
**Reimagining Humanity: Posthumanist Reflections in Mary Shelley's
'Frankenstein'**

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Abstract

Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" serves as a pivotal text for posthumanist analysis, challenging traditional humanist conceptions and blurring the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines. This paper explores the novel's profound exploration of identity and otherness through the character of Victor Frankenstein's creature, which disrupts established notions of human identity. The creature's journey from a "hideous" creation to a sentient being prompts readers to reconsider fixed definitions of humanity and to empathize with his experiences of rejection and isolation. Additionally, the novel delves into the ethical implications of Victor Frankenstein's unchecked scientific ambition and the quest for bodily modification and enhancement, reflecting posthumanist concerns about the manipulation of the human body. Furthermore, "Frankenstein" challenges traditional notions of human agency and autonomy by depicting the creature's quest for autonomy and his interactions with society, highlighting the ethical implications of denying agency to non-human entities. Through its exploration of these themes, Shelley's "Frankenstein" encourages readers to critically examine and challenge traditional humanist ideas and to embrace a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of what it means to be human in an interconnected and diverse world.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, identity, otherness, ethical implications, scientific advancements, agency, autonomy

Introduction

Posthumanism is conceptualized as a speculative entity that challenges and redefines traditional notions of humanity. In the context of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," posthumanism offers a profound and nuanced exploration of identity, otherness, and the ethical implications of scientific and technological advancements. Shelley's novel serves as a compelling text for posthumanist analysis, as it challenges traditional humanist conceptions and blurs the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines.

The creation of the creature by Victor Frankenstein disrupts the established notions of human identity. Victor's scientific experimentation results in a being that exists in an ambiguous space between the human and the non-human. Initially perceived as a monstrous and inhuman creation due to his unconventional origins, the creature's evolution throughout the novel reveals human-like emotions, desires, and intellect. His journey from a "hideous" creation to a sentient being capable of learning, feeling, and desiring challenges the reader's understanding of what it means to be human. One of the primary concerns of posthumanism is the definition of the human and the "other." In "Frankenstein," the creature's struggle with identity and his search for belonging exemplify this concern. He is both like and unlike humans, defying a fixed definition of humanity and highlighting the fluidity and complexity of human identity. The creature's experiences of rejection and isolation from society due to his appearance and origins prompt readers to empathize with his plight and question the arbitrary distinctions made between humans and non-humans.

Furthermore, Shelley's novel delves into the ethical implications of technological advancements, a central focus of posthumanist critique. Victor Frankenstein's unchecked pursuit of scientific progress and the devastating consequences of his actions serve as a cautionary tale against the dehumanizing effects of unbridled technological ambition. The novel prompts readers to reconsider the ethical boundaries of technology and its impact on humanity. Moreover, "Frankenstein" explores the theme of bodily modification and enhancement, reflecting posthumanist interests in the manipulation and enhancement of the human body. The creature's constructed body and his desire for a mate raise questions about the ethical implications of bodily alteration and the quest for perfection through scientific means. Victor Frankenstein's reluctance to fulfill the creature's request reflects the novel's cautionary stance on the consequences of pursuing bodily enhancement without considering the ethical and moral ramifications.

The theme of agency and autonomy is intricately woven into the narrative of "Frankenstein," presenting a complex exploration of these concepts within a posthuman context. The novel challenges traditional notions of human autonomy by

depicting the creature's quest for autonomy and his interactions with society. Despite his human-like emotions, desires, and intellect, the creature is consistently rejected and marginalized by society due to his monstrous appearance. This rejection reflects the posthumanist critique of human-centric perspectives and highlights the ethical implications of denying agency to non-human entities. Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" offers a compelling posthumanist exploration of identity, otherness, and the ethical implications of scientific and technological advancements. Through its depiction of the creature's constructed body, his struggle with identity, and Victor Frankenstein's unchecked scientific ambition, the novel raises profound questions about the nature of humanity, the ethical boundaries of technology, and the complexities of agency and autonomy in a posthuman world. Shelley's exploration of these themes encourages readers to critically examine and challenge traditional humanist ideas and to embrace a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of what it means to be human in an interconnected and diverse world.

