

Frankenstein: An Echo of Social Alienation and Social Madness.

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Abstract: *Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein', through the portray of the 'monster' hints the uncanny defamiliarization of the familiar role of the society. It shows how the society if anybody does not suit its taste alienates that from itself. The monster's hideous appearance is the reason of the society's disliking it and so it is regarded with disgust and hatred. This results not only in the reader's realization of a defamiliarization, but the monster's own defamiliarization with society. A minute reading of Frankenstein explores racial overtone carried by the creature's yellow skin. Moreover, Victor Frankenstein through his scientific research goes beyond the horizon to fulfill his dream to attain the unattainable and thus alienates himself.*

Keywords: *Alienation, Defamiliarization, French Revolution, Racism, Radicalism*

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is the very power glass through which we can have the glimpse how society alienates people because of their certain characteristics which usually do not fulfill the desired and decisive taste of the society. It uncovers the uncanny defamiliarization of the familiar role of the society. The monster, a creation of Victor Frankenstein's madness is used to testify this. The monster's hideous appearance is the reason of the society's disliking it and so it is regarded with disgust and hatred. Although the monster has amiable intentions, the people around him, moulding their mind in accordance to the society's value and rules, immediately take it for granted that the monster is actually evil. The monster is rejected by people who do not know him, by people he loves, and even by his own creator, Victor Frankenstein. The importance that the ordered society likes only the ordered people and totally places upon person's appearance is evidenced by the way that Frankenstein's monster is judged based on his monstrous façade.

The monster's hideous appearance causes anyone who sees him to flee because, as the society clears out, the very appearance of the monster contradicts his inner goodness. It does not support the form of beauty and order. It is perceived as somewhat satanic. The monster's first encounter with a human happens when he enters into a hut belonging to an old man and seeing the monster's appearance the man becomes frightened though the monster does no harm to the man. It is a testimony that the society is never ready to accept the monster, an unknown creature as a part of the society and it is enough to assume that the unknown creature is considered as a monster with evil thoughts and intentions. The monster has a similar experience in a village the following day. In this case the reactions are different. One of the villagers faints, some scream, and the majority of them attack the monster. They think that either they should hurt or drive away the monster before it would take the chance to hurt them. The people are unable to think that there may be softness in some corner in the mind of the monster. And we perceive it when we see that the monster saves the girl in spite of his being spurned by humans before [1].

Edmund Burke, one of the earliest critics of French Revolution considered it as a movement which led the way to anarchy and destruction of human society, not one which supported constitutional democracy. He further pointed out that it was rather a rebellion against authority and tradition [2]. In reply to Burke, Thomas Paine, a radical intellectual, who participated in the revolutionary event himself, on the other hand, revealed that the regretful manner of Burke uncovered suspicion, that the British Constitution needed something to hide its defected countenance as France did not adopt 'British Constitution' [3].

Mary Shelley imposed both the naive ideals and the tragic consequences of the French Revolution in her creature, and thus, became a powerful critique of the revolution ideology, which A. Mellor explains: "The Creature cannot obtain the human sympathy he craves and is driven to violence by the constant suspicion, fear, and hostility he encounters. He thus becomes an emblem for the French Revolution itself. The Revolution failed to find the parental guidance, control, and nurturance it required to develop into a rational and benevolent state" [4]. She saw at first hand the sufferings the French villagers had to take by fifteen years of warfare when she travelled through France with Percy Bysshe Shelley on their journey to Switzerland in the summer of 1814. Around that time, a rigid reaction against the scientific rationalization of nature in art and literature and other social changes had already been on its way, when the first Romantics threw their revolt against social and political norms of the Enlightenment period. The natural historian Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon proclaimed, "The most temperate climate lies between the 40th and 50th degree of latitude, and it produces the most handsome and beautiful men. It is from this climate that the ideas of the genuine color of mankind, and of the

various degrees of beauty, ought to be derived. The two extremes [tropical and subarctic] are equally remote from truth and beauty" [5].

