

Technological Anxiety and Scientific Ambition in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*

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Abstract

This article explores technological anxiety and scientific ambition in Mary Shelley's novel Frankenstein by Mary Shelly. This novel is the earliest literary work that brings to light uncontrolled knowledge and the desire to use scientific technologies and the consequences faced by human beings. It reflects these ideas through the character Victor, his unquenchable drive to reveal the secrets of life and to create new life. His irresponsible experiments result in failure and the destruction of his life. This article also focuses on the isolation and rejection faced by individuals: because of scientific obsession, the creature is abandoned by its creator and rejected by the world. Every human needs love, companionship, family, and friends to share feelings and emotions. Without these needs, the individual becomes angry, hateful, violent, take revenge and feeling hopeless about survival. This article studies the relationship between creator and creature. The responsibility of the creator after creating the creature is more important than creating it. Frankenstein remains a connection to present-day issues in contemporary society, which continues to face the problem of technological anxiety.

Keywords: technological anxiety, scientific ambition, isolation, responsibility, creator, experiment.

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Introduction

In the twenty-first century, the development of technology has reached its zenith. But this technological improvement is always associated with fear and hope. This progress makes human beings think about their ethics, responsibility, and the limits of their ambition. Literature sheds light on the anxieties created by technology and the dangers of uncontrolled knowledge. The consequences of using science without moral considerations are the result of destruction to mankind. One of the earliest and most powerful works on this scientific theme is *Frankenstein*, a novel by Mary Shelly. It is considered to be the first scientific fiction in literature. This novel deeply explores scientific experimentation, the creation of a human and the fear of technological advancement. Though *Frankenstein* was written in the nineteenth century, it is relevant today because of modern society. The evolution of artificial intelligence, robotics, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, cloning everything shows the progress of modern technology. This excess always results in danger, and knowledge without responsibility leads to destruction and suffering, as shown in *Frankenstein*.

The novel brings out the character Victor Frankenstein, who is a brilliant young man. He is obsessed with discovering the secret of life. He acquires knowledge about the anatomy of the human body and the creation of life. He gathers all the raw materials from the graveyard. He formulates the reactions and sets all the raw materials. A new creature appears, which looks so horrified. He fears its appearance and abandons it. This rejection becomes the turning point of the novel. The creature, which is created by Victor get out of that place and suffers from loneliness, isolation, and hatred from society. He cannot make any friends because his appearance makes everyone fear him. This bitterness makes the creature turn his pain and suffering toward its creator, where the conflict begins. Shelly explores the consequences of irresponsible acts of knowledge about science. Victor's mistake is not simply that he creates the creature; rather, he fails to accept the responsibility for that creation. Later, this becomes a victim in the destruction of his life.

One of the central ideas in the novel is technological anxiety, which refers to the fear of scientific advancements. When scientific development goes beyond human control, it results in suffering and agony. With this technology, people think they can play the role of God in creating everything, which is completely against the law of nature. Victor achieves greatness through his knowledge and experiments. But later, he loses his family, his wife, his mental peace, his health, and he goes through many deaths in his family. Thereupon, *Frankenstein* stands as a response to the excitement and fear surrounding scientific progress.

Scientific Ambition and the Danger of Knowledge

The desire to know more about scientific techniques is the core notion of the novel *Frankenstein*. This scientific ambition results in the destruction of Victor's

life. Mary Shelly explores destruction by using scientific knowledge through the character Victor Frankenstein. His unquenchable thirst to know more about scientific experiments, technology usage, anatomy of the human, creation of life result in great distress. Victor, from his childhood, was fascinated by the mystery of life, natural philosophy, and alchemy. He says, "The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine" (23). Victor is not satisfied with ordinary life. He wants to bring something new with the help of scientific knowledge.

Victor's experience begins when he reaches the University for his higher studies in modern science. He is deeply inspired by the lectures of Walden, whose achievements are noteworthy in the law of nature. Victor wants to achieve something more than this. He proudly says that, "So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein; more far more, will I achieve" (36). This desire becomes a victim in his life and drives him beyond the limits of morality and responsibility.

