



Interrogating the Human Condition in the Digital Age: A Comparative Analysis of Power, Control, and Ethical Dilemmas in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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Abstract:

This paper explores the intricacies of the human condition in the digital age through a comparative analysis of Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" and Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein." Drawing on themes of power, control, and ethical dilemmas, this study examines how these two seminal works of English literature offer profound insights into the intersection of technology and humanity. Through close textual analysis, the paper investigates the ways in which the totalitarian regime of Gilead in "The Handmaid's Tale" and Dr. Frankenstein's unchecked ambition in "Frankenstein" shape the characters' identities and moral choices, while also reflecting broader societal anxieties surrounding technological advancements. By situating these novels within their historical and cultural contexts, the study elucidates how Atwood and Shelley grapple with questions of power dynamics, responsibility, and the unintended consequences of scientific innovation. Ultimately, this comparative analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the human condition in the digital age, offering valuable insights into contemporary issues and ethical considerations surrounding technology and society.

Keywords:

Human Condition, Digital Age, Power, Control, Ethical Dilemmas, Identity, Agency, Resistance, Surveillance, Technology, Technological Advancement, Social Control, Autonomy

Methodology:

This paper employs a comparative literary analysis to examine “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood and “Frankenstein” by Mary Shelley. It involves close reading of the texts, comparing themes, characters, and narrative techniques. The analysis considers historical contexts, theoretical frameworks, and interdisciplinary insights to explore the human condition in the digital age. Critical reflection is encouraged throughout to deepen understanding and enrich scholarly discourse.

Objectives:

The core objectives of this paper is

- To Explore Themes of Power and Control
- To analyze the ethical dilemmas presented in each novel, exploring questions of responsibility, accountability, and the unintended consequences of scientific innovation
- To Compare and Contrast Narrative Techniques
- To Offer Insights into Contemporary Issues
- To Contribute to Academic Discourse

Introduction:

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancement and digital interconnectedness, the human condition finds itself at an unprecedented crossroads. As society grapples with the implications of ubiquitous technology, questions surrounding power, control, and ethical responsibility come to the forefront. It is within this context that literature serves as a vital lens through which to examine and interrogate the complexities of the human experience in the digital age.

This paper embarks on a journey to explore the human condition in the digital age through a comparative analysis of two seminal works of English literature: Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale” and Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein.” Both novels, despite being separated by centuries, offer profound insights into the intersection of technology and humanity, shedding light on timeless themes that resonate with contemporary society.

“The Handmaid’s Tale” presents a dystopian vision of a future society known as Gilead, where totalitarian control and the subjugation of women are enforced through the manipulation of technology and the appropriation of religious ideology. Within this oppressive regime, the protagonist, Offred, navigates a world where her identity and agency are continually threatened, prompting reflections on power dynamics, resistance, and the pursuit of autonomy.

In contrast, “Frankenstein” explores the consequences of unchecked scientific ambition and the creation of life through technology. Dr. Victor Frankenstein’s experiment to create a sentient being ultimately leads to tragedy,

as his creation grapples with questions of identity, belonging, and moral responsibility. Shelley's novel delves into the ethical dilemmas inherent in technological innovation, raising profound questions about the limits of human knowledge and the hubris of playing god.

By juxtaposing these two works, this paper seeks to illuminate the ways in which literature engages with the challenges and opportunities presented by technology in shaping the human condition. Through close textual analysis, historical contextualization, and theoretical exploration, this paper aims to uncover the underlying themes and ethical considerations that resonate across time and space.

In doing so, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of the human experience in the digital age, offering insights into the ways in which literature can serve as a mirror to society, prompting critical reflection and dialogue on the pressing issues of our time. Through our analysis of "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Frankenstein," this paper endeavors to shed light on the enduring relevance of these works and their capacity to enrich our understanding of technology, power, and the human condition.

Discussion:

This paper focuses in various aspects to highlight the human condition in digital age through the close examination of the two selected literary text. Firstly this paper will focus on examining the depiction of power and control in "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Frankenstein," exploring the mechanisms employed by the regimes in each novel and their intersection with technological advancements.

In "The Handmaid's Tale," power and control are wielded by the totalitarian regime of Gilead, which imposes strict social and religious norms to maintain its authority. The regime utilizes a combination of surveillance, indoctrination, and physical coercion to assert control over its citizens. While specific technological advancements like cameras are not explicitly mentioned in the text, the regime's methods of control are reminiscent of modern surveillance states, where individuals are constantly monitored and regulated. The Handmaids, in particular, are subjected to intense scrutiny and manipulation, their lives tightly controlled by the regime's oppressive rules and rituals.

