

# Future Dystopia in Mary Shelly's Frankenstein and the Question of Time in Anderson's Fairy Tales: A Critical and Descriptive Study

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## Abstract

*Fairy Tales* is a collection of tales that does not make it a book with a single plot, and where readers do not get an all-encompassing plot summary. However, the researcher will talk about certain plotlines that are observed through Andersen's stories. One of the important points to be noted here is that these stories differ in length and topic; therefore, not all of the tales will follow one of these plotlines. Frankenstein is a novel written by Mary Shelly in 1818. This novel is a story of a person who brings back to life a dead body and then being afraid of the phenomena and being able to control the monster created, the creator runs away because of the fear that he feels about his actions. This paper tries to put the concept of time in Fairy Tales of Anderson and then it explains how time and future are related and how by analyzing these two works of fiction shows future is perceived to be an example of dystopia.

**Key Words:** *Dystopia, Time, Magic realism, Frankensteinian, Being-in-the-world*

## Introduction

Anderson's *Fairy Tales* is a collection of tales that does not make it a book with a single plot, and where readers do not get an all-encompassing plot summary. However, the researcher will talk about certain plotlines that are observed through Andersen's stories. One of the important points to be noted here is that these stories differ in length and topic, therefore, not all of the tales will follow one of these plotlines.

The fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen are distinct from those compiled by the Brothers Grimm or Edgar Alan Poe. One of the less known facts about the stories of 'Little Mermaids' and 'Ugly Ducklings' is that many of the most beloved stories written by Andersen actually have their basis in his autobiography. For example, a duckling that turns out to be a swan, for instance. Andersen faced the same situations in his

personal life as he grew up not just facing the effects of poverty, but the ravages of a mother trying as best she could to deal with encroaching mental illness. Her attempts to impose a restrictive acceptance of conformity upon young Hans was done—like the mother duck's—with the best of intentions. Just like the mother duck, the writer's mother had no idea her perception was reality was not quite authentic. Thus, we see that there is an autobiographical connection here which the author has sublimated into a story. Are Andersen's stories only for children or are they meant for elders and grown-ups also? The answer is that these stories although may reject chronological time sequence or may be more aligned to Magic realism, yet they do possess messages that make these stories great. Helle Porsdam in *Copyright and Other Fairy Tales: Hans Christian Andersen and the Commodification of Creativity*:

Anybody with enough knowledge of the Danish language to be able to read Andersen in the original is aware that Andersen wrote stories that might be read aloud to children, but that were designed in such a way as also to be of interest to the grown-ups reading them aloud. The difference between the way in which Andersen is perceived by his countrymen and by readers who cannot read him in his own language may well have something to do with his translators. (3)

The autobiographical inspiration of *The Red Shoes* is more direct: they were born out of his obsessive attention to the pronounced squeaking, which issued forth from his new boots bought specifically to wear during his church confirmation ceremony. The attention drawn to the squeaky boots essentially allowed them to take on a life of their own, much like the title footwear of his fairy tale, which in turn inspired a classic film.

Andersen's fairy tales have retained their power to enchant largely by virtue of delineating universal themes. If the universality of the tales are capable of making individual connections with readers across a broad range of social strata, it should not be at all surprising they spring from personal experience. Anderson was a writer committed to the purity of literary creation. He grew embittered watching less talented writers enjoy greater popularity and success by appealing to fads. Why wouldn't such a writer eventually conceive a story like "The Emperor's New Clothes"?

The strain of innocence that continually comes face to face with the deceptive nature of the adult world that recurs in the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen speak to a mature intellect that never lost touch with the pain of childhood. A pain that more palpable and tangible in the autobiographical worlds of Andersen's Snow Queen and Tin Soldier than in the worlds of Cinderella and Snow White assembled by the Grimms but created by others.

