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A Fair Exotic: Fear and Mistrust of the Colonized Other in *Frankenstein*

Mary Shelley as a young girl, loved to dress up in oriental costumes, as her friends reminisced. That fact indicates she was fascinated by the orient, rather than the surmise that George Byron and Percy Shelley influenced her with their love of the orient. The nineteenth century was a great age of exploration, discovery and imperialism. Percy's *The Revolt of Islam* was written at the same time as Mary's *Frankenstein*, which are compared as texts with affinities. However, there is one aspect of Mary's novel that is neglected, which will be examined in this essay.

There are extensive analyses of psycho-biographical factors that led a nineteen-year-old girl to write such a "monstrous" novel, because Mary's position in English literary history is unique, as the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft and as the wife of Percy Shelley. Accordingly, there are extensive analyses in light of the pregnancies, miscarriages, and disasters that befell Mary, that induced her to create such a Gothic novel, but there is one character in this story about the loneliest figure in English fiction, who is not lonely or sad; Safie has been compared to Eve, Mary Wollstonecraft, and other major characters, Caroline, Elizabeth and Justine, but she needs to be examined as a character in her own right, instead of an appendage of others. The novel has themes of exploration and voyages into the orient, but there is only one character who is non-western. We will see how the character of Safie ties up with the themes, and how as the innermost layer of the narrative circles, her story provides a replication, but also a variation from other themes in *Frankenstein*.

In the layers of narratives, Safie's story occurs in the middle, repeating the familial patterns that led critics to do research on Mary's unhappy childhood, tumultuous life with Percy, miscarriages and suicides. Much is made of her journal entry that she dreamed that her dead infant was revived, which ties up with Frankenstein's dream, but there are two connected themes that could be examined. All the explorers in the novel are over-reachers and like Prometheus they are punished. The only explorer who is not punished is the one who reverses their journey and their outcomes. Safie is the only non-western character except her Arab mother and her Turkish father; although these two characters are hardly mentioned, the critics' response to them is remarkable. Safie's mother is viewed as Mary Wollstonecraft, Caroline Beaufort and Madame Moritz. These biographical details tend to eclipse one factor: these characters need to be studied in their own right.

Safie disappears as suddenly from the tale as she appears. Her story, like all the concentric circles of the plot, is repetitive. Many events and characters in Safie's story resemble others, from the beginning. Even a character slightly mentioned, sacrifices his finances to unite the woman he loves with her lover. Safie's story is more complex and we can examine the resemblances in the plots to see how it fits in with the schemes, yet varies, how hers is the only story that ends with a modicum of happiness.

Another reason why Safie is eclipsed is because of the persistent pattern in the novel of *Paradise Lost*, which suggests that the monster, like Satan, spies on Felix and Safie as Adam and Eve. However, there are

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certain important links in the theme, the undercurrent that lies throughout the novel: fear and mistrust of the colonized other. Thus, we need to look at the De Lacey family in isolation. The De Lacey family is very like all the others. Walton has a sister called Margaret. Felix has a sister called Agatha. Frankenstein has a cousin, an adopted sister who becomes his wife. This thematic link provides a kind of order, a pattern in a novel death-ridden and haunted by guilt. Safie's story is outstanding because it is a story that ends happily.

What special quality does Safie possess in order to achieve this? Is it beauty? In a novel in which everyone is aristocratic, sophisticated and beautiful, the monster strikes a peculiarly jarring note. His very first perception of female beauty is Safie's. Safie teaches him about love and rouses in him the desire to have a partner for himself. The monster realizes that the greatest fulfillment that a family can experience is through the union of two heterosexual lovers.

This is the very first couple that the monster sees and thus begins his initiation into adulthood and socializing process. He is fascinated by Safie's beauty, and she serves as a useful fool to him in the learning process. This learning process is close to the process of colonization, that serves as a continuous metaphor throughout the story.

Critics have pointed out the racist terms yellow and black—hideous colors in the monster's makeup that account for all the violence and rejection that he faces. Safie is accepted and loved, even though she is an outsider, but the monster is not; the complex themes of beauty, money and oppression tie up with this rejection theme. The clue can be found in the description of Elizabeth Lavenza, the daughter of an Italian revolutionary. Elizabeth's blue eyes and blondness present a perfect contrast to the monster's yellow eyes and black hair. We know that a "foreigner," an Italian is acceptable as long as she is beautiful. She is received into the bosom of the family and promised as heaven's last best gift to Victor. The female child, abandoned/deserted/betrayed or left by the dying or treacherous father, such as Caroline, Justine or Safie, for a while reinstated into an adoptive family but ultimately, betrayed or killed, is that repetitive pattern that we find in Elizabeth's story. It becomes clear that women are victims in this story, just like they never tell their stories; they are not only reduced to death but silence too.

