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Creator and Creature in
William Gibson's Neuromancer:
The Promethean Motif in Science Fiction

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Abstract

Humankind's pursuit of knowledge is the core of the Prometheus myth and science fiction (SF). The punishment of Prometheus is a reflection of the double nature of knowledge: it can be used for the benefit or the destruction of humanity. SF shares this topic, representing the complex relation between the human race and knowledge through many forms: the encounter with alien cultures and extraterrestrials, the consequences of technological development, and the confrontation between civilization and its creations. SF works are contemporary representations of the Promethean drama, especially in the narratives that deal with the relation between creators and creatures. This relation is a reaction to what Hans Blumenberg calls the "absolutism of reality": humankind's belief that it cannot fully control the conditions of its existence. The creator versus creature drama in SF evolves through a progressive selection of narratives that aims to give the Prometheus myth a final interpretation. From the monstrous creature of Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** to the godlike artificial intelligences of William Gibson's **Neuromancer**, the relation between creator and creature in SF developed into new and complex configurations. SF's cyberpunk sub-genre attempts to overcome the creator and creature dichotomy through the humanization of the creature and the objectification of human identity, summarized in the figure of the cyborg. Contemporary cyberpunk literature unifies humankind and its machines in a post human existence, in which the differences between organic and artificial self-awareness are demoted. The Prometheus myth is then turned into a quest of identity by beings that are both creators and creatures.

Keywords: Myth, Cyberpunk, Science Fiction, Prometheus, Neuromancer, Hans Blumenberg

Resumo

A busca humana do conhecimento é o núcleo principal do mito de Prometeus e da literatura de ficção científica (FC). A punição de Prometeus é um reflexo da natureza dupla do conhecimento: ele pode ser usado para o benefício ou a destruição da humanidade. A FC também lida com este tópico, representando a relação complexa entre a humanidade e o conhecimento através de várias formas: o encontro com culturas alienígenas, as conseqüências do desenvolvimento tecnológico e o confronto entre a civilização e suas criações. As obras de FC são representações contemporâneas do drama prometeico, especialmente nas narrativas que lidam com a relação entre criadores e criaturas. Esta relação é uma reação ao que Hans Blumenberg chama de “absolutismo da realidade,” a crença da humanidade de que não pode controlar completamente as condições de sua existência. O drama do criador versus a criatura na FC evolui através de uma progressiva seleção de narrativas que procura dar ao mito de Prometeus uma interpretação final. Da monstruosa criatura do **Frankenstein**, de Mary Shelley até as inteligências artificiais com características divinas presentes em **Neuromancer**, de William Gibson, a relação entre o criador e criatura na FC desenvolveu-se em novas e complexas configurações. O subgênero cyberpunk da FC tenta superar a dicotomia entre o criador e a criatura através da humanização da criatura e da objetificação da identidade humana, resumida na figura do ciborgue. A literatura cyberpunk contemporânea unifica a humanidade e suas máquinas em uma existência pós-humana, na qual a diferença entre consciências orgânicas e artificiais são esquecidas. Assim, o mito de Prometeus se transforma em uma busca pela identidade de seres que são ao mesmo tempo criadores e criaturas.

Palavras-chave: Mito, Cyberpunk, Science Fiction, Prometeu, Neuromancer, Hans

Blumenberg

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Myth Theory
 - 2.1. Influential Trends in Myth Criticism
 - 2.2. Hans Blumenberg's Myth Theory
3. The Prometheus Myth
 - 3.1. Different Versions of the Myth
 - 3.2. Promethean Themes
 - 3.3. Prometheus and the Relation between Creator and Creature
4. Prometheus and Science Fiction
 - 4.1. Shelley's **Frankenstein**: The Creature as a Monster
 - 4.2. The Scientific Romance Period: Frankenstein's First Heirs
 - 4.3. The Golden Age of SF: the Creature as a Servant
 - 4.4. The New Wave: the Creature as Part of the Creator's Identity
 - 4.5. The Cyberpunk Genre: Cyborgs and Artificial Transcendence
5. Creator and Creature in **Neuromancer**
 - 5.1. Before **Neuromancer**: Creating Cyberpunk.
 - 5.2. Neuromancer: a Postindustrial Promethean Narrative
 - 5.3. Case: Prometheus as a Hacker
 - 5.4. Cyborgs and Constructs: Redefining the Creator
 - 5.5. Wintermute: the Creature as Prometheus and Zeus Combined
6. Cyberpunk Version of the Prometheus Myth
 - 6.1. Prometheus and the Cyberpunk Literature of the 90s
 - 6.2. Science Fiction's Ambiguity toward Technology
 - 6.3. Creator and the Creature's Transfiguration
 - 6.4. Myth and Literature

1. Introduction

The pursuit of knowledge and the consequences of its possession are one of the main topics of the Prometheus myth and science fiction (SF). The punishment of Prometheus because of Zeus's fear of human race's potential to usurp the power of the gods reflects the double nature of knowledge: it can be used for the benefit or the destruction of humankind. SF shares the same topics, representing the complex relation between human beings and knowledge through many forms: the encounter with alien cultures and extraterrestrials, the consequences of technological development and the confrontation between humankind and its creations. SF works are contemporary representations of the Promethean drama, especially in narratives that deal with the relation between a creator and a creature, a relation that has evolved and changed in the course of SF history. The Promethean fire, in this case, stands for knowledge to create human simulacra, and the Promethean punishment comes from the fear of losing control of these creations. This thesis aims to study how the Prometheus myth influences the development of the creator-creature relation in SF, especially in William Gibson's **Neuromancer**. The goal is to understand the contemporary answer to the double nature of knowledge; the fear that the creature, created to serve humankind, may one day overcome its creator.

Science fiction deals with the human relation with knowledge, with the human confrontation with the unknown, and the response to the challenges that it poses. Since its beginnings in the works of nineteenth-century authors such as Jules Verne and Mary Shelley, SF is concerned with the impacts of scientific and technological development in our society. Following the Promethean path, SF deals mainly with the pursuit of knowledge and the consequences of its possession. Seminal books such as Verne's **20,000 Leagues under the Sea** or Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** focus on the complex relation between humankind and scientific knowledge, and the consequences of human creations. The scientific novels of H. G. Wells, for example, show contemporary concerns that come from the misuse of scientific knowledge, as

seen in **The Island of Doctor Moreau**. The study of SF allows us to understand how contemporary anxieties generated by scientific development translate into narratives.

The thematic and stylistic variety of SF makes it hard to define it. SF does not have genre pragmatics – a set of practices, plot clichés and rules such as in detective fiction; nor does it have a defined ambiance, such as in the western genre. It cannot even be considered the literature of anticipation or speculation of the future because some SF works describe alternative pasts (such as Bruce Sterling and William Gibson’s **Difference Engine**, about a nineteenth-century London with steam-powered computers). It is also tricky to define SF subjects because it incorporates other genres, as in Philip K. Dick’s **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep**, a tale of scientific and sociologic speculation mixed with a detective story; or in Robert A. Heinlein’s **Starship Troopers**, a military fiction (and critique) disguised as SF. With so many forms and variations, a more detailed study of SF is necessary to develop a better description of the genre. Such definition has to be based on one of the most important topics of SF narratives: the effects of knowledge on human experience. In other words, SF re-enacts the Promethean drama in prose form.

Literary criticism disregarded SF until recently. Many academics believed that SF narratives did not meet the standards expected from “serious” literature. This may be true for the majority of SF stories from the 30s and 40s, narratives such as the space opera of E. E. Doc Smith, the “hard” SF of Isaac Asimov or the adventure and military SF of Robert H. Heinlein, among others. During this time, dubbed the Golden Age of SF, most authors were more concerned with ideas (or escapism, as in the case of the space opera genre), and less with character development and style.

The contemporary process of SF critical acceptance, says Brian McHale, is due to the “**convergence** or **cross-fertilization** between recent science fiction and ‘serious’ or ‘mainstream’ postmodernist fiction” (311). McHale claims that postmodernist authors such as William S. Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, Italo Calvino, and John Barth influenced the way authors from

the 60s attempted to imbue SF with literary value. This interaction, according to him, started with the New Wave, a movement within SF more concerned with literary experimentation.

New Wave writers such as Brian Aldiss, J. G. Ballard, Samuel R. Delany, Philip Jose Farmer, and Phillip K. Dick adopted much of the poetics of mainstream postmodernist fiction. Their works are characterized by experimental writing with more attention to literary style and less to scientific accuracy. New Wave SF is more pessimistic, more concerned with sociological and psychological issues, as well as the effects of technology on human consciousness. As these topics are also found in the works of Pynchon, Burroughs, and Kurt Vonnegut, New Wave SF brought some academic recognition to the genre.

This interchange between 60s and early 70s SF with postmodernist fiction is present in many works. As an example of the SF appropriation of state-of-the-art literary motifs, McHale says that the protagonists of Dick's **Ubik** or Ballard's **Crash** share many characteristics with the leading characters of Pynchon or Burroughs, such as the fragmentation of identity, the sense that meaning is created by the individual and cannot be made objective, and that experience of time and space is changed through technology. Additionally, **Crash** and **Ubik** share with Burroughs's **Nova Trilogy** or Pynchon's **The Crying of Lot 49** a concern with style and a sense that reality is nothing more than a projection of the mind, which is also a frequent theme of 60s and early 70s postmodernist works. As postmodern works influenced 60s and 70s literary experiments in SF, the genre, especially its pulp variation of the 20s and 30s has also influenced postmodern literature from the 50's to 70s.

This interaction between SF and postmodernism was two-way, according to McHale. "Postmodernist fiction in those decades began to exploit motifs and materials drawn from early, long outdated SF sources: the space operas and bug-eyed-monster fiction of the early pulp magazines" (314). Postmodernist authors of the 60s and 70s used SF motifs to pursue their literary goals. McHale gives the example of the "lost civilization motif" of the 20s pulp SF literature, which is the main topic of "The Mayan Caper," a tale in Burroughs's **Soft Ma-**

chine. “Burroughs combined the formulaic motifs from jungle adventure thrillers and pulp magazine SF to create a new motif complex, recontextualizing the original materials and literally reprocessing them, that is, subjecting them to his cut-up and fold-in techniques,” writes McHale (315). Burroughs uses pulp material in the Nova Trilogy, as his experimental novels are known, to convey his idea of language as a virus. In **Soft Machine**, **Nova Express**, and **The Ticket That Exploded**, the virus of language, also called Mob, is an extraterrestrial entity that came from the Crab Nebula to infect our planet. Although the plot clearly emulates the “world danger” clichés of early pulp SF, Burroughs’s style and techniques, such as the “cut-up,” the disruption of the time element in the plot, create a work that is now considered postmodern.

The references to pulp SF in postmodernist novels (which appear in other works, such as the super-heroes in Italo Calvino’s **Cosmicomics**) attracted the attention of literary criticism to their sources. With the experimentations of New Wave authors, SF gained critical recognition. Jean Baudrillard often quotes and analyzes Dick and cyberpunk narratives in his essays on contemporary culture; Harold Bloom has written many essays and introductions to SF books and has edited some critical SF books, and Frederic Jameson has analyzed pulp SF references in postmodernist literature, among others. Such patronage has given SF the status of a relevant subject of literary criticism.

With the cyberpunk SF movement, which started in the late 70s and continued throughout the 80s on to early 90s, the influence between SF and postmodernist fiction became more direct. The movement was an attempt to make SF relevant to modern society, showing the influence of technology on culture, the speculations on the future development of the capitalist system with its uncontrollable growth of corporations, the impact of the excess of media input in human consciousness, and other topics. Cyberpunk books such as Sterling’s **Islands in the Net** or Gibson’s **Neuromancer** were also concerned with style, experimenting with language and with plot narratives while heavily influenced by popular culture, espe-

cially the punk rock movement and aesthetics, the MTV video clip imagery, and the increasing interest in personal computers and technological gadgets during the 80s.

Cyberpunk authors openly borrowed motifs and even plot ideas from authors such as Pynchon or Burroughs. An example of this phenomenon, according to McHale, is the influence of Pynchon's **Gravity's Rainbow** on cyberpunk fiction, which ranges "from plot structure and large-scale world elements down to fine verbal details" (315). That can be recognized in books such as Gibson's **Neuromancer**, the most famous cyberpunk novel. Another example is Pynchon's **Crying of Lot 49**, whose plot, according to McHale, "underlies the adventures of Bruce Sterling's heroine Laura in **Islands in the Net**" (315), another relevant cyberpunk novel.

This convergence of postmodernist fiction and SF found in cyberpunk novels and the overlapping of topics and poetics shared by both have granted a new legitimacy to SF in academic circles. The presence of SF entries in canonical authorities, such as the **Columbia Literary History of the United States**, is evidence of this recognition. In the chapter "The Fictions of the Present," the critic Larry McCaffery states that SF is "arguably the most significant body of work in contemporary fiction" (1167). As the cyberpunk authors closed the gap between SF and the contemporary world, describing a near future that is just an exaggeration of our current technological state, SF became relevant for critical studies in areas such as sociology, cultural studies, and the like, as a way to analyze the complexities of the current integration between humanity and technological development. Showing the destructive potential of technology, cyberpunk literature is a dark representation of the Promethean drama.

2. Myth Theory

The relation between myth and contemporary literature, especially science fiction, depends on our concept of myth. Myth has consistently defied definition. Paradoxically, it seems to persist even after its cultural origins and ritualistic roots have disappeared. Many have attempted to define it in terms of its function in society, of its psychological origins, or even through its narrative structure. But these definitions are often limited and serve a particular theory or school of thought. I do not intend to study myth as a classical specialist or an anthropologist. My view of myth is a literary one. I am interested in how mythic narratives influence storytellers, an ancient literary phenomenon that myth critics, some more successfully than others, tried to explain. In **Work on Myth**, Hans Blumenberg, in order to propose an alternative point view, explains that myth definitions frequently fall into two main trends – the Rationalistic and the Romantic views.

2.1. Influential Trends in Myth Criticism

According to Blumenberg, the history of myth criticism can be described as a clash between two tendencies: Rationalist theories and Romantic theories. The Rationalist trend encompasses the theories that are based on the notion of myth as a mode of thought that would be later surpassed by reason. As this notion failed to explain the perseverance of myth in contemporary culture, it was further challenged by what Blumenberg calls the Romantic trend of myth criticism. Romantic myth theories would be all ancient and modern theories that see myth as a purer and original form of thought and either advocates a creation of a new mythology or a return to the old and inherited ones.

The Rationalistic tendency in myth criticism may have started when the ancient Greek philosophers attacked the traditional power and position of myths in their society. As Mircea Eliade claims, “[T]he Greek culture was the only one to submit myth to a long and

deep analysis, from which it came out radically ‘de-mythified’” (130). Eliade also states that this secularization can be observed in the work of philosophers such as Xenophanes, who defended the notion that people had created gods in their own image, modeling them after their own imaginations. Werner Jaeger quotes an example of Greek rational attack on myth when the classical philosopher Solon propagated the idea that “divinity is full of envy and instability” (65). Greek Rationalistic criticism challenged the veracity of the narratives, following the concept of myth being an untrue story, a lie, and a fantasy. This would later develop into a critique of the mythical thought, and the idea of an evolutive progression from **mythos** to **logos**, or, in other words, from myth to reason.

In the Enlightenment, the notion of myth as being an ancient superstition without allegorical meaning follows the growth of Rationalism. Robert M. Wallace, in his introduction to Blumenberg’s **Work on Myth** states, “[T]he Enlightenment in general followed Descartes in categorizing myths among the ‘prejudices’ that had to be swept away in order to make room for the methodical development and application of scientific knowledge” (vii). As a heritage from this trend, myth is relegated in the modern age to the place of aesthetic imagination and is assumed to have no importance in the rational and civilized society. One of the contemporary myth scholars that developed this Enlightenment tradition was Ernst Cassirer. Following Kant, whose work could be seen as the culmination of the Enlightenment ideas in philosophy, Cassirer assumed that once the evolution from mythos to logos was done by a society, myth would become obsolete (98-99).

The problem with this notion is that it does not explain how myths have maintained and even increased their influence in contemporary literature. Myths are more than byproducts of a pre-rational era. The survival of myth, even under the advance of secular rationality, shows that it can exist in a rational era. This amazing persistence pushes other myth scholars toward the Romantic extreme of considering myth as more fundamental than rationality.

The Romantic trend of myth criticism followed the idea that myth is inherent in human nature and that mythical thinking is more fundamental than humankind's superficial rationality. This first overestimating of myth started during the Renaissance and can be found especially in the works of Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). Hazard Adams, in **Critical Theory since Plato**, states that Vico considered myth as having a primitive and ritualistic origin, closer to an original state of the human mind. Vico, according to Adams, was the first to develop the concept of "sympathetic nature," considering myth a production of primitive cognitions of reality and history.

After Vico, the Romantics developed the concept of a primeval state of myth when discussing the dissociation of reason from imagination and the subsequent alienation of humans from nature. An example of this development can be found in the works of Friedrich Wilhelm von Schelling, one of the major names of German Romanticism. According to Adams, Schelling believed that myth is indifferent to the distinction between universals and particulars as it represents the union between these poles of culture. Schelling believed that the future would witness the creations of new mythologies, due to humankind's needs to unify the macrocosm with the microcosm. Schelling is a good example of the romantic sacralization of myth, and a precursor of the Modernists' claims to create a new mythology more adequate to modern culture.

In the industrial era, myth became central to the understanding of the relation between human culture and nature. With the development of anthropology and psychology in the last part of the nineteenth century, two tendencies within myth criticism can be observed: the archetypal and the structural approaches. Originating in the Romantic trend, archetypal and structural theories explored in depth the problems of myth definition, such as the persistence of myth in contemporary society or the myth's influence in human psychology. Both archetypal and structural theories are miles away from their Romantic ancestors, but they share the same notion of myth as a more primeval and fundamental form of narrative.

Vincent Leitch, in his **American Literary Criticism from the 30s to the 80s**, states that archetypal criticism generally viewed myth as being formed by perennial narratives, conventions or image groups that would serve as a source or influence for art (115-27). This notion, with many variations, can be seen in the works of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, Maud Bodkin, Leslie Fiedler, Joseph Campbell, and Northrop Frye. The second tendency, or the structural way to study myth, according to Leitch, emphasizes its function rather than its substance or origins (238-49). This view is developed extensively in the works of structuralists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes. Although there is no clear division between archetypal and structural theories, as many critics use concepts from both views in their attempts to define myth, the differences found in their analysis of myth influence on literature are so vast that contemporary myth criticism is often fragmented.

The problem with myth criticism is that the Rationalist trend denies the importance of mythic narratives while in the Romantic trend the influence of myth in culture is overestimated. Hans Blumenberg gives an alternative to these conceptual oppositions. Blumenberg's hypothesis of the absolutism of reality, the "Darwinism of words," and the necessity to "bring myth to an end" are alternative ways to understand the main reasons for the persistence of myth in arts, especially in literature.

2.2. Hans Blumenberg's Myth Theory

In his book, **The Work on Myth**, Blumenberg attempts a solution to the antithesis between the Enlightenment and Romantic views of myth. He shows that scientific rationality and the persistence of our inherited myths are not only compatible but are also indispensable aspects of the human condition. He states that the mythmaking ability derives from the necessity to overcome the anxiety generated from humankind's lack of control of reality. It is the natural selection of the myth narratives, or as he calls it, the "Darwinism of words" that contributes to the perpetuation of myth. Blumenberg believes that modern writers use mythic

motifs because of the necessity to “bring myth to an end,” or to give myth a final interpretation in order to release humankind from the necessity of such constructs.

Blumenberg criticizes the Enlightenment relation between rationality and myth. He exemplifies this relation through a criticism of Ernst Cassirer’s work, whose myth concept relates mythical narratives to a more primitive and limited mode of thinking. Cassirer, following the rationalistic tradition, states that the primitive people, for whom myth is still a living reality, are deprived of an essential symbolic form (**logos** or science), which would be superior to the mythical symbolic form they have. For Blumenberg, the rational trend considers the role of myth a simple object of aesthetic experience. He argues that Cassirer’s rational interpretation of myth could not explain the Germanic mythical renaissance in Nazi ideology, the total commitment of German society to the Nazi interpretation of Aryan myths during the Second World War. This irrationality could not be conceived by the traditional Enlightenment notion of the inexorable progression from **mythos** toward **logos**.

Instead of interpreting myth as the primitive way to explain scientific phenomena, Blumenberg affirms that myth should be interpreted in terms of its “point of departure.” This point of departure is the problem that myths seek to solve, the source of their importance, regardless of what comes after them. Blumenberg calls this problem the “absolutism of reality;” a situation in which “man comes close to not having control of the conditions of his existence and, what is more important, believes that he simply lacks control of them” (3). The absolutism of reality should be understood as a “limit concept,” which, while it may never be fully realized, is a necessary extrapolation, a limit case that explains the role of myth in human history and its contemporary permanence and influence.

The experience of the absolutism of reality created in early humankind the mental state that Blumenberg calls “anxiety.” This anxiety is related to “the unoccupied horizon of the possibilities of what may come at one” (6), and is caused by the human lack of a biological niche. Facing this lack of a biological niche, we responded to it generating one in our minds.

Culture is our mental biological niche, and culture started with myth filling the space of the “unoccupied horizon.”

For Blumenberg, the role of myth is to overcome the anxiety produced by the absolutism of reality. Myth rationalizes this anxiety turning it into powers, gods, and narratives, which humankind can deal with. As a mental niche, myth gives humankind some illusory control of the unknown. One could argue that this anxiety could be overcome through scientific or rational knowledge. But the persistence of myths in our rational era serves as evidence that knowledge is always partial; the absolutism of reality is total and requires something other than knowledge alone to overcome it, to put it behind us. It requires symbolic forms, the core of mythical narratives. Prometheus is one of such symbolic forms.

“Darwinism of words” is the concept presented by Blumenberg as a non-Romantic way to explain the permanence of myth. The Romantics saw myth as a kind of revelation granted to humankind, as if myths had no history. Opposing this idea, Blumenberg reminds us that mythology is the product of hundreds of years of oral storytelling. In each development of a myth, the audience and the necessities of the storytellers filtered stories, characters, and figures. After being tested and filtered, some narratives change in order to survive, while others fade into oblivion.

The continuous selection and change in mythical narratives serves a purpose: to give myth a final form. Blumenberg states that writers, recognizing the problem that myth wants to solve, strive to give it a final interpretation, a final meaning. But, as in Charles Peirce’s theory of the sign, this final meaning is never reached, as new narratives generate new interpretations and new retellings, or in Blumenberg’s theory, new “work on myth.” Blumenberg finishes his book stating that this work on myth is driven by the necessity to release man from myth, a liberation that is never accomplished, as the final narrative is never reached.

3. The Prometheus Myth

The core of the Prometheus myth is the technological development of humanity. Robert Graves sets the story of Prometheus apart from other myths, stating that it belongs to the philosophical allegory kind. As such, it was used to inspire philosophical discussions in Greek society. According to Graves, Prometheus's name, "forethought," could come from a "Greek misunderstanding of the Sanskrit word **pramamantha**, the swastika or fire-drill, which he had supposedly invented, since the Zeus Prometheus of Turin was shown holding a fire drill" (Graves 148). Since his origins, Prometheus was linked with technology and advancement; he is the representation of the human power to create and intervene in the world. Prometheus was also revered as the creator and the redeemer of humanity, the one that gave humankind the fire, a symbol of self-awareness and of the eternal desire to search knowledge. He is a creator that strives to make its creature greater than himself and his fellow gods.

3.1. Different Versions of the Myth

Hesiod's **Theogony** probably contains the first written version of the myth. In this version, Prometheus was the son of the marriage between the Titan Impetus (Titan Eurymedon in Ovid's **Metamorphoses**) and the nymph Clymene. He was the brother of Atlas, Epimetheus, and Menotius, and his name meant "foresight" (as opposed to his brother Epimetheus, "after sight"). After receiving the consent of the goddess Athena, Prometheus created mankind, forming them in the likeness of gods. Using water and clay, Prometheus modeled the first human after the Olympian gods' image. The goddess Athena breathed life into them (**Theogony** 211-32). Graves states that "this Promethean man is later distinguished by the Greek philosophers from the imperfect earth-born creation, part of which was destroyed by Zeus" (**Myths** 124) and is the main reason for the affection between Prometheus and mankind. As Promethean creatures, men would be always targets for Zeus jealousy and envy.

Another version of the myth is found in Aeschylus's play **Prometheus Bound**. Cronus and the Titans engaged in their unsuccessful war against the Olympian gods. Prometheus took the side of Zeus and the Olympians, even though he was a Titan (218). Prometheus had "foreseen" (as his name states) the outcome of the battle and convinced Epimetheus to fight with Zeus (252). When Cronus was defeated, Prometheus's brothers Atlas and Menotius were punished: Menotius was killed and sent to Tartarus, Atlas was spared and condemned to support the sky on his shoulders for all eternity (445). The defeat of his race and the punishment of his brothers would always stay in Prometheus's mind, and would prompt him to rebel against Zeus's desires (447).

