



Monstrous Behaviour: A Deviant Approach to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*



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Abstract

Psychiatrist and educator Rudolf Dreikurs once said, “It is autocratic to force, but democratic to induce compliance” (67). Criminologist Lonnie Athens asserted, “Not poverty or genetic inheritance or psychopathology but violentization is the cause of criminal violence” (qtd. in Rhodes 137). And the ‘monster’ in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* postulated, “I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous” (114).

This article proposes to be all about how Mary Shelley, in *Frankenstein*, iterates an innocent and attachment-seeking child’s potential transformation into a vengeful ‘monster’ caused by cruel behaviour of the society. The Mongolian looking helpless child-creature here serves as the ubiquitous mouthpiece of rejected, marginalised and suppressed existence. What the ‘monster’ blamed for his misconduct is actually the absence of the fulfilment of the lower-order needs as in Abraham Maslow’s pyramid of the hierarchy of needs for achieving self-

actualization. Here, what Dreikurs would call the 'active-destructive' child asserts that he indulged in revengeful behaviour only to seek attention by demonstrating his reaction against lack of secure relationship, thereby clinching what psychologists and criminologists today claim in saying that lack of recognition for good behaviour catalyses misbehaviour in children.

This paper aims to take up a psychoanalytical perspective a la the theories of Merton and Sykes and Matza, alongside Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to analyse the subtleties of the formative influence exerted by the so called grown-up world on the impressionable child psyche.

Key words :

Pyramid of hierarchy of needs, Maslow, Lonnie Athens, Violentization, Ecological Systems Theory, Urie Bronfenbrenner, active-destructive, Rudolf Dreikurs, Sykes and Matza, Merton, strain theory.

Research Paper

Introduction:

The novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley published in 1818 is a novel dealing with the creation and development of a grotesque and sentient creature in an unorthodox scientific experiment. Although the novel's biographical, feminist, scientific, historical and many other interesting aspects have been analysed by different critics; the behavioural aspect of the creature through deviant approach has not been analysed so far. The novel is also a tale of an abandoned and physically deformed attachment-seeking child who is forced to take up 'active-destructive' role to demonstrate its reaction against lack of secure relationship. Here, the crucial role of the sensitive child's rejection by its creator and society in making it maladjusted and rebellious also becomes an engaging prospect of analysis.

Background:

The theme of deviant behaviour is taken up by litterateurs from ancient times. Many works of literature present the conflict between character and society in which an individual character manifests deviant behaviour by not conforming to his/her society's norms. The theme of nonconformist behaviour in part of Paris, Prince of Troy, in his abduction of Helen, wife of king Menelaus, caused the Trojan War. Prometheus's act of disobeying Zeus in his creation of mankind and giving fire to them stolen from mount Olympus is a well-known episode from Greek mythology. The act of abdicating the ancient Roman goddess Proserpine by Pluto, the king of the dead, and her subsequent residing in earth and hades for six months

cyclically cause cycle of season according to Roman mythology. The episode of abduction of Sita by Ravana caused the legendary war of *Ramayana* in Hindu mythology. The theme of deviant behaviour also permeates in Islamic myth in the form of the deprivation of Husain and his followers from accessing water by Umar ibn Sa'ad in the battle of Karbala.

The English epic *Paradise Lost* too deals with the theme of deviant behaviour in terms of the rebellion of the Fallen Angels against their legitimate ruler God. The picaresque novels of the eighteenth century dealt with the adventures of deviant characters. Sentimental novels too had some deviant male characters as the tormenters of virtuous, sentimental heroines. During her contemporary period, Mary Shelley found Coleridge's 'The Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel' dealing with the terrific results of deviant behaviour. The protagonist in 'The Ancient Mariner' broke his bond with Nature by killing the albatross while the protagonist in 'Christabel' broke accepted social norms by staying in wood at midnight alone. All of Byronic heroes are presented as tortured outcasts in revolt against the tyranny of social order and authority.

Historical and biographical references:

Being born on the onset of French Revolution, Mary Shelley knew the fact that the tortured and deprived citizens of France guillotined their callous torturer Louis XVI. The Haitian Revolution also manifested the vengeance of the oppressed. This made Mary Shelley well aware of the fact that brutalized people become brutal. She was naturally dismayed by the abandoning behaviour of Lord Byron and Gilbert Imley towards their children. The incidence of her own rejection by William Godwin after her elopement with Percy Shelley and the latter's showing signs of callous parenthood in his refusal of taking custody of his children with Harriet and his having adulterous relationship with women made Mary Shelley sensitive to the misery of others. Her awareness of galvanization of dead bodies of hanged men by notorious alchemists such as Conrad Dippel and Giovanni Aldini made her recognize the sacrilegious act of disturbing the dead. These brutal and profane activities must have enabled and inspired Mary Shelley to write the tale of a tortured individual's vengeance against society during the competition held at Villa Diodati.

