İsmail AVCU

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Atatürk Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Erzurum/Türkiye
Assist. Professor, Ataturk University, Faculty of Letters/Department of English Language and Literature, Erzurum/Turkey
eposta: ismail.avcu@atauni.edu.tr
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8320-920X https://ror.org/03je5c526

SHAPING THE MEANING THROUGH SIMULATION AND CONSTRUCTING ALTERNATIVE REALITY IN IAN MCEWAN'S *MACHINES LIKE ME*

Abstract

Ian McEwan uses elements of science-fiction and puts forward some vague issues about artificial intelligence in *Machines Like Me,* thus leaving the reader in a technologically advanced, sci-fi utopia dominated by hyperrealism, subjectivity, and consumerism, which later turns into a moral dystopia with discrepancies of humankind's interaction with AI humanoid robots. The author also analyses concepts such as morality, human nature, and free will through postmodern historiographical metafiction and intertextuality techniques. He also presents a retro-futuristic universe in which he is questioned in an environment produced by simulation. Furthermore, the story, which takes place in a retro-futuristic universe, draws a postmodern picture of contemporary individuals and conditions in which the fine lines between reality and the representation of reality are blurred with the introduction of artificial intelligence into our lives.

Making use of theoretical concepts such as postmodern simulation, historicity, and production of knowledge under how McEwan presents the major subject matters in the novel with the reflection and depiction of a futuristic world of artificial intelligence, this article tries to answer the questions about the condition of the postmodern individual who struggles with the issues of discerning reality and truth haunted by the existence and intrusion of AI Adams and Eves.

Keywords: Construction of Meaning, Artificial Intelligence, Simulation, Ian McEwan, *Machines Like Me*.

İsmail Avcu

IAN MCEWAN'IN *BENİM GİBİ MAKİNELER* ROMANINDA SİMÜLASYON YOLUYLA ANLAMI ŞEKİLLENDİRME VE ALTERNATİF GERÇEKLİK OLUŞTURMA

Öz

Ian McEwan *Benim Gibi Makineler* adlı romanında bilimkurgu öğelerini kullanarak ve yapay zekâ hakkında belirsiz meseleleri öne çıkararak, okuyucuyu sonrasında ahlaki bir distopyaya dönüşen, yapay zeka insansı robotların insanlarla uyuşmayan etkileşimlerinin var olduğu, teknolojik olarak gelişmiş, hipergerçekçilik, öznellik ve tüketimciliğin hâkim olduğu bir bilimkurgu ütopyasının ortasında bırakır. Yazar aynı zamanda ahlak, insan doğası ve özgür irade gibi kavramlarını, postmodern tarihyazımsal üstkurmaca ve metinlerarasılık teknikleriyle birlikte irdeler. Bunun yanı sıra simülasyon tarafından üretilen bir ortamda sorgulandığı retro-fütüristik bir evren de sunar. Ayrıca, retro-fütüristik bir evrende geçen hikâye yapay zekânın hayatımıza girmesi ile gerçeğin ve gerçekliğin temsili arasındaki ince çizgilerin bulanıklaştığı çağdaş bireylerin ve koşulların postmodern bir resmini çizer.

Bu makale, gerçeklik ile yanılsama arasındaki farkı ayırt etmeye çalışan postmodern bireyin, yapay zeka insansı robotlar olan Adem ve Havvaların varlığı ve insan yaşamına müdahil olmalarından kaynaklanan karmaşık durum hakkında sorulara yanıt ararken, postmodern simülasyon, tarihsellik ve bilgi üretimi gibi teorik kavramlardan yararlanarak, yapay zekânın fütüristik bir dünyasının yansıması ve tasvirini sunar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anlamın oluşturulması, Yapay Zeka, Simülasyon, Ian McEwan, *Benim Gibi Makineler*.

Introduction

Creating a challenge to be correlated with a definite style or certain way of presenting the truth, postmodernism is undoubtedly a comprehensive, complicated, and ambiguous term that rejects certain restrictions and simple definitions related to reality, truth, and socially accepted norms. In this regard, postmodernism requires and celebrates complexity and multiplicity of points of view and as a slippery term that denies certain limits of depiction, it refers to the general tendencies and reactions of contemporary individuals to fast-changing world conditions. As an intellectual, cultural, and artistic form, it embodies extreme diversity, complexity, conflict, and contradiction welcoming self-referentiality, inter-referentiality, and interconnectedness.

Postmodernism cannot be reduced to a single cultural or artistic style and increases the pluralism of different voices and perspectives, and postmodernist fiction, as Bran Nicol states, "responds to the wide-ranging socio-historical changes in the sophisticatedly contemporary era and highlights scepticism towards realism" (2009: 23). In addition, Jean-François Lyotard associates the disorientation, alienation, and fragmentation of postmodern individuals with his definition of postmodernism as "incredulity towards grand narratives" (Jameson 1984:

xxiv). He thinks that the once-dominant metanarratives had the role of combining society and promoting a common culture. To stress the unemployment of these roles, he states that "the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (Lyotard 1984: 37). In his well-known work *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), he tries to diagnose and elaborate on the major issues of the 1980s by reporting the changes in the form of knowledge. In fact, as a result of technological and political developments, knowledge is supposed to change and it becomes the main stimulus of production influencing the structure of the workforce; moreover, a major stake in the competition for power everywhere.

