Gendering Robotic Bodies in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* and Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous*

Ian McEwan'ın *Benim Gibi Makineler* ve Annalee Newitz'in *Otonom* Romanlarında Robotik Bedenlerin Cinsiyetlendirilmesi

Yağmur Sönmez Demir*
University of Heidelberg, Çankaya University

Abstract
With the ubiquity of robotic devices in contemporary age, human-like robots have become protagonists of literary works, especially of science fiction which extrapolates from the existing technology and represents how the societies will be arranged or what kind of rules the individuals will be imposed on in the future. In Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019) and Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous* (2017) humanoids are in the center of the narrative and though being mechanical human productions, they are expected to comply with heteronormative genders and required to perform their gender roles. Adams and Eves in *Machines Like Me* are produced in a limited number and created as factotum, while Paladin in *Autonomous* is a military bot who is produced as non-binary and without any gender marker; it is basically a machine with blades on its shoulders and hidden shields and weapons, yet because of its being in the military domain and its appearance, it is referred to as "he" by the humans until it was understood that he has a "woman's brain." From then onwards, Paladin was accepted as a woman, and she complied with the social expectations of femininity. When these novels are read through the prism of the classical theories of gender and posthuman feminism, it is observed that just like those of human beings, bodies of robots are also compelled to perform culturally constructed gender roles. Through a comparative examination of these novels, this paper investigates how humans are unable to leave their anthropocentrism behind and how human-centered perspective functions as an entrapment for the nonhumans and thus they are required to comply with the anthropocentric understanding of gender, which is still constructed in a binary logic in regulating the lives of nonhuman entities.
Keywords: gendered robots, performativity, compulsory heterosexuality, posthuman feminism.

Öz
Günümüzde robotik cihazların yaygınlaşmasıyla birlikte, insan benzeri robotlar edebi eserlerin, özellikle de mevcut teknolojiden yola çıkan ve gelecekte toplumların nasıl düzenleneceğini ya da bireylere ne tür kurallar dayatılacağını temsil eden bilim kurgu eserlerinin baş kahramanları haline geldi. Ian McEwan'ın *Machines Like Me* (Benim Gibi Makineler, 2019) ve Annalee Newitz'in *Autonomous* (Otonom, 2017) adlı eserlerinde anlatının merkezinde yer alan insansı robotların, mekanik insan üretimleri olmalarına rağmen, heteronormatif cinsiyetlere sahip olmaları ve toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini yerine getirmeleri beklenir. *Benim Gibi Makineler*'deki Adam ve Eve robotlar sınırlı sayıda her işi yapacak kapasitede üretilirken, Otonom'daki Paladin askeri bir robottur ve herhangi bir cinsiyete ait olmadan üretilmiştir; aslında omuzlarında bıçakları, gizli kalkanları ve silahları olan bir makinedir, ancak askeri alanda olması ve görünüşü nedeniyle, "kadın beynine" sahip olduğu anlaşılana kadar insanlar tarafından "erkek" olarak adlandırılır. Kadın beyni meselesi ortaya çıkınca Paladin bir kadın olarak kabul edilmiş ve toplumun kadınlık kimliği beklentilerine uymuştur. Bu romanlar klasik toplumsal cinsiyet kuramları ve insan sonrası feminizm çerçevesinde okunduğunda, tıpkı insanlarınki gibi robotların bedenlerinin de kültürel olarak inşa edilmiş toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini yerine getirmeye zorlandığı görülmektedir. Bu makale, bu romanları karşılaştırmalı olarak

*Post-doctoral Research Fellow, University of Heidelberg; Assist. Prof. Dr., Çankaya University
ORCID# 0000-0002-8204-2401; yagmurdemir40@gmail.com; https://doi.org/10.47777/cankujhss
CUJHSS (ISSN 1309-6761) Dec 2023; 17/2, 274-286. Received Aug 25, 2023; Accepted Dec 18, 2023

inceleyerek, insanların insanmerkezciliklerini nasıl geride bırakamadıklarını ve bu insanmerkezci yaklaşımın insan olmayanları nasıl tuzağa düşürdüğünü ve insan olmayanların insanmerkezci toplumsal cinsiyet anlayışına nasıl uymak zorunda kaldıklarını ortaya koymaktadır, ki bu cinsiyet anlayışı da ikili bir mantıksal düzenle insan olmayan varlıkların hayatlarını düzenler.
Anahtar kelimeler: cinsiyetli robotlar, cinsiyet edimi, zorunlu heteroseksüellik, insanötesi feminizm.