In *Frankenstein*, an implicit reaction of Mary Shelley's awareness of this pseudoscience can be read: "He was not, as the other traveler seemed to be, a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island, but a European" [6]. A minute reading of *Frankenstein* explores racial overtone carried by the creature's yellow skin. An educated white European man was at Burke's and Buffon's time considered as a universal standard. There is no question that this aesthetic ideology of the sublime and superiority contributed to justifying colonialism and slavery [7].

The Creature begins to receive an education in the ways of mankind. Through the introduction of Safie, bride to Felix DeLacey, whose family he has been quietly observing for several months, the Creature's world is opened wide. Being an Arabian, Safie cannot at first communicate with the DeLacey's. In their effort to teach her the language, the family inadvertently teaches the Creature as well. But what is the worth of knowledge when it is gained inadvertently? Nothing but misrepresentation is the result of this knowledge. The Creature learns much, through his experiences at the DeLacey cottage. It also learns the behaviour one shows to other. With its contact with the language, the creature learns how to interact with others, ponders the true nature of its existence, its identity, and decides choices about its future. What it wants from its life is directly a result of the education it receives. The creature is no longer an innocent. Whenever it wanders through the woods in search of food it accidentally causes harm to the people who come across him. It is now in its adulthood and is responsible for its actions, since it knows the consequences of its actions [8].

In *Frankenstein* family is the counterpart of loneliness. Sometimes loneliness can be the impetus for evil. Family is the only solution that can destroy the evil. So the monster only wants the family from its creator. It wants a companion so that it can have an anchor in the social world – can lead its life. In this aspect it is alienated from the society. Moreover, throughout the book deaths of parents and children occur so frequently. Death of all these children symbolizes that the future is threatened. It is also threatened by the new world – a world of rapid scientific changes that occurred during the Industrial Revolution [9].

Frankenstein is distinctly related to a particular period of crisis in humanism: the failure of the French Revolution. The dangers of radicalism and abstract idealism, ensued by brutal reality, are the impetuses that led Mary Shelley to put life in *Frankenstein*. In this sense, she supported Burke's negative attitude towards the movement for any inconsiderate political change. English society was consciously observant of the revolutionary events in France since they were still aware of the misery come out of the English Revolution between 1640 and 1660, the execution of Charles I and the havoc of the republican experiment of Oliver Cromwell [10].

Victor Frankenstein is the personification of the ideology that later caused the French Revolution to turn into barbarities and it is perceived through his seeking education at the University of Ingolstadt where Jacobinism flourished. Victor Frankenstein uses dead bodies to build new body, a better humanity – a new life and this proves that Mary Shelley thinks that the revolutionary zeal is already corrupted. The deliberate association of the Monster with the bloody progress of the French Revolution echoes the author of *Frankenstein*'s rejection of the revolutionary ideas. Failing to calm their historical hatred towards the aristocracy and Clergy, Girondists and other political factions, could not create a state that would recognize the rights and freedoms of all its citizens and in this topsy-turvy state the inability to reconcile the traditional order to the new led to massacres and the execution of Louis XVI and Maria Antoinette in 1793 [11].

The Jacobins, the unreliable generators of the democratic vision of liberty, turned into the selfish thirst for power, and thus, only usurped the previous political and economic leadership of the aristocracy and the church for themselves. Observing this, various revolutionary forces that opposed to so called the revolutionary government (mainly under Jacobins control) took action. Mary Shelley created a metaphor for the revolutionary French nation by the vision of a gigantic body, the Creature that, abandoned by its creator, turns its aggression against him.

In *Critique of Empire in Frankenstein*, Elizabeth Bohls cites an Indian literary critic, Gayatri Spivak: "It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the representation of England to the English" [12]. Captain James Cook's famous voyagers were mostly inspired by geographical and scientific discoveries, and it is significant in correspondence to the initially liberate motifs with which the *Frankenstein*'s characters commenced their explorations. The pursuit for knowledge exhibited by the main characters of Frankenstein mirrors the pursuit for knowledge, and most importantly, for new economic sources of Western Europe in Mary Shelley's time. As for James Cook, there are two special occasions that directly link the important circumstances of *Frankenstein*'s plot. Cook's expeditions to the Pacific, staffed with scientists, resemble the fate of an overreacher who finally succumbs to the confrontation with his goal, as James Cook did when he was killed by natives on his returning to Hawai in 1779 [13].

