

Political Satire in Paul Torday's *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*

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Abstract

Contemporary English fiction has increasingly delved into political themes and the intricacies of British ruling elites, partly driven by the decline of the British Empire after World War II. This decline provided fertile ground for writers and critics to explore political issues. Fiction, uniquely positioned to delve into the inner circles of decision-making, scrutinizes the motivations of politicians in ways that non-fiction cannot. Paul Torday's *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* exemplifies this type of politically tinged fiction. This research paper aims to uncover British political hegemony through a literary lens, re-examining the political satire within Torday's novel. Torday effectively portrays the political dilemma faced by the British people. The paper critically analyzes political satire, capturing the scope of Torday's narrative on British political life during that specific period. Drawing on oriental-occidental literary perspectives, the study sheds light on this important work.

Keywords: Political novel, Paul Torday, Spin, Satire, Yemen, Imperialism.

Introduction

Salmon Fishing in the Yemen, Paul Torday's debut novel, achieved tremendous success, establishing his name in the literary world. The novel received notable recognition, including the Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize for Comic Literature 2007 and the Waverton Good Read Award for Adult Debut Novels 2008. It was serialized by BBC Radio 4 and subsequently adapted into a film by BBC Films and Lionsgate in 2011 (Silverman 2012; Binns 2013). The novel adopts an epistolary form but incorporates a diverse range of communication methods, including letters, emails, interview transcripts, memos, diaries, newspaper articles, proposals, TV show scripts, Hansard excerpts, and investigation records (Alaghbari and Al-Nakeeb 2017, 31). This multi-faceted approach aligns with Jesse Matz's observation that "the new forms of the modern novel were of course provoked by real-world social and political problems and events" (2008, 78). Torday skillfully weaves together elements of nature, sports, science, faith, politics, terrorism, feminism, romance, comedy, the East, and the West, creating a subtle postmodern novel

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structure that serves as a political satire (Shaw 2021, 28). Torday's first foray into fiction resulted in a masterful work in terms of genre and theme.

Salmon Fishing in the Yemen lends itself to various analytical approaches. Alaghbary and Al-Nakeeb conducted a linguistic analysis of modality in the novel, exploring the constructed dichotomy between the East and the West (2017, 31). This was followed by a discourse analysis by Mubarak Altwaiji, who investigated "the political and cultural attitudes towards Yemen and the improved representation of Yemen in post-September 11th British discourse" (2019, 326). The first literary critical study of the novel was conducted by Baleid Saeid, who examined the use of symbols within its pages (2014, 5-20). Saeid further explored the consciousness of female characters in another paper (2019). The most recent research, conducted by Martian Shaw (2021) in his paper "The End of Imperialisms in Paul Torday's *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*," argues that Torday presents a critique of imperialism within the novel. He, as the title of the paper suggests, focuses on the failure of imperialism's contemporary attempt under a new trading name "globalization" (762), as it failed in its previous historical attempts under its real names, i.e. colonialism and imperialism (780). The present study is different and broader. It focuses on the aspects of political satire embedded in the novel, aiming to uncover how Torday employs this genre to criticize the British political mechanism in the early twenty-first century. It provides a complete discussion of how Torday, with an inner vision, unveils how the corrupted British political mechanism functions nationally and internationally. It endeavors to cover all the aspects of political satire in the novel.

The present study falls within the realm of qualitative research and employs a close reading approach to analyze *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* (2007) as the primary source. The study critically focuses on the thematic content of the novel. To accomplish this objective, a qualitative analysis framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) is adopted. This framework encompasses three stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. By following this approach, the study ensures that its findings are substantiated by relevant textual evidence. Additionally, the in-depth thematic discussion of the text offers a wealth of interconnected evidence, contributing to the construction of a comprehensive portrayal of the novel as a contemporary political satire.

The Political Mission of Salmon Fishing in the Yemen

A report published on May 22, 2023, by the research group "Action Against Armed Violence" sheds light on the undisclosed involvement of the UK's special forces (UKSF) in military operations across 19 countries, including Arab and Islamic nations such as Yemen, Algeria, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, the Strait of Hormuz, and Pakistan. The report reveals the British Special Forces' participation in operations that involve assassinating British citizens in Iraq and Syria, covering up civilian killings in Afghanistan, and engaging in combat in Yemen alongside tribal leaders who recruit children, all without the consent of the British Parliament (Jones & Overton 2023).

The latest report from Action Against Armed Violence (AAAV), along with leaked documents from the US Pentagon in April 2023 about the British role in the Ukrainian war (Robert 2023), as well as Sir

John Chilcot's Report of the Iraq Inquiry (Committee of Privy Counsellors. 2016), collectively provide insights into the colonial nature of Britain and contribute to a partial understanding of its imperialistic agenda. They have brought the long-standing issue of British government involvement, particularly in Middle East affairs, back into the spotlight. This took the British people nearly a decade and so to fully comprehend the true motives behind the disastrous Iraq war and gain a better understanding of their government's role in the Middle East and other parts of the world. However, a literary writer does not need to wait that long to uncover the truth. Instead, they seize the moment and depict reality as it is. In *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, Paul Torday did exactly that by exposing the dark side of British involvement in the Middle East and Islamic countries.

