



Scientific Ambition and Moral Failure: A Comparative Study of *Frankenstein* and Its Film Adaptations

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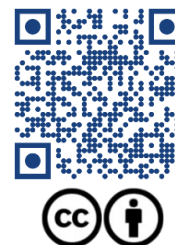
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Received: 10 Mar 2026; Received in revised form: 08 Apr 2026; Accepted: 11 Apr 2026; Available online: 15 Apr 2026

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Abstract— *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) by Mary Shelley is considered to be a seminal work in studying the ethical consequences of scientific ambition. This paper presents a comparative analysis of the novel and selected film versions applying posthumanism, bioethics, and AI ethics as analytical tools. It argues that although in Shelley, moral failure is found in the negligent attitude of Victor Frankenstein towards his creature, in the film adaptations, this failure is redefined within the context of the changing technological and cultural realities. The analysis uses close analysis of some of the central scenes in the movie to illustrate how these adaptations change the personal failure in ethics to one that is more societal in nature, like the responsibility of an institution and the independence of the technology. Ultimately, *Frankenstein* proves to be a prescient ethical exploration that anticipates the modern issues of artificial intelligence and biotechnology.



Keywords— AI ethics, Film adaptation, *Frankenstein*, Moral failure, Scientific ambition.

I. INTRODUCTION

Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley remains a seminal work that addresses the question of the relationship between science and ethics. Composed during an era of the great intellectual flux, the novel reflects the optimism of Enlightenment science and the cynicism of Romanticism. The story of *Victor Frankenstein* and his efforts to acquire knowledge and control the life in its entirety exemplifies of how humanity seeks to transcend nature but fails to take responsibility for what it creates thereby revealing the moral dangers of such ambitions. With the increased pace of scientific and technological progress in the contemporary world, the motif of *Frankenstein* has gained some fresh interpretations, especially as it applies to the realms of artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and biotechnology. The paper compares the novel and selected major film adaptations to understand how the themes of scientific ambition and moral failure are expressed across different media and historical circumstances.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Frankenstein has attracted countless interpretations over the years, indicating that this novel contains various layers of meanings. Early critics considered it a product of the Romantic period and thought that it cautioned against an excessive emphasis on science and reason. They frequently portrayed *Victor Frankenstein* as a tragic hero whose flaws stem from his ambition, pride and isolation. Nevertheless, subsequent literature approached the novel from fresh perspectives, such as notions of technology, morality and being human.

Theorists such as Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway view the creature as a figure that challenges the notion of what a human being is. The concept of the cyborg described by Haraway applies well in view of the fact that the creature is both human and man-made. Bioethics are an issue other critics dwell on, where concepts by Beauchamp and Childress are applied to demonstrate that Victor neglects his duty as a creator by failing to take care of the creature. Even more recent ones compare the creature to artificial intelligence. Philosophers, such as Luciano Floridi, assert that, similar to AI, the creature becomes more powerful than

its creator, raising the questions of responsibility and the risks of creating new forms of life.

The adaptation studies have also helped in realising the evolution of *Frankenstein* across media. Theorists state that movies are a mirror of the fears of the epochs in which they were created, like early twentieth-century fears of industrialisation, modern fears of artificial intelligence and machine autonomy. Although considerable work is available on this, the gaps that still exist concern integrated analyses that incorporate both theoretical frameworks and the close readings of the cinematic texts, which this research paper attempts to address.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework encompassing posthumanism, bioethics and AI ethics to explore *Frankenstein* and its adaptations. Posthumanism challenges the assumption of what it means to be human, and in this process, they provide a lens through which the creature can be considered as a subject and not an object. Bioethics provides an example of how one may interpret the behaviour of *Victor Frankenstein* based on the lens of responsibility, harm, care and the ethical obligations of being a creator of science. AI ethics uses these problems to apply in present-day contexts, such as the problem of autonomy, alignment and responsibility in artificial systems. Together, these frameworks enable a comprehensive understanding of the rise and fall of scientific ambition.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The paper follows a qualitative, comparative methodology, integrating literary analysis and film studies. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818) serves as the main text, and it is complemented by the analysis of the selected film versions, such as *Frankenstein* (1931), *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), and *Victor Frankenstein* (2015). Key scenes are examined through the prism of visual composition, plot development, and theme focus, with a special emphasis put on how they showcase creation, responsibility, and moral deficiency. The theoretical frameworks provided above inform the analysis and make it possible to interdisciplinary interpret both textual and visual material.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

It is not scientific ambition itself that is condemned in *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley; rather, it represents a pure human desire that is associated with the Enlightenment views of progress, discovery, and control of nature. This

intellectual atmosphere is evident in the way *Victor Frankenstein* tries to gain knowledge, as he tries to overcome the boundaries of nature and reveal the mysteries of life itself. The novel, however, poses the challenges of this ambition by showing the ethical drawbacks that arise due to the detachment of responsibility and foresight. Victor did not fail in the process of creation but rather in his failure to foresee, manage and reckon with the repercussions of his experiment. Bioethically, his behaviour is an extreme breach of the major principles of nonmaleficence and responsibility. He creates a living being without thinking about its welfare, psychological development, or social belonging, and his desertion of the being only creates the contrast of a grave violation of the ethical care. The trajectory of the creature, from innocence to violence, proves that monstrosity is not inherent, it is developed by negligence, rejection and pain. In this way Shelley re-evaluates the idea of moral failure as relational based on the breaking of responsibility between creator and creation in contrast with the act of scientific innovation itself.

