Blade Runner And Frankenstein: Comparative Essay

With science progressing and playing with genetics, people are now able to choose the sex of their babies. Perhaps in the future we can create human beings that are genetically modified making them physically stronger and more intelligent. This can be beneficial if you happen to have diseases or faulty genes in your bloodline but for the rest of society, maybe playing with life is a little like playing with fire – a little unpredictable.

“The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom” – Isaac Asimov American Writer and Biochemist. (Goodreads.com, n.d.)

This quote explores the use of science and technological advance in both literary text Frankenstein (1818) and non-literary text Blade Runner (1982). Both of these texts explore how science and technology has changed and progressed. As well as this, they raise both ethical and non-ethical boundaries for science and technology and whether we should create life just because we can. (Goodreads.com, n.d.) As humans we all make mistakes, we all want to explore, grow, learn and go above and beyond. We constantly push past boundaries and laws.

Artificial intelligence and Frankenstein

Every day we deal with artificial intelligence in the form of smart devices including laptops, phones, Siri and Alexa. The development of this technology is rapidly progressing, impacting our daily lives and making information easier to access. But this isn’t always considered as a good thing. Science and technology can take over.

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Artificial intelligence used to only be seen in movies and read about in fiction novels. It was far fetched and not realistic. But what if the story-line of Franstein came to life? Victor Frankenstein studied how anatomy worked and how the human body was built and how it could fall apart. He then created a character and bought it to life for his own personal gain. He created something unique and special and became obsessed with it. He didn’t stop to consider the ethical or potential consequences of his actions. He created life, thinking he could create a new race of beings. How farfetched and scary is that? Not to even mention the moral implications of what could happen.

When Frankenstein first created the being, he did not allow for it to gain intelligence, strength and emotional depth.

It went far beyond his wildest dreams and was able to learn about the world around it and how it could interact with other humans. When the being (monster) ran away, it had to learn how to develop and survive but was visually very frightening. The monster developed feeling and emotion toward people he had never even met. This is seen when the being (monster) begins to tell his side of the story. He narrates his side of the story, telling it in the order of events, from

when he first woke up through his lonely journey. But most of his narrative focuses on a family in a nearby cottage from where he hides out. From watching the ins and outs of the family's life, he begins to learn and develop skills from simple vocabulary to communication skills. He learns about human history and how everything came to be. From war, to heartache to love and creation of human life. He begins to wonder what he is, where he comes from, if he too has any family.

"I was not even the same nature as man. I was more agile than they and could subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame, my stature far exceeded theirs. When I looked around, I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?"

"But where were my friends and relations? … What was I?"

With what started out as a hideous, terrifying beast with no knowledge of himself or the world, we see a side of him that is almost human like. He learns and develops the feelings of love and emotion. But that changed when people rejected him and cast him away. He re-acted by becoming vengeful and full of hatred and despair.

This just shows how wrong the experiment went. Frankenstein could not have predicted how his creature would develop and take on human traits. What started as a benign scientific experiment became an out of control frightening violent creature that was capable of far more than its maker intended.

At the time that this work of fiction was released, people were generally doubtful and a little scared of artificial intelligence and perceived that it may "take over the world". Science was way ahead of people's understanding of what it all meant and what it may mean for the future.

Science and technology in Blade Runner

Another frightening scenario a few years later was in the form of the film Blade Runner. Around this time "artificial intelligence" was a catch phrase everyone was using but no one really knew what it meant. At the time of making the film, the producers made predictions of what the future may look like.

The neo-noir film is set in a dark, dreary version of the year 2019 in Los Angeles. It explores the implications of scientific and technological experiments. Climate change has dramatically affected the earth's atmosphere and has resulted in constant rain. It can be described as a "claustrophobic" place with streets being overcrowded. Companies such as Tyrell Corporation, (responsible for manufacturing the replicants) had headquarters in a pyramidal shaped building overlooking the city. With other visual representations such as the almost cinematic screens advertising Coca-Cola and the real estate or other job opportunities in off-world colonies. Certain camera angles and tilts recall the neo-noir genre. Main characters are nearly always framed as close ups, as it shows importance to not only their character but role. There is also low-key lighting (almost dark and shadowy) that also portrays the genre of film and the hopelessness of the society humans have created.

In the film, some humans remain on earth and others relocate to off-world colonies. Six

replicants travel to earth illegally to confront their creator, Tyrell. They are seeking longer life spans than the four years that have been allotted to them. All replicants have implanted memories that they believe are their own. Meanwhile the humans have developed a test for the replicants to monitor their human behaviour and their emotional response. This is seen in a close up of one of the main characters, Rachel, when she believes she is human but is taking the test. She doesn't understand why this is happening.

"Suspect? How can it not know what it is?" – Deckard, Blade Runner

This means that even replicants are capable of a human response. Perhaps this means that they should be treated like humans?

The nexus-6 replicants display characteristics that are "basically identical to that of humans". They do however have the ability and physique being physically stronger with stealth, agility and intelligence varying on its model and make. Like the monster in Frankenstein (1918), they develop feelings and emotions. But this was supposed to be prevented by having a lifespan of 4 years?! At least this model has physical limitations and cannot reproduce.

Thankfully we no longer have the 80's style haircuts and shoulder pads, some of their other predictions are a little more realistic. The advancements in science and technology are progressing at a fast rate with forms of artificial intelligence already part of our daily lives. We have facetime available on all smart devices making the world a better place for business and personal connections. In addition to this, we have smart billboards in most major cities that are able to target marketing based on who may be close by. Currently law enforcement such as police, are utilising drones to help them, while agriculture is also making the most of this technology to enable them to maintain crops. Perhaps we are not so far from flying cars as we think.

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Both the film and novel, in some way explore the use of science and technology through artificial intelligence and what it means. As we can see from the examples in both Frankenstein and Blade Runner, even though intentions may be good, it has the potential to go wrong quickly and spectacularly.

Maybe the old quote of "just because you can doesn't mean you should" should be given more attention. (Goodreads.com, n.d.)

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