Exposition:

The novel posits many characters in their attempt to escape from conflicting and frustrating situation by assuming defence mechanism. As for instance the lieutenant of Walton's, a frustrated lover, accepted the alternative goal of being 'a man of wonderful courage and enterprise...madly desirous of glory, or rather...of advancement in his profession' (8). Likewise, R. Walton, a failed writer, chose the alternative goal of proving his worth in

scientific field. Thus they assumed a socially acceptable and socially laudable goal by sublimating their unfulfilled goals. Victor Frankenstein also assumed the defence mechanism of rationalization. He denied his failure of assuming responsibility for his creation by naming the creature as 'hideous enemy' (226) and emotionally insulating himself from his near and dear ones by avoiding company. R. Walton displaced his frustrated feeling of love to Frankenstein when being in 'want of a friend' (7). Similarly, the child-creature assumed aggressive behaviour as defence mechanism to reduce its frustration induced by an apathetic society.

Motivational aspect of the creature's needs:

The novel, *Frankenstein*, has three narrators – R. Walton, Frankenstein and the Creature. One may find it amazing that while the first two narrators had higher goals in life as they expressed their wish or at least ability to contribute to the welfare of mankind, the last narrator was satisfied with bestial activity of killing and destroying. However, the motivation and behaviour of the characters become elucidated when explained in the light of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow's theory suggests that one must be able to procure food and shelter before one desires for personal security. Only after procuring personal security can a person wish for friendship, intimacy and family. Then comes the need to feel respected. After mastering all of the previous level needs one tries to realize one's full potential. While analysing the characters of Walton and Frankenstein we find them as having the potential to realise their lower order needs. Therefore, they tried to achieve fame through exploring their full potential in the field of scientific knowledge. While dealing with the conditioning of life of the creature we find that it more powerful and more adaptable than any human being. Through analysing its character we find that its physiological needs and safety needs were at stake and its need for love, belongingness, and esteem was thwarted. This made it assume the vengeful and destructive behaviour to dispel the barriers in reaching its lower order needs.

The positioning of the creature in bio-ecological system:

Enquiry into the behavioural aspect of the creature leads us to find explanation in its process of socialization. The positioning of the creature as a physically deformed child and its interaction with its environment helps us in explanation of its behaviour through the study of Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. According to Bronfenbrenner, development and socialization are influenced by the different width circles of the environment with which a person is in active inter-relation. 'This includes three significant assumptions: 1) person is an active player, exerting influence on his/her environment, 2) environment is compelling person to adapt to its conditions and restrictions and 3) environment is understood to consist

of different size entities that are placed one inside another, of their reciprocal relationships and of micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystems' (Saarinen 88). In case of creature, we find its rejection at the point of its generation. The very anguish experienced by the creature is expressed in the epigraph of the novel taken from *Paradise Lost*:

'Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?' (743-5; bk. 10)

The choice of the epigraph signifies the grudge of the creature toward Victor for abandoning it in an abject condition in a world relentlessly hostile to it. The epigraph further foists responsibility upon Victor of the creature's ugliness and eventual evil. The creature's relation to its microsystem is pointed out by its words, 'I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on' (275). This situation shows the child-creature's positioning in the bio-ecological system as whatever cognitive or motor behaviour it showed its visible biological deformity was more influential to people in making it abhorred.

Active-destructive role of the progeny:

Now as one analyses how the progeny differs from other children in its behaviour, one finds whereas other children show attachment to their parents and try to emulate them, ironically enough one finds the progeny of Victor Frankenstein trying to destroy its creator. Its activity can be analysed through Rudolph Dreikurs' theory of child development. Dreikurs has posited that when a child fails to attain positive response of the society, it tries to attract attention towards itself by assuming active-destructive role. Through the speech of the creature relating to the murder of Clerval, it can be testified that its active-destructive was an attempt to draw the attention of its creator to its misery— 'Not the ten-thousandth portion of the anguish that was mine during the lingering detail of its execution. A frightful selfishness hurried me on, while my heart was poisoned with remorse. Think you that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears? My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy, and when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture such as you cannot even imagine' (272).

