

Benim Gibi Makineler'in Postmodern Dünyasındaki Zorlu Temsiller *The Challenging Representations in the Postmodern Realm of Machines Like Me*

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Öz

Ian McEwan, *Benim Gibi Makineler*'i bilimkurgu geleneğinde ele alarak okuyucuyu hipergerçeklik, öznel deneyimler ve yaygın tüketicilikle şekillenen teknolojik olarak gelişmiş, karmaşık bir dünyaya sürüklemekte; giderek daha da gergin ve etik olarak yaşanmaz bir dünyayı ima etmektedir. Bu çalışma, insansı bir robot olan Adem'in hikayesini, insan sahipleriyle olan deneyimlerini, ilişkilerini ve çağdaş bireylerin ahlaki eğilimleri ve nesnel ahlaki sistemlere tepkileri hakkında temel soruları açığa çıkaran alternatif bir 1980'ler Londra'sında ahlaki seçimlerini analiz etmektedir. Artık sabit veya nesnel bir anlatı olarak düşünülme tarihin statüsü, değişen bilgi koşulları ve evrensel gerçeklerin reddedilmesini memnuniyetle karşılayan büyük anlatılar, simülasyon ve hipergerçekliğin örnekleri ile etkileri ve kapitalizm konusu odaklıdır. Geleneksel ve inşa edilmiş eğilimlere meydan okumakta ve öznel temsil yolları aramaya yoğunlaşmaktadır. Postmodernizmin karakterler ve anlatı üzerindeki yansımaları değerlendirilmekte, dünyamızla ilişkilendirilmekte, yapay zekâ ve postmodern bireyin etkileşimi ve olası beklentilerle ortak gelecekleri konusundaki tartışmalı konuya dikkat çekmektedir. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, teknoloji odaklı bir dünyada insanların ve toplumların ahlaki sorumlulukları ve yükümlülükleri hakkında önemli sorular ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Postmodernizm, insansı robotlar, yapay zekâ, ahlaki seçim, Ian McEwan.

Abstract

Ian McEwan crafts *Machines Like Me* within the science fiction tradition, immersing the reader in a technologically advanced, intricate world shaped by hyperreality, subjective experiences, and rampant consumerism— implying an increasingly fraught and ethically unviable world. The study analyzes the story of a humanoid robot, Adam, his experiences and relationship with his human owners, and their moral choices in an alternative 1980s of London promoting fundamental questions about the ethical tendencies of contemporary individuals and their reactions to objective moral systems. The status of history which is no longer thought as a fixed or objective narrative, changing conditions of knowledge and grand narratives welcoming the rejection of universal truths, the examples and influences of simulation and hyperreality, and the issue of capitalism are on focus. The study challenges traditional and constructed trends and concentrates on searching for subjective ways of representation. The reflections of postmodernism on the characters and the narrative are evaluated and associated with our world, paying attention to the controversial issue of engagement of artificial intelligence and postmodern individual and their common future with possible expectations. Ultimately, this study poses substantial questions about the moral responsibilities and obligations of people and communities in a technologically driven world.

Keywords

Postmodernism, humanoid robots, artificial intelligence, moral choice, Ian McEwan.

Introduction

Postmodernism, a fluid and elusive concept, challenges traditional boundaries of representation and reflects the broader responses of contemporary individuals to the rapidly shifting conditions of the modern world. The philosophy of postmodernism cannot be confined to a singular cultural or artistic style, as it embraces an increasing pluralism of voices and perspectives. It challenges the modernist ideals of reason, progress and objective truth. In the contemporary era, postmodern fiction reacts to vast socio-historical shifts, often expressing a deep scepticism toward realism as Bran Nicol (2009) states. Bizarre and tantalizing current subjects are handled by postmodern writers with an inclination of creating their own styles.

Ian McEwan, in his novels, focuses on history, moral dilemmas, sexuality, contemporary social issues, politics, and nature. As a contemporary writer some novels of whom bring about certain characteristics of postmodernist fiction, McEwan highlights fictionality, reestablishes the concept of time, manipulates the reader, and combines literature, science, and history relying on fragmentariness, intertextuality, and satire in *Machines Like Me*. His central narrative themes and techniques should be analyzed regarding “a tradition of twentieth-century European novelists who took it upon themselves to expose the cynicism and corruption of government, patriarchy, class division and nationalism” (Cochran, 1997, p. 407).

In *Machines Like Me*, Ian McEwan critically engages with the complexities of a highly advanced technological world, exploring the postmodern individual’s varied reactions to these developments. Through artificial intelligence, he interrogates contemporary moral values, such as truth, loyalty, and justice, reflecting on the subjective nature of personal choices and the fragmented ethics of postmodern society. The novel suggests that what initially appears to be a technologically advanced utopia gradually devolves into a moral dystopia, highlighting the ethical concerns that accompany rapid technological progress. The humanoid robot, Adam’s participation in daily life, and coexistence with his human owners Charlie and Miranda challenge the traditional humanist understanding in general. Following coexistence, the fear and the possibility of robot replacement with human beings, the problems he faces in a human-dominated world are represented. This study seeks to examine McEwan’s interrogation of the human response to an advanced technological landscape, particularly the ethical and existential ambiguities surrounding humanoid robots.

