

Research Article

A POST-COLONIAL READING OF THE REPRESENTATION OF OTHERNESS IN M. SHELLEY AND A. HUXLEY

* Mabandine DJAGRI TEMOUKALE

Department of Anglophone Studies, University of Kara, Togo.

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ABSTRACT

Through a post-colonial reading of *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World*, this paper analyses otherness in order to expose the mechanisms by which the Self that defines itself as the center constructs the Other as the periphery. In the context of the two selected novels, it can be argued that the angelization and exaltation of the Self and its values lead to the demonization and enslavement of the Other. Although the Other is perceived as a threat to the existence of the Self, it is, however, established that the Other is used to validate the definition of the Self. As such, when the Other is absent, the Self proceeds to create or invent it as illustrated in *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World* respectively.

Keywords: otherness, postcolonial critique, Other, Self, angelization, demonization.

INTRODUCTION

One of Shelley's (1797-1851) literary representations of otherness is reflected in his novel *Frankenstein*, which tells the story of a creature that has been designed to be a living human being, capable of defying the vulnerability experienced by its fellow citizens. Unfortunately, the creature's physical appearance is considered, by humans, to be gigantic, monstrous, and prodigious. Rejected by its creator because of its ugliness, the creature, pejoratively called the monster, goes to live with other fellow creatures (the humans) who do not accept it either. The monster is then forced to live in caves, hiding from the sight of people, and coming out only at night in search of food. His desires to live with and love humans are drowned in despair and anguish. The monster, who until then has not reacted in a way that would endanger the life of his creator (Victor Frankenstein) and the other members of the community, is forced to become an evil monster in order to survive in an unjust and hostile world. Thus, the noble monster has undergone a moral metamorphosis to become a gangster, a criminal, a murderer, and an evildoer. It is from this shift from the angelic to the demonic figure that the relationship to the Other in *Frankenstein* rests. In contrast, in *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) proceeds to establish two figures of the Other. Firstly, he brings a young man named John (raised in a reserve) into the (imaginary) World State in order to highlight the civilizational advances of the 'brave new world', i.e., the world state. The relationship between John and the citizens of this State provides a glimpse into the latter's perception of the Other, the foreigner. Secondly, Huxley creates or invents the Other through the techno science that allows the rulers of the World State to have citizens born through in-vitro fertilization. Through the Bokanosvsky method, which consists of depriving the fertilized egg of the necessary oxygen so that cell division can produce up to ninety-six (96) identical embryos, we witness the realization of sameness within a social class and of differences between classes (Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons). Thus, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons can be different in class but identical within a class. Alphas and Betas, on the other

hand, do not undergo 'Bokanosvskification' because these two classes constitute the privileged, middle, and upper classes of society. Therefore, the need and rejection of the Other become a paradox or an ambivalence that the World State translates into the fabrication of both heterogeneity (castes/classes) and homogeneity (identical human beings resulting from Bokanosvskification). Through a post-colonial reading of *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World*, this article analyses otherness in order to expose the mechanisms by which the 'Self', which defines itself as the center, constructs the Other, the periphery (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2000; Smouts, 2007; Dubreuil, 2008; Manathunga, 2011; Muhsin, 2018). In the context of the two novels, it can be argued that the angelization and exaltation of the 'Self' and its values aim at the demonization and enslavement of the Other. Thus, human society in *Frankenstein* and the citizens of the World State in *Brave New World* are represented by 'Self' while the Other is embodied by the monster and John respectively. The encounter between John and the people in *Brave New World* as well as the monster meeting humans in *Frankenstein* parallels the encounter between colonialists and indigenous people in many colonies throughout the world (Bernardot, 2014; Chemmachery, 2010; Tejel Gorgas, 2009; Milanović, 2006). Edward Said (1935-2003), a Palestinian-American intellectual, gave a background against which post-colonial theories are built. His famous book entitled *Orientalism* (1978) criticizes the distorted representations that the West has made of the Orient by showing how these representations translate into a discourse about the colonized (seen as the Other) (Lançon, 2014; Kober, 2014; Lerma Hernández, 2021). As such, terms that describe the relationship between Self and Other come under the following forms:

Manichean binaries of self and others, master and slave, schizophrenic, xenophobic, and ambivalent, desiring and desired, loved and detested, needed and rejected, and so on. Terms that constitute the discourse also range between hegemony, hybridity, ambivalence, syncreticity, representation, assimilation, subjectivity, in-between's, diaspora, writing back, colon, subaltern, and many more (Muhsin, 2018, pp.178-179).

according to Ashcroft et al (2000, p.9) "is derived from the Latin *alteritas*, meaning 'the state of being other or different; diversity, otherness'. Its English derivatives are *alternate*, *alternative*, *alternation*, and *alter ego*". In this paper, alterity is used interchangeably with Otherness to describe the mechanisms through which humans in *Frankenstein* have transformed the creature into a monster through discourse and actions. It also illustrates the conflicting encounter between John and the citizens in *Brave New World*. The paper, therefore, deals with the Other in the selected novels by M. Shelley and A. Huxley on one hand, and how to navigate the world of otherness.

THE OTHER IN M. SHELLEY AND A. HUXLEY

The stories in *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World* show the propensity of people to judge others whose history they know almost nothing about. They do so, to a large extent, on the basis of a few differences they observe and perceive. The monster in *Frankenstein* loses sympathy because of the negative perception humans have of him as the following passage indicates:

I remembered too well the treatment I had suffered the night before from the barbarous villagers, and resolved, whatever course of conduct I might hereafter think it right to pursue, that for the present I would remain quietly in my hovel, watching, and endeavoring to discover the motives which influenced their actions (Shelley, 1994, p.138).

From this statement, the reader understands that the rejection and the monstrous actions attributed to Victor Frankenstein's creature are social constructions since he claims to have once been virtuous, ambitious, kind, and lovable toward those villagers he usually calls "my human neighbors" (Shelley, 1994, p.137). In a sense, the monster brings in a life philosophy according to which people come to life as innocent, weak, and fragile beings, with innocent eyes with which they can look at others without judging them. Unfortunately, as they grow up, they realize that there are disparities, gaps, classes, and classifications as illustrated by the attitude of human society in *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World*. The monster considers that the evil in society comes mainly from otherness and social injustice. Victor Frankenstein's creature is not only exposed to otherness, but also to misery and inhuman treatment. The Monster's loss of moral rectitude and mental toughness is due to the fact that he has lost sight of his childhood dreams, that is, his true nature or being (Chatillon, 2005; Kouchner, 2005; Sautter, 2012). It is, therefore, crucial to note that many factors can alter the true nature of things. In a sense, circumstances and time can lead to the metamorphosis of people. Indeed, otherness in *Frankenstein* focuses on the relationship between Victor Frankenstein's creature and human society, whereas in *Brave New World*, it is between the less privileged classes (Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons) and the class of Alphas, all of which are created and regulated by the demographic policy of the World State. In *Frankenstein*, the monster claims that his madness is imposed on him by the perception, opinion, and judgment of which he is a victim. In other words, the otherness that shapes his being is relational. In *Brave New World*, by contrast, the State has, through scientific and technological prowess, the chemical substance by which it creates the differences that give rise to otherness. With the exception of John, who is born outside the State, the other citizens with their class differences have been the product of biotechnological manipulation (Romeo-Casabona, 2011; Alessio, 2011). Thus, deliberately reducing the amount of oxygen in a fertilized tube leads to the birth of children without eyes, as in the case of the Epsilons. The latter are almost monsters in the same way as the monster in *Frankenstein* since they all have ugliness in common: "The lower the caste", said Mr. Foster, 'the shorter the oxygen. The first organ

