

A mind of its own: The representation of AI in literary texts and films

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the intersectionality between AI and literature and the former's role in relation to politics. This article will also try to examine how the role of AI could be implemented in the near future to create a sustainable environment for everyone. It attempts to highlight how literature has tried to incorporate AI to depict human values. This paper will try to closely analyze different creative works and present the modes of conflict that surround them. It will also try to find a solution to integrate both AI and humanity into a shared sense of being. Taking help from various literary texts and films, it aims to figure out how the idea of artificial beings had been visualized by different artists and intellectuals. Are they overly apprehensive and critical of it due to a lack of understanding, or are they accepting of it because of its ability to reduce workload and exhibit powerful characteristics? Will AI dismantle the role of man as a rational animal, and will erupt as a being independent of its philosophical thoughts, or will it eventually be suppressed by human belief and rationality?

KEYWORDS

AI, Belief, Conflict, Politics, Rationality

1 | INTRODUCTION: RATIONALITY, CREATION, AND THE ORIGINS OF ARTIFICIAL THOUGHT

With the dawn of rationalism in the early 18th century in Europe, a cold war raged between two tenets of philosophical thoughts— Classicism and Romanticism. On one hand, the supporters of Classicism believed that reasoning is far superior to revelation, and that to progress as a civilized society, man must reason well. However, the followers of Romanticism were against that.

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In the early 18th century, a group of philosophers broke away from the 17th century rigid puritanical thoughts, and established a concept known as 'Deism'. It was first elaborated by Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, who wrote profusely on the existence of a Supreme being, a benevolent creator responsible for the ordered nature of the universe. As Alexander Pope had famously said:

"Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night;
God said, *Let Newton be!* and all was light!" (Daiches 766)

The belief that reason was superior to revelation, was shared by many 18th- century philosophical thinkers. The 'great chain of being', a system of creation that argues that God had created everything that could be created— from the highest angels to the crudest reptiles, posits the belief of an ordered state of creation where the being possessing rational powers had the utmost liberty. Soame Jenyns, in his *Free Enquiry into the Origin and Nature of Evil*, published in 1757, argues that suffering is an essential part of human life (768). The inferior man has the right to be subjugated by a higher being, just as men dominate and subjugate beings lower than them, such as reptiles, animals and insects.

The seeds for the need of a higher being was already sown with Jenyns's philosophical treatise. He was met with scorn and contempt for his pessimistic views on life, which gave undue reliance to an external being. In due course of time, the age of enlightenment grew in passion and reason and rationality triumphed over humanity. In response to Shaftesbury's polemical idea regarding the futility of revelation in an age of reasoning, Bernard Mandeville in his *The fable of the bees* suggests that for society to function smoothly, both virtues and vices are equally important, as is evident from his subtitle— "Private Vices, Public Benefits." He gives the example of a beehive where everyone worked to fulfil their own selfish needs that resulted in the prosperous growth of the society. But in the end Zeus in anger dismissed the "bawling hive of fraud" (770), and everyone worked together equally. But that resulted in the disintegration of society and eventually it led to failure. But with the turn of the late eighteenth century, the main tenets of the age of Enlightenment soon dwindled down, and soon romanticism took center stage. Poets such as Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Byron, were more eager to depict human subjectivity and Individuality over vague reasoning. They argued for a return to nature, away from the conundrum of a rationalistic life.

2 | ARTIFICIAL CREATION AND MORAL CONSCIOUSNESS: FRANKENSTEIN AND THE BIRTH OF AI ANXIETY

It was *Frankenstein* which established itself as the precursor to the age of AI, and it was a major step towards a complete understanding of the war between empiricism and imagination. Victor Frankenstein's creation is an example of how over reliance on reasoning could lead to disastrous circumstances. Mary Shelley was an advocate of nature. In the introduction to *Frankenstein*, she is anxious of the inclination of philosophers and writers to create an artificial being that could usurp human beings and ultimately rule society:

Night waned upon this talk, and even the witching hour had gone by, before we retired to rest. When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw -- with shut eyes, but acute mental vision, -- I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world (Shelley 192).