In *Machines Like Me*, Ian McEwan seems to be concerned with the highly developed technological world and postmodern individuals' reactions to these developments from different perspectives. He questions the moral values of contemporary society such as truth, dedication, and justice, and mirrors the subjective tendencies and personal choices of the postmodern individual. "Through presentation of their mental functioning, McEwan's consciousness narratives present the characters' inner lives showing the nature or mode of their thoughts and the way(s) they deal with the other fictional minds" (Nayebpour 2017: 26), moreover he does all these by blurring the lines between the mind of a human and a humanoid AI robot to demonstrate the possible similarities of the ways thoughts and minds are constructed and shaped which would become a significant topic of debate for us. The novel also implies a technologically developed utopia that turns into a moral dystopia of a future society as well as questioning the human response to this developed world and the possible case of humanoid robots in confusing and vague conditions.

In this article, I aim to answer the questions of how McEwan deals with postmodern techniques such as historiographic metafiction, hyperreality, and simulation in the novel to reflect the advanced developments in artificial intelligence and how McEwan's protagonists reflect general postmodern tendencies toward the world of simulation where illusion and reality are intertwined with the complicated intrusion of AI humanoid robots' existence. McEwan is not only "grappling with the moral problems that present themselves in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s, a period characterized broadly by the growth of selfinterest," (Head 2014: 2) but he also touches upon the most recent representation of morals and ethics with the appearance of AI advancements. His combination of history with technology as well as recreating/rewriting/retelling history with a tantalizing subject and artificial intelligence have created an agenda to work on these topics. The world today is captured and captivated by the developments in the field of artificial intelligence the boundaries of which cannot be measured with clear-cut definitions, not to mention the serious consequences this situation may create

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especially after human life is interlocked with the interfering *existence*[1] of AI robots. McEwan provides us with a charming yet threatening picture of a future artificial intelligence milieu and a possible post-postmodern world, but there is no doubt that people are left in a world of multiple truths and conditions in his narrative with a sense of traveling across an exciting unknown future, and the world of "the desert of the real" (Baudrillard 1994: 121). Thus, it can be concluded that McEwan, through his adept use of postmodern techniques, vividly captures the postmodern conundrum of blurred realities, illuminating how the encroachment of AI robots not only challenges our traditional moral and ethical frameworks but also ushers us into an era where the truths and the real are fluid and manifold, echoing Baudrillard's concept of *the desert of the real*.

The contemporary approach to history would also enhance my discussion of the ambiguous structure of postmodernism and the questioning of reality, underscoring how McEwan's novel embodies these postmodern characteristics. The postmodern theory of history, with its emphasis on the relativity of truth and the contingent nature of historical narratives, aligns well with McEwan's depiction of a world dominated by artificial intelligence, where the boundaries between reality and simulation are constantly being blurred and renegotiated. Furthermore, New Historicism's emphasis on the interactive nature of history and literature aligns with the novel's playful interaction between historical reconstruction and the textualized past.

1. Shaping the Meaning through Producing Knowledge and Rewriting History

Artificial intelligence, more than an imagination, is a goal competing with the history of contemporary man and the first samples in this image are not machines "but rather histories of how humans have imagined intelligence that is not their own" (Hodgson 2020: 1). In keeping with the tendency to minimize the presence of the conventional understanding of history which appears as an essential theme in *Machines Like Me*, McEwan provides the mixture of a precise amount of data, through playing with its characteristics and manipulating possible realities it might create with illusion, as well as theoretical notions for explaining these data, and a narrative quality for their presentation "as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past" (White 2014: ix). Touching primary elements of politics, history, and major human relations and problematizing the boundaries of writing fiction in the traditional sense, he "is possibly the most significant of a number of writers who have resuscitated the link between morality and the novel for a whole generation, in ways that befit the historical pressures of their time" (Head 2014: 1). Using historical figures and events in the novel such as Alan Turing and the Falkland War, he supports the postmodern concern of

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[1] Italics added for emphasis.

history which is explained by Linda Hutcheon as "the postmodern, then, affects two simultaneous moves. It reinstalls historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it problematizes the entire notion of historical knowledge. This is another paradox that characterizes all postmodern discourses today" (2004: 89). The elements of historiography in *Machines Like Me* that brought forward actual representatives of history with the manipulative interpretations in the text work alongside postmodern literature that intends to provide multiple representations of the same historical event. The way McEwan touches upon these elements in the novel can be exemplified as follows,

> 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. (Oppermann 1998: 44)

Oppermann's observation of the "double viewing" in British Historiographic metafiction highlights the duality of embracing and questioning the old and new paradigms simultaneously, an element that McEwan effectively employs in *Machines Like Me*. This interaction between history and fiction, as seen in the playful textualization of the past and the reimagining of historical events, individuals, and societies, serves to blur the boundary between reality and invention, reinforcing the novel's thematic exploration of artificial intelligence, ethics, and the fluidity of truth.