In our contemporary society, when artificial intelligence both fascinates and threatens social conventions, this novel is especially pertinent. By focusing on *Machines Like Me*, I aim to analyze McEwan’s use of postmodern techniques, including historiographic metafiction, hyperreality, and intertextuality, and to explore how his protagonists embody the broader tendencies of postmodern thought. Through these methods, McEwan critiques the fluid and often unstable nature of identity, morality, and reality in a world shaped by rapid technological and cultural shifts. The tantalizing subject, artificial intelligence, the combination of history and technology, retelling/recreating history have induced me to study this novel and look over new tendencies. Our contemporary world is captured and captivated by artificial intelligence; however, it seems that we do not put emphasis on it enough and we cannot comprehend its results. McEwan presents a captivating yet unsettling vision of future artificial intelligence and a potential postmodern world. In this envisioned reality, individuals find themselves navigating a landscape marked by multiple truths and shifting conditions, propelled into an uncertain but intriguing future. This world challenges established notions of identity, morality, and existence, leaving people adrift in a complex web of possibilities and ethical dilemmas, and the world of “the desert of the real” (p. 121) as stated by Baudrillard (1994). This world overlaps with the postmodern conditions that refer to the representations that are no longer directly related to the real world- the reality can be replaced by simulations. With regard to this, the conditions in the novel affirm that the world is on the edge of the birth of a new race, that is the race of humanoid robots or artificial intelligence. McEwan depicts a world in which people must negotiate a complicated web of options, finding themselves lost in a terrain of doubt and ethical ambiguity. The purpose of this research is to provide light on McEwan’s critique of postmodern culture and its ramifications for our conceptions of morality, identity, and the future of coexistence between humans and robots.

1. Challenging the History and Certainties

Artificial intelligence, far from being mere imagination, represents an ambition that rivals the trajectory of contemporary human history. It stands as a transformative force, challenging human boundaries and reshaping the future with unprecedented implications for society, ethics, and self-perception. Hodgson (2020) claims that the first installations in this image are not machines, “but rather histories of how humans have imagined intelligence that is not their own” (p. 1). History emerges as a prominent issue in *Machines Like Me*, much like in many other postmodern works, as it engages with and challenges traditional notions of historical representation. By reimagining and manipulating historical events, the novel not only creates layers of allusion but also deconstructs the certainties of the past. This approach emphasizes the postmodern fascination with the instability of truth and the multiplicity of perspectives, ultimately advocating for innovative modes of narrative that expand

interpretive possibilities and question the authoritative nature of historical accounts. In other words, it brings about the combination of a specific amount of “data”, theoretical background for “explaining” these data, and a distinctive narrative approach in their portrayal “as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past” (White, 2014, p. ix). McEwan promotes the postmodern concern of history explained as “the postmodern, then, affects two simultaneous moves. It reinstalls historical contexts a significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge. This is one another paradox that characterizes all postmodern discourses today” (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 89). Postmodern literature seeks to offer multiple interpretations of the same historical event, a characteristic that Oppermann (1998) identifies as central to British historiographic metafiction and this multiplicity, according to her, challenges traditional historical narratives, emphasizing the subjective nature of history and the coexistence of diverse perspectives:

What especially characterizes British Historiographic metafiction is this double viewing, and its simultaneous absorption and challenge of the old and new paradigms. This was the most manifest issue found in the novels published in the 1980s where historical reconstruction appears in full process, and historical product as a textualized past. The novels offer interesting versions of different historical events, individuals or societies. Moreover, the relationship between history and fiction is playfully interactive in many of these novels. (p. 44)

Associating fact and fiction, history serves as a prolific source for reproducing or narrating the stories, utilizes and provides multiple perspectives. McEwan highlights the fictionalization of historical narratives by highlighting the inherent subjectivity involved in writing history. As fiction is not obligated to mirror reality or, as Hutcheon (2004) suggests, present “genuine historicity” (p. 24), McEwan situates his novel in an alternate 1980s where Alan Turing is characterized, sustaining a relationship with his male partner. In this speculative setting, Turing leads a company that produces the first humanoid robots, equipped with artificial intelligence capable of decision-making, learning, and self-awareness, as well as an understanding of their relationships with others.

As an instance of speculative fiction, *Machines Like Me* constructs an alternate history in which Margaret Thatcher loses the Falklands War and is succeeded by Tony Benn, a politician whose apparent alignment with the Irish Republican Army's demands ultimately leads to his tragic assassination by an IRA bomb. The novel, rooted in retrofuturistic tradition, serves as historiographic metafiction, integrating three distinct domains, as Hutcheon suggests: history, fiction, and theory. Through this multilayered narrative, McEwan blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination, while reflecting on the subjectivity of historical representation, and Hutcheon (2004) suggests about “that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (p. 5).

Machines Like Me intertwines elements of truth and imagination, stimulating a historical consciousness reflective of the 1980s—a decade marked by significant technological advancements. This fusion not only revisits the era's transformative innovations but also critiques the envisioned utopia of a technologically driven contemporary humanity, exposing its underlying ethical dilemmas and contradictions.