Illuminating the flaws and shortcomings of the existing political system is an essential objective of the political novel (Howe 2002, 203), and *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* so aptly and precisely achieves that. From the outset of the novel, Torday makes both the protagonist, Dr. Jones, and the reader aware of its political dimension (24). In the middle of the novel, through the character Maxwell's confession, the writer confirms that the "initial interest in the salmon project was purely for political reasons" (102). This serves as a clear indication that *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* carries a political mission, making it a political satire. In other words, the novel aims to offer a vision and reevaluation of the political choices and decisions related to the UK's involvement in Middle East affairs during the early 21st century. "To be absolutely candid, the Middle East has been something of a graveyard for the reputation of a number of governments, and opposition parties too" (235), Maxwell remarks. Towards the conclusion of the novel, Torday employs the same character as a spokesperson to further elucidate his mission and emphasize the political theme of his work:

Now I come to one of the most difficult chapters in a political life that has never been without its challenges. I must speak of events which transcended political life. No Aristotle, no Shakespeare, no writer that I can think of has had to describe events such as I will now write of. I do not aspire to their talents. I am simply a modest journalist who has found himself drawn into the center of events which have changed this country, perhaps the world, forever. I must do the best I can, with my limited powers, to help my readers understand what happened. (287)

The aforementioned excerpts from the text demonstrate that akin to all comic novels, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* is a serious political satire with significant objectives to accomplish. Firstly, it interrogates British foreign policy in the Middle East. Secondly, it explores the manipulation of media and press by British politicians. Thirdly, it underscores the consequences of British policies and participation in the so-called war on international terrorism. Lastly, it presents an unvarnished truth regarding the practices of British politicians. These weighty targets of Torday's satire form the crux of the subsequent discussion.

Salmon Fishing in the Yemen is undoubtedly an exemplary political novel par excellence. In this regard, literature of an anti-political nature holds significantly less value compared to political literature. This raises questions for non-English readers about whether literature should be purely anti-political or if it can be politically incorrect. What is the relationship between literature and politics? Should readers

resist the meaning of political literature and its ethics, which contribute to literary and cultural hegemony and dominance? The esteemed British culture, like any white-oriented culture, is often perceived as being on an equal footing with politics. Yet, the relationship between literature and politics is akin to “walking in a minefield,” as described by Barbara J. Eckstein (1990, 1). One setback of contemporary and classical British literature is that, like politics, it can be used to perpetuate power and exert authority over others. In doing so, the British employ this power to reinforce the myth of their own superiority over others. Contemporary British fiction plays a significant role in blending political life with literature, often based on binary oppositions of “we” and “others.” George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945) and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) serve as symbolic satires that represent exploitative and complex superiority, with the notion that “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others” (126). These stories can be analogically applied to various contexts within British politics. Similarly, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* is also read and perceived as a satirical representation of such dynamics.

However, an anti-political or apolitical approach can be seen as “deconstructive”, as Paul de Man suggests. A political interpretation of *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* objectifies political art and produces propaganda that caters to a popular audience. This undermines what art, including *Salmon Fishing*, should not be. Edward Said, in his works *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) and *Orientalism* (1978), draws our attention to the stark reality of the political culture within occidental politics and the text of art. Occidental propaganda has perpetuated the devaluation and subordination of the oriental, reinforcing a state of double consciousness and subjectivity within the orientalist mindset.

Incidentally, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* serves as a symbol of perpetuating a long-standing stereotypical image of the “other,” characterized by bipolarity and difference. The exploration of cultural and political disparities plays a crucial role in emphasizing this phenomenon. The story relies on ethnic and racial coding as significant factors in shaping the characters, illustrating political prejudice. The narrative frequently “others” non-British and non-Western characters, reinforcing stereotypes of backwardness, illiteracy, and shortsightedness associated with Sheikh Muhammad ibn Zaidi and his community due to their non-European and non-white identities. On the other hand, white-skinned characters like Dr. Alfred Jones, David Sugden, and Peter Maxwell are portrayed as intelligent, witty, and hardworking, representing the white man’s “we” - the civilized and supposedly more equal Europeans. Through his artistic approach, Torday exposes political dilemmas and deconstructs the hegemonic culture of British consciousness.

Furthermore, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* contains rich content that can be analyzed within “the genre of satire” (Shaw 2021, 761). To explore the novel’s political critique, the textual analysis adopts a cultural materialism framework, treating the literary text as a historical document. In light of this approach, researchers aim to analyze how Torday depicted the underlying principles of British political life at the beginning of the twenty-first century, as well as how he employed satire to criticize the nation’s political engagement with significant events of that time.

So far, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* delves into the exploration of how British political power extends beyond its geographical boundaries in a mission to rule over the “other.” Apart from its literary

purpose, the story carries British values to Yemen, a distant country in Arabia, where the British can legitimize their authority and fulfill their historical belief in the white man's burden of civilizing others, specifically the uncivilized Bedouins of the Arabian Peninsula. The choice to disguise their political motives with a project like salmon fishing in Yemen is not coincidental, as Yemen is not ideally suited for this type of sporting business due to climate and geographical factors.