In its broadest sense, gender is an ideologically, socially, and culturally constructed concept that influences the cultural, social, psychological, and behavioral aspects of humans' lives. Social psychologists Myerson and Kolb argue that the concept of gender is "an axis of power, identities, an organizing principle that shapes social structure, and it is knowledge" (2000, p. 563). The relationship between body and power was first acknowledged by Michael Foucault, in his chapter "Docile Bodies," taking a soldier as a starting point, he states "the body was in the grip of stringent powers, which imposed on its constraints, prohibitions or obligations" (1995, p. 136). According to Foucault, the pervasive force of society shapes an individual's body, which is turned into a type of a prison for the individual. Drawing on Foucault's arguments on the relationship between power and individuals, Butler further comments "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender: that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1996, p. 33). Gender identities are social constructions that result from power relations and are internalized by individuals. With the ubiquity of robotic devices in our age, human-like robots have become protagonists of literary works, especially of science fiction, which generally extrapolates from the existing technology and represents how societies will be arranged or what kind of rules individuals will be imposed on in the future or in alternative realities. Two such thought-provoking novels, which give insights about nonhuman human entanglements, are Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* (2019) and Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous* (2017), with humanoids at the heart of the narrative. Though mechanical human productions, the humanoids are approached with an anthropomorphic attitude by the humans and they are assigned or expected to have heteronormative gender identities and are required to perform their prescribed gender roles.

There are a great number of scholarly criticisms of *Machines Like Me,* while only few articles have been published on *Autonomous.* Among the scholarly articles on these novels, merely few of them comment on the gender identity of humanoids. Büyükgebiz, for instance, studies the former from the perspective of masculinity studies and argues that Adam, the humanoid, is a "victim of hegemonic masculinity" (2021, p. 68) and with this feature, he "provokes the fear of losing masculinity" (Büyükgebiz, 2021, p. 59) in society. While Büyükgebiz provides an insightful reading of the novel, he solely focuses on the gender role of Adam. There is only one comparative analysis on these novels by Hayles, who studies above mentioned novels and Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* and argues that "the human aura is subverted by conscious robots" in the novels (2023, p. 255), and concludes that "the human aura should be transformed to include a biophilic orientation to cognitive capacities on Earth" (Hayles, 2023, p. 277). Although Hayles presents a penetrating account of the novels, her focus differs markedly from that of this article. The aim of this paper is to read *Machines Like Me* and *Autonomous* through the prism of the classical theories of gender and posthuman feminism to display how just like those of human beings, bodies of robots are also compelled to perform culturally constructed gender roles, for both the robots and gender roles are constructed by the same hegemonic and anthropocentric structure. Through a comparative examination of these novels, this paper investigates how humans

are unable to leave their anthropocentrism behind, and how nonhumans are subjected to dualistic and anthropocentric understanding of gender.

Gender has been extensively studied and written on, and it is not straightforward to define, being a complex and multifaceted concept. Depending on their physiological characteristics at birth, babies of humans are attributed to either male or female roles. Feminist critics have offered challenging accounts of the concept of gender, and the most commonly held belief is that patriarchy conditions the way people behave. Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement "One is not born a woman but rather becomes one" from *The Second Sex* (1973, p. 34) establishes the ground for the idea that gender is a cultural construction. De Beauvoir claims that nobody is born with a gender, it is invariably acquired, and "to become a woman is a purposive and appropriate set of acts, the gradual acquisition of a skill" (Butler, 1986, p. 36). Building on De Beauvoir's ideas, Butler considers gender as "the discursive and cultural means by which sexed nature or a natural sex is produced and established as prediscursive prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (1996, p. 11). Thus, the construction of gender is indeed political, and once a baby is born into a specific culture, it is plunged into this pre-discursive gender structure. Classical theories of gender are criticized by posthumanist scholars on the grounds of having an anthropocentric approach, which assumes the "belief that humans enjoy special, central, even cosmic significance," (Butchvarov, 2015, p. 1). Humans have long desired to believe that they are the most important beings in the world and have developed a biased understanding of the other beings around themselves from an anthropocentric perspective. In fact, posthumanism and gender theories intersect with their criticism of heterosexuality. Disputing human exceptionalism, posthumanisms seek to debunk the idea of human exceptionalism and to decentralize human, represented mostly by a white, heterosexual, male, able-bodied, and a middle-class person. By abolishing the long-held idea of human at the center, posthumanisms pursue ways to establish a non-hierarchical relationality based on the idea of fragility of boundaries. In posthumanist understanding, so-called boundaries between human and nonhuman are rendered redundant, and a renegotiating of the concept "human" is suggested by drawing attention to the interdependence of all entities.