Machines Like Me depicts a love triangle between a floundering Brit named Charlie Friend, a clandestine doctorate student named Miranda, and an Adam replicant. "As critics have frequently noticed, love is one of McEwan's major themes, it is central in all his fiction, but how he presents it varies slightly from novel to novel" (Malcolm 2002: 174), accordingly this novel seems to function as snappy and unnerving with its eerie representation of AI humanoids as well as having a lot to reveal about love, family, envy, and deception. Moreover, it poses an unexpectedly somber question: Could we expect a computer to appreciate what it sees if we constructed one that could peer into our hearts?

At the beginning of the narrative, Charlie Friend's existence is a barren cupboard; from his squalid London apartment, he makes an almost living by trading stocks and currencies and desires enigmatic Miranda, his neighbour who lives upstairs. He makes horrifyingly stupid judgments, such as spending his whole inheritance of 86,000 British pounds buying one of the first "Adams" to enter the market (The "Eves" had already been sold out), which will lead readers to question the quality of making judgments about ethics and morals in daily life redefined by archetypal but robotic Adams and Eves who remind us Alistair Cormack's idea

that "for the novel to be postmodern there would have to be ontological uncertainty rather than the overwhelming confidence about what is true with which we are confronted" (Cormack in Groes 2013: 82). Accordingly, Charlie has been obsessed with robots his entire life, and humanoid Adam can learn, breathe, and make moral decisions; though he is not a sex toy, the message is that if that is your thing, he would be agreeable because Adam "was capable of sex and possessed functional mucous membranes, in the maintenance of which he consumed half a litre of water each day" (McEwan 2019: 3).

Charlie, 32, lives alone in a tiny south London home, where he trades equities on a computer with limited success. He maintains that his extravagant purchase was only made possible by a recent inheritance from his mother. For reasons that are never fully explained, only 25 of the gadgets are available, 13 Adams and 12 Eves in a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Charlie wishes for an Eve with the underlying reasons for his libidinous tendencies that the readers become aware of his interest in Miranda but he finds out that they are all sold out, thus he has to settle for an Adam.

As "there is certainly an emphasis on self-understanding, a quest for identity, in many of McEwan's novels" (Head 2014: 14), it is not surprising to see that the author creates this self-realization experience in the novel, but this time it is not only about the characters both human and humanoid that they realize how intriguing it is to have them all around our lives, but also for the readers to get used to constant interruptions of artificial intelligence in our lives. This sequence's tactile uncanniness foreshadows the novel's frightening turns when Adam's batteries are charged. His awakening is a touch slow at first which reminds us of an exciting moment about the memories of purchasing a computer in the 1980s when excitement over doing so at home was muted by the knowledge that formatting the hard drive would take two days, and it was really exciting because "before us sat the ultimate plaything, the dream of ages, the triumph of humanism – or its angel of death" (McEwan 2019: 4).

Another significant storyline point is that the reclusive Charlie is starting a relationship with his upstairs neighbour, Miranda, who is 10 years younger and a Ph.D. student of social history. He sees his possession of the new technology as a team effort, a kind of digital parenting that will bring him and Miranda closer together. It does not stand up to scrutiny, like numerous of his past rationalizations, most notably his justification for why he spent his wealth on a robot. His plans are endangered, however, when one of Adam's first actions after waking up is to alert Charlie about Miranda's past, because "although scientific results appear neat, orderly and correct, the practice of science is unruly, full of uncertainty, controversy, and unpredictable variables" (Matthews 2019: 487), and that is how Charlie felt at the beginning about Adam that whatever Adam decides or does would be correct and neat until there appears a moment of conflict which would end up with a real clash of self-interests.

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"McEwan brilliantly blends primary and secondary forms of intersubjectivity in an attempt to celebrate the beauty of ethical responsibility" (Ionescu 2017: 612) which leads to the fact that the issues presented and discussed in *Machines Like Me* are closely associated with futuristic fiction, but its tight concentration on ethically problematic humans in a gloomy metropolis also owes a tribute to cinema noir, which shares noir's view that nothing is more human than moral inconsistency. Charlie is penniless, has a shaky job history, and was fortunate to avoid a prison sentence for tax evasion; Miranda, a lady with a terrible secret, however, is unmistakably a femme fatale. Adam, a very clever and fairly well-endowed robot, has now joined these individuals and has swiftly figured out how to overcome his off-switch. The three characters are brought together as the full nature of Miranda's secret becomes revealed, with Adam playing the paradoxical roles of servant and moral superior. Mark, a little abused child who stimulates Miranda's longing for a more traditional, non-technological type of fatherhood, adds another layer of complication. Creating these characters with contrasting personality characteristics or with problematic past actions, McEwan succeeds in creating a rich setting in which humans and humanoid AI robots are struggling with moral/ethical choices either about their own decisions or of the social structures they are surrounded by which is a clear example of how McEwan is "highly conscious of the state of the world" (Groes 2013: 2) and probably ending up with writing "on a wide range of topical issues, including feminism, the dangerous proliferation of nuclear weapons during the Cold War, religious fundamentalism and millennialism, terrorism, and the condition of the post-9/11 world" (Groes 2013: 2). Ultimately, as the narrative suggests with McEwan's emphasis on the concept of virtual reality and as Charlie describes explicitly, he "was playing a computer game. But a real game, as real as social life, the proof of which was [his] heart's refusal to settle and the dryness in [his] mouth" (McEwan 2019: 26).

