

The Monster's Roar: Ethos of reverse colonization in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"

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Abstract

Gothic literature as a genre has always had a cathartic impact, inducing in us both terror and intrigue at once. The fear of the unknown and the constant pursuit of a monster; whom we instantly presume to be uncivilized because it speaks in a tongue which we are not familiar with. Same was the case with the colonizer and the colonized, the periphery and the center, the master and the servant. No matter what dichotomy one uses, the colonizer was always the pedestal being and the colonized the scary animal which needs to be breed and looked after. However, change being the only constant, the colonized are now becoming the center and pushing the center to the periphery. A reverse colonization of sorts has been put into effect where the other is claiming back its position of power in the tongue which has been burdened on them by its former claimants. Reverse colonization is a reality in the world today which is highly evident in the corporate and knowledge sector of the west, where people from the east are dominating. This paper focuses on reverse colonization ethos with respect to the 'Monster' in Mary Shelley's bestseller '*Frankenstein*.'

Key words: Center, Periphery, Reverse Colonisation, hybridity, meta- fiction, native unease, white man's burden, gothic, monster, hybridity, hegemony, occident, orient, abrogated, appropriated

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Who was Mary Shelley?

Mary Wollstonecraft (Godwin) Shelley was a nineteenth century English novelist, biographer, travel writer, dramatist and an essayist. She was the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, who was one of the first champion and writer of women rights, stated in her magnum opus- '*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*' Her husband was one of the major romantic poets, Percy Bysshe Shelley who has many classical poems to his credit. Though she has authored many other works, '*Frankenstein or Prometheus Unbound*' is her most famous work. It was composed when she was house bound along with her second born son, P.B. Shelley, Byron and Claire Clairmont near Lake Geneva due to the rainy weather conditions. To while away their time, Lord Byron gave each a task to write an original ghost story. One night, this story of Frankenstein appeared in Mary Shelley's dream,

"I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world." (Spark, 157)

Thus she got inspired to write this short story which eventually after her husband's egging on became a fully fledged novel.

Frankenstein and Reverse Colonisation:

The title Frankenstein refers not to the created but the creator. The novel opens in the form of a Meta fiction, in which a captain of a ship is shown, who converses with his sister in an epistolary manner while he is out on a mission in the freezing pole. Robert Walton is the name of the captain who via these letters re-tells the horror story of Frankenstein to his sister. He had by chance encountered a very harried and haggard Victor Frankenstein. After nursing him back to health he bears witness to an unheard tale of man's ambition to become God and his proverbial fall.

Victor Frankenstein lived with his family in the quiet city of Geneva. He was introduced to the great science of philosophy, chemistry and physics accidentally in childhood:

...till an accident again changed the current of my ideas. When I was about fifteen years old we had retired to our house near Belrive, when we witnessed a most violent and terrible thunderstorm...As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner (Shelley, 36-37)

At that time a man learned in these sciences was staying at their place, it was he who introduced him to such new avenues of electricity and ancient philosophers of those time- Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus. Thus this was the first ignition of his future maverickism. In Shakespeare's texts where disturbances in nature act as a foreboding of future despair, in the same manner this thunderstorm was a warning of the future disaster he would be causing.

The second ignition occurred when he entered the university life of Ingolstadt along with his friend, Henry Clerval. Natural philosophy and chemistry became his areas of interest.

They penetrate into the recesses of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows.’ Such were the professor’s words—rather let me say such the words of the fate—enounced to destroy me. As he went on I felt as if my soul were grappling with a palpable enemy; one by one the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of my being; chord after chord was sounded, and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein—more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation. (Shelley, 46)

This was the same colonial feeling of discovery and conquest embodied in Victor. To venture out and find; that which is unknown and exotic, to claim their superiority over the ‘Other’.

One of the phenomena which had peculiarly attracted my attention was the structure of the human frame, and, indeed, any animal endued with life. Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed? It was a bold question and one which has ever been considered as a mystery; yet with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our inquiries. (Shelley, 50-51)

The condescending attitude of the colonizers of doing something mighty by burdening us with a foreign tongue and civilizing the ‘other’ into their European way of life is one, which we didn’t ask for. Instead of the colonizers calling the colonized as a **white man’s burden**, it is in reality the other way around. They are the **brown man’s burden** for they have forever put the colonized at a **native unease**. Our own tongue has become disparaging and demeaning in the eyes of our own future generations.

No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these reflections, I thought that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption. (Shelley, 54)

Lord Macaulay and his downward filtration theory sought to create such men who would be brown in their looks but their thoughts, lifestyle and attitude would be European. He had wanted to create bots of European mimicry, which to an extent he has been successful in doing.

If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit whatsoever to interfere with the tranquility of his domestic affections, Greece had not been enslaved, Caesar would have spared his country, America would have been discovered more gradually, and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed. (Shelley, 56-57)

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their monumental book '*The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*', have given a lucid definition of Post-colonial as the term which covers all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. Post-colonialism didn't end with the exit of the colonizers but it is still continuing till the present day. That is the major volley of effect it has, had on all the cultures it has invaded and hybridized.

