

The Flavour of *Poor Things* (2023)

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Abstract

Poor Things has achieved remarkable success, surpassing \$100 million globally and becoming Yorgos Lanthimos's highest-grossing film. This accomplishment highlights the film's broad appeal and its ability to engage audiences with its unique blend of dark comedy, magical realism, and rich thematic content. The present paper aims to analyse *Poor Things* (2023), adapted from Alasdair Gray's 1992 novel and reinterpreting Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* for a modern audience. The film follows the journey of Bella Baxter, a resurrected woman navigating a surreal, gothic version of Victorian London, as she evolves and grapples with questions of identity, morality, and empathy. This paper seeks to uncover a potentially overlooked thematic dimension in the film – its subtle engagement with veganism. By examining the narrative and thematic elements, the paper reveals how *Poor Things* subtly aligns with vegan principles, particularly in Bella's growing empathy toward animals and her rejection of meat. While veganism is not explicitly emphasised, it emerges as a significant undercurrent, deepening the film's exploration of ethics and the interconnectedness of all living beings. Through this lens, the paper positions *Poor Things* as a multifaceted cinematic work that not only reinterprets classic literature but also engages with contemporary ethical issues, showcasing Lanthimos's ability to provoke thoughtful reflection through cinema.

Keywords: *reading food, veganism, weird, Victorian fiction, multifaceted cinema*

From Mary Shelley to Yorgos Lanthimos

Yorgos Lanthimos's *Poor Things* (2023) is a cinematic odyssey that navigates the tumultuous waters of creation, identity, and ethical responsibility. Drawing inspiration from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Alasdair Gray's 1992 novel, the film reimagines the tale of resurrection, not merely as a return to life, but as an awakening to the moral complexities of existence. Set in a mesmerising, gothic version of Victorian London, *Poor Things* presents the story of Bella Baxter – a creature reborn into a fascinating and cruel world.

While *Poor Things* serves as a reimagination of Shelley's novel, it deviates from traditional interpretations by depicting Bella as an attractive young woman rather than a monstrous creature. This portrayal introduces a unique twist to Bella's character, which gradually unfolds as the narrative progresses. The film explores Bella's transformation from a passive being, brought back to

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life by the eccentric Dr Godwin Baxter, into an assertive and self-aware individual who begins to challenge the societal norms imposed upon her.

Beneath this reimagined surface lies a deeper connection to the original text, particularly in its subtle engagement with ethical questions – a connection that becomes more apparent when considering Mary Shelley’s ethical stance.

Shelley’s vegetarianism, as evidenced in her portrayal of the creature’s refusal to consume meat, adds a subtle yet significant layer to the thematic discourse of the film. In *Frankenstein*, the creature explicitly states: “My food is not that of man. I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite; acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment.” (Shelley 1831: 120) This ethical choice reflects a broader commentary on the moral responsibilities of creation and existence – a theme that *Poor Things* explores through Bella’s evolving empathy and ethical awareness. This aspect of the *Frankenstein* novel, as highlighted by vegan scholar Carol J. Adams in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, remains underexplored despite the extensive critical attention the work has received. Adams notes the remarkable oversight in critical discourse regarding the creature’s vegetarianism, which subtly underscores a broader ethical narrative within Shelley’s work (1990: 108).

Lanthimos’s film, with its dark humour and surreal landscapes, invites audiences to contemplate the boundaries of humanity and the nature of empathy. Yet, beneath its vivid narrative and striking visuals lies a deeper current – one that questions the ethical fabric of our interactions with all living beings. In a world where beings are often commodified, where the distinction between human and animal blurs, *Poor Things* challenges us to reconsider our place in the web of life.