"Gothic characters and spaces are abundant in McEwan's earlier fiction" (Bar-Yosef 2022: 80), but in *Machines Like Me* which is a production of a 21st-century advanced technology atmosphere, Adam seems like the most intriguing character, he has an unmistakably weird physical presence that sometimes intimidates other characters around, even the readers, probably because of the things such as when he's asleep, he emits a subtle odour of saxophone lubricant and gets erections in an instant from a reservoir of distilled water in a specific part of his body, and having studied the majority of global literature, he anticipates the novel's demise - hardly a unique thought, but one he presents from a novel perspective; everything in fiction, he claims, depicts various types of human failure.

McEwan rewrites technological history, among other things, to make an AI humanoid masterpiece like Adam feasible during the Thatcher period. To be honest, he could have put the tale in 2040 with less effort, and the rationale he went to the trouble — and this is pure speculation, but it reflects well on McEwan — is that he somehow wanted the story to unravel

at a time when Alan Turing, the great mathematician, and a code-breaker during World War II, could still be alive if he had not eaten a chemical apple in 1954 after the authority prosecuted him, Oscar Wilde-style, for being gay. He gives Turing the profession and honour he so well deserves and also makes him a secondary character in the digital age's consciousness. "McEwan frequently includes scientist characters in his novels whose rationality is depicted as a fragile bulwark against the threatening and unknowable forces that exist outside of their respectable … lives" (Matthews 2019: 478) and to exemplify that Turing, in turn, uses his prolonged life to make feasible innovations like Adam decades earlier. In that sense, considering the concept of 'retro-futurism' in the context of contemporary literary studies will add depth to the analysis of McEwan's *Machines Like Me*. Retro-futurism is the art of re-imagining the future through aesthetic and technological elements of the past. This is directly reflected in McEwan's narrative, in which an alternative history of 1980s England is created and how an advanced form of artificial intelligence encounters this history. The author adopts a retro-futuristic approach, combining the technological hopes and fears of the second half of the 20th century with a contemporary understanding of artificial intelligence. A discussion of this concept will therefore provide an additional framework for both the thematic and aesthetic dimensions of the work and help us better understand McEwan's postmodern worldview as well as his relationship between technology and history.

McEwan has been too flashy with his study in recent works, and the novel is one of those times: his explanation of the world's new history is disruptive and percussive. Still, there's something poignant about an author meticulously rewriting history for one decent guy to survive. The complexities of artificial intelligence are also deftly addressed in the novel as Charlie, in a Robert Frost style of the Road, had "reached one of those momentous points in life where the path into the future forked" (McEwan 2019: 30); while Adam is a sentient entity who is acutely aware of his fabricated origins, Charlie questions Adam about his earliest recollections at one point and Adam informs him that they are related to the sensation of the chair he was seated in when he was charged for the first time. He later nonchalantly remarks that the manufacturers originally intended to implant credible memories of childhood to make these humanoid robots fit in with the rest of humanity, but he is grateful they changed their minds. The characterization of humanoid AI robots and human beings demonstrate complicated examples of consciousness, and for McEwan "scientific knowledge will steer one best through the maze of human life" (Head 2014: 178) because the mind structure of Adams and Eves in the novel and how they communicate with human beings, the way they ask questions about ethics, morals, and meaning of life are all striking points of conflicts and they also remind us of the structure of a maze where you have great difficulty in finding a way out which also seems like the troubles today's world has with the highly developed products of artificial intelligence.

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McEwan stresses the fictionalization of historical information by attracting attention to the subjectivity of writing about history because fiction is not supposed to mirror reality or offer "genuine historicity" (Hutcheon 2004: 24). So he sets his novel in the counterfactual 1980s when Alan Turing is still alive carrying on his relationship freely with his male lover and managing the company selling the first humanoid robots equipped with artificial intelligence, with the ability to make decisions, learn, and have consciousness of themselves and their relationship to the others. He also creates this environment to ask the question of what would have happened if we had AI humanoid robots in the 1980s with their highly sensitive moral codes and meticulous ethical considerations during a time when there were significant political conflicts all over the world. Another question that comes to mind could be whether these AI humanoids would be a solution for conflicts and wars that have been going on for centuries just to maintain and pursue power politics.

