



‘The Creature’ of Modern Frankenstein: An Exploration of Representation of Plastic Consciousness in Children’s Literature

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Abstract

Amongst many, a major cause of “ecological wounding” is the presence of plastic in our environment which take over decades or sometimes even centuries to decompose into simpler constituents. This paper evaluates the representation of plastic and the inculcation of plastic consciousness and the spreading of ecological sensitivity through them. By bringing literature and plastic on an equal pedestal, the perusal seeks to answer, among others, the question: How is plastic represented in children's literature? Why has the concept of the disadvantages of plastic become a part of children’s literature? Is children’s literature concerning degradation due to plastic spreading critical thinking about our environment and igniting environmental sensitivity or plastic consciousness?

Keywords: plastic, children's literature, environment, ecology, debris

Introduction

The loss of biodiversity and animal extinction, deforestation and persistent degradation of wetland and dryland ecosystems, fluctuations in the distribution of rainfall/snowfall, magnification of greenhouse effects, and acid rain etc., are increasing day by day due to and lack of healthy interaction between the biotic and the abiotic resources around us. Along with some ecological issues like avalanches, tidal waves, tsunamis, hurricanes, wildfires, landslides, earthquakes, and manmade activities are adversely affecting the environment. Amongst many, a major cause of “ecological wounding” is the presence of plastic and plastic products in our

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environment which take over decades or sometimes even centuries to decompose into simpler constituents because of lack of ultraviolet light that assists them in breaking down and also because they can fight microbial degradation (Ghosh 285). Plastic has become a permanent tenant of our atmosphere, landscapes, waterscapes and food chain, so much so that “from plastic bottles to plastic money, we are (en)plasticised: have plastic trees, plastic birds, plastic soil, plastic water, plastic stomachs, and a plastic planet” (Ghosh 277). It poses biosecurity threats by transferring diseases into the wider environment. The presence of the eternal plastic debris in “the remotest corners of the planet ... metaphorically understood, [even] in uninhabitable islands” has necessitated the policymakers, organisations, manufacturers, consumers and the common man to take action to improve the management of plastic waste and to reduce the effects on the environment (Ghosh 280). As a result, plastic consciousness has found representation in children's literature in the last two to three decades.

Since a relationship exists “between literature and the physical environment ... [or] interconnections [exist] between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artefacts of language and literature” (Glotfelty xix), the aim of the paper is to critically examine selected children's books from eco-critical stance. The paper evaluates the representation of plastic and the inculcation of plastic consciousness and the spreading of ecological sensitivity through them. The present study ventures into this direction with a host of texts like *A Planet Full of Plastic: And How You Can Help* by Neal Layton, *Pesky Plastic: An Environmental Story* by Leticia Colon De Mejias, *Harry Saves the Ocean!* by N.G.K. and Sylva Fae, and *One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia* by Miranda Paul. By bringing literature and plastic on an equal pedestal, the perusal seeks to answer questions like: Who is Modern Frankenstein and what did he create? Did he notice the horrific side of his ‘creature’ too late? How has this ‘creature – the plastic’ been degrading the environment of his master? Does Modern Frankenstein repent like Shelley's Victor Frankenstein? What is Modern Frankenstein doing to correct his mistake? Why has the concept of disadvantages of plastic become a part of children's

literature? How is plastic represented in children's literature? Is children's literature, concerning degradation due to plastic, spreading critical thinking about our environment and igniting environmental sensitivity or plastic consciousness? Does this sensitivity include exposure, exploration and appreciation of the surroundings in children? Is the literature captivating, reliable, with a compelling story that the children may relate to? What measures do the children take as a result of their education in this particular field?

Methodology

The present perusal scrutinises the pervasiveness of plastic and its adverse effects from a tripartite approach. First, it attempts to probe the invention of plastic as the creation of Modern Frankenstein. Comparing the stances of both Victor Frankenstein and Modern Frankenstein, it maps the excitement, ambition, disillusion, repulsion, remorse and amendments of both the creators for their respective creations. Secondly, the paper studies the representation of plastic in selected children's books from an eco-critical lens. Here, it seeks to determine how plastic consciousness and ecological sensitivity can be encouraged in children who are the future of the world. Finally, in order to testify to the efficacy of the instructive-cum-entertaining narratives from selected works on young impressionable minds, the medium of a questionnaire has been employed. The survey was conducted on a group of 100 children variably between the ages of 5-10 years. The tripartite approach adopted here helps to establish a collision between literature and plastic and premises upon Ranjan Ghosh's views on plastic.