Discussion

In the realm of critical theory, the posthuman is conceptualized as a speculative entity that challenges and redefines traditional notions of humanity. Posthumanist critique interrogates humanism, a philosophical stance asserting a universal and autonomous human nature, rational and endowed with free will, seen as the pinnacle of existence. Contrarily, the posthuman perspective acknowledges human imperfection and internal disunity, viewing the world through diverse lenses while upholding intellectual rigor and commitment to objective analysis. Central to this posthuman approach is the capacity for fluidly shifting perspectives and adopting various identities. Critical theorists posit the posthuman as possessing an emergent ontology rather than a fixed one, implying not a singular defined individual but one capable of "becoming" or embracing diverse identities and understanding the world from multifaceted viewpoints.

Posthumanist methodologies vary widely and have often been subject to critique. The term itself is contentious; Manuel DeLanda, a prominent figure in posthumanist discourse, dismisses it as "ridiculous." Attempting to encapsulate the concepts of works like Robert Pepperell's "The Posthuman Condition" and Hayles's "How We Became Posthuman" under a single term presents challenges due to these inconsistencies.

The notion of the posthuman aligns closely with Donna Haraway's "cyborg" as presented in "A Cyborg Manifesto." Haraway's concept of the cyborg offers an ironic reinterpretation of conventional cyborg imagery, subverting the traditional boundary between humans and machines. Haraway's cyborg theory can be viewed as a precursor to the posthuman, as it sparked critical engagement with the concept in

theoretical discourse. Following Haraway, Hayles, a foundational figure in posthumanist theory, argues that the liberal humanist perspective, which dichotomizes the mind and body, viewing the body merely as a "vessel" for the mind, becomes increasingly problematic in the late 20th and 21st centuries due to advancements in information technology. Hayles contends that we must be mindful of the implications of these technological developments, recognizing information as "disembodied"—something that cannot replace the human body but can only be integrated into it and human practices. In Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," a posthumanist reading uncovers the blurred boundaries between human and non-human, the ethical implications of scientific advancements, and the exploration of agency and autonomy in a posthuman world.

The creation of the creature challenges the traditional humanist understanding of what it means to be human. Victor Frankenstein, through his scientific experimentation, constructs a being that is neither fully human nor fully non-human. The creature's journey from a "hideous" creation to a sentient being capable of learning, feeling, and desiring challenges the fixed notion of human identity. The creature's eloquence, intelligence, and emotional depth reveal the complexities of identity and otherness, suggesting that humanity is not defined solely by appearance but by consciousness, emotion, and experience. Victor's unchecked pursuit of knowledge and ambition in the field of "natural philosophy" raises ethical questions about the consequences of scientific and technological advancements. His obsession with creating life leads to devastating outcomes, including the loss of innocent lives and the destruction of his own family. Shelley critiques the human desire to manipulate and control nature, highlighting the dangers of technology when wielded without ethical consideration.

The novel explores the implications of agency and autonomy in a posthuman context. The creature's demand for a mate and its subsequent revenge against Victor reflect the complexities of agency in a world where humans and their creations coexist. The creature's actions, driven by its desire for companionship and acceptance, challenge the notion of humans as autonomous beings separate from their creations.

The novel prompts readers to reconsider the boundaries between human and non-human, the ethical implications of technological progress, and the complexities of agency and autonomy in a posthuman world. Through a posthumanist lens, "Frankenstein" encourages us to reflect on what it means to be human in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" offers a profound exploration of posthumanism, particularly in its nuanced depiction of identity and otherness. The novel challenges traditional humanist concepts by

blurring the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines, thereby prompting readers to reconsider the fixed definitions of humanity. The creature created by Victor Frankenstein serves as a central figure in this exploration. Initially perceived as a monstrous and inhuman being due to his unconventional creation, the creature's evolution throughout the novel disrupts the established notions of human identity. His complex emotions, desires, and intellectual capacities demonstrate human-like qualities, challenging the reader's understanding of what it means to be human.