Shelley emphasizes Frankenstein's preternatural resistance to the monster's desire for a mate or, simply, for his companionship. Frankenstein would never have considered the project had it not been for the monster. Once Frankenstein decides that he cannot complete the female creature he has made at the monster's request. He tells Walton that he destroyed it (female creature). Instead of threatening, Frankenstein supports his claim and says, "I am content to reason with you". Needless to say the monster's ominous warning that "we may not part until you have promised to comply with my requisition" is a threat, and by this time, he is already responsible for the deaths of William and Justine. But the fact is that the monster feels the need of a social context for his own existence that is why it is asking for a mate. Brooks points out that if the monster needs to be suited in the world, it essentially needs to bind itself to Frankenstein. Likewise, to remain articulate, Frankenstein needs the monster. It means that Frankenstein has rejected his own 'society' (the monster – the artificial social being). The monster also alienates itself from the social context [14].

Victor Frankenstein is engaged in his scientific research and cannot think lovingly of Elizabeth and his family. Actually he is engaged in such a work which does not obey the Nature. Moreover, he goes beyond the horizon to fulfil his dream to attain the unattainable. Nature takes its revenge on Frankenstein by depriving him of his both mental and physical health while doing his research. It should also be mentioned the character of the Turkish merchant, Safie's father, living in Paris who was sentenced to death for a crime he had not committed. Here his religion and wealth forces him to alienate the society. He is helped to free from prison by the DeLacey's family and he promises to give her daughter to Felix as a fiancé. But later he escapes from Christian dominion of Europe with Safie, leaving the DeLacey's to suffer the punishment for helping him flee.

In Mary Shelley's masterpiece *Frankenstein*, Frankenstein's monster is the inherently evil force. "There is one primary question that the reader faces within this novel: Is the monster naturally evil or is his revenge-based behavior a result of the society around him? As the novel progresses, the monster grows in several ways". It learns of those around him and of language and books; the other is the way in which it becomes progressively evil, seeking only revenge. One parallel can be linked to Frankenstein's creation and it is the exaggerated life cycle of a normal human being. "The monster starts out as an uneducated infant, newly born and innocent to the world". And like the baby it gradually learns everything. The monster in Frankenstein shows us about society from a defamiliarized perspective. It is the mad and corrupted society.

Society, that is, those whom the monster regards as peers, do not treat the monster as an equal. They see and treat him as a creature from another planet. Instead of naming the monster as we do in the case of a newly born baby, Frankenstein continually views the monster as an ongoing experiment. This encourages a feeling of ostracization and contempt in the monster. Furthermore, unlike a typical infant, the monster never receives the taste of growth with parents. He is not taken cared by any one. As part of the monster's mock growth, it learns how to handle society. With this knowledge of language comes a method of communication and expectation of equal treatment, or at least acceptance, from Frankenstein. The monster undertakes many questions, in the span of only days, which humans take lifetimes to answer, such as the presence of Creation and Fate (who am I and what my purpose is?) "And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant... hideously deformed and loathsome... I was not even of the same nature as man. I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted upon me; I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with knowledge...". This results not only in the reader's realization of a defamiliarization, but the monster's own defamiliarization with society. The monster did good deeds; it shoveled snow and saved a girl, yet people do not understand it, they rather react negatively. In turn, this produced enough abandonment and hatred for the monster to take vengeance in its own turn [15].

Mary Shelley seems to support her parents' legacy as she finds the negative effect of the French Revolution. However, she also felt that the Revolution was necessary to cast a new society. The tyrannical rule of the upper class had to be overthrown so that the oppressed can be freed. But it becomes evident through her writing that Mary Shelley never forgot the legacy of her parents. The French Revolution turned to be a movement which led the way to anarchy and destruction of human society, not one which supported constitutional democracy. This very idea stimulates Mary Shelley to paint the metaphor – the 'monster', which is build for the good, but turns to be evil.

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