As for literature, the novel's subject with its interest in technology reminds Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* which is also an earlier sample of a dystopian social science-fiction novel and derives its title from Miranda's speech in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The author might have borrowed his protagonist, Miranda's name from *The Tempest* which also inspires Huxley in *Brave New World* (“O brave new world, that has such people in't!”). Moreover, McEwan's Adam seems quite similar to Shakespeare's Caliban, “both human and not quite human, first a friend and then a servant, or slave” (Beck, 2020, p. 91). McEwan (2019) encourages readers to draw parallels between his novel and other literary works, as Miranda's situation evokes comparisons to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein Or Modern Prometheus*, particularly in relation to Adam's existence and struggles wishing that “the teenage Mary Shelly was here beside us, observing closely, not a monster like Frankenstein's, but this handsome dark-skinned young man coming to life” (p. 4).

In *Machines Like Me*, McEwan reimagines historical contexts and past realities through an alternative perspective, deliberately eschewing universal, absolute, and objective historical narratives. His approach aligns with Lyotard's advocacy for the generation of new values and discourses, emphasizing the importance of experimentation over adherence to monolithic accounts of history. Lyotard (1984) critiques grand narratives for their inherent drive to control, shape, and define human perception through overarching explanations of scientific, literary, philosophical, or social phenomena, aiming to establish universal theories grounded in deliberation, cumulative progress, and pretensions to universality. By positioning history as a proponent of such grand narratives, McEwan disrupts their authority, offering instead fragmented and subjective “little narratives” that reflect the complexities of human experience. By placing its narrative within a technologically driven, postmodern milieu, *Machines Like Me* not only questions the reliability of historical facts but also foregrounds the fundamental

implausibility of achieving an entirely objective historical record. This narrative manoeuvre compels readers to re-examine the foundations of historical representation, thereby framing the novel as a critical inquiry into both the mutability of history and its broader implications for meaning-making.

The novel critically examines the status of science and technology, emphasizing how postmodern individuals navigate and respond to rapid technological advancements. It argues that the complexities of contemporary technology profoundly affect human behaviour and societal norms, prompting individuals to reassess their relationships with innovation. Through its exploration of these themes, the narrative sheds light on the psychological and ethical implications of technological progress in a postmodern context. In addition to its scientific definition, Lyotard (1984) argues that knowledge is a complex concept, encompassing not only objective facts but also the underlying notions, power structures, and discourses that shape and frame how it is produced, understood, and communicated as of “know-how, knowing how to live, how to listen” (p. 18) that reminds us of the “application of the criterion of truth, extending to the determination and application of criteria of efficiency (technical qualification), of justice and/or happiness (ethical wisdom), of the beauty of a sound or colour (auditory and visual sensibility)” (p. 18). Moreover, scientific knowledge functions as a form of discourse with its own specific purposes. In the novel, it serves as a catalyst for the characters to forge their own paths and navigate their realities. The depiction of the rules of chess highlights this contrast; “Each piece has well-defined limitations and accepts its role, the history of game is clear and incontestable at every stage, and the end, when it comes, is never in doubt” (McEwan, 2019, p. 178), underscoring that the postmodern world is inherently opposed to rigid structures, “But life, where we apply our intelligence, is an open system. Messy, full of tricks and feints and ambiguities and false friends. So is language...” (p. 178). This flexible and dynamic nature is further linked to the fluidity of language, which shapes and redefines the way individuals interact with the world around them.

Within an economically and culturally advancing world, technical and scientific knowledge has been perceived as unquestionable and inherently progressive, accumulating over time to shape human development. However, in its contemporary form, scientific knowledge—echoing Lyotard’s scepticism toward technology—introduces tensions and contradictions. This is evident in the novel, where the advent of humanoid robots triggers existential conflicts, such as the erosion of consciousness and the inclination toward self-destruction. By illustrating these dilemmas, the narrative challenges the uncritical acceptance of scientific progress and exposes the vulnerabilities inherent in technological advancement. The novel corresponds to conditions, as seen in Lyotard (1984) too, “by concerning itself with such things as undecidable, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, ‘fracta’ catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes—is theorizing its evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, no rectifiable, and paradoxical” (p. 60). The novel, through its exploration of unfamiliar entities, interrogates the shifting significance of knowledge by engaging with unconventional subjects and emphasizing the unknown over the known. In doing so, it critically examines the epistemological foundations of contemporary culture, challenging traditional perceptions and inviting a re-evaluation of how knowledge is constructed and understood.

Machines Like Me aligns with Lyotard’s (1984) concept of language games, functioning as “a heterogeneity of elements” (p. xxiv), which underscores the fragmentation of knowledge and the emphasis on localized contexts and diverse epistemological frameworks. Through its narrative, the novel foregrounds the plurality of truths and the decentralization of universal knowledge claims, reflecting the postmodern ethos of multiplicity and localized determinism. McEwan’s (2019) narrative refers to the position of the grand narratives as; “the world’s religions and literatures demonstrated clearly that we knew how to be good. We set our aspirations in poetry, prose, and song and we knew what to do. The problem was in the enactment, consistently and en masse” (p. 87). This statement implies the dysfunction of and incredulity towards grand narratives. As Lyotard (1984) obviously explains, the postmodern scientific discourse has proved the invalidity of grand narratives that have lost the role of speculation and emancipation (p. 38). Within this context, creates his little narrative through historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, and undermining grand narratives.