In the context of posthumanism, the creature's struggle with identity and his search for belonging exemplify the posthumanist concern with the definition of the human and the "other." The creature is caught between two worlds: he is both like and unlike humans. This duality of his nature defies a fixed definition of humanity and highlights the fluidity and complexity of human identity. Shelley's portrayal of the creature prompts readers to confront their own preconceived notions of identity and otherness. The creature's experiences of rejection and isolation from society due to his appearance and origins challenge the reader to empathize with his plight and question the arbitrary distinctions made between humans and non-humans. Moreover, the creature's quest for acceptance and his desire for a sense of belonging in a society that rejects him resonate with posthumanist ideas of inclusivity and the dissolution of boundaries. The novel emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings and the shared experiences and emotions that define humanity, regardless of one's origins or appearance.

Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" serves as a compelling posthumanist text that challenges traditional humanist ideas by exploring the themes of identity and otherness. Through the character of the creature, the novel prompts readers to reconsider the fixed definitions of humanity and the arbitrary distinctions made between humans and non-humans. Shelley's exploration of the fluidity and complexity of human identity encourages readers to embrace a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of what it means to be human in an interconnected and diverse world.

Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" serves as a compelling exploration of posthumanism, challenging traditional humanist ideas and blurring the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines. The novel's depiction of Victor Frankenstein's creation, initially a monstrous and inhuman being, evolves to demonstrate human-like emotions, desires, and intellect. This transformation of the creature raises profound questions about the nature of humanity and identity, central themes in posthumanist discourse. One of the primary concerns of posthumanism is the definition of the human and the "other." In "Frankenstein," the creature's struggle with identity and search for belonging exemplifies this concern. He is both like and

unlike humans, defying a fixed definition of humanity and highlighting the fluidity of human identity. Additionally, the novel delves into the ethical implications of technological advancements, a central focus of posthumanist critique. Victor Frankenstein's unchecked pursuit of scientific progress and the devastating consequences of his actions serve as a cautionary tale against the dehumanizing effects of unbridled technological ambition. The novel prompts readers to reconsider the ethical boundaries of technology and its impact on humanity.

The novel challenges traditional notions of agency and autonomy in a posthuman world. The creature's quest for autonomy and his interactions with society reveal the complexities of agency in a world where humans are deeply interconnected with their creations. "Frankenstein" forces readers to confront the idea that humans are not autonomous beings separate from their creations but are instead intertwined with the technologies and beings they create. Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" provides a profound exploration of posthumanism through its depiction of bodily modification and enhancement. The creature, constructed from various body parts and brought to life through scientific experimentation, represents a radical reimagining of the human body, raising important ethical and philosophical questions about the implications of bodily alteration and the quest for perfection through scientific means.

The creature's constructed body serves as a potent symbol of posthumanist concerns regarding the manipulation and enhancement of the human body. Victor Frankenstein's ambition to create life through scientific experimentation results in a being that defies traditional human boundaries. The creature's physical form, assembled from disparate parts, challenges the idea of a natural, fixed human body and underscores the potential consequences of unchecked technological intervention in human biology.

Furthermore, the creature's desire for a mate highlights the novel's exploration of bodily enhancement and modification. In his quest for companionship and acceptance, the creature demands a partner created in a similar manner to himself, emphasizing the novel's focus on the ethical implications of creating and modifying life through scientific means. Victor Frankenstein's reluctance to fulfill the creature's request reflects the novel's cautionary stance on the consequences of pursuing bodily enhancement without considering the ethical and moral ramifications. In "Frankenstein," Shelley presents a compelling critique of the ethical boundaries of bodily modification and enhancement, raising important questions about the implications of manipulating the human body through science. The novel challenges readers to consider the ethical implications of pursuing bodily perfection and enhancement through technological means and prompts us to reflect on the potential consequences of blurring the boundaries between the natural and the artificial.