Understanding vegetarianism and veganism

This foundational connection between Shelley’s ethical stance and the narrative of *Poor Things* invites a deeper exploration of how the film aligns with themes of veganism and ethical living. In order to discuss the significance of this message, it is necessary to briefly consider the ethical frameworks that underpin it – namely, vegetarianism and veganism. These concepts transcend dietary choices, encompassing broader philosophical and ethical considerations that are important to understanding the film’s subtle yet powerful commentary. Vegetarianism and veganism both stem from ethical concerns about animal treatment, but they differ in their extent and intensity. Vegetarianism typically involves avoiding meat while still consuming other animal products like dairy and eggs. In contrast, veganism goes further by rejecting all forms of animal exploitation, including the use of animal products in food, clothing, and other areas of life.

In *The Edinburgh Companion to Vegan Literary Studies* (2022), edited by Laura Wright and Emelia Quinn, veganism is portrayed not simply as a diet

but as an all-encompassing ethical stance. Wright and Quinn argue that, “veganism does operate for many as a way of thinking about and engaging with the world, one that is experienced as a deeply felt and embodied response to suffering” (2022: 1).

Similarly, *The Routledge Handbook of Vegan Studies*, also edited by Laura Wright, explores the complex dimensions of veganism, examining its connections with critical race studies, feminist theory, and environmental activism. Wright emphasises that veganism should be understood not just as a personal lifestyle choice, but as a political and ethical position that challenges systemic injustices, whether they affect animals, marginalised human communities, or the environment (2021: 4). This holistic perspective is essential for analysing how veganism subtly appears in cultural texts, including cinema.

The editors of both volumes are committed to expanding the understanding of veganism beyond its dietary dimensions. Wright and Quinn, in the introduction to *The Edinburgh Companion to Vegan Literary Studies*, articulate their vision of veganism as an interdisciplinary and intersectional field of study that intersects with ecofeminism, posthumanism, and literary theory. They argue that by exploring veganism in literature, scholars can uncover “the multiple contradictions and failings embedded in the enactment of a vegan life”, while also offering new perspectives on human and non-human relationships (2022: 2). In *The Routledge Handbook of Vegan Studies*, Laura Wright similarly emphasises the need to understand veganism as a critical framework that addresses broader ethical concerns. She highlights how veganism can serve as a lens to interrogate power dynamics, challenge entrenched social hierarchies and promote a more just and sustainable world. The choice to focus on veganism in these scholarly works reflects a broader cultural and academic shift towards recognizing the importance of ethical living and its representation in various media (2021: 6).

The theoretical perspectives offered by these collections of articles provide a vital context for understanding the ethical dimensions of *Poor Things*. The film’s portrayal of Bella Baxter’s evolving empathy towards animals and her rejection of meat can be seen as a reflection of the broader vegan principles articulated by Wright, Quinn, and other contributors to these volumes. Bella’s journey is not just a personal transformation, but an ethical awakening that aligns with the comprehensive view of veganism as an engagement with the world that challenges existing norms and advocates for a more compassionate and just society.

From Gray’s Glasgow to Lanthimos’s vision

The narrative of *Poor Things* is rooted in Alasdair Gray’s 1992 novel of the same name, which serves as the foundation for the film’s storyline. Gray’s novel, largely set in Glasgow, provides a deliberate social commentary on the city. In

contrast, Lanthimos's adaptation deliberately omits specific Scottish references, a choice that carries implications beyond geographical context, affecting the film's thematic emphasis, audience appeal, and artistic interpretation.

One significant implication of omitting Scottish references is the broadening of the film's appeal to a wider, more global audience. By removing the specific cultural and geographical context of Glasgow, Lanthimos transforms the story into a more universal narrative that can resonate with viewers from diverse backgrounds. This approach enables the film to explore themes of identity, ethical boundaries, and societal norms without being tethered to a particular location, thereby making the narrative more accessible internationally. As film scholar Andrew Higson observes, "Transnational cinema often seeks to avoid specific cultural markers that might limit a film's international appeal, opting instead for a more universal approach to storytelling." (2006: 19)

Moreover, the absence of Scottish references shifts the focus from the socio-political commentary on Glasgow to a more abstract and fantastical exploration of the human condition. Gray's original novel used the setting of Glasgow to critique the social and political landscape of the time, embedding the story within a specific cultural context. In contrast, Lanthimos's film, by eschewing these references, opts for a more stylised and surreal representation of Victorian London. This shift enables the film to delve deeper into the fantastical elements of the story, enhancing its Gothic atmosphere and emphasizing the universal aspects of Bella Baxter's journey.