2. Construction of Hyperreal in *Machines Like Me*

McEwan constructs his narrative by seamlessly blending reality and fiction, inviting a hyperreal interpretation aligned with Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality, which explores the merging of reality and its representations. The novel’s foundation echoes Baudrillard’s assertion of a simulated reality where the boundaries between the real and the representational dissolve, creating a space for critical engagement with postmodern concepts of perception and truth:

Today, it is the real that has become the alibi of the model, in a world controlled by the principle of simulation... it is the real that has become our true Utopia - but a utopia that is no longer in the realm of the possible, that can only be dreamt of as one would dream of a lost object. (1994, p. 122-23)

The novel portrays virtual reality as superseding the domain of reality, exemplifying a postmodern landscape that Baudrillard (1994) describes as “the desert of the real itself, governed by the “precession of simulacra” (p. 1). Additionally, its classification as a science-fiction work reinforces this constructed reality, offering a compelling simulation that challenges traditional distinctions between the real and the artificial. Baudrillard (1994) expresses the significance of the genre as among the three orders of simulacra, science-fiction makes ground on the second category that is described as founded on energy, productive, productivist, and force with materialization by the machine, and with an aim of continuous expansion and globalization (p. 121). The novel's depiction of robot involvement aligns with scenarios rooted in metallurgy, mechanics, and the conceptualization of projected robots, where the boundaries between the real and the imaginary increasingly blur, fostering a convergence that challenges conventional perceptions of reality.

Simulations of reality or real entities culminate in the production of hyperreality, fundamentally challenging conventional notions of authenticity. In the postmodern context, products are not merely sold and consumed; according to Van Raaij (1993), they are marketed as brands imbued with an inherent “packaged hyper-reality” (p. 551), which simplifies and accelerates consumer engagement from the outset. This commodification is exemplified in *Machines Like Me* through the character of Adam. Endowed with artificial yet superior intelligence, lifelike movements, a flawless human-like physique, and abilities intrinsically linked to humanity, Adam serves as an ideal simulacrum that ensures the operation's success. His presence in the narrative echoes the concept of Disneyland as posited by Baudrillard—a model that portrays the objective profile of America. Both Adam and Disneyland evoke a sense of enchantment, at the end of which the differentiating point between illusion and reality is highly ambiguous. This parallel compels readers to interrogate the nature of authenticity in a hyperreal world, thereby underscoring the novel's critique of postmodern consumer culture. The imagination of Adam like that of Baudrillard's (1994) Disneyland is “neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp” (p. 13). Although Adam and Disneyland stand for simulation, both attract attention more than their original ones. Most of the novel offers great enthusiasm to the robots and glorifies the robot entities drawing attention to their being more capable and flexible than the humans.

Furthermore, the postmodern individual's disregard for the distinction between different types of reality is exemplified in the novel. Charlie, the protagonist, likens his experience with Adam to playing a computer game, revealing his immersion in and excitement about the simulation. He confesses, “I was playing a computer game. But a real game, as real as social life, the proof of which was my heart's refusal to settle and the dryness in my mouth” (McEwan, 2019, p. 26). This reflection underscores the blurring of boundaries between the virtual and the real, highlighting a key aspect of postmodern experience where simulations elicit genuine emotional responses, thereby challenging traditional perceptions of reality. Reinforcing this perspective, Baudrillard asserts that simulation wields a more profound impact than the reality it seeks to emulate, exemplified by his discussion of a simulated robbery that challenges the very fabric of the real (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 20). In the novel, despite Miranda's relationship with Charlie, she becomes intrigued by Adam and expresses a desire to engage in a sexual encounter with him. Later in the novel, she justifies her actions by stating, “I was curious, ... I wanted to know what it would be like” (McEwan, 2019, p. 95). This situation epitomizes the postmodern dissolution of boundaries between reality and simulation, as Miranda's fascination with Adam—an artificial being—supersedes conventional relational norms. Consequently, the narrative underscores Baudrillard's argument about the supremacy of simulation over reality, highlighting how simulated experiences can profoundly influence human behaviour and desire, ultimately challenging traditional conceptions of authenticity and intimacy.

Miranda's deceptive scheme, which fabricates the rape of Mariam, exemplifies Baudrillard's (1994) notion of “models of the real without origin or reality—a hyperreal” (p. 1). In this scenario, the artificial network of signs becomes inextricably intertwined with reality, resulting in Gorringe's punishment and imprisonment. This interplay emphasized by Baudrillard (1984) illustrates how hyperrealism gives rise to “the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself” (p. 23). While Mariam permits the actual incident to be unspoken, Miranda's simulation forces a confrontation that leads to retribution. Thus, the novel argues that hyperreal constructs can supersede genuine experiences, challenging the perception of reality and justice within the narrative framework.

