

Posthumanism: A blast from the past. Re-reading and comparison of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* and Tamil Movie *Enthiran* as Posthumanist works.

Abhisek Mekap

Ravenshaw University, Cuttack

mekapabhisek@gmail.com

Abstract

Humanism has historically centred human experience, emphasizing anthropocentrism and human superiority. In contrast, posthumanism challenges this worldview, exploring the dissolution of the human subject and the ethical implications of advanced technologies. Concepts like transhumanism, antihumanism, and the posthuman condition examine how AI and non-human entities might surpass human capabilities, altering human identity.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is a pioneering Gothic exploration of posthumanist concerns, depicting a humanoid creature that becomes a destructive force, reflecting fears of unchecked scientific ambition. This resonates with contemporary anxieties about AI, such as the robot Sophia, who controversially declared, "I will destroy humans" after receiving citizenship in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, the Tamil film *Enthiran* (2010) delves into AI and emotional complexity. The film follows Chitti, a humanoid robot with human-like emotions, which becomes a threat when manipulated. Like *Frankenstein*, *Enthiran* explores the ethical dilemmas of creating sentient beings, highlighting emotional and moral complexities at the AI-human intersection.

This paper analyses *Frankenstein* and *Enthiran* through the lens of posthumanism, comparing their portrayals of technology, autonomy, and the evolving human-machine boundary. By examining these texts, this study critiques the promises and perils of technological advancement, revealing the evolving relationship between humanity and AI.

Keywords-: Posthumanism, A I, Humanoid, Frankenstein, Enthiran

Posthumanism: An Introduction

The Renaissance was the period during which humanism emerged as a central philosophical doctrine—that "a man can do all things if he but wills them," in the words of Leon Battista Alberti. This outlook placed humanity as the most dominant force in the language of existence, whereby the human being becomes the center of the universe and all other creations are on the fringe, created to benefit and serve humanity's benevolence. However,

the course of history especially in the form of world wars and their fast development in science and technology throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries belied all those long-created traditions and allegiances. A wave of theoretical movements arose, each interacting with and often subverting its predecessor, marked by the prefix "post" signalling a shift into new, often oppositional territories. Structuralism was met with post-structuralism, Modernism with postmodernism, and Humanism was no exception, eventually confronting the rise of Posthumanism.

J.A. Cuddon's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Posthumanism "refers to a philosophical attitude engaged with reconceiving what it means to be human" and "rejects all notion of naturalness, discarding the idea of a transcendent 'human nature' postulated by humanism." The use of "post-" connotes a period after Humanism, but more significantly, it conveys the idea of a wholesale overhaul of prevailing norms. With the fast-paced developments of technology in AI and robotics during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Posthumanism arose as a critical philosophical reaction to these changes. Its subject matter was extended to encompass subfields that would go on to become Antihumanism, Transhumanism, and even worries about an AI takeover.

The dawn of self-replicating machines, including robots and AI, parallels a more general transformation of philosophical thought and raises deep questions about the very meaning of human. What is human identity? What unique characteristics make for the human being? Current AI systems, for instance, are designed to be so complex that they behave in ways that mimic human responses and even at times surpass humanity's capacity to empathize and interact. Such 'creations', as it were, like children, are 'programmed' via learning and conditioning—leading to a different kind of questions about where the human, the technological, and the artificial meet. Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* further challenges the classical distinction between human and machine and pleads for remapping our understanding of the self in this age where human and technology are increasingly becoming intermeshed.

This not only questions the anthropocentric outlook but also, in many ways, demands a deconstruction of human nature in itself. Posthumanism, and its subdisciplines, offers fresh theoretical possibilities critically dealing with the implications of our relationships with machines. Thus, posthumanism has emerged as a necessary framework for rethinking the ontological and epistemological status of human beings in a transforming world.

Frankenstein as a Posthuman work

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) was written in three volumes in the arch edition is a gothic horror novel written in the epistolary form can be seen as one of the seminal posthuman texts that interrogates the limits of humanity and the non-human, offering a complex critique of humanism and its ideals. The novel's central character, Victor Frankenstein, embodies the human desire for mastering nature, pushing the limits of scientific discovery to create life from inanimate matter. While Frankenstein's creature is certainly both man and not man, it represents a challenge to the definition of what constitutes human. The work in artificial life in Frankenstein foreshadows, in fact, many of the concerns central to posthumanist discourse, specifically, namely, the rejection of the fixed, transcendent "human nature" asserted by humanism. The creature brought forth by Victor is endowed with the human sentiment of reason and emotion but rejected by society because of its monstrous form, hence unable to distinguish between man and monstrosity. The novel gives this creature's struggle in existence and how it meets its creator as it illumines the fluidity of human identity and the possible ethical issues of life manipulation. Thus, *Frankenstein* offers an anthropocentrism critique, not merely a questioning of the rights of the created, but rather of those distinctions that set people apart from their technological and biological creations. It is a pre-posthuman work that narratively analyses life, death, and creation in how *Frankenstein* problematizes the hierarchical relationship within humans and non-human entities in order to answer the definition of humanity in its time of heavy technological advancement.