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments

of life around me that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. (Shelley, 58-59)

A monster was created by Victor himself; it was his Hubris which made him commit a grave mistake as such. The same Hubris which made the center alter the reality of the periphery. Thus the subaltern was made to believe in the hegemony of the ruling center not only through the subversion of their culture, language but also by making their natural surroundings look bereft.

‘The volume of Plutarch’s Lives which I possessed contained the histories of the first founders of the ancient republics. This book had a far different effect upon me from the Sorrows of Werter. I learned from Werter’s imaginations despondency and gloom, but Plutarch taught me high thoughts; he elevated me above the wretched sphere of my own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages. Many things I read surpassed my understanding and experience. I had a very confused knowledge of kingdoms, wide extents of country, mighty rivers, and boundless seas. But I was perfectly unacquainted with towns and large assemblages of men. The cottage of my protectors had been the only school in which I had studied human nature, but this book developed new and mightier scenes of action. (Shelley, 153)

These words are spoken by the monster in Frankenstein who epitomizes the periphery. After having created him, Victor himself gets frightened and leaves him to his own fate. The Britishers had done the same thing, made us at unease with our own culture resulting in us always trying to scale that invisible wall to avenge that which was snatched away from us. The

monster like the periphery learnt his master's tongue with the simple intention of not reverse colonizing but for it to be considered as integrated into the same society. However, the tongue which we were burdened with has now been **abrogated**, that is, it has been decentralized from its monopolized seat of power and is now **appropriated**. Post-colonial countries have their own distinctive creolized version of the English language; Hinglish, Chinese English, African English, Australian English so on and so forth. As his language skills increase, the monster gains a sense of the world.

The monster is met with horror wherever he goes making him aware of the wreck that his creator and coloniser has caused. He states, 'I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed.' He requests Victor to create a female version of the monster so that he can also cherish the same human pleasure of companionship but fearing that he would soon breed an army of similar ogre creatures, Victor ends up destroying the female companion even before its completion. This enrages the monster further who just wanted to feel similar to someone and live in peace with his partner. As Michael Frank writes in his essay that Reverse-Colonisation narratives, Arata argues, are both, the product of geopolitical fears – anxieties concerning the increasing fragility of the British imperial dominion – as well as a response to what he describes (perhaps somewhat vaguely) as “**cultural guilt**”: “In the marauding, invasive Other, British culture sees its own imperial practices mirrored back in monstrous forms” (Arata, 108). The Monster vows to take revenge and ends up killing those who were closest to Frankenstein to make him realize how he feels all alone in this whole wide world. Thus begins a process of **Reverse-colonization** where we end up being considered as merely inferior mimic beings and rise ourselves to the position of the center. Hubris will be followed by Nemesis and this is our retributive justice.

...but revenge remains—revenge, henceforth dearer than light or food! I may die, but first you, my tyrant and tormentor, shall curse the sun that gazes on your misery. Beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful. I will watch with the wiliness of a snake that I may sting with its venom. Man, you shall repent of the injuries you inflict.’(Shelley, 206)

In the world as of now, the East is dominating with major job positions being helmed by them - **Indra Nooyi** who is the head of Pepsi co., **Sundar pichai** who was made the Ceo of Google, **Sadiq Khan** the first Muslim mayor of Britain, **Satya Nadella** Ceo of Microsoft, **AjayPal Singh Bagga** the chief executive officer of MasterCard, young **Malala Yousafzai** who is now a leading human rights voice and recipient of Nobel prize. Not just this but according to news reports, homework of the occident is being outsourced to the people in the Orient plus online coaching and tutorials are provided from here to there. We are no longer only the lampooned Call center outsourcing country, we are now outsourcing our knowledge as well whose mettle has been proven time and again.

What further proof does one need when the prestigious, Spelling bee competition of the west is being won by Indians three years in a row? Latest co-winners of it are, **Nihar Saireddy Janga** and **Jairam Jagadeesh Hathwar**. While, the world's youngest Chess Grandmaster is **Praggnanandhaa**. The Occident like Victor Frankenstein is trying to stifle the Monster from roaring back by using methods like revoking of HB1 Visas in the future so as to stop the work opportunity being outsourced to Indians and giving preference to Americans(Economic Times, 4th March 2016). However, this is nothing but buffoonery trying to close the lid on a volcano that they started. As Newton's third law of motion, every action will have an equal and opposite effect, so Post- Colonialism will be followed by Reverse Colonisation.

The novel reaches a conclusion where the monster has his ultimate revenge after making Frankenstein all alone in this wide world and then takes away Victor's life. Yet the monster emerges as the ultimate tragic hero who exclaims in the closing chapter 'I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on.' Giving us a window into the burning suffering he was subjected to without any fault of his and the lines which appear on the title page perfectly surmise the ethos of Reverse Colonisation, 'Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay To mould me Man, did I solicit thee From darkness to promote me?'

CONCLUSION:

Thus the novel ends without any definite closure with the monster after a dramatic soliloquy jumps out of the cabin window, borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance. The ending is a westernized one where the troubling east is dreamt off as being thrown away forever in dark oblivion. But the dragon, snake, ostrich, beaver, kiwi, tiger and the other periphery are slowly but surely edging towards the center; Reverse Colonisation is a reality and here to stay! Our **REVERSE COLONISATION** isn't an invasion but an inclusion, not negative but positive, not to be feared but to be admired.

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