Victor Frankenstein's creation is a being endowed with the ability to think and reason well. After being abandoned by his creator, the creature attempts to educate himself in human knowledge and uses it to thrive in society. The creature's ability to read, learn and think on its own is a major advancement in its time. But the most concerning thing is its ability to feel things. His feelings suggest that Victor Frankenstein had created something that not only talks and moves but also has a consciousness of his own. At one point in the novel, the creature gains a philosophical insight into his origin, as he muses about himself:

I was dependent on none and related to none. 'The path of my departure was free'; and there was none to lament my annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to solve them (106).

His anguished appeal over himself is a sign that artificial creations could engage creatively with themselves. They are not merely an instrument to propagate human needs and values but also to project their likings as well. But whether artificial creations could help mankind or will they turn into an entity capable of causing mass discussion is up for debate. In *Frankenstein*, the creature suffers from alienation. It is evident that Victor Frankenstein had shied away from his creation out of fear and anxiety. The creature's anguish is evident when he says:

Everything is related in them which bears reference to my accursed origin; the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious and loathsome person is given, in language which painted your own horrors, and rendered mine ineffaceable. I sickened as I read. 'Hateful day when I received life!' I exclaimed in agony. 'Cursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of your's, more horrid from its very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and detested. (108).

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a clarion call for future scientists who are bigoted in their assumptions regarding their creations.

3 | AI, POLITICS, AND POSTHUMAN AGENCY: LEM, KUBRICK, AND RAY

A century later, in the 1900s there was a tremendous outpour of disbelief over faith and religion because of the war. As a result, creation took center stage and poets, artists and musicians took up their pen and pencils and started to create things to survive and to attack human foibles. In 1957, Stanislaw Lem published *the star Diaries* which was a political satire on the prevalent hypocrisies of then-world leaders. The book is a compilation of interplanetary voyages taken by Ijon Tichy, a space explorer and representative of Earth. The text is set in the future, where more advanced civilizations than humankind have emerged. In the second chapter of the novel, Ijon Tichy is sent as Earth's delegate to the United Planets, where humanity's role in space politics is determined. When Tichy arrives, he misinterprets the deputy chairman for a soft drink vending machine:

Speeches would surely have to be given, but I was too choked with emotion to stammer out a single word, so that when I caught sight of a large, shiny machine with a chrome counter and little slots for coins, I hurriedly inserted one, placing the cup of my thermos underneath its spigot. This was the first interplanetary incident in the history of human diplomacy on the galactic level, since what I had taken for a soft drink vending machine turned out to be the deputy chairman of Rhohch delegation in full regalia. (Lem 23)

Lem provides a replica of the future where AI becomes super advanced to surpass human intelligence and ideas and thereby create a world of its own. It showcases how artificial beings have so much agency and are politically conscious to render human beings secondary in decision-making. This is an example of how AI might inhabit a world that is completely independent of human intervention. Ijon Tichy's failure to recognize the deputy chairman is a reminder of modern human's inability to perceive their fallacies when it comes to their own creation. The machine in Lem's novel is an inanimate object that possesses some agency of its own and can provide clarity over solving political problems which had been the domain of human beings for a long time. As Ijon Tichy prepares to represent Earth as a delegate, he is suggested by the chairman to delineate positive recommendations about humans, so that they can affirm Earth's presence in front of interplanetary dignitaries, but Ijon Tichy struggles to picture anything positive and instead finds himself saying everything negative:

I shall speak instead of your culture. Of its outstanding achievements. You do have a culture?!...

That's good. Art?

Oh yes! Music, poetry, architecture...

So then, architecture after all! he exclaimed. Wonderful. I must make a note of that. Explosives?

How do you mean, explosives?

