

A STUDY OF NETFLIX'S FRANKENSTEIN: CINEMATIC NARRATIVES OF AI ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGICAL FEAR

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ABSTRACT:

This paper, titled “A study of Netflix’s Frankenstein: Cinematic Narrative of AI Ethics and Technological Fear” analyses the 2025 American Gothic science fiction film Frankenstein, produced, written, and directed by Guillermo del Toro, as a modern cinematic reinterpretation of artificial intelligence ethics. This study, while inspired by Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, does not prioritise the novel as its primary text, instead it performs a systematic content analysis of the 2025 film adaptation to examine how nineteenth-century concerns regarding creation are recontextualised within twenty-first-century technological discourse. For over two centuries, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein created widespread awareness. In this qualitative content analysis, semiotic interpretation functions as an analytical instrument rather than an individual method. Semiotics explains the mechanism by which visual and narrative signs produce meaning, for example, the “Monster” is depicted not as an actual threat but as a consequence of neglect, societal rejection, and widespread anxiety. This movie remake shows how cultural stories still make artificial creatures places of collective concern, which changes how people think about AI. The methodology combines systematic content analysis with interpretive analysis to examine how the film reinterprets Frankenstein as a narrative that anticipates modern concerns over artificial intelligence. This cinematic reinterpretation illustrates how cultural narratives continue the depiction of artificial beings as symbols of collective anxiety, hence shaping public perception of AI. The study concludes that Frankenstein provides a foundational ethical framework for contemporary society to address responsibility, creativity, and awareness in the age of lifeless machines.

KEYWORDS: Ai Ethics, Creator Responsibility, Technological Anxiety, Cultural Narrative, Science Fiction Cinema.

INTRODUCTION

Cinema has been a source of entertainment for individuals worldwide for numerous generations. The magic of cinema is the result of the combination of images that are in motion. Film has consistently mirrored society, and conversely, culture has influenced film.

Guillermo del Toro Gómez is a Mexican filmmaker, author, and artist. His work has been characterized by a strong connection to fairy tales, Gothicism and horror, often blending the genres, with an effort to infuse visual or poetic beauty in the grotesque.

Storytelling has developed due to modernisation and digitalisation, with film now playing a crucial role in this narrative form. In the contemporary cinematic landscape, which emphasises commercial material, mythological concepts and gothic fairy tales are also gaining prominence on modern screens. Films such as *Frankenstein* tried to integrate Gothic science fiction themes with commercial narratives. Throughout the history of cinema, methodologies for understanding and decoding the art and science of film have also progressed. Diverse methodologies are established to analyse movies with a strong theoretical foundation. Semiotic analysis is a powerful method for examining the profound meanings in movies, facilitating an exploration of the underlying significance of the different signs and symbols employed by the creator. Through semiotic analysis, the audience can interpret the director's language along with its intended significance.

Toro's *Frankenstein*, another big, gothic fairy tale, started streaming on Netflix in early November. It is the most recent film version of Mary Shelley's famous book. It joins Boris Karloff's 1931 version of *Frankenstein*, the cult classic *Young Frankenstein* from 1974 and Kenneth Branagh's 1994 version, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Del Toro's movie, which stars Oscar Isaac as Victor Frankenstein and Jacob Elordi as the Creature, takes viewers from the frigid tundra to the halls of high society in Victorian England. First, we read the book. We discuss a lot about narrative function since the novel is made up of letters from a ship captain named Walton who tells how he and his crew rescued Victor Frankenstein in the Arctic, where he was chasing the creature. After that, Victor started telling Walton his life story. Victor narrates part of the story about how he sees the creature again after a few years. The creature then tells him his story. learners are usually surprised by how well-spoken and kind the creature. A lot of people feel that Victor is the monster for leaving the creature. We had some very deep talks regarding the issues of the book, like education, nature vs. nurture, parenting, abandonment, and loneliness. It's not a scary story, but being alone is scary.

Frankenstein beyond the horror genre, serving as a cultural sign-system that reflects the anxieties and aspirations of various historical ages. In the nineteenth century, the horrific figure symbolised risks of unchecked scientific inquiry and the ethical challenges of human experimentation. In the twenty-first century, the same figure is sometimes reinterpreted as a metaphor for artificial intelligence and the uncertainty linked to rapidly evolving technologies. Consequently, the monster transforms into a dynamic semiotic symbol whose significance varies in parallel with shifting technical and cultural narratives. This study explores the distinct segments of the *Frankenstein* film in order to explain the layers of meaning by deconstructing the many symbols and signs presented on screen.

Objectives

- To examine the semiotic depiction of artificial intelligence through the cinematic narrative of Frankenstein.
- To analyse the prominent cinematic symbols in the film.
- To examine the symbolic representation of the “Monster” as a metaphor for technological fear in modern society.
- To explore Frankenstein as a modern techno-cultural myth.