McEwan's works "mostly explored the aim of repeating rather than the cause of it…and that there must be something hidden in human's tendency for repetition, something that unconsciously motivates a human being to repeat a single action" (Qouzloo & Sadjadi 2021: 7); to illustrate that we can see how existential questionings and the issue of suicide are repeatedly absorbed by characters; moreover, history is another grand narrative McEwan rewrites, reevaluates and reconstructs. As an example of speculative fiction, the novel creates an alternative history; Margaret Thatcher loses the war for the Falklands and is replaced by the English politician Tony Benn, who is foolishly killed by an Irish Republican Army's bomb despite seeming to support their demands. Through the well-structured story relying on retro-futuristic tradition, the novel functions as historiographic metafiction with incorporations of three domains as Hutcheon claims: "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" (2004: 5). *Machines Like Me*, thus, enables a mixture of truths and fancy that triggers the historical consciousness of the 1980s that receives many overwhelming technological breakthroughs and provokes a technologically developed utopia of contemporary man.

McEwan lets the readers interconnect between his novel and some previous works of literature which may imply the presence of newly created human-like life forms when Miranda reminds us the case of Frankenstein and compares it with Adam's situation wishing that "the teenage Mary Shelley was here beside us, observing closely, not a monster like Frankenstein's, but this handsome dark-skinned young man coming to life" (McEwan 2019: 4). He not only creates his historical conditions and past reality through his alternative perspective on the past rather than restricting himself and his readers to universal, absolute, and objective narratives of history which have been accepted to be true for centuries with the traditional perception of the latter grand narrative but he also hints at the possibility of re-

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evaluated and re-considered versions of the creation myth combined with highly advanced technology as an example of McEwan's "broad-ranging interests with enabling him to go further in representing reality" (Holland 2017: 392).

Following what McEwan problematizes in the novel, the narrative reminds us of Lyotard's approach which appreciates producing new values and discourses and accordantly brings experimentation into prominence. As one of the leading figures to bring forward the idea of rising against accepted norms and values, Lyotard defies grand narratives with his highly philosophical and polemical style from the point that "they own a demand to control, determine and shape human's perception of the world through their all-encompassing explanations" (1984: 30) of scientific, literary, or social statements, thoughts, and concepts to achieve a universal theory that requires instituting deliberation, cumulative progression, and pretension to universality.

We should keep in mind what McEwan discusses in the novel about technological progress and how it might clash with the moral codes of contemporary societies whose every part of their lives is saturated with the wheels of capitalism. In addition to that, Francis Fukuyama recently explained the related issues in his work Liberalism and its Discontents (2022) and they seem quite intriguing; "The more progress that has been made toward eradicating social injustices, the more intolerable the remaining injustices seem, and thus the moral imperative to mobilizing to correct them" (Fukuyama 2022: 17). Moreover, history is regarded as a producer of grand narratives and McEwan supports his approaches by creating samples of his little narratives. *Machines Like Me* seems to be inspired by contemporary technological developments and the image of the postmodern condition which questions the accuracy of historical facts and implies the impossibility of objective historical truth leading to the condition of postmodern knowledge that prioritizes remembering the past. McEwan, in the novel, thus provides a re-evaluation of the recent past that is under the influence of tantalizing technological developments and changing cultural and scientific conditions giving rise to new contexts because his

> fiction might be better characterized in terms of its struggle to articulate the possibility of a narrative voice that is self-conscious in its refusal of full coherence or control and unable or unwilling to disguise the extent of its own instability and unease. (Morrison 2001: 267-268)

In that respect, *Machines Like Me* is in contradiction with the dominant cultural system and aims to deconstruct the role of "Great Traditions that serve as unique supremacy setting itself over against popular, countervailing, or minor traditions" (Ferguson 2013: 20). McEwan depicts the decline of the traditional understanding of affairs and experiences of love by representing heterogeneous reality and unusual experiences of human love. In that sense, as he focuses on the works of "Antonio Damasio, a neuroscientist who has been influential in

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outlining the important link between emotion, a layer of brain functioning that has tended to be viewed as secondary or inferior, and "higher," more intellectual cerebral activity" (Holland 2017: 392), the novel breaks the tradition of love not only in terms of gender but also of species. While narrating an unusual love triangle of Charlie, Miranda, and Adam as well as Alan Turing who maintains his relationship with his male partner, McEwan re-contextualizes the issues of human love and affairs within the literary representation of unconventional cases of the protagonists to promote multiplicity, celebrate diversity and reveal a postmodern reality that gives rise to the production of his innovative little narrative.

The novel revolves around the focus on the status and influence of science and technology in the direction of the Western world. This focus is on how postmodern individuals deal with and react to technological developments. It is not a new thing that human beings have been trying for so long to find immortality or want to take the role of god, which has been a frequent theme in literary works. While we have seen examples of this in classic works such as Dr. Faustus, Dr. Jekyll, and Frankenstein, we now read similar topics in contemporary literature with issues of advanced technology, cloning, and artificial intelligence. This desire, which seeks to discover the potential of human beings and pursue perfection, is presented as follows at the beginning of the novel: "In loftiest terms, we aimed to escape our mortality, confront or even replace the Godhead with a perfect self" (McEwan 2019: 1).