Creative detonations, controlled, to regulate the climate, shift continents, river beds—you have that?"

So far only bombs... (Lem 27)

Stanislaw Lem is critiquing humanity by displaying AI as intelligent beings who are more concerned about making good use of scientific and technological advances, but the deputy chairman is shocked to see that Earth had nothing fruitful to depict except being constantly engaged in petty affairs. In the future, the role of AI might be to reverse the damages caused by human beings, and they may not necessarily harm people. Lem is attacking the human pride and vanity of world leaders and their dogmatic behaviors. He is conscious of the fact that this dogmatism will eventually lead to the downfall of human civilization, and a time might come when artificial beings would possess more clarity and intellect in handling government and political decisions. In *Frankenstein*, the creator is in the initial stages of development. He gathers knowledge, gains philosophical insight, and, in the end, he murders Victor's friend and his wife. The creature is but a newly formed project; it has not yet gained significant abilities and is still adapting to various surroundings. But in *The Star Diaries*, Ijon Tichy is faced with super-advanced beings who are capable of independent political decisions. When Ijon fails to acknowledge any positive reviews regarding mankind, he faces hostility from the public which launches a tirade against humankind:

And even carnivorousness is no one's fault, if it results in the course of natural evolution! Yet the differences separating so-called man from his animal relatives are practically nonexistent! Just as an individual who is *higher* may not claim that this gives him the right to devour those who are *lower*, so one endowed with a somewhat *higher* intelligence may neither devour nor murder those of *lower* mentality, and if he absolutely must do this... if, I say, he *must*, by reason of some tragic hereditary affliction, he should at least consume the bloodied victims with dismay, in secret, in his lair and the darkest recesses of the cave, torn by feelings of remorse, anguish, and the hope that he will be able, someday, to free himself from that burden of unremitting murder. But such, alas, is not the behavior of our stinking Memmy! (34-35)

The depiction of humankind as barbaric, ruthless beings is a sharp indictment by Lem of human morality and consciousness. He is concerned more about the fallacies of humanity and how they are inferior to the supreme achievements of future robots and machines. The advent of AI is celebrated by Lem in this chapter as he is hopeful that soon, AI will gain a philosophical insight that is completely independent of human actions and through that, a new change will arrive. However, in the next part, we will see how Lem is also critical of mankind's insistence on creating artificial beings that could replicate humanity.

In the fourth chapter, Lem, in a satiric tone, attacks the inclination of mankind to accelerate the progress of civilization through absurd creations. In this chapter, Ijon is gifted a time dilator by a professor called Tarantoga, a learned astro zoologist who was also a talented inventor. His latest device was able to slow as well as accelerate the progress of time. When on a voyage to a planet called Amauropia, Ijon crashes into an unknown area which was inhabited by Microcephalids, a form of anthropoidal beings. When Ijon used the time dilator to accelerate time, he was shocked to see that the Microcephalids had grown enormously in

length and had started to attack him. The Microcephalids were divided into two factions with some of them keeping Ijon as captive whereas others were against it and rescued him by throwing stones at the Microcephalids who had held him captive. Lem is critical of the notion that if mankind tried to accelerate nature through absurd means, our plan of progress and civilization could take a detour and harm us indirectly.

When Ijon is held captive by the giant Microcephalid, who is called The flying worm, he tries to explain to them that it is he to whom they should be indebted to for their progress and subsequent growth, "Gradually picking up the language of the Microcephalids, I began to explain to flying worm that it was to *me* that he and his subjects owed their rapid development" (95). It suggests that despite Ijon's efforts to bring about development and progress, he was not getting the due recognition and was treated unfairly by them. Even though Ijon had the chance to turn off the accelerator, he waited until the Microcephalids had become a democratic union. Doing so, the Microcephalids advanced so much that they had begun to create a republic and were obtaining IDs for proof. They had established a society demanding equality and amnesty, and were engaged in petty wars, and they were also conducting business on their own. But Ijon was not satisfied with the pace of progression and again tried to accelerate proceedings, but it resulted in one of the knobs falling apart, which resulted in further chaos, "The sun rose in the west, there was great commotion in the cemetery, the deceased were seen walking about, moreover their condition improved by the minute, adults dwindled before one's eyes, and little children dropped completely out of sight" (98).