Like Tayeb Saleh's *Season of Migration to the North* (1968), Torday's *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* reveals the truth that the British undertake projects not for the benefit of the colonized communities, but as a means to achieve their dominating ends. As Saleh astutely noted: "*The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns, not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops; the schools were started so as to teach us how to say 'Yes' in their language*" (47). These striking facts are unfortunately masked by noble-sounding concepts of diversity, multiculturalism, harmony, coexistence, tolerance, and democracy. However, upon closer examination, actions reveal that the primary function of salmon fishing in Yemen is a means of domination. The response of the British Prime Minister and the involvement of his media secretariat in the project, for instance, unmistakably operate under hegemonic terms. The Prime Minister's pragmatic acknowledgment that military intervention is "regrettably but inevitably" used to impose their glittering ideals of democracy and cultural values forcibly reflects an egoistic policy rooted in what fits their interests (167), a concept Derrida (1971) termed as the "white mythology". He pointed out that it is an attempt "to reassemble and reflect the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that's the mythos of his own idioms for the universal form that he must still wish to call Reason" (213).

The novel satirically redefines the political identity of British policy, highlighting the construction of British self-identity about the 'other'. Yemen is depicted stereotypically as a hub of extremism, serving the British government's interests and the writer's portrayal, thereby undermining the Sheikh's project under the pretext of fundamentalist threats. The problem lies with the British Prime Minister and politicians who arrogate to themselves the right to determine the destiny and way of life of others. Despite their claims of respecting diversity, multiculturalism, and democracy, they effectively impose their values and disregard the privacy and socio-cultural norms of others, as evident in the story when the Prime Minister justifies military interventions: "*This government and the preceding governments from this party are proud of their record in introducing democratic ideals through the mechanism of political and sometimes, regrettably but inevitably, military intervention in the Middle East and Central Asia. And history will show us to be right*" (167). The Prime Minister aims to reshape Yemeni society to align with British goals, labeling any deviation as backwardness, terrorism, and savagery. This type of politics, characterized by a single-minded perspective, a singular vision, and a unified voice, represents a colonial mechanism that manifests in new forms of colonialism through subtler and indirect means.

Additionally, the British political element in *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* portrays a narrow and stereotypical image of the Yemenis as dangerous, fundamentalist, extremist, and savage. Through this portrayal, the British identity is defined by the process of othering, where the self is constructed in opposition to what it is not, i.e., the Other. Yemen is constructed as the Other in the British/Western geographical imagination of Yemen and the Middle East (Seng 2013, 3). This stereotypical narrative of

Yemen as a haven for extremists and fundamentalists serves the British government's agenda as well as the writer's propaganda to disrupt the Sheikh's project under the threat of fundamentalism.

In *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, the British are depicted as saviors to others, possessing extraordinary power that can turn the impossible into possible. As Beaufoy states, "We are all battling against people telling us '[T]hat is not possible. You can't do that.' We say 'I know, but I'm going to try anyway.'" The complexity of the national hero is exemplified in the story through the recruitment of Dr. Jones, a fisheries expert, to set up the salmon fishing project in Yemen. The Sheikh provides the financing while the expert advises on the project. This advice is seen as a moral obligation towards third-world countries and also reflects the British and white-skinned man's perceived divine task of educating and taking care of the orient. The British Prime Minister's press secretary, Patricia Maxwell, highlights the political benefits of the project to Britain, as it strengthens its relationship with the Islamic world. The title of the story is appropriately connotative and sarcastic. While fishing serves a political purpose rather than an economic necessity for the British state to maintain its relationship with Islamic countries, the salmon represents a Trojan horse through which the Britishers compensate for their exploitation, in this case, the Yemenis.

Historical Context in Salmon Fishing in the Yemen

It is universally acknowledged that literature is one of the best means to document historical incidents. Literary texts of all genres have been documenting all aspects of societal life in all nations and languages. Literature preserves the spirit of its age. As Stuart A. Scheingold puts it, "The literary imagination has long been recognized as capturing the spirit and the soul of the times" (2010, 2). In modern times, historical fiction, in general, and political novels, in particular, are fully engaged with this mission. As Joseph Botner states, this genre provides "a vivid record of past events, an insight into the nature of political beings or a prediction of what lies ahead" (1955, 1). It represents political thought in a language form to represent a nation. According to Homi Bhabha, "It is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the West" (1990, 1). English political novels are the best embodiment of Bhabha's statement. However, Scheingold believes that "English novels are less literary classics than cultural representations of politically consequential segments of English society" (2010, 147). The fictional representation of the captured political spirit of English society at the beginning of the twenty-first century is an essential purpose this paper explores, by studying one of the distinguished English political novels written and published during that time.

Salmon Fishing in the Yemen is, in part, about a wealthy Yemeni Sheikh who dreams of introducing the sport of salmon fishing to Yemen. The Fitzharris & Price agency, which runs the Sheikh's properties in the UK, puts Ms. Harriet Chetwode-Talbo in charge of this project. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK supports the project because they view the Sheikh as a very important ally in the Yemeni councils, considering this project a symbol of Anglo-Yemeni cultural cooperation. To achieve this seemingly impossible task, they choose Dr. Jones, a fisheries scientist who works for the National

Centre for Fisheries Excellence. Despite celebrating his professional success, Dr. Jones refuses the idea, considering it absurd and futile.

Nevertheless, Dr. Jones later agrees to work on the project when he is put under unreasonable pressure by his senior manager, who gives him the ultimatum of either resigning or accepting the Yemen salmon project proposal. The Prime Minister's office embraces the idea as it has significant implications for changing the negative perception of UK involvement in the Middle East. Maxwell, the Director of Communication in the Prime Minister's office, closely monitors the project's execution until the very end. Influenced by Harriet's persuasive dialogue and the Sheikh's spiritual discussions, Dr. Jones develops a deep affection for the project and commits himself wholeheartedly to it. He and his team overcome numerous challenges and successfully introduce salmon into Yemen. Yet, on the day of the project's grand launch, a sudden flood sweeps away not only the Prime Minister and the sheikh but also the entire project.

