JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH FOR HUMANITIES
ISSN 2663-192x

ORCID of the Journal: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-0723-9485
DOI Number of the Paper: https://zenodo.org/records/12602560
Edition Link: Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH, 4(2) April-June 2024
Link of the Paper: https://jar.bwo-researches.com/index.php/jarh/article/view/453
HJRS Link: Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH (HEC-Recognized for 2023-2024)

IDENTIFYING UNHOMELINESS AND MIMICRY: A POSTCOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN

Author 1:	**Dr. IESAR AHMAD**, Associate Professor, Department of English My University, Islamabad, Email: iesar.ahmad@myu.edu.pk
Corresponding & Co-Author 2:	**MUHAMMAD YOUNAS**, M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, MY University, Islamabad, Email: younaspcit@gmail.com
Co-Author 3:	**MUHAMMAD TAYYAB**, M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, MY University, Islamabad, Email: tayyab.tabbassam2000@gmail.com

Paper Information

Citation of the paper:
(JARH) Ahmed, I., Younas, M., & Tayyab, M., (2024). Identifying Unhomeliness and Mimicry: A Postcolonial Analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.* In *Journal of Academic Research for Humanities*, 4(2), 42–50B.

QR Code for the Paper:

Subject Areas for JARH:
1 Humanities
2 English Literature

Timeline of the Paper at JARH:
Received on: 30-04-2024.
Reviews Completed on: 23-06-2024.
Accepted on: 23-06-2024.
Online on: 29-06-2024.

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Recognized for BWO-R:
HJRS HEC Journal Recognition System

Published by BWO Researches INTL.:
BWO RESEARCHES (PVT) LTD INTERNATIONAL

DOI Image of the paper:
DOI 10.5281/zenodo.12602560

Abstract

The study is an attempt to explore unhomeliness, hybridity, and mimicry in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (first published in 1818) from the theoretical perspective of postcolonial theory. It also investigates the psychological, social, and cultural implications of the monster's existence as an outcast physically and biologically through the theoretical lens of unhomeliness, otherness, and mimicry of Homi K. Bhabha's. It further examines the monster's displacement, ostracization, and lack of recognition and acceptance in human society. It also focuses on the hybridity, alterity, difference, and acceptance of the monsters in human society and its cultural norms. The study also focuses on the mimicry, oddity, and eccentricity of the monster in the given temporal and spatial norms of the given society. The monster's mimicry is an attempt to assimilate into the social, physical, biological, and cultural norms of society, but in vain due to its ugly and subhuman form. The study has its great significance in terms of modern scientific innovation and experiments like artificial intelligence and digital humanism. The key lines from the novel will be chosen for the analysis and findings of the study. Also, the selected text would be evaluated and analyzed through the theoretical lens of postcolonial theory and cultural studies. The study would authenticate that homelessness, hybridity, and mimicry would be considered privileged and advantageous sites to contest and challenge the Euro-centric universal norms.

Keywords: Homelessness, Mimicry, Hybridity, Colonialism, Identity

Introduction

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (first published in 1818) has long been celebrated as a seminal work in Gothic literature. It highlights the themes of creation, monstrosity, and the consequences of the unchecked scientific ambition and lust of human beings. However, the current analysis through the postcolonial perspective unveils a rich tapestry of socio-political dimensions, especially when viewed and analyzed through Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of homelessness, split identity, hybridity, difference, and mimicry. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of *Unhomeliness* is pragmatically and critically discussed in *The Location of Culture* (1994). It is a critical and theoretical idea within the critical and analytical realm of postcolonial studies. It refers to a condition of being *at home* and *'not at home'* simultaneously, creating a sense of profound displacement, hybridity, and estrangement. Bhabha argues that the colonial encounter disrupts established notions of home and belonging, leading to a state of unhomeliness where individuals, cultures, and communities find themselves in a perpetual state of transition, complicity, hybridity, and negotiation. As Bhabha explains, "the 'unhomeliness' inherent in that rite of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation. The process of the domestic space becomes sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha, 1994, p.9). Furthermore, Bhabha connects unhomeliness with displacement and says "In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused" (ibid). In *Frankenstein*, unhomeliness resonates profoundly with the survival of the creature's existence and recognition of human society. His birth through scientific experimentation and abandoned by its creator, the monster grapples with a profound sense of unbelonging, homelessness, and identity crisis. Its existence and survival become emblematic or conundrum of a postcolonial subject's struggle for identity within a society that perceives it simultaneously as familiar, eccentric, unhuman, and alien. Similarly, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry and hybridity portrays the complex dynamics of cultural imitation, difference, and resistance. Mimicry involves the imitation of the colonizer's language, sport, social, legal, and cultural institutions by the colonized subject. Bhabha contends in his influential work *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* (1984) that "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1984, p.126). In the essay, he expresses how mimicry operates as a strategy employed by the colonized to gain social acceptance and recognition within the colonizer's framework. In *Frankenstein*, Bhabha's concept of 'mimicry' provides a complementary lens through which to analyze the monster's attempts to assimilate into human society as well as get approval of social and cultural recognition. (Niaz, 2023), The monster's mimicry is revealed in its desperate efforts to learn human arts and language, social customs, and societal norms. After the thorough investigation and critical analysis of *Frankenstein* through the postcolonial perspective, the study aims to uncover the layers of homelessness, hybridity, identity, and mimicry embedded in the text which contributes to a deeper understanding of the concerns of the undertaken study. (Syed, Samina, Shamsa, 2023), Nevertheless, the overarching objective of this study is to bridge the gap between traditional literary analysis and postcolonial theory, by enriching the deep comprehension of *Frankenstein* as a text that transcends its Gothic origins.