One can clearly observe that Butler maintains an anthropocentric approach about the much-debated distinction between sex and gender, and declares that one is born with "a sex, as a sex, sexed, and that being sexed and being human are coextensive and simultaneous. Sex is a human attribute and there is no one who is not sexed" (1996, p. 142). While it is commonly held that choice of gender is a way of interpreting social gender roles, Butler argues that sex, gender, and the body are all different types of constructions, and the body emerges as an instrument on which social and cultural significations are imprinted (1996, p. 12). Human bodies are politically constructed as a result of gender; thus, there is no natural body that precedes culture. The body is also constructed linguistically by way of performative utterances such as it is "a girl" or "a boy." Analogous to Butler, Monique Wittig contests the distinction between sex and gender. According to Wittig, the category of sex is politically laden, she maintains "We have been compelled in our bodies and our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with an idea of nature that has been established for us" (1992, p. 9). She claims that the concepts "woman" and "man" are manufactured concepts that serve to consolidate and stabilize a binary relation, the economic requirements and the reproductive goals of a system of compulsory heterosexuality (Wittig, 1992, p. 2). Similarly, Butler puts forth that gender is a kind of imitation and that

> The naturalistic effects of heterosexualized genders are produced through imitative strategies … In this sense the reality of heterosexual identities is performatively constituted through an imitation that sets itself up as the origin. In other words,

> heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself. (2004, p. 128)

It could be argued that gender is directly related to the metaphysics of being and it is also a kind of performance because it "happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation" (Butler, 1994, p. 3), and it is" the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (Butler, 1996, p. 45). Butler underlines gender as a construction that develops over time rather than being an inherent attribute of humans. This proposition of Butler has been contested by scholars of feminist posthumanism. Karen Barad, for instance, holds that

> All bodies, not merely "human" bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity- its performativity … Human bodies are not inherently different from "nonhuman" ones. What constitutes the "human" (and the "nonhuman") is not a fixed or pregiven notion, nor is it a free-floating ideality. (2003, p. 823)

Within the framework of posthumanism, not only humans but also nonhumans should be thought of as a part of the universe, thereby being included in the ethical, ontological, and epistemological processes and production of the matter of bodies.

Adrienne Rich considers heterosexuality a universally pervasive *institution* shaping male and female relationships. It is through this institution of heterosexuality that men and women enter romantic relationships on the basis of unwritten, yet plainly established conventions. According to Rich, heterosexuality is not natural; rather, it is political in character, serving the wants and desires of males within the patriarchal system and necessitating various forms of male coercion of women in order to produce it. Rich maintains that "heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women" (1980, p. 30). As a system of oppression, compulsory heterosexuality coerces women to remain within well-defined and formidable boundaries. Rich's theory of compulsory heterosexuality focuses primarily on female suffering and lesbian existence. She has been criticized for excluding male homosexuality from her writings. In this respect, Connell draws attention to the fact that it is not only women for whom heterosexuality is obligatory, "compulsory heterosexuality is also enforced on men" (1995, p. 104). Likewise, reminding the proverbial "it takes two to tango," Tolman states that "boys and men, too, are engaged in the process of reproducing heterosexuality, and it is compulsory for men as well" (2006, p. 77). Men are also influenced by the dominant culture, which inculcates the belief that heterosexuality is the only acceptable and natural practice of sexual relationships. If the novels studied are considered within the scope of critical posthumanism, compulsory heterosexuality acts as a tool to regulate the lives of nonhuman beings as well as humans, though in its essence compulsory heterosexuality critiques the existence of nonhuman entities, which presents us with a quandary. While the borders of human and nonhuman are eroded in practice when it comes to the issue of gender, they remain unshakeable in principle.