Modern Frankenstein's Creature: 'The Plastic'

This part of the present paper caters to the first five questions listed to be explored. Mary Shelley's character Victor Frankenstein belongs to the most distinguished family of "counsellors and syndics" of Geneva and devours natural philosophy and chemistry at the University of Ingolstadt (Shelley 21). He is so "smitten with the thirst for knowledge" that he confesses

neither the structure of languages, nor the code of governments, nor the politics of various states possessed an attraction for me. It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn, and whether it was the outward substance of things or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man that occupied me, still my inquiries were directed to the metaphysical or in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world.... But what glory would attend the discovery if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death! (Shelley 27, 28).

For this reason, Victor devotes himself “particularly to those branches of natural philosophy which relate to physiology [and] After days and nights of incredible labour and fatigue, [he] succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, [he] became capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter,” and creates ‘the creature’ (Shelley 43, 44). Modern Frankenstein is the modern man – an inhabitant of “labour intensive, garbological, and fast-capitalist system” forced to share “plasticcitizenship” (Ghosh 278, 287). Contemplating upon beneficial properties of plastic, like extreme versatility, ability to be tailored to meet specific technical needs, lighter weight than competing materials, durability and longevity, resistance to chemicals, excellent thermal and electrical insulation properties, and far superior aesthetic appeal, Modern Frankenstein used polymers to create the ‘new creature’ by “polymerisation [which] effectively produce[s] long chains of molecules made up of a large series of interconnected links” (Ghosh *The Plastic Turn* 67). It is the size or the “hugeness” of the molecules that “account[s] for plastic’s essential feature: its plasticity” (Freinkel 5). In 1907, Leo Baekeland named his invention as Bakelite—“the first fully synthetic polymer, made entirely of molecules that couldn’t be found in nature” (Freinkel 6). Wide varieties of plastics like polyethylene, nylon, acrylic and Styrofoam were made extensive use of during the Second World War for industrial and military needs and “that’s when plastics truly began infiltrating every pore of daily life; quietly entering our homes, our cars, our clothes, our playthings, our workplaces, even our bodies” (Freinkel 6). Talking about the

translocationality of plastic, Ghosh also says, “plastic seeps into salt, water, soil, animal and human bodies, media, and our psychosis in non-linear, non-hierarchical, fragmentary mobility and fluidity; this does not discriminate between its point of origin and eventual destination, race, ethnicities, discriminations of colour, religious affiliations, cultural heritage, and political schoolings” (278). Eric Fawcett and Reginald Gibson’s development of polyethylene in 1933 paved the way for stronger polyethylene to be designed later. With legends like Hermann Staudinger (1881–1965), Wallace Hume Carothers (1896–1937), Paul J. Flory (1910–1985), and Stephanie L. Kwolek (1923–2014), the field of polymer science and engineering witnessed advancement and expansion (Patterson 39, 40). Over 1.8 trillion pieces of plastic found in an area in the Pacific Ocean called the great pacific garbage patch, landfills like Apex Regional in Las Vegas, United States, Bordo Poniente in Mexico, Laogang in China, Malagrotto in Italy, Delhi Landfills in India, and Deonar in Mumbai, India could be compared to Victor Frankenstein’s creature.

