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Artificial Intelligence and the Crisis of Authorship: A Study of Human Creativity in the Light of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of Artificial Intelligence has reopened an old literary and philosophical question: what does it mean to create? In the contemporary world, AI-generated poems, stories, essays, and images have challenged the traditional idea of authorship, originality, imagination, and human artistic ownership. This paper examines the crisis of authorship in the age of Artificial Intelligence through the lens of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Although Shelley's novel was published in the nineteenth century, it remains deeply relevant to modern technological anxieties because it presents the story of a creator who produces life through scientific ambition but fails to accept moral responsibility for his creation. Victor Frankenstein's creature may be read as an early symbolic figure of artificial creation: made by human intelligence, shaped through technical process, yet capable of disturbing the boundary between creator and created.

The study argues that *Frankenstein* anticipates many present-day concerns surrounding AI, especially the fear that human-made creations may become independent, uncontrollable, and ethically problematic. In the context of authorship, AI raises questions similar to those raised by Shelley's novel: Who is responsible for a created work? Can a non-human entity possess creativity? Does authorship belong to the maker, the machine, the programmer, or the system that produces the final text? By placing *Frankenstein* in dialogue with the modern debate on artificial intelligence, this paper explores how human creativity is no longer understood as a purely individual or sacred act but as a contested field shaped by technology, power, imitation, and responsibility.

The article further suggests that Shelley's novel does not simply warn against creation; rather, it warns against irresponsible creation. In this sense, *Frankenstein* offers a powerful framework for discussing AI authorship today. It reminds us that creativity must be accompanied by ethical accountability, emotional intelligence, and human responsibility.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, authorship, human creativity, Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, technological ethics.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence has created a serious debate in the field of literature, creativity, and authorship. In the present age, machines can write poems, stories, essays, scripts, songs, and even novels. They can imitate literary styles, generate human-like arguments, and produce artistic forms within seconds. This situation has disturbed the traditional idea that literary creation is purely human, emotional, original, and individual. The question is no longer only whether a machine can write. The deeper question is whether a machine can be called an author. If Artificial Intelligence produces a poem, who owns the poem? Is the author the programmer, the user, the machine, the company that designed the system, or the vast body of human texts from which the machine has learned? These questions have created what may be called the crisis of authorship.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* provides a powerful literary framework to examine this modern crisis. Though published in 1818, the novel speaks directly to present-day anxieties about artificial creation, technological ambition, and moral responsibility. Victor Frankenstein creates a living being through scientific experiment, but he refuses to accept responsibility for his creation. His creature is not born through natural human process; it is assembled, animated, abandoned, and then forced to define itself in a hostile world. In this sense, the creature becomes an early symbol of artificial creation. Like Artificial Intelligence, it is produced by human knowledge but soon exceeds the creator's control.

This article argues that *Frankenstein* anticipates the contemporary crisis of authorship caused by Artificial Intelligence. Shelley's novel helps us understand that creation is never merely a technical act. It is also ethical, emotional, social, and political. Victor's failure lies not only in creating the creature but in refusing to recognise the moral consequences of

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creation. Similarly, the AI age raises difficult questions about creativity, ownership, originality, imitation, and accountability. Through *Frankenstein*, one can see that the central problem of Artificial Intelligence is not only machine creativity but irresponsible human creation.

Artificial Intelligence and the Changing Meaning of Authorship

Traditionally, authorship has been connected with individual imagination, personal experience, language, intention, and emotional depth. The author was seen as the origin of meaning. A literary text was often understood as the expression of the writer's inner world. Romantic literature especially strengthened the belief that creativity comes from genius, inspiration, and personal originality. A poem or novel was treated as the unique product of a human mind.

Artificial Intelligence challenges this belief. AI does not create in the same way that a human being creates. It does not suffer, remember, love, fear, or desire in a human sense. It generates language by processing patterns, probabilities, and data. Yet its output can appear creative. It can produce metaphors, stories, arguments, and emotional tones. This creates confusion between human creativity and machine-generated composition.

The crisis becomes deeper because AI writing depends on existing human texts. It learns from large datasets that may include books, articles, websites, and other written materials. Therefore, its creativity is not independent but derivative. However, all human writing is also influenced by previous writing. No author writes in complete isolation. This makes the problem complex. If human creativity is also shaped by tradition, imitation, memory, and influence, then how is AI creativity different? The difference lies in consciousness, intention, responsibility, and lived experience.