This event can be interpreted as a metaphorical sweeping away of British imperialistic politics beyond its borders. Also, this policy perpetuates the historical oriental-occidental binaries, evident in various places such as Yemen, Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, and many parts of the Arab and Islamic world, according to up-to-date reports referred to above. These regions are often perceived as threats to the West, western values, and humanity, as argued by thinkers like Samuel Huntington in his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996) or Terry Eagleton in *The Idea of Culture* (2000). Nevertheless, Arab intellectuals have remained vigilant against such projects due to their holistic historical experiences with the West. As Tayeb Saleh states, "They imported to us the germ of the greatest European violence, as seen on the Somme and at Verdun, the like of which the world has never previously known, the germ of a deadly disease that struck them more than a thousand years ago" (1968, 47). References to the Crusades in works like *Season of Migration to the North* can analogically be linked to the same crimes committed by the British in Iraq, Afghanistan, and similar contexts in our contemporary history. These serve as live examples of the British democracy they attempt to impose on others by any means necessary.

Furthermore, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* highlights a historical notion that is flawed: the belief in the superiority of the west and the inferiority of the rest. The project of introducing salmon fishing to the tribal people in the Middle East is presented with a demagogic language of salvation, reinforcing the historical perception of western superiority. This notion is evident in the interrogation scene between the Prime Minister and the members of the House of Commons, where Stewart expresses disruptive thoughts as an honest politician, contrasting with Torday, who serves as the mouthpiece of the Prime Minister reflecting British policy dynamics. Both the Prime Minister and the members of the House of Commons are aware that the salmon fishing project serves British politics rather than the British economy. In this process, they play the dual role of examiner and examinee within the legislative authority of the House of Commons, aiming to manipulate public opinion.

It is indispensable to consider the historical contexts when interpreting *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* due to the prevailing extreme political assumptions associated with orientalist, particularly the portrayal of the Middle Eastern man. This portrayal has long been accompanied by a persistent image of evil and

lust deeply embedded within the cultural structure of the text and the political language employed by the writer. Despite being categorized as a romantic comedy and a cultural phenomenon, the novel remains a political work that serves political purposes and is infused with political satire throughout.

Besides the negative perception of the message conveyed by the text and its political implications of conspiracy, it is possible to offer a new contemporary interpretation that sheds light on the way the west portrays the “other,” the different. As one delves into the underlying meanings of the story, subtle messages become evident. In the case of *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, these messages involve the depiction of the Middle East as a dangerous and mysterious place, contrasting with the calm and rational image of Britain. This portrayal reflects stereotypical constructions that need to be critically examined due to their potential for fostering misunderstandings and reinforcing post-imperial attitudes. As Bennis states, “The Middle East is a dangerous place – at least as far as the story is concerned – and such righteous endeavors can never go unscrutinized, or unpunished” (2013, 151). Therefore, it becomes crucial to problematize these stereotypes and challenge them, recognizing their potential to perpetuate misperceptions and uphold lingering post-imperial mindsets (Woon 2012, 3).

Another noteworthy objective to consider in Torday’s *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* is the ethical dimension of British foreign policy in the Middle East. The Yemen salmon project serves as a metaphor to explore this aspect. Maxwell, the director of communication in the prime minister’s office, explicitly mentions the ethical focus in various places, particularly in the Middle East, stating, “We have got ethical in so many places...at the Middle East” (100). At the beginning of the story, Harriet reveals the project’s stated ethical goal as supported by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office: “The Foreign & Commonwealth Office supports this project as a symbol of Anglo-Yemeni cooperation” (2). However, as the narrative unfolds, the seemingly insane and absurd project, as perceived by Dr. Jones, takes on a different significance. It is presented as a blueprint for Anglo-Yemeni cooperation, with wider implications for how the UK’s involvement in the Middle East is perceived within the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Torday further underscores the broader implications for the UK’s involvement in the Middle East through a satirical press comment in an imaginary article from the International Herald Tribune. He sarcastically suggests that the British approach in the region focuses less on military buildups, in contrast to the USA. Instead, he posits that British policy appears to be emphasizing cultural and sporting imagery, possibly in an attempt to mitigate the impact of recent military actions in southern Iraq.

UK Politics and the Game of Media

The enduring legacy of imperialism deeply rooted in Western culture continues to shape their political perspectives on other races and cultures. It has perpetuated the coercion of narratives that not only contradict the professed values of liberty and justice but also dehumanize and belittle non-Western races. This manipulative narrative was glaringly evident during the recent Israeli aggression on Gaza, where Western powers, including Britain, propagated a discourse that not only defied reality but also perpetuated harmful stereotypes against non-white races, specifically here the Palestinians.

Political Satire in Paul Torday's *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*

From political leaders like Rishi Sunak, Boris Johnson, Joe Biden, Antonio Blinken, Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz to others, the top echelons of the British political system peddled a false narrative echoing their imperialistic legacy of hegemony, segregation, and hypocritical double standards. The imperialistic politicians, resembling micro-images of their predecessors, employ the same mechanisms of narrative manipulation, exemplifying the dangers of imperialism and neo-colonialism. The repetition of historical patterns becomes a satirical reflection of the British elites' mindset. George Orwell's touching inquiry in *Marrakech* prompts reflection on the perceived superiority of Western civilization, as he ponders, "but there is one thought which every white man ... thinks when he sees a black army marching past. 'How much longer can we go on kidding these people? How long before they turn their guns in the other direction?'" (Orwell 1968, 393).