But many times, the mightiest and most promising creation becomes the reason for its creator's disillusionment, depression and disappointment. Soon Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein undergoes a similar experience and he is repelled and appalled by the monstrosity of his creation. “The beauty of the dream vanished,” he becomes breathless and “horror and disgust filled [his] heart” (Shelley 50). He acknowledges, “Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room” (Shelley 50). With the passage of time, Modern Frankenstein also realised that his ‘creature’ was generating “a waste apocalypse, an irremediable fate of extinction through a gradual but certain course” (Ghosh 277). He comprehended that “plastic encroachment” of the environment has resulted in “bio-fouling and defouling” (Ghosh 278, 279). It has caused disruption, alteration and dilapidation of the original natural system resulting in exacerbated global warming and flooding, accumulation of plastic debris as sediment in water beds, acidification of aquatic environments, degrading health conditions and reproductive impairments. Agricultural/pastoral encroachment and expansion, increased usage of fertiliser, rising fuel wood collection, cultivation of cash crops, injurious fumes from use of

chemicals, toxic gases, industrial smoke in the atmosphere, excessive utilisation of groundwater aquifers, decomposers exhausting dissolved oxygen, landfills, disproportionate nitrogen deposition causing soil acidification, oil spills, and urbanisation due to overpopulation have resulted into degradation of the vegetation patch structure, the ground level water, the surface topographical features, and the human health and longevity. Like Victor Frankenstein, Modern Frankenstein grasped that many kinds of plastics do not fully degrade, dissolve or rust but get fragmented into little wreckages leaving impending 'eco-toxicological' impacts on the environment. Their incineration at extremely high temperatures results in releasing lethal fumes which cause cancers and birth defects. Less than a century-old creature, plastic has spread its roots in all aspects of human life by becoming a substitute for many materials like natural rubber, wood, iron, steel, ivory, horn, silk and cotton. Some properties of plastic encourage single or light-use which demands it to be discarded at rather a faster rate than production.

When Shelley's Victor finds out that his younger brother William has been murdered and Justine has been accused of the crime, he becomes distraught, traumatised, and guilt-ridden. He spies the monster lurking around the place where his brother's dead body had been found and becomes convinced that "the wretch, the filthy demon to whom [he] had given life," is responsible for William's brutal and miserable murder (Shelley 70). After pondering over the two years full of "scenes of evil and despair" that Victor has been trying to forget, he admits, "I had turned loose into the world a depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery; had he not murdered my brother?" (Shelley 71). Similarly, plastic has come to "stick to us in ways and means that are unfathomable, in scales that are often immeasurable, in moments that are, most often, unguarded," thus "creating a 'funeral pyre'" (Ghosh 286, 283). Modern Frankenstein has also understood that he "had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light of [his] own vampire, [his] own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to [him]" (Shelley 71). He apprehends that his relationship with plastic is "a complicated

mix of dependence and distrust — akin to what an addict feels towards his or her substance of choice” (Freinkel 8). Initially Modern Frankenstein’s discovery or creature offered “wow-inducing possibility” but by 1967 with the release of the movie *The Graduate*, it had become “a bland, airless future, as phoney as Mrs Robinson’s smile,” which “stir[ed] such visceral disgust” that he has begun to hate it (Freinkel 5, 9). Freinkel quotes Norman Mailer who designates plastic as ““a malign force let loose in the universe ... the social equivalent of cancer”” (Freinkel 9). Modern Frankenstein is repenting that his monster – the plastic – can exist in diverse forms and conditions “as anthropogenic debris” (Ghosh 281). It has assumed enormous “stature ... with superhuman speed” exceeding “that of man,” “height [that] is superior,” “joints more supple” and a “figure hideously deformed and loathsome” (Shelly 95, 96, 119). As a result, in the present times Modern Frankenstein is consumed “with rage and horror,” to witness the “unearthly ugliness render[ing the monster of plastic] almost too horrible for human eyes” (Shelly 95). This “deep disenchantment” with “the miracle and menace of modern life” demands a “close ... in mortal combat” and an interminable assessment of the plastic economy and the absolute prohibition of plastic materials “to restore those victims whom [it has] so diabolically murdered!” (Freinkel 9; Shelly 95). “A train of reflection occurred” to both the Frankensteins “to consider the effects of what” they had done and what they are “now doing” (Shelley 169). They contemplate, “Had [they] right, for [their] benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?” (Shelley 170). They have begun to shudder “to think that future ages might curse [them] as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at a price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race” (Shelley 170). Filled “with the bitterest remorse,” they have thought of ways to redeem themselves and achieve salvation (Shelley 169). Like Victor “tore to pieces” and destroyed “the [second] creature on whose future existence [the first one] depended for happiness”; Modern Frankenstein is also changing the ways to use and dispose of plastics in order to turn the plastic pollution problem around. (Shelly 170). He is reducing, reusing and recycling the plastics, taking away excess plastics from products where possible, recuperating energy from plastic waste

