Impact of technology in frankenstein novel

Literature, Russian Literature

In Mary Shelly's Novel, Frankenstein. deep moral questions about scientific advancement are raised, pondering the idea that one day science may go too far, reaching the realm of gods. This is a recurring theme of the novel, and it reflects the time period the book was written in, an era of new discoveries and advancements such as electricity, modern chemistry, and atomic theory. Today is a time of different advancements but the same questions about science and morality. As science continues with new ideas such as the human genome project it is easy to become lost in the magnificence of technology, but one must remember to keep science grounded with a moral connection, a soul in the science. As Shelly shows in Frankenstein, it is important to have a soul and nurturing motivation when striving for advancement in science, lest a true monster be created in society today in the wake of innovations such as the human genome project.

The human genome project truly is one of humanity's greatest achievements. This project involved finally sequencing the entire human genome, and opens the door to a wealth of applications. By examining a person's DNA, it is possible to tell what diseases they are at risk for, their chance of developing mental disabilities, and even information as trivial as their preferred sleeping habits. This knowledge will allow new medicines to be developed, and allow diagnoses and prescriptions to be more accurate than ever before. As people yearn for knowledge, a greater push for even more of such knowledge develops, and in this way science soars to new heights. With this some might argue that grounding scientific advancement might simply hinder it, making all of the aforementioned achievements impossible. Such is the opinion of Paul Northam in the following: " Surely no

reasonable person can condone the idea of turning our backs on the vast potential of genetic research." (Northam 4) Pesky things such as morals seem to be mere hindrances to be discarded to make room for more advancement. As James Watson famously says, " If we [scientists] don't play God, then who will?" Scientists seem to be the vanguard of humanity's advancement in one regard, and they are the ones who " play God" for the advancement of humanity's knowledge and power. This parallels another story with disastrous consequences that seemed to only be a pursuit of knowledge. " 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" (Shelly 35) As science continues on with a disregard for morality and care, it leaves unparalleled problems in its wake that are the opposite of the beauty envisioned. Desire alone is not enough to create greatness, one needs to keep the soul in the science, to prevent such horrors from ever arising as seen in Frankenstein. Because of these factors, one might call this the gilded age of scientific advancement, as the future of scientific study seems to be completely bright and golden, but that is only an assessment of the outer surface.

Beneath the surface, there are a number of potential issues that one must be aware of should the science be used incorrectly. There is potential for the information of the human genome to be abused in a gross perversion of what it was intended for originally. The project's provided knowledge about disease has the potential to be used by corporations to essentially segregate employees based on their genetic profile. Who would hire someone who has an 80% chance of heart disease knowing the costs of the medical benefits

and additional complications it brings? This is not the only potential dark aspect of the human genome. Designer babies, genetically engineered children to have ideal traits, seem to be completely positive. While they do have the potential to benefit humanity, they also raise a moral conflict similar to that seen in the novel, because they can be created with complete apathy and minimal involvement of loving parents. At the same time, these " perfect" children may not be as perfect as one believes, as shown by P. Tittle in the following: " Those advocating, and fearing, genetic engineering for its designer kids application seem to be forgetting that we are products of both nature and nurture."(Tittle, 4) Scientists often forget that humans are a product of both nature and nurturing, and in this way it is easy to see how so many scientific endeavours end up being misused. In an in a scenario like this, one must truly question whether this is nurturing and humane or simply another endeavor for science. As P. Tittle also says, " having intelligence or ability is not nearly as important as knowing what to do with it. So success isn't necessarily goodness."(Tittle, 2) This quote can be compared to similar messages by Shelly through Victor's story. He singlemindedly focused on gaining knowledge, and found out how to create life " I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter." (Shelly, 30) This knowledge was misused and resulted in the creation of a horrible monster. With this, one can gather that Shelly wouldn't be concerned finding out if humans actually can these babies or sequence the genome, she would question whether or not they should. Shelly's analysis and argument still has a strong presence today, and rightfully so.

Shelly's monster in the novel, Frankenstein, provides a metaphor for the result of any scientific endeavor should it go too far without containing any soul or morality. She argues that there needs to be a soul in science with the experiences of fictional characters rather than real world events. In doing so, her argument is immortalized and can be interpreted and applied to science far beyond her lifetime, with a prime example being the Human Genome Project. Shelley argues several key points that can be applied to the human genome project. The first is creation without morals. " You would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature."(Shelly 68) Shelly's choice of words and perspective here show that science can be apathetic at times, and discard any creation that is deemed as a failure. " When the test fails the subject is discarded. Genetic engineering is not tested on humans because that is against the law, animals receiving the same rights is a much debated topic." (Curezone, 8) The acceptability of this comes into question when dealing with living beings, as Shelley said over 200 years ago. Shelly also argues that science needs a moral grounding, or one of her monsters will be unintentionally created. There are a number of potential problems with the knowledge the Human Genome Project reveals, and as Shelley says in the following, some things are better off remaining unknown: " Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow."(Shelly, 31) These points fit within the larger argument that science should not be without soul, or a good moral grounding.

Through the various arguments relating modern day science such as the Human Genome Project to Mary Shelley's 200 year old text, Frankenstein, it is clear to see that although the context has changed, the arguments remain the same. As science advances at an astonishing rate, it has the potential to leave destruction in its wake as the monster of the novel did. The world is concerned with what humanity will be able to do in the future, seeing nothing but the bright promise of science and knowledge. Without morals, this science can quickly turn dark, with genetic screening at large corporations and even discrimination based on a person's DNA, an unchangeable aspect unique to that individual. With this in mind, the next step is clear to see. Humanity must answer the big question, one that Mary Shelley thought of 200 years prior: Even if it is possible to find all of this knowledge about the human genome, should we?