*Frankenstein* is a novel written by Mary Shelly in 1818. This novel is a story of a person who brings back to life a dead body and then being afraid of the phenomena and being able to control the monster created, the creator runs away because of the fear that he feels about his actions. *Frankenstein* is an exceptional novel in the precepts of English literature. This work of fictions tries to find the solutions to questions that mystified not only the author Mary Shelley but also the readers of that time and still haunts human beings in contemporary society. The author presents a distinctive personality, named as, Victor Frankenstein and how he creates one more character called the monster. There is a competition between these two characters that want each other's attention, but do not achieve that aim and in the end; this lack of attention reduces both the characters as if they have fallen into an abyss. It is as though there are two distinct halves to one character, where each contest for devotion from the other and for the chance to be the sovereign of the other half. Ultimately, this struggle diminishes both men to ruins. William Christie writes in "The Critical Metamorphoses of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein":

Mary Shelley 'initiated a new literary genre, what we now call science fiction', for the same fear of mechanization out of control informs the typical science-fiction dystopia of our own century: a sinister scientific technocracy whose success is built upon the marginalization and attempted dehumanization of the mass of the people — in 1984, for example, and Huxley's *Brave New World* through to the more recent cyberspace equivalents of William Gibson. (8)

## Analysis

Technology is one of the important themes in the novel as we see the Creature is actually made of dead body parts that have been restored, giving him a monstrous and scary form. This process of creating a monster and being destroyed by the same monster parallels with the over-use of technology in human existence and how instead of being used as a 'tool', it has engaged us and reduced human beings to mere tools and quasi-robots. The process is bilateral, which means that it is not one sided but the technology itself had its revenge on human beings in many different ways. Thomas Vargish writes in "Technology and Impotence in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*":

Technology usurps and empowers simultaneously. It usurps authority at precisely the moment of empowerment, and this paradoxical effect means that all serious discussion of technology must involve a discussion of values. Technology appears to usurp the value-function, substituting its own imperatives at moments of choice, moments when we would desire and expect the application of values we think of as "human." Technological developments have a way of intersecting or ambushing the traditional values or at least of radically altering the contexts in which they operate, a fact of immense political consequence. (323)

This concept of revenge in the novel leads the Creature to scream at Victor and kill those close to him, including his friend Henry and his wife Elizabeth. This can be elucidated by alluding to genetic selfishness that is creating misery in the human world rather than helping human existence, as Michael J. Sandel in his article, "What's Wrong with Designer Children, Bionic Athletes, and Genetic Engineering?" writes:

I do not think the main problem with enhancement and genetic engineering is that they undermine effort and erode human agency. The deeper danger is that they represent a kind of hyperagency—a Promethean aspiration to remake nature, including human nature, to serve our purposes and satisfy

our desires ... .And what the drive to mastery misses and may even destroy is an appreciation of the gifted character of human powers and achievements. (5)

From the time when Industrial Revolution filled all parts of European and British society by the time of her writing, Shelley questions how far the current wave of advances should push the individual in terms of personal and spiritual growth. The author conveys the impression that possibly the technological advances made to date deprive the soul of development when a man becomes too dependent on technology. Personal freedom is lost when a man is made a slave to machines, instead of machines being dominated by man. Thus, Victor becomes a lost soul when he tries his ghastly experiments on the dead and loses his moral compass when he becomes obsessed with animating the dead. Victor's overindulgence in science takes away his humanity, and he is left with the consequences of these actions without having reasoned out the reality that his experiments may not have the desired effects. This message has been put forth earlier by a great German philosopher Martin Heidegger in his *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. He writes:

And yet the revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of poiesis. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such. But does this not hold true for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind's blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it. (14)

Similarly, Milchman and Rosenberg while talking about the similarities and differences in the methodology of Heidegger and Foucault talk about the issue of technology and how it has been perceived by both these philosophers. They write in their famous book, *Foucault and Heidegger: Critical Encounters*:

Both Heidegger and Foucault operate with the thesis that technology is "autonomous." Because the autonomy thesis is frequently interpreted as the exaggerated and mysterious claim that technology has become a Frankensteinian monster with a life of its own. (57)

Andersen wrote many classic stories that we could analyze, but here the researcher attempts to analyze one of his longest and famous tales: *The Snow Queen* (1844). The story begins with a classic fairy tale motif, the magic mirror, which in this case distorts things so that they appear the opposite of what they really are. When a hobgoblin carries this mirror up to heaven in an attempt to mess with everyone's heads, the mirror cracks and falls to earth in pieces. The shards then blow around and lodge in people's eyes and hearts, causing people to become uncaring and to only see the bad things in others.

