Seeds of Simulations in Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley

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Human imagination and literature are the closest mates, who in their turn can do miracles. Literature is the space where imagination has no check. That is a reason, many modern scientific inventions see their initial accomplishment in literature. In the modern times we have humanoid robots, which were conceived in the form of Monsters in literature way before science made a breakthrough. In twentieth century, science, literature, media, and human society at large has been taken over by simulations. Simulations is a concept developed by Jean Baudrillard in his book Simulacra and Simulations. The concept of simulation is being used extensively in movies in the form of VFX. This research paper argues that the seed of simulation were also sown by the literature as early as 1800. In this context this research paper will study Mary Shelley's work Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus.

Keywords: Simulation, Prometheus, Postmodernism, VFX

1. INTRODUCTION

Simulation is a concept in which scientist imitate or copy the reality and transform that into a machine which is supposed to work more efficiently. In recent time Artificial Intelligence (AI) is leading the way to create simulators for performing different tasks in human societies. A simulator is:

A set of instructions, a model needs some agent capable of obeying the instructions and generating behaviour. We call such an agent a simulator. Thus, a simulator is any computation system (such as a single processor, a processor network, the human mind, or more abstractly an algorithm), capable of executing a model to generate its behaviour. A simulator is typically specified at a high level since it is a system that we design intentionally to be synthesized from components that are off-the-shelf and well-understood. (Theory of Modelling and Simulation 32)

Beyond scientific usages and adaption of the concept of simulation, this concept was adapted by a French theorist, Jean Baudrillard in his book Simulations and Simulacra. Jean Baudrillard does not deal with the concept of Simulation in scientific terms but, employees this concept to understand the socio-political side of human society. He uses the concept of simulation to understand the functioning of postmodern society. Simulations is concept made famous by Jean Baudrillard, through his book, Simulacra and Simulations published in 1994. In this book, Jean Baudrillard discusses the idea of reality in postmodern society. He discusses various stages of simulation; the first stage of simulation is mere copying or duplicating the original. In this case, there is an obvious difference between the original and copied versions. An example of this act of simulation would be stone carving. The next stage of simulation is where the boundary between original and duplicate is slightly blurred but it

still exists, an example of this would be digital photography. The third stage of simulation is one where in the original is absent. An example of third stage of simulation is advanced technological VFX's or 3D movies. In the last stage of simulation, the real is absent, and one only experiences the simulations, and the reality transforms into hyperreality. In the postmodern studies, Hyperreality and Simulations are dominant concepts, which have influenced, the world of movies and art. Simulations of the postmodern times, scares Baudrillard to a great extent. He finds it very challenging for the people in postmodern age to find truth. Simulations not only, impact the real but evade the notion of right and wrong or truth or falsehood. As per Baudrillard's example, a person feigning/dissimulating a disease is acceptable, because it is easy to find truth in it, in dissimulation, a person can dissimulate a disease but not the symptoms of disease, however in simulations, a person not only fakes a disease but also develops symptoms of the disease, leaving even science in utter confusion, because science or medicine are supposed to treat right symptoms not the simulated symptoms. The simulations work at the cultural level also, as per Baudrillard, He cites two examples in this regard, the example of 'Watergate scandal', and the 'Disney land'. In the former case Baudrillard says that Watergate scandal is not a scandal, but hiding the shortcomings and problems of capitalism, in the back of Watergate is a scandal. Here again, the real is hidden or covered from the scene and people are not allowed to see the truth. In case of 'Disney Land', Baudrillard says that it is second order simulations, and people are made to realise that Disney Land is simulation and everything other than that is real. So, simulations work at both fronts, at one place it considers simulations as real to hide reality and at other place it, considers simulation as simulation to hide the reality. This paper is not intended to highlight the complications of simulations, rather trace the acts of simulations in a novel written as early as 1800.

MAIN TEXT

Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus is a famous novel written by Mary Shelly which was published first in 1818. This theme of this novel revolves around the changing scientific temperament of the early nineteenth century European societies. Frankenstein deals with the simulation of man or to put plain words creation of life on earth, creation of being similar to man. Scientist have always been attracted to find the process of creation of life, something that has evaded scientists. Since scientist could not decode the process of creation of life and could not create life, or a being similar to man, eventually ended up in developing a copy of human being in the for robots, whose finest version would be simulation, in the form of humanoid robots. Frankenstein deals with this process and sows the seeds of simulation as early as 19th century. In the novel Frankenstein Victor, the protagonist of novel is presented as a scientist having keen interest in physics and the idea of creation of life or the elixir of life, "It may appear very strange, that a disciple of Albertus Magnus should arise in the eighteenth century; but our family was not scientifical, and I had not attended any of the lectures given at the schools of Geneva.18 My dreams were therefore undisturbed by reality; and I entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life." (22)

This elixir of life, which many writers, like Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus before Victor were looking for, Victor found it in a spark of electricity. Victor narrates in Frankenstein:

The catastrophe of this tree excited my extreme astonishment; and I eagerly inquired of my father the nature and origin of thunder and lightning. He replied, "Electricity"; describing at the same time the various effects of that power. He constructed a small electrical machine and exhibited a few experiments; he made also a kite, with a wire and string, which drew down that fluid from the clouds. (24)

With the spark of the electricity, Victor was able to create life in the form of Monster, when he imparted life into huge frame of lifeless monster created from the parts of dead bodies of human, his first reaction was of his own creation was as follows:

I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! —Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriance's only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion, and straight black lips" (52).

After the creation of the monster, the narrative shifts to the relationship between the creation i.e., Monster and the creator i.e., Victor. The Monster throughout the narrative chases his creator Victor. Victor attempts to escape from Monster but at the end of novel, Monster kills his creator, The murder of Victor is narrated by his friend Walton:

I entered the cabin, where lay the remains of my ill-fated and admirable friend. Over him hung a form which I cannot find words to describe; gigantic in stature, yet uncouth and distorted in its proportions. As he hung over the coffin, his face was concealed by long locks of ragged hair; but one vast hand was extended, in colour and apparent texture like that of a mummy. When he heard the sound of my approach, he ceased to utter exclamations of grief and horror, and sprung towards the window. Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness. I shut my eyes involuntarily, and endeavoured to recollect what were my duties with regard to this destroyer. I called on him to stay. (183)

This novel not only presents the idea of creation of life which later took the form of simulation, but also lists the impact of such creations which has been the dominant theme of many works and movies in the 21st century. Richard Dicks novel Do Android Desire for an Electric Sheep? deals with the advance concept of simulation and its harmful impact on human beings. This novel was later adapted into a movie by the title Blade Runner which is a Hollywood production. In Bollywood, Robot, is based one similar theme of creation of life and it impact.

Amongst all these, Frankenstein can be considered as the first work which discussed the theme of simulation or creation of human life, but if we employ Jean Baudrillard's idea of simulation, Frankenstein will fall in first order simulation, where we find huge difference between the original and the simulated or copied version Monsters. The Monster is easily identified as an alien, from whom everyone fears even his own creator. Later the works like, Do Androids Dream for an Electric Sheep? belong to the last stage of simulation where the difference between the original and the copied is completed blurred and the real gets replaced by the simulated.

2. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said the Frankenstein by Mary Shelley contains the seeds of simulations. It is the first order of simulation as per Jean Baudrillard, where the reality is not replaced by the simulation, but the copied version can easily be differentiated from the real. After Frankenstein, the act of imitation kept evolving and acquired the stage of simulation, which Jean Baudrillard considers the fourth order simulation, which is a case of hyperreality.

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