Review of Literature

Semiotics is an effective method for analysing a film's multiple meanings. According to a post on WordPress, the Equatorium (2025), contemporary films employ visual components to give frames deeper meanings and increase viewer engagement. In their films, filmmakers prioritised visual clues and symbolic expression of meaning over words. This article claims that the butterfly theme for the female character in del Toro's Frankenstein represents weakness and entrapment, crimson represents generational pain through women, and of course, the gothic genre tropes of decay, romance, and the paranormal. There is a lot of symbolism in this movie. Del Toro splits the movie into Victor's Tale and the Creature's Tale using the book's original format. This film explores this fascinating area between hope and despair, the potential for scientific progress and the fear of uncontrolled invention. It uses literary metaphors, colour language, and an emotional throughline to convey the substance of the narrative. Despite the suffering caused by the symbols and customs he was raised with, the creature is faced with a new horizon that he is free to discover. Del Toro's Frankenstein, when confronted with a fresh sunrise symbolises optimism following tragedy and is only significant due to the journey the narrative travelled to get there.

The study of Min Adlina and Pandi Muhammad (2025), highlights the key character arc appears by Victor's transformation from an enthusiastic scientist to a man overcome with guilt about the fallout from his desire. Victor's psychological traits include moral conflict, obsessive-compulsive behaviour, and eventual regret. His immaturity and lack of moral vision are demonstrated by his refusal to accept responsibility for the creature. It is possible to read Victor's relationship with his creation as a philosophical analogy between God and humans or as a metaphor for parent-child interactions. The study confirms Frankenstein's ongoing significance in light of contemporary ethical discussions about science, technology, and artificial intelligence. The book can be used in educational settings to promote literary appreciation, critical thinking, and ethical reflection. It also offers great chances for interdisciplinary study. It inspires future scholars to investigate Frankenstein as a timeless commentary on the human condition and the limits of knowledge, in addition to a gothic fiction.

According to Lieki Drema (2025) Movies can highlight the contemporary debates in bioethics, artificial intelligence, and technological governance concepts alive. Utilising contemporary storytelling techniques, they can impact the audience. This study aims to investigate the transformation of ethical responsibility when Frankenstein transitions from literary form to streaming adaption. This reorientation symbolises current concerns around technical governance and institutional authority. The adaptation depicts crudeness not merely as a result of individual pride but as an outcome of social structures that establish experimentation, surveillance, and

rejection. Responsibility is consequently redefined as social and structural, matching the discourse with contemporary critiques of biomedical authority and state power.

Anupam Chetia (2025) tries to explain the psychological, emotional, and existential aspects of isolation in the work, aiming to highlight Shelley's examination of human nature, alienation, and the pursuit of connection in a world filled with isolation and divergence. The creature's tragic existence illustrates humanity's desire for acceptance and company, as well as the potential for terrible consequences arising from a lack of supervision. Shelley's examination of this issue points out the vital human necessity for empathy and friendship, as well as the difficulties associated with detaching oneself from these fundamental elements of the human experience. Frankenstein offers an ongoing examination of the human condition and its risks of alienation in our pursuit for knowledge and ambition through a study of isolation.

Theoretical Framework

This study applied semiotic theory to analyse the multiple levels of meaning generated and interpreted by the audience. This approach enables intellectuals to analyse how signs and symbols are employed by the filmmaker to convey meaning. Ferdinand de Saussure is recognised as the pioneer of semiotics. He concentrates on the formal and structural significance of signs and symbols. This study concentrates on Roland Barthes's interpretation of semiotics. This is a post-structuralist approach applied to many cultural occurrences and myths, emphasising the flexibility of meaning. Semiotics defines a sign as the unit of meaning, with the actual component, such as a word or image, referred to as the signifier. The concept or idea denoted by a signifier is signified. Denotation refers to the express or literal meaning of a sign, while connotation refers to the cultural or refined meaning of a sign.

Methodology

This study applied a qualitative methodology through semiotic analysis to explore the several levels of meaning in Netflix's adaptation of Frankenstein. The study is informed by Roland Barthes's semiotic theory, which discusses the cultural and mythical significance of content. The data was gathered from a comprehensive analysis of visual and linguistic aspects across various segments of this film. The interpretation of data involves the identifying of relationship between signs and their signified meaning layers. In this qualitative content analysis, semiotic interpretation serves as an analytical tool rather than a standalone approach. Semiotics explains the process by which visual and narrative signs generate meaning; for instance, the "Monster" is shown not as a tangible threat but as a manifestation of neglect, societal rejection, and pervasive dread. This film remake demonstrates how cultural narratives perpetuate artificial life as sources of communal concern, thereby shaping public conceptions about AI.