We then cut to a large town where we are introduced to a boy and girl, Kay and Gerda. Kay's grandma tells the two kids a story about the Snow Queen (she is in charge of the snowflakes), and, one winter's day, Kay sees the Queen for himself. However, when the Queen beckons him to follow her, Kay draws back in fear. As we jump ahead to the summer, a crucial plot point occurs: the thing to remember here is the magic mirror. One of its shards gets into Kay's eye, and he starts acting like a major jerk. When winter rolls around again, he takes off with the Snow Queen, and everyone thinks that he is dead. Everyone but Gerda, that is. Gerda's not about to give up that easily, and so she embarks on a series of adventures—and challenges—as she pieces together Kay's whereabouts. Things draw to a close with some doves telling Gerda that they saw the Queen heading toward Lapland. Gerda then hops on a reindeer and makes her way to the Queen's palace, where she has to face her fair share of obstacles once again. But it turns out that inner strength and love are the strongest powers of all: as Gerda's tears fall on Kay, the mirror dissolves and is washed away with Kay's tears (it's tears galore by this point). With everything, back to normal the duo head home. In addition, that, at last, brings us to our quote.

**Quote:**

The roses on the roof were in full bloom and peeping in at the open window; and there stood their little chairs which they used as children, upon which Kay and Gerda now sat down, each on their own, holding each other by the hand, while the cold, empty splendor of the Snow Queen's palace vanished from their thoughts like a painful dream. The grandmother sat in God's bright sunshine, reading aloud the following passage in the Bible: "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."



–And Kay and Gerda exchanged looks, and they now understood the meaning of the old hymn:—

–"The roses bloom but one short hour, then die,

But th' infant Jesus ever lives on high."

–And there they both sat — grown-up, yet children still, for they were children in their hearts; and it was summer — warm, glorious summer! (n.p)

### **Explanation:**

Here this is a standard fairytale ending, as in every fairytale after all the challenges have been overcome, the characters of the story learn about life and its principles, and have moral experience and moreover, they are reunited, and one more thing that happens is it often happens that the weather changes from winter to summer. Concisely, equilibrium is restored.

With Kay under the Queen's spell, it is up to Gerda to restore order. The ending of the story consequently celebrates the triumph of love and goodness. This final passage has the further effect of making us think about the time span in which the story takes place. Gerda certainly goes through a lot, and the narrative skims over the passing of the seasons quickly. Still, when Gerda rescues Kay, we assume the two are still children. When they enter their house, however, they find that they are now grown up. It seems that this journey has taken much longer time than the reader could have realized and alternatively, the characters have turned into adults which questions the concept of time in this story.

It is a fairy tale, after all, so we are not limited to the usual laws of time and space. It is not even, as if everything has to be clear-cut: what is important is that the duo has emerged from their saga as grown-ups while remaining children in their hearts. Fairy tales frequently contain moral themes, and subsequently, these Andersen's stories move towards the 'happy ending', where everything is completed or ended with a passage from The Holy Bible and also with some hymns summing up what Kay and Gerda have learned.

## Conclusion

The conclusion from this study about a world ruled by technology is almost the same as the findings of the many quoted philosophers, who work with different practices and concepts related to man's *being-in-the-world*. The essence of the findings of both the novel and philosophers mentioned is that man in his *being-in-the-world* appears in a degraded, unworthy mode of existence, made slave by over-use of technology and properly portrayed by Mary Shelly in 1818 in her novel *Frankenstein*. The comparison of the literary and philosophical bodies of the text has revealed that similar symptoms of predicament appear characterizing the fiction at plot level and at the semantic level. At both levels, we understand that *Frankenstein* understood as a warning about the technological monster is a real threat to human existence and will reduce not only society to a dystopia but inauthenticity at an existential level as well.

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