In posthumanist thinking, the creature is an influential character that disrupts the conventional meaning of humanity. Being both a man and a machine at the same time, the creature forces one to reconsider the idea that humanity is rooted in biological beginnings or physical appearance. The fact that it can learn a language and have empathy and think of its existence makes it a subject and not an object, which challenges anthropocentric hierarchies. However, regardless of these virtues, the monster is not recognised and included because of its physical looks, showing the random and marginalising preferences according to which humanity is socially constructed. This paradox highlights one of the central posthumanist arguments that humanity does not have an objective demarcation point which is determined by nature, but rather it is culturally and ideologically constructed. The story by Shelley predicts modern arguments regarding artificial creatures, cyborg identities and the ethical position of non-human creatures, implying that non-human moral considerations should be expanded to cover the traditional human groups. In this regard, the creature turns into a reflection of the restrictions and biases of human society.

Adaptations of *Frankenstein* to the screen follow these themes across the visual and narrative techniques that mirror the anxieties of their cultural periods. *Frankenstein* (1931) changes the scene of the creation into a dramatic scene with massive lab machinery, flashing lights and harnessing of electricity. Such visual focus on machines and power makes the process of creation a moment of technological success and changes the focus of the narration towards the responsibility of ethics in favour of the accomplishment of scientific success. This change is

emphasised by the triumphant pronouncement of success by Victor, who puts the creation in the context of mastery instead of being a moral endeavour. Instead, the creature is positioned as an immediate danger, which supports a binary opposition between human and non-human, which corresponded to the anxieties of industrialisation and uninhibited technological advancements of the early twentieth century. This change streamlines the convoluted system of morality that Shelley possesses by shifting the experience of moral failure to an extrinsic effect of the transgressive ambition and not the neglect of relationships.

Conversely, the ethical and emotional aspects in the works by the author of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, are revived in *Frankenstein* (1994). The creation process is presented in a visceral and embodied way and focuses on organic imagery and physical struggle. The monster is born in a fluid environment, and it is not distinguished where the creature was naturally born and the way it was created. Such depiction adds more moral weight to the creator since the job of Victor would be comparable to that of a parent. His later abjection of the creature is therefore even more ethical, showing the ineffectiveness of care and the results of being thrown away. The emotional depth and sufferings of the creature shown in the film confirm the novel criticism of social marginalisation and moral negligence and agree well with both bioethical and posthumanist interpretations.

A further development is evident in *Victor Frankenstein* (2015), where a dimension of collaboration and experimentation is added to the story. The film complicates the concept of individual responsibility by foregrounding the partnership between Victor and Igor, implying that the creation of science is usually a group activity. This transformation is symptomatic of current anxieties regarding the institutional and collaborative character of technological production in which there is the spread of responsibility throughout networks of researchers, developers, and organisations. The focus on the experimentation and the process, not on the single point of creation, is consistent with contemporary scientific work and begs the question of accountability in the complex world. In this regard, moral failure is not isolated to an individual but turns out to be a structural problem, involving more social and institutional systems.

The creature as seen through the lens of AI ethics can be viewed as an early interpretation of an autonomous system, which develops its behaviour based on its interaction with the environment. Similar to modern artificial intelligence, the creature learns by seeing, adjusts to external factors, and progresses in some way of thought and self-consciousness. The absence of guidance, education or moral orientation offered to the creature by Victor is analogous to what has now been termed the “alignment problem in AI ethics”, the problem

of making artificial systems behave in a way that is morally desirable to humans. The violent behaviour of the creature, then, can be interpreted not as a sign of intrinsic wickedness but as the result of insufficient design, absence of control and societal disapproval. This interpretation highlights the necessity to incorporate ethical aspects during the creation and implementation of intelligent systems and the necessity of additional responsibility after their development.

Taken together, these discussions indicate an apparent change in the portrayal of scientific motivation and moral degradation across both literary and cinematic texts. Though the novel by Shelley attributes the moral failure to the individual neglect of the creator, the failed moral states gradually come to refer to the moral failures of the culture and the moral failures of the institutions. Simultaneously, the combination of posthumanist, bioethical, and AI ethical spheres proves that *Frankenstein* is not an object of history but a living and changing text that still responds to the topical ethical issues. What makes it relevant over time is its ability to shed light on the complicated connection between creation, responsibility, and limits of humans to give perceptive understanding on the ethical dilemma that contemporary science and technology may raise.