Research Objectives

1. To figure out how the monster in *Frankenstein* experiences a sense of homelessness and Identity crisis.
2. To foreground the monster's attempts to assimilate into human society, with a focus on understanding the complexities and

obstacles in its quest for acceptance and recognition.

Research Questions:

1. How does the monster in *Frankenstein* experience an identity crisis, strangeness, deformity, and homelessness?
2. In what ways does the monster try to mimic or conform in human society and what bitter challenges does it face in this process through its creator and environment?

Significance of the Study:

A textual analysis of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is significant as it focuses on the issues of unhomeliness, hybridity, lust for scientific ambitions, and mimicry. By employing Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of unhomeliness and mimicry, the study investigates the marginalized human deformity and oppressed existence of the creature and its monstrosity.

Problem Statement

While there has been a considerable rational and scientific investigation of Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), it suggests to research gap to address the concern of unhomeliness, identity crisis, and mimicry in the postcolonial perspective. This critical analysis of *Frankenstein* (1818) focuses on the intriguing ambition of man's quest and lust for human knowledge and scientific innovations.

Research Methodology:

The qualitative method of research is employed in this project. Employing textual analysis as a research method by Katherine Belsey, the researchers investigate unhomeliness and mimicry in *Frankenstein* (1818). Belsey writes "textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism" (Belsey, 2013, p.160). The researchers develop an understanding with a detailed reading of the text that interconnects with theoretical concepts. Belsey, furthermore highlights the role of research to contribute knowledge for further studies in the same field. The interpretation of the text from a theoretical perspective helps understand the multiplicity of meanings in different contexts. Ronald Barthes endorses the same point and articulates that "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author" (Belsey, 2013, 165). Thus, the textual reading of *Frankenstein* unveils the elements of unhomeliness and mimicry in the monster.

Literature Review

The researchers have contributed to the critical and theoretical findings in the dynamics of selected constructs of the study. In *Colonial Race-Making & Modernity's White Prometheans* (2004), Alan Lloyd Smith argues deeply with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through a critical race lens. In his study, he investigates the novel's intricate themes of race and power dynamics. Smith dissects the racialized representations within the novel, particularly focusing on the characterizations of Victor Frankenstein, the Creature, and other minor characters. One strength of the study lies in its meticulous analysis of the racial elements present in the text. Moreover, the research skillfully connects these racial dynamics to broader historical and cultural contexts, elucidating how Shelley's narrative intersects with colonial ideologies and Eurocentric perspectives. (Syed, Samina, Ishrat, 2023), Smith also navigates the complex interplay between race and power dynamics in the novel, highlighting how characters like Victor and Walton embody Eurocentric ideals of exploration, domination, and rationality. In a similar vein, the essay's dense prose and complex theoretical frameworks might require readers to possess a certain level of familiarity with critical race theory and postcolonial studies to fully appreciate its arguments. In *The Strange and Twisted Life of Frankenstein* (2018), Jill Lepore investigates the complex narrative of *Frankenstein.* One of the strengths of Lepore's essay lies in her exploration of the