We know Safie's story through the monster's report, and we never read her letters. Her letters do not serve any purpose, since Walton sees the gigantic creature with his own eyes before he hears Victor's tale. However, she is the other female character like Caroline, Justine and Elizabeth, who may be strong, courageous, stoic and articulate, but never given a chance to speak for herself.

If we look at the hazardous journey that she undergoes, her flights, her adventures, we know that she is a woman on a quest, that turns out to be successful, in contrast to the men who end up as losers. Is it because Safie, on a noble mission as opposed to these self-centered over-reachers, succeeds and others cannot because they are poisoned by the sin of ambition?

It is easy to view Safie as a brave woman who liberates herself. The phrase, "immured within the walls of a harem, allowed only to occupy

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herself with infantile amusements” was repugnant to Safie and like Rousseau announcing his battle cry to shake off one’s chains, she takes up a worthy cause, that of liberating herself. She sets herself free and brings comfort to the cottage with money and help from servants.

There is one element that Safie carries from the east that is almost divine in its sweetness. Her music shows that she comes from a cultivated, civilized race that existed before Christianity had its hold on humankind. When the monster claims that he was a quicker, smarter learner than Safie, we remember that Safie has to unlearn another language and culture in order to acculturate herself with the westerners. Her problem is that of the bilingual learner instead of the monster whose mind is a blank page. These facts help us to construct Safie’s lost story.

Since Frankenstein is unimpressed by the Monster’s intelligence, it is perhaps good to look at the eloquence or non articulateness of women characters in the story. Elizabeth spiritedly defends Justine and had Justine not been browbeaten into confessing a crime that she did not commit, she might have been acquitted. However, Safie is dumb, metaphorically, because she does not speak the language her lover speaks. Yet she manages, through enterprise, to reach her destination. She finds out from letters where her lover lives, and engages a woman servant who speaks both her language as well as Italian to bring her to the cottage. Safie’s dumbness does not deter her from sending non verbal love messages to Felix. There are several interpreters that she depends on: her father and another who knows her language and transcribes her love-letters to Felix. When her servant dies, she communicates to her guide the name of the place that De Lacey’s reside in; Safie brings love and happiness, but also wealth and comfort.

It is at this moment that Volney’s *Ruins of the Empire* gains significance. The monster learns from Volney that without wealth and lineage, a person is nothing. Safie’s father is wealthy and her mother is a Christian Arab who passes on to her daughter ideas that constitute her education. Two references to the slothful nature of the Asiatic and the infantile pursuits of harem inmates indicate Mary’s views and prejudices about the east. Influenced by her mother’s treatise, *A Vindication of Rights of Women*, she oversimplified her views of the orient, yet the only person who emerges as a victor in the novel is Safie. Is it because she is educated, intelligent, cultured and beautiful and as the antithesis to all the other passive domestic angels like Caroline, Elizabeth and Justine, she wins simply because she is the other, the unknown oriental figure in whose victory, in defying her father and embracing western liberal values, the feminist in Mary Shelley wanted to achieve a victory? This may be the obvious explanation, but the answer is not so simple or pleasing.

The De Lacey’s had both wealth and lineage. It is what distinguishes them from the rough villagers and the monster notices it. The family’s caring and concerned attitude teaches the monster not to steal their food. What ensues is the process of being civilized. This is the second insight he has into humans; the first is an unfortunate one when he is beaten with sticks and stones. He emphatically claims that he remains good like Adam until he is badly treated and becomes Satan. Echoes from *Paradise*

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Lost tend to obscure one undercurrent that runs throughout the novel—the parallel theme of master and slave.

We may assume Safie is a concubine or slave who is treated well and thus integrated into society. The monster is beaten and rejected, and unloved, uncared for, becomes vengeful and vindictive. Here the slave master motif becomes prominent, culminating in the arrogant declaration of the monster: “Obey slave for I am thy master!”

Identity is remarkably fluid in this novel and one being overflows into another, Elizabeth-Justine, Henry-Victor, Walton-Frankenstein, Caroline-Elizabeth or even Monster-Safie. The pursuer and the pursued, Victor and the monster, almost become caricatures of each other. Each is isolated, haunted, destitute and ridden by guilt and horror; it may point to the hidden guilt of the colonizer who braves new worlds only to enslave and displace the native inhabitants. That is shown clearly when the monster weeps over the fate of the Native Americans. And like Columbus who began his voyage westward, which led to ruin and massacre, the explorer’s guilt seems to form an undercurrent in the novel.