Lanthimos's approach was deeply influenced by his interaction with Alasdair Gray. As noted in an interview, Lanthimos met Gray shortly after acquiring the rights to adapt the novel and discussed his vision for the film. Although Gray passed away before the film's completion, Lanthimos has mentioned that their meeting gave him a better understanding of Gray's intentions and the thematic depth of the novel. This interaction allowed Lanthimos to preserve the novel's essence while bringing his unique vision to the screen, blending Gray's narrative with his distinct cinematic style (Welsh, 2024).

The omission of Scottish references also underscores Lanthimos's artistic vision, which prioritises a stylised and otherworldly depiction of the story over a culturally specific one. By doing so, the film aligns itself with the broader tradition of Gothic literature and cinema, where settings often serve as symbolic backdrops rather than realistic depictions of specific places. This choice reinforces the film's exploration of universal themes such as the boundaries between life and death, the nature of monstrosity, and the search for identity.

Yorgos Lanthimos's directorial style

Yorgos Lanthimos is renowned for his distinct directorial style, characterised by unconventional narratives, surrealism, dark humour, and a keen exploration of human behaviour and societal norms. His films often delve into themes of power, control, and the absurdity of social constructs, creating thought-provoking and visually striking cinematic experiences. Lanthimos's previous films, including *Dogtooth* (2009), *The Lobster* (2015), and *The Favourite* (2018), serve as critical touchstones in understanding his approach in *Poor Things*, particularly regarding the portrayal of food and consumption and their broader narrative significance. What follows is a brief introduction to each of these films with a focus on the representations of food.

1. *Dogtooth* (2009): Lanthimos's breakthrough film, *Dogtooth*, which won the Prix Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival, explores the extreme measures taken by parents to isolate their children from the outside world. Food plays a symbolic role, often used as a tool of control and manipulation within the isolated family. The parents dictate the children's access to food, reflecting the broader theme of control and the perversion of natural instincts. Here, food embodies power dynamics and the absurdity of the controlled environment, underscoring the artificiality of the family's isolated existence.
2. *The Lobster* (2015): This film presents a dystopian society where single people are transformed into animals if they fail to find a partner within a specific timeframe. *The Lobster* blends dark comedy with a critical examination of societal expectations around relationships, with food again serving as a crucial thematic element. The rigid rules around dining in the hotel where singles stay highlight the oppressive and dehumanising nature of society. The absurdity of these rituals, including the preparation and consumption of food, mirrors the broader absurdity of the social constructs entrapping the characters.
3. *The Favourite* (2018): Set in the court of Queen Anne, *The Favourite* explores themes of power, jealousy, and manipulation through a darkly comedic love triangle. Food is depicted grotesquely and excessively, symbolising the decadence and moral decay of the ruling class. The lavish feasts and indulgent consumption contrast with Queen Anne's physical ailments, emphasising the excesses of the elite. Food becomes a symbol of power and the corruption it engenders, with scenes of overeating and vomiting highlighting the grotesque realities of unchecked indulgence.

In *Poor Things*, Lanthimos continues his exploration of complex characters and societal norms through Bella Baxter. However, this film marks a significant departure in his portrayal of food. While Lanthimos's earlier films use food to

underscore themes of control, absurdity, and excess, *Poor Things* introduces a more nuanced and ethically charged portrayal. Here, food becomes a vehicle for exploring ethical boundaries and identity, particularly through Bella's evolving relationship with consumption. Unlike the grotesque or absurd representations in his earlier films, Lanthimos uses Bella's refusal to eat meat and her preference for plant-based foods to subtly introduce themes of veganism and ethical living. This shift aligns with the film's broader themes of resurrection and self-discovery, as Bella's dietary choices reflect her growing empathy and ethical awareness. The film's focus on Bella's rejection of meat serves as a quiet yet significant departure from Lanthimos's previous works, marking *Poor Things* as a film that not only questions societal norms but also engages with deeper philosophical considerations.