where applicable, and restructuring products to create more supportable substitutes because he has understood that

climate change, sustainability, and antitoxin movements make environmentalism a practice that entails grappling with how one's own bodily existence is ontologically entangled with the well-being of both local and quite distant places, peoples, animals, and ecosystems. Campaigns against plastic link not only coastal regions but also inland zones to the mushrooming plastic found in the oceans. (Alimao 131)

The Representation of Plastic Consciousness in Children's Literature

Another effort of Modern Frankenstein to create plastic consciousness among people is to educate them properly. To combat the issue of plastic pollution more effectively, the awareness programs can begin with the beginners in life, i.e. children. For that matter, what could be the more befitting medium of education than literature and the target readership than children who are the future? The urgent need for environmental sensitivity is purposely reflected in the children's literature. The current part addresses the set of the next five questions related to the representation of plastic in children's literature noted at the beginning of the paper. Aiming specifically at the young minds, the literature guides children in an instructive as well as entertaining manner to keep them engaged. It has the knack of projecting the most repulsive presence of trash and the quotidian existence of plastic in such an enthralling manner that children feel engrossed in the 'plastic-trash worlds' and they feel inadvertently drawn towards the environmental concerns. In order to inculcate plastic consciousness among children, it devises a host of values and ethical responsibilities in the young wards towards the surroundings so as to minimise disadvantages and collateral damage induced by plastic in the environment. Keeping in view the foregoing discussion, four books from children's literature have been selected. The first, *A Planet Full of Plastic: and how you can help* is a non-fiction written and illustrated by Neal Layton for the ones who love nature and want to help the environment. The next, *Pesky Plastic: An Environmental Story*, written by Leticia Colon De

Mejias and illustrated by Tamara Visco, is an amalgam of fiction and non-fiction as it simultaneously narrates three different stories while giving certain fast facts about plastic pollution. The third, *Harry Saves the Ocean!*, written by N.G.K. and Sylva Fae, and illustrated by Janelle Dimmett, is a fictitious narrative of a mouse that is confounded with the problem of plastic pollution in the sea and attempts to give a solution well-suited to its sensibilities. The final, *One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia*, written by Miranda Paul and illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon, is based on the true events mapping the efforts of a handful of Gambian women in recycling the plastic mess into productive merchandise. A disparate selection of texts provides and later determines the holistic development of awareness in children through varied genres of writing and types of situations across both human and non-human worlds.

To begin with, the writers first try to catch the attention of the children by making them comfortable with plastic. To this end, Neal Layton in *A Planet Full of Plastic* devises a nameless boy as his listener to whom he narrates the 'plastic tale.' The boy supposedly is the reader of the book too (and by extension represents all the readers) as he is shown holding a copy of it. At the very outset, Layton addresses the nameless boy and purposely inquires: "Do you ever think about what things are made of?" (n.p.). Such a sudden question and conversational tone of the narrator not only makes the boy but the reader also inquisitive about the probable material. Without much ado, Layton announces, "... lots of things are made of something called plastic" and supports his statement with interesting illustrations showing diverse plastic objects (n.p.). Next, he appraises plastic as "FANTASTIC", which is found in all shapes, forms and colours, indicating the diversity in the material. It is deemed as a "super-useful" and "an incredible discovery" since many different things are made out of it (Layton n.p.). Here, Layton intentionally creates a 'plastic utopia – plastopia' (a term coined here). In this new age plastopia, plastic is found everywhere and dominates everything. In fact, plastic is celebrated for its diversity, strength, durability, flexibility, pervasiveness and attractiveness. Nevertheless, the conception of such 'plastopia' in children's minds generates a notion of plastic consciousness. This newly acquired

consciousness resonates with the children's understanding of the world around them, the world which is overwhelmed by plastic.