novel's political and social dimensions. By tracing the ideological currents of Shelley's time, including the debates surrounding abolitionism and revolutionary fervor, Lepore contextualizes the novel within a broader historical context. She demonstrates how *Frankenstein* serves as a mirror to society's anxieties and aspirations, grappling with questions of power, responsibility, and the human condition. (Samina, Rabia,Syed, 2023), Moreover, Lepore's research of the racial subtext in *Frankenstein* adds a compelling layer to the interpretation of the text. Victor looks at the creature and reflects the "lifeless thing" at his feet, come to life: "I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs" (Shelley, 2012, p. 58). By drawing parallels between the creature's plight and the experiences of enslaved individuals, Lepore also sheds light on the novel's relevance to discussions of race, identity, and oppression. Her examination of racial imagery in stage productions and political discourse offers valuable insights into how *Frankenstein* has been appropriated and reinterpreted throughout history. Brendese explores *Frankenstein* within modern political theory. His study reveals how Shelley's narrative serves as a lens through which to examine the complex interplay between racial determinism and dynamism present in Euro-modernity. Frankenstein's actions, portrayed as a Promethean endeavor, symbolize the risks and monstrous outcomes of Euro-colonial projects of subject formation and race-making. (Aman, Muhammad, et. al. 2023), Brendese argues that these endeavors, often driven by White imperial masculinity, have profound implications for understanding modernity and liberal humanism as inherently implicated in the creation of monstrosities. (Thompson, 2024), Moreover, Brendese highlights how Euro-colonial aspirations intersect with the treatment of Indigenous peoples, portraying them as raw material for civilizational processes aimed at assimilation into Whiteness. Central to Brendese's analysis is the confrontation between Victor Frankenstein and his Creature, who rejects subservience and demands autonomy. Frankenstein's fear of creating "a race of devils" (Shelley, 2012, p. 203) underscores deeper anxieties about racial identity and power dynamics. Through this lens, the essay challenges readers to confront the uncomfortable truths about race and identity embedded within Euro-modernity. Dhruv Purabiya (2018) explores the themes of monstrosity and humanity in *Frankenstein* (2012). Purabiya studies various facets of the monster in the text, delving into its creation, its relationship with its creator Victor Frankenstein, and it's longing for love. Purabiya's research highlights the multifaceted nature of the term, encompassing not only physical deformity but also psychological and societal implications. (Soomro, Shayan, 2023), by examining the monster's origins, behavior, and interactions with other characters, the study sheds light on the complex nature of its monstrosity. Additionally, the author aptly connects Shelley's portrayal of the monster to broader themes such as societal norms, scientific advancements, and the human condition. Moreover, the researcher examines the humanity of the monster, arguing that its longing for love serves as a poignant reflection of human emotions and desires. Through textual evidence and critical analysis, Purabiya's research effectively demonstrates how Shelley imbues the monster with human-like qualities, challenging readers to reconsider their preconceptions of monstrosity. While the study provides a comprehensive examination of its subject matter, there are areas where further elaboration or discussion could enhance its depth. (Zhang, Papi, 2024), For instance, a more detailed analysis of Shelley's narrative techniques and stylistic choices could offer deeper insights into the portrayal of the monster and its significance within the novel.The detailed survey of the relevant literature has shown that ample research has

been done on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, but the present research has been carried out, simply to highlight unhomeliness, hybridity, and mimicry in the postcolonial perspective. The present research is aimed at exploring the factors responsible for these issues in the novel. Hence, the present study will address the gap by analyzing the text by focusing on the aspects of unhomeliness, hybridity, self and other, and mimicry in the monster's character.

Analysis and Discussion

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a literary classic celebrated for its gothic and scientific themes. The present research focuses on the concepts of unhomeliness and mimicry within the postcolonial perspective.