In contrast, "Frankenstein" explores power and control through the narrative of Dr. Victor Frankenstein, who harnesses the power of science to create life. Dr. Frankenstein's ambition and hubris lead him to overstep ethical boundaries, ultimately resulting in the creation of the Creature. However, once the Creature comes to life, it challenges Dr. Frankenstein's control and asserts its own agency. Despite being created by Dr. Frankenstein, the Creature becomes a symbol of resistance, rebelling against its creator and society's rejection of its humanity.

The Intersection of power and technology in both novels highlights the ways in which advancements in science and society can be weaponized to exert control over individuals. In "The Handmaid's Tale," the regime's use of technology is implicit, with its methods of surveillance and enforcement serving as tools of oppression. In "Frankenstein," Dr. Frankenstein's scientific experimentation represents a form of technological advancement that ultimately leads to unintended consequences and loss of control.

Furthermore, both novels explore the dynamics of agency and resistance in the face of oppressive power structures. Characters in "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Frankenstein" navigate their limited agency within systems of control, often resorting to acts of rebellion and defiance to reclaim their autonomy. This comparative analysis of power and control in "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Frankenstein" offers insights into the complex interplay between authority, technology, and individual agency in shaping the human experience. By examining the

dynamics of control over characters' lives, their agency, and resistance, a deeper understanding of the ways in which power operates and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of oppression is gained.

Secondly, this paper's focus is on exploring the ethical dilemmas presented in both "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Frankenstein," particularly concerning scientific experimentation and technological innovation. The examination will delve into the responsibilities of the creators, Dr. Frankenstein and the architects of Gilead's society, and the consequences of their actions on society and individual characters.

In "Frankenstein," Dr. Victor Frankenstein's pursuit of scientific knowledge and his ambition to create life lead him to conduct experiments that defy ethical boundaries. By playing the role of creator, Dr. Frankenstein assumes the responsibility of bringing life into existence, but he fails to consider the moral implications of his actions. His creation of the Creature without regard for its well-being results in tragic consequences, both for the Creature and for those around him. The ethical dilemma at the heart of "Frankenstein" revolves around the question of scientific responsibility and the consequences of unchecked ambition.

Similarly, in "The Handmaid's Tale," the architects of Gilead's society manipulate scientific advancements for their own ideological purposes, resulting in profound ethical dilemmas for both individuals and society as a whole. The regime's use of technology to control reproduction, enforce gender roles, and suppress dissent raises questions about the ethical boundaries of scientific experimentation and the responsibility of those in power. The consequences of these actions are felt by characters like Offred, who are forced to navigate the oppressive regime's rules and face the consequences of their defiance.

The ethical dilemmas presented in "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Frankenstein" highlight the potential consequences of scientific advancement when wielded without ethical consideration. By examining the responsibilities of the creators and the impact of their actions on society and individual characters, we gain insight into the moral complexities inherent in the pursuit of knowledge and technological innovation. These novels serve as cautionary tales, urging readers to critically reflect on the ethical implications of scientific experimentation and the responsibilities that come with wielding knowledge and power.

The narrative techniques employed by Margaret Atwood and Mary Shelley to represent technology in "The Handmaid's Tale" and "Frankenstein" will be examined. The analysis will explore how technology is portrayed, its symbolic significance, and its impact on the plot, characters, and themes. Additionally, a comparison and contrast of the authors' approaches to depicting technological advancements will be conducted.

In "The Handmaid's Tale," Margaret Atwood employs a dystopian narrative style to depict the oppressive regime of Gilead and its use of technology. While specific technological advancements may not be prominently featured, the pervasive atmosphere of surveillance and control suggests the regime's reliance on modern technology to maintain its authority. Atwood's narrative focuses on the psychological effects of living under constant surveillance, emphasizing the loss of privacy and autonomy experienced by the characters. The symbolic significance of technology lies in its representation of power and control, serving as a tool of oppression wielded by the regime to suppress dissent and enforce conformity.

On the other hand, Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" adopts a Gothic narrative style to explore the consequences of scientific experimentation and technological innovation. Dr. Victor Frankenstein's creation of the Creature through scientific means serves as a central plot device, highlighting the ethical dilemmas and moral complexities inherent in the pursuit of knowledge. Shelley's narrative emphasizes the Creature's existential journey and its search for identity and belonging in a society that rejects its humanity. The symbolic significance of technology

in “Frankenstein” lies in its representation of the dangers of unchecked ambition and the hubris of playing god, as well as the potential for creation to become a destructive force.