A similar approach has been adopted by Miranda Paul in *One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia* where she introduces a plastic bag as something "silky ... flapping in the wind settl[ing] under a tree" which comes to Isatou's rescue just when her palm-leaf basket carrying fruits tips (n.p.). Drawing a contrast between the useless broken basket and the appealing plastic bag, the writer establishes how the naive girl finds the "strange fabric" useful enough to carry her load (Paul n.p.). After her first rendezvous with plastic, Isatou becomes conscious about the multi-utility of plastic which is used both by children (as they slurp *wanjo* from holes in clear plastic bags) and adults (as they carry things in bright blue and black plastic bags) in the rural area. Furthermore, plastic pervasiveness is manifested in the marketplace which displays "rainbows of plastic" enchanting everyone with its attractive hues (Paul n.p.). Interestingly, as Isatou breaks her bag walking by the marketplace, just then the next plastic bag floats by. The second plastic bag not only rescues the girl again from the discomfort but also signifies the ever-availability of the material which has become so convenient to procure in the 'plastopia.' However, as soon as the readers, the boy and the little girl in the two preceding texts, begin to revel in the 'plastopia' and marvel at the utilitarian force of plastic, the writers attempt to deconstruct the notion by enlisting the disadvantages of having plastic on earth. In doing so, they try to re-inscribe the plastic consciousness and encourage environmental sensitivity in young wards. Layton stresses the problem with plastic, which confounds the boy: "If you look around, you won't just see plastic where it is meant to be. You'll also see it where it's NOT meant to be" (n.p.). Then he supports his argument with images of plastic use (more of abuse) and plastic litter degrading the natural surroundings. Likewise, in *One Plastic Bag*, Isatou notices that the torn plastic bag which she had dropped once on her way has been joined by more. She confesses, "one plastic bag becomes two. Then ten. Then a hundred. Plastic isn't beautiful anymore" (Paul n.p.).

Similarly, in *Pesky Plastic*, Leticia Colon de Mejias warns the readers and the children about the accessibility and flexibility of plastic bags discarded by humans. They are easily blown around by the wind, eventually reaching rivers, trees and oceans. Arguably, human negligence and overindulgence in plastic create havoc on the natural surroundings. In this context, Rachel Carson reasons, "The most alarming of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal material. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable; the chain of events it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in living tissues is for the most part irreversible" (23). Such a 'dangerous' and 'lethal material' – plastic – eventually leads to "ecological wounding" of the natural resources, which is 'irrecoverable,' and; "biotic extinction" of different species, which is 'irreversible' (Ghosh 285, 278). The credit for such mushrooming of plastic and its good health goes to the "careless and flippant reject[ion]" of plastic utilities instead of a resilient one and, most importantly, to the non-biodegradable nature of plastic (Ghosh 285). Layton commendably narrates the story about plastic to educate the children and informs them how natural things can bio-degrade while plastic stays "for years and years" until the weather breaks it down into smaller pieces (n.p.). Eventually, it ends up in different places where it is not supposed to be. Even in *Harry Saves the Ocean!*, N.G.K. and Sylva Fae stress the non-perishable nature of plastic. They conceive an animal kingdom divided into terrestrial and aquatic parts. Harry, a mouse, goes to sea with his family for a stay. There he finds a whale stuck in a plastic bag. As the mouse helps the whale to get detangled from the plastic mess, the aquatic creature complains about how the plastic dumped into the sea does not perish away. It laments, "Your bags and your bottles, your bucket and spade...The trouble [is] with plastics, they don't biodegrade" (N.G.K. and Fae n.p.). In order to bring the idea home, the two writers, like Layton, draw the comparison of plastic with other perishable things.