The events unfolding in Gaza today only validate the prophetic insights of Paul Torday, who, in *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, warned of the perilous consequences of imperialism. He sheds light on the role of British politicians in manipulating and weaponizing the media, recognizing it as a powerful tool with dual capabilities. Media plays a significant role both in the story's plot and in the political game of the UK. British politicians firmly believe that when harnessed and manipulated effectively, media can be as influential as military interventions in advancing their agendas. Numerous newspaper articles discuss the Yemen salmon project, turning it into a public issue. To portray this aspect, Torday selects the renowned BBC political commentator, Mr. Andrew Marr, to interview the Prime Minister on the topic of the salmon project in Yemen.

During the interview, Marr describes the project as "an idea from way out on the lunatic fringe" and characterizes it as "more of a hallucination than a vision" (104). The Prime Minister, on the other hand, views the project as a "heroic, extra bit of vision" comparable to achievements such as building a ship out of iron or laying a cable across the Atlantic (105). When questioned about the government's motives for supporting such a bizarre project, Vent defends his government's stance. He argues that the project has the potential to bring positive change to a Middle Eastern country and improve the lives of its people without resorting to deploying British troops, helicopters, or fighter aircraft, as they have done in the past. At this point, Marr inquires if the project is an official government policy. However, Vent denies this and suggests that it is his perspective. He states that the Yemen salmon project is a unique endeavor "that deserves sympathy and encouragement" (106).

Moreover, Vent expresses his pride and superiority while explaining the uniqueness of the project. He emphasizes that it is special because it deviates from traditional military confrontations and serves as "a powerful symbol of . . . a different sort of progress - Yemeni tribesmen waiting for the evening rise by the side of wadi with fishing rods in their hands" (106). He further questions, "Isn't that an image we'd rather have in our mind's eye than a tank at a crossroads somewhere in Fallujah?¹ If we can manage to introduce salmon into Yemen, where else can we do it? Sudan? Palestine?" (106). Torday provides Maxwell with an opportunity to clarify and explain the significance of the project.

In the novel, the writer asserts that the government's purpose behind the project is to foster friendship with the Middle East and demonstrate goodwill towards others. The discussions in newspaper

articles and TV show programs highlight that the Yemen salmon project is considered a government policy rather than a personal viewpoint.

Torday takes the scrutiny of the UK's policy in the Middle East to a higher level by presenting the questioning of the Prime Minister by members of parliament. One member notably asks him to explain how his government and previous governments of his party deemed it appropriate to interfere in the political, cultural, and religious affairs of a sovereign Middle Eastern country (163), while another member questions the project's representation of "gross religious and cultural intrusion" (164). Vent denies any form of interference or intrusion caused by the Yemen salmon project. Instead, he claims that it serves as a validation of "this government's multicultural policies" (164).

During his interrogation in the House of Commons, a member of parliament finds it strange that a high-ranking government official is dedicating significant time to the salmon project while thirty percent of the armed forces budget supports military operations in Iraq and deployments to defend oilfields in Kazakhstan and other Middle Eastern countries (166). He sarcastically remarks, "Surely this government needs to consider the consistency of its policies? We have been told often in this House that democracy can flower from the barrel of a gun, but we have never yet heard of democracy being hooked on the end of a fishing line" (166-167).

In response, the prime minister asserts that: *[T]his government and the preceding governments from this party are proud of their record in introducing democratic ideals through the mechanism of political and sometimes, regrettably but inevitably, military intervention in the Middle East and Central Asia* (167). The above argument is truly shocking and highlights how the British politicians of both the ruling party and the opposition perceive and handle affairs in the Middle East. Democracy cannot flourish through the use of force or by dangling it as a carrot on the end of a fishing rod. Here, the "barrel of a gun" symbolizes the uneven British policies in the form of military intervention, while the "fishing rod" represents a soft approach to cultural intervention. Ultimately, the outcome remains the same, and for British politicians, the end justifies their means.

Furthermore, Torday delves into the realm of covert operations in which the UK is involved, unbeknownst to Parliament (192-193). The soldiers who become victims of such operations, like Captain Robert Matthews, are reported as "Missing in Action" (225). Vent decides to put the Yemen salmon project on hold (178). He justifies this decision, stating, "There are some religious and political issues here that need sensitive handling... We're pretty much committed to going down a particular road in the Middle East, and it would be difficult to do so without people beginning to ask why we'd started down it in the first place" (249). Torday questions this chosen path, highlighting the perplexity of the government's foreign policy through the words of the foreign secretary, who wonders, "Why could nobody else see that this was the way to go?" (249).