Comparatively, Atwood and Shelley approach the depiction of technology in their respective works from different angles. Atwood’s portrayal focuses on the societal implications of technology, highlighting its role in maintaining oppressive power structures and eroding individual autonomy. In contrast, Shelley’s portrayal emphasizes the moral and philosophical implications of scientific innovation, exploring the ethical boundaries of creation and the consequences of tampering with the natural order.

The narrative techniques used by Atwood and Shelley to represent technology In “The Handmaid’s Tale” and “Frankenstein” offer nuanced insights into the ways in which technological advancements intersect with human experience and societal dynamics. Through their respective approaches, both authors engage with themes of power, control, and ethical responsibility, prompting readers to critically reflect on the impact of technology on individual lives and society as a whole.

The characters In both “The Handmaid’s Tale” and “Frankenstein” navigate questions of identity, agency, and resistance within technologically mediated societies. The analysis will explore the ways in which technology shapes their identities and influences their actions, while discussing themes of individual autonomy, surveillance, and the struggle for self-determination.

In “The Handmaid’s Tale,” characters like Offred grapple with the loss of identity and agency imposed by the regime of Gilead. The technologically mediated surveillance and control mechanisms of the society restrict individual autonomy, leaving characters like Offred with limited options for resistance. Despite the oppressive conditions, characters in the novel find ways to assert their agency and resist the regime’s attempts to erase their identities. Through acts of defiance and small rebellions, they reclaim a sense of self and assert their humanity in the face of dehumanizing oppression.

Similarly, in “Frankenstein,” the Creature struggles with questions of identity and agency in a society that rejects its existence. Created through scientific experimentation, the Creature’s identity is shaped by its creator’s actions and society’s perceptions of it as a monster. Despite its inherent humanity and desire for acceptance, the Creature is denied agency and subjected to surveillance and persecution. However, the Creature’s quest for self-determination and autonomy drives its actions throughout the novel, leading to acts of rebellion against its creator and society.

The Intersection of technology and identity in both novels underscores the ways in which technological advancements can shape and influence individual lives. In “The Handmaid’s Tale,” technology is used as a tool of surveillance and control, eroding individual autonomy and agency. In “Frankenstein,” technology serves as a catalyst for the creation of life, raising questions about the boundaries of identity and the responsibilities of creators.

The exploration of Identity, agency, and resistance in the context of technologically mediated societies in “The Handmaid’s Tale” and “Frankenstein” offers insights into the complexities of human experience in the digital age. Through their respective narratives, both Margaret Atwood and Mary Shelley prompt readers to critically reflect on the ways in which technology intersects with questions of identity, autonomy, and the struggle for self-determination in shaping individual lives and societal dynamics.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of “The Handmaid’s Tale” and “Frankenstein” offers valuable insights into the human condition in the digital age, exploring themes of power, control, ethical dilemmas, narrative techniques, and the intersection of technology with identity, agency, and resistance. Through these seminal works of literature, Margaret Atwood and Mary Shelley provide thought-provoking reflections on the implications of technological advancements for society and the individual. “The Handmaid’s Tale” presents a chilling dystopian vision of a society where technological advancements are wielded as tools of oppression by a totalitarian regime. The narrative explores the loss of autonomy and agency experienced by characters like Offred, highlighting the importance of resistance and resilience in the face of dehumanizing control. “Frankenstein,” on the other hand, delves into the moral and philosophical implications of scientific experimentation, presenting a cautionary tale about the dangers of unchecked ambition and the hubris of playing god. Through the character of Dr. Victor Frankenstein and his creation, the novel explores questions of identity, agency, and the consequences of technological innovation. By comparing and contrasting these two works, we gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which power operates, ethical dilemmas arise, and individuals navigate questions of identity and resistance within technologically mediated societies. Both novels serve as timely reminders of the importance of critical reflection on the ethical implications of scientific advancement and the responsibilities that come with wielding knowledge and power. “The Handmaid’s Tale” and “Frankenstein” offer profound insights into the complexities of the human experience in the digital age, prompting readers to engage with questions of power dynamics, ethical considerations, and the struggle for autonomy and self-determination. Through their enduring relevance and thought-provoking narratives, these works of literature continue to inspire reflection and dialogue on the pressing issues of our time.

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