Grand appetites

Poor Things has clear ties to the traditional Gothic novel, but the film also draws inspiration from the historical figure of Dr Anna Kingsford, a prominent Victorian-era antivivisectionist, feminist, and mystic. The character of Bella Baxter embodies many of the ethical and philosophical stances associated with Kingsford, suggesting a deeper connection between the film's narrative and Kingsford's pioneering activism.

Dr Anna Kingsford was a pioneering advocate for animal rights and a staunch opponent of vivisection, paralleling the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Kingsford was also a committed vegetarian, believing that a plant-based diet was essential for fostering compassion toward animals and improving human health. In her influential work, *The Perfect Way in Diet* (1881), Kingsford argued for a return to what she considered humanity's natural diet, free from the cruelty of animal exploitation. Her activism and writings challenged the scientific and social conventions of her time, advocating for a new ethical paradigm that recognized the interconnectedness of all living beings (Coulthard 2022: 325-326). As noted in *The Edinburgh Companion to Vegan Literary Studies*, "Before the twentieth-century term 'veganism' appeared, some proponents of vegetarianism argued that dietary change did not complete the reform required to achieve the 'perfect way'" (Gregory, 2022: 319). Kingsford's contributions significantly shaped the early ethical frameworks of vegetarianism and veganism.

In *Poor Things*, Bella's actions and ethical choices echo Kingsford's philosophy. Like Kingsford, Bella rejects meat and demonstrates profound empathy for animals, particularly those disfigured by bizarre vivisection experiments. Her evolution from a passive creation to an assertive advocate for the oppressed mirrors Kingsford's journey as a woman who defied societal norms to champion the rights of both humans and nonhumans. Bella's

declaration in the film's final act— "I was created to break the rules"— resonates with Kingsford's defiance of the rigid structures of Victorian society.

Other characters and plot elements in *Poor Things* also engage with these themes. Dr Godwin Baxter's role as Bella's creator mirrors the scientific hubris Kingsford critiqued, while his eventual recognition of Bella's autonomy subtly challenges his initial disregard for ethical concerns. The subplot involving vivisection directly echoes Kingsford's opposition to animal cruelty, with Bella's empathy for the disfigured creatures reinforcing her alignment with Kingsford's advocacy for compassion. In contrast, characters like Archie represent the societal norms that Bella—and, by extension, Kingsford—defies. His patriarchal attitudes challenge Bella's ethical awakening, highlighting the resistance to Kingsford's ideals in her time. Additionally, the broader society depicted in the film reflects Victorian-era practices of commodification and exploitation, further challenging the ethical frameworks Kingsford championed.

While it is possible that the production team was not explicitly aware of Dr Kingsford, the parallels between Bella Baxter and Kingsford are striking. These parallels likely arise from the cultural and historical context. The Victorian influence on modern ethical debates, the Gothic tradition's focus on societal critique, and the revival of interest in figures like Kingsford contribute to the natural alignment between Bella's character and Kingsford's ideals. This connection enriches our understanding of Bella's character, and the ethical themes embedded in *Poor Things*, suggesting that the film's narrative resonates with the pioneering spirit and ethical commitments of figures like Dr Anna Kingsford.