There is a powerful current of mistrust, fear of the unknown and the colonized other in the novel. Safie, beautiful, loyal and devoted is forced to make a choice between her father and her lover. She has to betray her father just as her father had betrayed Felix. Throughout the chapters she is alluded to as the Sweet Arabian that emphasizes her otherness. For her, the motive may not have been pure loyalty and honesty. Her father, delivered by Felix, should have kept his promise to Felix. Felix claims that his motives were honourable and he would have done his duty irrespective of marriage with Safie, but certain events need to be examined closely.

Is Safie’s father, a desperate man, really to blame for using his daughter, when he faces death? His story is never told from his point of view, and that seems to point at a gap, a missing text. The reason why Felix decided to stand up for him is because he is unjustly condemned for his race and religion. That fact points to the injustices and prejudices of western society, especially the greed for the Turk’s wealth that leads to this condemnation. Why would the Turk wish to marry his daughter to the member of a race that has unjustly oppressed him? Why is so little made of this unjust condemnation when many pages are crowded with the question of whether Justine will get acquitted or not?

In a novel where the self flows into the other constantly, the monster could be the mirror image of Safie or vice versa. Safie does in a major way what the monster tries to do in secret: lighten the load of the cottagers. The monster carries wood and water for the De Laceys and as an unseen good angel, is praised. Safie, beautiful as an angel, contributes to their happiness in a material as well as spiritual way.

If we regard Safie as an extension of the monster, we can analyze the colonial element in a new way. It was the loot from the orient that enriched the coffers of England. Although Safie reverses the journey of Clerval and Walton—those who try to sail eastward and fail in their ventures, she is the one who succeeds. She not only brings wealth to the cottagers because she retrieves her mother’s jewels but also because she spreads happiness in the cottage, so she is bringer of emotional bliss as well as ma-

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terial comfort. That she profits from this enterprise is evident because she learns a new language and customs and lives a more fulfilled life in the open than being a prisoner of the harem. She is the successfully colonized creature who becomes integrated, not only into the De Lacey family, but also to western society.

Unfortunately, her story has no utopian happy ending that in a novel full of catastrophes seems to introduce a kind of interlude where, for a while there seems to be Edenic bliss. It is the place where the repetitive pattern can come to a stop, because hers is the lone story of success as compared to Frankenstein's, Walton's or Clerval's. When she exits from the novel, it is because she has educated the monster already.

Yet, her flight from the cottage and the plot indicate that this is not a neat ending to her tale. In fact, the monster who becomes an extended self of her as a colonized being, seems to enact one very crucial role on her behalf. When he is driven out violently, we see an undercurrent of hostility being enacted against the other, the being who fits nowhere.

We see that the wretched and enslaved creatures are rejected simply because their appearance is so different that they appear to be monsters. And the feeling of hostility and rejection only nurtures hatred and anger and finally violence. The monster acquires the tools of learning only to turn them against his oppressor, just as the colonized, being educated in the language of the masters, finally learn to rebel against them, this time strengthened by the very weapons that the masters controlled them with.

In this context, we see what part language plays in Safie's story. She falls in love with Felix at first sight and language is not necessary for her to communicate at that stage. Her brilliant black eyes convey the silent message of love, just as the oriental airs that she sings to the old man, seem pleasing to the ear of the De Laceys and the eavesdropping monster. Later, her father and an old servant write her letters for her to Felix. Her maid servant like many other mothers that suddenly die in the novel, manages to convey to Safie's guide the name of her destination, the region where the De Laceys are staying, so Safie is safely brought there. Language is a barrier, in Safie's case as well as in the monster's but she surmounts it successfully. First with gestures, and then with lessons she learns to communicate with them and thus educate the monster at second hand.

Once her purpose is served, she exits from the story and then is heard no more except when the letters are mentioned. She is not only a convenient device but also the turning point in the narrative where bad relationships and rejections come to rest on a story where, as a contrast we find happiness and fulfilment. And one may say that a different movement begins here when we again start to move to the borders of the narrative instead of being at the centre of the concentric circles. That would explain everything. To the reader's surprise, we find that it does not.

Safie is reinstated, cherished, accepted and loved. She is given a better life pursuing learning and domestic bliss than playing infantile games in a harem. Mary, influenced by her mother's famous treatise, perhaps thought of the harem in a prejudiced way. However, Safie is not merely the monster's unwitting educator but a projection of himself, especially in

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a novel that continuously re-enacts, in infinite combinations, the master-slave, surrogate mother, incestuous spouse, rejecting parent, monster child allegory. When the monster says that I was only vindictive when people rejected me in spite of my good deeds, we can interpret this as not Satan's anguished cry in hell but as the difficult dynamics between the slave and master, so dependent on each other and the colonization that led to such unequal relationships. Safie, educated and acclimatized to western ways is not a failure. Similarly, the monster's claim that he might have been different had he been treated kindly is also a suggestion that the many riots, revolts and massacres that occurred in colonies may hint at this. It is impossible to ignore the many allusions to slavery, in spite of the references to *Paradise Lost* and Mary's turbulent life that merely cloud the issue.