Salmon Fishing in the Yemen, thus, explores, in one way or another, the consequences of British politicians manipulating the media and press. It is not surprising that authors Trevor Morris and Simon Goldsworthy (2008), in their book *PR-A Persuasive Industry?: Spin, Public Relations and the Shaping of the Modern Media*, recommend reading *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* to comprehend the intricate

relationship between politics and the media. Like Vent, British politicians inherently mistrust the media and press (Morris 2008, 288). Nevertheless, they recognize the significance of press coverage and the pivotal role it plays in the political game within liberal democratic countries. Therefore, some politicians believe it is better to avoid or carefully handle press statements. This is why Maxwell insists that Dr. Jones and everyone at the National Center for Fisheries Excellence must keep their distance from the press (68). Harriet informs the reader that “papers are full of stuff about Iraq” (78). The government’s perception is already negative due to its military involvement in various Middle Eastern locations. If news of the Yemen salmon project were to reach the public before being cleared by the Prime Minister’s office, it would further contribute to the government’s unfavorable image.

The narrative of the Yemen salmon project, along with similar stories, serves a purpose. Maxwell, the director of communication in the Prime Minister’s office, elucidates this purpose by stating, “Everyone can get blindsided, sideswiped, no matter how good they are. That’s when I can add some value. That’s what I do. If the news is bad, I present it in the best possible light. If the news is very bad, I come up with a different story” (98). Maxwell further compares throwing news to the media to throwing a bone, where the media eagerly shapes public perception based on the news provided, regardless of its positive or negative nature. The objective is to divert people’s attention from more significant news by masking bad news with trivial stories. Maxwell explains: *The attention of most of the media is about twenty minutes, and a new story, a new angle, normally tempts them to drop the bone you want them to drop, and look at the new bone you’re offering them... It was one of those bad news days you sometimes get* (98-99).

In essence, the story of the Yemen salmon project is merely a bone thrown to the media to distract their attention and entice them to focus on a different story. It is spun by Maxwell, along with the Prime Minister, to divert both the media and the British public from the unfavorable stories emerging from Iraq and other Middle Eastern locations (108). This strategic maneuver is made at the highest level of decision-making (109). A telling excerpt from Maxwell’s speech underscores this reality: “We had spun the story our way. We got good leaders in the Daily Telegraph and the Times... the stories about dead bodies in the Middle East were on pages four and five. The front pages were about fish, and even the review and magazine sections were all doing pieces on fishing” (108-109).

Torday continues to depict the ends of British politicians in fabricating and disseminating stories through various media channels. One such story can serve as a means of distraction, using a cricket match for a noble cause. The news of the cricket match held at the orphanage is manipulated to divert attention and conceal more pressing news concerning the British military and logistical operations in the Middle East, which could potentially be at the forefront of news headlines. This tactic of prioritizing news for the media and the public demonstrates the pragmatic and Machiavellian nature of British decision-makers. Accordingly, the opposition and some uninformed members of the public lacked an understanding of the extent to which our armed forces were overstretched at that time. Had they been aware, time would not have been wasted on such arguments. Thus, a distraction was necessary, and the cricket match at the orphanage served that purpose (234).

The Yemen salmon project serves as another example of these intricate political tactics of disruption. Dr. Jones reveals the true motive behind the project, as explained to him by Maxwell:

You've seen the placards on demonstrations: 'Troops out of Iraq', 'Troops out of Saudi Arabia', 'Troops out of Kazakhstan'. I mean, it's becoming like a tedious geography lesson. The original idea was to provide a diversion to all these protest groups by doing something different in Yemen – focusing on fish instead of guns.
(272)

On the contrary, in addition to serving as a distraction, the Yemen salmon project is also employed as a political strategy to attract voters. It becomes a significant consideration in election calculations, particularly in relation to the British angling community (273). Through Maxwell's explanation, Torday enables Dr. Jones, and the reader, to understand how politicians manipulate these calculations. Maxwell outlines their plan, stating that they will emphasize the Prime Minister's passion for angling, using his previous statement in the House as a starting point. They will repeat this message in newspapers and on television, aiming to show the public that they are the government that supports anglers. Maxwell asserts that if they fail to secure the votes of at least three million anglers in the next election, he will consider it a loss of his skill (273-74).

Torday goes beyond examining politicians' manipulation of the media and delves into questioning the purpose of traditional media institutions like the BBC World Service. Maxwell reflects on this and raises doubts about the role of less-controlled media such as the BBC. He suggests that if the media does not serve the government's propaganda and fails to extend the influence of the British voice beyond imperial boundaries, it would be preferable to replace it or shut it down. As an example, he mentions the potential closure of BBC Arabic, which has been broadcasting news in Arabic to a significant audience in the Arab world for nearly eight decades. This decision can be understood within the context of wanting to establish controlled broadcasting channels that align with their interests and act as the "voice of Britain" on a global scale (238).

Maxwell's suggestion of establishing a controlled TV station exposes the British government's agenda of media control (239). He provides an example of a TV show pilot to illustrate the manipulation associated with such a station. This station aims to enhance the perception of the British government and downplay its actions abroad. In the pilot episode, Muhammad Jaballah, the presenter, visits Dugan village in Pakistan, where houses destroyed by a Tomahawk cruise missile lay in ruins. Among the victims are members of Farrukh's family. Farrukh and his two friends participate in the show, competing for prizes that promise an extraordinary transformation in their lives. Jaballah claims they are there "to bring a smile back onto the faces of Farrukh and his friends" (241). Farrukh provides the correct answer.