The multifaceted meaning of *Poor Things*

The title *Poor Things* initially may not seem immediately clear, but the novel on which the film is based provides insight. Like Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and other Gothic novels of its time, Alasdair Gray's novel employs a frame narrative, presenting itself as a "found document" that the author is merely editing, suggesting the entire story is true. Within this narrative, the "editor" remarks:

I have also insisted on renaming the whole book POOR THINGS. Things are often mentioned in the story and every single character (apart from Mrs Dinwiddie and two of the General's parasites) is called poor or calls themselves that sometime or other. (1992: xi)

Chris Lambert, in his review "Poor Things Explained", offers the following interpretation of the title:

I think the title ultimately gets at this notion that we are all our poor things facing the overwhelming struggle to live well. The experience can break us. But some

continue to seize whatever hope is within reach. Either way, the title evokes a sense of empathy for humanity as a whole. (2023 online)

The implications of the title extend beyond the characters, encompassing empathy for all sentient beings, which aligns with vegan and anti-speciesist principles. The phrase “poor things” can be interpreted as “poor beings,” referring to not just the animals experimented on in the film, but also the various tormented characters Bella encounters, the impoverished individuals she tries to assist, and Bella herself, whose artificial nature raises questions about whether she is a being or a thing. The film suggests that there is no significant distinction between humans and other animals, aligning with the core axiom of anti-speciesism, where all beings are treated as things.

At the beginning of the film, Bella is more a thing than a human being, her brain replaced by that of a newborn. Brought back to life by Dr. Godwin Baxter, Bella starts as a being with little sense of self but vast intellectual potential. Her journey begins when Duncan Wedderburn (Mark Ruffalo), a lawyer intending to exploit her, takes her on a journey through Lisbon, Alexandria, and Paris. Along the way, Bella faces numerous challenges that help her develop a strong sense of self. Her experiences with the poor and marginalised, particularly those subjected to vivisection, lead her to unlearn societal conditioning and foster an ethical framework centred on care—much like the visions of Mary Shelley, Dr Anna Kingsford, and Carol J. Adams.

Bella’s transformation from an object to an empathetic, self-aware being directly reflects the film’s title. *Poor Things* encapsulates the film’s exploration of empathy and ethical living, extending compassion not just to humans but to all sentient beings. In this way, the title is a powerful symbol of the film’s overarching message, challenging the viewer to reconsider the boundaries between beings and things, human and animal.

The broader cultural and cinematic impact

Poor Things can be seen as a contemporary reinterpretation of classic Gothic literature, bringing new relevance to themes of creation, identity, and ethical responsibility. By positioning Bella Baxter’s story in a fantastical Victorian London, Lanthimos invites viewers to reflect on contemporary issues through the lens of a period setting. This approach highlights timeless ethical dilemmas while drawing parallels between historical and current societal issues, resonating with modern audiences.

The film’s unique blend of genres and rich visual style significantly contribute to its broader cinematic impact. *Poor Things* masterfully combines elements of Gothic fiction, dark comedy, and magical realism, creating a genre-bending narrative that challenges traditional cinematic boundaries. The Gothic elements are evident in the exploration of resurrection, monstrosity, and human identity, echoing the eerie atmosphere of classic Gothic literature.

Simultaneously, Lanthimos infuses the narrative with dark humour, using absurdity and satire to critique societal norms and human behaviour, much in the tradition of black comedies.

Magical realism plays a crucial role in grounding the fantastical elements within a believable, albeit surreal, world. By blending the real with the fantastical, Lanthimos explores profound ethical and philosophical questions without losing the audience in fantasy. This genre-blending enriches the narrative complexity of *Poor Things* and positions it within a broader cultural discourse, challenging viewers to reconsider the boundaries of genre in contemporary cinema.

The film's striking visual style amplifies its impact. Lanthimos's use of a fish-eye lens and hyper-stylized cinematography creates a distinctive aesthetic that sets *Poor Things* apart from conventional period dramas. The exaggerated and sometimes disorienting visuals contribute to the film's surreal atmosphere, reinforcing themes of distorted identity and reality. Thomas Elsaesser (2005) notes that "the blending of genres and the disruption of classical narrative forms are characteristic of a cinema that seeks to engage the viewer on multiple levels, both intellectually and emotionally" (506). Lanthimos's visual strategy exemplifies this approach, inviting viewers to question their perceptions of reality and the nature of the cinematic experience.