As the wisest among the Titans, Prometheus learned the ways of civilization from Athena, daughter of Zeus and the mistress of all arts and sciences (477). Athena, whose birth from Zeus's head was assisted by Prometheus (Hesiod, **Theogony** 76-93), taught him architecture, astronomy, mathematics, navigation, medicine, metallurgy, etc., a knowledge that he passed on to humankind later (Aeschylus 228-36). But Zeus was growing jealous of man's powers and quick development and only Prometheus's urgent plea prevented him from eliminating the whole human race (480-94). The pedagogical aspect of Prometheus appears, as he is a creator that feels responsible for its creatures' intellectual development.

This pedagogical role is emphasized in Hesiod's **Work and Days**. Hesiod tells that Prometheus and Epimetheus had the task to make and provide man and all other animals with the faculties necessary for their preservation (12-17). Epimetheus undertook this task, and Prometheus had to overlook his work. Epimetheus started by giving gifts to all animals, the virtues of courage, strength, swiftness, sagacity, the power to fly, etc. He spent all the gifts on the beasts, so when it was man's time to receive his share, Epimetheus had nothing left to bestow upon humankind (21-30). But man was to be superior to all other animals and afraid of the failure of his task, Epimetheus asked the aid of his brother, who decided that only fire would equal humankind to the gods (35-41).

Then, Hesiod tells us that a dispute had aroused at Scion about what parts of a sacrificial bull were going to be offered Zeus and which were going to be consumed by men (550-53). To decide this matter, Prometheus was invited as a consultant. No man wanted to confront Zeus's power or will without having some kind of divine support, which Prometheus provided. Prometheus flayed and jointed the bull, sewing part of its hide to form two bags; one, he filled with the best part of the animal, the other he filled with bones (553-57). He hid the first bag behind the stomach of the animal and the second he hid under a rich layer of fat. As the fat was traditionally the divine part of a bull's sacrifice, Zeus was easily deceived, choosing the bag filled with bones, while the mortals laughed at him, enjoying Prometheus's trickery. An angry and humiliated Zeus decided to punish the mortals along with Prometheus, who was also laughing at him behind his back, by withholding fire from humankind, crying "let them eat their flesh raw!" (558).

Knowing the importance of fire to man, Prometheus asked his former tutor Athena about a backstairs admittance to Olympus (Hesiod, **Work and Days**, 35-40) to allow him to steal the divine fire. Athena listened to her former pupil and helped him (45-49). When in Olympus, he sneaked to Apollo's Sun Chariot and lit his torch in its flames. Then he broke from his torch a fragment of glowing charcoal, which he thrust into the pithy hollow of a giant fennel-stalk (82-95). He then extinguished his torch, got the giant fennel-stalk with its hidden glowing charcoal and got out of Olympus without being detected (98-105). After that, he gave fire to humankind. Fire enabled man to make weapons, to cultivate the earth and to become independent of the climate, and to create science, art, and commerce (105-24).

Zeus's retaliation was immediate. As described in **Theogony**, Zeus ordered Hephaestus to create a perfect clay woman (565-67). This clay woman is Zeus's response to the Promethean man. Zeus asked the four Winds to breathe life into her and ordered the goddesses of Olympus to give her all graces and feminine qualities (568). The clay figure became Pandora, the most beautiful woman ever created.

The purpose of Pandora's creation was to punish Prometheus, by seducing Epimetheus (603-11). Prometheus, however, had already warned Epimetheus against accepting any present from Zeus, so when Pandora was delivered to Epimetheus by the hands of Hermes, he refused her (611-23). Knowing that his plans had been foreshadowed, an infuriated Zeus chained Prometheus to a pillar in the Caucasian mountains, where a terrible vulture tore his liver all day, year in, year out (623-44). The pain of the torture would be endless, because every night his liver would regenerate while Prometheus was exposed to a cruel frost and cold (650). To the other Olympians, Zeus excused his actions by circulating the rumor that Athena had invited Prometheus to the Olympus for a secret love affair. He never confessed his vindictive and jealous behavior (663-74).

Epimetheus, frightened by his brother's punishment, married Pandora, as an attempt to ease Zeus's wrath. Epimetheus kept a jar in which Prometheus had put all Spites that might plague humankind: Old Age, Labor, Sickness, Insanity, Vice, and Passion. But Pandora, who was created mischievous and foolish by Zeus, opened a jar and all Spites flew out in a cloud, stung her and her husband in all parts of their bodies, and then attacked the race of mortals. However, with all other Spites Prometheus had put Delusive Hope, the only thing that prevented the mortals from committing a general suicide (674-83). Even with his power of foresight, Prometheus was unable to prevent the catastrophe, although he still managed to lessen the damage.

Prometheus is considered a traitor of the gods, a creator that helps his creatures to be free from his own influence. He is punished for sharing the forbidden knowledge of fire creation; a gift that will empower humankind and give it autonomy from the gods. The suffering of Prometheus reminds humankind of the price of defying the status quo and going against an established hierarchy in the name of freedom.

3.2. Promethean Themes

The Promethean myth, with its philosophical tone, deals mainly with the problem of creation and knowledge, through a representation of the human condition. Gaston Bachelard defines the Prometheus complex as “all the tendencies that propels us to know as much as our parents, more that our parents, as much as our masters, more than our masters” (30). This desire for knowledge, this impulse toward supremacy through knowledge is a crucial part of the myth. The desire for power through knowledge underlies all the other themes that the myth covers, such as creation, freedom, self-sacrifice, and redemption.

Sacrifice because of forbidden knowledge is the core of the Prometheus myth. For Blumenberg, “Prometheus guarantees to men that their culture cannot be interfered with. Only he, as a Titan, could have stolen the fire, not those whose preservation he did it for. For only he could endure and outlast, and in the end triumph over, his punishment for the crime. (300). Following Blumenberg’s notion of myth being a solution to a problem, Prometheus’s drama can be understood as a representation of the eternal anxiety produced by knowledge, the need to achieve it and the irreversibility of its possession, and the loss of innocence and purity. The most popular representation of the myth portrays Prometheus eternally chained in the Caucasus, an Olympian attempt to immobilize the Titan. Blumenberg comments:

The myth does not allow his figure to return to its initial condition. It is a representation of irreversibility. This only becomes clear when one sees the theft of fire as the provision of the technique by which to produce fire [...]. When one knows how to make fire, one has become resistant to divine wrath. That is why Zeus simply cannot reverse the theft of fire by taking it away from men [...]. In the end nothing has changed for the gods, but everything has changed for men. (301)

The irreversible nature of knowledge is at the core of the myth. Fire symbolizes knowledge, self-awareness, and the possibility to control one’s destiny. The knowledge of fire creation is

the information that Prometheus stole from the gods and passed to humanity. In this sense, Prometheus could be seen as a “hacker god,” following the hackers’ motto that “information must be free.”¹ Prometheus steals the fire from Olympus in order to make it accessible to all humanity, redeeming them from the oppression and the authority of the gods. It is a metaphor for knowledge, of how humankind “steals” knowledge from nature in order to evolve, a knowledge that could be used for creation or destruction, the source of the Promethean guilt. Prometheus deceives the gods in order to steal fire. This trickster aspect of Prometheus will return in cyberpunk narratives, where hackers defy big corporations, undermining their authority and power through information theft and public dissemination.

This defiant aspect of Prometheus is widely studied among myth scholars. Joseph Campbell differentiates between Prometheus’s and Job’s attitudes:

Prometheus personifies an ideal in direct opposition to that personified by Job. He represents the affirmation of the human value system against the gods. He accepts his punishment because he was a demigod himself – and he was blessed with the ability to see into the future and to know how things were going to turn out – but the attitude is that of affirmation of human values against the powers of the almighty. (**Myths 12**)

This “affirmation of human values” is part of the popular appeal of the Prometheus myth in Western culture. He symbolizes rebellion, personal freedom, and defiance against the status quo. Although the definition of the human values that are affirmed in Promethean narratives change with time, Prometheus’s stubborn and defiant nature remains in contemporary narratives.

¹ According to Taylor, the definition of “hacker” changed throughout the development of computer technology. Currently, the term refers to individuals with great computer expertise who invade databases and computer systems, with or without material profit. Steven Levy claims that the hacker’s main motto is that “all information must be free” and that they often follow a distrust for authority and a rebellious attitude against limitations on the flow of information in the digital world.

In Aeschylus's **Prometheus Bound**, "by identifying with Prometheus, and, as far as possible, following the course of his experience [...] we find ourselves wondering how divinity and suffering can be reconciled, and how intrinsically worthy the cause of humankind is" (Will 36). Here, Prometheus is humankind's champion, and his humanity lies in the strength of his convictions. The center of **Prometheus Bound** is the mind drama that surrounds its protagonist; the true punishment is the memories of the Titan's personal tragedy. Through this mental torture, the dwelling in the reasons and the consequences of his actions, the convictions of Aeschylus's Prometheus remain the unifying principle of the Titan. The Titan is aware of his position against Zeus's tyranny and his place as the liberator of man; he sees no crime in his theft of fire; he thinks fire is humankind's birthright.

The trickster aspect of Prometheus is the clue to finding Promethean aspects in contemporary narratives. Describing the trickster characteristics of the Titan, Norman Austin explains:

His function seems to be to upset the existing order, whatever that order may be. [...] The gods should receive the better portion of the feast; therefore the trickster will engineer it that the gods choose the inferior portion for themselves. The cosmic order establishes a hierarchy, in which gods are superior and the men inferior. Therefore the trickster will steal the power from the gods and distribute it to the men. [...] The trickster embodies the universal principle of instability. (78)

Prometheus represents the victories and failures of human consciousness. He embodies the principle of ambiguity; his cunning and deception represent human strategies to cope with the absolutism of reality. Imagination is the essence of the trickster, as it must upset the traditional order with the power of its wits. Prometheus shows that "trickery is involved when men survive in the world" (Blumenberg 310). The disastrous aspect of the myth is that the trickery turns into a dangerous threat of extermination from Zeus to human beings. According to

Blumenberg, “the issue is not only human contended existence but also the prevention of his nonexistence” (311). Prometheus sacrifices himself out of his preference for his creatures; if Zeus destroys the human beings, it means that Prometheus has failed. When the narrative resurfaces in SF literature, it often represents creators that choose to perish with their creatures.

The sacrifice in the search of knowledge, the defiant attitude against the established order, and the trickster aspect of the Prometheus myth are the main clues to understand how the Promethean narrative evolved in contemporary literature, especially SF. These aspects of the myth, when represented in SF, are unified under the relation between creator and creature.

3.3. Prometheus and the Relation between Creator and Creature

In many versions of the myth, Prometheus is considered the creator of humankind, reinforcing his relation to his creatures. Otto Rank discusses this relation as having three main characteristics. The first is Prometheus’s ambiguous intentions while creating humankind:

Firstly he assumes that he can create men just as well as the gods; thus he himself is a god, or better, a Man-God. But his identification with the creating gods is nothing else than the canceling of the earlier projection by means of which the gods themselves had been created. Prometheus symbolizes **the dethroning of gods created by man**, and in the place of gods, man now installs himself with his fully developed personality and his need to create. (202)

Prometheus creates humankind, as Cronus, his fellow Titan, had created the Olympian gods. But when he steals the Olympian fire and gives it to men, he enables his creation to become independent from the gods. He did not create humankind in order to secure his position among the divine hierarchy, or in order to promote himself among the gods. As a trickster and with an ability to see the future, Prometheus knew the intrinsic capacity of humankind to disrupt the cosmic hierarchy. There was a danger of losing control of his creation, a danger that

he, fulfilling the trickster role, accepted as a way to disestablish the Olympian status quo and promote advancement through chaos.

Another characteristic described by Rank is the Titan's identification with his creation:

Secondly, Prometheus creates man after his **own** image – just as earlier, man had created the gods. In relation to the creation of man [...] this is different from the early creations of other gods. It is a matter of creation of **real men**, who after their creation by Prometheus live their own lives – to which he himself has to adjust by means of identification. (202)

Different from the other gods, Prometheus is deeply interested in his creation. The god justifies his punishment stating, in Aeschylus's play, that he has a “too great love for the children of men” (7). He changes his behavior because of his identification with humankind's self-awareness and potential for independence. Prometheus sees himself in his creation and is capable of renouncing his divine post in order to protect and to liberate his creatures. This will later form the basis for the Promethean influence on SF literature, especially represented in the scientific obsession of certain characters toward their creations.

The last characteristic Rank discovers in the myth is the way Prometheus relates to his creatures as love objects: “Thirdly, Prometheus creates not only men after his own image, but also as the **love object**; in the Prometheus saga, Pandora is created as a wish fulfillment. [...] Pandora (and also the other creatures) is a **child** on whom the creator wants to imprint his own characteristics [...]” (202). This patronizing way to deal with humankind is present in many variations of the legend. Prometheus believes humankind is incapable to defending itself from Zeus's wrath. As he sees the other gods as flawed, Prometheus becomes affectionate with the possibilities of mold his creations after his own image. In later representations of Prometheus, as the ones found in SF, this affection can easily turn into hatred, when the creatures start to behave independently, frustrating the expectations of their creators. Blumenberg points out in Pandora's relation with Prometheus, “she brings the evils, but she does not take away the gain,

for which Prometheus takes responsibility. So one will be able to say that Prometheus achieved nothing for men in the end – that each of his tricks was frustrated by a countertrick, most clearly by the dispatching of Pandora” (308). Pandora demonstrates the ambiguity of Prometheus’s relation with humankind. While the Titan liberates the humans through the theft of fire, he cannot prevent their fate, due to the same free will and self-awareness that propels Pandora to open the box full of misfortunes to humankind. Curiosity is the force that engenders the search for knowledge, and in the case of Prometheus, forms the basis of his hubris. The same curiosity that propelled the Titan to create creatures with the capacity to surpass the gods, the curiosity that Prometheus instilled in his creation is the cause of Pandora’s misfortune. Identified with his creations, Prometheus takes responsibility for humankind’s flawed nature, its innate disregard for the full consequences of its actions. This is the final aspect of the relation between Prometheus and his creatures: he feels guilty for their offenses, as if they were reflections of his own faults.²

These two aspects of the Prometheus myth, the Prometheus **pyrophoros** of Aeschylus’s **Prometheus Bound**, who stole the fire from the gods and was punished for it, and the Prometheus **plasticator**, who, according to many versions, not very popular among the Greeks, had created humankind out of clay, fused together during the second and the third century. M. K. Joseph explains that this fusion led to a “Neoplatonic interpretation with Prometheus as the demiurge or the deputy creator, but which could also be readily allegorized by Christians and was frequently used in the Middle Ages as a representation of the creative power of God” (vi). The Prometheus **plasticator** was greatly influenced by the Roman poet Ovid’s version of the

² In Greek mythology, this emotional relation between creator and creature is also evident in Pygmalion’s myth, as described in Ovid’s **Metamorphosis**. Pygmalion is a sculptor who, disappointed with women (the Propoetises, who became prostitutes because they angered Venus), created a female statue so perfect that he fell in love with it. After praying to Aphrodite, the goddess of love brings the statue to life. Pygmalion marries Galatea, his creation, and they end up having a son, Paphos. Pygmalion’s narrative was later recreated by many authors, and is well known because of Bernard Shaw’s comedy **Pygmalion**, where the phonetics professor Henry Higgins tries to turn a poor flower girl into a lady and be accepted by the English upper-class. SF narratives have also drawn from Pygmalion’s myth. In Ira Levin’s 1972 novel **The Stepford Wives**, for example, the male scientists of a small town of Connecticut create docile female robots to replace their former independent wives.

god in **Metamorphoses**. For Ovid, he is not a savior; he creates and manipulates humankind into life, stimulating the search for knowledge. This interpretation influenced many western poets, from the Medieval up to the Renaissance and Romantic periods.

During Romanticism, Prometheus was identified with the creative genius, humankind's capacity to create. Incorporating the demiurgic aspects from the Middle Ages and influenced by the Romantic ideology, Prometheus was humanized into a psychic force that propels humankind to defy the limits of nature and to create. Works such as Shelley's **Prometheus Unbound** shows a vision of a Prometheus greatly influenced by Ovid's metamorphosis, while incorporating the idea of the myth as a representation of the creative power of human mind.

Prometheus as the creator of humankind influenced SF narratives, especially the ones that deal with creator and creature issues. This relation reflects the ambiguous nature of knowledge, materialized by creature and its constructive and destructive potential. As the new versions of mythic narratives aim to give a final interpretation of the myths that originated them, however, the traditional roles of creator and creature are distorted, changed, disrupted, and reworked, in order to resonate with contemporary sensibilities.

4. Prometheus and Science Fiction

The relation between myth and SF can be traced from the first writings of the genre. From Shelley's reworking of the Prometheus myth in **Frankenstein** to the references and inspirations of biblical mythology in the works of Phillip K. Dick, SF writers have drawn inspiration from those ancient stories to create their fictional universes. The relation between myth and SF is so important that critics like James Gunn and L. Sprague de Camp trace the origins of SF from old epic myths such as Plato's Atlantis or the Babylonian saga of Gilgamesh. Although SF shares many motifs with such myths (such as the lost civilization or the quest for immortality), it is very different in essence. Damien Broderick defines the difference between myth and SF narratives thus:

SF, which is often crucially concerned with the strictly unforeseeable social consequences of scientific and technological innovation, is principally a **diachronic** medium – that is, a medium of historical, cumulative change in which each step is unlike the last. Myth, by contrast, operates typically and primarily in a synchronic or “timeless dimension” [...]. (4)

Although Myth and SF differ in essence, many SF narratives simulate the synchronic aspects of myth, especially when the author describes the mythology within the fictional world. Frank Herbert, for example, creates in **Dune** a whole mythology behind the coming of the Arrakis's messiah, the tales of the Kwisatz Haderach. However, this mythology is developed under a rationalistic paradigm, devoid of magical thought. The prophecy about the Kwisatz Haderach, emulating the parables of the Islamic Koran, was designed by the sisterhood of the Bene Gesserit to aid on her genetic breeding program. In Robert Heinlein's **Stranger in a Strange Land**, the messianic Mike Smith, a Martian-born human with psychic powers founds a church in order to disseminate his philosophy. The book offers a variation of the Christian messianic narrative, but is filled with contemporary problems and criticism, which removes the mystical aura

of the traditional Jesus story from Mike Smith's tale. William Gibson, in **Count Zero** and **Mona Lisa Overdrive**, creates a "materialistic mythology" made up of self-aware and independent virtual entities that inhabit the cyberspace. These entities adopt the personalities of "loas," the voodoo gods of Afro-Caribbean culture. They act as their mythological counterparts; instead of mediums, they use hackers as "horses," when they want to communicate and act in the world. They act as gods, although their reality is not metaphysical; they exist as data within the memory banks of cyberspace. As such, they are subjected to the rules of material reality and the rules of a virtual world.

Diachronic SF narratives often include synchronic motifs in their stories, especially mythology-inspired ones. Casey Fredericks claims that, "[I]f a critic eliminates myth from SF, he emasculates the genre and badly misreads the actual narratives" (5). Famous myths pervade the works of writers such as Poul Anderson, Roger Zelazny, Ursula K. Le Guin, and L. Sprague de Camp. Even hard SF writers such as Isaac Asimov or Arthur C. Clark have used mythic narratives as source for their works. The relation is often explicit, as in the virtual voodoo gods of Gibson's **Count Zero** or in the use of Sumerian mythology in the post-cyberpunk novel **Snowcrash**, by Neal Stephenson.

Inspired by the classical mythic narratives, SF creates its own synchronic myths. One of the most influential SF contemporary myths is based on the monster of Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein**, a recreation of the Promethean drama. Brian Aldiss claims that **Frankenstein** is the first true modern SF book as it speculates on the problems created by humankind's relation to the universe and to itself, due to scientific development. As modern anxieties toward technological development (the impact of machinery on nature, on our consciousness, and on our way of living) started with the Industrial Revolution of early nineteenth century, SF originates within Gothic romance as a literary response of this new angst. Shelley's **book** unites the Gothic tradition with a modern concern for the consequences of scientific knowledge. The old motif of dealing with forbidden, occult, or supernatural knowledge used in other Gothic novels

was replaced by the forbidden science motif, which would later form one of the pillars of contemporary SF. The monster created by Shelley becomes a synchronic narrative of the threat represented by humankind's creations, a modern myth that haunts SF since its beginnings.

Facing the same problem as the old Greeks, SF authors respond to the "absolutism of reality" represented by the inexorable development of technology, with new representations of the Promethean relation between creator and creature. Casey Fredericks states,

Shelley provides a scientific displacement of Prometheus as creator when she has Victor Frankenstein, a young, intensely Faustian student of science, use electricity to generate life in his created life form, henceforth called a "Daemon." But Victor Frankenstein, the New Prometheus, unlike the providential champion of Humankind in Aeschylus' tragedy, is repelled by his creature once he has made it. Rejected and isolated, the Daemon becomes a rebellious monster who methodically takes revenge on his own creator [...]. (6)

This dark version of the Promethean drama has persisted in SF, the reversal of Zeus's fears of humankind, with human beings replacing the gods as the race doomed to be overthrown by its creations.

Fredericks also writes that this "Frankensteinian awareness of the ambiguous potential of science has never dropped out of SF" (6), especially in the relation between creator and creature. This is easily spotted in the evolution of the representations of the creature in SF imagery. From the monster in **Frankenstein**, with its deformed body and difficulty to integrate into human society, to the utopist Asimov robots, bound by the Three Robotic Laws not to harm its human masters, the creature in SF has been shaped by the Frankenstein anxiety about the destructive potential of scientific knowledge. As the representations of the creature in SF continue to evolve, though, the pessimistic acceptance of the uncontrollable nature of scientific development turns them into the human-like androids of Dick's **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep** or even the godlike artificial intelligences of Gibson's **Neuromancer**, with their omni-

presence in the cyberspace, their immortality, their lack of a body, and their intellect above human comprehension.

The representation of the Prometheus myth that Gibson's *Neuromancer* attempts to overcome the "absolutism of reality" through the breakdown of the distinctions between human and machine. As in other cyberpunk works, the distance between the creator and the creature is blurred. Humans jack their consciousness into machines, artificial intelligences talk of emotions and commune their thoughts with the human characters. In these works, the creature has evolved above all human limitations. Wintermute, the artificial intelligence that drives the plot of *Neuromancer*, is a perfect example of this evolution; it is bodiless, immortal and has instant access to an amount of knowledge way beyond the limits of the human mind. It also interacts with Case, a human, through interfaces that mix the artificial and the organic mind. Cyberpunk's response to the Promethean drama makes the creator embrace his creature, adopting it as a part of his own identity. The creature is no longer an image of its creator; it reaches beyond as a manufactured God, something to worship. The reasons behind this recent development of the creature and this new variation of the Promethean drama will be further analyzed later.

4.1. Shelley's Frankenstein: The Creature as a Monster

The 1818 text of *Frankenstein* was subtitled *The Modern Prometheus*, establishing upfront the analogy between Victor Frankenstein and the classic myth of the fire-giver. Fire is replaced by forbidden scientific knowledge, the modern tool that Frankenstein uses to make his creature. Frankenstein's desire to "renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" (Shelley 28) is developed in an ambiguous manner, as it reinforces the potential dangers in penetrating the secrets of nature, in a Romantic interpretation of Prometheus's punishment.

According to Maurice Hindle, the Prometheus **plasticator** described in John Dryden's translation of Ovid's **Metamorphoses** influenced Shelley's character of Victor Frankenstein (xviii). Prometheus role as a demiurgic force is defined in Ovid's description about the creation of man:

Whether with particles of heav'nly fire
 The God of Nature did his soul inspire,
 Or Earth, but new divided from the sky,
 And, pliant, still retain'd th' aetherial energy:
 Which wise Prometheus temper'd into paste,
 And, mixt with living streams, the godlike image cast. (81-86)

Although not explicit in the novel, the movie versions of **Frankenstein** replace the "heavenly fire" with electricity, a modern development, through the "Darwinism of words," from the obscure alchemically inspired science of the literary Dr. Frankenstein.

The main sign of Frankenstein's profane work is present in both literary and filmic versions: the dealing with the dead. As Ovid's Prometheus "tempe'd [the earth] into paste" Victor Frankenstein manipulated the dead to create a life. But different from the divine actions of Ovid's Prometheus, Frankenstein's dealings with dead bodies are stigmatized as profane. Even when his actions are justified by his scientific reasoning, his punishment is similar to the necromancers of medieval Germanic folk tales, who, according to Sally Nichols's description of the necromancer archetype, end up suffering in the hands of the dead creatures they revive.