The audience, along with the reader, is shocked to discover that the promised prize beyond Farrukh's wildest dreams is nothing more than a dishwasher. Farrukh now possesses a dishwasher but lacks a home, thanks to the British government's sarcastic and insensitive idea of transformation. This painfully ironic compensation attempts to turn the agony of Farrukh's loss of family and home into a humorous redemption through a dishwasher. The relentless propaganda of the media works to whitewash the crimes

committed by their government. One may question the value of a dishwasher when an entire house, along with its inhabitants and belongings, has been destroyed by those who claimed to “bring a smile back” to Farrukh’s face and to thousands like him in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and many other regions in the Middle East and Asia. The dishwasher serves as a symbol of the British media’s role in whitewashing the heinous and bloody crimes of their government in various parts of the world, with Dugan being no exception.

Therefore, the British government employs carefully chosen media outlets to serve as whitewashers, just as the dishwasher functions in a symbolic sense. The TV quiz serves as a clear example of how journalists and the government collaborate in their grand task of winning the war of hearts and minds in the Middle East (246). Torday’s satirical remarks regarding the government’s selective approach to journalists covering its activities support the argument that controlled media is used to propagate government policies, falsify the truth, manipulate public awareness in Britain, and present a distorted image of British foreign policy worldwide. A conversation between the Prime Minister and Maxwell further reinforces this interpretation.

During the launch of the Yemen salmon project, a carefully selected group of media personnel is present on the plane. The Prime Minister inquires about the journalists on board, and Maxwell provides the list, which includes familiar names from BBC and ITV, while Channel Four is excluded. Additionally, new faces from angling-related publications are invited, such as “Angling Times, Trout & Salmon, Atlantic Salmon Journal, Coarse Fisherman, Fishing News, and Sustainable Development International” (288-89).

The selection of journalists in this scenario is based on the satisfaction of government officials rather than their qualifications. The treatment of journalists is also determined by this factor, with some being invited while others are excluded, some receiving preferential treatment with gin and tonics, and others receiving no hospitality at all. In essence, British politicians attempt to control media professionals and manipulate them to align with their agenda.

UK Foreign Policies: A Magnet for International Terrorism

Applying Fredric Jameson’s concept of the political unconscious, which states that “all literature must be read as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community” (1981,56), *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* portrays the repercussions of American-British total war policies on terrorism and their impact on the lives of British families. These families have experienced the deployment of their sons and daughters to war-torn regions such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and other parts of the Middle East and the world. Through the character of Harriet, we can envision her sitting and observing a stack of returned letters she sent to her fiancé, Robert Matthews, a captain in the Royal Marines who is reported as “Missing in Action” (255). Despite the desperate efforts of both families to gather any information about his fate, they remain unsuccessful. Torday skillfully portrays their worries, agonies, and trembling voices in Harriet’s correspondence with Robert and later with herself. By employing his literary imagination, Torday exposes his characters to the calamities resulting from British foreign policies, depicting their interior lives intricately woven into the fabric of British political life. These two families symbolize the shattered

lives of numerous British families who have lost their children due to disastrous foreign policies imposed by reckless politicians.

Moreover, the satirical element in *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* reveals the consequences of British foreign policies. The explicit objective of British involvement in the Middle East is stated as “to improve the lives of those troubled people who live in the Middle East” (105). This involvement can take the form of direct military confrontation, or a more subtle intervention aimed at cultural transformation, such as the Yemen salmon project. Intercepted al-Qaeda email exchanges, provided by the Pakistan Inter-Service Intelligence Agency, reveal the perception of such a project by al-Qaeda members in Yemen. According to Tariq Anwar’s messages to fellow al-Qaeda members, the project is considered “evil” because it is seen as non-Islamic in nature and intended to divert attention from the greater evils perpetrated by the “crusaders” against the entire Muslim nation in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and Palestine (94). The perpetrators create an association between fundamentalist terrorism and Islam and between Arabs and vulgarity, ignorance, backwardness, nomadism, desert-dwelling, and less civilized groups. This malicious association serves to reinforce British hegemony over other societies, as cultural hegemony appears inseparable from the political imperialism that is continually justified.

It is vividly clear that Torday artistically captures the political life of the British people in *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, documenting the political deception perpetrated by the British government towards their own citizens, who bear the costly consequences of the mistakes made by their political elites. The narrative sheds light on the underlying principle that governs British politics, which encompasses various forms of political, cultural, and religious interventions aimed at reshaping Middle Eastern countries (105). Torday emphasizes the intrusive nature of British involvement in Middle Eastern affairs through the voice of a member of the House of Commons (164). While the British government boasts of having “excellent policies in the Middle East” and claims that militant Islam is being suppressed while democratic consumer societies are emerging (249), a member of the House of Commons raises the point that British involvement, exemplified by the Yemen salmon project, has become a “magnet for international terrorist activity” (168). Even Sheikh Muhammad ibn Zaidi, who is pro-British, becomes the target of two international terrorist incidents, first in Scotland and then in Yemen. In the latter attack, even the Prime Minister himself falls victim when he visits Yemen to launch the salmon project (300). Although the Prime Minister tragically dies in a flood during this trip, it remains uncertain whether his foreign policies are also drowned with him. Nonetheless, his demise serves as a symbol of the tragic end of British imperialism, which was once an empire where the sun never set.

Remarkably, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* portrays real-life political characters. The author skillfully delves into “the very heart of power in the United Kingdom” (110), providing a penetrating exploration of the mindset of those at the center of the UK’s political machinery. The Prime Minister and Maxwell are two notable examples of carefully crafted characters representing UK politicians. Through extracts from Hansard, Maxwell’s unpublished autobiography, political interviews, interrogations, and the observations of the story’s protagonist, Dr. Jones, the novel vividly presents a comic depiction of UK

politicians. *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* serves as a serious examination of the mindset of those who occupy key positions within the UK political system.