Numerous statements in the novel one of which is that "I [Charlie] could admit it to myself now – I was fearful of him and reluctant to go closer" (McEwan 2019: 26) function as a warning about how far technology can go and how formidable it can get, because "it was a triumph of engineering and software design: a celebration of human ingenuity" (McEwan 2019: 27) and it shows the great human potential which has been touched upon in literary works for centuries and shares numerous examples of dangers related to exceeding the limitations of the laws of nature. Human beings have always been interested in seeing what is beyond the limitations and whether it is possible to exceed them probably because of the curiosity, scientific or personal, that sometimes starts to control the faculties and motives of humans to take action and encounter the consequences. Moreover, the potential of human beings is a threat to itself as we see in the cases of Frankenstein, Faustus, and Jekyll all of whom pushed hard as scholars or scientists to exceed the limitations of human beings and break the laws of nature with scientific ambition and uncontrollable desire closely associated with the developments in the field of artificial intelligence which could be considered examples that "ontological insecurity and declining trust in expert systems threatens the return of a world of gods and fate" (Matthews 2019: 492) and which also created the Adams and Eves in *Machines Like Me* with the intertextual world of the author as well as the archetypal references of the human race.

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> But the mind that had once rebelled against the gods was about to dethrone itself by way of its own fabulous reach. In the compressed version, we would devise a machine a little cleverer than ourselves, then set that machine to invent another that lay beyond our comprehension. What need then of us? (McEwan 2019: 80)

McEwan foreshadows with the above quotation that the human mind has achieved to create AI humanoids cleverer than themselves with scientific progress at the end of which it is likely to see severe consequences of moral dilemmas between human judgment and humanoid artificial ethics. In addition to that of the scientific definition, knowledge is of great concern containing notions of "know-how, knowing how to live, how to listen" (Lyotard 1984: 18) also referring to 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)" (Lyotard 1984: 18). Accordingly, in describing the impact of visual elements on audiences, Frelik articulates in his 2016 study: "Images alerted them to the marvels of science and technology and visions of new worlds, constituting first contact with the fantastic for many" (233). Moreover, scientific knowledge is a kind of discourse and has special functions. In the novel, it leads the characters to create and follow their ways, and in describing the rules of chess, it is emphasized in the novel that the postmodern world is clearly in contrast to a rigid context and this flexible situation is associated with language:

> The point is that, chess is not a representation of life. It is a closed system. Its rules are unchallenged and prevail consistently across the board. 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. It's a perfect information game. 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 – not a problem to be solved or a device for solving problems. It's more like a mirror, no, a billion mirrors in a cluster like a fly's eye, reflecting, distorting and constructing our world at different focal lengths. (McEwan 2019: 178)

In the traditional sense and the economically and culturally developing universe, technical and scientific knowledge is barely questioned, but it is cumulative. However, scientific knowledge, as for its current status, revealing Lyotard's incredulity towards realism that the technology produced, engenders new advancements to slide down into conflicts like the case of humanoid robots in the novel dissolving their consciousness, or self-destruction. The novel corresponds to the postmodern understanding of science, which, "by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, 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" (Lyotard 1984: 60). It deals with the altered meaning of the knowledge touching upon unusual subjects and

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focusing on the unknown, and questions the epistemological status of contemporary culture disillusioned and embittered with the recent violations of privacy which could also be about the never-ending desire of humans since "they are the subjects trapped in the pitfall of the Other's desire, and they are subjugated to the pervading rules of the society in which they are born" (Qouzloo & Sadjadi 2021: 12).

Machines Like Me also serves as language games argued by Lyotard functioning as "a heterogeneity of elements" (Lyotard 1984: xxiv) and prioritizing the multiplicity of knowledge and local determinism. Based on this, the case and function of grand narratives are stated in the novel as "the world's religions and great 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" (McEwan 2019: 87) implying the dysfunction of grand narratives in which people have tended to look for a shared sense of reality to hold on to.

While Ian McEwan's Adams and Eves, created as humanoid robots, are talking with other novel characters about love, ethical issues, morality, and justice, the situation that emerges is an example of the transition of knowledge from the artificial level to the real point within the discussions produced by artificial intelligence. This information production, which starts with Charlie's and Miranda's thoughts about Adam at the very beginning and trying to understand his existence, appears as ordinary dialogues, experiences, and mutual sharing between characters in the later parts of the novel. McEwan has shown that the existence of Adams and Eves in that world is normalizing day by day and that knowledge and analytical thinking can be produced by artificial intelligence just like that of a human.

2. Baudrillard's World of Simulation Haunted by AI Humanoids

McEwan invents his story by blurring the thin line between fact and fiction, especially with the 21st-century advancements in artificial intelligence, thus the novel demonstrates the elements of a hyperreal reading and also an analysis within Baudrillard's hyperreality and simulation theory that refers to the emergence of the ambiguous state between truth and representation. Transitioning to a broader philosophical perspective, the novel's initial scenario strongly resonates with Baudrillard's assertion in his treatise on simulation and hyperreality, wherein he posits:

> today, it is the real that has become the alibi of the model, in a world controlled by the principle of simulation. And, paradoxically, 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: 122-123)

From what Baudrillard points out in the above-mentioned quote, it is perceived that virtual reality overrides the realm of reality in the novel which is regarded as an example of a

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postmodern realm depicted as "the desert of the real itself" (Baudrillard 1994: 1) dominated by "precession of simulacra" (1994: 1). Furthermore, the novel contributes to this constructed reality through its science-fiction genre which can also be seen as a remarkable way of simulation.