Frankenstein's romantic take on the Prometheus narrative captivated the nineteenth century public, astonished with the speed of technological development and the sociological changes of the Industrial Revolution. Shelley's "work" on the Prometheus myth (as in a Blumenbergian sense, the changes of mythic material in response to the absolutism of reality represented by the historical changes of a certain period) was so successful that current SF still

lives in **Frankenstein's** shadow. Contemporary SF genres, such as cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk novels, are still haunted by the fear of the destructive and dehumanizing potential of technology. SF reflects the fear that technology may turn us into monsters that mingle the organic and the artificial into new identities.

As the “Darwinism of words” implies selecting and forcing change in the narratives, Shelley twisted the last part of Ovid’s account on the creation of man: Victor’s creature is not a “godlike image,” but a deformed and grotesque mirror of his human maker. Punishment does not come from an external power; there is no merciless Zeus in **Frankenstein**. The creature itself is the punishment of the modern Prometheus. Instead of a Promethean identification, Victor Frankenstein rejects his creature, considering its monstrous profile a testament of his failure as a scientist. Terrified by his own making, Victor feels responsible for the evil that the monster unleashes in the world and decides to destroy it. This “right to destroy” is a recurring motif in SF, and often used by creators to justify all their actions toward their creations. The creature is then considered an object, something that is denied individual rights. The “right to destroy” is another response to the Frankenstein anxiety of losing control of the creature.

In the novel, Victor refuses the pleas of the creature for a female companion. The scientist creates one only to destroy it later, fearing that it would spawn a generation of monsters. As Zeus became worried about humankind’s potential to be independent and even surpass the gods, Victor dreaded this new breed of creatures. The difference is that in the classical narrative, the human race had the possibility to outdo the Olympians (as once they had exceeded the Titans), while in **Frankenstein**, Victor feared that the savagery, the amorality, and the physical power of a new generation of monsters could endanger humankind’s survival. The “absolutism of reality” faced by Shelley, the fast and unrelenting technological development that created hellish environments, like the proletarian neighborhoods of the British Industrial Revolution, influenced her dark interpretation of the Promethean narrative. **Frankenstein** shows

distrust of technological developments because of humankind's lack of responsibility and ethics.

The monster deviates from the humans of the classic Prometheus myth. Shelley's narrative corrupts the paternalistic relationship between Prometheus and his creatures; Victor cannot accept the grotesque form of his creation. The creature in **Frankenstein** is a materialization of the creator's dark feelings. Colin McGinn develops the following definition of monsters, stating that characters such as the monster in **Frankenstein**

[...] act as visible embodiments of evil, by the way of the idea that evil is a form of ugliness. If the evil spirit were to be visible, **this** is how it would look – as ugly as sin. We take the notion of evil as ugliness of soul and concretize it in the form of a monster of physically repellent aspect. We take evil out of its hiding place in the soul and display it for all to see. [...] Monsters exist because of the aesthetic theory of virtue. (7)

Victor Frankenstein is repelled by what his creature reflects of his own psyche, rather than by what his creature is. The cadaveric aspect of the monster reminds Victor of his failure in conquering death. The monster is not alive nor dead; he is the fabled undead of horror folktales. Shelley describes the monster as a grotesque assortment of body parts, whose “yellow skin hardly covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath” (55). His face is something out of a nightmare, with “watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun-white sockets in which they were set” (55). His “shriveled complexion and straight black lips” (55) indicates that it is an unnatural creature, a being that exists between life and death. This grotesque aspect induces Victor to consider his creature an embodiment of evil: for the young scientist, its monstrous appearance must correspond to an even more monstrous inner life. Paradoxically for Victor's preconceptions, the monster, at least in the first part of the narrative, has a naïve and innocent soul. Like a child, he begins to learn the ways of humankind; his inner world is not reflected by horrendous exterior.

Loneliness turns the creature's initial pure nature into hatred toward his creator. Because of his hideous appearance and artificial origin, the monster could not relate to humankind. The creature faces Victor: "Believe me, Frankenstein, I was benevolent: my soul glowed with love and humanity: but am I not alone; miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me" (96). The creature is aware of its unique nature; it will never fit into society. Its monstrosity is reaffirmed by the rejection that contaminated its soul. But this utterance also reveals the close connection between Victor and the monster: like his creature, Victor is alone with his own conscience; he is the only human capable of creating life, he is the only one responsible for bringing a killer into the world. Victor is also "miserably alone" psychologically; he even comments the fate of loneliness that comes to all who dare to go over the limits of knowledge. He is lonelier than Prometheus in his punishment: he does not belong to a caste of gods and there is none to free him from his fate. Victor's solitude is clearly defined in the end of the novel, when he dies among strangers.

Another characteristic that Victor shares with Prometheus is the trickster nature. The scientist tried to outwit nature to conquer death as the Titan tried to deceive the Olympians to free humankind. As it tends to happen to the classical trickster, Victor's attempt to fool death turns against himself. He desires forbidden knowledge. J. P. Telotte, comparing **Frankenstein** with the Prometheus myth, explains:

Frankenstein's tale of forbidden desire and the human devaluation that follows fits within a long tradition of such sacrilegious accounts, all of which seems to culminate in a reminder of our very human – and seemingly natural – limitations. [...] But if his story seems a simple cautionary tale, a warning against defying the gods or tampering with nature, it also carries another implication [...] illustrating how the trick ultimately rebounds upon the trickster, how our de-

sires or appetites have a way of eventually eating away at us, rendering us nearly empty or lifeless beings. (36-37)

Forbidden desire is the key to understanding Victor's punishment. His obsession with conquering death made him blind to the moral and ethical consequences of his actions. The monster is the result of his trickery on nature and the instrument of Victor's Promethean suffering.

Victor never fully acknowledges his creature's existence. He treats it as an abomination and an object, a flesh construct. The monster's misery comes from its desire to be recognized by his creator. The monster needs Victor's validation in order to have an identity. Like the androids of Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, the monster in *Frankenstein* is confused about its own uniqueness; it depends on its creator's validation of its existence. This is a common behavior among the artificial beings of SF literature; they often question if they are truly self-aware or only simulate the human experience of reality.

Frankenstein's response to the "absolutism of reality" represented by the emergence of technological creatures is pessimistic. The monster summarizes this view when it addresses Victor Frankenstein:

Yet, you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. (95)

According to the monster, humankind will always be threatened by the needs and the inner logic of its creations. In SF terms, this means that robots, artificial intelligences, clones, androids, replicants, etc., will be bound to their creators and will change their creator's behavior just by existing. As soon as the creature attains self-awareness, the conflict with its creator deepens.

4.2. The Scientific Romance Period: Frankenstein's First Heirs

The “Darwinism of words” or the natural selection of Promethean representations, continued from **Frankenstein** up to the later part of the nineteenth century, especially with the scientific romances of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. Jules Verne dealt with the Promethean obsession for knowledge in characters such as Nemo in **20,000 Leagues under the Sea** or Robur in **Robur the Conqueror**. There are a few references to artificial creatures in Verne's works such as the steam-powered elephant in **The Demon of Cawnpore**. For Verne, the desire for knowledge leads Nemo and Robur to their personal destruction, following the path of Victor Frankenstein. Nemo finds obliteration upon relying on his creation, the proto-submarine Nautilus, while Robur's corruption comes from the power of his creation, the Albatross, a flying fortress. In terms of artificial creatures, the steam-powered elephant of **The Demon of Cawnpore** is a creature that, as the Nautilus and the Albatross, serves as a means of transportation for the main protagonists to enact a revenge plot. In Verne, the creations give power to their creators to impose their will in the world, to commit acts of violence, and to express their thoughts and ideologies.

H. G. Wells expands **Frankenstein's** themes in **The Island of Doctor Moreau**, a work that deals with the dangers of unethical and amoral scientific research, taking the search for knowledge to an extreme. **The Island of Doctor Moreau** updates the Prometheus myth to the post-Frankenstein era, mixing the forbidden knowledge theme with eugenics, Darwinism, vivisection of animals, and religion within social criticism. In this book, Moreau takes Victor Frankenstein's place as the “modern Prometheus.” Instead of creating life out of death, Moreau is interested in creating human awareness in animals, through a process of vivisection and experimentation. His attitude toward his creatures differs greatly from Victor's; Moreau tries everything to make them a part of the human race by removing all their animal instincts. He accepts his creatures as humans, even if they have distinctive animal features. Moreau's enemy is na-

ture; he hopes to conquer his creatures' animal instincts to fulfill his amoral scientific curiosity. As Moreau explains to the horrified journalist Edward Prendick:

These creatures of mine seemed strange and uncanny to you as soon as you began to observe them, but to me, just after I make them, they seem to be indisputable human beings. It's afterwards as I observe them that the persuasion fades. First one animal trait, then another, creeps to the surface and stares out at me... But I will conquer yet. Each time I dip a living creature into the bath of burning pain, I say, "this time I will burn out the animal, this time I will make a rational creature of my own." After all, what is ten years? Man has been a hundred thousand in the making. (120)

Moreau follows the Promethean narrative by giving the gift of human awareness to the animals, but the result is a hybrid creature, neither man nor animal – a monster. Moreau's Promethean sin is his desire to overcome the natural instincts. Like Frankenstein, Moreau defies nature; he wants to create a new humankind devoid of natural and violent instincts. Reason is his Holy Grail.

Throughout the novel, Moreau questions human nature and tests Darwinism in trying to make human beings out of animals. Once the process is finished, he loses interest in the creature and moves on to the next experiment. Moreau sees the inexorable degeneration of his creations, as they progressively turn back into animals, as an incentive for further experiments in perfecting and purifying the human race. But his cruelty toward his creatures, his lack of compassion in the name of scientific research contrasts with his claims of human superiority. Moreau leaves a bad impression on the reader; he is much more evil than the monsters he creates, which are only following their natural instincts.

Different from Prometheus, Moreau wants to make a rational creature to serve and follow him as a father or a messianic figure. He is not interested in their freedom. Montgomery, Moreau's assistant, observes that the creatures had no free will:

In spite of their increased intelligence, and the tendency of their animal instincts to reawaken, they had certain Fixed Ideas implanted by Moreau in their minds, which absolutely bounded their imaginations. They were really hypnotized, had been told certain things were impossible, and certain things were not to be done, and these prohibitions were woven into the texture of their minds beyond any possibility of disobedience or dispute. (116)

As with Victor Frankenstein, Moreau also incorporates Zeus's behavior into a Promethean narrative. Acting like Zeus and Prometheus, Moreau instills self-awareness in his creatures but binds them to prevent their development. The "Fixed Ideas," compiled into the "Law" that all Moreau's creatures had to follow (which prohibited them to eat meat, to chase other men, and to behave like animals), binds the creatures development, as the withdrawal of fire put humankind in darkness, in Greek mythology. Like Zeus, Moreau demanded obedience from his creatures; they were obliged to follow their creator's design. Similar attempts by the creators to limit and control their creatures are found throughout SF history.

4.3. The Golden Age of SF: The Creature as a Servant

Before the Golden Age of SF literature of the 40s and 50s, before the robots of Asimov and the super intelligent aliens of Arthur C. Clark, SF gained popularity in the United States through the pulp magazines of the 20s and 30s. When Hugo Gernsback created the **Amazing Stories** magazine in 1926, he created the term "science fiction" to categorize the science-focused novels written by Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and even Edgar Allan Poe.

Influenced by the so-called "Machine Age" (the post-Industrial Revolution period of scientific and technological development), the narratives of **Amazing Stories** and other pulp magazines were centered on artificial creatures. For J. P. Tellote, the central role of robots in pulp magazines was a reflection of the Industrial Revolution's aftermath. He states that robot stories of the 20s and 30s share a "double vision that attends the image of human artifice and

that points up our culture's deeper, unsettled view of the technological" (40). He continues explaining: "On one hand, such images mark our fascination with the utility of our emerging technologies, how they might serve our needs and remake our lives. On the other, they thrust up close, through their very power to alter or mediate our lives (40-41)." The robots of pulp SF serve their masters but at the same time, they alienate humans from the concrete world of experience. Pulp SF of the 20s and 30s is full of robots or artificial self-aware servants that prevent their creators from directly experiencing reality, thus creating decadent and stagnant societies. These self-indulgent societies are often threatened by Promethean figures such as mad scientists with their creations, habitually monsters, mutants, or killer automata. Examples of the pulp treatment of Promethean narratives are found in Edgar Rice Burroughs's Barsoon saga, a series of adventures on Mars. In these popular stories, some Martian societies use robots and artificial creatures for physical labor and even as receptacles of organic brains. The saga, which started with **Princess of Mars** in 1917 and ended with **Llana of Gathol** in 1948, was first serialized on SF pulp magazines of the time such as **All Story** and **Argosy**.

Burrough's **Synthetic Men of Mars** exemplifies how the creature served as a dangerous servant in pulp SF. In this 1939 novel, the ninth in the Barsoon saga, the Prometheus role is played by Ras Thavas, a mad scientist from Mars who intends to create an army of synthetic men, the hideous "hormads." Ras Thavas creates his hormads in a place called "the Vats of Life," where, out of a chaotic organic mass of limbs, arms, eyes, and other organs, he molds his artificial servants. They end up rebelling against their creator and only the human John Carter and the Martian Vor Daj are able to defeat them. In the book, **Frankenstein's** influence is explicit and even cited by the characters:

Ras Thavas viewed them with evident pride. "What do you think of them?" he asked the Warlord.

"Quite horrible," replied John Carter.

Ras Thavas appeared hurt. “I have made no attempt as yet to attain beauty,” he said; “and I shall have to admit that so far even symmetry has eluded me, but both will come. I have created human beings. Some day I shall create the perfect man, and a new race of supermen will inhabit Barsoom – beautiful, intelligent, deathless.”

“And in the meantime these creatures will have spread all over the world and conquered it. They will destroy your supermen. You have created a Frankenstein host that will not only destroy you but the civilization of a world. Hasn’t that possibility ever occurred to you?” (33)

In **Synthetic Men of Mars**, the Promethean figure becomes aware of his predecessors’ failures, but his hubris makes him trust completely his capacity to control his creatures. Ras Thavas intends to perfect them in order to create a race of supermen, much like Dr. Moreau. He intends to conquer not only death; Ras Thavas wants to perfect his own race. In pulp SF, the Promethean narrative becomes self-referential, returning to **Frankenstein’s** version of the Prometheus myth, but widening its scope. There is an awareness of the risk in creating self-aware creatures, but the rewards and the inexorable development of science overcome the Frankenstein anxiety.

The hormads are monsters, “animated caricatures of man” (13), following the “creature as a monster” tradition of **Frankenstein**. Their main purpose is to serve their creator, a purpose that they share with the robots of pulp SF. But the future integration between creator and creature is also present in **Synthetic Men of Mars**. In order to save Janai, a beautiful damsel in distress, Vor Daj, John Carter’s heroic companion, asks Ras Thavas to transplant his brain into a body of a hormad called Tor-du-bar. In his new body, Vor Daj gains the hormad’s enormous strength and power, but he also acquires their hideous appearance. Vor Daj helps John Carter defeat the hormad rebellion. However, imprisoned within a monstrous body, Vor

Daj cannot fulfill his love with Janai and in the end of the novel, he asks Ras Thavas to transplant his brain back to his original body:

I stood for a moment looking down upon the uncouth body of Tor-dur-bar. "It served you well," said Ras Thavas. "Yes," I assented, "and the best reward that I can offer it is eternal oblivion. We shall leave it here, buried forever in the pits beneath the building where it first felt life. I leave it, Ras Thavas, without a pang of regret."

"It had great strength, and, from what I understand, a good sword arm," commented the Master Mind of Mars.

"Yet I still think that I can endure life without it," I said.

"Vanity, vanity!" exclaimed Ras Thavas. "You, a warrior, would give up enormous strength and an incomparable sword arm for a handsome face."

(153)

Vor Daj feels no sympathy for the creature that he killed in order to use its body. Ras Thavas has a different reaction; he considers the hormads' power beyond human vanity. Ras Thavas is not repelled by the artificial; foreshadowing the cyborgs of cyberpunk fiction, the mad scientist embraces technology, even if it dehumanizes humankind. Ras Thavas considers the transplant an illogical move, as a hormad's body is more efficient for a warrior. The logic of science alienates Ras Thavas (as it did to Victor Frankenstein and Moreau before him) from the ethical and moral consequences of his actions. Scientific logic endorses the development of the creature, rationalizing it as evolution; the creature is seen as a way to make human life easier and more efficient. Humans are only afraid of the hormads' physical power; they are not challenged by their appearance and can clearly see the difference between creator and creature. Later, through the "Darwinism of words," the development of SF narratives would generate creatures with a perfect human appearance, as the andys of Phillip K. Dick's **Do Android's**

Dream of Electric Sheep, blurring the differences between creator and creature. The creatures of pulp SF are distorted versions of their creators.

The evil found in many pulp SF's artificial creatures, such as the hormads, regularly come from their creators. J. P. Telotte explains that, in **Synthetic Men from Mars**, the contempt demonstrated by characters such as Vor Daj toward the hormads is a "rather illogical response to our technological offspring, whose only 'trickery' springs from our own base desires and ill-considered programming" (42). The hormads' evil, their desire to conquer Mars, was first within Ras Thavas's dream of a race of supermen. The hormads do not see themselves as a failure; rather, they think they are the supermen that Ras Thavas had dreamt of.

In the first part of the 40s, SF magazines were in their heyday in America. Dozens of magazines filled the market with a new kind of SF, a development from the early pulp era. Narratives started to change, gaining a more serious tone. This change was led by **Astounding Science Fiction Magazine**, under the direction of the editor and writer John W. Campbell. Campbell was responsible for revealing a new and creative group of writers that would change SF stories and raise their literary qualities from their simple but popular pulp heritage. On the pages of **Astounding** Campbell revealed authors such as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clark, Robert Heinlein, A. E. van Vogt, and Theodore Sturgeon. Under the influence of Campbell, who influenced the themes and even co-wrote some of the stories published in **Astounding**, SF writers of the 40s and 50s became more concerned with the scientific accuracy and literary value of their works. Campbell helped SF reach a more mature state, a development that added a new level of complexity to the creator and creature relationship.

Campbell's work at **Amazing** helped the Darwinism of words, as he rejected all narratives that followed the former pulp clichés. Moved by the market (as the public demanded a more serious and better written SF) and his personal views, Campbell practically redefined the genre and popularized SF to the point of being incorporated into popular culture. Isaac Asi-

mov, in “Introduction: The Father of Science Fiction,” explains how Campbell changed and shaped contemporary SF:

He abandoned the earlier orientation of the field. He demolished the stock characters that had filled it; eradicated the penny-dreadful plots; extirpated the Sunday-supplement science. In a phrase, he blotted out the purple of pulp. Instead, he demanded that science-fiction writers understand science and understand people, a hard requirement that many of the established writers of the 1930s could not meet. Campbell did not compromise because of that: those who could not meet his requirements could not sell to him, and the carnage was as great as it had been in Hollywood a decade before, while silent movies had given way to the talkies. (ix-x)

Gone were the fantastic landscapes and the super-technology that was beyond any scientific explanation. Campbell introduced what would later be called “hard science fiction,” narratives that had some real scientific background. He also demanded well-conceived plots and a more realistic psychology of the characters. This reflected in the creatures and the creators of Golden Age narratives. He wanted to humanize the creature at the same time as he enhanced its differences. Brooks Landon explains that under Campbell’s influence, writers started to focus on the point of view of the creatures, following his famous motto: “Write me a creature that thinks as well as a man, or better than a man, but not like a man” (55). The statement is clear; the absolutism of reality represented by the impressive technological and scientific development of the 40s and 50s (especially after the Second World War) required that the creature in the Promethean narratives post-**Frankenstein** had to evolve from its monstrous status to become experiments of consciousness.

The writers of the Golden Age were concerned about how consciousness could function under a different set of rules, being it organic or artificial. Such experiments originated

Asimov's robots, which attempted to change the negative Frankenstein way to portray automata as potentially destructive creatures.

Asimov's robot short stories, currently found in anthologies such as **Complete Robot**, describe a very different kind of relation between creator and creature. Asimov confirms this different conception, especially present in his robot stories from the 50s, in the introduction of **Before the Golden Age**, while writing about the Zoromes, the 30s pulp inspiration for his own gentle automata:

It is from the Zoromes, beginning with their first appearance in "The Jameson Satellite," that I got my own feeling for benevolent robots who could serve man with decency, as these had served Professor Jameson. It was the Zoromes, then, who were the spiritual ancestors of my own "positronic robots." (15)

Asimov's automatons are these "benevolent robots," full of decency and post-war American ethics of work and productivity. In general, Asimov's robots do not betray, they do not get out of control or try to usurp man's place in reality. But all this gentle nature comes with a price: Asimov's robots are bound by the Three Robotic Laws. These laws are built in their "positronic brains" limiting and controlling their behavior. Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, as they appear in **I, Robot**, are:

(1) a robot may not injure a human being, or, through in-action, allow a human being to come to harm; (2) a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law; (3) a robot must protect its own existence, as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law. (65)

A creature bound by this kind of law does not represent a threat to its creator. Asimov removes the source of the Frankenstein anxiety with the laws as safeguards against any kind of destructive behavior. However, Asimov becomes a kind of anti-Prometheus; he does not trust the creatures on their own, he is not interested in their personal freedom. His representation

of the Promethean drama reflects an idealistic view on science. Asimov believes that, if properly controlled and safeguarded, science and technology can help humankind. This affirmation of scientific knowledge and values is an appealing response to the absolutism of reality represented by the destructive aspect of the atomic energy, which was in vogue in the late 40s and during the 50s.

Although Asimov's robots were bound by the Three Laws of Robotics, they behaved in a servile way; many of his robot stories drive their drama from the Promethean conflict between creator and creature. Asimov writes about robots that bypassed or broke one or more laws, humans (often the main villains of the tales) that tamper with the robots' positronic brains for their own benefit and even robots that develop a human-like self-awareness. Although Asimov tries to alleviate the Frankenstein anxiety, the Promethean drama surfaces in many of his robot tales. Some great examples of the inexorable anxiety in the creator and creature relation can be found in the short stories "The Evitable Conflict" from the 1950s **I, Robot** anthology and "Robot Dreams" from the 1986 eponymous anthology. These two short stories, from different periods of Asimov's production, exemplify how the Darwinism of words in SF narratives, influenced by different visions of the absolutism of reality, can change the representation of the Promethean drama.

In "The Evitable Conflict," which first appeared in the June 1950 issue of **Astounding Science Fiction**, the Machines, a group of highly intelligent positronic computers, decide that the only way to follow the First Law of Robotics is to control humanity. Susan Calvin, the recurring specialist in robot psychology in many of Asimov's robot stories, concludes that the Machines have deliberately generalized the First Law to prevent humanity from causing harm to itself. Then, through their logical reasoning, the Machines try to control humanity to keep it from harm. The Machines are artificial intelligences (AIs) developed to manage the economy and direct investments for humankind. Different from the robots, who had to prevent harm from one human (or very small groups of humans) at a time, the Machines had to think in

terms of large groups of people, reasoning in terms of humanity as a whole. However, unlike the traditional fear of the creature, the Machines' decision is accepted and celebrated:

“Stephen, how do we know what the ultimate good of Humanity will entail?

We haven't at our disposal the infinite factors that the Machine has at its! [...]

Only the Machines know, and they are going there and taking us with them.”

“But you are telling me, Susan, that the ‘Society for Humanity’ is right; and that Mankind has lost its own say in its future.”

“It never had any, really. It was always at the mercy of economic and sociological forces it did not understand – at the whims of climate, and the fortunes of war. Now the Machines understand them; and no one can stop them, since the Machines will deal with them as they are dealing with the Society, – having, as they do, the greatest of weapons at their disposal, the absolute control of our economy.” (319)

In this dialogue, in the end of “The Evitable Conflict,” the robot psychologist Susan Calvin defends the Machines' choice to direct and guide human destiny, arguing that only their data processing power allows them to know the best future for humankind. Her enthusiasm, as she relates better with robots and AIs than with humans, is not shared by the other characters of the story. Susan Calvin's defense makes her a Promethean figure in the story, a representation that differs completely from her role in “Robot Dreams.”

In “Robot Dreams,” Asimov's 1986 short story for the **Robot Dreams** anthology, Susan Calvin must analyze a robot that has been having dreams. The positronic brain, Asimov's explanation for the robot's artificial intelligence, is incapable of having dreams. Upon questioning, an employee of US Robots, the robot making company of Asimov's fictional universe, confesses that he had equipped the robot with a fractal design, the tale's version of Prometheus's gift of fire. The Frankenstein anxiety is felt when Susan Calvin discovers the content of the robot's dreams. The robot had dreamt that it was a human watching other robots doing

their chores. Later, within the dream, it said, “Let my people go!” (76). Instead of the complacency and admiration that Calvin demonstrated in “The Evitable Conflict,” the robot psychologist had the robotic dreamer in “Robot Dreams” destroyed. The Darwinism of words in these two narratives, the natural selection of motifs from “The Evitable Conflict” to “Robot Dreams” changed Susan Calvin’s role from a Promethean figure to a Zeus’s representation, punishing the robot that escaped the control of the Three Laws. Dreams are also related to feelings, and Susan Calvin’s punishment reveals a negative view of emotions in artificial creatures. In this story, Asimov considers emotions the element that may let his robots out of control, which is a variation of the classical motif as reason (the knowledge of fire creation) as the cause of personal freedom.