Unhomeliness in Frankenstein

The theoretical concept of unhomeliness and mimicry as articulated by the postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha, refers to the sense of not belonging, of being banished in one's own identity and space. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha discusses unhomeliness as "displacement of time and person, its defilement of culture and territory, refuses the ambition of any total theory of colonial oppression" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 41). In *Frankenstein*, unhomeliness takes centre stage as Victor Frankenstein creates his creature from the disparate body parts. It results in the birth of the ugly creature which is neither fully human nor fully monster. The creature's existence embodies the perplexed and complicated experience of being an outsider, both physically and culturally. Based on the concept of unhomeliness and mimicry the monster lives as an outsider in the society of his creator. Moreover, Victor's act of creation is a form of unhomeliness, disrupting the natural order and invoking a sense of alienation. He is marginalized in society, as he reflects, "I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on" (Shelley, 2012, p. 275). The creature, rejected by its creator and society, becomes a living manifestation of the consequences of this unhomeliness and ugliness. "I am an unfortunate and deserted creature; I look around, and I have no relation or friend upon earth. These amiable people to whom I go have never seen me, and know little of me. I am full of fears, for if I fail there, I am an outcast in the world forever" (Shelley, 2012, p. 159). Its constant search for acceptance and belonging mirrors the struggles of those marginalized in a postcolonial world. As the creature says, "I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?" (Shelley, 2012, p. 174) The monster reflects on his loneliness and how the rejection by society contributes to his sense of misery. In a desperate situation, the monster feels, "who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?" (Shelley, 2012, p. 152). Here, the monster questions his origin and purpose, grappling with fundamental questions about his identity. The monster expresses his perception of himself as an outcast, abandoned and rejected by society, leading to a crisis in his sense of self. Furthermore, in *Frankenstein*, this notion is particularly evident in the plight of the monster. Shelley intricately weaves a narrative that reflects the monster's yearning for acceptance and its inherent dislocation from both the natural and social orders. For instance, consider the monster's reflection on its existence as "I was dependent on none and related to none... I was wretched, helpless, and alone" (Shelley, 2012, p. 152). This poignant self-awareness mirrors the broader postcolonial theme of displacement, akin to the experiences of marginalized communities subjected to the disruptions brought about by colonial encounters. (Milosavljevic, Reynolds, 2024), The creature's journey through the picturesque landscapes of Europe becomes a metaphor for the colonial subject's navigation through an unfamiliar and hostile environment. The rejection and fear the creature encounters from humans make him question his place in the world, emphasizing his

sense of unhomeliness "I was dependent on none and related to none. The fateful day when I received life included my destruction. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a friend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous" (Shelley, 2012, p. 152). The researchers investigate that Mary Shelley has ingeniously woven the threads of unhomeliness, hybridity, and mimicry into the fabric of her narrative, inviting readers to confront the unsettling realities of colonialism. This reality has been observed in the monster- a creature born from the unholy amalgamation of stolen body parts as human lust for scientific innovation. The creature's existence is marked by a profound sense of displacement, and human deformity, wherever it tries to assimilate into the social human world, but is harshly rejected by human society as an alien and ugly creature. (Heinzmann, Koylu, Ehrsam, 2024), The study investigates how Victor Frankenstein driven by scientific curiosity and ambition, appropriates and reproduces body parts from various sources echoing the colonial practice of plundering resources from different regions of colonized countries. The monster's unhomeliness is rooted in its fragmented identity, a reflection of the dislocated societies that bore the brunt of colonial exploitation. The monster's physical appearance becomes a symbol of its unhomeliness and mimicry. Its grotesque amalgamation of body parts not only evokes horror but also serves as a metaphor for the dismemberment of indigenous cultures during the colonial era. The monster, like colonized nations, grapples with the loss of wholeness, a haunting reminder of the violence inherent in imperialistic pursuits.

Mimicry as a Colonial Paradox

Mimicry is seen as a behavior where the colonized or oppressed individuals start copying the actions, attitudes, language, and culture of the colonizers or oppressors. In the postcolonial context, mimicry refers to the imitation or adoption of the colonizer's culture and norms by the colonized. Bhabha views in his powerful work *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* "colonial mimicry is the desire for reformed recognizable other as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1984, p. 126). One of the questions of my contention is why the monster tries to mimic or assimilate into human society. He mimics as Bhabha (1984) puts it, to be "recognizable and performed" like that of the white – the so-called superior civilized white person. Bhabha's concept of mimicry, where colonized subjects imitate the culture of the colonizers, finds resonance in the creature's attempts to assimilate into human society. This narrative reflects the tension between the creature's mimicry and the rejection it faces, mirroring the complexities of cultural assimilation within a postcolonial context. Homi K. Bhabha's theory of mimicry as a colonial paradox suggests that while mimicry can be a strategy of survival and adaptation for the colonized, it also exposes the fragility and instability of the colonial power dynamic. Victor's creation of the monster exemplifies the paradox of mimicry. The creature, in its attempts to assimilate into human society, mirrors the actions, behaviors, and desires of its human counterparts. In his monologue, the creature utters, "I, the miserable and the abandoned, am an abortion, to be spurned at, and kicked, and trampled on" (Shelley, 2012, p. 275). The monster expresses his perception of himself as an outcast, abandoned and rejected by human society resulting in a crisis in his sense of selfhood and eccentric deformity. Yet, despite its mimicry, the creature remains an aberration, forever marked by its unnatural origins and ugly creation. This mimicry becomes a tragic reflection of the colonized subject's struggle to fit into a world that rejects its very existence as being an outcast subhuman creature. In *Frankenstein*, the monster engages in a form of mimicry as it observes and learns from humans in its quest for acceptance and recognition by societal