Gender is a primary social category shaped by the social norms; therefore, "most social behavior is embedded in the performance of specific roles, and gender roles serve as a backdrop that pervades the performance of such specific roles" (Wood & Eagly, 2010, p. 631). Depending on their genders, individuals are attributed some certain ways of behavior. To exemplify, "Men, more than women, are thought to be agentic—that is, masterful, assertive, competitive, and dominant. Women, more than men, are thought to be communal—that is, friendly, unselfish, concerned with others, and emotionally expressive" (Wood & Eagly, 2010, p. 632). In addition to agency and communion regarding gender stereotypes, people also make a point of the contrasting features of male and female bodies; they "regard men as muscular, strong, and tall and women as pretty, sexy, and petite. With

respect to the mind, … women [are] more creative and verbally skilled and men [are] more analytical and quantitatively skilled" (Wood & Eagly, 2010, p. 632). The adjectives used to define the gender roles of females and males are prescriptive rather than descriptive, which is also the result of the dictation of heteronormativity.

In such a social structure that enforces stereotypical roles on individuals, it seems impossible for technology to remain abstracted from social and cultural norms. Katherine Hayles maintains technology "has become so entwined with the production of identity that it can no longer meaningfully be separated from the human subject" (1999, p. xiii). Both transhumans and cyborgs, as well as technologically constructed nonhuman bodies, are in the grasp of hegemonic structures. Victoria Pitts holds "high-tech body appears socially plastic" (2005, p. 46), implying that they are modelled on socially accepted norms and beliefs. In contrast to the assumption that technology has the potential to free human beings from their cultural limitations as well as physical constraints, she acknowledges that "our self-identity, our sexualities, and other aspects of our embodied subjectivity are shaped by powerfully gendered discourses" (Pitts, 2005, p. 46). Similarly, Balsamo suggests that it is not possible to have an environment free of the identity or material body because "the gender … identity of the material body structures the way that body is subsequently culturally reproduced and technologically disciplined" (1996, p. 233). Gender is "both a determining cultural condition and a social consequence of technological deployment" (Balsamo, 1996, p. 9). The ubiquity of gender stereotypes also influences the production of robots and humanoids; they have mostly been attributed stereotypical personality traits and occupational role stereotypes, depending on their predetermined genders. Although robots are mostly produced gender-neutral, people interacting with them insist on labeling them with gender markers, which is one of the results of anthropocentrism; humans want to perceive everything around themselves depending on their own understanding of life, to benefit their own interests. Robots' non-binary production could be considered in line with Donna Haraway's cyborg metaphor explained in *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Being neither fully organic nor fully inorganic, cyborgs are hybrid entities which occupy a third space, and "the cyborg is a creature in a postgender world" (Haraway, 2016, p. 8). The figure of the cyborg, then, deconstructs the binary understanding of gender, it has no origin thereby no oedipal link to connect it to an antecedent; however, human perception struggles to codify stereotypical gender roles on nonhuman entities.

Posthumanist thought challenges this tendency of human beings to place themselves above all other beings. Rosi Braidotti, for instance, asserts that the historical nature-culture boundary is currently "replaced by a non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction" (2013, p. 3). Haraway suggests that questioning and no longer consenting to the tenets of human exceptionalism begins with "knowing more … and feeling more" about human and nonhuman living beings and their dynamic entanglements in and with the world (1990, p. 295). Gaining a deeper understanding of nonhuman living beings and the dynamic interactions between them and humans may challenge the notion of human exceptionalism. Within this frame, traditional notions of gender and body have also been challenged by posthuman critics. Instead of rigid boundaries and anthropocentric approaches, a more fluid understanding of gender, going beyond traditional gender roles, is proposed. In this regard, feminist posthumanities "engages with critical and creative pursuits that address our changing relationships between political animals of both human and more-than-human kinds, and among bodies, technologies, and environments" (Asberg & Braidotti, 2018, p. 16). The boundaries between humans and nonhumans are obliterated, for the lines between "the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 89) are crossed in the Anthropocene. Referring to Butler's concept of gender as a performance,

