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BLACK MIRROR; OR, THE MODERN FRANKENSTEIN: DEPICTION OF SHELLY'S MONSTER IN "BE RIGHT BACK"

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Abstract:

The paper aims do a comparative study of Charlie Brooker's TV series Black Mirror, focusing on the episode "Be Right Back" and Mary Shelly's Frankenstein on how scientific advancement and horrors of technology can turn into a dystopian nightmare. Black Mirror shatters the utopian dream of how technology will unite us. Mary Shelly put a start to expose the horrors of scientific progress. Now, almost two centuries later Black Mirror presents a bleak picture about the horrors of technology. It does not place itself in the past or future like most sci-fi works. Like Frankenstein, it places itself in a possible present, a possible parallel universe with advanced technology. While each episode presents individual themes, the frame narrative of technology influencing human lives, often with heavy repercussions, remains constant. The paper attempts to look at the point of parallelism between the two mediums, Frankenstein and Black Mirror's 'Be Right Back' which is the creation itself and the negative reaction to creation from a post-human lens.

Keywords: Frankenstein, Black mirror, Technology, Post humanism

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However, the prescience of Milton's words holds true, exactly 200 years after Shelley unleashed her monster on paper. It is a foreshadowing of the further events of the story where Shelly attributes the responsibility of creation to the creator. In this day and age of artificial intelligence and humanoid citizenship, how far away are we from witnessing a mass outcry from virtual Frankenstein's? How far away are we from witnessing a story of vengeance turning into real stories of vengeance? The name Frankenstein has by now become "a cultural shorthand for science out of control" and "the experiment-gone-wrong" (Lederer and Ratzan 463,464) Technological and cultural anxieties that accompany the new age are not just products of the one-time frame. The fear of scientific advancement has been floating around for centuries and forewarning have been delivered in both literary and artistic forms.

However, as the history of humankind has shown as time and time again, where there is slavery, there is oppression. And where there is oppression, there will (and should) inevitably be rebellion. " meditated largely on androids used as slave labor off-world, with their violent rebellion leading to a plethora of Voight-Kampff tests and mass executions.

Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Orange, a work of hypertext electronic literature, takes forward Frankenstein's frame narrative where Mary Shelly herself creates a female monster, but her construction itself is both her liberation and anguish. The recurring theme of creations having a distinct opinion and identity recurs in these works. Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan's HBO magnum opus "West world" deals with an even more brutal rebellion by robots, with them uniting against mankind to break out of their cages. Possessed of humanity, intelligence, emotions and even memory and devoid of human failings such as physical exhaustion, is it really far-fetched to fear a world where our monsters lay us to waste?

Charlie Brooker's Be Right Back, a part of his Black Mirror anthology, does not attempt to answer these questions. Instead, it takes a nuanced look at how humankind and its unique potboilers of idiosyncratic emotions can never be recreated by a set of codes and binary 1-2s, no matter how earnest the attempt is. Be Right Back looks at androids employed to "love" humans - an altogether scarier interpretation of "labor of love". Yet, minus the human failings, this robot loves perfectly. It loves flawlessly. It is indeed the perfect companion, the perfect soul mate. Is it only failing? Perfection.

Be Right Back explores how the perfect soul mate, isn't really a perfect soul mate but is that heady concoction of inexplicable and intangibles. In a world of binary ones and twos and blacks and whites, in the world of Siris and Cortana, imperfection doesn't exist. They are perfect lovers, laborers, planners, and monsters. In Be Right Back, the monster was harmless. It could be hidden in the attic. In Rihanna's verse, the monster could be hidden under the bed. But where does one hide a perfectly intelligent, perfectly precise, perfectly engineered perfectly perfect monster? Or more pertinently, where does one hide from them? According to Brian Stableford, the Frankenstein story has become "a central myth of the kind of

technophobia which argues that modern man is indeed doomed to be destroyed by his own artifacts (and that such a fate, however tragic, is not undeserved)" (9). This is the central component of concurrence that connects Charlie Brooker's Black Mirror to Mary Shelly's Frankenstein.