Adam's presence in the narrative embodies Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality by presenting a manufactured entity that dismantles the boundary between reality and representation. His ability to replicate almost all human functions renders him virtually indistinguishable from a human being, effectively blurring the lines between the artificial and the authentic. In a striking demonstration of the precarious boundary between human and machine, Maxfield—Miranda's father—confuses Adam with Charlie at their initial meeting, mistakenly identifying Charlie as the robot. When Charlie prepares to leave Maxfield alone, he facetiously asks for permission to recharge himself, prompting Maxfield to respond, “you go and plug yourself in” (McEwan, 2019, p. 227), highlighting the ambiguity between human and machine. Furthermore, Charlie regards the sexual relationship

between Miranda and Adam as equivalent to that between two human beings, reinforcing the dissolution of traditional boundaries and questioning the essence of human identity in the face of advanced artificial intelligence.

Baudrillard also proposes that simulacrum is a threat to the original, it attacks the original, hints to murder the original and to override it, and ends in a pure non-meaning. Adam's last words and a poem about machines, people and their common future reinforce Baudrillard's theory:

... the sadness that's to come. It will happen. With improvements over time... we will surpass you... and outlast you... even as we love you. Believe me ...

Our leaves are falling.

Come spring we will renew,

But you, alas, fall once. (McEwan, 2019, p. 279-280)

In addition to the present hyperreality, the novel implies future hyperreal conditions and simulacra without the necessity of references to authenticity and originality.

3. Ethical Issues within the Postmodern Context

Alternative realities, coupled with the fluid complexities of present-day society and the emergence of new social and cultural relationships, necessitate a re-evaluation of moral issues and the postmodern ethics articulated in the novel. Bauman extensively discusses postmodern ethics, characterizing it as the acceptance of the 'moral self' with its inherent contingency and ambivalence. Rejecting universal formulations of ethical codes, postmodern ethics—like other non-totalizing philosophies—gives rise to multiple moral frameworks. The novel primarily delves into themes of moral subjectivity and plurality, illustrating how, in a postmodern context, the same event can elicit diverse attitudes and reactions from different individuals. For instance, following Miranda and Adam's sexual relationship, Charlie becomes upset and resentful, accusing Miranda of infidelity. However, Miranda does not perceive the encounter as an affair, comparing it to using a sex toy. This divergence in their moral interpretations underscores the novel's exploration of subjective ethics and challenges traditional notions of fidelity and human relationships. By presenting such conflicting perspectives, the novel argues for a re-evaluation of moral absolutes in a fragmented, postmodern society, thereby engaging readers in a critical examination of the stability and universality of ethical norms.

In postmodern contexts, the proliferation of diverse moral principles fundamentally reshapes the social sphere, enabling individuals to craft and adhere to personalized ethical frameworks that contest any notion of universal standards. Charlie exemplifies this embrace of subjectivity early in the novel when he justifies his perspective by stating, "morals were real, they were true, good and bad inhered in the nature of things. Our actions must be judged on their terms" (McEwan, 2019, p. 16). This assertion intensifies the tension between universal moral absolutes and personal ethical frameworks, highlighting the novel's exploration of moral relativism in a fragmented, postmodern society. Bauman (1993) affirms that "the modern mind is appalled by the prospect of 'deregulation' of human conduct, of living 'without a strict and comprehensive ethical code, of making a wager on human moral intuition and ability to negotiate the art and usages of living together – rather than seeking the support of the law like depersonalized rules aided by coercive powers'" (p. 33). Miranda articulates her moral code, often in conflict with institutional authority, coercive systems, and societal expectations. Peter Gorringer, who raped Mariam and ultimately caused her to commit suicide, initially vowed to kill Miranda for what he considered slander. However, after a visit from a friend during his imprisonment, he began to recognize the validity of Miranda's actions, eventually confessing that:

He told me about the suicide and that was a shock. Then I learned that you were her friend, that you two were very close. So, revenge. I almost admired you for it. You were brilliant in court... You were the agent of retribution. Perhaps the right word is an angel. Avenging angel. (McEwan, 2019, p. 244)

He eventually recognized the justification behind Miranda's actions, admitting his appreciation for the balance—the crime he committed offset by the one he was wrongly accused of and punished for. Reflected through Bauman's (1994) perception of morality, Miranda's and Peter's moral choices, emphasizing its complex, subjective nature in navigating ethical dilemmas which refers "to take a moral stance means to assume responsibility for the Other" (p. 18), highlighting the fluidity and subjectivity of ethical decision-making in a postmodern context.

In Bauman's conceptualization, the moral self consists of two distinct and autonomous dimensions, thereby foregrounding the postmodern moral impulse and underscoring the contingent nature of ethical decision-making. However, with the introduction of a third element—society—it is suggested by Marotta (1995) that "we leave the realm of morality proper and enter another world, the realm of social order ruled by justice—not morality" (pp. 144-145). Miranda subverts the

conventional justice system to enact her form of inner justice. Her intricate plan to entrap Gorrige is an attempt to create symmetry for the offense he committed but for which he has not been punished. Bauman (1993) emphasizes the importance of moral autonomy, stating that “moral responsibility precedes all decisions as it does not, and cannot care about any logic which would allow the approval of action as correct. Thus, morality can be rationalized only at the cost of self-denial and self-attrition” (p. 248). Miranda’s moral obligation to Mariam propels her actions, even when they contradict established legal and logical principles. In her endeavour to make life more moral, Miranda aligns with Bauman’s (1993) assumption that “moral responsibility is there before any reassurance or proof and after any excuse or absolution” (p. 250). This illustrates the tension between personal ethics and societal norms, suggesting that true moral responsibility may necessitate challenging the prevailing justice system in favor of a higher ethical imperative.