affected was the brain. After that the skeleton. At seventy percent of normal oxygen, you got dwarfs. At less than seventy eyeless monsters (Huxley, 1932, p.14). In *Brave New World*, these citizens in the Epsilon caste are discriminated against, devalued, and animalized because of their physical appearance. Epsilons' monstrous shape is due to the fact that they are intellectually and physically programmed and predestined to such a life during their in-vitro fertilization. In a society deemed civilized like that of the World State, Epsilons become the Other in the eyes of the other classes and especially Alphas and Betas who enjoy better physical and intellectual health and appearance. To this internal otherness is added the external one involving John, who comes from the primitive reservation outside the World State. In both novels, Shelley and Huxley show the contribution of techno science in creating injustice in human society. Shelley's monster and Huxley's Epsilons are the results of genetic manipulation. Both writers expose the fact that science has, in some cases, promised justice but delivered injustice as Victor Frankenstein and the leaders of the World State have manufactured human creatures whose physical appearance evokes rejection and horror. The contrast between Victor Frankenstein's creature and the World State's Epsilons is that Victor puts more physical, intellectual, and moral potential into his creature but covers it with an ugly body whereas the World State's geneticists programmed ugliness and intellectual deficit into the embryos thanks to oxygen regulation. The end result of such a practice is that it automatically leads to a monstrous physical appearance of the Epsilons at birth. The origin of otherness in both *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World* is, therefore, linked to other citizens' ignorance about the process which has led to the birth of the creature (monster), the Epsilons, and other lower classes. In addition, those who stigmatize Victor's creature do not know who its creator is, while the classes, with the exception of the Alphas in the World State, are conditioned to accept their status despite the plausible physical and mental injustices they sometimes feel. Furthermore, the prejudice and other discriminatory attitudes towards the monster in the society created by Mary Shelley point to human failings that have cost and broken many lives throughout human history (Faniko, 2018). To provide some moral reflection for her readership, M. Shelley (1994) made the monster reminiscent of Walton, a friend of his creator: "Once my fancy was soothed with dreams of virtue, of fame, and of enjoyment. Once I falsely hoped to meet beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities I was capable of bringing forth. I was nourished with thoughts of honour and devotion. But now vice has degraded me beneath the meanest animal" (Shelley, 1994, p. 245). The monster reveals, in the above statement, that men comment and make value judgments about him because of his outward form just as they are accustomed to doing when they meet various other humans. Their defective perception due to their inability to connect with others leads them to overlook the inner virtues of others. They cannot, therefore, see the intellectual strength of the monster and the physical qualities he possesses because these humans have a distorted image of the Other.

Similarly, in *Brave New World*, the curiosity about John, pejoratively called 'savage', shows the intolerance that the citizens of the World State develop. They think they are more civilized and freer because the dominant discourse of the 'Self' is primarily concerned with maintaining this binary opposition (Galland & Lemel, 2008; McNamara, 2019). Blinded by their certainty and superiority, the citizens of the World State, as a community, can be satisfied with the difference that John's presence brings. Thus, the presence of the Other silences the internal differences of a community as it is noted between Shelley's monster and humans on the one hand, and between John and all the different classes or castes in Huxley's World State on the other. Perceive as a threat to the existence of the 'Self',

the Other becomes a tool and means of social cohesion within a group that may feel different from that Other it has constructed through its own prisms.

NAVIGATING THE WORLD OF OTHERNESS IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

The society in which people grow has a considerable impact on them (Delacollette *et al.*, 2010). It is noted that the belief systems put in place to regulate lives and give interpretations to everything beyond human understanding are to some extent the same ones that limit so many people on their path to fulfillment (Rebzani, 2005; Caune, 2019). It is noted through the writings of Shelley and Huxley, that people are always ready to accuse or blame others because of many stereotypes they develop; the aim of which is to thwart the burning desire of the Other to exist. In *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World*, John and the monster, respectively, are insulted and called bad names since they are seen as different from the 'Self'. The purpose of this demonization of the Other is to force them to withdraw in order not to be a threat to the existence of the 'Self' any longer. Consequently, the withdrawal of Victor Frankenstein's monster from humans is forced by their gaze, that is, the opinions of those who define themselves as the center. Similarly, John's retreat from the World State shows that his denigration is powerful enough to push him aside and isolate him from others. To this end, it is revealed that the inability to open up to the Other leads to the construction of prejudices and categorizations that are unfortunately erected as standards against which members of Shelley's and Huxley's imagined society must be calibrated. Besides, when the calibrator is wrong, it is obvious that the calibrated instruments cannot produce reliable results. It can, therefore, be said that the citizens in *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World* define themselves as the center because of their peripheral vision of John and the monster. Both characters are presented as symbols of difference in terms of physical form (for the Monster) and civilization (for John, pejoratively called 'savage'). In contrast to John, who is proud to be different in the World State even though he is presented as a subject of curiosity, the monster decides to make many concessions (learning the language of the community, helping a vulnerable family by bringing firewood) to preserve harmony and be accepted and loved. It is, therefore, understandable that John seeks self-assertion while the monster wants to assimilate into the society that rejects him. Indeed, the monster and John think they can spend their time arguing to be understood and accepted by others until they realize that discrimination and rejection are inevitable in both societies. The withdrawal of the two characters to avoid being contradicted, challenged, mocked, and ridiculed can be explained by their lack of 'courage to be' (Gounelle, 2012; Haigis, 2009). To navigate their worlds, both characters need to face their fear of loneliness with more confidence in the future of their actions (Brown & Murphy, 2011).