Interestingly, the non-biodegradable property of plastic is related to another quality: translocationality. Since it does not rot easily, it keeps on travelling and "through an inexplicably complicated process reach[es] the sea" (Ghosh 284). Plastic may

float as “plastic litter” or sink as “plastic debris” but it stays there forever (Ghosh 281). Consequently, one may sympathise with the complaining whale in *Harry Saves the Ocean!* when it says, “the ocean is full of rubbish” and the aquatic life is grieved “thinking and dreaming of the home they once had” (N.G.K. and Fae n.p). Undoubtedly, the ocean is not pure and habitable anymore. Layton further shows concern about “the bits of plastic [that] have collected together, creating five enormous garbage patches full of plastic” in the oceans, with the most famous being North Pacific Garbage Patch (n.p.). The sea, in this sense, acquires a new meaning and becomes the “plastic sea” or the “hypersea—the gothic art of extraordinary objects coming together” (Ghosh 283, 288). No wonder the reconfiguration of sea—its appearance and properties—evoke the feelings of revolt, revulsion, nostalgia and helplessness in sea creatures who are subjected to the slow violence of plastic and lead a death-in-life kind of existence. The reality of plastic sea strikes hard: the creatures either get stuck in the plastic mesh (like the whale in *Harry Saves the Ocean!*) or are tempted to ingest plastic (like the creatures in *Pesky Plastic*). Nevertheless, the plastic, “in forms unconceived and unforeseen, can reach the remote and distant lands to infiltrate the systems of unsuspecting creatures, resulting in the ‘change’ in the biotic” (Ghosh 284). *Pesky Plastic* is woven around a similar concern where the three different species are lured by plastic to consume it. Firstly, Sally – the sea turtle, is enticed by something floating above it in the water and takes it as a jellyfish. But at that very moment, it is warned by the writer: “Wait! Sally, don't eat that. It is a plastic bag!” (Mejias n.p.) Similarly, Pat – the Pelican, notices something on the sea surface and takes it as a fish which eventually turns out to be a plastic bag again. Finally, Allen – the Albatross, while waiting for its mother, is attracted by a plastic object stranded on the uninhabitable shore which he takes as food. Indisputably, all these creatures need food for survival. When they find more plastic than fish, they “cannot tell the difference between plastic and food” (Mejias n.p.). Rather, the plastic debris looks “exciting and aberrational, making and seducing” these sea creatures to “pick plastic as food and food as plastic for them and their younger ones” (Ghosh 285). The case of the Albatross becomes more significant here. Notably, Albatross resides in an inaccessible part of the planet which is beyond human reach. But

plastic manages not only to access these uninhabitable corners but also leaves behind its impact. It reaches the digestive tracts of the mother Albatross and the young ones, fed with regurgitation. What is more, plastic can taint the food chain as the smaller creature which feeds upon plastic becomes toxic for the bigger creature. In this manner, plastic ingestion eventually spawns plastic deaths or perhaps aquacide/ecocide.

Such plastic exposure not only deludes aquatic life into "trick ingestion through its colour and shape and appearance" but also attracts terrestrial animals (Ghosh 286). In *One Plastic Bag*, a lot of village goats die as they forage through trash and eat plastic bags which "twist around their intestines, and the animals cannot survive" (Paul n.p.). The sight of dying goats due to plastic becomes disheartening for now grown-up Isatou who feels disillusioned. When the reality of plastic invades 'plastopia,' Modern Frankenstein and Isatou, the boy in *A Planet Full of Plastic*, feel repelled and shocked. The 'plastopia' envisioned earlier now becomes infested with dirt, squalor and deaths, unattractive and deemed uninhabitable. In terror, the boy in *A Planet Full of Plastic* exclaims: "But I don't want animals to get hurt! And I don't want our planet to fill up with plastic" (Layton n.p.). His aversion to plastic generates a dialectic of 'plastic memory' and 'plastic guilt' (terms coined here). The memory of the overindulgence in plastic and 'plastic abuse' evokes the guilt of spawning evil and death, sealing the "ecocidal fate" of life on earth (Ghosh 283). This plastic memory-guilt dialectic (a term coined here) can be alleviated, to some extent, by adopting the "poetics of responsibility...which does not concern with what we humans *are*,...but with what we humans *do*" (Garrard 79). The eco-critical approach, in this sense, becomes "a more effective rhetoric of transformation and assuagement" (Garrard 79). This would call for a "response-ability on a damaged earth," a healing response to the wounded ecology (qtd. in Ghosh 287). To this end, the human race necessitates marching from being anthropocentric to eco-centric in fulfilling the claims of both responsibility and responseability.