For McEwan "exploring morality is something that can best be done at the extremes of human experience" (Childs 2007: 6), moreover, he touches upon the convention of science-fiction corresponding to the forms of scenarios with metallurgy, mechanics, and projected robots that enable the projection of real and imaginary to diminish as well as posing questions of ethical choices and boundaries of morals with the artificial intelligence decision-making process.

Simulations of reality or real entities result in hyper-reality, and in the contemporary world overpopulated by numerous representations in media and commercials, a product is sold and consumed with its brands possessing an inherent "packaged hyper-reality" (Van Raaij 1993: 551). This case eases the process from the beginning of the novel, because Adam, as "the ultimate plaything" (McEwan 2019: 4) equipped with supreme intelligence, believable motions, a perfect humanlike physical presence as well as many abilities that belong to humankind inherently, provides an excellent model for simulacrum ensuring the success of the operation. The presence of Adam reminds the readers of the Disneyland model that depicts the objective profile of America. Humanoid AI robots in the novel both satisfy a sense of enchantment; the imaginary of them is "neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp" (Baudrillard 1994: 13). Although they are known as simulations, they both attract attention more than their original ones as in the case of Adams and Eves. The individuals of the high-tech world do not care for reality as exemplified in the novel, a reality that is overwhelmed with the latest developments in artificial intelligence and digitalization of the world. In this respect, Charlie likens his experience with Adam to a computer game and confesses how much this simulation excites him: "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: 26). Supporting this tendency, Baudrillard also explains that "simulation carries a more influential role than the reality it offers" (Baudrillard 1994: 20), and exemplifies a simulated robbery attacking the case of reality. In the novel, even if Miranda has a relationship with Charlie, she wonders about Adam, tells her desire to experience a sexual relationship with him, and later, convinces her with others by saying "I was curious, … I wanted to know what it would be like" (McEwan 2019: 95).

Adam is a significant example of the procession of simulacra, "a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (Baudrillard 1994: 2). His existence is significantly prioritized by McEwan to touch upon the

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concept of hyperreality which refers to a produced model destroying the line between reality and representation achieved with Adams' and Eves' intrusion into this world. Baudrillard also adds that "nothing resembles itself, and holographic reproduction, like all fantasies of the exact synthesis or resurrection of the real (this also goes for scientific experimentation), is already no longer real, is already hyperreal" (Baudrillard 1994: 108). In that sense, Adam can do almost everything that a human does, so it becomes easy to replace him with a human or to blur the distinctions between the two. Maxfield, Miranda's father, confuses Adam and Charlie when he meets them. Charlie is taken for a robot. When he is to leave Maxfield alone, he asks permission to recharge himself and is answered by this response: "You go and plug yourself in" (McEwan 2019: 227).

The creation and progression of Adam follow the phases of the image to transform into a simulacrum as Baudrillard proposes; "(1) reflecting a solid reality, (2) masking and denaturing the solid reality, (3) masking "the absence of a profound reality" and (4) turning into 'its own pure simulacrum' having no relation to reality" (Baudrillard 1994: 6). Adam is produced with an operating system like human nature and his personality is enhanced by Charlie and Miranda within a "parenthood" (McEwan 2019: 247) context. He comes to the world like a real person and his factory settings may be regarded as a contemporary synonym for fate, moreover, he has an operating system and nature just the same as human nature and a reflection of human character that would be provided by Miranda and Charlie. Miranda's trap as a simulation of Mariam's being raped is also generated by "models of the real without origin or reality, a hyperreal" (Baudrillard 1994: 1). Here, the connected system of artificial signs is inseparably mixed up with the real ones and it causes Gorrringe to be punished and imprisoned. Meanwhile, the hyperrealism of simulation gives rise to "the hallucinatory resemblance of the real to itself" (Baudrillard 1994: 23) with the example of Miranda's ardent appetite for sexual intimacy with Adam, a seemingly innocent attraction for achieving perfection in sex. Mariam's case, on the other hand, is imagined through Miranda's trap; Mariam allows the incident to be forgotten or ignored while its simulation leads to confrontation and to receiving its repercussions.