Barad discusses the link between performativity and the production of the subject, and how it is related to the production of the matter of bodies, and she suggests "Posthumanist notion of performativity—one that incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors" (2003, p. 808). Much as posthumanist critics foreground all-inclusive approaches in order to embrace both humans and nonhumans, anthropocentric attitudes pervade in the contemporary age. Within the scope of gender theories, Braidotti draws attention to "masculinist universalism" (2013, p. 22), which is also critiqued by humanist feminism. Nonhumans also suffer from masculinist universalism, in that they are under the pressure of rigid gender roles. Haraway states that cyborg bodies are "maps of power and identity" (1990, p. 180); it seems it is nearly impossible to be freed of the chains of gender. The nonhumans in McEwan's and Newitz's novels are, too, within the grasp of patriarchal gender roles and stereotypes.

Both novels present the stories of nonhuman entities that are forced into performing one of the genders in binary logic. McEwan's *Machines Like Me* explores the intersection of nonhuman and human relationships, and the story is set in an alternative London in the 1980s. In this alternate history, the UK has undergone extensive computerization, and the Internet and artificial intelligence have played active roles in every field of life. One of the latest and most expensive consumer electronics devices is the humanoid Adam, "a man of plausible intelligence and looks, believable motion and shifts of expression" (McEwan, 2019, p. 10). A total of twenty-five robots have been produced: twelve of the first edition are called Adam, and thirteen are called Eve. Charlie, the narrator of the novel and owner of Adam, would have picked an Eve, but all the females have been sold out, so he has purchased an Adam. Newitz's *Autonomous* is set in 2144 and features several types of robots, which, to cover the expense of their construction, are placed in indentured servitude. In the fictional world of *Autonomous*, people are also seen as commodities, and the story revolves around the issues of ownership, personhood, and identity. The plot centers on two main characters: a drug pirate known as Jack (Judith Chen) who breaks into pharmaceutical businesses to smuggle affordable access to life-saving medications so that the poor can have access to those too, and Paladin, a robot agent working for International Property Coalition together with a human agent named Eliasz. Meanwhile, Paladin and Eliasz try to find Jack because she has committed an intellectual property crime.

Two distinct approaches regarding the production of robots are presented in these novels. Although Adams and Eves are advertised as machines, it could be argued that physically, they are produced as perfect and idealized male and female stereotypes while Paladin is produced as a non-binary military robot. When considered in accordance with anthropocentrism, humans' tendency to consider themselves the most supreme beings on earth leads them to assume the role of the creator, who, according to Judeo-Christian religions, created humans in his own image. Like God, humans create humanoids similar to their own bodily features and physiognomy in *Machines Like Me*. The appearances of Adam and Eve are almost identical, with the exception of their reproductive organs. Their facial expressions are also arranged in parallel with their genders, "The user's handbook claimed that [Adam] had forty facial expressions. The Eves had fifty. As far as I knew, the average among people was fewer than twenty-five" (McEwan, 2019, p. 86) says Charlie. This arrangement is in line with scientific findings regarding emotional facial muscular responses in female and male human beings, "women were overall more emotionally responsive than men" (Wiggert et al., 2015, p. 7) and "women express facial actions more frequently than men" (McDuff et al., 2017, p. 8). As the governing logic behind producing robots is humanocentricism, humans cannot go beyond taking themselves as the reference point in creating an entity. In their role of creators, humans build their relationships with

the nonhumans within the framework of humanocentrism, which is problematic when considered from the viewpoint of posthumanism. Though produced non-binary, Paladin is referred to as "he" by humans because it acts as a soldier and has blades on its shoulders as well as hidden shields. There is a propensity among humans to attribute gender markers or pronouns to the robots they interact with in the novel because that is a part of the gender identity for humans who perceive the world according to their own values. Paladin does not care how humans hail him. Regarding the use of pronouns among the bots, it is explained by the narrator that

> Gender designations meant very little among bots. Most would respond to whatever pronoun their human admins hailed them with, though some autonomous bots preferred to pick their own pronouns. … Especially a bot built like Paladin, whose hulking body, with dorsal shields spread wide over his back, took up the space of two large humans. (Newitz, 2017, p. 46)

The robot's physical appearance (i.e., huge size) and function lead humans to assign a masculine pronoun to it because human beings are controlled by an anthropocentric approach and its discursive practices. Evidently, this is an instance of linguistic and discursive construction of the body of Paladin as a male.