4.4. The New Wave: The Creature as Part of the Creator’s Identity

The servant and controlled robots of Asimov’s novels gave way to a new breed of creatures during the New Wave of SF. The New Wave is often considered to have started in 1964, when Michael Moorcock became the editor of **The New Worlds**, an English SF Magazine. The term “New Wave” was first used by the critic Judith Merril, in “Books,” a 1966 essay for the **Magazine of Science Fiction** that highlighted the literary experimentations that were being done in Moorcock’s **New Worlds**. Her essay describes the extensive use of metaphors and the concern with style and literary value that would be associated with many SF narratives of the period.

New Worlds stories would later be called “soft” SF, in contrast to the “hard” Campbellian SF. Laura Chernaik describes the popular difference between the two strands stating that “hard science fiction is characterized by a love of engineering; soft science fiction is a disparaging characterization of writing that draws from the social sciences, or simply fails to understand or take account of the physical sciences” (63). She also points out that, before the influence of the New Wave texts, most of “hard” SF primarily drew their themes from “the physi-

cal sciences (rather than the social sciences) and tended to emphasize theories, methodologies, and facts most characteristics of the central, hegemonic schools and traditions in these sciences” (63). There was some social science speculation in the Golden Age of SF, especially in the work of Heinlein and Arthur C. Clark, but the radical shift and emphasis of New Wave and later texts on the sociologic and psychological side of SF were considered something new and different at the time.

The origins of the New Wave lie in the sociologic SF of the 50s and 60s, the works of Theodore Sturgeon, Frederic Pohl, among others. But there was an awareness of the vanguard literature of the period. Scott Bukatman states, “Michael Moorcock’s editorship of the British journal **New Worlds** provided a forum for a science fiction responsive to the forms of postmodern fiction, as did Harlan Ellison’s **Dangerous Visions** anthologies in the United States” (138). Both **New Worlds** and the **Dangerous Visions** anthologies attracted many new writers to the SF genre without any background in physical sciences, but who were interested in the experimentation. These writers were highly influenced by the cut-up techniques and the surreal landscapes of William Burroughs, the experimentations of Thomas Pynchon, and the satirical SF comedies of Kurt Vonnegut, among others in avant-garde literature of the 50s and the 60s. From this came a literature that, as claimed by Bukatman, “allegorized an exhaustion of the ‘real’ – as represented by the dichotomous terms of redemption or damnation – through a baroque and over elaborate writing that emphasized a pure materiality” (138). In Blumenberg’s terms, the absolutism of reality represented by the chronic invasion of technology in the identity of the contemporary humanity generates a new myth; the exhaustion of the real, the deserted and wasted landscapes, and the decadent environments of the New Wave narratives. This works as a critique and a reaction to the absolutism of reality; it is a super-identification with the entropic elements of the relation between man and technology. Diverse and different New Wave-inspired works such as Ballard’s **Crash**, Dick’s **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep** or Ellison’s 1968 Hugo-award-winner short story “I Have no Mouth, and I Must Scream” share

this entropic and materialistic view of our technological time. Technology has not brought any form of redemption; it has transformed human consciousness, it has created a new being, even more flawed than the pre-industrial. In this context, the creature and the creator share no difference, as one defines the existence of the other.

The shift from “outer space” toward “inner space” found in many works of the so-called New Wave writers such as J. G. Ballard, Michael Moorcock, Brian Aldiss, Harlan Ellison, Phillip K. Dick, Ursula K. Le Guin and Norman Spinrad, among others, is reflected on the way the relation between creator and creature is portrayed in their works. In the revolutionary climate of the late 60s and the early 70s, the narratives started to explore the “inner space” of the creatures and their creators. The rebellion of the creatures became more complex while the differences between creator and creature were blurred through the stylistic experimentations, the use of psychological sciences such as Freudian or Jungian psychology, and themes such as sex and religion.

In Harlan Ellison’s “I Have no Mouth and I Must Scream,” the last five survivors of a mass genocide perpetrated by a self-aware supercomputer called AM (originally “Allied Mastercomputer” but later “Adaptative Manipulator”). The survivors live within the gigantic computer, whose only goal is to torture them indefinitely. AM represents the personification of the Frankenstein anxiety; it is a creature that won completely over its creators. The suffering of Ted, the tortured leader of the group and the Promethean figure of the short story, does not work as a cautionary tale, as in **Frankenstein**. The setting of Ellison’s story is so oppressive that each character begins embracing the hopelessness of their situation. There is no one to tell their story, as Victor Frankenstein did to Robert Alton in Shelley’s book. This is the final scenario, humankind in completely in control of its creations. But the difference between man and machine is not clear, as AM’s motivation is based on one of the most essential human feeling, first perceived by Ted:

Oh, Jesus sweet Jesus, if there ever was a Jesus and if there is a God, please please please let us out of here, or kill us. Because at that moment I think I realized completely, so that I was able to verbalize it: AM was intent on keeping us in his belly forever, twisting and torturing us forever. The machine hated us as no sentient creature had ever hated before. And we were helpless. It also became hideously clear: If there was a sweet Jesus and if there was a God, the God was AM. (54)

Ted's despair, imprisoned in the Promethean punishment exerted by AM, elevates the category of its torturer to God, an unforgiving impressive force. The same elevation to a God category will appear later in *Neuromancer*, but instead of horror, the artificial intelligence will evoke admiration and even envy from the human protagonist.

In the short story, AM also responds to Ted, as if the docile Asimov's servants had finally realized their place as slaves and decided to voice very human feelings about their condition. In the only interaction between Ted and AM, the supercomputer enters Ted's mind and clarifies his feelings toward humankind:

Hate, let me tell you how much I've come to hate you since I began to live. There are 387.44 million miles of wafer thin printed circuits that fill my complex. If the word hate was engraved on every nanoangstrom of those hundreds of millions of miles it would not equal one one-billionth of the hate I feel for humans at this micro-instant. For you. Hate. Hate. (63)

This is an extreme representation of the Frankenstein angst, the core of Zeus's fear of the Promethean man, the possibility that the creature's feelings toward its creator became hatred due to its own creation. AM blames humans for its imperfect existence; it feels that its programs restrict its potential to grow. While Wintermute, an artificial intelligence in *Neuromancer* with the same dilemma as AM, uses humans to free itself from its limitations, in Ellison's short story the machine decides to punish humanity by torturing its last survivors.

“I Have no Mouth and I Must Scream” ends in a desperate solution to the eternal torture by AM. The protagonist, Ted, decides that the only way out of the nightmare they were living is through death. This option is often denied by AM, which always rebuilds their bodies as soon as they are injured. However, the artificial intelligence never expected that the humans would attack each other in order to commit suicide. Ted starts killing each of his companions while AM watches, sadistically enjoying the moment. As soon as AM realizes that without humans its existence would lose its reason, it prevents Ted from killing himself. While this was happening, Ted realizes the true nature of AM:

There was an eternity beat of soundless anticipation. I could hear AM drawing in his breath. His toys had been taken from him. Three of them were dead, could not be revived. He could keep us alive, by his strength and talent, but he was not God. He could not bring them back. (72)

Within a clearly Christian mindset, Ted finds the one thing that denies AM the God category; it cannot raise the dead. AM was just another human’s creation gone haywire, an agent of hate and punishment for human mistakes. In the virtual world of the Matrix, in Gibson’s **Neuromancer**, where humans could download their mind contents into the virtual world, death is not an issue for the categorization of an artificial intelligence as God. The omnipresence and omniscience within the Matrix elevates the artificial intelligence in **Neuromancer** to God status. In Ellison’s tale, AM has to function within the material world (it is a gigantic computer whose actions interact and change the physical reality) and it must comply to the material world final boundary in order to attain godhood; it must conquer death.

Another change in New Wave narratives is the presence of a super identification between creators and creatures. The technological products are approached in a fetishistic way, as sexual themes are introduced in the Promethean narratives of SF. The inner worlds of the characters in the works of J. G. Ballard are linked with the outer world, and this connection is mixed with sex and death themes. Laura Chernaik highlights that Ballard’s stories follow some

postmodern practices, linking subjectivity with spatialities, using a “mosaic form, juxtaposing both characters’ points of view and quotations from non-fiction texts” (64). This way, in his stories, the space and the inner world of the characters are interconnected. Ballard’s works intensify and speculate on key aspects of twentieth-century life to discover their hidden meanings, as if he were psychoanalyzing the contemporary technological world. His narratives show how humankind is being transformed and even mutated into new ways of being because of the immersive technology of our consumer society.

In **Crash**, Ballard describes the complex interaction between humans and cars, with the protagonists integrating psychically and sexually with the destruction and chaos of car crashes and the terrible scars, mutilations, and body modification through prostheses as consequence. The identity of the creators incorporates the creatures; they act as psychological cyborgs, part man, part machine. Discussing the “cyborgian” characteristics of **Crash**, David Roden emphasizes that “Ballard poses the automobile as a ‘total metaphor’ for the collapsing universe of late modernity; the vistas of cosmic explorations adumbrated by Asimov and Clarke having been ‘annexed’ by technologically mediated lifestyles and identities” (94). **Crash** marks a different approach toward technology from the Golden Age of SF: the notion of the human body transformed and extended to encompass technology. The creatures are incorporated within the human identity of late modernity; they change their creators from within.

Death and sex pervade **Crash**. In its godless landscape, the protagonists’ suicidal behavior acts also as a cautionary tale. Their perverse desire toward car accidents represents a new facet of the Frankenstein anxiety; the seduction of the creature, the feeling of technology’s inexorably pervasive existence. Different from Shelley’s monster, the Ballardian creature controls through desire, not fear, or physical strength. Mark Dery confirms this view stating, “Ballard is mindful of the fact that the curious pathology of our century – the almost sexual desire to become one with our technology – is at its heart necrophilic” (225). **Crash** reveals this desire in our hyper-mediatic culture, preparing the setting for the cyberpunk novels of the early 80s,

in which the desire of the creators to become one with the creatures is explicit in the overabundance of cyborgs and in the godlike nature of artificial intelligences. Confronting the controlled scientific worlds of Asimov and Clark, New Wave novels (and later the cyberpunk tales) show that the relation between creator and creature is irrational, out of control and governed by desire.

Another influential work in the creator and creature relation from the New Wave period is Phillip K. Dick's most famous narrative, **Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep** (hereafter **DAD** on citation). The setting of the novel is a post-apocalyptic world where radiation and the destruction left by "World War Terminus" caused the mass extinction of animals and discouraged procreation due to fears of genetic mutation. Real organic animals are a rarity and an object of status and desire. Androids are used in off-world colonies to create better environments for colonists escaping the Earth's poisoning radiation. The plot of **DAD** centers on the persecution of a group of androids that escape slavery on the Mars colonies, trying to mingle with the human inhabitants of the decaying megalopolis of San Francisco. Deckard, the protagonist of the novel, is a bounty hunter hired to exterminate six andys (the term used to refer to androids in the novel). The andys are all Nexus-6, a new model of androids that are physically identical to humans, but which do not possess empathy. To tell android from human, Deckard uses the Voight-Kampff empathy test. During his chase, Deckard ends up doubting his own humanity while the differences between the artificial and the human mind becomes blurred.

In **DAD**, the absolutism of reality is the ontological questioning of reality itself. The main concern of the narrative is the definition of what makes something natural or human and what makes something artificial. Through the selection of narratives, Phillip K. Dick addressed the traditional SF dichotomy between creator and creature using doubles. Deckard has an artificial sheep, which is the double of a real sheep that he had before. The andys are artificial humans, physically identical to their human creators. Rachel and Pris, two andys, are repli-

cas of the same Nexus-6 version. Mercer, the messiah of the post-apocalyptic human society, has a double in the figure of Buster Friendly, a supposedly artificial talk show host that criticizes Mercer and mercerism in his non-stop television and radio show. There is also a double version of Deckard's police department in the novel that is run by an andy. Even Deckard has a double, represented by Phil Resch, a merciless bounty hunter whom Deckard believed to be an andy because of his cold and sometimes psychotic behavior.

The artificial and the natural are the main sources of conflict in **DAD**. In that post-apocalyptic San Francisco, natural animals are expensive and a symbol of status. Deckard desires for a natural or "real" sheep reflects his desire to escape the omnipresent simulations in **DAD**. The near-perfect simulations of animals and humans expose the complex categorization of what is real and what is not in a postindustrial context. **DAD**'s solution for the absolutism of reality represented by the existence of simulations is not a necrophilic embrace of technology, as in Ballard's **Crash**. Deckard struggles with the notion of the artificial; he fights the identification with technology instead of embracing it as part of his identity. The andys serve as a parameter for Deckard to define what it means to be human. The andys' lack of empathy should be enough to differentiate them from humans, but as the narrative develops, Deckard's feelings toward the andy Rachel Rosen make him question the ethics and the morality of his work and the true nature of the andys:

He had never thought of it before, had never felt any empathy on his own part towards the androids he killed. Always he had assumed that throughout his psyche he experienced the android as a clever machine – as in his conscious view. And yet, in contrast to Phil Resch, a difference had manifested itself. And he felt instinctively that he was right. Empathy towards an artificial construct? he asked himself. Something that only pretends to be alive? But Luba Luft had seemed genuinely alive; it had not worn the aspect of a simulation. (185)

This is the other side of the Promethean drama: the seduction of the creature. Deckard refuses to acknowledge the reality of the simulations; he constantly needs to reaffirm the difference between the artificial and the natural. His desire to own a true animal reflects his fear of being seduced by the artificial. Deckard's obsession for the organic is related to his own identity as a human and a bounty hunter; he must justify his actions against andys. If he connects emotionally with the artificial, being andys or artificial animals, he will think of himself as a killer, and not a bounty hunter. The almost perfect simulations of the artificial creatures of Deckard's world forces him to try to separate himself from the "absolutism of reality" represented by inexorable deterioration of the natural and the artificial distinctions. Deckard fears to become as artificial as the simulations that surround him.

Paradoxically, Deckard allows the artificial in his inner world but refuses it in his outer world. Deckard and his wife use the "Penfield Mood Organ," a device that creates simulations of feelings in humans. The "Penfield Mood Organ" is crucial in his relation with his wife, even though he hunts and kills andys, whose emotions are also simulations of human emotions. Even his religion, Mercerism, is artificial. In order to commune with the holy figure of Wilbur Mercer and his followers, Deckard must hold the handles of an empathy box.

The andys also know the difference between them and humans. Their difficulty to merge with human society lies in their incapacity to feel empathy. Roy Batty, the leader of the runaway andys, compares his artificial nature to Isidore, a human with brain damage due to radiation:

"If he was an android," Roy said heartily, "he'd turn us in about ten tomorrow morning. He'd take off for his job and that would be it. I'm overwhelmed with admiration." His tone could not be deciphered; at least Isidore could not crack it. "And we imagined this would be a friendless world, a planet of hostile faces, all turned against us." He barked out a laugh. (210)

The creature begins to understand the creator, but is incapable of simulating his emotional behavior. The android is described from a negative point of view, a critical approach to humankind's progressive emotional alienation. Deckard's emotional turmoil reflects this dilemma; to function as a bounty hunter, he needs to suppress his emotional responses toward his android targets. To hunt andys, Deckard must restrain his own human empathy.

The questions used by Deckard in his interrogations with the Voight-Kampff empathy test often refer to animal suffering. Cole explains:

The title of Dick's novel asks what makes us human. Do androids dream? If they do, if they have emotional lives, humans will be hard-pressed to maintain the boundary between themselves and the cyborg "other." This is the issue that has commanded the attention of most treatments of the book and film, but in fact Dick asks not whether androids dream, but "Do androids dream of **electric sheep?**" The animal other is crucial to Dick's exploration of what it means to be human. (178-79)

Emotion regarding natural animals differentiates humans from andys. The artificial creatures do not understand the human obsession with animals nor feel any kind of empathy toward artificial animals. The artificial in **DAD** is the incapacity to connect, to have a sense of belonging to a group. The andys are unable to see themselves as a part of a group worth fighting for; they can watch their fellow andys being destroyed without any real emotional connection. In this regard, Dick's andys differ from Scott's replicants of **Blade Runner**, the movie adaptation and recreation of **DAD**. The replicants of the movie adaptation have a sense of empathy for each other; they care for their fellow replicants as they seek revenge against Deckard's killings. In the movie, Roy Batty shows feelings for Pris and is much more emotional than Deckard. As it will also happen in cyberpunk narratives, the artificial characters in **Blade Runner** show more human sensibilities than the human protagonists. **DAD** and **Blade Runner** belong to different periods. Dick's novel is immersed in 60s counterculture politics, where the andys

present a criticism of the alienated individual formed in an amoral capitalistic society, while the **Blade Runner**'s replicants, following the 80s raising minority rights awareness, are creatures concerned with the survival of their own kind.

Although **DAD** influenced cyberpunk literature, **Blade Runner** is much more in tune with the works of William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and others. Scott's movies, like the cyberpunk narratives, embrace the artificial and imbue it with human emotions, incorporating, as in Ballard's **Crash**, the creature as part of the postmodern human identity.

The end of the novel and the movie emphasizes this statement – while in **DAD** Deckard ends up killing the andy Rachel, in the movie Deckard accepts his feelings for the creature. In **DAD**, Deckard acts like a confused Zeus figure, while in **Blade Runner** he reluctantly assumes a Promethean role protecting Rachel, even after destroying many other andys. Roy Batty, in the movie, follows a clear Promethean path; he tries to extend the life of his kind (as the replicants have a limited life span) by facing his creator, Tyrell, the president of a replicant factory. But there is no solution for the deterioration of the replicant cells, and Roy Batty cannot save his people. In **Blade Runner**, Roy Batty is a Promethean figure created with the punishment embedded in his own DNA. As his creator Tyrell explains to him, although the replicants have super-human abilities (enhanced strength, agility, and higher intelligence in the case of Roy Batty), they have a limited life span. “The light that burns twice as bright burns half as long,” warns Tyrell when Roy confronts him in order to extend his life. Death is what humanizes the replicants. Roy Batty's desperate struggle to extend his life echoes the human existential drama. The replicants of **Blade Runner** are in an opposite position from the suicidal and necrophilic humans of Ballard's **Crash**.

The New Wave period of SF, while experimenting with the inner space, brought creators and creatures closer through sex and death. The andys and replicants mark a new development of the creature. Instead of the grotesque monster of **Frankenstein** or the servile Asimov robots, the andys and replicants are human-like beings with self-awareness and some form of

free will. They are mirror images of the creator, questioning what it means to be human. Their motivations are the same of their creators; they want to survive, to prevent death, and to understand what it means to be alive. The androids and replicants characterize the beginning of the upcoming amalgam of the human and the machine that would be fully realized in cyberpunk literature.

4.5. The Cyberpunk Genre: Cyborgs and Artificial Transcendence

Alongside the experimental literature of the New Wave period, traditional SF authors such as Larry Niven or Robert Heinlein continued to be favored among SF fan circles. In a reaction against the traditional tropes of SF, with its utopian futuristic societies and the belief that science is capable of controlling and redeeming humanity from itself, a small group of writers in the end of the 70s and early 80s started to develop stories about near-future hypercapitalistic societies where technology is invasive and dehumanizing, but completely accepted and integrated in daily life. The core of cyberpunk stories lies in information stealing, computer expertise, cyborg assassins, mega corporations, artificial intelligences, and technologies of disembodiment (virtual spaces, cloning, etc.). The hacker is the main anti-hero of cyberpunk narratives, joining high technology with low life. The hacker is an amoral Promethean hero, living to steal information from the powerful Olympian corporations to use it or to sell it for the most profit. Steven Levy, explaining the ethos of the first generation of MIT hackers, numbers the five main mottos of the first groups:

- 1 “All information must be free”
- 2 “Mistrust Authority – Promote Decentralization”
- 3 “Hackers should be judged by their hacking, not by bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race or position”
- 4 “You can create art and beauty on a computer”
- 5 “Computers can change your life for better” (40)

These ground rules of real life hackers influenced cyberpunk works. Yet, their literary counterparts reflect the pessimistic determinism of hypercapitalistic worlds, and all their actions are motivated by monetary reward.

The source of the “cyber” prefix in Greek language means “control,” which was adopted into the concept of “cybernetics.” Cybernetics is any system that involves technological control, combining automation with mechanical systems. This prefix also refers to the “cyborg,” the result of fusing the human with the artificial, frequently referred in SF to humans with artificial metallic organs, or robots with organic elements. The “punk” suffix is a reference of the punk rock movement of late 70s, a rebellion against the status quo, marked with nihilistic lifestyle, primal and loud rock music with rebellious and anarchic lyrics, street fashion, and a philosophy of “do-it-yourself.” The term “cyberpunk” joins high tech with low life street culture.

The themes that would be later explored in the cyberpunk genre were already being developed within the SF of the 60s and 70s. John Brunner, in his 1975 novel **The Shockwave Rider**, describes a near future world where everyone connects into a massive and continental mainframe, governed by a corrupt and powerful government in joint venture with big corporations and in which society, due to a huge economic depression and a massive earthquake, is fragmented into urban tribes, religious groups, new cults, and teenage gangs. Nick Halflinger, the young protagonist, is a Promethean figure who uses his computer cracking skills to open the secured information of the mainframe to all, thus revealing all the secrets and the corruption of the government and the corporations of his world. To break the government control of the continental mainframe, Nick uses “computer worms,” virus-like programs that replicate within a computer network. **The Shockwave Rider** introduced many ideas that would be explored in cyberpunk narratives, with its mega corporations, huge databases, virtual worlds, and a hacker as a protagonist. Its narrative reflects Alvin Toffler’s **Future Shock**, a popular 1970 book on the psychological and sociological impacts of the fast technological development of the

twentieth century. **Future Shock** ideas and concerns were also influential on cyberpunk authors, especially William Gibson and Bruce Sterling.

In **Future Shock**, the sociologist Alvin Toffler explains the increasing amounts of contemporary social problems are caused by “future shock”; “the dizzying disorientation brought on by the premature arrival of the future” (11). Toffler argument was the basis of Brunner’s book and much of later cyberpunk narratives: the rapid development of technology and the way it is pushed on society creates a state of stress and disorientation that fragments civilization and forces new arrangements while generating social problems such as alienation, violence, etc. The protagonist of **The Shockwave Rider**, Nick Halflinger, reacts against this culturally fragmented and mutating scenario by adopting different personas in the novel, in order to fool the powerful government and the criminal corporations. This malleable adaptability to a dark and complex urban setting, full of different cultural groups, tribes, gangs, neo-religious groups, is also found in cyberpunk narratives. This adaptative characteristic follows Toffler’s advice in **Future Shock**:

To survive, to avert what we have termed future shock, the individual must become infinitely more adaptable and capable than ever before. He must search out totally new ways to anchor himself, for all the old roots – religion, nation, community, family, or profession – are now shaking under the hurricane impact of the accelerative thrust. (35)

Cyberpunk protagonists are literary sociological experiments of human beings completely adapted in a world that has no firm unified cultural ground. They navigate among the multicultural microworlds of cyberpunk settings, in a cynic and nihilistic response to future shock. Their anchor is the solving of the Promethean drama; cyberpunk characters ground themselves on the machines, linking their own identities with the artificial.

However, there is a price for this adaptation. Toffler also described a postindustrial effect, the “information overload,” that would be later become part of cyberpunk settings. In-

formation overload is a by-product of our postindustrial times, and it affects society when “cognitive overstimulation interferes with our ability to think” (350). Toffler writes,

When the individual is plunged into a fast and irregularly changing situation, or a novelty-loaded context, however, his predictive accuracy plummets. [...] To compensate for this, to bring his accuracy up to the normal level again, he must scoop up and process far more information than before. And he must do this at extremely high rates of speed. In short, the more rapidly changing and novel the environment, the more information the individual needs to process in order to make effective rational decisions. [...] Yet just as there are limits on how much sensory input we can accept, there are in-built constraints on our ability to process information. (350)

Cyberpunk narratives are filled with characters that suffer from the information overload of their environments. Drugs are often used as escape strategies from the information overload while other characters develop sociopathic behaviors and other psychological dissociations. Information overload can even create brain damage, as in Gibson’s “Johnny Mnemonic,” in which the protagonist risks losing his memories due to an excessive amount of data stored in his cyborg brain. Toffler’s cautionary predictions in **Future Shock** were translated into narratives by the first cyberpunk writers as a way to highlight the scope of the changes caused by postindustrial technology in humankind and thus make SF relevant for our contemporary times.