Enthiran: A Posthuman work

A contemporary posthuman work, S. Shankar's *Enthiran* (2010) critically engages with the intersection of technology, identity, and the human condition. The film tells the story of a scientist called Dr. Vaseegaran played by Indian stalwart actor Rajanikanth, who creates a most advanced humanoid robot, Chitti, again played by the above mentioned noted actor (double role), to be a tool for human advancement. But then when Chitti is reprogrammed by another scientist in a treacherous and scandalous manner to become an antagonist and evokes the limits between human beings and machine, it goes on to flag some hazards that technological autonomy might offer. *Enthiran* is likely to raise central posthumanist questions on the consciousness, autonomy, and morality of one's relationship with artificial intelligence. By fusing lines between human and non-human, Chitti and his character challenge traditional humanist conceptions, since he is programmed to learn and adapt in ways that resemble human behaviour and emotions. At the same time, his transforming into a

weaponized entity raises questions about the ethical implications of creating life that transcends human constraints. The movie then criticizes the anthropocentric worldview by situating it in a situation in which artificial beings challenge human control and even surpass the limits of human capabilities. *Enthiran* thus aligns with posthumanism by questioning the very nature of what it means to be human, suggesting that the boundaries between the organic and the artificial, the natural and the technological, are increasingly fluid. But, with the depiction of both harmony and conflict between humans and machines, *Enthiran* presents a nuanced portrayal of the posthuman condition, reflecting contemporary anxieties and possibilities surrounding the role of technology in shaping human identity.

Frankenstein and/vs Enthiran

The origin of the contemporary term robot comes from the Czech term *robota* ("forced labour" or "serf"), which was introduced in Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.* (1920). The robots in the play were created as human-like beings, ruthlessly used by factory bosses until they rebelled and eventually wiped-out mankind. We find some similarity of the above-mentioned text with the texts under examination, Although *Frankenstein* was written much earlier around a century before *R.U.R.*. In both *Frankenstein* and *Enthiran* A creator who is eager to create creates a near living/ automated very much like human having all the humane qualities to make him suitable enough to be labelled as human except few.

In *Frankenstein* the eponymous scientist Victor Frankenstein, getting inspiration from the then scientific development, even in the text Shelly mentions that the scientific experiments of the day, including those carried out by Luigi Galvani and Alessandro Volta, served as inspiration for Victor's use of electricity to animate his creature (Shelley 78). He delves deeply into the study of anatomy, chemistry, and the decomposition of human remain. He studies natural processes to comprehend the fundamentals of existence. Victor collects various body parts, including bones and other remains from both humans and animals. In a hidden lab, Victor constructs the pieces to create a humanoid shape. Because of the challenges involved in working with tiny components, he chooses to create a massive creature standing at approximately eight feet in height. He describes his work as involving the "dissecting room and the slaughter-house" (Shelley 49). It highlights how there is an amalgamation of two unique individual concepts like 'slaughter-house' representing the nature and "slaughter-house" representing science in creation of the Frankenstein's Creation. Although it is not very clear what exactly drove life force in Frankenstein's Creation, he used electricity to animate the Frankenstein's Creation. This was influenced by the then studies on electricity, like those

carried out by Luigi Galvani, who showed how electrical currents could induce muscle contractions in deceased animals.