Technology in Black Mirror is as Elizabeth Gaskell said, "a monster of many human qualities, ungifted with a soul." Be Right Back deals with the theme of loneliness and companionship, When Ash Starmer, Martha's boyfriend dies in a car accident Martha is left shattered. After the realization that she's pregnant, acute loneliness drives Martha to take the technological leap. She first texts to a cyber persona of Ash molded by his public social media profile. As one step leads to another the technology is given access to all of Ash's private emails and videos, leading to the creation of a virtual Ash who can assess the patterns and talk. The final part of the Frankenstein a journey is the creation itself when Ash gets a synthetic physical form. Even though Martha finds solace in the android's arms for some time, we understand her growing dissatisfaction with it. The android can only mimic but cannot substitute her dead boyfriend. While Frankenstein is repulsed by the hideousness of the monster, Martha is repulsed by the unnaturalness of it.

Even then, as Victor Martha refuses to tell anyone about the presence of the new Ash. She does not want him taken away either does she want to completely accept him. Martha after the initial relief is now torn between her mind unable to accept the android figure and yet she cannot let him go. She grows discontent with it and orders it out of her bedroom when the new Ash complies it angers her even more as she says "No! Ash would argue over that. He wouldn't just leave the room because I ordered him to." Here starts the distinction between the real Ash and the new Android Ash. She slowly starts to realize that the human side of the real Ash cannot be replaced. The figure before her is just a predictable simulacrum of the Ash's profile. Martha bursts out saying "You are not enough of him! You are nothing! You are nothing." (Brooker.)

If unearthly ugliness of the monster disgusted Frankenstein, the unearthly demeanor of the creature displeased Martha. The outrage both of them felt was at the dissimilitude between the human and the creation. What is most strange here is that the Creature is a sleeping beauty until its orgasmic stirring rouses Frankenstein to recognize the monstrosity before him. (Sherwin. 885) Similarly, Martha starts distancing herself from the humanoid Ash only after it attains a physical form.

Martha brings new Ash to the cliff and asks him to jump. The creature reasons that " I(real Ash) never expressed suicidal thoughts or self-harm." Martha responds, " Yeah, well, you aren't you, are you." The new Ash finds it difficult to process that sentence. She continues and says "You are just a few ripples of you. There is no history to you. By this point, she has stopped addressing him as Ash. She clearly sees them as two entities- one, her husband who

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died and the other, just an incomplete image of him. While Martha points out that the real Ash would have scared and crying, the Android Ash learns quickly and starts pleading for his life. The ability of technology to learn and mimic humans resonates with the Shelly in an idea of the advanced creature capable of learning human ways.

The monster leans English by reading Milton. The new Humanoid Ash sexually satisfies Martha in bed by learning everything from internet porn sites. These beings thus display a superior consciousness that can learn and adapt to the environment they are placed under. By now wholly the Creature's creature, he must be considered a florid psychotic, pursuing the naked form of his desire in fantastic nowhere that is his own. (Sherwin. 886) The new Ash in Black Mirror does not have the dominating presence of the monster. Rather, it is taught to be subjugated by humans. Martha orders it to hit her and it does not obey her. While the dominant freewill of Frankenstein's monster that led to a series of destructive events is eliminated in this narrative, this subjugated Android which is not a reflection of the real human Ash frustrates Martha. This makes us probe the question of where there really exists a middle ground for these creations to satisfy their human creators and retain their free will.

The desire of Frankenstein's monster for sexual pleasure contrasts with Ash's lack of any sexual emotion. The humanoid is built only to satisfy its administrator. It can turn his erection on and off at any point. Thus, the creation in Be Right Back appears to be an inverse of the Frankenstein's Monster where all its dominant traits are toned down to please the creator. This absence of free will makes it less human and hence unacceptable to Martha.