Moreover, the film's success could pave the way for more experimental and genre-blending films in mainstream cinema. By challenging the conventions of genre and narrative structure, *Poor Things* encourages directors to take creative risks and explore unconventional storytelling methods. This opens the door for a more diverse range of films that push the boundaries of traditional cinema, potentially leading to a richer and more varied cinematic landscape. In this way, *Poor Things* not only reinterprets Gothic literature but also contributes to the evolution of contemporary cinema, encouraging a rethinking of what modern films can achieve both aesthetically and thematically.

Subtle vegan narratives in cinema and the unique approach of *Poor Things*

Veganism has been portrayed in various ways in cinema, often reflecting contemporary attitudes towards animal rights and ethical consumption. Early portrayals were rare and somewhat peripheral, but in recent years, there has been a growing interest in exploring vegan themes more directly. Three notable films stand out for their impactful depiction of veganism and animal rights:

1. *Earthlings* (2005): Narrated by Joaquin Phoenix, this documentary is a powerful exposé of animal exploitation across various industries. Using explicit, graphic imagery, it confronts viewers with the realities of animal cruelty, adopting a direct and confrontational style to convey its message.

2. *Okja* (2017): Directed by Bong Joon-ho, *Okja* tells the story of a young girl and her genetically modified super-pig, combining adventure with social satire to critique the meat industry. The film embeds its vegan message within a narrative that blends fantastical elements with sharp social commentary, making it accessible to a wide audience.
3. *Cowspiracy* (2014): This documentary explores the environmental impact of animal agriculture and advocates for a plant-based diet to combat climate change. Like *Earthlings*, it uses a documentary format to present its argument, focusing on the global environmental consequences of meat consumption.

Poor Things enriches cinematic portrayals of veganism by subtly embedding vegan themes within a narrative that is not explicitly about veganism. Unlike the direct approach of *Earthlings* or *Cowspiracy*, *Poor Things* uses cinematic techniques based on the show-don't-tell approach to convey its ethical message. This subtlety allows the film to reach a larger audience, encouraging viewers to reflect on ethical issues without feeling overtly preached.

Bella Baxter's growing empathy for animals and her rejection of meat reflect key vegan principles, similar to the characters in *Okja*. However, where *Okja* uses a clear narrative to critique the meat industry, *Poor Things* weaves its vegan themes into a rich tapestry of other issues, such as identity, resurrection, and societal norms. This multifaceted approach allows the film to explore veganism within a slightly different ethical context, challenging viewers to consider the interconnectedness of all living beings as part of the film's larger narrative.

While *Earthlings* and *Cowspiracy* use the documentary format to directly address the exploitation of animals and the environmental impact of animal agriculture, *Poor Things* offers a more nuanced, fictional exploration of such themes. By focusing on Bella's personal journey and her gradual ethical awakening, the film integrates veganism into its character development and thematic depth, demonstrating that ethical considerations can be woven into diverse narratives without being overtly didactic.

As Jason Mittel argues, "the most powerful cinematic stories often convey complex ideas and ethical considerations through character development and narrative subtlety, allowing viewers to arrive at their own conclusions" (2015: 322). *Poor Things* exemplifies this approach, using Bella's transformation and ethical choices to explore broader vegan principles. By doing so, the film not only fits within the cinematic tradition of vegan portrayals but also challenges and expands it, showing that subtle, character-driven narratives can be just as impactful in conveying ethical themes as more direct approaches.

Kinds of kindness

The phrase “you poor thing” is a familiar British expression of sympathy, often used to console children or loved ones. One can imagine Dr Anna Kingsford uttering it upon witnessing a dog undergoing vivisection without anaesthesia for the first time. This initial empathy can evolve into the intellectual foundation of veganism and other philosophies inspired by *ahimsa*, the Sanskrit term for “do no harm” or “non-violence,” though these often fall short of vegan principles. Bella, the protagonist, begins exploring these concepts after meeting an unconventional couple on a ship.

