are the basis for critical

stylistic analysis. Textual-conceptual function is a combination of textual features and ideational function. Many of them have a prototypical form which supports the conceptual effect, and a set of more or less peripheral forms which also approve the conceptual effect, although sometimes not consistently or not so obviously. Thus, the textual metafunction parallels the linguistic analysis. They are both considered with the structure and meaning of the texts and might include phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics in such analysis. The concern here is towards the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic interpretations of selected structures and terms from the novel under investigation, to explore the ideology that exists behind the writer's linguistic choices. Lexical meaning is largely carried in NG. This is partly because of the flexibility of these groups in encompassing premodifiers and qualification, and partly because of the availability of a special resource called the thematic equative, which has evolved as a means of packaging the message of a clause in the desired thematic form (Halliday, 1985:72).

Syntactically, NG has a head as an obligatory element, which can be the foregrounding element in the stylist's eyes, that means the matter which has been talked about, and it is realized by a noun. This foregrounded head is usually surrounded by other elements that can be examined. NG is built up by several word classes, such as noun, adjective, verb, numeral, determiner, and preposition. Those words function as modifying elements of the headword noun, and they have positions which can precede and follow the headword (Simatupang, Ervina CM & Dahlia, 2018). Halliday identifies the functions of Deictic, Numerative, and Epithet as premodifiers of the head, and the qualifier as a postmodifier of it.

Deictic indicates whether a specific head is intended. It has the function of identifying a particular head that has been referred to, or signals that the hearer or reader is not assumed, or does not need, to be familiar with the specific identity of the head at that point. Numerative indicates the number or quantity of the head, either in exact terms, 'three', 'twenty', or in inexact terms, 'many', 'much'; or it specifies order, 'first', 'fifth'. Epithet indicates some quality of the head. It can answer two main questions: "What do you think of the

## **Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American Societies in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* : A Critical Stylistic Analysis**

**Asan Hashem Al-Hasson & Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali**

head?" and "What is the head like?" i.e., the Epithet may be an expression of the speaker's subjective attitude towards the head or it is an objective property of it. Classifier has function to put the head into its subclass or to classify it, so that we can contrast one thing with other things. Qualifier comes after the head is either a phrase or a clause. It is an experiential function in the NG. It adds a new information about the head either positive or negative (Thompson, 2000: 182-183).

To interpret NG semantically and pragmatically, it is necessary to split the ideational metafunction into two dimensions: the logical and experiential. The experiential meaning is divided into premodifier, head, and postmodifier. The meanings of the terms chosen by the writer to name and describe the societies and their inhabitants have denotations and connotations. On one hand, denotation is a logical meaning that represents the literal meaning of the term and it is associated with the form of the word (Thompson, 2000:183). On the other hand, connotation is an experiential meaning which is expressed negatively or positively. It is an indirect or implied meaning or feeling. Further, it is explicit meaning that is obtained from explicit readers' cultures and it is associated with the function of the word. In brief, it is considered as the emotional suggestions of a word, and it has obvious ideological potential that the choice of a word implies pejorative or ameliorative connotations. It is not just a reference but it shows the writer's opinion of that reference (Jeffries, 2009).

### **3-1 Methodology**

### **3-2 Data Collection**

The intended research investigates ideology as conveyed through the choice of words in describing Iraqi and American societies and their inhabitants. The selected extracts from Powers' *The Yellow Birds*, which talk about two young American soldiers who navigate the terrors of the Iraq war, is to be analyzed.

### **3-3 Tool of Analysis: Naming and describing**

Names can call and identify things in different ways. A name is not limited to the reference of the noun, but it includes the words that

accompany the nouns, the co-texts like adjectives, postmodifiers, clauses, and the nominalized verbs. It functions as a grammatical subject or object of a predicator (Jeffries, 2009). The elements of the NG are examined concerning the head, as an obligatory element, preceded by optional modifier and followed by optional qualifier. The target of such analysis is to show the way of describing both Iraqi and American societies and their inhabitants by such tool. The denotations and connotations of the chosen terms may explore the ideology. It may show whether the novel is politically loaded or it is innocently written.

### **3-3-1 Chosen Passages from the novel: *The Yellow Birds***

- Only the noise of rockets and machine guns and helicopters swooping down near vertical in the distance told us we were in a war (p.10).