In terms of their personalities, the humanoids are expected to behave in accordance with their assigned roles. While Adam assumes an agentic and violent role as he becomes more experienced, Eves are passive and remain subservient to their owners. When Adam is delivered to the house of Charlie, his upstairs neighbor and later lover Miranda have, of course, adjusted Adam's features according to their perception of an ideal man. Adam has been produced with a clearly distinguished male physical appearance; Miranda comments that he is a "handsome dark-skinned young man" (McEwan, 2019, p. 13). Adam has a strong body similar to a stereotypically idealized man, "He was muscular around his neck and spine. Dark hair grew along the line of his shoulders" (McEwan, 2019, p. 19). Later, Charlie compares him to a manager, a prestigious position with the authority of control, and is mostly reserved for men. Looking at Adam in a suit he says, "How upright, formal and plausible he looked, like the assured manager of an expensive hotel" (McEwan, 2019, p. 315). Both Miranda's and Charlie's perception of Adam and the adjectives they use to describe him evince that they consider Adam as a typical man rather than a robot, for their understanding of genders is also shaped by the heteronormative gender roles imposed on individuals.

Despite being produced to serve humans, Adam assumes an agentic role as well as a violent attitude, which are accepted as stereotypical features of males. As for his agency, he starts with little decisions like choosing a sweater of Charlie to wear without his permission. His deciding what to do with a very great amount of money he earns via online trading also exemplifies his agency. While Charlie and Miranda want to use the money, to purchase a nice house, Adam uses all the money for charity purposes, saying "Every need I addressed was greater than yours" (McEwan, 2019, p. 366). In spite of following the orders of his human masters, it could be argued that he assumes a certain authority and makes his own decisions, just as it was expected from a man. Adam's agency could also be interpreted in parallel with posthumanist thought, according to which "the universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming … Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world" (Barad, 2003, p. 818). As agency is not solely an attribute of human beings, but every element of the universe, it is natural for Adam, the humanoid, to display agential behaviors. From a critical posthumanist perspective, nonhuman entities are also as agents as humans, yet in the novel the agent nonhuman is the one which is defined as a male entity. That is

why, the shadow of stereotypical gender roles regulates the agent potentialities of nonhuman entities.

Adam's propensity to engage in violence, which is also considered in relation to men, is made obvious throughout the narrative. The first act of violence is directed at his owner, Charlie, who wants to put him into inactivity by pressing the kill switch on his neck. When Charlie has attempted to do that, he ends up with a broken bone in his wrist. Afterwards Adam threateningly tells him, "the next time you reach for my kill switch, I'm more than happy to remove your arm entirely, at the ball and socket joint" (McEwan, 2019, p. 180). Adam's second act violence is observed in Goringe's apartment to protect Miranda from his slap; "Gorringe dropped to his knees, just as I had, with his captured hand … .Still maintaining the pressure, Adam forced the young man back to his chair and, as soon as he was seated, released him" (McEwan, 2019, pp. 323-24). As it is clear from these incidents, Adam does not hesitate to resort to violence and hurt people, just like what is expected from a stereotypical man, and his "tendency to violence arises from the necessity of proving the masculine role attributed to him" (Büyükgebiz, 2021, p. 67). In addition to his assumed role of masculinity, his first act of violence could be considered an act of defending his right to continue to exist in the world as a being if considered in the posthumanist frame of thought. The representation of nonhumans in the novel cannot go beyond the binary logic problematized by posthumanism, thus they are attributed human genders and depicted either as servants to humans or having potential to be harmful to humans. They are then reduced into dualistic understanding of either being at the service of humans or being threats to them, which is again at odds with critical posthumanism which aims to achieve to place all entities on a flat ontology.