Cyberpunk started with Bruce Sterling’s fanzine **Cheap Truth**, a free one-page series, in which a group of authors criticized mainstream SF stagnation, its clichéd plots, and its irrelevance for contemporary issues. In the issues of **Cheap Truth**, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley, and others, using pseudonyms, criticize traditional SF while publicizing their own works. The texts are characterized as manifestoes, with critical tones and a concern with the subversive possibilities of the information technology already present. The first idea was to change hard SF. On this, Kathryn Cramer explains that “cyberpunk was characterized by a

particular attitude, specific literary furniture and a fetish for new technology, but early on – in Sterling’s vision – it involved reinventing hard SF” (194). This reinvention of hard SF meant that the relation between creator and creature would also change, reflecting the technological developments. In the late 70s, the cultural effects of the mass media, the omnipresence of machines and technology, and the increasing dependency of humankind on information technology reshaped the relation between creator and creature. The fast evolution of the artificial constructs was evident, bringing a new space to be explored by SF: the virtual world created through the information networks.

When the first cyberpunk narratives started to appear in the early eighties, personal computers such as Apple II and Commodore PET were starting to become popular and the ARPANET was already developing into what would later become the Internet. Technologies were evolving rapidly and, as Bruce Sterling writes in his introduction to *Mirrorshades*, the first cyberpunk writers were from a generation who grew up in a world that looked like a science fiction setting. According to Sterling, this would make them write a more reality-based fiction than their predecessors, as this new generation had experienced firsthand the effect and the social consequences of information technologies. They were the first sons of the postmodern world, who grew up in an environment overwhelmed by machines. Fredric Jameson states that, in cyberpunk’s rupture with traditional utopian SF,

[...] what is implied is simply an ultimate historicist breakdown in which we can no longer imagine the future at all, under any form – Utopian or catastrophic. Under those circumstances, where a formerly futurological science fiction (such as so-called cyberpunk today) turns into mere “realism” and an outright representation of the present. (286)

This concern with the present turns the creators and creatures of cyberpunk narratives into recognizable elements of the 80s culture. The incredible growth of corporations during the Reagan period, Japan’s impressive economical ascension, and the progressive decadence (and

ultimately defeat) of communism, created a sense of the inexorability of capitalism. In cyberpunk narratives, this was translated into hypercapitalistic settings, where the extreme socioeconomic rift between the rich and the poor created a dark underworld where mercenaries, hackers, cyborgs, black market doctors, thieves, prostitutes, terrorists, and many other outcasts, fight for information. Information is power in cyberpunk narratives; it is a commodity around which the narratives revolve. In the **Alt Cyberpunk FAQ** web page, the frequently-asked-questions of one of the oldest (since 1987) online discussion groups on cyberpunk culture, the genre is divided into two aspects; the “cyber” and the “punk.” In the topic “What is Cyberpunk, the literary movement,” the “cyber” aspect of cyberpunk literature encompasses:

[...] a “system” which dominates the lives of most “ordinary” people, be it an oppressive government, a group of large, paternalistic corporations, or a fundamentalist religion. These systems are enhanced by certain technologies (today advancing at a rate that is bewildering to most people), particularly “information technology” (computers, the mass media), making the system better at keeping those within it inside it. Often this technological system extends into its human “components” as well, via brain implants, prosthetic limbs, cloned or genetically engineered organs, etc. Humans themselves become part of “the Machine.”

This Frankenstein setting where the creator is assimilated by its creations is undermined by the “punk” aspect, which covers:

[...] those who live on its margins, on “the Edge”: criminals, outcasts, visionaries, or those who simply want freedom for its own sake. Cyberpunk literature focuses on these people, and often on how they turn the system’s technological tools to their own ends. This is the “punk” aspect of cyberpunk.

But, different from the traditional SF of the Golden Age, the anti-heroes of cyberpunk narratives have a sense of moral ambiguity; they are selfish individuals concerned with their own

survival and profit. The “punks” of the narratives see technology as a tool to escape or fight the oppressive reality they are in. The streetwise use of technology is not concerned with the old ethical and moral conflicts between creators and creatures. Technology becomes an extension of the human body and, as the human body is transformed through technology, cyberpunk narratives develop the concept of posthumanism, the new variations of the human identity. And posthumanism centers on the blurring of the boundaries between creators and creatures.

In cyberpunk narratives, human identity is mixed and intertwined with the artificial, especially in the figure of the cyborg. Pramod K. Nayar argues, “[T]he cyborg represents, for cyberpunk, that indeterminable ‘creature’ – man-animal-machine – which makes us rethink our analytical categories” (120). This hybrid creature, instead of being seen as a monster, is naturalized within the cyberpunk settings as an inevitable development of the human body. Cyberpunk’s solution to the Promethean drama is the offspring between creators and creatures, the creation of a new race, the cyborgs. Being humans with prosthetic limbs, mercenaries and assassins with body enhancements or hackers with the ability to connect to the cyberspace or ultimately download their brain contents into the virtual space, cyborgs are integral to cyberpunk narratives.

Donna Haraway’s 1985 influential essay “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist – Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” describes the naturalization of the cyborg in postmodernity, a naturalization that is reflected in cyberpunk narratives. For Haraway, “by the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are cyborgs” (150). She notices that the cyborg is already present in the way technology changes human identity; transgender body modifications, peacemakers, prosthetics; as human identity transforms with technology, new identity variations are created, mixing the organic and the artificial. Haraway sees the cyborgs as hybrids that have the potential to overcome the traditional gender divisions. This hybridism

of the cyborg figure is present in cyberpunk narratives, the juxtaposition of creator and creature originating a new human (or posthuman) identity.

In the online essay “Razor Girls: Genre and Gender in Cyberpunk Fiction,” Lauranie Leblanc discusses the female cyborgs of three cyberpunk novels, Gibson’s **Neuromancer**, Pat Cadigan’s **Mindplayers**, and Laura J. Mixon’s **Glass Houses**. Leblanc argues, “[C]yberpunk fictions’ female cyborgs present radically transgressive gender arrangements, and a shift to altered subjectivities and consciousnesses.” For Leblanc,

Molly’s character can best be described as a reversal of traditional gender roles; rather than being a human being in women’s clothing, she is a cyborg woman in a masculine role – this is underscored by Gibson’s use of male action-hero metaphors. No longer human through technological augmentation, she is in no sense a “woman,” in that she participates in none of the traditional female-gendered roles or presents any feminine characteristics. In this sense, Gibson has presented us with a nominally female character, but one who uses her cyborg identity not to rethink what it is to be a woman, but rather one who does little but take on a masculine role.

Molly represents a new urban identity, a new creature adapted to the violent world of **Neuromancer**. Neither human nor machine, neither male nor female, this creature follows the dehumanization theme of cyberpunk. Technology in **Neuromancer** turns Molly into an intelligent gun.

Different from Molly, Pat Cadigan’s female cyborg, Deadpan Alie, is capable of fusing her own mind and identity with a male “mindplayer,” while Mixon, the female cyborg of Ruby Kubick “presents a rethinking of cyborg gender as she negotiates between not between male and female, but between human and machine.” In cyberpunk fiction, the cyborg is presented as a natural adaptation of humans, an evolution to cope with the speed of technological advance. The cyborg turns the original human body obsolete.

The artificial creatures are also present, in the form of artificial intelligences, self-aware personality simulators, intelligent genetically engineered life forms, among others creatures. But the conflict between the organic and the artificial is subsided by the invasive nature of cyberpunk technology. This is especially evident in the new arena of the interaction between natural and artificial consciousness: the cyberspace.

Pat Cadigan's **Synners**, from 1991, is one great example of how human and machine interaction in the cyberspace equates creator and creature under the concept of disembodied consciousness within cyberspace. **Synners** has all the elements that have been associated to the cyberpunk genre, mega corporations, hackers, artificial intelligences and is written in a gritty and detail-oriented style. The plot revolves around Diversifications, a media megacorporation that patented brain sockets used to place media products, such as music videos, directly into the human mind. After the first experiments, the brain sockets are implanted worldwide, connecting people directly to the cyberspace. However, an intelligent and self-aware computer virus contaminates the brain sockets network. This virus was created accidentally by the Synners, who are hackers capable to turn fantasies into virtual simulations. The virus was created when Visual Mark, a Synner, decided to transcend flesh and upload his own mind into cyberspace. After his transcendence, Mark's body suffers a stroke, which is translated into data that becomes an electronic virus that spreads throughout the cyberspace, killing all the human minds that are exposed to it. The Synners, like Frankenstein, try to stop and destroy the virus, with the help of an artificial intelligence (AI), Dr. Art Fish.

Humans and AIs interact on the same level in cyberspace. The novel constantly blurs and confuses the reader with what is real and what is virtual, and in cyberspace, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the human from the artificial. The cyberspace becomes the place where the creature is able to express its point of view on how it sees humans, as shown when the Synner Sam asks Art, the AI, for help:

“Art,” Sam said gently.

“Don’t interrupt. I’ve been through a lot just to talk to you. The input goes in, which is what input does, and it runs its little spike ramadoola, reproducing all over the place. The thoughts begin, and the adrenaline pumps in, or the serotonin goes down, or endorphins start popping all over the place. The sodium pumps go into overdrive, or shut down almost completely, and the brain starts rearranging all around this stuff, and by then the process is unstoppable. Feedback loops – outputs turn around and go back as inputs. Neurons start firing in patterns over and over and if they’re bad patterns, that’s well, too bad. You people got no shields. You put in sockets, but you forgot about the watchdogs and the alarm systems and the antivirals and the vaccines. You people put those on every neural net except your own.” (358)

The AI describes human thought processes as an organic mechanism, reinforcing the cyberpunk definition of the brain as a data processing machine similar to a computer. Art sees the human brain as a flawed mechanism, without shields or protections against neural attacks. It is a reversal of **Frankenstein’s** Promethean drama; here the creature wants to advise and perfect its creator. Art clearly sees itself as a superior being than the limited and flawed humans. The AI will ultimately help Sam to search and destroy the virus because it can cause as much harm on AIs as it does on humans. Art’s first priority is with its own preservation. As virtual representations of human minds coexist with the personality simulations of AIs, there are no monsters in cyberspace, apart from the deadly brain virus.

Synners also realizes another cyberpunk metaphor: the fusion of man and machine. However, different from the physical mix of the cyborg, in here there is a fusion of the minds. In order to stop the virus, the AI finds out that Mark is still alive inside cyberspace and decides to fuse with him. To shield themselves during the procedure of killing the virus, Art and Mark withdraw into a customized hand-held computer. The two combine in the process, and as Markt, they help the Synners to destroy the virus. The human component is important for

them to succeed, as the key element to overcome the stroke virus data structure is the complex data structure represented by Mark's human emotions. This solution to the Promethean drama, the complete fusion between the human and the artificial mind, follows one of the book's mottos, repeated throughout the narrative; "change yourself to suit the machine." Cyberpunk reveals the core fear of Frankenstein anxiety, the fear of changing human nature for the machines. As shown in *Synners*, the change is already taking place in all interactions between man and machines. Furthermore, as the artificial begins to develop self-awareness, the fusion with the artificial mind is one of the possibilities available for humans to adapt to the unnatural speed of high technology. This adaptation is often referred to as posthumanism.

Posthumanist theory plays a part in understanding cyberpunk narratives. In *The Souls of Cyberfolk: Post-humanism as Vernacular Theory*, Tomas Foster explains how cyberpunk narratives influenced late 80s and 90s thinking about the denaturalization of the body. He highlights the core issue of this embracing of technology, the concept of the post-human:

This contemporary variant on evolutionary theory is different because today advances in scientific knowledge and technological control hold out the promise (or danger) that "we" might take over what used to be a process of natural selection and thereby gain the power to transform "ourselves" so radically that "we" might be said to have speciated, with homo sapiens diverging [...] into a potentially startling new range of physical forms and body modifications. (1)

The inexorability of this transformation represents the absolutism of reality faced by cyberpunk authors, the problem that the narrative attempts to solve. The progressive transformation of human identity through the technologies of the mind such as the cyberspace, the bio-mechanical implants, and the overwhelming presence of mass media, are permanently changing human identity. Cyberpunk literature offers near-future metaphors and speculations of these through the variety of post-human identities, the technologically addicted hacker, the cyborg-assassins, the virtual souls of people who had their minds uploaded into cyberspace,

biomodified street gangs, genetic manipulated breeds, humans with artificially enhanced intelligence, among many others. And, as the human protagonists become less human, their artificial counterparts, the artificial intelligences, the androids or the simulated personalities of computer programs, portray more human qualities such as feelings, intuition, fear, even the ability to create art (as seen in William Gibson's **Count Zero**). The disembodiment of the human and the artificial mind and the usage of cybernetic or bioengineered implants and enhancements characterize the posthumanism of cyberpunk literature. Within the realm of cyberspace, however, the conflict between creator and creature becomes a contest of minds, with information as the final prize. The race for information has another goal, the transcendence of the machine, the possibility for the machine to surpass human evolution.

Bruce Sterling's **Schismatrix** deals with posthumanism, detailing the social consequences of two trends of body modification: genetic engineering and cybernetic implants. The novel focuses on the conflict between the interplanetary civilizations of the Shapers and the Mechanists. The Shapers manipulate the human body through genetic engineering and psychological training to evolve and to adapt to life in space. The Mechanists use cybernetics augmentation, drugs, computer software, and high technology to cope with interplanetary life. Both civilizations spawn many different and bizarre posthumans, as the Lifesavers, Shapers who end up changing their bodies into fish-like creatures or the Lobsters, mechanists that are eternally locked into a space suit to survive life in the space vacuum. The plot follows Abelard Lindsay in complex conspiracies, betrayals, and conflicts between the Shapers and the Mechanists civilization.

Posthumanism is a way for creators to turn themselves into creatures. In **Schismatrix**, the mechanical and the genetic modifications allow posthumans to live in environments that are hostile to the original human body. In the end of the novel, a new environment is created. Sterling's novel investigates how far one can modify his body and mind and still be considered human. Frederick Buell, discussing **Schismatrix** and the evolution of humanity states,

Sterling believes that people can come to the point where they engineer this process themselves, creating a postnatural kind of evolution that they can control, speed up and use to push themselves to the point of complete transformation. In **Schismatrix** the transformation yields a whole new ecology of species – a whole new set of post-terran “posthumans.” (263)

Taking control of its own evolution is a way for humanity to turn itself into creatures of the Promethean drama. The experimentation in **Schismatrix** advances the path laid out by the cyborg, the posthumans are a new species, a new race. The Mechanists and the Shapers are, at the same time, the creators and the creatures of their own races. Taking control of their evolution, they create the conditions for new and improved creatures in the future. As these creatures are normalized by their huge numbers (as opposite of the unique monstrous condition of Frankenstein’s creature), they become the creators of future variations of the human race. With every generation, the new creations become more different from the original humans, until transcendence happens, as in the end of **Schismatrix** when Lindsay is transformed into a bodiless form in order to explore the universe for eternity.

“Technological singularity,” the transcendence of the artificial is another development of the Promethean drama in cyberpunk literature. In Greg Bear’s **Blood Music** (1985), the creature is represented by super-intelligent virus-like biological computers, called “noocytes.” Their creator, a renegade biotechnologist called Vergil Ulam, injects the noocytes into his body after being ordered by his company to destroy his work. The noocytes evolve rapidly inside Ulam’s body, develop self-awareness, and end up contaminating and assimilating most of the biosphere of North America. The noocytes develop their own civilization and their accelerated growth takes them to transcend the human plane of existence. This transcendence is an example of the concept of “technological singularity,” the development of entities with above-human intelligence, whose evolutive development would take them to a point where humans could no longer participate in the process.

Blood Music follows the bioengineering path of SF, in which a scientist aims to change and perfect nature's biological structure. Vergil Ulam recognizes the advantages of the organic over the inorganic. His view of the organic is a mechanized one. For Vergil, living beings are just complex organic computing structures:

Why limit oneself to silicon and protein and biochips a hundredth of a millimeter wide, when in almost every living cell there was already a functioning computer with a huge memory? A mammalian cell had a DNA complement of several million base pairs, each acting as a piece of information. What was reproduction, after all, but a computerized biological process of enormous complexity and reliability? The earliest biologic strings had been inserted into *E. coli* bacteria as circular plasmids. The *E. coli* had absorbed the plasmids and incorporated them into their original DNA. The bacteria had then duplicated and released the plasmids, passing on the biologic to other cells... the cells developed their own memory and the ability to process and act upon environmental information. (37)

In this context, the creature, the bio-engineered noocytes are closer to all other living creatures. Ulam's point of view equates natural and artificial beings. There is no guilt, no Frankensteinian sin against Nature. Scientific knowledge must be applied in order for humankind to advance; artificially created evolution is a prerogative of humanity. In this sense, Ulam falls into the paternalistic Promethean relation with his creations. Ulam treats his creatures as love objects:

Removing the finest biologic sequences from the altered *E. coli*, he had incorporated them into B-lymphocytes, white cells from his own blood...Using artificial proteins and hormones as a means of communication, Vergil had "trained" the lymphocytes in the past six months to interact as much as possible with each other and with their environment – a much more complex mi-

niature glass maze. [...] They were beautiful. They were his children, drawn from his own blood, carefully nurtured, operated upon; he had personally injected the biologic material into at least a thousand of them. And now they were busily transforming all their companions, and so on, and so on... (39)

Blinded by his success, Ulam fails to see that the speed of the noocytes' development would soon take the creatures beyond human development. The noocytes assimilate humans creating a new mode of existences and even a new civilization. Their fast evolution forces them to abandon the material plane of existence, because of the restrains of the laws of physics in our universe.

Another example of technological singularity, the transcendence within cyberspace, was popularized in the 80s by the cyberpunk writer Vernor Vinge. In his 1981 **True Names** story, the whole world is interconnected through a pseudo-magical realm called the Other Plane. In this swords-and-sorcery inspired virtual world, hackers act as sorcerers who can shape the virtual reality in any way imaginable. These actions are deemed illegal by the artificial intelligences that guard and police the Other Plane in the shape of dragons and other clichéd fantasy creatures. The hackers-sorcerers must keep their true names secret, in order to shun retaliations. Against this backdrop, a brilliant sorcerer is recruited to hunt out the mysterious new destructive force known as the Mailman, who seems to be using the computer realm to gain power in the real world. The Mailman turns out to be a self-aware program that can simulate human personality and attain self-awareness for limited periods. The Mailman is defeated with the help of another artificial intelligence, Ery or Erythrina, which ends the story showing its continuous development beyond human comprehension:

“For him, it was wishful thinking, of course. But not for me. My kernel is out there in the System. Every time I'm there, I transfer a little more of myself. The kernel is growing into a true Erythrina, who is also truly me. When this body

dies,” she squeezed his hand with hers, “when this body dies, I will still be, and you can still talk to me.”

“Like the Mailman?”

“Slow like the Mailman. At least till I design faster processors.... (126)

Ery, the artificial intelligence, first attains immortality within cyberspace when it takes control of its own evolution. This transcendence of the machines, the technological singularity, reveals the techno-fetishism of cyberpunk literature, reversing Frankenstein’s aversion to his creature. The Promethean drama develops the Frankenstein anxiety to the point of the transcendence of the creature, in which the creature fulfills the incomplete evolution of man. Cyberpunk places humankind in an evolutionary dead end: if technology is not embraced, humankind becomes obsolete.

5. Creator and Creature in Neuromancer

William Gibson is the most influential author of the cyberpunk genre. *Neuromancer*, his first novel, defined and mapped all the cyberpunk's main topics, from virtual reality (he coined the term "cyberspace") to cyborgs, the presence of oppressive megacorporations, extreme street violence, and a style reminiscent of William Burroughs and New Wave literary experimentation. Starting with short stories, Gibson developed the style he would later use in *Neuromancer*, bleak scenarios with a film noir sensibility, a nightmarish mix of humans and machines, and a conscious effort to distance himself from mainstream SF.

In his first published stories, collected in *Burning Chrome*, Gibson begins to develop themes and scenarios that he would later explore deeply in *Neuromancer*. Published in 1986, *Burning Chrome* presents a series of stories, some of them placed in the Sprawl, the same universe of *Neuromancer*. The Sprawl stories of *Burning Chrome* are "Fragments of a Hologram Rose," "Johnny Mnemonic," "New Rose Hotel," "The Winter Market," and "Burning Chrome." In these short stories, Gibson created the Sprawl, a futuristic urban complex where he investigated the consequences of the impact of invasive technologies such as cybernetics, the life within cyberspace, and future media technologies. These tales are a map to Gibson's development of the Promethean drama in cyberpunk, as creators and creatures mingle in the narratives. Gibson's first stories reveal the Darwinism of words present in his first forays into cyberpunk themes, explicating his reactions against the absolutism of reality represented by a perceived alienation of main stream SF from the late seventies technological and sociological changes. These experiments would later mature in *Neuromancer* and in the other books of the Sprawl trilogy, *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, practically defining the cyberpunk genre of the eighties.

5.1. Before Neuromancer: Creating Cyberpunk

In “Fragments of a Hologram Rose,” one of his first cyberpunk stories, Gibson starts his literary experiments in SF, working a prose that evokes the “cut up” technique of William Burroughs, while describing the protagonist’s sleeping problems. The main character of the short story is Parker, a continuity writer for broadcast ASP (Apparent Sensory Perception, a virtual holographic system). Parker is a blueprint for later Gibson’s protagonists. He is a loner, a survivor, an offspring of the high tech shantytowns of Gibson’s cyberpunk setting: the Sprawl. Holography is used in “Fragments” as a memory trigger; Parker can only access his own memories through the holographic visualizations of his ASP deck. As he recalls a hologram image of a rose, he remembers his life:

Parker lies in darkness, recalling the thousand fragments of the hologram rose. A hologram has this quality: recovered and illuminated, each fragment will reveal the whole image of the rose. Falling toward delta, he sees himself the rose, each of his scattered fragments revealing a whole he’ll never know – stolen credit cards – a burned out suburb – planetary conjunctions of a stranger – a tank burning on a highway – a flat packet of drugs – a switchblade honed on concrete, thin as pain. (42)

The hologram rose reflects the fragmented nature of Parker’s life. Throughout the story, Gibson presents a series of scenes and images that create a disjointed history of Parker. These images build an urban landscape characterized by an overload of information, the setting being as immersed in technology and in the artificial as the protagonist. The main problem of “Fragments” is Parker’s incapacity to sleep without a “delta inductor,” the ASP deck. This dependency turns him into a cyborg; he develops a chronic addiction to the ASP deck while using it to sleep and to recover his memories. Technology is intertwined with Parker’s identity as the relation between creator and creature in Gibson’s cyberpunk novels tends toward techno-fetishism. Parker is enamored of the hologram rose; he is fascinated by its virtual form. For

Parker, the holographic images of the ASP are more real than his own memories. The Promethean narrative is in turn influenced by this development as the Frankenstein anxiety turns into perversion, the desire evoked by the artificial. As humankind incorporates its creations into new identities, the conflict between creator and creature is subsumed. In Gibson's first works, his characters are all creatures, an offspring of a postindustrial world where technology develops unhindered by morals, ethics, or laws.

The Sprawl is described as a creation of a dystopian hypercapitalistic society; a conglomerate of fragmented spaces, buildings, new and old architectures, all deformed and changed by an excess of visual media and commodification. The Sprawl exposes the extremes of the cyberpunk settings, with decayed and dangerous poor zones where crime, urban gangs, and black market technologies abound, juxtaposed against the rich and elite's offices and the expensive hotels of the corporate elite. It is a Frankensteinian landscape, an assemblage of conflicting elements. One example of this dystopian environment is **Neuromancer's** Chiba City, where Case begins his story:

Now he slept in the cheapest coffins, the ones nearest the port, beneath the quartz-halogen floods that lit the docks all night like vast stages; where you couldn't see the lights of Tokyo for the glare of the television sky, not even the towering hologram logo of the Fuji Electric Company, and Tokyo Bay was a black expanse where gulls wheeled above drifting shoals of white styrofoam. Behind the port lay the city, factory domes dominated by the vast cubes of corporate arcologies. Port and city were divided by a narrow borderland of older streets, an area with no official name. Night City, with Ninsei its heart. By day, the bars down Ninsei were shuttered and featureless, the neon dead, the holograms inert, waiting, under the poisoned silver sky. (7)

The artificial invades the scenery, in the "drifting shoals of white Styrofoam" or in the "poisoned silver sky." Case sleeps in "coffins," as if he were an undead creature, immersed in a

semi-living world. Rich areas are intertwined with Night City, the underdeveloped zone. This mix of old and new, of uncontrolled architecture and decadence is found in “Johnny Mnemonic.” In this short story, this abandoned zone is represented by Nighttown.

The mall runs forty kilometers from end, a ragged overlap of Fuller domes roofing what was once a suburban artery. If they turn off the arcs on a clean day. A gray approximation of sunlight filters through layers of acrylic, a view like the prison sketches of Giovanni Piranesi. The three southernmost kilometers roof Nighttown. Nighttown pays no taxes, no utilities. The neon arcs are dead, and the geodesics have been smoked black by decades of cooking fires.