- Perhaps that is how it was: a field full of hyacinth. It was not like that when we stormed the building, not like that four days after Malik died. The green grasses that waved in the breeze were burned by fire and the summer sun. The festival of people on the market street with their long white shifts and loud voices were gone. Some of them were lying dead in the courtyards of the city or in its lace of alleys. The rest walked or rode in sluggish caravans, on foot or in orange and white jalopies, in mule drawn carts or in huddled groups of twos and threes, women and men, the old and young, the whole and wounded. All that was the life of Al Tafari [sic] left in a drab parade out of the city. They walked past our gates, past Jersey walls and gun emplacements, out into the dry September hills. They did not raise their eyes in the curfewed hours. They were a speckled line of color in the dark and they were leaving (p.14).

- I thought of home, remembering the cicadas fluttering their wings in the scrub pines and oaks that ringed the pond behind my mother's house outside Richmond. It would be morning there [....] Soon, I looked out over the water. I smiled. I remembered late Novembers. Needles browned by the warm Virginia air collecting like discarded blankets on the shore. Taking the warped steps down from the back of the house on the cusp of morning, the sun slouching behind the tallest trees on the hills above the draw where our house sat (p.57).

**Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American Societies in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* : A Critical Stylistic Analysis**

**Asan Hashem Al-Hasson & Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali**

**3-4 Analyzing the Selected Passages**

This passage from the novel under investigation describes the case of an Iraqi city named Talafar before and after the attack. The tool (naming and describing) with reference to Halliday's ideational meatafunction (2004), has been used. This extract has a number of NGs, and each group will be analyzed into their own functional elements as it is shown in the tables below. Certain symbols are used to mark the functional elements of the nominal groups: (D=deictic; N=numerative; E=epithet; C=classifier H=head; Q=qualifier). Using Oxford Dictionary, a denotation can be mentioned for each NG under investigation. Further, A Dictionary of Literary Symbols (2007) is used in exploring the connotations of selected terms. The following table views NGs which reflect positive connotations about Talafar.

<b>NG</b>	<b>Functional structure</b>	<b>Denotation</b>
a field full of hyacinth	DHQ	the land of Talafar is full of flowers
the green grasses	DEH	the grasses of Talafar's land is full of life
the breeze	DH	the gentle wind of Talafar
the festival of people on the market street with their long white shifts and loud voices	DHQ	an event ordinarily celebrated by Talafar's inhabitants
the market street	DEH	the street of Talafar's market in which the festival occurs in
their long white shifts	DEEH	the inhabitants' transferences are described as long and white.

NG	Functional structure	Denotation
loud voices.	EH	it is an ordinary habit in Talafar's market

**Table (1)**

### **NGs' Structure that Reflects Positive Connotations about Talafar**

The positive description of Talafar reveals the positive writer's attitude towards the land. The image of hyacinth represents peace, commitment and beauty. It is also a sign of power and pride. It reflects happiness and love. The green grass gives the sense of life and fertility. Further, life in Talafar was normal and nothing interrupts it, but this positive life no longer exists and everything good in the city has been removed by the attack, for the description is viewed in the past tense by using the auxiliary (was).

The following table views the writer's choice of the NGs, which has negative collocation, to describe the city and its inhabitants.

NG	Functional structure	Denotation
the noise of rockets	DHQ	an image of the war in Talafar. The rocket is a missile-containing explosive that is powered by gas. It causes loud noise.
machine guns	CH	denotes an automatic gun that can fire a lot of bullets one after the other very quickly.
helicopters	H	An aircraft whose lift is derived from the aerodynamic forces acting on one or more powered rotors turning about vertical axes. It is used in wars to support for ground troops, and to destroy enemy.
Four days after Malik dead	NHQ	Malik is an Iraqi from Talafar who works with the American soldiers as a translator. He is killed in a mysterious

**Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American Societies in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* : A Critical Stylistic Analysis**

**Asan Hashem Al-Hasson & Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali**

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		way four days before the action of the attack.
the summer sun	DEH	in summer, the Talafar's sun is too hot and it is described as it causes fire.
some of them	HQ	the Talafar's people who were lying dead.
the courtyards of the city	DHQ	open area in Talafar where the dead people were lying.
its lace of alleys	DHQ	lace is a cloth which is full of holes, alleys is a narrow road between buildings.
sluggish caravans	CH	slow moving of a covered horse-drawn wagons, used by deserted travelers.
orang-white Jalopies	EH	old cars dyed white and orange. They are used to transport residents.
mule drawn carts	EEH	underdevelopment forms of transport pulled by a donkey
huddled groups of	EHQ	gathering two or three persons while