Victor's greatest dream is expressed in the famous line: "Life and Death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through and pour a torrent of light into our dark world" (33). He believes that life and death are not limited. He thinks that he can control nature. He sees himself as a godlike figure. During his experience, he completely forgets his family and isolates himself in the laboratory. This scientific ambition slowly makes him become addicted to the scientific knowledge. An article published by Muhammad Ardiansah in "The Effects of Technological Abuse to Social Life as Reflected in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*" says that:

Anti-Social is a person who was previously able to socialize but because of a certain situation it made him hard to socialize, usually because of the busyness of new things which made him forget his friends and family. This type tends to happen to people who follow the latest trends and keep up with technology. (610)

Victor finally achieves in his experiments. But instead of feeling happy, he is torn by fear, anxiety, horror, regret, and fear for his life. He says, "But now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart" (67). Shelly uses this moment to highlight the danger of knowledge when it is not used in a good way.

Jamie Q. Roberts in "*Frankenstein*: Hoe Mary Shelly's sci-fi classic offers lessons for us today about the dangers of playing God" says that:

Victor Frankenstein, like others in the novel, is appalled by the appearance of his creation. He flees the creature, and it vanishes. After a hiatus of two years, the creature begins to murder people close to Frankenstein. And when Frankenstein reneges on his promise to create a female partner for his creature, it murders his closest friend and then, on Frankenstein's wedding night, his wife. (Para. 12)

Over the trajectory of the novel, Victor gradually understands the danger of his deeds. He says to Walton that, "Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquisition of knowledge" (66)

Isolation, Loneliness and Rejection in Frankenstein

The important thing the novel focuses on is the inner conflict faced by Victor. He feels isolated and rejected. Shelly highlights the hatred and alienation in his mind and heart. The technological anxiety holds a firm place in Victor's mind. Victor suffers inwardly by losing his family, loved ones, and his society. He feels unhappy, angry, even becomes violent. He isolates himself and is obsessed with science and experimentation. He admits, "I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (44). Victor's state of isolation becomes more severe when he creates the creature. Instead of feeling proud and honored, he wears out in a terrible situation of fear and horror. He feels guilty for what he has done. He avoids everyone, trembling and helpless. He says, "I shunned my fellow-creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime" (71). Victor chooses the path of isolation by his own. Because he feels guilt: it is his mistake for breaking the law of nature and implementing his desires toward the ambition of his goal. The initial encounter with Victor, who abandons the creature immediately after its birth, sets a tragic tone for the monster's subsequent experiences, as it is said, "Nothing is so painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change" (Shelley 85)

The creature also faces same sense of loneliness and alienation from the society. He is a creature, but he looks like a ghost, with more scars on his body. His face is not good-looking. Everyone who sees the creature runs away, and, out of fear, they even beat him. Facing untold miseries and hard situations, the creature cries out in agony. He doesn't have anyone to love him. He has no family, friends, or loved ones to share all his grief. Even the creator neglects him. He sadly says that, "I had never yet seen a being resembling me, or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I?" (82). These questions show how the creature feels distress, pain, and confusion about the identity it possesses. The consequences of isolation manifest severely for both characters, leading to tragic outcomes. Victor's self-imposed alienation results in a deterioration of his mental health and a deep sense of guilt over the chaos unleashed by his creation (Ziskind 1427). The creature starts to behave more violently because of his sorrowful life. He says, "I am malicious because I am miserable" (103). The creature possesses all the human feelings: happiness, enjoyment, sharing, hope, laughter, needs a companion and a loved one. When he is repeatedly rejected by the world, he turns evil and, at one level, wants to kill the creator and his family.

Ayub Hasan in "From Community to Alienation: Psychological and Social Isolation in Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*" says that:

The characters in this novel are all victims of alienation and loneliness, indicating that their isolation not only affects their personal lives but also has broader implications for their moral and ethical decisions. The monster, too, becomes increasingly violent and vengeful in response to its isolation, illustrating how alienation can lead to destructive behaviours. The cycle of rejection and violence perpetuates a tragic narrative in which both creator and creation are ensnared in their own forms of isolation. (205)