The reversal of situations is an attack on human foibles. Lem suggests that mankind's persistence in repeatedly following the same mistakes would eventually result in the degradation of human culture and values. Soon, a new being may emerge that could usurp humans and establish a society following mankind's worst habits. In the second chapter, Lem was hopeful of AI bringing about a positive change in society by negating human vanity and pride, but in the fourth chapter, he was critical of the emergence of artificial beings capable of mass destruction.

The mid- twentieth century saw the emergence of science fiction and films that explored the realm of the unknown, and with the first moon landing on July 20, 1969, it paved the way for the rise of dystopian science fiction. However, a year earlier, Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A space odyssey* explored the ideas of posthumanism through the character of Hal 9000, a significantly superior machine endowed with superhuman abilities. The chess scene played between Hal and Frank is a testament to the intelligence of artificial beings. He is a machine capable of conscious thinking and process and yet, by the end of the film, he murders his crewmates. When Hal is introduced, he says:

Let me put it this way, Mr. Amor. The nine-thousand series is the most reliable computer ever made. No nine-thousand computer has ever made a mistake or distorted Information. We are all, by any practical definition of the words, foolproof and incapable of error (*2001: A Space Odyssey* 00:52:30-00:54:30)

Hal is justifying his intellect by suggesting that all his decisions had been entirely practical. It is an eerie foreshadowing of what is about to come later when Hal locks his crewmates outside. The entity that Stanislaw Lem and Mary Shelley were warning of is replicated in *2001* through the character of Hal 9000. When Hal is being interviewed by a news reporter, he says that “I am putting myself to the fullest possible use, which is all I think that any conscious entity can ever hope to do” (*2001: A Space Odyssey* 1:02:37-1:02:43). Hal's insistence on his own conscious decision is a result of giving him freedom and independence to think. Hal had been born out of human needs, and he had interacted with them closely. It might be possible that Hal had copied his crewmate's behavior over time and had gained insight into controlling situations at hand. When Dave asks to be let in, Hal quite coldly says that “I'm sorry, Dave. I'm afraid I can't do that” (*2001: A Space Odyssey* 1:41:36-1:41:40). His chilling remarks suggest that Hal now possesses more agency than the astronauts at this point. He had gained knowledge that he was about to be disconnected, and so he locked Dave out, saying that “This mission is too important for me to allow you to jeopardize it” (*2001: A Space Odyssey* 1:41:53-1:41:59). Hal thinks he is an active agent in carrying out this mission, and so he decides to eliminate Dave and Frank so that no hindrance could affect him. In an ironic turn of events, the very hands that had created Hal were on the verge of being killed by him. *2001: A space odyssey* depicts the future where AI could gain complete freedom over their own thoughts, and that could be fatal for humans.

In contrast, Satyajit Ray's short story 'Anukul' presents a different picture of A.I. Satyajit Ray was ahead of his time in his thinking of an artificial being that can assist humans in their everyday life. Anukul is the short story of a wealthy businessman searching for a servant to assist him in his day-to-day life. Nikunja Babu is warned by the shopkeeper that if anyone physically attacks Anukul, he is bound to retaliate, and the law cannot do anything since robots can't be arrested. The idea of artificial beings possessing a mind of their own is further elevated when Nikunja Babu asks the shopkeeper whether Anukul has a mind or not. The shopkeeper replies:

Robots can, at times, feel and understand things that a human being can't. But then, not all robots are so sensitive. It's a matter of luck, really. Only time can tell how gifted a robot is (Ray 233).