NG	Functional structure	Denotation
the noise of rockets	DHQ	an image of the war in Talafar. The rocket is a missile-containing explosive that is powered by gas. It causes loud noise.
machine guns	CH	denotes an automatic gun that can fire a lot of bullets one after the other very quickly.
helicopters	H	An aircraft whose lift is derived from the aerodynamic forces acting on one or more powered rotors turning about vertical axes. It is used in wars to support for ground troops, and to destroy enemy.
twos and threes		leaving their city.
a drab parade	DEH	a cheerless moving of procession to celebrate an important day or event.
dry September hills	ECH	the city's hills are described as dry in a hot temperature.
a speckled line of color	DEHQ	the inhabitants are leaving in the dark but they are distinguished through this colored line.

**Table (2)**

**NGs' Structure that reflects negative connotations about Talafar**

The writer describes the land of Talafar as it was green and full of roses, but the city's residents were in extreme poverty since they only had the old means of transportation. Further, the description of Talafar's inhabitants reflects the normal circumstances after the attack; they are celebrating their time while leaving their city. What is behind the words are ideologies, to justify the occupation since the people do not use this land to develop their livelihood and that they do not deserve to live in such land, rather they are not attached to it. They are too underdeveloped to behave like natural human beings.

**Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American Societies in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* : A Critical Stylistic Analysis**

**Asan Hashem Al-Hasson & Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali**

The following table reveals NGs used for describing the living place of the American troops in Talafar.

<b>NG</b>	<b>Functional structure</b>	<b>Denotation</b>
Jersey walls	CH	refers to the barricades in New Jersey, where the writer from, seen along the center of highways, at pretty much anywhere traffic, the more portable bright orange and white plastic versions that are filled with sand or water.
gun emplacement	EH	the place where the weapon is located.
curfewed hours	EH	a siren is used, a law or a regulation stating that people must stay inside their houses in such time.

**Table (3)**

**NGs' Structure that reflects positive connotations about American in Talafar**

In the other side, a positive attractive image is intentionally reflected. It connotes the systematic existence of the American soldiers, and the symmetry spreads wherever the American soldiers stay. Gun represents security and power for its owners. It is also a sign of danger and instant death to the inhabitants of Talafar. The term (curfewed) represents lawfulness regularity in the action of the attack. The following table views the NGs in the second extract, which describes the house of the writer in America that reflects the American society.

<b>NG</b>	<b>Functional structure</b>	<b>Denotation</b>
the cicadas	DH	a large homopterous insect found chiefly in warm

		countries
their wings in the scrub pines	DHQ	the wings of the cicadas are cleaned by pines.
oaks that ringed the pond behind my mother's house outside Richmond	DHQ	oak tree is a large tree in wood and forests. It has strong hard wood. The oak causes delicate noise in the pond.
late Novembers	EH	November is a time for snowing in America
the warm Virginia air	DECH	in Virginia, the air is warm
discarded blankets on the shore	EHQ	the remaining blankets on the beach
the tallest trees on the hills above the draw where our house sat	DEHQ	The writer's house sets on an area, which is higher than the surrounding land besides the tallest trees.

**Table (4)****NGs' Structure that reflects positive connotations about America**

The positive connotation is reflected through the choice of such NGs to describe the location of the writer's house in America which is part of America. The use of positive expressions to describe an American house indicates the writer's bias towards his society. It is not innocent for the writer to use the cicadas. According to English symbolic tradition, cicadas are singing creature, very fond of music. They are "fine speakers", linking to beautiful summer. They symbolize the new life, to fly in the sky of America in the time of flying helicopters in the Iraqi sky. Also, choosing the term "oak" to fall on the pond and cause a delicate noise, in the time the sounds of bombs resound in Iraq, may have a political intention. The description of the warm atmosphere of America, in the time of describing the high temperatures in Iraq, which is similar to the bombs that burn their target, is not innocently loaded. The description of the discarded blankets on the coast that the tourists have used to give them warmth can be compared with the

## **Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American Societies in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* : A Critical Stylistic Analysis**

**Asan Hashem Al-Hasson & Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali**

description of the abandoned corpses of Iraqis lying in Talafar's alleys after the attack. It is not innocent to describe hills which carry the tallest trees in America at the time of describing dry September hills in Iraq.