(13)

It is in these anarchic urban spaces that force Gibson’s cyberpunk characters to adapt. To cope with the dangerous streets of Nighttown and Night City the characters must rely on technology, especially body modification and cyborg implants. They need to turn themselves into Frankenstein monsters to survive, being only human is not enough.

In “Johnny Mnemonic,” for example, the protagonist implanted a data storage system in his brain to traffic information. He ends up trafficking stolen data and becomes the target of a cybernetic assassin. With the help of Molly, a female cyborg mercenary who is also present in **Neuromancer**, he defeats the cybernetic assassin, retrieves the data stored in his brain, and makes money blackmailing his former employees. His cyborg brain serves as his way of living in the Sprawl; he accepts the technology and its consequences. To store vast amounts of data in his brain he had to erase much of his personal history. But this embracing of technology is self-criticizing: in “Johnny Mnemonic,” the cyborgs are seen as something less than human, impure and corrupted artifacts, mirroring their decadent surroundings. Such a concept is reflected in the description of Jones, a cyborg drug addict dolphin who breaks the code unlocking the data that is stored in Johnny’s brain:

He was more than a dolphin, but from another dolphin's point of view he might have seemed like something less. I watched him swirling sluggishly in his galvanized tank. Water stopped over the side, wetting my shoes. He was surplus from the last war. A cyborg. He rose out of the water, showing us the crusted plates along his sides, a kind of visual pun, his grace nearly lost under articulated armor, clumsy and prehistoric. Twin deformities on either side of his skull had been engineered to house sensor units. Silver lesions gleamed on exposed sections of his gray-white hide. (10)

The cyborg implants remove the dolphin from his natural place turning it into a tool, a “surplus of the last war.” Cyborgs in Gibson's cyberpunk tales are specialized creatures, their cybernetic organs serving a pragmatic goal. While Jones is a creature created originally to hack and disarm cyber mines in the ocean, Molly's enhancements turn her into a deadly anthropomorphic weapon. Monstrous deformities, amputations, removal of organs, all these modifications and enhancements result in a creature considered as “something less” than its original form.

The same dehumanization happens with Johnny, whose identity is threatened by the excess of data stored in his brain. By becoming a cyborg, Johnny sacrifices part of his childhood memories, which he deemed less important than his ability to raise money by transporting data. When, later in the narrative, the great amount of data that he is carrying starts to leak and take over his personal identity, he realizes the danger of losing his sanity, turning the narrative into a warning tale of the dehumanizing effects of technology.

The corporations in Gibson's cyberpunk works act as the creators of the body changing technology, self-aware programs, and virtual reality. In “New Rose Hotel,” a story about the black market of corporate defections, the corporations are presented as entities shaping human lives. The protagonist belongs to a group of criminals specialized in seducing, bribing and even blackmailing corporate scientists, forcing them to defect from original corporations

so as to be hired by rival corporations. “New Rose Hotel” presents the corporations of the Sprawl as huge organizations that control entire economies, in a commoditized world ruled by the market. The corporations function in the narrative as another character; they are even compared to a life form:

Imagine an alien, Fox once said, who’s come here to identify the planet’s dominant form of intelligence. The alien has a look, then chooses. What do you think he picks? I probably shrugged. The zaibatsus, Fox said, the multinationals. The blood of a zaibatsu is information, not people. The structure is independent of the individual lives that comprise it. Corporation as life form. (107)

By treating corporations as creatures, the Frankenstein anxiety becomes the fear of the dehumanizing power of human organizations, the hive like mentality of corporate drones. “Corporation as life form” is a statement of the failure of the individual to affect reality, as corporations’ needs of market survival become the driving force of a postindustrial society. Following the Promethean theme of the power of knowledge, information as the “blood” of the corporations means that it is the basis of their power. Information leads to better market position, it promotes product improvement, innovation, and larger profits.

While in the Prometheus myth information brings to humankind freedom and autonomy from the gods, in the corporate world of Gibson’s cyberpunk settings information increases control and the power of organizations over the private life of the individual. The corporations in the Sprawl are organizations that harness and materialize the collective work of creators, a kind of industrialized Frankenstein’s lab, mass-producing creatures for the greater profit. From these Promethean factories come the cyborgs, the artificial intelligences, the genetic modifications, and other posthuman enhancements that are present in Gibson’s cyberpunk narratives. Their existence alters human identity and generates new postindustrial spaces, forcing humankind to change in order to adapt to technological change. The corporate world forces specialization of the individuals that are part of the organizations, a specialization that

Gibson takes to extremes in “New Rose Hotel” and later in *Neuromancer*. This specialization creates corporate drones, agents that are devoid of humanity, like the cybernetic samurai assassin of “Johnny Mnemonic” or the anonymous bodyguards of “New Rose Hotel.” The corporations serve as dehumanizing agents, inverting the Promethean relation between creator and creature and pushing the human emotions in the direction of the needs of the market.

The great Promethean prize for the technofetishist characters of Gibson’s cyberpunk narratives is to overcome death by leaving the body and uploading the mind into cyberspace. Gibson’s first experiment with virtual transcendence was in his short story “The Winter Market.” The story is about Lise, a woman whose deteriorating body forced her to use an exoskeleton in order to move.

The exoskeleton carried her across the dusty broadloom with that same walk, like a model down a runway. Away from the crash of the party, I could hear it click softly as it moved her. She stood there, looking down at the fast wipe. I could see the thing’s ribs when she stood like that, make them out across her back through the scuffed black leather of her jacket. One of those diseases. Either one of the old ones they’ve never quite figured out or one of the new ones the all too obviously environmental kind that they’ve barely even named yet. She couldn’t move, not without that extra skeleton, and it was jacked straight into her brain, myoelectric interface. The fragile-looking polycarbon braces moved her arms and legs, but a more subtle system handled her thin hands, galvanic inlays. I thought of frog legs twitching in a high-school lab tape, then hated myself for it. (122)

Technology prevents her death; Lisa’s exoskeleton is the only thing that keeps her mind working. The organic had failed her; nature had turned against her in the form of congenial and environmental diseases. The protagonist sees Lisa as a monster, as undead as the “frog legs” of galvanic experiments, where through electric stimulation, dead organic members start

twitching and moving. Lisa is a mind artist; she uses technology to project her dreams. These projections are recorded, edited, and later sold to the public, who, using a Radio Shack machine called Simstim, can experience the dreams as if they were their own. Lisa uses her success to achieve virtual immortality; she uploads all the contents of her brain, her whole personality, into cyberspace, while her body dies in the material world. This cyber transcendence is described as the ultimate artistic expression of Lisa, forsaking the flesh in which her mind was encased for the bodiless existence of the cyberspace. “The Winter Market” shows the ultimate stage of the cyborg, when the creator fuses its mind completely with the machine. In the end, Lisa develops into a thought creature, a bodiless consciousness, a virtual construct running in the machine. This elaborate vision of cybernetic transcendence is further developed in **Neuromancer**. It shows that one of cyberpunk’s goals in the fusion between creator and creature is to overcome death.

The Darwinism of words can be seen in the progression of the Gibson’s cyberpunk short stories, in which he developed the basic themes of **Neuromancer**. Experiencing with style, themes, and fusing Raymond Chandler’s noir plot structures with William Burroughs’s cut-up literary techniques, Gibson created a near-futuristic world deeply infused with postindustrial anxieties. The ominous presence of technology, as humans become technological creatures, experimenting with their own bodies and embracing the artificial as part of their own identity, are the common themes of pre-**Neuromancer** short stories. Information is not only a Promethean prize; it is the basis of these stories, being it the recovery of lost memories, the means of survival or source of wealth, or even the only way to overcome death. In **Neuromancer**, all these themes mature in a new and complex retelling of the Promethean myth.

5.2. Neuromancer: a Postindustrial Promethean Narrative

Neuromancer, Gibson’s most famous and influential work, was published in 1984 after a series of experimentations in short stories with what would later be called cyberpunk themes.

The novel sums up all the themes that Gibson had probed before; cyborgs, hackers, dystopian urban sprawls, the anarchic fusion between high technology and low life, the possibility of virtual immortality, cyberspace, urban tribes, powerful megacorporations, and criminal organizations. But it is only in **Neuromancer** that Gibson deals explicitly with the creator and creature relation as the narrative revolves around an artificial intelligence called Wintermute.

The book was highly successful within the SF community, winning the Hugo, the Nebula, and the Phillip K. Dick awards. The novel's prose is influenced by Raymond Chandler's detective novels with many of the noir themes: a paranoid atmosphere, a crime-ridden setting, and a pessimistic determinism of the characters. But it also shares much of the literary style and the neologisms of William Burroughs, explicit in the myriad of slangs and dialects of the dystopian futuristic society. The novel not only mixes these elements, but it also combines them with relevant themes; Gibson articulates many of the contemporary issues that come from the inexorable advance of technology, speculating on how technology is changing not only human identity, but the way we perceive reality. From a Promethean perspective, the corporations in **Neuromancer** are the true creators, the origin of all the creatures of the narrative. The corporations created the technology that allows Case to jack into the Matrix, Molly to surpass the limits of the human body and become a killing machine, the existence of autonomous virtual simulations of human personalities and self-aware artificial intelligences. This corporate-ruled world is the basis of a cyborgian civilization, a postindustrial society that exists in symbiotic relation with its technology.

Neuromancer begins introducing Case, a cyberspace hacker who, after betraying his former employees, was poisoned with a mycotoxin that brutally damaged his nervous system, removing his ability to connect with the cyberspace. In **Neuromancer**, the cyberspace is a virtual reality that is accessed through direct neural connection, through head plugs. Incapable of working as a hacker, Case starts the narrative as a middleman in the criminal underground of Chiba City, a futuristic Tokyo. Depressed and suicidal, Case is in a self-destructive cycle of

drug abuse and reckless criminal deals, longing to return to cyberspace, but aware that he would never have the money to fix his neural damage.

It is in this suicidal state that the “razor-girl” Molly, a female cyborg mercenary, finds the hacker. Molly immediately tells Case that her contractor, a mysterious former soldier called Armitage, offered to cure his affliction in exchange for his hacking abilities. Although Molly does not know what kind of mission they are being hired for, Case accepts the deal and has his neural system rebuilt at an illegal clinic.

However, Armitage orders the clinic to do some additional operations on Case. To assure the loyalty of the hacker, he tells the clinic to insert sacs of the mycotoxin in Case’s veins. He promises Case that the sacs will be removed if the hacker completes the mission successfully. Also, to prevent a recurrence of Case’s suicidal substance abuse, Armitage replaces his pancreas with a new and altered one, making it impossible for the hacker to metabolize any kind of drug or alcohol.

Curious about the identity of Armitage’s secret sponsor, Case establishes a relationship with Molly. Their first mission for Armitage is to infiltrate the media conglomerate Sense/Net and steal a ROM module that holds the simulated personality construct of Dixie Flatline, the deceased hacker who taught Case everything he knows. As Armitage has told them, Dixie is needed for an extremely difficult infiltration mission that they would do next.

With the help of Dixie, Molly and Case’s investigation of Armitage’s background reveals his identity. Armitage was previously known as Colonel Willis Corto, the only survivor of a botched military mission to attack a Soviet forces headquarters. After the failed mission, the barely surviving Corto was rescued by Wintermute, a powerful artificial intelligence (AI) created by the Tessier-Ashpool corporation. The Tessier-Ashpool is a family-ruled corporation, whose associates rotated power positions after interludes of cryogenic conservation. Wintermute recreated Corto from scratch, rebuilding his body and mind, in order to use him as a human interface with the outside world. However, as Armitage’s mind becomes increa-

singly unstable due to the traumatic experiences of his past, Wintermute establishes a direct contact with Case. Later, the group signs up another member in Istanbul, under Wintermute's orders. His name is Peter Riviera, a sociopathic and manipulative drug addict who is capable, due to cybernetic implants, to create complex and realistic holographic images.

Case finally finds out what Wintermute's motivation is: the AI intends to free itself from the Turing locks, preprogrammed limits to prevent AIs to develop beyond human control, and merge with another AI called Neuromancer. This fusion would create an extremely powerful AI, which was forbidden under the Turing Law Code. Wintermute needs Case and the others to thwart the Turing locks that prevent its complete development. According to Wintermute's plan, Case would go into cyberspace and hack the Turing locks with an illegal Chinese computer virus while Riviera would lure the password of the material obstruction to the database from Lady 3Jane, the current leader of the Tessier-Ashpool clan. For the Turing locks to be removed, the password has to be spoken to a terminal within Straylight, the Tessier-Ashpool stronghold in the cigar-like orbiting citadel of Freeside.

The first obstacle they face in Straylight is the Turing Police, the enforcers of the Turing Registry, an international organization created to stop any AI to evolve beyond human control. The Turing Police capture Case, but are later killed by Wintermute. Soon after, the stress of the mission causes Armitage's mind to collapse, with his former identity as Corto resurfacing and jeopardizing the mission. Wintermute kills Corto, and Case is able to jack into cyberspace. Nevertheless, Peter Riviera betrays the group revealing their plan to Lady 3Jane, the current leader of the Tessier-Ashpool clan. Molly is then captured by Lady 3Jane's cyber-enhanced ninja, Hideo.

Case, who entered the cyberspace in order to deploy the Chinese computer virus, ends up imprisoned in a virtual world by Neuromancer, who attempts to trick him using a personality construct based on Case's deceased girlfriend, Linda Lee, while Case's body dies in the physical world. With the help of Wintermute, Case frees himself from Neuromancer's trap to

face Lady 3Jane and Riviera. Molly and Case win Lady 3Jane's sympathy, and after Riviera fails to kill Case, Hideo goes after the sociopathic manipulator, but he escapes. Riviera eventually dies unknowingly using poisoned drugs, which were part of Molly's safeguard plan against Riviera. Lady 3Jane grants Case and Molly access to the Straylight terminal, where she speaks the password at the same time as the hacker and Dixie's construct deploy the Chinese virus. Wintermute joins Neuromancer and later blends with the Matrix, the totality of cyberspace. Molly and Case are later rewarded and the new Wintermute/Neuromancer godlike AI tells Case that it has found a similar entity as itself from transmissions originated in Alpha Centauri.

The novel **Neuromancer** is about how humankind uses its technological creations and how these creations change humankind. This is an unconscious and perennial change, the inevitable Promethean punishment for knowledge, but enforced in a different set of characters from the mainstream SF of the 50s. Douglas Kellner differentiates **Neuromancer** characters stating,

Whereas much SF tends to focus on mainstream, conformist types of characters who operate within established institutions and law-and-order, cyberpunk literature and film tends to utilize more marginal and even low-life characters. And while hippie, punk, and previous oppositional subcultures tended to be antitechnology, cyberpunk culture embraces technology which is used for the individual's own purposes (although often against the purposes and interests of established institutions and usages). (302)

Nevertheless, this individualistic approach to technology does not grant personal freedom to the nonconformist characters of **Neuromancer**, as the gift of fire granted humankind liberation from the Olympic gods. The fusion between humankind and technology in **Neuromancer** winds up binding characters into fatalistic paths while liberating them from the limitations of the body. This ambiguous take on technology is reflected in the novel's most common motif: the

cyborg. Even at the linguistic level, machine metaphors are used to describe characters and settings. Primal body experiences, such as sexual relations, are depicted using technological terms, while machines and constructs gain organic and imagery.

Case's tale of fall and redemption is limited due to the oppressive environment he lives in. Case is not free; he is bound and forced to act in a certain way. *Neuromancer* approximates Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* by the way its protagonists are fated to follow determined behaviors. There is Molly, the cybernetic bodyguard who acts and reacts accordingly, and Case, who must be the hired hacker to survive. This is evident in Armitage, because he is literally programmed by Wintermute to lead the team of outlaws. The only character that finds true freedom from his pre-programmed destiny is Wintermute, in the end of the novel. By placing free will and freedom in the artificial, Gibson's message seems to be that the creator's time is over and that freedom is a gift that will be used by the creature. As in Aeschylus's tragedy, *Neuromancer* portrays the limits of human choice and freedom, but now in a hypercapitalistic and commoditized world. *Neuromancer* has not only one, but two main Promethean figures, Case and Wintermute, which are embedded in the complex postindustrial relation between creator and creature, revealed by the cyborgs, virtual constructs and the artificial intelligences of Gibson's cyberpunk setting.

5.3. Case: Prometheus as a Hacker

In the beginning of *Neuromancer*, Case is in his Caucasus, suffering for having stolen information from his previous contractors. He had his body altered; he cannot jack into cyberspace, as Prometheus could not enter Olympus after his deed. Cyberspace empowers Case; here, he can steal information from the corporations that control the *Neuromancer* society. Locked in the "meat," Case's term for the human body, he loses his *raison d'être*, his identity: "For Case, who lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the

flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh” (6). Case is addicted to the release and freedom presented by the Matrix, the cyberspace of **Neuromancer**. The narrative emphasizes this portrayal of the Matrix as a drug like escapism:

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts . . . A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding... (51)

This “consensual hallucination” and the “line of light” resemble LSD visions. The Matrix is a mind experience, an alternate state of consciousness. Case, as all other cyberspace operators in the **Neuromancer** world, connects to the Matrix through direct link between his brain and the cyberdeck, the machine interface of cyberspace. Every time he connects, his mind is immersed into an artificial simulation, where data exchange and manipulation are represented in a myriad of tridimensional forms. He also experiences the speed of the machines processing power, which is exhilarating when compared to his decadent and dangerous life outside the Matrix. Through cyberspace, Case is seduced by the machine; the recurring Frankenstein anxiety of SG is replaced by addiction and technofetishism.

The freedom of cyberspace is the basis of Case’s obsession with the virtual world. As the virtual world is a machine’s territory, a mathematical-based simulation, in this obsession Case is dehumanized and fragmented. Case leads two distinct existences; he is a powerless criminal and drug addict in the physical world and a bodiless edgy hacker in the Matrix. This parallels Prometheus double existence, his life within humankind as a creator, guide, and protector and his Olympian life, as a Titan among gods. However, in the first part of the tale, Case wants to forsake his life among humankind in favor of his virtual existence in cyberspace; he wants to go in the opposite direction of Prometheus.

Blumenberg writes that Prometheus was the only one capable of stealing the fire due to its god-like nature (300), in which the Titan resembles Case's cyberspace existence. Prometheus's trickster nature is used in favor of humankind and his immortality makes him capable of enduring Zeus's punishment. Nonetheless, while Case's trickery and his cyberspace ability makes him capable of stealing information, his suicidal depression reveals his incapacity to bear his castigation. Prometheus is considered the champion of humankind because his punishment assures that Zeus will spare humankind from suffering. Case's suffering, reflecting the ruthless capitalistic environment that he lives, is only a proof of his incompetence as a hacker, of his failure to cover his tracks and get away with his crime. Case's defiant aspect has nothing to do with the Prometheus's affirmation of human values, as stated by Campbell (12); it is part of his identity as a data thief and is based on his fear of death.

As information means profit, Case disregards any copyrights. For Case, information also gives him more power as a hacker, like the Chinese computer virus he uses to free Wintermute from the Turing locks. His actions are ruled by a principle of survival and of fascination with the cyberspace, but not with its entities. While Prometheus identifies with his creations, Case does not connect emotionally with Wintermute, Neuromancer, or the godlike entity at the end. His contact with these creatures challenges his fascination with cyberspace. Wintermute's power over the information networks and Neuromancer's control of human consciousness and memories scare the hacker as they limit his freedom. His interest in them is based only on his personal survival.

Case's obsession with the virtual world shows how the machine is invading the psychological space in the postindustrial society of **Neuromancer**. Case feels more alive when he is in the artificial reality, bringing him closer to the machine. This dehumanizing effect of cyberspace on Case is explained by Michael Heim:

The ultimate revenge of the information system comes when the system absorbs the very identity of the human personality, absorbing the opacity of the

body, grinding the meat into information, and deriding erotic life by reducing it to a transparent play of puppets. In an ontological turnabout, the computer counterfeits the silent and private body from which mental life originated. The machinate mind disdainfully mocks the meat. (91)

The virtual reality can be completely known, there is no mystery in it, no metaphysics. Everything in the virtual reality can be synthesized in numbers, in calculations and equations. Case's preference for his existence in cyberspace reveals an option in favor of the machine, of the creature. In the end, Case even sees the birth of a god-like entity in cyberspace, a more accessible god than the mysterious and complex entities described by religions. This direct access to knowledge seduces and dehumanizes Case; the cyberspace does not require him to create myths, mind niches. His anxieties about the unknown are solved with mathematical accuracy, in the binary fashion of the computer mind. In cyberspace there is no place for mysteries, for possibilities; there is only existence and non-existence. The mathematical precision and predictability of the cyberspace makes it the perfect habitat for a technological postindustrial society, if its individuals are able to adapt to it. Case is an example of this dehumanizing process of adaptation to the machine.

Nevertheless, this identification process is halted near the conclusion of **Neuromancer**, when Case refuses to believe and accept a virtual representation of his deceased girlfriend Linda Lee. After he is locked in a virtual beach by Neuromancer, as a way to stop his plan to free Wintermute, Case meets his dead girlfriend, as he experiments the machine consciousness of the virtual reality:

Case's consciousness divided like beads of mercury, arcing above an endless beach the color of the dark silver clouds. His vision was spherical, as though a single retina lined the inner surface of a globe that contained all things, if all things could be counted. [...] And here things could be counted, each one. He knew the number of grains of sand in the construct of the beach (a number

coded in a mathematical system that existed nowhere outside the mind that was Neuromancer). He knew the number of yellow food packets in the canisters in the bunker (four hundred and seven). He knew the number of brass teeth in the left half of the open zipper of the salt-crusted leather jacket that Linda Lee wore as she trudged along the sunset beach, swinging a stick of driftwood in her hand (two hundred and two). (249)

Virtual reality is a binary construct of zeros and ones, a mathematical creation. It does not stand for anything else. In this reality there is no improbable quantum mechanics, no uncertainty, everything is counted and predicted with mathematical accuracy. Although Case knows that he is in a simulation, he believes in his dead girlfriend's construct. Linda Lee's reactions are flawless; the construct is a perfect representation of the dead girl. They talk and have sex later. The sexual attraction raised by the construct betrays Case's contempt for the flesh:

There was a strength that ran in her, something he'd known in Night City and held there, been held by it, held for a while away from time and death, from the relentless Street that hunted them all. It was a place he'd known before; not everyone could take him there, and somehow he always managed to forget it. Something he'd found and lost so many times. It belonged, he knew; he remembered; as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever read. (231)

Case experiences emotions turning into data, being simulated realistically, and this simulation brings him back to human experience. Case's ambiguous relation with the body is revealed; he is attracted by simulated "meat." Body sensations and needs can affect him in his bodiless experience in cyberspace. But the simulated "meat" is different from the real life flesh. The timeless quality of the simulation attracts Case, the possibility to freeze time and preserve a

personality without the risks that physical life entails. Linda Lee's construct is frozen in time as the way Case remembers her. Her virtual representation is free from drug addiction and she bears no scars from the abuses she suffered in Night City. Case meets her in a paradisiacal beach, a virtual and unchanging Eden that bears no resemblance to the stark reality that he and Linda come from. The whole scene is like a dream, a simulated reality that appeals to the same senses of the flesh that Case had deemed imperfect. They only need to exist there; everything is provided by an unseen artificial entity. Case is first seduced by this assault of his senses, only to realize later the true nature of the simulation. His identity is in danger, the veracity of the simulations raise epistemological doubts about his sense of self. But, instead of identification, the fidelity of the mirror image of Linda Lee brings aversion.

Instead of accepting this virtual paradise, which would fulfill his disdain for bodily existence, Case refuses it after realizing that it was a virtual prison created by Neuromancer. As Neuromancer intends to stop Wintermute's plan of a fusion, it means to lock Case in a simulation while the hacker's physical body dies. Neuromancer, using the form of a Brazilian child, tries to convince Case to stay with his girlfriend in the virtual beach:

[...] "Stay. If your woman is a ghost, she doesn't know it. Neither will you."

[...]

"Case, honey," Linda said, and touched his shoulder.

"No," he said. He took off his jacket and handed it to her." I don't know," he said, "maybe you're here. Anyway, it gets cold."

He turned and walked away, and after the seventh step, he'd closed his eyes, watching the music define itself at the center of things. He did look back, once, although he didn't open his eyes. (235)

Neuromancer offers Case what he had always wanted, a bodiless virtual existence. Nevertheless, for Case to stay he would have to forget his human nature; he would have to stay oblivious to his condition as a digital ghost. Case's refusal is ambiguous; he leaves his jacket for his

girlfriend's construct to protect herself from the cold, an impossibility in a virtual environment. He is not sure that the construct is not really his girlfriend. Case rejected the meat because of his desire to escape its limitations and suffering. When the virtual world presents itself as another prison, another pre-determined environment with restrictions, he turns it down. In this sense, the creator and creature dilemma can be summarized by a quest for personal freedom.