All four texts discussed above convincingly portray the poetics of responsibility and response-ability to plastic peril. They

encourage formulating a 'plastic brotherhood of eco-warriors and toxic relievers' who work collectively to bring a new order. Indeed, Layton's call for group effort proves worthy here: "It'll take each and every person working together to stop the planet filling up with plastic" (n.p.). He further suggests a tripartite strategy to clear up the plastic mess—reduce, reuse and recycle—which is also upheld by Leticia Colon de Majias in *Pesky Plastic*. Both writers reason if we limit plastic usage, we can reduce the pollution it causes. Even the manufacturers need to contemplate before producing plastic objects which have a shorter utilitarian span in comparison to their shelf life. Further, the plastic objects must be reused "over and over again" (Layton n.p.). Finally, the used plastic things can be recycled into newer forms. As Ghosh says, "plastic continues to spread and is recycled, enhancing the complex networks of access and excess" (278). This idea is best illustrated in *One Plastic Bag*. Assessing the toxic impact of plastic bags on the surroundings, Isatou gains plastic consciousness and decides to recycle the bags. Overpowering her disgust, she ventures into the repulsive garbage dump and courageously plucks plastic bags from the garbage pile. With the help of her friends, she washes off the dirty bags, cuts them into strips and rolls them into spools in order to crochet them into beautiful purses. These 'eco-warriors and toxic relievers' (terms coined here) crochet day and night and acquire blistered fingers. While the rest of the villagers mock them as dirty for doing filthy work, the group effort of Isatou's team is soon rewarded when her recycled purses become a huge success in the city. The sold-out purses not only solve the problem of plastic management but also wring in more money. With Isatou's recycling, the plastic pile is reduced in size and she hopes that one day it shall be gone leaving her village green and clean. It is here that the book comes to a full circle—setting off with pre-plastic time when Isatou first notices plastic to post-plastic time when she succeeds in clearing up the plastic mess.

The idea of cleaning up through teamwork is further elaborated in *Harry Saves the Ocean!* When Harry is confronted with the problem of plastic litter in the sea and onshore, he pledges to do the needful. In order to alleviate the distress of aquatic partners, the terrestrial being forms its own "beach clean-up crew," declaring, "if

we all lend a hand, we'll soon make a difference to the sea and the sand" (N.G.K. and Fae n.p.). He ropes in seagulls, turtles, puffins, pelicans, and crabs in conjunction with the other mice. Unanimously, they clear up the beach and put the trash in degradable and non-biodegradable trash bins. One may wonder how plastic connects all to a common front to save the world from plastic peril. Arguably, such kind of exposure to plastic abuse through literature heightens the environmental sensitivity of the children who acquire a renewed plastic consciousness: "plastic discarded is plastic left unguarded" (Ghosh 280). The children further attempt to explore and appreciate their surroundings by adopting the damage control strategy as suggested in the preceding discussion through group effort, where they get trained for community service in future. There is no denying the fact that the topics like ecological concerns and plastic abuse seem dull and unappealing to children. So, to make them interesting, it lies in the capacity of the writers to strike a chord with the young ward's imaginative capabilities. While *A Planet Full of Plastic* and *One Plastic Bag* begin by attracting the children with the promising 'plastopia,' *Harry Saves the Ocean!* and *Pesky Plastic* opens with a dramatic situation wherein the animals are shown on the verge of danger: the whale is stuck in a plastic bag and Sally, the sea turtle, is about to eat a plastic bag for breakfast. Such a compelling opening at once captivates the children who relate to the endangered species and show concern and sympathy.