### **4-1 Conclusion**

The writer of a novel tries to express his feelings about a specific case. Thus, this study explores the language of selected extracts from Powers' *The Yellow Birds* stylistically in a critical way at two levels: naming and describing. Talafar is one of the Iraqi cities; the image represents the land of Iraq. The stylistic indicators, which are used by the writer, display and identify his beliefs of negative impression towards Iraqi society and its people in the time of reflecting the positive image in describing the surrounding of the writer's home which is part of America. It manifests how Powers uses various linguistic choices of NGs to build a message of war and variety of techniques are used in constructing them. Moreover, Jeffries (2010) asserts that 'textual conceptual functions' are used to display the implicit ideologies produced by linguistic features. So, the ideology behind these linguistic features, which are observed above, can be summarized through three dimensions. These selected lines, as they are part of the novel, may affect the readers politically, socially and psychologically.

- Politically, and through the negative description of the city of Talafar after the attack, the Iraqi readers find themselves belonging to a country that lacks the basics of normal life, and through this feeling, they may try to find the place or haven that it contains and provides them with a safe haven. Further, the image of the green land of Talafar and the image of its inhabitants who live in poverty and use old means of transportation provide justifications for the invasion since those people do not take advantages of this green land to develop their livelihood.

- Socially, after reading this description, the Iraqi readers may try to change the values and habits they used to follow and live on all their life. They may feel ashamed of being committed to these

habits, only to belong to this society. They try to change their behaviours, which lead to change the society.

- Psychologically, the feeling of despair will dominate the readers' minds and make them hate the environment in which they live; in other words, their outlook towards society might have changed, and then they try to find another belonging that makes them feel proud to live in a comfortable life.

On the other hand, the description of the American society is quite positive. One may dream to live in such an orderly residence, and wonderful atmosphere.

The novelist's ideology is an impetus to conclude that Iraq needs development. Its people should learn how to live progressively. The novelist implies that the invasion has brought civilization and modernity to a primitive land. It is worth mentioning that since ancient times, the wealth of Iraq is abundant, as Iraq possesses a huge oil reserve. In addition, Iraq has possessed scientific and cultural wealth which is part of Iraq's economic wealth; and what was happened and is happening now in Iraq is to stop the development and growth of Iraqi individual by various means; and the destruction is due to American interference in its affairs.

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**Ideological Representations of the Iraqi and American Societies in Kevin Powers' *The Yellow Birds* : A Critical Stylistic Analysis**

**Asan Hashem Al-Hasson & Wafa Abdul Latif Abdul Aali**

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التمثيل الأيديولوجي للمجتمعين العراقي والأمريكي في رواية  
"الطيور الصفراء" للكاتب الأمريكي كيفن باورز: تحليل أسلوبى نقدي

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المستخلص

يقدم هذا البحث تحليلاً أسلوبياً ونقدياً للأيديولوجيا في مقاطع مختارة من رواية كيفن باورز "الطيور الصفراء" المنشورة عام ٢٠١٢؛ إذ تتناول الرواية سرداً ذاتياً كما يقول الكاتب، لتجربته الشخصية اثناء المشاركة في معارك غزو العراق عام ٢٠٠٣. وهدف البحث هو الدراسة المستعملة ومضامينها الأيديولوجية وكيفية خلق المعاني والأفكار التي يسوقها الكاتب-الراوي، وينطلق البحث من استعمال نظام تحليلي قياسي يدعى "المجموعة الاسمية" او ال (Nominal Group (NG) وهو قياس أسلوبى نقدي من بين عشرة قياسات الواردة في نظرية الكاتبة ليسلي جيفريز (٢٠١٠)، ويتضمن هذا التحليل القياسي والإحصائي المعاني الدلالية القاموسية (Denotative) والمعاني الشعرية والبلاغية الأكثر عمقاً (Connotative) سواء كانت إيجابية أم سلبية، ولذا تكشف هذه الطريقة النقدية-التحليلية للأسلوب التأثير السياسي والاجتماعي والنفسي لمثل هذا الوصف على القارئ عراقياً كان أم أمريكياً، والغرض منها تسريع فكرة الغزو وشن الحروب من أجل أهداف خفية، إنَّ مثل هذا التحليل يكشف بما لايقبل الشك الأيديولوجيا الكامنة وراء الأحداث والسطور.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نصي، مفاهيمي، وظيفة، اسمي، مجموعة.

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