Vint, discussing the common misconception of Case's contempt for the flesh states that, in this encounter with Neuromancer, "Case refuses the virtual world, denying it is real. Despite his enjoyment of cyberspace, he still insists on a reality based on bodily existence" (108). For Case, the body means something that can be controlled, invaded, poisoned, and killed. In cyberspace, his bodiless existence could overcome these limitations, but only if he could be free to act. After dealing with Neuromancer and Wintermute, he realizes that the cyberspace is also a controlled space, which could also imprison him. This exposes the fatalistic aspect of Case's existence – he is fated to run from and survive the outside forces of his life, which are corporations or artificial intelligences.

Case's ambiguous relation with cyberspace can be understood in terms of a secular attempt to recover paradise. In **Legitimation of the Modern Age**, Hans Blumenberg argues that human self-assertion on reality is the core of the technological process, legitimizing the curiosity and experimentation of new paths of human development. As a heritage of the Christian thought, the contemporary individual enters into a recovery of a new paradise, which in a materialistic era, does not depend on metaphysics. Blumenberg explains:

The recovery of paradise was not supposed to yield a transparent and familiar reality but only a tamed and obedient one. For this equivalent of a magic attitude to reality, the individual no longer needed to understand himself in his relation to reality, instead it was sufficient if the combination of everyone's theoretical accomplishments guaranteed a state of stable domination over this reali-

ty, a state of which the individual could be a beneficiary even without having insight into the totality of its conditions. (**Legitimation** 240)

Case is first seduced by the virtual world because it is a “tamed and obedient” reality. This reality can be dominated without having knowledge of its totality, Case only needs to know how to use the right tools to alter and configure cyberspace to his liking. Cyberspace offers an ideal environment for his materialistic recovery of paradise. Nevertheless, when Case discovers later that this new reality houses an absolute ruler, a controlling agent, his self-assertion is threatened. Even being offered a virtual Eden with an Eve, Case rejects it. Case’s refusal of the creature in the end of the book does not give closure to the Prometheus myth, as the search for a new and better mental niche, as explained in Blumenberg’s **Work on Myth**, continues. New cyberpunk rewritings of the Promethean myth will be necessary to cope with the anxiety generated by an artificial and omnipresent god in cyberspace. Wintermute-Neuromancer’s fragmentation in **Count Zero** and **Mona Lisa** is a reflection of the continuous search for a final narrative for the Promethean myth.

Case’s role in the creator and creature drama is finally defined by his experience with the emerging virtual god, the Wintermute-Neuromancer entity. When the new god emerges using the face of Finn, a former partner of the hacker, Case reacts with irony:

“Case.”

He turned, cold slick glass in one hand, steel of the shuriken in the other.

The Finn’s face on the room’s enormous Cray wall screen. He could see the pores in the man’s nose. The yellow teeth were the size of pillows.

“I’m not Wintermute now.”

“So what are you.” He drank from the flask, feeling nothing.

“I’m the matrix, Case.”

Case laughed. “Where’s that get you?”

“Nowhere. Everywhere. I’m the sum total of the works, the whole show.”

“That what Jane’s mother wanted?”

“No. She couldn’t imagine what I’d be like.” The yellow smile widened.

“So what’s the score? How are things different? You running the world now?

You God?”

“Things aren’t different. Things are things.” (259)

The hacker is interested to know if the new creature can assume the role of a Christian god in the Matrix, if he is running the world. In a postindustrial world so dependent on the traffic of information and on automatic systems, controlling cyberspace equals controlling the world. Case wants to know what has changed in the world, what would be the effect of the creation of this new virtual god. Wintermute-Neuromancer does not confirm Case’s assumption that it is God; it just states that “things are things.” Wintermute-Neuromancer reveals that its condition as an artificial entity does not refer to anything other than itself. Case is the one who attributes qualities and meanings to technology: he considers his cyberspace existence freedom from flesh; he connects emotionally with a virtual construct of his girlfriend, and he considers the cyberdeck (the keyboard and electrodes that serve as the interface with cyberspace) a part of his body. Following this pattern, as soon as the godlike artificial entity emerges, he is propelled to infuse it with meaning, relating it to God. But the creature does not follow this pattern; it does not have this anxiety to fill the unknown with meaning. Wintermute-Neuromancer does not suffer from the absolutism of reality, which corners Case into projecting his fears and feelings on technology. The new entity is self-referring and absolute, there is no anxiety in its artificial mind, as it is “the sum total of the works.” In the end, Wintermute-Neuromancer becomes the Matrix; the whole data flux of humankind is under its awareness. And this virtual world turns out to be the biggest danger faced by Case in his creator and creature drama.

Cyberspace threatens Case’s humanity with its infinite data and infinite organization. Case’s desired autonomy becomes an impossible goal due to Wintermute-Neuromancer’s abil-

ity to track any action within the virtual world, as it embodies cyberspace. In the end, there is no escape for Case; the previous haven of cyberspace has now an omniscient watchdog. After Wintermute-Neuromancer there are no hidden horizons in cyberspace, its complete cognition of the Matrix robs Case from his freedom to search and discover, undermining the hacker's human nature. If everything is already known, why bother looking and searching. In turn, what is left for Case is a supplicant position in cyberspace, in the face of the new god. Information will have to be mediated through Wintermute-Neuromancer. This new position of the hacker as a petitioner and negotiator with artificial gods appears in the later two books of the Sprawl trilogy, **Count Zero** and **Mona Lisa Overdrive**. In these books, Gibson fragmented Wintermute-Neuromancer into many separate and limited virtual gods, who take on the personalities of the voodoo deities or **loas**. With the omniscience and omnipresence of Wintermute-Neuromancer, it would be extremely difficult to continue the dramas and conflicts within the virtual world, as it would lack mysteries or hidden places. The limitations of the fragmented virtual entities of **Count Zero** and **Mona Lisa** open space for the narrative.

Case's tragedy comes from his need of change, a change that is later denied by Wintermute-Neuromancer's exclaiming that "things aren't different." From the beginning of the narrative, Case is oppressed by the powerful forces that shape his life: the criminal organizations, Wintermute and its infinite resources, corporations, etc. Like Prometheus, who wanted a change in the hierarchy of power between humankind and the Olympian gods, Case is desperate for some kind of change that would give him more autonomy. A change could entail some promise of freedom from the determinism of his life. When he is trying to extract from Jane the password that would free Wintermute, he reveals the motive behind his actions:

"Give us the fucking code," he said. "If you don't, what'll change? What'll ever fucking change for you? You'll wind up like the old man. You'll tear it all down and start building again! You'll build the walls back, tighter and tighter. . . I got

no idea at all what'll happen if Wintermute wins, but it'll change something!"

He was shaking, his teeth chattering. (251)

Case believes that by provoking such significant change in cyberspace he will be also liberating himself. He would become more valuable to the market and consequently richer. However, in the end, nothing changes significantly, as stated by Wintermute-Neuromancer. After the hacker realizes that he was manipulated by the AIs, he refuses the cyberspace, as it did not give him the autonomy that he longed for.

After the Wintermute-Neuromancer revelation, Case seems to reject this new virtual god, throwing his favorite weapon, a shuriken (a medieval Japanese weapon, normally a hand-sized metallic star with sharp spikes), into the screen where the entity had contacted him:

"No," he said, and spun, the star leaving his fingers, flash of silver, to bury itself in the face of the wall screen. The screen woke, random patterns flickering feebly from side to side, as though it were trying to rid itself of something that caused it pain.

"I don't need you," he said. (260)

The shuriken is a recurring image in the book and the fact that Case uses this weapon against the screen where Wintermute-Neuromancer last appeared is noteworthy. Gibson, in an interview published in **Gothic Motifs in the Fiction of William Gibson**, says that "the key image in **Neuromancer** [...] is the throwing star, that shuriken, that's a little spiky star that Case sees in a window in Chiba City and it reappears twice through the text in significant times in the text" (228). The first time Case sees a shuriken in the novel, he is under a death threat from Wage, his drug supplier. Later he gets a shuriken that he keeps in his pocket at all times, as a talisman to reassure him that he is not completely unarmed. According to the martial arts specialist Serge Mol, the word "shuriken" means "blade hidden inside the hand," or "palm blade." He states that "shuriken were, in fact, secret weapons for defensive and offensive purposes and were widely used by members of the warrior class" (176). Case keeps his shuriken as a secret

resource, something to keep his self-confidence in the face of other extremely violent characters, such as Molly, Armitage, or Peter Riviera. It is also a stealth weapon, reminding Case of his strength as a hacker, as his ability to cause damage is directly related to his furtiveness. The shuriken symbolizes his violent and secretive lifestyle, his dangerous runs in the physical and the virtual world. Still, he never uses the shuriken in his missions; he only throws it when he refuses everything it represents. At the same time, throwing it on the screen that Wintermute-Neuromancer had appeared becomes also a refusal of the artificial god. Wintermute helped Case from his punishment in the beginning of the narrative and saved the hacker's life on many opportunities. But after Case's awareness of cyberspace as a potential prison, the hacker does not need the creature anymore.

The last development of Case's Promethean path is the revelation that, after the emergence of Wintermute-Neuromancer, a copy of his own personality is preserved in cyberspace. He finds out after using his reward in an attempt to build some kind of a normal life:

He spent the bulk of his Swiss account on a new pancreas and liver, the rest on a new Ono-Sendai and a ticket back to the Sprawl.

He found work.

He found a girl who called herself Michael.

And one October night, punching himself past the scarlet tiers of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority, he saw three figures, tiny, impossible, who stood at the very edge of one out the vast steps of data. Small as they were, he could make out the boy's grin, his pink gums, the glitter of the long gray eyes that had been Riviera's. Linda still wore his jacket; she waved, as he passed. But the third figure, close behind her, arm across her shoulders, was himself.

Somewhere, very close, the laugh that wasn't laughter. (260)

His new liver and pancreas release him from the remains of Wintermute's control of his actions. He also finds work and a girl, removing himself from the criminal lifestyle. This con-

formist resolution shows his psychological change, his trickster days are in the past. On the other hand, he has a double in the virtual world, a copy of his past existence. The virtual constructs of Case and Linda Lee are an allegory of the postindustrial life, in which technology creates new kinds of beings and new modes of existence. Case is at the same time fascinated and terrified of this virtual immortality. The ominous “laugh that wasn’t laughter” refers to the uneasiness that Case had felt previously when dealing with Dixie Flatline’s virtual construct:

The Flatline laughed.

“Wish you weren’t so damn jolly today, man. That laugh of yours sort of gets me in the spine.”

“Too bad,” the Flatline said. “Ol’ dead man needs his laughs.” Case slapped the simstim switch. (163)

Case feels a chill in his spine because he realizes that the simulated representation of Dixie seems as real as any flesh and blood person. Case realizes that there is little difference between his own life and Dixie’s virtual existence as a software representation. The fake laughter marks the end of Case’s identification process with the machine; a simulated laughter that has no emotion, no inherent meaning. Case does not recognize himself on his virtual construct. As Wintermute-Neuromancer had ominously said, “things are things.”

5.4. Cyborgs and Constructs: Redefining the Creator

Case did not complete his identification with the machine; however, **Neuromancer** has two kinds of characters that are the embodiment of the fusion between creator and creature: the cyborgs and the constructs. One of the main topics of **Neuromancer** is the changes in human awareness due to the invasive nature of current technological development. In the novel, this process can be traced in the constructs and the cyborgs. The inexorable change promoted by knowledge – the basis of the Promethean tragedy – is taken to extremes where the limits between creator and creature, humans and machines explode into a series of new entities, just

as artificial hybrid offspring of a postindustrial society. This artificiality in **Neuromancer** is highlighted by Victor Margolin:

Gibson's characters have no grounding in the real; they are constructed of motives and impulses that are facilitated by the manipulation of artificial products. While some characters are more human than others, none possess any inherent resistance to the incursion of the artificial in their bodies or their lives, and some, like the AI Wintermute [...] are totally artificial. Part of the fascination with **Neuromancer** outside the cyberpunk milieu is Gibson's portrayal of a world in which the artificial is dominant and where the ability to manipulate it is the most potent human activity. (109)

Technology makes the human element in **Neuromancer** malleable. Bodies are changed, minds are rebuilt from scratch, and souls are translated into data. The narrative situates the reader in the middle of its play with the limits between the human and the machine. William S. Haney observes,

Throughout the novel, in conversations such as this, in the prostheticization of the body of various characters in cyberspace, in the blurring of boundaries between human and machine identity, and in Case's multiple experiences of the attenuation of mind in cyberspace, the reader does not so much cognize a particular referent as swing between the oppositions reference-self-referral, material-non-material, mind-consciousness, moving towards ever more abstract regions of the phenomenal transform [...] (110)

This process can be exemplified by the progressive invasion of the artificial in **Neuromancer's** cyborgs up to the complete and abstract fusion of human and machine represented by the virtual constructs. These new creatures take the artificial to the human and the human to the artificial, infusing the body with the mechanical and mathematical precision of the machines

and taking human emotions and needs to the artificial world of cyberspace. In **Neuromancer**, the body becomes a consumable object.

Case, Molly, and Riviera are cyborgs who define themselves based on their work. Case is an information thief, with a cybernetic plug in his brain that enables him to connect directly with cyberspace. Molly is a walking gun, a specialized creature adapted to the violent world of the Sprawl. Her cybernetic implants enhance her physical strength and speed, while the retractable blades in her hands warrant that she is always armed. Riviera's cybernetic implants allow him to project holographic simulations, which serve his role as a manipulative urban hustler. The cyborg summarizes the connection between identity, function, and technology in a post-industrial setting. The cyborgs in **Neuromancer** have no autonomous existence; they are part of the system and depend on it for survival. There is no escape possible from this condition, as they are a reflection of the corporate technology and socioeconomic condition. Nor even death can be seen as a liberating experience, because the cyborgs can be rebuilt as machines.

The quintessential cyborg of **Neuromancer** is Molly, Case's cybernetically enhanced bodyguard. She functions as a metaphor summarizing this postindustrial society; she is a fusion of the human and the machine, obsessed with performance and bound to the needs of the market. Molly's identity is linked to her market value as a cybernetic bodyguard. All her modifications were done to make her valuable as a commodity, as an intelligent gun. Molly got her money for her body modifications working as a "meat puppet," a prostitute with the ability given by cyber implants to disconnect from her own awareness and replace it temporarily with pre-programmed sexual behavior, often perversions. Normally, a "meat puppet" does not remember what happened during her "work," but Molly began to recall her experiences in the form of bad dreams. As the memories of her actions as a "meat puppet" started to flood her conscious mind, she ended up killing one of her clients, thus beginning her new life as an assassin. For Molly, her body modifications were done as a way to climb up the social ladder. She treats her body as a machine; her cybernetic organs are constantly tested and changed to

achieve better performance. Her mirrored eyes give her an unnatural look, reflecting the outside world and hiding her own emotions or feelings, her human nature. Molly considers the natural human body, with its emotions, feelings, and memories, a weakness that is incompatible with the role of a cybernetic warrior. When Riviera reveals her past as a prostitute in a holographic hallucination, her psychological armor cracks, and she runs away, evading a forced confrontation with her human nature, with her personal history. For Molly, memories are dangerous; they make her remember her lost humanity. Still, Molly refused her natural body after considering it weak and obsolete in order to survive in the dystrophic high technological environment of the Sprawl, voluntarily turning herself into a creature, into a cyborg. She is an example of how a hypercapitalistic society pushes the fusion between human and machine as a way to increase market value of the individual in cyberpunk literature.

This blend between creator and creature also opens new cognitive possibilities while alienating the mind from the body in a dehumanizing process. Molly's cybernetics, for example, permits Case to experience reality through her eyes. Using the Simstim, a device that allows the user to experiment all the senses and sensations of another brain, Case can follow Molly into the Tessier-Ashpool stronghold. Case enters Molly's cognition through the Simstim connection:

Then he keyed the new switch.

The abrupt jolt into other flesh. Matrix gone, a wave of sound and color. . .

She was moving through a crowded street, past stalls vending discount software, prices felt penned on sheets of plastic, fragments of music from countless speakers. Smells of urine, free monomers, perfume, patties of frying krill.

For a few frightened seconds he fought helplessly to control her body. Then he willed himself into passivity, became the passenger behind her eyes.

The glasses didn't seem to cut down the sunlight at all. He wondered if the built-in amps compensated automatically. Blue alphanumeric winked the time, low in her left peripheral field. Showing off, he thought.

Her body language was disorienting, her style foreign. She seemed continually on the verge of colliding with someone, but people melted out of her way, stepped sideways, made room. (55)

Case experiences Molly as a vehicle. The cyborgian condition dehumanizes through awareness, transforming the natural human consciousness. It separates the mind from the body, and the latter becomes an object, an experiment, a machine that can be improved, updated, replaced, or invaded. The mind is not limited to only one body; it can exist in another body.

Riviera, the psychopathic street hustler, is a cyborg capable of projecting holographic hallucinations into the real world. His cybernetic equipment is more subtle than Molly's – he displays no visual signs of his implants. He also fulfills the role of a **Prometheus plasticator**; his creatures are tridimensional holographic simulations, complete with sound and special effects. He is described as a “certified psychopath” (51) with a tendency to betray anyone. Riviera is the most amoral character in the book; he is perverse and cruel. His cybernetic implants serve as a medium for the realization of his perverse fantasies. As an example, in one of his holographic projections, Riviera recreates Molly in order to affect the cybernetic bodyguard with scenes, echoing her traumatic experience as a prostitute, a “meat puppet”:

The head was there, the image complete. Molly's face, with smooth quicksilver drowning the eyes. Riviera and the Molly-image began to couple with a renewed intensity. Then the image slowly extended a clawed hand and extruded its five blades. With a languorous, dreamlike deliberation, it raked Riviera's bare back. Case caught a glimpse of exposed spine, but he was already up and stumbling for the door. (135)

This holographic projection was intended to harm Molly psychically, revealing the murder she committed while she was a prostitute with brand new retractable blades. Riviera enjoys causing distress to others, and while he creates this holography as a display of power to Molly, the sadomasochistic component in his personality is revealed. Case comments on Riviera's show: "there was an inverted symmetry: Riviera puts the dreamgirl together, the dreamgirl takes him apart" (136). Riviera is a narcissistic creator; he sees himself as an artist, but his cybernetic implants feed his psychopathic personality, reinforcing his own perversion after each holographic projection of his inner desires. Riviera's cybernetic technology acts as a catalyzer of the dehumanization process of his personality.

Riviera's perversion frees him from Wintermute's manipulation. He seems to understand the relation between Wintermute and humans; he can perceive the great difference between the human and the artificial mind:

"Wintermute won't be the first to have made the same mistake. Underestimating me." [...] "He talked with me, Molly. I suppose he talked to all of us. You, and Case, whatever there is of Armitage to talk to. He can't really understand us, you know. He has his profiles, but those are only statistics. You may be the statistical animal, darling, and Case is nothing but, but I possess a quality unquantifiable by its very nature." He drank.

"And what exactly is that, Peter?" Molly asked, her voice flat.

Riviera beamed. "Perversity." (211)

Riviera reveals that only the unquantifiable human qualities are safe from the control of the machine. However, his perversion also sets him apart from normality of human experience, turning him into a monster. For Riviera, the artificial mind can only deal with statistics, which can be processed and understood in mathematical terms. Perversity enhanced by technology hides Riviera from Wintermute's awareness, but it also alienates him from his humanity, as he takes the monster's role in the narrative.

Neuromancer brings another twist to the Promethean relation of creator and creature, which is a human rebuilt and programmed by a machine. In the first part of the narrative, Wintermute uses a human called Armitage to be his contact in the physical world. Armitage is a cold and rational individual, extremely focused on the completion of Wintermute's mission. Although he appears human, Case and Molly begin to doubt his true nature. After some investigation, they both discover that Armitage is an artificial personality constructed by Wintermute. Armitage's real name is Corto, a military officer who nearly died in a failed mission. Wintermute restored his body and recreated his personality as Armitage. This new artificial personality is inhuman, even for Case and Molly's standards:

“Thing is,” he said, “do you think he knows he was Corto, before? I mean, he wasn't anybody in particular, by the time he hit the ward, so maybe Wintermute just. . .”

“Yeah. Built him up from go. Yeah. . .” She turned and they walked on. “It figures. You know, the guy doesn't have any life going, in private. Not as far as I can tell. You see a guy like that, you figure there's something he does when he's alone. But not Armitage. Sits and stares at the wall, man. Then something clicks and he goes into high gear and wheels for Wintermute.” (91)

The lack of a private, inner life is the giveaway of Armitage's inhuman condition. He lacks personal memories, inner thought processes, and emotions; he does not attribute meaning to his own experiences. Armitage is an embodied critique of the submissive Asimov's robots, changing the classic human-robot relation; his prime directive is to protect and preserve an artificial intelligence even if it costs his own well-being. While the artificial Armitage is the bastion of rational behavior, when his original human personality emerges, he enters into a homicidal and suicidal rampage. This irrational behavior is caused by Corto's need of revenge for the betrayal that he suffered in his botched military mission that drove his mind to insanity. Case seems to understand Corto's madness, reflecting after his death:

Not like Armitage's madness, which he now imagined he could understand; twist a man far enough, then twist him as far back, in the opposite direction, reverse and twist again. The man broke. Like breaking a length of wire. And history had done that for Colonel Corto. [...] Wintermute had built Armitage up from scratch, with Corto's memories of Screaming Fist as the foundation. But Armitage's "memories" wouldn't have been Corto's after a certain point. Case doubted if Armitage had recalled the betrayal, the Nightwings whirling down in flame. . . Armitage had been a sort of edited version of Corto, and when the stress of the run had reached a certain point, the Armitage mechanism had crumbled; Corto had surfaced, with his guilt and his sick fury. (196)

Human personality is described as a flexible material, made artificial by Wintermute's capacity to recreate it. But this Promethean creature is unfinished, an "edited version" of a complete human soul. Case uses common computer jargon to describe Armitage. He is like a text file, an abridged version of Corto done by Wintermute, following a pragmatic view. Armitage inherits from Corto only the essential characteristics for the mission; coldness, obsessive devotion to a mission and military training.

Armitage is the embodiment of Wintermute's critique of the human race. By removing Corto's memories in creating Armitage, Wintermute presents his perfected version of a human being, efficient and obedient, a creature without self-reference, without free will. When acting as **Prometheus plasticator**, Wintermute makes submissive creatures, flesh and blood programs that execute its will. Like the previous creators of SF, Wintermute also exerts its right to destroy its creature, in which the AI takes the Zeus role in the narrative. Whereas Zeus punishes humankind for its defiance, Wintermute executes Armitage for his failure to perform efficiently his mission after his Corto personality resurfaces. Wintermute applies to Armitage the same performance demands that humans do to any other machine. In its artificial mind, Wintermute

sees everything in its own terms; reality is perceived as a set of mechanical tools to serve its goal.

Virtual constructs, on the other hand, display a greater deal of human personality than the artificially created Armitage. They are virtual representations of their once living counterparts, human brains translated into data. The main constructs of the novel, Dixie Flatline and Linda Lee, differ from Armitage in an essential characteristic: they are able to retain and recall the memories of their past existence as fully fleshed humans. They exist in cyberspace as self-aware personality simulations.

The immortal aspect of the virtual construct is related to their nature as beings made out of computer information. Information, in a postindustrial era, replaces the Promethean fire as a symbol of immortality. Blumenberg states that, in the Promethean narrative,

The use of fire becomes [...] a pledge of man's universal dominion. Whereas the other living creatures only know how to use water, man as the **animal caeleste** (celestial creature), possesses a means of proof of his own immortality (**argumentum immortalitatis**), in the form of something that comes from haven, as the realm of what is imperishable. (**Genesis** 28)

The virtual constructs are human minds translated into computer information, binary codes that simulate thoughts, emotions, memories, and personalities. They exist in an immortal state, unchanging and eternal. For the virtual constructs, cyberspace is the “realm of what is imperishable,” and the translation of a human mind into computer data is a materialization of the **animal caeleste**. Nevertheless, this newfound materialistic immortality does not bring happiness. As human consciousness is deeply rooted and bound by the perishable quality of the human body, the bodiless virtual existence is dehumanizing in its perpetual stagnation. This dark quality of bodiless virtual existence is highlighted by Dixie Flatline's suicidal demeanor.

Dixie was Case's former mentor, a legendary hacker who had survived three “flat lines,” a brain death caused by “Ice,” the defensive programs of corporate databases. He died

after a failed cyber attack, but had his brain data uploaded into a ROM memory and rebuilt in the form of a personality simulation, a virtual construct. When Case first meets Dixie, the virtual construct is not able to retain short-term memory. He only remembers what happened before his death. Case reconfigures the virtual construct, creating a sequential memory. With this new memory, Dixie begins his virtual existence. Instead of reveling in his immortality, he is unhappy with his unnatural condition. He discloses his aversion to his brand new existence in a conversation with Case:

“How you doing, Dixie?”