Torday's concept of the ideal political function of government officials is succinctly expressed by Maxwell: *I am the guardian of our purity of purpose. We are the rational managers of a modern democracy, taking the optimum decisions to safeguard and enhance the lives of busy citizens who haven't got the time to work things out for themselves* (114). However, the fictional Yemen salmon project and the potentially real black operations in the Middle East cast doubt on the purity of purpose in UK politics. The military involvement of the UK in distant wars like Iraq and Afghanistan is also called into question. Are all these policies truly aimed at spreading democracy? Torday argues otherwise. The concluding chapter of *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, titled "Conclusions of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee," reveals that military intervention primarily serves to protect regional oil resources, with the introduction of democracy being a mere pretext (317). Such policies do not improve the lives of British citizens. Maxwell provides an example of the negative consequences: "The picture on the front page of the Independent during the energy crisis of the old lady's corpse with her hand frozen to a cold radiator and icicles on the end of her nose was not good press for us" (233). Thus, Torday challenges the notion of the politicians' purity of purpose.

In addition to depicting the irrationality of UK politicians, Torday also explores their hypocrisy. Harriet describes her initial encounter with Maxwell as dreadful, referring to him as "the most ghastly little man" (150). She expresses her astonishment, questioning how individuals like him attain positions of power: "How people like that get into such positions of power is quite beyond me" (150). Ms. Mary Jones holds her husband, Dr. Jones, responsible for being deceived by his boss under pressure from politicians, leading him to compromise and become involved in the irrational Yemen salmon project (17). She further expresses her surprise, stating, "One is constantly surprised by the elasticity of people's standards" (254). The cost of such a compromise is the termination of his job, the end of his academic career, and, above all, his reputation (308).

Nevertheless, Dr. Jones is not the sole victim. The Prime Minister himself loses his life for the sake of a photograph with a salmon fish in Yemen, driven by political gains that he always denied. The characters Vent and Maxwell serve as fictional embodiments of the hypocrisy of modern UK politicians. Their tragic fate in the story symbolizes the tragic end of British hegemony and imperialism in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and potentially elsewhere.

Conclusion

Paul Torday's *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Marrakech* stand as powerful examples of anti-colonial narrative, offering a damning critique of colonialism and portraying the horrors and atrocities committed by Western powers in the Middle East and African colonies during the last centuries until now. These literary works serve as testimonies from Western writers questioning the moral decay inherent in colonial culture, while also shedding light on the suffering, oppression, marginalization, and dehumanization endured by the victims of colonial atrocities.

Torday's *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* serves as a poignant exploration of the tragic consequences of British involvement in the Middle East. Through the lens of the Yemen salmon project, the novel exposes the disruptive interference of British politicians in the affairs of other societies and sovereign states. It provides a critical understanding of the dynamics of British policy and the contemporary manifestations of its neo-colonial mechanisms both within the Middle East and beyond. The story's satirical nature offers a biting commentary on the inward and outward politics of the British state, revealing how the salmon project is manipulated for political gain or diversionary purposes. Moreover, it draws attention to the stereotypical portrayal of non-British individuals, particularly Arabs and Muslims, in the British perception. The role of the media in disseminating false narratives and serving as a platform for state-controlled news is also underscored. This research endeavors to illuminate the political theme of the novel and analyze the underlying meanings beyond the surface text, providing a critical reading of the political satire intended to captivate the reader's attention. Ultimately, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* serves as a reflection of British politics from within, highlighting how British politicians maneuver the game of politics through new, subtler forms of colonialism and hegemony.

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السخرية السياسية في رواية بول توردي (صيد السلمون في اليمن)

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الملخص

تعمق الأدب الإنجليزي المعاصر بصورة متزايدة في الموضوعات السياسية وتعميقات سلوكيات النخب البريطانية الحاكمة، مدفوعاً جزئياً بانهيار الإمبراطورية البريطانية بعد الحرب العالمية الثانية، حيث وفر هذا الأفلول أرضاً خصبة للكتاب والنقاد لاستكشاف القضايا السياسية، فوظفت الرواية توظيفاً فريداً للتعلمق في الدوائر الداخلية لصنع القرار، لسبر دوافع السياسيين بطرق لا يمكن لشكل أدبي عدا الرواية القيام بها، وتمثل رواية *صيد السلمون في اليمن* لبول توردي مثالاً لهذا النوع من الرواية السياسية، لذا يهدف هذا البحث إلى الكشف عن الهيمنة السياسية البريطانية من خلال عدسة أدبية، واستكشاف السخرية السياسية في رواية توردي، حيث يصور توردي بفعالية المعضلة السياسية التي تواجهها الأمة البريطانية، وتحلل هذه الورقة تحليلاً نقدياً التهكم السياسي، في محاولة للإحاطة بنطاق سرد توردي للحياة السياسية البريطانية خلال فترة محددة ببدية القرن الحادي والعشرين، بالاعتماد على المنظور الأدبي الشرقي-الغربي، لتسلط الضوء على هذا العمل الروائي المهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرواية السياسية، بول توردي، التلاعب، السخرية، اليمن، الاستعمار.

Endnotes

¹ Fallujah is a city in the Iraqi province of Al-Anbar and is located on the west of Baghdad and Euphrates.

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