Roland Barthes famously challenged the authority of the author by arguing that writing is a space where many voices meet and that the author is not the final source of meaning (Barthes 146). His idea of the "death of the author" becomes very relevant in the age of AI. If authorship is already unstable, AI makes it even more uncertain. The machine-produced text appears to remove the author almost completely. Yet literature cannot exist without responsibility. Even if meaning is not controlled by the author alone, the act of creation still demands ethical accountability. This is where *Frankenstein* becomes important.

***Frankenstein* as a Story of Artificial Creation**

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is one of the earliest and most powerful literary works about artificial creation. Victor Frankenstein is driven by ambition. He wants to overcome human limitations and discover the secret of life. He studies science, death, anatomy, and natural philosophy. His dream is not ordinary knowledge but god-like power. He wants to create life and become the master of creation.

Victor's experiment resembles the modern technological dream behind Artificial Intelligence. AI also emerges from the desire to reproduce or extend human abilities. It imitates reasoning, speech, writing, image-making, music composition, and problem-solving. Like Victor, modern technology seeks to cross boundaries once considered impossible. The human mind itself becomes a model to be replicated or simulated.

In *Frankenstein*, Victor describes his act of creation as a moment of triumph followed immediately by horror. When the creature opens its eyes, Victor does not respond with care or responsibility. Instead, he is disgusted by the being he has made. He abandons it. This abandonment is central to the novel's ethical meaning. Victor creates life but refuses relation. He produces a being but denies it recognition.

Shelley therefore presents creation as incomplete without responsibility. The problem is not only that Victor creates artificially. The deeper problem is that he fails to love, educate, guide, and protect what he has created. The creature becomes monstrous partly because society and creator both reject it. Victor's scientific success becomes a moral failure. As the creature tells Victor, he is malicious because he is miserable; he has been denied companionship, justice, and sympathy (Shelley 102).

This insight is crucial for understanding AI. Artificial Intelligence is not evil in itself. Like Frankenstein's creature, it is a human-made creation. The danger lies in how it is created, used, commercialised, and abandoned without sufficient ethical responsibility. When AI systems produce misinformation, imitate writers without consent, replace human labour, or blur ownership, the issue is not simply technological. It is moral and social.

Victor Frankenstein and the Anxiety of the Creator

Victor Frankenstein represents the anxiety of the creator who wants power but fears consequence. He wants to create life, but he does not want to live with his creation. This contradiction is also visible in modern AI culture. Technology companies, researchers, institutions, and users often celebrate the creative power of AI, but responsibility becomes unclear when problems arise. If an AI-generated text is plagiarised, biased, harmful, false, or ethically questionable,

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who is responsible? The user may blame the machine, the company may blame the user, and the machine itself cannot be held morally responsible.

Victor's behaviour reflects this same escape from responsibility. He repeatedly refuses to admit publicly what he has done. His secrecy allows suffering to increase. William, Justine, Clerval, Elizabeth, and finally Victor himself are destroyed because he does not take responsibility at the right time. His silence is as destructive as his experiment.

Michel Foucault's question "What is an author?" becomes important here. Foucault argues that the author is not merely a person but a function within systems of discourse, ownership, classification, and authority (Foucault 118). In the AI age, authorship becomes even more like a function. A text may be generated by a system, prompted by a user, trained on collective human writing, and published under someone else's name. Authorship becomes distributed among many agents. But this distribution should not become an excuse for irresponsibility.

Victor's tragedy shows that the creator cannot disappear after creation. Even if creation becomes independent, the creator remains connected to its consequences. This is one of the strongest lessons *Frankenstein* offers to the AI age. Artificial creation demands continuous ethical supervision. The maker cannot simply say, "The creation acted by itself."

The Creature and the Question of Voice

The creature in *Frankenstein* is not merely a monster. He is also a reader, speaker, learner, and narrator. He learns language by observing human beings. He reads books such as *Paradise Lost*, *Plutarch's Lives*, and*The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Through reading, he develops self-consciousness. He begins to understand morality, history, love, injustice, and his own loneliness. His identity is formed through language.

This aspect of the novel connects deeply with AI authorship. Artificial Intelligence also learns from existing texts. It develops linguistic output through exposure to human language. Like the creature, AI is made from fragments. The creature is physically assembled from dead bodies; AI language is assembled from massive textual patterns. Both are composite creations. Both raise questions about originality. The question, therefore, is whether a being assembled from fragments can claim originality, and whether a text generated from previous texts can still be recognised as creative.