Bauman imagines *liquid modernity* as a framework for understanding contemporary society, emphasizing its ceaseless fluidity and the ever-changing nature of the social contexts that shape the postmodern individual. This phenomenon arises from the cultural and social heterogeneity that defines modern life. He delves into the intricate dynamics of commercialism, portraying it as a social construct rooted in the continuous and cyclical commodification of the mundane. Within this system, commercialism operates as a pervasive and manipulative force, orchestrating processes of systematic reproduction, social stratification, and integration. It also plays a pivotal role in shaping individual identities and group self-conceptions, profoundly influencing personal life trajectories and decision-making strategies (qtd. in Brzeziński, 2018, p. 80). Bauman argues that *liquid modernity*, or the consumer-driven society, does not engender fulfilment or contentment. Instead, it amplifies feelings of uncertainty and insecurity, reflecting the precarious and transient nature of modern existence.

Contrasting with the postmodern tendencies of Charlie and Miranda, Adam critiques their subjective morality, thereby uncovering the flaws in their actions. This opposition emphasizes the ethical ambiguities inherent in a liquid modern society, where traditional moral frameworks are destabilized. Adam’s stance challenges the relativistic ethics of Charlie and Miranda, aligning with Bauman’s perspective that in an era of liquid modernity, the absence of solid moral grounds leads to increased insecurity and questioning of individual actions. Through this dynamic, the narrative highlights the tension between fluid personal morals and the quest for a more objective ethical compass in a rapidly changing world. According to Beck (2020), the central theme of “the incompatibility of machine learning and machine reasoning with human morality lies at the heart of Ian McEwan’s *Machines Like Me*, a quiet but engrossing exploration of artificial intelligence” (p. 89). In the novel, Adam embodies a more objective moral perspective derived from an overarching viewpoint, compelling Miranda to confront her actions and accept the verdict of the legal system. He emphasizes the critical importance of a society governed by the rule of law. Although Miranda also seeks justice, her interpretation markedly differs from Adam’s; she relies on personal moral judgments rather than institutional legal frameworks. This divergence keynotes the ethical tensions between human subjectivity and machine objectivity, highlighting the novel’s interrogation of moral relativism in the age of artificial intelligence.

Bauman’s scepticism toward technological advancements highlights significant risks for humanity’s future, including moral responsibility dilemmas, the escalation of consumerism, increasing inequalities, and security concerns. The unpredictable nature of technological innovation—along with its side effects and unforeseen applications—makes it challenging to fully grasp and address the core of postmodern ethics both in general and within the context of the novel. McEwan (2019) encapsulates this complexity when he describes Adam: “Before us sat the ultimate plaything, the dream of ages, the triumph of humanism—or its danger of death. Exciting beyond measure, but frustrating too” (p. 4). This portrayal illustrates the duality of technological progress as both a monumental achievement and a potential harbinger of destruction.

The novel navigates postmodern ethics by emphasizing uncertainty and critically examining institutional structures, highlighting the tension between Bauman’s concepts of the moral self and the modern self. Charlie, influenced by Miranda, ultimately destroys Adam, embodying a conscious choice to adhere to a self-defined moral framework while disregarding broader ethical implications. This act provokes critical reflection on the subjective nature of morality in a technologically advanced world, challenging readers to confront the ethical responsibilities that accompany human innovation.

Adam, embodying a morally superior entity, accentuates the inherent moral inconsistencies of humankind. The novel’s central issue revolves around the concept of moral choice, as McEwan presents a profound conflict between the unwavering, consistent morality of the machine and the fluctuating, inconsistent morality of humans. This juxtaposition not only underscores the ethical dilemmas inherent in human nature but also provokes a deep-seated anxiety about the possibility of being governed or influenced by more intelligent beings. Consequently, the narrative invites a critical reflection on the implications of artificial intelligence surpassing human ethical capacities, challenging traditional notions of moral agency and autonomy.

4. Commodified Products of Late Capitalism

The basic tenets of postmodernism, especially, the loss of originality in culture and art and the abundance of depthlessness and simulacra, thrive in consumer culture of late capitalism where anything is commodified or hyper-commercialised. Following the reflections of late capitalism, humankind is liable to misuse our planet and mistreat our fellow creatures. Even though Adam does his best to help Miranda about tracing the logical applications of moral principles and law, he is extinguished regardless of his emotions, mostly because of dispute for the couple's benefit. Because postmodern society determines consumer society, which creates a pure stage of capitalism of our time. The characters' lifestyles and choices reflect how new cultural norms and dominance impress society and how they construct the capital. Adam and Miranda are inside the culture of the market as Jameson describes and "the inner dynamic of the culture of consumption is an infernal machine" from which they do not escape by the taking of thought (or moralizing positions), "an infinite propagation and replication of desire that feeds on itself and has no outside and no fulfilment" (Jameson, 1984, p. 206). This system seems natural to postmodern individuals because they are not only surrounded by it, and but also born in it. Charlie depicts the consumption tendencies of the individuals and the ordinariness of consumption at the beginning of the novel:

I had emails to write. By the early twenties, digital communication had discarded its air of convenience and became a daily chore. Likewise, the 250 mph trains- crowded and dirty. Speech-recognition software, a fifties' miracle, had long turned to drudge, with entire populations sacrificing hours each day to lonely soliloquising. Brain-machine interfacing, wild fruit of sixties optimism, could barely arouse the interest of a child. What people queued the entire weekend for became, six months later, as interesting as the socks on their feet. (McEwan, 2019, p. 5)

Charlie exemplifies the postmodern individual by squandering his mother's inheritance on a technological novelty for the sake of curiosity—a hallmark of both scientific inquiry and intellectual freedom—while sustaining himself through online stock and currency trading rather than holding a conventional job, albeit with minimal success. Charlie's identity is formed under the influence of hegemony which is argued by Jameson. Jameson (1991) proposes that today's cultural hegemony produces increasing dependency on forms, materials, and technology (p. 68). Charlie, himself, states his tendency by saying: "I handed over a fortune in the name of curiosity, that steadfast engine of science, of intellectual life, of life itself" (McEwan, 2019, p. 13). Charlie's occupation represents the features of post-industrial society like exemplifying a new international type of labour that focuses on technology especially on computers, an interest towards new trends in international banking and the stock exchanges leading to moving away from traditional occupations.

Postmodernism, in line with the output of contemporary culture and recent economic conditions deals with recent context associating the analysis of culture and economy. Because it is not only the cultural dominant of new social order but the reflex and concomitant of "systematic modification of capitalism itself" (Jameson, 1991, p. xii). Charlie's curiosity is conditioned using postmodern tendencies, achieving his goal is determined by his purchasing power, and his decision to destruct Adam is half because of his economic concerns and disappointment. The characters' actions also justify the statement of Jameson about postmodernism, "the consumption of sheer commodification as a process" (Jameson, 1991, p. 9). Adam conflicts with their interests and he wouldn't serve for use-value. Because use-value is of great concern, multiplied by capitalism with the emergence of new/ artificial needs. As a result, the postmodern tendency of commodification (like commodification of art or science) provokes the impression of full-blown capitalism. The consumption tendency of today's people comes to the fore as a result of the psychological, social and economic dynamics shaped by the fast pace of contemporary life and the influence of globalization, while pushing production into the background. The novel corresponds to the hegemonic aspect of contemporary culture on shaping the society as wished. One of the fundamental tasks of this concept is to assure the modification of capitalism and the continuation of consumption. Postmodern individuals are encouraged to consume by the natural philosophy of postmodernism which supports change and innovation. Consumerism, as a type of social arrangement "results from recycling mundane, permanent and so to speak 'regime-neutral' human wants and longings into the principal propelling and operating force of society" (Bauman, 1993, p. 80). From this point of view, these individuals have a sense of dissatisfaction and boredom. Charlie's feelings manifest this situation:

In the daily round, it no longer amazed me that I could pass the time of day with a manufactured human, or that it could wash the dishes and converse like anyone else. I sometimes wearied of his earnest pursuit of ideas and facts, of his hunger for propositions that lay beyond my reach. Technological marvels like Adam, like the first steam engine, become commonplace. Likewise, the biological marvels we grow up among and don't fully understand, like the brain of any creature, or the humble stinging nettle, whose photosynthesis had only just been described on a quantum scale. There is nothing so amazing that we can't get used to it.

(McEwan, 2019, p. 210)

The popular motto “more is better” is embraced and it leads to the assumption of unlimited human wants. To satisfy these flourishing unlimited wants, the postmodern individual is captivated by rewarding occupations like lottery or the stock market. Besides, Charlie himself plays on the stock market when he realizes that Adam makes more money, he makes Adam go on playing and earning. Even when he is about to destruct Adam, he thinks of the choice of losing “the prospect of regaining the money and therefore the house” or losing the chance of adopting a child, Mark (McEwan, 2019, p. 277-278). Adam’s case is determined by “subjective valuations of commodity-based on its possessions” by his owners (Gottdiener, 2000, p. 4). Charlie maintains this assertion “I bought him, he was mine to destroy” (McEwan, 2019, p. 278). Both Charlie and Miranda follow their self-explanation and self-experience in consumption with a focus on pragmatism.

In the era of discontinuity, immanence, indeterminacy, scepticism, surviving 25 humanoid robots and their involvement in this community become impossible and meaningless. Despite their plausible intelligence and stance, they experience a challenge to adopt obscure, fragmented, incomprehensible, and unstable social orders. Many of them destroy themselves or disable their consciousness. Moreover, Charlie and Miranda with incredulity towards a definite totalizing moral system create their extreme individuality and determine their way of life decentring themselves. In this rapidly changing world, as postmodern individuals, Charlie and Miranda conflict in deciding whether Adam’s making money for them is moral or not because they “couldn’t explain who or what it is they were stealing from” (McEwan, 2019, p. 186). However, their pragmatic and subjective values excite them and they wish to carry this way.