social, and cultural norms. (Bouwer, Lesterhuis, Smedt, et. al. 2023), Despite its grotesque appearance, the creature seeks to mimic human behavior, language, customs, habits, and behavioral norms as a strategy for survival, acceptance, and societal confirmation and recognition. The researcher has investigated that a tangible and objective instance is the creature's observation of the De Lacey family. By eavesdropping on their conversations and learning from their interactions, the creature engages in a form of mimicry to understand and adopt human customs to be adapted and acclimatized in human society. The study has investigated that the monster's mimicry is a survival strategy, an attempt to bridge the gap between its own identity and the dominant cultural norms and coded referentiality. However, this mimicry is marked by an inherent tension, as the monstrous creature can never fully assimilate and adapt to the recognizable human society due to its physical ugly appearance, monstrosity, eccentricity, deformity, and the prejudices its bitter experience during this process of acceptance and recognition by the human society (Stavans, Zadunaisku, 2023). The colonial mimicry within the undertaken study foregrounds the complexities and intricacies of adopting the colonizer's culture while being perpetually marked as the other and marginalized. Moreover, Victor Frankenstein himself can be seen as a colonial figure representing the Western civilization, engaging in a form of intellectual colonization through his scientific pursuits, as well as madness for innovation. The act of creating life in a laboratory has demonstrated the arrogance of colonial powers in their attempts to reshape and control foreign lands and peoples. The savage and ugly monster, in turn, becomes an exhibition of the unintended consequences and ethical dilemmas inherent in colonial endeavors.

Conclusion

After the comprehensive analysis of the selected and marked texts, the study concludes that Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* substantiates and authenticates the ever-intriguing concerns of unhomeliness, hybridity, split conscience, and mimicry in the theoretical lens of postcolonialism and cultural studies. The monster, a hideous creature born from the scientific lust and unbridled curiosity of Victor Frankenstein, becomes a poignant metaphor for the consequences of colonial exploitation and the struggles for identity, acceptance, and existence in its aftermath. Unhomeliness, hybridity, and mimicry overwhelmingly permeate the narrative, as well as echoing the displacement experienced by the colonized nations and peoples during the era of European expansion across the continents. The monster's fragmented identity and its perpetual inner and outer conflict with the Self and Others reflect the lasting impact of colonialism on the cultural, social, and individual levels. Mimicry, as an alternative survival strategy, underscores the tension between the colonizer and the colonized. The monster's attempts for recognition and assimilation into human society expose the inherent challenges and contradictions of adopting the dominant culture while remaining marked by difference. The narrative raises questions about the true nature of acceptance and belonging in a world shaped by colonial legacies. Furthermore, the power dynamics between Victor Frankenstein and his creation mirror the hierarchical relationships between colonizer and colonized. The creature's journey from innocence to violence symbolizes the transformative and often destructive consequences of colonial oppression and suppression. The acquisition of knowledge and language skills by the monster reflects the intricacies and complexities of colonial education, where the dissemination of dominant ideas is both a tool of empowerment and a source of disillusionment. Moreover, the study explores the colonial backdrop of the

novel and also provides a fertile ground for exploring the themes of, ethnicity, identity, ambivalence, alterity, hybridity, race, and otherness. The creature's odious and eccentric physical appearance, described as "yellow skin" and "watery eyes," carries racial and ethnic undertones that align with the colonial-era perceptions of non-European peoples. After the comprehensive investigation and analysis of the chosen texts from the novel, the study concludes that the racial biases and dehumanization of the marginalized and others are deeply embedded in the colonial and imperial discourses. Furthermore, the novel's setting – from the icy landscapes of the Arctic to the exotic locales where Victor collects his materials – reflects the colonial fascination with the unknown and the conquest of uncharted territories. The exploration narrative intertwines with Victor's scientific pursuits, drawing parallels between the blind quest for scientific knowledge and the colonial quest for dominance of the empty spaces across the globe.

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