Also we see through the monster hostility and rejection being enacted against Safie. Try hard as she might, she will never be one of them! And this is made clear, not literally but symbolically, when they reject the monster. Since Safie is the Monster's other self, this is an undercurrent of rejection and mistrust made manifest in the symbolic as well as literal expulsion of the monster by his "Protectors" as he calls them.

The term protector is significant. It is the monster who protects them by performing difficult tasks for them. Hard manual labor, like snow-shovelling, drawing well-water and chopping wood were tasks carried out by slaves for their masters, the aristocrats who would rather not soil their smooth hands by doing such tasks. Yet they are his protectors! Is it because they teach him language and communication, learning about civilization, initiation into adult sexuality and above all, being able to learn the master's discourse by learning to read? We remember that Mary Shelley, a voracious reader was almost a self taught scholar. She learned from oppression of women in the oriental harem from her mother's treatise on *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Inspired by that, she wrote Safie's story as a dubious story of success; as the woman who managed to liberate herself from the harem, from being the plaything of a Pasha. However, we learn her story at second-hand, even third-hand because Felix, and then the monster tells her story. However, if she is to be free, she cannot be rejected by her "protectors" who take her in as a stranger, teach her their language and custom, and try to integrate her into their home. She brings a fortune that softens their lot, much like the oriental treasure that is looted by colonizers, but it is an exchange that mutually benefits everyone. The monster, however, like a slave, remains outside the periphery and cannot be drawn in, because his appearance inspires horror and hostility. So the monster is Safie's other self against whom rejection and expulsion are enacted.

The explorers and adventurers are enterprising and bold, ready to venture forth into a brave new world, staking all they have, and thinking nothing of danger. Yet their enterprises fail. Frankenstein himself discourages and inspires them, alternatively. We find that here we must examine Frankenstein's motive thoroughly.

It is significant that Frankenstein dismisses the woman monster before she is created. He thinks she will be ten times more malicious than the male monster. What she will do when she is born, including giving birth to a monstrous race, a monstrous race which may clearly recall coloniz-

ers who characterised the natives as savages, cannibal and man-eating monsters. He clearly fails to see that his monster is intelligent and eloquent. The female one he rejects is not yet born and he destroys her, in an act culminating in a climax in this novel about rejecting parents and bad parenting and the result thereof. All this is a result of distrust of the other, the unknown and unfamiliar. More than Mary's fear of rejecting parents, death due to childbirth, miscarriage and infant deaths is at work here.

We see this same fear reflected in Walton and Clerval, especially the former. When Frankenstein inspires Walton's crew to sail beyond the seas and not give up, he rallies them, up to a point but deep down, in his heart, there is the mistrust and lack of faith in himself, not due perhaps so much as a fear of danger, but fear of the unknown, which stems from a kind of mistrust of the colonized other, who, like Frankenstein's monster, kill or eat them. It is not so much the danger but the fear of failure that drives him to give up. We notice that there are practical reasons for the failure, like the revolt of the crew, the icebergs. Clerval's venture never materializes because the monster kills him. But there is at a deeper level a kind of psychological reason that again points to bad parenting in the novel.

We notice that all three are rebels: Frankenstein, Walton and Clerval. It is often the father who is responsible for the failure and tragedy. If Frankenstein's father had not spoken slightly of Cornelius Agrippa, he would never have been egged on to read him and thus create the monster. Walton had deeply resented his father's denying him a seafaring life. Clerval finally manages to bring his father around, but he is killed because of the fateful intervention of Frankenstein's father who insists that Clerval must accompany Victor. Had that command not been obeyed, he might have gone to the east.

One can oversimplify by saying that the novel is built on a series of failures of ventures. That it is about bad parenting, inadequate fathers, and monstrous, murderous children. That it is a cathartic process for the author who felt guilt at being the cause of her mother's death as well as being perhaps an unhappy, illegitimate mother. The theme of monstrous birth, murder and infanticide runs throughout the novel. And true to the pattern, even the old blind man fails to speak for the monster although the mishap is more accidental than intentional. But he also in a way conforms to the theme of inadequate parents. Added to this however, is that theme of the mistrust that runs as a powerful current throughout the novel. Safie disappears, but her letters resurface. Quite uselessly as proof because Walton had seen the monster even before he heard Victor's story, thereby receiving proof enough of the tale of hideous progeny. And Mary justifies herself in her long introduction to the novel. All these reasons however, obfuscate one crucial issue: in a novel where there is doubt, mistrust and reversal of roles between self and other, there is no doubt that the catastrophes stem from this inherent lack of trust, and thus render this tale of voyages and explorations one about abysmal failure.