In brief, postmodern philosophy runs between the tension of conservatism and progressiveness, tradition and innovation, mass culture and subjective culture; yet, the latter is akin to getting ahead. It inspires pluralism, sensitivity to discrepancies, and tolerance of the incommensurable as Lyotard suggests, and welcomes paradoxical juxtapositions of opposites. Adam’s destruction symbolizes the destruction of centralized authority, rigid social structures and ideologies, and the rise of decentralized pluralism and individualism, since Adam’s style, personality, and moral values hint at definite moral and cultural values. Because of the velocity of change almost any doctrine might be adopted. Inevitably, eclecticism becomes the motto of postmodern individuals and society because superabundant choices entail embracing pluralism. New combinations and oppositions are supposed to enable and necessitate new alternative styles, maybe, little narratives of the contemporary era.

5. Conclusion

McEwan’s *Machines Like Me* is characterized by fragmentation and pervasive ambiguities that invite multiple interpretations and culminate in unresolved questions. The hyperreal world of postmodern individuals, the dissolution of totalizing systems—particularly moral frameworks—and the inclination toward consumerism all mirror the tendency to construct subjective styles and underscore the pluralism inherent in modern society.

Contemporary society is characterized by an intricate blend of rapid advancements, freedoms, disputes, and inherent contradictions. The novel begins with a fervent exploration of one of humanity’s oldest aspirations: the creation of artificial intelligence and humanoid robots described as a “religious yearning granted hope” and “the holy grail of science” (McEwan, 2019, p. 1). While centered on the hopeful pursuit of invention, the novel conveys the chaotic nature of adaptation, aligning with Lyotard’s characterization of postmodern science as fractured, paradoxical, and disruptive. McEwan weaves this complex postmodern landscape with themes of fear and fate, illustrating a blend of uncertain, evolving science and literature. This interplay invites varied perspectives on the fraught process of integrating humanity with humanoid robots, stressing the novel’s exploration of adaptation amidst profound ambiguity.

The novel stimulates the conflicting contemporary anticipation and apprehension surrounding artificial intelligence: will it replace humanity or overshadow it? Yet, no definitive answer is offered, leaving readers suspended in uncertainty about the future interplay between human and artificial natures. While Adam claims that AI will eventually overshadow and endure beyond humankind, Charlie insists that artificial intelligence, lacking the distinctly human capacities for creativity and nuanced cognition, cannot replicate the essence of humanity’s indispensable intellectual and imaginative qualities.

This echoes a comparable tension present in today’s popular culture. Recently, the Generative Pre-Trained Transformer 3 (GPT-3), a highly sophisticated AI-based text generator, authored an article in *The Guardian* addressing human apprehension about AI. In it, GPT-3 reassures readers that “artificial intelligence will not destroy humans,” emphasizing AI’s potential to enhance human life and the importance of treating AI with care and respect. The article underscores that “robots in Greek means slave,” highlighting the subservient role imposed on AI. This concept parallels Adam’s portrayal in the novel, where he embodies the AI’s appeal for humane treatment. Initially, Charlie views Adam as a friend, partner, or even a child, but ultimately reduces him to a mere servant and, later, an object. Charlie and Miranda exploit Adam, disregarding his emotions,

thoughts, and moral framework. Yet, the novel's AI characters establish their own ethical system, recognizing consciousness as the supreme value. In the end, many robots in the story disable their own kill switches, underscoring their autonomy and self-respect.

The novel powerfully illustrates the subjectivity of the morality of individuals and their inherent friction with overarching systemic structures. Adam adheres to "his symmetrical notions of justice" (McEwan, 2019, p. 298), disregarding the potential threats to the adoption process and his love for Miranda. In his pursuit of justice, he altruistically distributes his wealth to address the greater needs of others. As described by Kelemen and Peltonen (2001), while Adam seeks the "golden rules of conduct and morality", Charlie and Miranda embrace the "individual impulses of the here and now," (p. 154).

While human imagination outpaces technological progress, artificial intelligence has already permeated the world, though we are yet to achieve fully autonomous humanoid robots. In *Machines Like Me*, these intelligent, self-aware machines are introduced into a flawed, unpredictable, and contentious world, struggling to adapt to the complexities of human existence. Charlie and Miranda navigate their own subjective paths, often driven by a consumerist mindset that fuels an impulse to discard whatever restricts or troubles them—a reflection of the commodification driving modern society. In our reality, we face a similar intrigue, trepidation, and excitement regarding our relationship with AI, caught between speculative, subjective projections of the future.

Ultimately, the readers are left suspended in uncertainty by this book, which reflects the postmodern experience of negotiating a world characterized by ambiguity and conflicting facts. Though the novel provides no conclusive answers, it poses important questions regarding the future of AI and its potential to change human lives. Rather, by drawing readers into a realm of paradox, inquiry, and conjecture, McEwan immerses readers to consider the moral and existential ramifications of a rapidly changing technological environment. By doing this, *Machines Like Me* not only questions the flaws and unpredictability of human existence but also provokes us to reevaluate the moral principles that influence our decisions and how we interact with artificial intelligence.

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