Data Interpretation

- **The Monster's Creation Sequence: Metaphor of Artificial life**

One of the most important parts of the movie is when Victor Frankenstein puts the creature together and brings it to life in a lab scene that uses a lot of technology. The scenario is mostly made up of machines, electrical currents, and dimly lighted scientific area. In a semiotic framework, these visual components serve as signifiers that convey profound cultural significances. Frankenstein pursues the sublime until Victor resolves with nature. He artificially

constructs something biological and immortal, different from the world. He says, “And having reached the end of the earth, there was no horizon left,” after constructing the creature. The accomplishment seemed unnatural. Frankenstein is a great example of gothic fiction because the creature, who is human but not, challenges the sublime. From a semiotic standpoint, the act of “creating life” serves as a metaphor for the generation of artificial intelligence. The film's narrative implies that technological advancement frequently arises from a search for sovereignty over nature.

- **Red Colour: As a Symbol of Creation, Violence and Fear**

Del Toro's Frankenstein is full of symbols. Del Toro divides the movie into Victor's Tale and the Creature's Tale based on the book's original format. Set up, do. In Victor's Tale, we learn a lot about symbols and colours that will be important later in the movie. The use of red in the movie is the most interesting thing. People are commenting about how del Toro utilises red to represent motherhood. Red is initially presented at its most intense with Victor's mother attired entirely in the colour. Following her death during childbirth, an event fundamentally centred on the exchange of blood, marked by bloody handprints on Victor's garments as she is removed, the recurring red motif gives rise to Victor's intimate connection with his mother and the significant impact of her absence on his existence. His red necktie, red bedsheets, and red gloves serve as constant reminders of his enduring sadness over the loss of a loved one to death. It is the spark for his uncompromising pursuit of immortality. Also red depicts loneliness of Victor that becomes violence. Once we get to the monster or Creature's Tale, red is nearly completely gone from the story, except for blood in wounds. It's not surprising that blood is always red on television, but it also has a lot of meaning. Blood is life, and because of the colour language in Frankenstein, this blood is a constant reminder of Victor in the Creature's immortal life.

- **Awakening of the Creature: Emergence of Artificial Consciousness**

Another important point in the story is when the creature first opens its eyes. As the creature starts to engage with its surroundings, the camera focuses on its cautious motions, slow breathing, and puzzled stare. These visual indicators serve as indicators of nascent consciousness. In semiotic analysis, the act of opening the eyes serves as a signifier of consciousness and perception. The creature's uncertain gestures and fragmented movements symbolize the early stages of cognitive development. In modern conversations about technology, this moment is similar to talks over whether machines can be sentient and aware of themselves in systems based on artificial intelligence. This symbolic depiction allows for the interpretation of the monster as a cinematic metaphor for the emergence of artificial intelligence into a not sufficiently prepared planet.

- **The Fire Scene: understanding and Destroying**

In a subsequent symbolic scenario, the creature encounters fire and initially feels captivated by its warmth and enlightenment. However, after experiencing pain, it learns that the same element that offers solace also possesses the capacity for danger. In semiotic interpretation, fire serves as a dual sign denoting both knowledge and destruction. Historically, fire has been linked to enlightenment and human advancement, while simultaneously representing threat and uncontrollable force.

- **Social Rejection: Cultural Anxiety Toward the Technological Fear**

In the movie, a common story element is that civilisation rejects and fears the alien. When the creature tries to get close to people, they react with anger, fear, or violence. The creature in Frankenstein sought camaraderie, stating, “we can be monsters together.” This was not merely a request for companionship, but a profound want to share in the solitude that becomes more painful when endured in isolation. We are all uniquely shaped beings, and our existence is really an objective for a kindred spirit. The darkness does not repulse you when your scars reflect one another. One experience decreased solitude when in surrounds of others, even in isolation. From a semiotic point of view, the scared reactions of the villagers show that they are all afraid and that they are not part of the culture. The creature's looks make it look "other," which means it is not socially acceptable.

In the context of technological interpretation, the monster might be seen as a symbol of new ideas or technologies that are strange or disruptive. In the past, societies have often been doubtful or suspicious of new technology that seem to threaten the way things are already done. People often worry about job loss, loss of control, and moral ambiguity when they hear about artificial intelligence, automation, and robotics. So, the creature stands for the cultural fear that comes with changes in technology. The refusal to accept it shows how hard it is for society as a whole to adjust to new technological realities.