Similar to Adam, Paladin is also expected to behave like a man, perhaps because of his function; he is a military bot equipped with various weapons. However, unlike Adam who has a sexual organ and is capable of having sex, Paladin does not have genitals or sexual programming, and he needs to learn about sexuality in his very first mission. When he meets Eliasz, they go to a shooting range to test Paladin's weapon capabilities. Mounted on Paladin's back, Eliasz tells the robot where to shoot so as to destroy the target house. While Paladin shoots, Eliasz's "reproductive organ, … was engorged with blood" (Newitz, 2017, pp. 92-93). As he is confused about the situation, Paladin asks Eliasz whether he needs to learn about "human sexuality" to which Eliasz replies "I don't know anything about that. I'm not a faggot" (Newitz, 2017, p. 116). Afraid of making his own desires apparent, Eliasz drifts into denial about his sexual identity. Paladin is not familiar with the word "faggot" and researches it on the Internet, not satisfied with what he has found, he consults his robot mentor, Fang who says

> His use of that word is a clear example of anthropomorphization. Robots can't be faggots. We don't have gender, and therefore we can't have same-sex desire. Sure, I let humans call me "he" because they get confused otherwise. But it's meaningless. It's just humans projecting their own biological categories onto my body. When Eliasz uses the word faggot, it's because he thinks that you're a man, just like a human. He doesn't see you for who you really are. (Newitz, 2017, p. 155)

This is an obvious exemplification of humans' involving non-binary bots in their oppressive social norms and heteronormative discursive practices. Just like Fang comments, it is meaningless for robots because these gender categories are culturally constructed to regulate human behavior and should not be projected onto robots; however, this is not the case. Human beings maintain their humanocentric approach to robots and assume that the use of human pronouns would serve well and they hail the robots as they would hail humans. The narrator comments, Paladin "was pretty sure that Eliasz anthropomorphized

her … Maybe he would never understand that his human categories—faggot, female, transgender—didn't apply to bots" (Newitz, 2017, p. 375). Eliasz is raised in a gender-conscious and anthropocentric society that forces everyone to conform to heterosexuality and live according to their assigned gender roles, that is perhaps why he cannot grasp that Paladin is neither a woman nor a man, thus holding a gender-neutral position.

The role women should play in a patriarchal society is rendered through the depiction of Eves and through Paladin when it is revealed that he has a woman's brain. While the reader is presented with the life of Adam in Charlie's household, there is meagre information about Eves. Of the thirteen Eves, four are bought by a sheikh in Riyadh, possibly to satisfy his sexual desires. Adam later learns that two of them found a way to kill themselves, probably because of the suppressive role they have to perform in a carceral home. It could be argued that the situation of these two Eves is the epitome of the role of women in domestic spaces. Luce Irigaray succinctly summarizes women's position in patriarchal societies as follows,

> Woman … is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies. That she may find pleasure there in that role … But such pleasure is above all a masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own, and it leaves her in a familiar state of dependency upon man. Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will "take" her as his "object" when he seeks his own pleasure. (1985, p. 25)

In the case of these Eves, they seem to have refused to succumb to realizing their owner's desires, and assuming agency about their lives, committed suicide. Charlie comments on their situation as they are "stifled by their womanly roles in a traditional Arab household, or cast down by their understanding of the world" (McEwan, 2019, p. 255). Women mostly acknowledge their subordinate position, partly because they are familiar with the impositions on themselves under the guise of social norms, yet as exemplified by Eves in this incident, humanoids have difficulty in tolerating such a secondary position. Another Eve whom Adam sees on the street is also in a similar condition, and "She'd found a way, … to set all her systems into a kind of unravelling. … I don't know what led her to it, but she was crushed, she was beyond despair" Adam reports to Charlie (McEwan, 2019, p. 289). It is obvious that Eves could not comply with being objects of a male's desire. Adam has difficulty in comprehending Eve's circumstances because as a male, he is in a better position than a woman, and he could not know about the gender roles of women in the limited time he has been around, for he had the chance of experiencing the role of a man and not vice versa. As a male robot occupying the upper leg of the binary just like all the men in patriarchal societies, Adam is in a privileged position.

Unlike the Eves mentioned in *Machines Like Me*, Paladin conforms to the expectations of Eliasz and acts like an ideal woman for him. It is apparent that Eliasz feels a sexual desire for Paladin, but because of compulsory heterosexuality forced upon him, he cannot wholly accept his attraction to a "male" robot. While collecting intelligence on the whereabouts of Jack, Eliasz was drugged in a party, and Paladin has to carry him to their lodging. When they arrive, under the influence of the drug, he gets rid of the restrictions imposed on himself about fixed gender roles and "normal" sexual affairs and says "Come to bed with me, Paladin, … It will be OK this once" (Newitz, 2017, p. 200). Paladin replies "But you said it was wrong. Two men cannot lie together" (Newitz, 2017, p. 202). With Eliasz's insistence though, Paladin lies down on Eliasz's bed next to him and "read[s] each molecular change in Eliasz' body as the man's euphoria grew and subsided" (Newitz, 2017, p. 201). Drugged Eliasz is freed from indoctrinations about heterosexuality and could come to terms with his sexuality and live out his desires for Paladin. Ingrained for years in the heteronormative sexual paradigm, Eliasz rejoices over learning the fact that Paladin's brain used to belong