The film opens and closes with the title *Poor Things*, but by the end, its meaning evolves, reflecting Bella’s perspective. Initially an anarchic, rebellious figure, Bella matures into a self-assured woman ready to care for others. This transformation mirrors the journey of long-term vegans, who come to understand the complexities of human behaviour and recognise that even those deemed “bad” may be victims of a corrupt society – a recurring theme in Lanthimos’s films.

The portrayal of other characters further explores these themes of kindness and empathy. Dr Godwin Baxter, the seemingly mad scientist, is revealed to be a victim of his father’s cruel experiments, marked by numerous scars. Duncan Wedderburn, the flamboyant lawyer who attempts to corrupt Bella, is portrayed as a desperate man overwhelmed by his emotions, similar to the weasel in *Pinocchio*. Max McCandles, Dr Baxter’s assistant, helplessly falls in love with Bella, becoming a pawn in uncontrollable plot twists. Even the most despicable character, General Alfie Blessington, is ultimately shown as pathetically weak, becoming a “poor thing” himself. These characters, though flawed, are portrayed with a certain empathy, suggesting that their actions are shaped by the oppressive societal structures they inhabit.

Emma Stone’s description of Bella required a skilled ensemble, which Lanthimos achieved through excellent casting, team-building rehearsals, and expert direction. The performances, even in minor roles like Hanna Schygulla’s sublime Martha Von Kurtzrock, enhance the film’s exploration of empathy and transformation. Stone’s performance, supported by this ensemble, underscores Bella’s journey from a “poor thing” to a liberated, compassionate individual.

Just as veganism offers humanity a second chance to prove its worthiness on this planet, Bella receives a second chance at life, free from the societal conditioning of her past. She refuses to be crushed again by the oppressive patriarchal society into which she was first born. Instead, she liberates herself and begins to help others who remain trapped, embodying the essence of a true vegan. *Poor Things* thus uses its characters and narrative to explore different “kinds of kindness,” showing how empathy can lead to transformation and ethical awakening.

A fantastical discovery of mind, body and world

Poor Things exemplifies Yorgos Lanthimos's distinctive ability to intertwine dark comedy, magical realism, and gothic elements into a narrative that challenges viewers to engage with profound ethical questions. The film's exploration of creation, identity, and moral responsibility is not only a reimagining of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* but also an intricate commentary on the ethical complexities of existence.

Central to this analysis is the subtle engagement with veganism, emerging through Bella Baxter's evolving empathy and rejection of meat. By weaving this ethical dimension into the narrative, Lanthimos extends the film's relevance beyond its gothic and surreal elements, positioning it as a critique of human-animal relationships and the broader societal implications of empathy and ethical living.

Bella's transformation from a passive creation to a self-assured advocate for the oppressed mirrors broader societal movements toward compassion, justice, and the questioning of entrenched norms. Her journey embodies the film's overall message that true ethical living requires a deep empathy for all beings, challenging viewers to consider their responsibilities within society. Lanthimos's nuanced portrayal of these themes ensures that *Poor Things* resonates as both a work of art and a commentary on contemporary ethical issues.

Ultimately, *Poor Things* exemplifies cinema's power to entertain, provoke reflection, and inspire discussion. Lanthimos's ability to evoke thoughtful reflection through his unique directorial style solidifies *Poor Things* as a significant and enduring work in contemporary cinema. Its engagement with ethical issues, particularly veganism, enhances its relevance and importance, positioning it as a film that not only reimagines classic narratives but also challenges modern audiences to reconsider the ethical frameworks of their own lives. This ethical depth, combined with its artistic innovation and cultural relevance, will ensure that *Poor Things* continues to be analysed and appreciated for years to come.

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