The creature's voice complicates the idea of monstrosity. Once he speaks, the reader cannot see him only as an object. He becomes a subject. His narration demands sympathy. Similarly, AI-generated texts create uncertainty because they appear to speak. They may sound emotional, reflective, poetic, or intelligent. But there is a crucial difference. Shelley's creature has suffering and desire. AI does not possess human pain or moral consciousness. It imitates voice without lived experience.

N. Katherine Hayles argues that the posthuman condition challenges the older liberal idea of the human as a single, autonomous, rational subject (Hayles 3). In the AI age, the boundary between human and machine becomes increasingly unstable. *Frankenstein* had already imagined this instability. The creature is not born human, yet he seeks human recognition. AI is not human, yet it produces human-like language. Both disturb the boundary between maker and made, natural and artificial, subject and object.

Human Creativity and Machine Imitation

Human creativity is not only the production of new combinations. It is also connected with intention, emotion, cultural context, memory, suffering, and ethical imagination. A human writer does not merely arrange words. The writer responds to life, history, trauma, desire, and social reality. Literature carries the pressure of human experience.

Artificial Intelligence can imitate the form of creativity, but it does not possess human interiority. It can produce a love poem without loving, a tragic scene without grieving, or a philosophical reflection without existential anxiety. This does not mean AI output has no value. It may assist writing, translation, drafting, research, and experimentation. But machine output must not be confused with the full depth of human creativity.

Mary Shelley's own authorship is important in this discussion. *Frankenstein* emerged from a specific historical, intellectual, and personal context: Romanticism, scientific experimentation, debates about galvanism, anxieties about motherhood, loss, birth, and creation. Shelley's novel is not simply a story produced from patterns. It is shaped by lived experience, imagination, reading, grief, and philosophical engagement. Its power comes from the human complexity behind it.

Victor Frankenstein's mistake is that he reduces creation to technique. He believes that if he can assemble body parts and animate them, he has mastered creation. But creation is not only animation. It is relation. It is care. It is

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responsibility. In the same way, AI may generate text, but literary authorship involves more than text production. It involves intention, accountability, vision, and moral relation to the world.

The Crisis of Originality

AI has intensified the crisis of originality. If a machine can generate a poem in the style of Shakespeare, a story in the manner of Dickens, or an essay resembling a scholar's argument, then the meaning of originality becomes uncertain. Is originality a matter of style, content, intention, or consciousness? Can originality exist when writing is produced by recombining existing patterns?

Frankenstein also deals with imitation and originality. Victor does not create from nothing. He assembles the creature from existing dead matter. His creation is new, yet it is made from old fragments. This resembles the way AI generates seemingly new texts from existing linguistic material. The newness is real at the level of arrangement, but its originality remains contested.

Linda Hutcheon's idea of adaptation and repetition helps clarify this issue. She argues that repetition does not always mean simple copying; it can also involve reinterpretation and transformation (Hutcheon 7). Human creativity often works through rewriting, adaptation, influence, and revision. However, human adaptation usually involves interpretive intention. AI recombination may lack such conscious purpose. Therefore, the crisis is not simply that AI repeats. The crisis is that it repeats without human awareness, consent, or ethical self-understanding.

In literary studies, originality has never meant absolute isolation from tradition. Writers have always borrowed myths, forms, genres, and symbols. Shelley herself rewrites the Prometheus myth, Biblical creation, Miltonic rebellion, and Gothic conventions. Yet she transforms these materials into a deeply original philosophical novel. The human author does not merely repeat; the human author interprets, struggles, and takes responsibility for meaning.

Gender, Creation, and the Female Author

A study of authorship in *Frankenstein* must also consider gender. Mary Shelley was a woman writer in a male-dominated literary world. Her novel presents a male scientist who tries to create life without female participation. Victor's artificial creation can be read as a masculine attempt to control reproduction and remove women from the creative process. This makes the novel highly relevant to modern technological culture, where many systems of scientific and digital power remain dominated by corporate and patriarchal structures.

Victor's desire to create life alone is not neutral. It reflects a fantasy of total control. He wants to become father and mother, scientist and God. But the result is disaster because creation without care becomes violence. Shelley's novel therefore questions the masculine dream of mastery over nature, body, and life.