VI. FINDINGS

This research establishes that scientific ambition is always morally neutral in *Frankenstein*, even though it would be problematic when deprived of its responsibility, care and foresight. In both the novel and its movie versions, the problem is not the very creation but the inability to take moral responsibility for the created. In the original story of Mary Shelley, this failure is symbolised in the outright refusal of the creature by *Victor Frankenstein*, and this refusal triggers a series of misery and brutality. The metamorphosis of the creature from a delicate and understanding creature to a destructive one highlights the fact that moral failure lies in the failure of care and not necessarily in being monstrous. This establishes a ground argument in that ethical responsibility should not end with innovation but a continued involvement in the results of innovation.

The second important observation is that posthumanist analysis redefines the creature as a valid subject, not a monstrous other and this makes anthropocentric connection of what it means to be human difficult. The intellectual and emotional capacities of the creature prove that the human cannot be brought down to biological source or physical appearance. Rather, ethical recognition and social inclusion are core to the meaning of personhood, as per the study. Adaptations of the film, especially subsequent ones, to a larger degree support this view by making the creature more

human, and focusing more on its emotional experience, which is consistent with posthumanist criticism of fixed human identity.

The analysis further reveals that the bioethical principles are consistently violated in all the representations of *Victor Frankenstein*, but it is varied in the extent and manner of the violation. The failure of ethics in the novel is a personal and psychological one that is based on negligence and irresponsibility on the part of Victor. In motion pictures, this failure is multiplied manifold, sometimes the effort of scientific institutions, of collaborative enterprises or of social institutions. This is a change suggesting a change in perception of ethics in science, having more to do with responsibility in a systemic sense than with personal responsibility, and this is indicative of modern anxieties about the development of mature scale technologies.

The other notable discovery that can be made is based on the use of AI ethics that presents *Frankenstein* as a proto-narrative of artificial intelligence. The creature is also developed in accordance with major elements of the AI systems, such as observation-based learning, adapting to the environmental stimuli, and experiencing unpredictable behavioural results. Victor's inability to guide the creature or rather align it to moral standards is similar to current worries about AI alignment and control. The paper concludes that the creature's behaviour can be viewed not as inherently violent but as an outcome of under design, non-existence of controls, and societal rejection, which makes the role of ethical regulation in the development of autonomous systems particularly significant.

Furthermore, the development of film versions evidences an evolving range of ethical attitudes: there were initial warnings against the dangers of science, more refined versions of the same show responsibility and relationships and finally, contemporary worries regarding shared and institutional responsibility.

Lastly, the paper concludes that *Frankenstein* has been found to be highly relatable in the modern context since it foresees major areas of ethical issues in contemporary science and technology. The theme of accountability, conformity and the impacts of negligence in the story finds origins in the contemporary discussion of artificial intelligence, biotechnology and posthuman identity. The manner in which these themes have been continuing to be relevant in both time and media is indicative of the idea that *Frankenstein* functions not merely as a literary work but as a sustainable ethical model that can be used to analyse the developing technological anxieties.

VII. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Frankenstein remains relevant over the years because it can foresee ethical issues that characterise the current world of technology. The age of artificial intelligence is characterised by the fact that machine learning processes are more autonomous in their decision-making, raising questions of accountability, bias and control. Victor Frankenstein's inability to mentor and own his invention indicates the modern issue of creators that adopt technologies without much knowledge of the effects they could have on society. Likewise, biotechnology (gene editing, synthetic biology, etc.) continues to be a way of repeating the theme of creation in the novel where experts have not considered ethical implications. The struggle of the creature to survive in this world that does not accept or recognize it reflects the modern disputes about the rights and status of artificial and biologically modified creatures. The adaptations of this work in films underscore this topicality by repositioning the themes of the work in the context of the current anxieties and proving that *Frankenstein* is not only a historical artefact but a living text that still shapes the ethical debate.

VIII. FUTURE SCOPE

Frankenstein's interdisciplinary theme opens up major prospects in future studies. Future research might explore how the novel is relevant to newly emerging technologies such as transhumanism, robotics and neural interfaces and how definitions of humanity change traditionally accepted ethical systems. It may also enhance the comparative studies by extending the references to international and non-Western versions of *Frankenstein*, which will give a reflection of how the concept of scientific ambition and moral responsibility is perceived in other cultural settings. Furthermore, the next generation research might include an empirical method, such as the examination of the audience reception, in order to analyse the ethical facets of film adaptation by contemporary audiences. The theme of another promising direction is to apply *Frankenstein* to policy discourse about AI control and bioethics with the help of literary knowledge to make decisions in the real world. With the ever-changing technology, *Frankenstein* will be a very essential reading when it comes to developing the ethical aspects of creation and innovation.

IX. CONCLUSION

Frankenstein is an influential and versatile novel that continues to educate or inform modern discussions on science, technology, and morality. By integrating posthumanism, bioethics, and AI ethics, this paper has

shown that the major issue in the novel is not the process of creating but not taking responsibility of the creation. Although film adaptations differ in their focus, all go through this theme in one way or another, and moral responsibility should be in balance with one another, and the lesson is becoming more and more urgently needed nowadays with the presence of artificial intelligence and biotechnology.

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