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The Danger of Technology

In the 18th and 19th century, the Industrial Revolution marked a significant step of development throughout human history. Technological innovations sparked the emergence of all kinds of inventions that helped human civilization from transportation to communication etc. However, rapid development in technology brought up questions. Many remained unanswered as most people were unprepared, just like how people are unprepared today for the newest technological advance such as the metaverse and brain-computer interfaces. As a result, scholars and artists began a heated discussion that lasted until today about the role of technology, its benefits as well as its potential threat through different medias.

In literature, *Frankenstein* was probably one of the most popular and classic pieces at the time. *Frankenstein* was an 1818 novel written by Mary Shelley towards the end of the First Industrial Revolution. By presenting a rather straightforward (compared to the other texts we have read) yet tragic science fiction story, Shelley examines the pursuit of science and technology, specifically the downside of it that most people ignore. In fact, such ignorance can cause significantly harmful consequences to society from a moral aspect.

Victor, the story’s protagonist, is a mad scientist who masters in human anatomy. He was so fascinated in the creation of humans that he wants to create one on his own behalf. “More, far more, will I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation”(Shelley). Prompted by his obsession with technology, Victor is so confident and excited to start his creation of Frankenstein that he begins to play god. “Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe theri being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theris”(Shelley). Victor sees himself as the father and god of the human world, where he himself is Prometheus and the secrets between life and death are the fire that Prometheus brings to humanity.

With great changes comes fear. Marvelous scientific discoveries and technological breakthroughs had been made throughout the Industrial Revolution, so many of them that people were overwhelmed and not entirely ready. As a pioneer to discuss the role of artificial intelligence by implementing such a creation to her novel, Shelley rationally expresses her concern regarding what people can do about science and technology. She leaves sufficient space for the audience to think about the consequences if science develops unconstrained over the limit.

Though Victor is eventually able to finish the creation of Frankenstein, it is far from ideal. Ironically, instead of bringing “fire” to humanity, Victor brings a fire that relentlessly burns his family and friends as well as himself, more or less, as a consequence of going beyond the limit of morality in science. “For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart”(Shelley). Upon seeing the creature he makes, Victor realizes his mistake and the danger of overreaching an unrealistic fantasy, at the huge cost of his mental and physical health. “By degrees I made a discovery of still greater moment. I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. … This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it”(Shelley). Victor realizes the capability of Frankenstein as threatening as a real human being and is therefore reluctant to continue making fellow artificial creatures like him, which causes Frankenstein’s resentful cry: “I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel”(Shelley). Here Frankenstein is making a reference to John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Lost*, God makes Adam as the first human being, teaches him, nurtures him, and makes him a female human company Eve. However, though Victor also makes Frankenstein as the first “artificial” human being, Victor never truly treats Frankenstein as a real human. He not only abandons and isolates Frankenstein in disgust but even makes him a bride and then destroys her, further irritating Frankenstein. “God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after ihs own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire and encourage him, but I am solitary and abhorred”(Shelly). How desperate! How grieving! How indignant! Victor never takes any ethical consideration of the consequences before making Frankenstein, nor does he take any parental responsibility for Frankenstein afterwards. This is the turning point where Frankenstein becomes a monster that demolishes Victor’s life.

In Victor’s final farewell, he learns his last but most important lesson in life, but it is too late. “Seek happiness in tranquility, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries”(Shelley). Vector learns the consequences of overreaching science beyond the limit of ethics, of recklessly pursuing science at all costs, of fearing and being unprepared to the astonishing power and potential of artificial intelligence, etc.

On the other hand, Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness* Heart of Darkness is written slightly later than *Frankenstein*, after the end of triangular trade in a post-industrial era. Science and technology are now in a transition stage of developing into modernity and people become more familiar with them. As a result, though not as heavily focused on technology as *Frankenstein*, *Heart of Darkness* touches on a different aspect of the danger of technology: people’s gradual reliance on technology. The advance or progress in whatever technology increases people’s reliance on such technology, no matter what the technology is or what harm it may do. Such reliance on technology is still relevant today in terms of the creation, existence, and abandonment of products of science inventions, of which the whole process is symbolized by the monster Frankenstein.

When Marlow goes after Kurtz, stimulating thoughts and images flash through his mind. “I thought I would never get back to the steamer and imagined myself living alone unarmed in the woods to an advanced age” (Conrad). Marlow is concerned if he will not return to the “steamer”, a symbol for technology from the industrialized, modern Europe in contrast to the uncivilized savage Africa. He fears his living in Africa without European technology that he used to live with. In Chinua Achebe’s critical article *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness*, he argues that “Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as ‘the other world,’ the antithesis of Europe and therefore civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality” (Achebe). This strengthens the idea that, in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow is challenged by and struggles with the lack of technology in Africa.

Both *Frankenstein* and *Heart of Darkness* warn us the danger of technology which applies in all ages. First, we have to take the ethical danger into consideration before each attempt to progress in technology. We have to ask ourselves all the necessary moral questions before making an advance. We also need to be aware of the danger of technology when we lose control of it. Some technology such as Frankenstein or artificial intelligence has incredibly high potential threats to us as it possesses the capability to develop and evolve by itself. The last danger is our reliance to technology and it is spontaneous: if, one day, we accidentally lose a crucial technology to our lives, we will perish on our own at a glimpse with the absence of it.