"Frankenstein" offers a provocative posthumanist exploration of bodily modification and enhancement, challenging traditional notions of the human body and prompting readers to reconsider the ethical implications of technological interventions in human biology. Through its depiction of the creature's constructed body and his quest for a mate, the novel raises profound questions about the consequences of pursuing bodily perfection and enhancement through scientific means and encourages us to critically examine the ethical boundaries of technological advancements in the context of human identity and existence. The theme of agency and autonomy is intricately woven into the narrative, presenting a complex exploration of these concepts within a posthuman context. The novel challenges traditional notions of human autonomy by depicting the creature's quest for autonomy and his interactions with society, revealing the intricate complexities of agency in a world where humans are deeply interconnected with their creations.

The creature's struggle for autonomy is a central aspect of the novel, highlighting the posthumanist concern with the blurred boundaries between humans and their creations. Created by Victor Frankenstein, the creature initially lacks agency and is subjected to the whims and desires of his creator. However, as the story unfolds, the creature seeks to assert his autonomy and forge his own identity, challenging the idea that humans are the only beings capable of agency and self-determination.

The creature's interactions with society further complicate the notion of agency and autonomy in the novel. Despite his human-like emotions, desires, and intellect, the creature is consistently rejected and marginalized by society due to his monstrous appearance. This rejection reflects the posthumanist critique of human-centric perspectives and highlights the ethical implications of denying agency to non-human entities. Moreover, Victor Frankenstein's actions and his treatment of the creature raise questions about human responsibility and the ethical dimensions of agency in a posthuman world. Frankenstein's refusal to take responsibility for his creation's well-being and his neglectful treatment of the creature underscore the dangers of unchecked scientific ambition and the ethical responsibilities that come with creating sentient beings.

"Frankenstein" prompts readers to reconsider the idea that humans are autonomous beings separate from their creations. Instead, the novel suggests that humans are deeply interconnected with the technologies and beings they create, and that the quest for autonomy and agency is not exclusive to humans but extends to all sentient beings. "Frankenstein" offers a profound posthumanist exploration of agency and autonomy, challenging traditional humanist ideas and prompting readers to reconsider the ethical and philosophical implications of human creativity and

responsibility. The novel forces us to confront the complexities of agency in an interconnected world and to redefine our understanding of autonomy in the context of technological and biological creations.

Conclusion

Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" stands as a seminal work in posthumanist discourse, providing a rich tapestry for exploring the complexities of identity, otherness, and the ethical implications of scientific and technological advancements. Through the character of Victor Frankenstein's creature, Shelley disrupts established notions of human identity and challenges readers to reconsider fixed definitions of humanity.

The creature's journey from a "hideous" creation to a sentient being capable of learning, feeling, and desiring prompts readers to empathize with his experiences of rejection and isolation. Shelley's exploration of the creature's struggle with identity and his search for belonging exemplifies posthumanist concerns with the definition of the human and the "other." The novel's nuanced portrayal of the creature's complex emotions, desires, and intellectual capacities challenges the reader's understanding of what it means to be human.

Additionally, "Frankenstein" delves into the ethical implications of Victor Frankenstein's unchecked scientific ambition and the quest for bodily modification and enhancement. The novel raises profound questions about the consequences of pursuing bodily perfection and enhancement through scientific means without considering the ethical and moral ramifications. Shelley's cautionary tale highlights the dangers of technology when wielded without ethical consideration and prompts readers to critically examine the ethical boundaries of technological advancements. Furthermore, "Frankenstein" challenges traditional notions of human agency and autonomy by depicting the creature's quest for autonomy and his interactions with society. The novel's exploration of agency and autonomy in a posthuman context reveals the intricate complexities of these concepts and underscores the ethical implications of denying agency to non-human entities.

Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" offers a compelling posthumanist exploration of identity, otherness, and the ethical implications of scientific and technological advancements. Through its nuanced depiction of the creature's struggle with identity, Victor Frankenstein's unchecked scientific ambition, and the complexities of agency and autonomy in a posthuman world, the novel encourages readers to critically examine and challenge traditional humanist ideas and to embrace a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of what it means to be human in an interconnected and diverse world. Shelley's exploration of these themes in "Frankenstein" remains relevant today, urging us to reflect on the ethical and philosophical implications of

human creativity, responsibility, and the blurring boundaries between the natural and the artificial in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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