Drawing a parallel with contemporary society, it can be underscored that otherness experienced by John and the monster is an exacerbated nationalism in M. Shelley's and A. Huxley's imagined countries. Critics recorded that in order to justify their aggressions or hatred toward others, invasion literature often employed racial stereotypes or innuendo. As such the German was depicted as cold, emotionless, and calculating; the Russian was an uncultured barbarian, given to wanton violence; the Frenchman was a leisure-seeking lay about; the Chinese were a race of murderous, opium-smoking savages (Llewellyn & Thompson, 2020). In a sense, the overconfidence of the Self leads to the denigration of the Other; and to navigate such contexts of otherness, John and the monster have

the responsibility to avoid open confrontations which can mount up to unexpected violence and murder as depicted in *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World*. It means that they can be aware of the circumstances around them and still decide not to be carried away by them. However, social harmony and homogeneity built up at the expense of diversity, as expected from John and the monster, can break down in the long run as the Other always yearns for freedom. Sometimes, it can happen that the Other conforms or surrenders outwardly, but inwardly they are radical rebels. The paradox in the relationship between the Self and the Other translates through the fact that John is surprised to have become a subject of curiosity and mockery in *Brave New World*, whereas he believes the World State's citizens are the most unhappy people in the world. His opinion about and perception of those who position themselves as the Self is totally different from what the Self thinks about themselves. Both John and the monster fail to be heard because they represent the periphery whose identity is defined by the center. Their failure to successfully navigate their hostile worlds shows the power of prejudices and stereotypes to destroy any entity labeled as the Other. The issue of otherness has remained alive in English literature from M. Shelley's *Frankenstein* (first published in 1818) to A. Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932). John and the monster who represent the Other are forced into confinement since, in one way or another, the Other is affected by the dominant ideology, prejudice, and stereotype designed by the Self.

CONCLUSION

The paper has explored through a post-colonial reading of M. Shelley's *Frankenstein* and A. Huxley's *Brave New World* the issue of otherness and found that the dominant vision and discourse imposed by the Self (the center) affect the Other (the periphery) negatively. The latter can no longer assert themselves, which suggests a sense of inadequacy as highlighted in the stigmatization of John in *Brave New World* and the monster in *Frankenstein*. It has been established that through the lack of benevolence, the Self indulges in the depreciation and devaluation of the Other. In *Frankenstein*, the categorization and characterization have led humans to a demonization of the creature (monster) and all its actions, most of which were not of a nature to harm the human community in which it finds itself. Similarly, John in *Brave New World* has been demeaned, dehumanized, and commodified when he has been used as a zoo animal to perform in shows, the purpose of which is to show the primitive being whose flaws and contradictions highlight the civilizational advances of the Self (the World State's citizens). The paternalistic attitude of the World State's leaders like Bernard Marx towards John is intended to illustrate the latter's infantilization and immaturity in order to justify the faults that have been wrongly or rightly attributed to him. Treated as a savage, John becomes aware of the prejudices of his fellow citizens when his beliefs and values have been rejected. Indeed, the project of angelizing the Self and demonizing the Other has been successful in both novels as it shows and exposes the processes by which society manufactures its angels and demons. Through *Frankenstein* and *Brave New World*, M. Shelley and A. Huxley show that otherness remains one of the most threatening evils human societies are able to breed and let grow. In a sense, the tragic events in their novels could have been avoided if the Self had allowed room for discussions with the Other.

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