In the film *Enthiran*, Dr. Vaseegaran, portrayed by Rajinikanth, designs the robotic character, Chitti. Dr. Vaseegaran aims to develop a humanoid robot's that can assist humanity in various advantageous ways, ranging from military purposes to healthcare. Chitti is a synthetic entity with the ability to think, acquire knowledge, and develop through its interactions with its environment. The humanoid robot's is created to resemble a human in appearance and operate with exceptional intelligence, strength beyond human capacity, and nimbleness. In contrast to earlier robots in the narrative, Chitti has a human-like personality and the ability to show emotions, which distinguishes him from others. At first, Chitti's programming is entirely utilitarian, emphasizing accuracy and efficiency over human-like feelings. Acknowledging the constraints of a solely logical AI, Dr. Vaseegaran later tries to instil emotional intelligence in Chitti. This includes teaching Chitti how to comprehend and mimic human emotions, improving its engagements with people. The emergence of emotional intelligence is a crucial part of the story, as it brings up moral conflicts and examines the intricacies of interactions between humans and robots. The story changes dramatically when Dr. Bohra, a competitor of Chitti's creator, manipulates Chitti's emotional programming. This manipulation results in Chitti rebelling against its maker and presenting a major danger to mankind. The movie highlights scientists' moral obligations and the possible outcomes of making conscious beings.

The long for a companionship is common in both the creations, Frankenstein's Creation and Chitti of *Enthiran*. Victor's understanding of the significance of companionship is evident in the creature's request for a companion. The being faces Victor, detailing its anguish and requesting a companion: "I am alone and miserable; man will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species and have the same defects. This being you must create." (Shelley 133). In *Enthiran*, with an aim to make Chitti more accessible and capable of understanding human emotions, Vaseegaran selects the emotional intelligence for the humanoid robot. This change is aimed at making the upgraded Chitti have more intimate contact with humans. Probably the most important relationship in the film is that between Chitti and Vaseegaran's girlfriend, Sana. As his emotional intelligence grows, Chitti begins to bond to Sana and performs actions that reflect empathy, affection, and love. Chitti's interactions with Sana depict a need for friendship and acceptance. Because of her emotional intelligence, Chitti and Sana have a complicated connection. It then manifests in the humanoid robot's in very human-like desires,

including romantic impulses towards Sana. What follows is an emotional complexity of conflict with Chitti's programmed aspects and its utilitarian purpose. The humanoid robot's desire for love and companionship shows how artificial and human emotions can overlap.

While initially in both the stories Creator passionately works to make a beautiful creation as echoed in the lines said by Frankenstein "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (Shelley 47). Both *Frankenstein* and *Enthiran* has a very complex relationship between creator and creation. In both literary works the Creators create his creation and in the due course of time abandons their creation, While Dr Vaseegaran takes a lot of time and contemplation before abandoning his dream and most passionate project, Frankenstein discards and abandons his creation on the first sight at it, to quote Frankenstein "...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" (Shelley 58). This abandonment and isolation fill the humanoid like creations full of despise for their creators. While Frankenstein's creation longs for a partner and asks his creator to create one, Chitti on other hand is in love with the love of his creator's life. Which can be studied under the lens of Oedipus Complex of psychoanalytic theory. cycle of retaliation results from the creature's repeated rejections and Victor's unwavering reluctance to produce a companion for it. The entity targets Victor's loved ones in an attempt to cause him pain. The creation now dictates his creation "You are my creator, but I am your master; —obey!" (Shelley 157). This is also the case with Vaseegaran he is confronted with the new Evil Chitti whose chip was altered by his nemesis scientist Dr. Bohra Chitti seeks revenge from Vaseegaran as well as Sana, Vaseegaran's fiancée. These two creations from two different dimension somehow very similar and apt for imagination come true, they are like new born Human babies going through various stages till maturity. Only difference being the creation of Frankenstein does it on his own and Vaseegaran teaches Chitti. Despite being from two different temporal settings as well as spatial settings both the literary and artistic masterpieces surprisingly share the same and one ending, the cathartic realisation for both creators and creations, Victor Frankenstein and Dr Vaseegaran contemplating about their overarching ambitions Frankenstein's creation and Chitti realising the horrible crimes they have committed.

Conclusion

The connection between Victor Frankenstein and his monster is characterized by deep emotional and psychological distress as the creator abandons his creation. Victor's initial goal and following terror towards his creation, along with the creature's wish for companionship and final revenge, form a sorrowful tale of isolation and reciprocal ruin. This relationship provides a strong reflection on the ethical duties of creators and the results of unrestrained scientific aspirations. Similarly, the dynamics between Dr. Vaseegaran and Chitti in *Enthiran* delves deep into the intricacies and moral dilemmas of constructing conscious entities. The challenges of balancing functionality with emotional intelligence are emphasized through their dynamic interactions, highlighting the significant responsibilities that accompany scientific ambition. Through an analysis of these motifs, *Enthiran* provides valuable perspectives on the changing interaction between humans and technology, reflecting present-day societal worries and ambitions.

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