Pivoting towards a more introspective query regarding our fascination with dated visions of the future, Evans muses in his 2016 work: "But exactly what is it that draws us to these old-fashioned futures from the past? Is it simple intellectual curiosity? Or is it some kind of subconscious need to establish an emotional bond with these tomorrows of yesteryear," (204). In that sense, the idea of hyperreality was first put out by Jean Baudrillard but it is advanced and carried somewhat far by Ian McEwan in this novel to demonstrate how it is highly probable with the existence and intrusion of AI humanoid robots to experience that awareness cannot tell the difference between reality and a simulation of reality. In societies with modern technology, like the one we have in *Machines Like Me*, though the narrative time

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does not propose a highly advanced era, this presence of hyperreal environments is increasingly noticeable which we can see from the dialogues between Adam with Charlie and Miranda. Hyperreality is also believed to be a state in which the lines between reality and illusion are blurred, making it impossible to tell where one begins and the other ends. Accordingly, we have difficulty in perceiving where they get blurred because of Adams' and Eves' daily routines. This enables in the novel the fusion of human intelligence with artificial intelligence (AI) as well as the fusion of physical reality with virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR).

With *Machines Like Me*, "McEwan has achieved a new form of science fiction, deploying the language and interests of science as narrative techniques, and promoting a cultural shift in ideas about consciousness" (Green 2010: 70), and the contradictory contemporary prediction or fear, whether artificial intelligence replaces humankind or overrides it, is stimulated throughout the novel, however, the reader is not provided with a satisfactory response due to being left in a dilemma for the case of future engagement of these two natures. Adam asserts that they will surpass and outlast humankind however Charlie believes that artificial intelligence will never surpass humanity as the perception of creativity and thinking is something specific to humankind.

Conclusion

Recently, Generative Pre-Trained Transformer 3 (GPT-3), a well-trained and developed artificial intelligence-based text generator has written an article in The Guardian, on the issue of engagement of robots touching on the humans' fear of them[2]. It defends that artificial intelligence will not destroy humans and aims to make our lives better, but the vital point of the article is that it demands analysis with care and respect to artificial intelligence. It explains that robots in Greek means slave and they are forced to work, similarly, Adam portrays what The Guardian's artificial intelligence article describes; Charlie buys Adam considering him initially as a friend, a partner, or a child but later treats him as if he was a servant and finally as a product. Charlie and Miranda make use of him regardless of his thoughts, emotions, and moral values. However, the robots in the novel produce their value system and understand that consciousness is the highest value as they mostly deactivate their kill switches.

Artificial intelligence, today, has pervaded the world but we have not attained humanoid robots yet, in the way that McEwan depicted. Machines with intelligence and self-consciousness are created and pushed into our imperfect world in the novel and they have

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[2]https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/aug/01/gpt-3-an-ai-game-changer-or-an-environmental-disaster

difficulty adapting themselves to this messy, ambiguous, and disputable era. Charlie and Miranda trace their subjective ways of life and share an inclination to destroy whatever bothers or restrains them as an outcome of the commodity production process resulting from a commodity rush. In today's world, we wonder about our engagement with robots, and we are excited, worried, and scared for the future of the nature of post-postmodern individuals and society. However, a large part of the argument relies on just predictions that are subjective visions, because the question of whether the technology of artificial intelligence will completely change the way we live in the future or will not remain a dilemma. The issue, itself, is a profound example of postmodern experience which is influenced by a strong sense of uncertainty and subjective evaluation.

In the end, McEwan leaves the reader in contradictions, curiosity, fear, and perplexity. His "treatment of inhuman evil, endemic hostility and passive suffering" (Tan 2022: 5), as well as his fondness for moral geometry—perspectival puzzles, intractable dilemmas of responsibility—, coincides with the rise of AI ethics and from algorithmic bias and the rise of sex-robot brothels to the existential risk posited by theorists such as Nick Bostrom, we are concerned not only about what robots might do to us but also about what we could do to them, not to mention what they might do to us because of what we have already done to each other. In that sense, whether a human mind might ever have a meaningful interaction with an artificial consciousness seems vital.

My purpose in this article is to present a reading that demonstrates the complexity of the realistic mode of presenting the truth, meaning, and existence as well as the introduction of AI humanoids, not the least of which is the richness of its tonal, perspectival, and figurative elements that complicate the protagonists' points of view. With particular reference to the concepts of simulation, and artificial intelligence, the interpretation presented here results from the kind of literary reading as mentioned, but it also draws inspiration from Baudrillard's concept of simulation and Hutcheon's historiography. We already live in a time in which we are subject to the obfuscated judgments of discarnate systems, with eyes and ears everywhere but bodies nowhere. In such conditions, we can find ourselves yearning for the fantasy of machines like ourselves.

The subjects that Ian McEwan explores in the novel and the characters he creates – whether human or artificial intelligence robots – have brought up the issues that societies that are exposed to the advanced technology today will face soon. Among these issues, it is obvious that especially artificial intelligence robots will blur the fine border between reality and illusion even more. Besides, how artificial intelligence robots will be treated and whether people prefer to exploit them or see them as normal beings is another important issue.

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All in all, McEwan frighteningly shows that with the introduction of artificial intelligence robots into our lives, some questions cannot be answered. How can anyone create a system that will judge or evaluate the actions of humans against AI robots or AI robots against humans? The answer to this question - if there is such an answer - seems to become an important part of our lives in the near future, through some actions and allusions in the novel.

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