Analysing deviant behaviour through strain theory:

Merton's analysis of deviant behaviour helps us analyse any deviant behaviour. Through his strain theory, we find the reason for deviant behaviour of any individual is the individual's inability to accept cultural goals and means. As we analyse the normal cultural goals and means placed before a normal new-born baby we find its goal is to love and respect its

parents and learn things to adapt to its immediate environment. The means to achieve the goals can be put as active help, support and nourishment provided by parents and immediate environment. The creature, in the novels although born as a full-fledged being, also needed parental care. However, it had to sorrowfully recount to its creator, 'No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing' (142).

In spite of its genuine attempt to find love and belongingness within De Lacey family, it found only abhorrence. When it found all its attempts at reconciling with mankind thwarted, it rejected the cultural goal and means to attain reconciliation by setting the goal of finding equally hideous female counterpart to share its abject condition through causing its maker comply with its demand. The refusal to fulfil this demand by Victor made the creature vengeful and determined to make its creator suffer. The inability on the part of Frankenstein to understand his duty to his creature obviously played a significant role in igniting deviant behaviour of the creature.

Neutralization and violentization of the creature:

According to Gresham Sykes and David Matza, guilt and shame dissuade most adolescents from engaging in criminal or delinquent acts. The 'malum in se' acts of killing and injuring the innocent creature seemed justified to human beings in the novel due to their finding its physical deformity abhorrent. The denial of victim in part of the human beings subsequently assured the creature of the lack of virtue in human beings. This further made it justify the injury on human beings perpetrated by it. The recollection of injustice received by the creature made it utter, 'Am I to be thought the only criminal, when all humankind sinned against me? Why do you not hate Felix, who drove his friend from his door with contumely? Why do you not execrate the rustic who sought to destroy the saviour of his child? Nay, these are virtuous and immaculate beings! I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on' (275). Thus we find constant categorization, labelling and stigmatization of the creature with the epithets such as monster, devil, fiend, demon, wretch, vile insect, demonical corpse as well as its treatment as such made it internalize the trait by assuming monstrous activities. The institutional knowledge, which makes one assume a different looking person as evil, took the toll of the inherent goodness of the creature as it freed the creature from guilt or shame. This made Frankenstein's prophesising his creature as enemy self-fulfilling as it indeed worked on destroying all of Frankenstein's friends and making his life miserable. Brutalization of the innocent and benevolent infant thus made it desperate to do something about the violent treatment. The

transition from a resolution to use violence to its actual use led the child-creature to the third stage of the Lonnie Athens' Violentization Process.

Victimization causing suicide:

In the field of criminology, Lonnie Athens developed a theory of how a process of brutalization by parents or peers that usually occur in childhood results in violent crimes in adulthood. Richard Rhodes' *Why They Kill* describes Athens' observations about domestic and societal violence in the criminal's backgrounds. The 'demeanour of the De Lacey family towards the monster makes it evident that however ideal a family may be, it is always insular enough to exclude anything or anyone having the potential to pose a threat to it. The creature, doomed to the exclusion from any family format, epitomizes this flaw in the concept of domesticity' (Hazra, 240). Indeed, this societal flaw debarred the creature from having any personal friend. The creature's both desires— of being accepted in the human society and having a companion 'as deformed and horrible as' (173) itself—were denied by the society. This made it adopt antisocial behaviour and finally to manifest the ultimate deviant behaviour through committing suicide. Its being infested with all the major factors conducive to suicidal behaviour – 'poor social background, disrupted relations and antisocial behaviour' (Allebeck & Allgulander, 1990, p. 5) caused the incidence.

Conclusion:

Thus, the depiction of birth and growth of the creature named as 'monster', in the novel, demonstrates the role of society in causing deviant behaviour as it raises the question as to who the real monster is. It is indeed asserted by Elizabeth Lavenza in the novel that when 'misery...come home...men appear... as monsters thirsting for each other's blood' (104). 'The novel makes it clear that before being rejected by its creator, its 'father', before being stoned by the villagers and before being shot by the villagers, and before being shot by the father whose daughter he had saved from drowning, the 'monster' had shown no signs of violence. It is only when he comes in touch with the mean vindictiveness and insularity of the human world that he learns to be violent' (Hazra, 239). Thus, the interrogation of the cause and the nature of the behavioural aspect of the creature leads us to find explanation in deviant psychology. It further helps us explore the unnatural power relation existing in patriarchal system that works to nullify the possibility of existence of female beings of 'same nature' (176) as male through labelling any of the system's adversary as deviant.

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