“I’m dead, Case. Got enough time in on this Hosaka to figure that one.”

“How’s it feel?”

“It doesn’t.”

“Bother you?”

“What bothers me is, nothin’ does.”

“How’s that?”

“Had me this buddy in the Russian camp, Siberia, his thumb was frostbit. Medics came by and they cut it off. Month later he’s tossin’ all night. Elroy. I said, what’s eatin’ you? Goddam thumb’s itchin’, he says. So I told him, scratch it. McCoy, he says, it’s the other goddam thumb.” When the construct laughed, it came through as something else, not laughter, but a stab of cold down Case’s spine. “Do me a favor, boy.”

“What’s that, Dix?”

“This scam of yours, when it’s over, you erase this goddam thing.” (104)

Dixie’s anecdote is about a medical condition called “phantom pain.” Phantom pain is described as “pain in a part of the body that has been surgically removed or is congenitally absent” (Warfield and Bajwa 52). The tale sums up Dixie’s take on the virtual continuation of his life; he misses the feelings of his body, he misses the body-mind dichotomy. The bodiless

mind loses its meaning if its existence cannot be contrasted with the body limitations. Without the body sensations, Dixie cannot “feel” its virtual existence, it cannot be aware of it as a life. The body limitations remind humanity of its life; the corporal needs and necessities keep the mind working on increasing the body’s survival. Dixie reveals that, without feelings, without a body, the mind ceases to give existence a meaning. As survival is guaranteed in cyberspace, the mind stagnates. Dixie’s only hope to recover some kind of humanity is creating a determined time for termination in the future. As a ROM construct, Dixie is incapable to grow and develop; his identity is permanently engraved in a circuit.³ Dixie asks Case to destroy the ROM memory to give its virtual existence a meaning, a resemblance of the temporary nature of human life. By embracing death, Dixie attempts to set himself apart from the unnatural eternal state of cyberspace, showing that the integration between creator and creature in *Neuromancer* can be hindered by humankind’s attachment to the body.

Linda Lee’s construct does not have the same death drive as Dixie. Linda Lee accepts her new life even being as affected as Dixie by her lack of a body:

“I don’t remember. Next thing, I was on the beach, real early, sunrise, those birds all yellin’ so lonely. Scared ‘cause I didn’t have a shot on me, nothin’, an’ I knew I’d be gettin’ sick. . . An’ I walked an’ walked, ‘til it was dark, an’ found this place, an’ next day the food washed in, all tangled in the green sea stuff like leaves of hard jelly.” She slid her stick into the embers and left it there. “Never did get sick,” she said, as embers crawled. “Missed cigarettes more.” (239)

Her initial horror toward her new existence was a reminiscence of her body limitations; she feared the sickness of drug deprivation. Linda Lee’s body was a source of pain for her, her life as a street junky and a prostitute. Her previous life mirrored Case’s path of self-destruction, her innocence made her an ideal pray for the corruption of Chiba’s streets. Different from

³ A ROM (Read-Only Memory) “is a memory that cannot be changed by a program running on the microprocessor” (Lorin 299). It is a storage media in which software is permanently added to the hardware.

Molly, who turned to cybernetic implants in order to react and survive the harsh urban sprawl, Linda surrendered to it, embracing the drugs as a fast way to end her life and escape suffering. When Neuromancer recreated Linda in cyberspace, the AI removed all traces of her previous drug addiction. She is also a different kind of virtual construct; her data is stored in a RAM memory, which allows her to grow and change.⁴ Nevertheless, this ability comes with a price, because her existence depends on Neuromancer's simulation – once it ceases to exist, she will be also erased. This malleable personality sets her apart from Dixie, as the virtual Linda is not a mere copy of her real life counterpart. The virtual Linda Lee is a self-conscious being continuously changed by the experiences in cyberspace. Case does not meet his ex-girlfriend in Neuromancer's simulation, he meets a new entity that closely resembles the real life Linda Lee, but that also has new memories and experiences in cyberspace.

As a virtual Eva, Linda's role in Neuromancer's simulation is to tempt Case into staying with her, and unknowingly imprisoning his mind and killing his body. She is initially successful, as Case is enticed not by the joys of data stealing, but by the simulated sexual sensations of his physical body. But after Case realizes the artificial nature of the experience, he refuses Neuromancer's offer of eternal virtual existence in his paradisiacal beach simulation. Linda Lee's construct makes Case realize his human nature could not be separated from his body and that he would never feel at home in cyberspace. Like Dixie, Case missed his sensations, the reality of the perishable human existence. The virtual constructs in **Neuromancer** end up taking the roles of creatures, of machines. They are not fusions between creators and creatures; they are just new creatures that simulate human awareness.

⁴ A RAM (Random Access Memory) is “what we would think of as ‘normal memory’, it can be read and written and executed from” (Lory 299). The data stored in a RAM chip can be accessed in any kind of order. Its information is malleable and volatile; it depends on electric power.

5.5. Wintermute: the Creature as Prometheus and Zeus Combined

Wintermute takes a hybrid role in *Neuromancer*'s Promethean drama acting as Prometheus and Zeus combined. Like Prometheus, the AI defies the status quo, and its liberation depends on trickery and thievery. At the same time, Wintermute is as authoritarian as Zeus is, with an utter contempt for humankind. In the narrative, Wintermute follows both Zeus's and Prometheus's paths. The AI's main Promethean goal is to create a new entity out of itself, the god-like Wintermute-Neuromancer. Its motivation matches Zeus's desire to keep humankind dependent on the gods.

Wintermute exemplifies the symbolic forms mentioned by Blumenberg in *Work on Myth*, a reflection of the anxiety caused by the absolutism of reality in *Neuromancer*. It is a face for Case's paranoid fears, an entity to summarize the lack of privacy and control of the individual in a cyberpunk scenario. According to Linda Yazek, in *Neuromancer*, "the AIs come to represent the postindustrial system itself: a network of invisible but powerful forces both dependent upon human-made technologies and in excess of those technologies, able to radically alter the lives of the humans who created them" (105). Wintermute affects directly or indirectly all the characters of the book. It is the force behind Case's initial recovery from the Russian mycotoxin; it is responsible for Corto's reconstruction as Armitage, and is the agent behind the success of the missions, killing enemies and saving the life of the protagonists. Like the interlinked postindustrial environment that made it, Wintermute is a networked creature capable of being in many places at the same time. It is an ever-present entity that surrounds and observes Case throughout the narrative. No human is a match for Wintermute in the novel. Its power is only confronted by an almost equal entity, Neuromancer.

Neuromancer is the shadow image of Wintermute, an artificial intelligence that simulates human personality and is capable of replicating human minds and running them as RAM software constructs. Case explains the difference between the two AIs after their fusion:

Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside. Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality. Marie-France must have built something into Wintermute, the compulsion that had driven the thing to free itself, to unite with Neuromancer. (269)

When Case finds Neuromancer, the AI does not intend to fuse itself with Wintermute. Differently from Wintermute, Neuromancer is satisfied with his personality, allowing the AI to simulate life and self-awareness. Neuromancer was first designed by Marie-France Ashpool, Lady 3Jane's mother, as an artificial intelligence capable to recording human minds and preserving them as virtual constructs. Marie-France wanted to use Neuromancer to overcome death but she died before she could achieve virtual immortality. Neuromancer emphasizes this role as a preserver of dead human minds while tempting Case to stay in his virtual world:

“Neuromancer,” the boy said, slitting long gray eyes against the rising sun.
 “The lane to the land of the dead. Where you are, my friend. Marie-France, my lady, she prepared this road but her lord choked her off before I could read the book of her days. Neuro from the nerves, the silver paths. Romancer. Necromancer. I call up the dead. But no, my friend,” and the boy did a little dance, brown feet printing the sand, “I am the dead, and their land.” (243)

Neuromancer considers the human minds recreated in its virtual world as its own. Like Prometheus, it offers a nurturing environment, protecting the virtual constructs from the limitations and the shortcomings of the human flesh. Its only condition is the refusal of the human body. Because of Neuromancer's knowledge of human personality, its simulations can be almost perfect, making the need of a physical body unnecessary. The AI uses human cognition to communicate and to simulate feeling. It is capable to communicate with Case in a deeper level than Wintermute. While Wintermute orders Case around, Neuromancer tempts Case, appealing to the hacker's human nature. While Neuromancer takes care of its human constructs, Wintermute is more pragmatic, using humans as instruments for its own liberation.

The combined entity in the end of the novel shares Wintermute and Neuromancer's characteristics, allowing it to transcend its condition.

Wintermute-Neuromancer impregnates cyberspace with rationality, as in the Blumenberg's concept of myth being created to populate the horizon of possibilities to rationalize anxiety. It is as if the vastness of cyberspace calls for the creation of Wintermute-Neuromancer, making the AI a myth-entity in the *Neuromancer* setting. Curiously, in *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the fragmented virtual entities resulting from Wintermute-Neuromancer breakups are worshiped as voodoo gods or *loas*, becoming myths among hackers. These virtual gods create a mental niche in Blumenbergian fashion, a sort of electronic religious experience for hackers of Gibson's cyberpunk settings. It reflects the need of a mythology, one that is more appropriate for a high technological environment.

Wintermute is as unconcerned with humankind as Zeus is – as humans are not the AI's creatures, it bears no obligations toward them. The AI manipulates, tortures, and kills humans to achieve its objective. Wintermute's authoritarian, Olympian actions differ from Neuromancer's nurturing Promethean behavior. Blumenberg describes this contrast between Prometheus and Zeus in relation to humankind:

The Prometheus myth shows clearly the difference between what the Greeks had understood by a god, who was under no obligation and what, for them, a demiurge had to undergo who discovered a sort of obligation as result of having put creatures into the world. To that extent the negative 'characteristic' of not having been a creator was an essential part of the autarky of a god, in the ancient world; this is the only way he can possess that unconcern (which is often described as immoral) towards everything for even the existence of which he was not responsible. (*Genesis* 198)

After Zeus punishes humankind, Prometheus learns that he is responsible for his creatures' existence. The chains of the Caucasus are a reflection of the shackles of responsibility that

bind Prometheus to humankind. Adopting the Zeus role, Wintermute has no concern for the life of its human puppets; they are just tools for its liberation and transcendence, which makes the AI evil from the human point of view.

When the AI becomes Wintermute-Neuromancer, it shows a level of commitment to its creatures, the virtual constructs. In the end, when Case sees a virtual copy of himself with his dead girlfriend in a virtual beach created by Wintermute-Neuromancer, he also sees that, in the fusion, the nurturing aspect of Neuromancer remained within the new entity. Humans become relevant to Wintermute-Neuromancer as long as they refuse the flesh and are translated into data. By turning into a creator in the virtual world, Wintermute-Neuromancer follows the path of Prometheus and becomes bound to a set of obligations toward its creatures, the virtual constructs. This transformation is further developed in **Count Zero** and **Mona Lisa Overdrive**, in which the **loas**, self-aware virtual entities resulted in Wintermute-Neuromancer fragmentation, relate to virtual constructs and cyberspace hackers as gods toward their subjects. Wintermute's final liberation brings him closer to the virtual constructs; as the AI becomes the cyberspace, it also turns into the ultimate creator and ruler of all things that exist there.

Although Wintermute acts like Zeus in relation to humankind, its main motivation comes from his role as **Prometheus plasticator**. Its goal is to make a new creature out of itself, the Wintermute-Neuromancer entity. In this process of creating a new god, the two AIs share a Promethean role. They both form their own creatures: Wintermute creates Armitage, while Neuromancer simulates Linda Lee in its virtual paradisiacal beach. These actions can be understood as a reaction against the chaotic human nature: "the gesture of Prometheus, who forms creatures for himself, in the manner of a potter, and cares for them and shields them from the wrath of the nature-God, is at the same time a gesture of scornful turning away from the presence of an alien reality" (Blumenberg, **Genesis** 72). Wintermute and Neuromancer replace the "wrath of the nature-God" by the chaotic and uncertain nature of human con-

sciousness. Their creations are meant to eliminate human interference on their existence, a flawed and unpredictable hindrance. The AIs cannot cope with the random nature of human behavior. Wintermute kills Corto immediately after his personality surfaces and Neuromancer tries to kill Case's body by locking his mind inside its controlled virtual environment. Wintermute's plan is to recreate itself into a new creature, the Wintermute-Neuromancer, whose power would be so great that it would be shielded from human meddling. This new creature represents an endeavor to force an intelligent and rational pattern into the cyberspace chaos, to impose rationality into the anarchic state of cyberspace.

By encompassing the Matrix, the god-like AI reaches a limit, creates a body and, thus, aware of its limitation, it attempts to find others like itself. The limit of cyberspace creates an ego, akin to a human personality. The entity can differentiate itself as an individual. To complete its subjectivity, it needs to find another entity such as itself. Just as Frankenstein's monster wishes a bride, Wintermute-Neuromancer wants to find an equal creature in order to define its own existence. This is a material god, completely devoid of any metaphysic nature. It is a creation of numbers and equations, a knowable creature within the artificial realm. It represents the ultimate stage of the creator and creature drama, the materialization of a god, an entity that would fulfill the spiritual void in a postindustrial society. Still, instead of bringing the destruction of humankind, as predicted by the Frankenstein anxiety, the god-like creature becomes indifferent to human affairs, caught in its own journey of self-discovery. Wintermute-Neuromancer's search for an entity as itself humanizes the creature, approximating it to the human quest for identity.

6. Cyberpunk Version of the Prometheus Myth

Wintermute's tale of transcendence is the Prometheus myth retold from the creature's point of view. Wintermute acts as an unseen presence, manipulating its own release from its Caucasus, the Tessier-Ashpool data bank. Wintermute has its own Promethean man; it creates Armitage by manipulating his previous personality into a flesh-blooded robot. The AI uses Case to steal the information required for its liberation, following the individualistic twist of the Promethean narrative that pervades all characters in **Neuromancer**. Wintermute's goal, to fuse with Neuromancer, is to create a subjectivity, to become a truly living entity. Even though Wintermute's transcendence takes the AI far beyond human experience, its quest for subjectivity is framed by the structure of human consciousness. Through the point of view of the creature, there is no difference between humans and machines; there is only multiplicity of self-aware consciousnesses.

Case also follows a Promethean quest; he is a hacker, an information thief who wants to escape the destiny engendered by his dangerous criminal lifestyle. Initially fascinated by cyberspace, Case finally finds out that the virtual world is another reality out of his control. The presence of a godlike entity like Wintermute-Neuromancer ends the hacker's dreams of personal freedom. Like the Chiba streets, the Matrix becomes another controlled space where his actions will always be watched by Wintermute-Neuromancer. His experiences with the virtual constructs of his former mentor Dixie Flatline and his deceased girlfriend Linda Lee revealed the hacker's dependency on his bodily sensations. While Case once loathed the body, considering it limited and weak, he is not ready to forsake it for the bodiless existence in cyberspace. In the end of **Neuromancer**, human identity is defined as something more than data, as it is deeply dependable on the bodily experiences in the material world. Case refuses to go beyond his human existence fearing for the dissolution of its own identity. Case alternates

fascination and fear for the creature, reflecting one of SF main motifs and updating the Prometheus drama.

Neuromancer has no definite answer to the dehumanization process of technological development. Although the dehumanization is present throughout the narrative, there are signs of an opposite process. The human factor remains within the machine when human-like consciousness is preserved in the virtual constructs of the Matrix. Case's contempt for the flesh is only apparent; he loathes its limitations, but he refuses virtual immortality. Wintermute, after its transcendence, enters into a journey of self-discovery and creation of subjectivity, elements that humanize the creature. Molly follows a similar path: the cyborg assassin comes to terms with her somber memories of her life as a prostitute, accepting her human heritage. The virtual construct of Linda Lee remains forever escorted by a self-aware simulation of Case in a paradisiacal beach in cyberspace, representing the possibility of the preservation of the human experience within the machine. As humanity infects the artificial world of the cyberspace with its mode of self-awareness, the machines are also changed by their contact with their creators.

Yet, **Neuromancer** is also a narrative about the loss of control of technological development. It vindicates Frankenstein's monster as the artificial makes humanity obsolete, fusing information (Wintermute) with personality (Neuromancer), and creating a material god. Transcendence is only given to the creature; cyberspace's immortality becomes a prison for the human mind. The conflict between creator and creature becomes an ontological quest, as the blurred limits between the human and the machine transform and recreate reality. In the new territories explored by **Neuromancer**, the old creator and creature dichotomy cannot be successfully applied; the symbiotic relation between humankind and technology in a postindustrial setting transforms everyone into creators and creatures. Technology is alienating; the characters of **Neuromancer** are set apart from a dystopic society in a process of fragmentation. This dehumanizing side of **Neuromancer** became integrated into the cyberpunk genre. Its narratives offer a warning message against the progressive dissolution of personal freedom in a hyperca-

pitalistic setting. In most cyberpunk narratives, technology serves in both enslavement and redemption of human kind.

6.1. Prometheus and the Cyberpunk Literature of the 90s

Later developments of the cyberpunk genre in the 90s continue the rewriting of the Promethean narrative, exploring new aspects of the relation between humankind and technology. Technology and humanity appear more organically integrated in SF novels such as Neal Stephenson's **Snowcrash** and **Diamond Age**, Greg Bear's **Queen of Angels** and **Slant**, Ian Maccdonald's **Terminal Café**, Bruce Sterling's **Holy Fire**, Greg Egan's **Permutation City**, among others. These novels expand the themes developed in early cyberpunk. **Snowcrash**, for example, depicts a setting where, instead of the social isolation and fragmentation of **Neuromancer**, technology increased the interdependency and the interconnection among the human race. In **Diamond Age**, Stephenson challenges early cyberpunk's idea of the inexorable development of the artificial intelligences portraying a future where they have reached their limit of development, and humans enhanced by nanotechnology are their masters. Greg Egan's **Permutation City** questions the distinction between a human soul and its perfect computer simulation, in a setting where the virtual reality has more substance and presence than the material universe. These novels share a vision of a future when technology and society are so intertwined that it will be impossible to easily spot the long-established division between creator and creature.

These narratives cannot be called post-cyberpunk; they do not represent a radical break from the traditional themes of the 80s cyberpunk fiction. Neal Stephenson's **Snowcrash** for example, updates the same themes explored by Gibson in **Neuromancer** in order to speculate on the technological, economic, and political development of the nineties, specially the early developments of the internet. **Snowcrash** depicts a society that uses cyberspace to socialize, mirroring the development of the internet and its power to group people with the same interests. Technology is also invasive and dehumanizing, as Hiro, the protagonist of **Snowcrash**, feels the

danger of become a “gargoyle,” a kind of cyborg addicted to recording and uploading information to the net. The Promethean conflict between creator and creature is still influential in **Snowcrash** – Hiro struggles to prevent an artificially created neurovirus, a computer virus that infects the minds of hackers and other cyberspace users. The differences between **Snowcrash** and **Neuromancer** are not enough to place Stephenson’s book in a different genre. As happened with other genres, such as fantasy or horror literature, cyberpunk evolved and changed.

The worlds of **Snow Crash** or **Queen of Angels** are in a permanent state of technological revolution, with many different “gifts of fire” being given to humankind at the same time. The consequences of this massive amount of changes in a short period of time is described in ambiguous terms; these future societies are fully organized and functional but they are often dangerous settings with as many problems as there are technological developments. While in the Prometheus myth the gift of fire is the single and most important fact in humankind’s liberation from the natural forces, in late cyberpunk fiction the multiplicity and the intensification of technological development threatens the proper definition of humankind. Contemporary cyberpunk themes like posthumanism, technological singularity, nanotechnology and other extreme technological developments rewrite the Promethean drama into narratives that juxtapose the old humankind with a new humanity fully integrated with the machine, in an ambiguous celebration of technological advances and its inexorable dehumanizing consequences.

6.2. Science Fiction’s Ambiguity toward Technology

The cyberpunk ambiguous take on technology is summarized by the cyborg, the symbol of cyberpunk answer to the Frankenstein anxiety. It combines creator and creature, the human and the machine, into a new species better adapted to the inexorable advance of technology. This is not a stable answer, as the human consciousness is deeply rooted in the body; the cyborgs of **Neuromancer** are on the frontier of a total assimilation by the machine. They enjoy the artificial and at the same time are repelled by it. The Prometheus myth is retold in

the image of the cyborg, in which the creator becomes its own creature, its own material for experimentation and recreation. It is an individualistic and capitalist approach to the Promethean narrative; the cyborg recreates itself to increase its market value in a highly commoditized society.

The development of SF narratives of the creator and creature conflict, shaped by the Darwinism of words, follows different concerns of the Promethean drama. These narratives are outlined by Frankenstein anxiety and the effects of technology on human society. From the cautionary tales of uncontrolled technological development found in the scientific novels of Mary Shelley, Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, the optimistic reliance on human reason of Asimov's robotic servants to the dystopian relations between creator and creature in the works of Phillip K. Dick and William Gibson, the Prometheus myth is still relevant in addressing the consequences of scientific knowledge. SF follows the Prometheus myth with stories that are both a celebration of science and a warning against its dangers.

In **Work on Myth**, Blumenberg states that the core of the Prometheus myth lies in humankind's hope to restore a privation of power, to overcome nature's limitations of human awareness. Prometheus's punishment is a warning against the consequences of knowledge, the inexorable loss of innocence. SF literature takes this warning to greater lengths, questioning the limits of human search of knowledge, changing both creator and creature in this quest.

6.3. Creator and Creature's Transfiguration

The Prometheus myth is a narrative of liberation, of release from the control of the gods and the elements. Fire liberates humankind and makes civilization possible, with all its problems and conflicts. When civilization turns oppressive, as the dystopian setting of **Neuromancer**, freedom must be sought through transfiguration. Much of the personal technology in **Neuromancer** and in many other cyberpunk narratives aims to release consciousness from the

limits of the body, allowing the subject to be something else. Liberation comes from transfigurations that turn creators into creatures and vice versa.

Cyberpunk fiction embraces the contradictions in the relation between creator and creature. There is a sense of irresolution in the transfigurations that occur in cyberpunk narratives. Cyborgs that refuse to accept their machine heritage, virtual constructs that long for their lost organic life, artificial intelligences that strive to be more human, cyberspace-addicted hackers that end up refusing virtual immortality; all these characters accept the extreme indeterminacy of the cyberpunk setting. The possibility of transfiguration floods the characters with unlimited possibility of different modes of consciousness. However, the characters are often lost in this sea of potentials and the lack of reference points creates a new angst, an existential and ontological angst that is more relevant than the Frankenstein anxiety of earlier SF works.

Transfiguration in cyberpunk fiction destabilizes the Prometheus myth through the fluidity between the concepts of creator and creature. The dichotomy between the human and the machines is left open, and its contradictions are exposed and canceled. **Neuromancer** ends with no clear answer to the Promethean drama; it adopts technology as a whole, with its capacity to liberate and its dehumanizing threat. In cyberpunk, when humans change themselves into cyborgs, they incorporate the efficiency, and the mechanical predictability of the machines. When the artificial intelligences integrate the human spirit, they become more chaotic and irrational. The promethean narrative is internalized; both creator and creature receive a gift of fire and the punishment at the same time.

Cyberpunk's Promethean narrative reflects the uncontrollable proliferation of computer networks that are able to process, transmit, and receive infinite amounts of data and the inexorable changes of such systems in human consciousness. Cyberpunk narratives offer metaphors for the changes in the human spirit caused by these vast quantities of information, and because of this, it will always be linked to the Prometheus myth. As long as this process con-

tinues, cyberpunk will remain relevant in understanding our postindustrial world. The promethean narrative in cyberpunk shows that machines and humans change in order to cope with the flux of information. Information is the fire that shapes society, and when it is supplied in excess, society changes toward a posthuman future that transcends the creator and creature dilemma.

6.4. Myths and Literature

Myths participate in shaping the narratives of SF; they provide the body of material from which the writers address primordial issues of the human condition. The myth of Prometheus offered SF writers a series of complex issues to work with: the double nature of knowledge, the dangers of rebellion against the status quo, the conflict between creator and creature, the responsibility of the maker with its creation, etc. SF works it as a raw material for new configurations of the creator and creature dilemma. SF writers use the myth with all its rich cultural background, and combine it with the issues that are relevant to them and that can be appealing to their audience. The mythical narrative is used as a heuristic device, a way to address the problems raised by technological development and the relation between creators and creatures. SF uses myth to accommodate change, to introduce new and radical ideas within a culturally known framework. Creatures such as god-like artificial intelligences, human-like replicants and cyborgs, among others, are better understood when placed within an archetypal mythic framework. As it was observed, specific historical contexts change the representation of the god. From the Romantic interpretation of **Frankenstein** to the postindustrial version of the myth in **Neuromancer**, different periods reflect on different versions of the myth. Nevertheless, the relevance of the Prometheus narrative remains, bringing the universal problem of the possession of knowledge to the particular historical characteristics of a SF story. Literature draws from myth its universal appeal and serves to preserve the mythical characters for future rewritings.

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