Shelley also brings out the isolation faced by Victor's friend, Robert Walton. Walton's friendship with Victor is very deep. Walton himself expresses his loneliness during his Arctic expedition, saying, "I have no friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to participate my joy" (Letter II). But when Victor has begun his experiments using science and technology, it creates a huge gap between him and his friend. At first, Walton wants to stop the action of Victor's unwanted act of creating life. For this reason, Victor does not want to continue his friendship with him. Later, when he has created the creature and faces the critical situation of fear and anxiety, Victor chooses isolation rather than friendship, which makes a permanent separation between them and leaves a scar in their hearts. Mary Shelley's presents Viktor's isolation as a psychological consequence of excessive scientific ambition; his obsession with knowledge gradually separates him not only from society but also from his own suppression of emotions and humanity. His ambition blinds him to emotional connections and moral responsibilities, neglects his family, ignores Elizabeth's affection, and distances himself from Henry Clerval, who represents emotional warmth and human companionship. Shelley contrasts Victor's scientific ambition with Clerval's appreciation for nature, literature, and human relationships. This contrast highlights how Victor's pursuit of knowledge leads to emotional vagueness, facade, inner turmoil, the phase of inner hollowness, and loneliness. "I was seized by remorse and the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures" (73), his scientific ambition leads to psychological suffering and emotional collapse. His loneliness, ergo, becomes both a physical and a psychological contradiction, emphasizing the destructive impact of uncontrolled scientific ambition. The isolation experienced by Viktor and the creature also reflects broader social commentary. Shelley suggests that society often rejects individuals who appear different or who challenge social norms. The creature's rejection is based purely on physical appearance rather than character or behaviour.

Nascent stage, the Creature (Frankenstein) shows kindness and compassion by helping the De Lacey family, as a secret. When they finally see him, they react with fear and violence. The creature painfully describes this rejection, stating, "I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me; and finding myself unsympathized with, wished to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me" (97). This incident deeply affects the creature and strengthens his

belief that society will never accept him. Shelley thereby criticizes societal prejudice and intolerance, showing how rejection creates violence and destruction, both in the physical and mental capacities of anyone. "I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?" (103), a demonstration, how loneliness and alienation transform innocence into violence.

Creator and Creation: Responsibility and Moral Failure in Frankenstein

The development of science and technology makes the individual forget their responsibilities as a human being. In the beginning, the desire to use technology, fulfilling needs and satisfying desires make everyone get trapped in a world of danger. Victor's desire to use science in a way of creating life results in success turning into failure. It becomes a bitter-sweet experience in his life. Feeling himself superior to God, which makes him fall worse than a human. After creating the creature, he fails to take responsibility as a creator. It is his own duty to care for the creature. Shelly highlights that creation is not only about power and achievement, but also about responsibility, companionship, compassion, love, and guidance. Victor's desire begins as a scientific dream but results in technological anxiety. He thinks to create a life, a person, but he never considers the consequences he has to face after creating it. He never thinks of if the creature is given life what will happen next? As a result, he fears his own creation. The creature doesn't know how to speak, survive, or understand. Out of fear and confusion, he leaves it completely alone. Later, the creature learns many things. It helps the De Lacey family by gathering wood and meeting their needs. It needs only friendship and companionship to share all feelings and sufferings. When it is not met, he turns his struggles and pain into hatred toward the creator's family. As a result, he kills Victor's brother and beloved Elizabeth; Justine is executed.

Though Victor knows that the creature is completely responsible for this, he remains silent. At one point, the creature demands that Victor create another creature like him, to whom he can share all his feelings. He tells Victor, "My companion must be of the same species and have the same defects. This being you must create" (101). When Victor decides to destroy the second creature, he is right to fear creating another creature at high risk. On the other hand, he increases the creature's loneliness and despair.

Thusly, the desire to use scientific technology in a destructive way leads to facing a great crisis in the lives of the individuals. Technological anxiety plays a crucial role in shaping the lives of individuals.

Conclusion

Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* remains a powerful literary work that explores technological anxiety and scientific ambition. Although the novel belongs to the nineteenth century, still relevant to the conditions of today's situations. Through

the character of Victor, Mary Shelly brings out the dangers of uncontrolled scientific ambition and the desire of using the knowledge without knowing the consequences and responsibility. Victor's desire to unveil the secrets of life leads him to leave his happy life, emotional bonds, and moral values behind. He is completely separated from his family, society, and a comfortable life. Mary Shelly also focuses on the responsibility of the creator toward the creation. She also brings out how rejection turns into destruction. The creature faces sufferings, pain, confusion, anger, and the feeling of taking revenge. Knowledge and invention should not exist without ethics, care, and accountability.

Frankenstein is not only a story about a creator and a creature; rather, it serves as a warning to those who misuse the knowledge of science and experiments. Shelley doesn't portray science and technology as evil. Instead, she tells us to use them wisely, with moral considerations and responsibility.

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