Black Mirror shatters the utopian dream of how technology will unite us. Mary Shelly put a start to expose the horrors of scientific progress. Now, almost two centuries later Black Mirror presents a bleak picture about the horrors of technology. It does not place itself in the past or future like most sci-fi works. Like Frankenstein, it places itself in a very possible present, a possible parallel universe with advanced technology. While each episode presents individual themes, the frame narrative of technology influencing human lives, often with heavy repercussions, remains constant. Yet, it also implicitly asks us to reflect on how we use technology and whether we might choose to use it differently. (Artt)

The story of Frankenstein is often interpreted and mobilized as a powerful and popular symbol of concerns over the risks and dangers of science, progressive modernity, and its ensuing technological creations. (Hammond. 181) Shelly with her visionary dystopian tale shook her audience awake demonizing technology. 200 years from now, Black Mirror, the British science fiction anthology television series created by Charlie Brooker explores the unanticipated consequences of new technologies. Frankenstein presents a creation as a catastrophe as Victor Frankenstein ventures into unchartered waters with his technology.

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That push to achieve something more is constantly seen in Black Mirror. In Be Right back, Martha is first able to access Ash's texts through a technological simulacrum, then his voice. When that becomes inadequate technology is pushed further to create a synthetic life-like replica of ash. In Archangel, the second episode of the fourth season a protective mother Marie Sambrell signs her daughter up for a neural implant to track her location, but it does not stop there. Marie is given access to her daughter's immediate sight letting her see everything her daughter sees on a tablet. Black Museum, the sixth episode of the fourth series, gives a face to be held responsible for technology through the character of Rolo Haynes, a neurological research recruiter a Frankenstein- like figure responsible for many creations. The show finally gives the audience a face to blame for technology, a psychopathic genius.

(Parham) Black Mirror takes forward Shelly's prophetic dream of technological advancement into the postmodern world and gives it a Shelly-an ending, that which makes the readers or audience question the need for scientific advancement at the cost of environmental detachment.

Black Mirror shows horror as a postscript of creation. Victor's narrative is full of nostalgia and longing for a happier time. His narrative after his creation shifts tone into a scarier reality of his catastrophic creation. In Be Right Back Ash is deeply buried inside his phone and his presence on social media shapes the persona of the artificial Ash.

Martha similarly hopes to encounter her dead husband but is saddened by the insufficiency of the new creation to match Ash. She cannot destroy him nor can she accept him, hence she sends him to the attic. As Artt points out Black Mirror's ambivalence towards technology is similar to Frankenstein's ambivalent attitude towards science. Does scientific advancement help humanity? Is it a bane or a boon? In the episode 'Black Museum', the comatose wife, Carrie's consciousness is transferred to her husband Jack's brain. This action leads to the gradual decrease in the affection they both had for each other with Carrie now invading his privacy completely.

Marry Shelly's Frankenstein was among the first to show instances of intelligent dialogue between the creator and the non-human creation. Black Mirror similarly shows intelligent dialogue between technology and humans. While a show like HBO's West world focuses on androids fighting back similar to the Shakespearean idea of Caliban telling Prospero "You taught me language: and my profit don't. The delicately sly script of "Be Right Back" notes the cruelty of situation as we realize that the real reason why Martha's daughter wants to visit her artificial dad (who never eats anything) is a ruse so she can have a second piece of birthday cake. (Winner)

The show mirrors two major prophetic concerns of Shelly. First, the fear of technological advancements where artificial humanoids being part of human society end up in widening the gap between what is human and what is not making androids slaves to the humanity it is destined to serve. Human's selfish nature using technology as a foil for their aims and wishes. A consistent theme in Shelly's Frankenstein is the inescapability of the monster. He is ever present and can make disastrous appearances at any point. Black Mirror follows the same structure of impending doom that can wreak havoc in the lives of its characters at any point. There is an air of uncertainty and horror that follows the technological advancements. The show is not about the creator nor is it about the technology. It is about how technology manipulates the people and their emotions. Similar to how Frankenstein is as much about the monster as it is about the people. Shelly demonstrated how the human-monster interaction will invariably have repercussions.

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