- **Ultimate Confrontation: Ethical Commitment of the Creator**

The climactic battle between Victor Frankenstein and the creature is a key point in the story. The creature asks its creator why it was left alone and is in pain during this meeting. This moment symbolically brings up the question of moral responsibility in new technology. Victor Frankenstein is the perfect example of a scientist who is too focused on gaining knowledge without thinking about how it will affect society.

In his childhood, Victor prays to a guardian angel, who is subsequently reborn as a dark angel (red once more) and vows to enable him gain victory over death. The new dark angel visits Victor three times in the film, each instance serving as a portent of the creature. This expressly refers to the beginning tale of Lucifer in Paradise Lost, paralleling the sense of dread and unholy with the creature, who similarly experiences expulsion by Victor. However, del Toro's portrayal of the creature simultaneously depicts him as an innocent and pure being. The creature represents the unforeseen consequences of uncontrolled experimentation. The encounter represents a moral discourse between creator and creation in a semiotic sense. In modern discussions about artificial intelligence, there are comparable worries about algorithmic decision-making, who is responsible for harm caused by technology, and what moral duties developers automation, and robotics. and companies have. So, the scene supports the main point that moral responsibility and technological progress cannot be separated.

- **The Seat of the Soul: Metaphor of Consciousness in Technological Creation**

Frankenstein is in this strange place between hope and despair, where scientific progress is possible but also scary because it could go too far. The greatness of elite and the decay of riches. The hunt for God and the enquiries that arise from this pursuit. Elizabeth informs Victor that "choice is the seat of the soul" as she turns down his love. Del Toro's Frankenstein doesn't just tell the stories of Victor and the Creature; it also looks at the gift of choice in their last conversation. The ship, Horisont, is a place where Victor and the Creature may work out their

differences and look forward to going home. In the book, the creature burns himself up with his creator, but in this version, he is allowed to remain living with Victor's permission.

CONCLUSION

Guillermo del Toro's Frankenstein is one of the beautiful examples of how the mythological, fairy tales or technological concepts are perfectly blend with a commercial movie without disturbing the flow of the movie. Every sequence of this movie starts with a narrative of the core theme that is visualized by the illustration of creator and his creation. Subsequently, each portion commenced with a symbolic depiction of the central idea. The editing department systematically evaluated each segment according to the central concept. Costumes embody the fundamental aspect of each narrative, and the creative team meticulously arranged certain pieces to achieve this effect. Semiotics is essential in visual storytelling, facilitating the simplification of complex narratives.

This study employed a semiotic framework to analyse the film narrative of Frankenstein and its modern version on Netflix, focusing on how visual symbols and narrative structures generate meanings associated with artificial intelligence, technical ethics, and societal apprehension. The examination of pivotal cinematic scenes demonstrates that the film utilises several visual symbols-including the laboratory environment, mirrors, fire imagery, and persistent colour symbolism- to convey profound cultural issues around the development and regulation of artificial life. The costumes were great, especially Elizabeth's gowns that were inspired by different bugs. The link between Elizabeth and the creature shows that something important doesn't have to last forever to be important.

Each symbol in Frankenstein is interpreted through the lens of the sublime. Red is significant due of its profound connection to life and human experience. Religious symbolism seeks to comprehend the broader universe and its mechanisms. Victor symbolises the intricate details of parental creation and dissolution, as well as the associated gender roles, prompting an analysis of human connection in all its imperfections. Frankenstein occupies a pivotal intersection between gothic and romantic ideas. Neither genre exists in complete isolation from the other, since several concepts are exchanged between them; nonetheless, it is the distinction that Victor's Tale embodies gothic elements while the Creature's Tale represents romantic themes that creates their convergence fascinating. The symbols like as insects, bandages, blood, and angels in the film's gothic segment are transformed via the creature's love perspective, highlighting his distinct personality.

At the end, Victor is forgiven even though he was violent, and the creature decides to forgive him because parent-child relationships are hard and sometimes the only way to move on is to let go. Victor Frankenstein's creature can be seen as a metaphor for early artificial intelligence, representing the first stage of technology creation when humans try to create autonomous life or intelligence. Early adoption of transformational technologies often causes cultural anxiety, as shown by the creature's waking, identity crisis, and social rejection. In this way, Victor represents the ambitious innovator, while the creature represents the uncertainty of experimental technological advancement. Director made a movie with layers, callbacks, and a very clear symbolic language that gave every scene value. It's not just a feast for the eyes; it's also a feast for the mind. This Frankenstein is completely true, even if it adds or takes away from some parts. It gets to the heart of the story using vivid language, literary references, and an emotional throughline. The creature has a new path to follow, and he can choose to do so even though it

hurts to leave behind the symbols and customs he grew up with. The ending was so real it's questions you to who was the real monster in ends. Del Toro's *Frankenstein* is a symbol of optimism after tragedy, but only because of the way the story got there.

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