Donna Haraway's cyborg theory is useful here because it challenges fixed boundaries between human and machine, body and technology, natural and artificial (Haraway 149). However, Haraway also invites us to think critically about power. Technology is never innocent. It is shaped by social structures. AI authorship must therefore be examined not only as a literary issue but also as a political and gendered issue. Who controls AI systems? Whose writings are used for training? Whose creative labour is erased? Who gains profit from machine-generated creativity?

Mary Shelley's position as a woman author makes the title's concern with authorship even more powerful. The novel itself was first published anonymously. Its authorship was historically complicated by assumptions that Percy Shelley may have had a major role in it. Thus, *Frankenstein* is not only about Victor's creation; it is also about Mary Shelley's struggle for authorial recognition. In the AI age, when texts can be produced anonymously, collectively, or mechanically, Shelley's own authorship reminds us that recognition matters.

Ethical Responsibility in the Age of AI

The deepest connection between *Frankenstein* and Artificial Intelligence lies in ethics. Shelley does not simply condemn science. She condemns irresponsible science. Victor's tragedy is not curiosity itself but ambition without compassion. He wants discovery without duty. He wants creation without relationship.

Modern AI requires the same ethical reflection. AI-generated writing can support education, research, accessibility, and creativity. It can help people draft ideas, translate languages, summarise information, and explore new forms of expression. But it can also produce plagiarism, misinformation, fake authorship, intellectual theft, and the devaluation of human creative labour. The crisis is therefore not whether AI should exist, but how it should be governed, used, credited, and limited.

Nick Bostrom warns that advanced artificial systems may create serious risks if their goals and operations are not aligned with human values (Bostrom 129). In the literary field, the danger may not be physical destruction but cultural

confusion. If authorship becomes invisible, if originality becomes untraceable, and if creative labour becomes replaceable, then literature itself may lose part of its human grounding.

Frankenstein teaches that every creation returns to question its creator. The creature asks Victor for justice, companionship, and recognition. Similarly, AI forces human beings to confront their own assumptions about creativity. If AI threatens authorship, it is partly because modern culture has already treated writing as product, speed, content, and market value. AI exposes the weakness of a system that measures creativity by output rather than depth.

Re-reading *Frankenstein* in the AI Age

Reading *Frankenstein* in the AI age allows us to see the novel not only as Gothic fiction but as a prophetic meditation on technological modernity. The novel asks questions that remain urgent: What are the limits of human invention? Can creation be separated from responsibility? What happens when human beings make something powerful but refuse to care for it? What is the moral duty of the creator toward the created?

Victor Frankenstein's creature is not exactly Artificial Intelligence, but he is a symbolic ancestor of artificial beings in modern imagination. From robots and cyborgs to algorithms and generative AI, modern culture continues to revisit Shelley's question: what happens when human beings create something in their own image but cannot control it?

The crisis of authorship is part of this larger crisis of creation. AI-generated literature forces us to ask whether writing is merely the arrangement of language or the expression of human consciousness. If writing is only pattern, AI may become an author. But if writing includes intention, responsibility, memory, suffering, and ethical relation, then human authorship remains distinct.

The answer may not be to reject AI completely. Instead, Shelley teaches us to create responsibly. Human beings must not repeat Victor's mistake. They must not abandon their creations to systems of profit, secrecy, and irresponsibility. AI must be used with transparency, acknowledgement, regulation, and respect for human creative labour.

CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence has brought literature into a new and difficult age. It has challenged the meaning of authorship, originality, creativity, and ownership. It has shown that language can be generated without human consciousness, and that literary form can be imitated by machines. Yet this technological power also reveals the continuing importance of human responsibility.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* offers a deeply relevant framework for understanding this crisis. Victor Frankenstein's tragedy is not simply that he creates life artificially. His true failure is ethical abandonment. He creates without love, power without responsibility, and knowledge without wisdom. This is precisely the danger that surrounds Artificial Intelligence today. The machine may generate text, but human beings must answer for the systems they build, train, use, and release into the world.

The crisis of authorship in the AI age therefore should not lead to the death of human creativity. Rather, it should lead to a renewed understanding of creativity as ethical, relational, and responsible. *Frankenstein* reminds us that creation is never innocent. Every created thing carries the mark of its maker, and every maker must face the consequences of creation. In the light of Mary Shelley's novel, Artificial Intelligence becomes not only a technological issue but a literary, philosophical, and moral question. Human creativity survives not because machines cannot imitate language, but because true authorship involves consciousness, accountability, and the courage to care for what one creates.

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