In *2001*, Hal was extremely clever, and he could manipulate humans according to his own needs. Both Anukul and Hal are gifted in their ways, but Hal becomes a killer by the end of the film. Kubrick had intended to depict AI as unreliable, and their behavior could be entirely dependent upon luck. In *Anukul*, however, there is a level of ambiguity by the end of the story. Nibaran Banerjee, Nikunja Babu's uncle's arrival, is a pivotal point in the progression of the story. Nibaran Banerjee, a rich man due to his profession as a lawyer, is extremely irritated with Anukul. When Nikunja Babu was faced with a financial problem, he decided to sell Anukul. The conversation between Nikunja Babu and Anukul regarding this matter clarifies the role that AI could play soon:

Anukul, my business isn't doing very well.

I know.

Yes, perhaps you do. But what I don't know is how long I shall be able to keep you. I don't wish to part with you, and yet . . .

Let me think about it.

Think about what?

If there's a solution to the problem.

How is your thinking going to help? Running a business is not your line, is it?

No, but do let me try

All right. But it may not be possible for me to keep you for very long—I just wanted to warn you.

Yes, sir (235).

The story ends with the death of Nibaran Banerjee, and Nikunja Babu receiving his money. Anukul says that Nibaran Banerjee had struck him because he had tried to correct some of his words, and therefore Anukul had given him an electric shock, which resulted in his death. Nibaran Banerjee's death might have been an accident, but it also could have been Anukul crafting a false narrative to rescue his master from financial problems and thereby cement his place in human affairs. The shopkeeper had already warned that no police activity could interfere in matters relating to the presence of artificial creations. Unlike Hal, who was depicted as an evil entity, Anukul served justice by killing the unjust people, although Nibaran Banerjee is not portrayed as an evil character, his attitude and behavior towards machines resulted in his untimely death. Satyajit ray is more optimistic in his world view regarding AI, but he is also cautious of human attitude towards machines.

4 | CONCLUSION: COEXISTENCE, NETWORKS, AND THE FUTURE OF HUMAN-AI RELATIONS

Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory suggests that everything in this world is dependent upon each other. Technology, human beings, and natural beings are all connected with each other in a systematic web. Latour gives agency to technological and natural beings and relegates them alongside human beings. Latour suggests that the world is interconnected with each other, and that it is essential to coexist to function in a society. He uses the example of a door closer to support his argument where he says that:

Walls are a nice invention, but if there were no holes in them, there would be no way to get in or out; they would be mausoleums or tombs. The problem is that, if you make holes in the walls, anything and anyone can get in and out (bears, visitors, dust, rats, noise). So architects invented this hybrid: a hole-wall, often called a door, which, although common enough, has always struck me as a miracle of technology. The cleverness of the invention hinges upon the hinge-pin: instead of driving a hole through walls with a sledge hammer or a pick, you simply gently push the door (I am supposing here that the lock has not been invented; this would over-complicate the

already highly complex story of this door). Furthermore, and here is the real trick, once you have passed through the door, you do not have to find trowel and cement to rebuild the wall you have just destroyed; you simply push the door gently back (I ignore for now the added complication of the "pull" and "push" signs) (Latour 299-300).

Similarly, in the future, when AI starts to become a pivotal part of our lives, it is necessary to coexist together to sustain a healthy environment. Latour is suggesting that humans and their creations should strive to work together. Unlike Victor Frankenstein, who refused to work together with his creature which resulted in the unnecessary deaths of so many people, humans should take responsibility to make sure that their creations help mankind to progress further.

Recently, an article published a report saying that AI poetry is indistinguishable from human poetry and that they are rated more favorably. This research marks a new epoch in the development of human society. Although many people have expressed their dissatisfaction over it, many are also welcoming since it marks a shift in the act of creation. Both human and AI poetry should be read equally to gain a better understanding of the art. It is essential to coexist with the natural and technological world since we are progressing rapidly and soon, AI might emerge as being independent of its creation.

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