The Questionnaire: Testifying the Efficacy of Plastic Consciousness Adopted in Selected Texts

The current part of the paper premises upon answering the final question posed at the beginning. In order to map the efficacy of the plastic consciousness adopted in the four children's books, the research ventures into the domain of fieldwork. It worked at two levels. About 100 children ranging between the ages of 5-10 years were first exposed to the selected texts. While narrating the texts, it was stressed that children become aware of the plastic consciousness and as the narratives proceed, they acquire environmental sensitivity naturally by underpinning the essential pointers. In the next step, a questionnaire was circulated amongst

them to be answered with the guidance of their parents wherever required. It addressed the questions like: What have you learnt about plastic—is it good or bad? We can sort plastic waste by segregating it into separate bio-degradable and non-degradable bins so that each can be treated accordingly—do you agree? Do you think we can reduce plastic pollution by not spreading plastic litter at home, avoiding throwing plastic wrappers and bottles outside the windows of the car, buying less disposable plastic, switching over to things made of bio-degradable materials like steel lunch boxes, bottles and straws etc.? We can reuse plastic many times by sharing things and toys, taking care of plastic objects and keeping them in good health so that they are durable—do you agree? We can recycle plastic by using plastic in craft, using plastic bottles as planters, and putting plastic bottles in recycling machines installed in public places—do you agree? Do you envision that one day, the world will be plastic-free—yes or no? Are you ready to make any promises today to solve this problem?

The analysis of the collected questionnaires shows that around 95 per cent of the children find plastic bad, and they want to reduce, reuse and recycle in order to make their world and future plastic free. They confessed that the reading of the four texts helped them to acquire new plastic consciousness, and herewith they will become more careful with plastic management. They even pledged that their plastic use would never become plastic abuse for the environment. They promised to say no to plastic straws, spoons, knives, and forks, avoid plastic carrier bags and switch over to reusable cloth bags, urge parents to use glass containers rather than plastic ones in the kitchen, use shampoo, conditioner, and soap bars as opposed to the liquid ones, snack on fruit, instead of crisps or sweets packed in plastic wrappers, use natural materials such as bamboo, recycled wood, glass, cork, etc., use reusable water bottles and steel tiffin, make green goody bags for their next birthday party, eat ice cream from a cone than a plastic cup, when hanging out washing use wooden pegs than plastic ones, and, go litter picking outside and play bad plastic hunt inside the house with parents and friends on holidays.

Conclusion

The above discussion and analysis indicate that plastic pollution is an unrelenting universal challenge due to the almost insurmountable danger it poses by having annexed and encroached on the most unfathomable parts of the oceans and the zeniths of the highest and the remotest mountains. It cannot be ignored that notwithstanding all-pervasive cognisance that the unwarranted use of plastics is leading to disproportionate environmental mutilation, the production of plastic is continuously mounting. We are nowhere close to the end of the 'plastopia.' The use of a tripartite approach investigates the relationship between Shelly's Victor Frankenstein and Modern Frankenstein. The first part of the paper elucidates how the activities of Modern Frankenstein gave birth to plastic and plastic products and his realisation of the eco-toxicological consequences of plastic assimilation in the living and non-living environments has led to efforts to control this pollution. The second part examines the representation of plastic in *A Planet Full of Plastic: and how you can help* by Neal Layton, *Pesky Plastic: An Environmental Story* by Leticia Colon De Mejias, *Harry Saves the Ocean!* by N.G.K. and Sylva Fae, and *One Plastic Bag: Isatou Ceesay and the Recycling Women of the Gambia* by Miranda Paul from the eco-critical lens. It establishes that children's literature is spreading plastic consciousness and ecological sensitivity through instructive-cum-entertaining narratives. It has been found that all four selected texts credibly represent the poetics of responsibility and response-ability towards the abuse of plastic. They inspire their readers, both young and adult, to become 'eco-warriors and toxic relievers' to bring a new order. The assessment of their plastic consciousness made through the medium of a questionnaire, discussed in the third part of the paper, proposes that such methodologies can raise the plastic consciousness among children, who are the building block of the whole world. The inculcation of environmental sensitivity in young minds through such interesting and educational narratives can propel them into action to save the environment. Although different methods and strategies have been adopted to control the plastic mess, but it still remains a problematic issue which doges any simple solutions. Undoubtedly, plastic has become such a powerful creation that it has begun to dominate its

creator – the Modern Frankenstein. It has superseded its creator in almost every sphere who now needs to rethink its existence and way of life vis-à-vis plastic and this can be an interesting subject for a deeper probe in future.

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