to a female soldier who died on the line of duty. This information would make things easier for Eliasz because his desire for Paladin would be justified; he has a woman's brain, and he is not just a machine. As soon as Eliasz learns this, he asks Paladin's consent for being hailed as "she,"

> "Should I start calling you 'she'?" … Changing his pronoun would make absolutely no difference at all. It would merely substitute one signifier for another. … Of course: If Paladin were female, Eliasz would not be a faggot. And maybe then Eliasz could touch Paladin again, the way he had last night, giving and receiving pleasure in an undocumented form of emotional feedback loop. (Newitz, 2017, p. 228)

As Eliasz has been raised in a certain society in which binary system of gender roles is decreed as the proper gender identity and pairing of man and woman is the proper way of sexual coupling, he insists on calling Paladin "she." Otherwise, he would be a "faggot" and that seems unacceptable. Paladin is well aware of what it means for Eliasz, his interior monologue is presented as follows,

> Paladin knew that human gender was part of sexual desire. But he was starting to perceive that gender was a way of seeing the world, too. … People assigned genders based on behaviors and work roles, often ignoring anatomy. Gender was a form of social recognition. That's why humans had given him a gender before he even had a name. (Newitz, 2017, p. 227)

Paladin is aware of the fact that it falls outside of the human categories of gender, which provides a self-conscious and agentic representation of a nonhuman. Paladin has perceived the significance of the gender roles for the society of humans and Eliasz is so deeply inculcated with the idea of heterosexuality as the proper norm that he is exhilarated to learn Paladin has a woman's brain and says to Paladin, "I knew there was a reason I wanted you, Paladin, … I must have somehow sensed that you were a woman" (Newitz, 2017, p. 231). Eliasz's anthropocentricism hinders him to accept Paladin as a non-binary individual. About which, Paladin ponders,

> There it was: the anthropomorphization. But did it really matter if Eliasz didn't understand that bots had no gender? If Eliasz saw her as a woman, Paladin could have what she'd been wanting for days on end. It would make things easier for both of them, even if the truth was more complicated than Eliasz realized. (Newitz, 2017, p. 231)

Paladin cannot help to notice the implications of Eliasz's attribution of human gender stereotypes to a robot. The narrator also comments, "Eliasz was truly an anthropomorphizer; he saw Paladin's human brain as her most vital part, especially because he believed it made her female" (Newitz, 2017, p. 293). When Paladin loses her human brain in a gunfight, she loses her abilities of face recognition; in other words, the part which made her a woman according to Eliasz no longer belongs to her. However, as his feelings to her is strong and genuine, he still wants to be with her; therefore, he accepts her as a woman and tells her "But you are still the most amazing woman I have ever known" (Newitz, 2017, p. 374). Later, Eliasz offers to go away to Mars, so he "bought out [her] contract. [he] can't stand the idea of the woman [he] love[s] not being autonomous" (Newitz, 2017, p. 373). Paladin accepts this proposition in a submissive way, as expected from a stereotypical woman in a patriarchal society. It is ironic that Paladin has become autonomous just to be the lover of Eliasz. Now that Eliasz has bought her contract, she does not have to work, and she is free to perform the role of a perfect partner for Eliasz. Hence, Paladin continues to perform the role of a woman, which was the only possible way for her to be accepted by the humans among whom she lives. With the romantic relationship

between Paladin and Eliasz, the inability of humans to eliminate their anthropocentric approach to nonhumans and embrace them as their equals even though they behave according to human values is exemplified.

The performative aspect of gender could also be observed in the lives of humanoids, especially those of Adam and Paladin, who generally perform the role they have been attributed by the humans around. Adam fulfills his male role by way of imitation according to Charlie who refers to him as "a facsimile human" (McEwan, 2019, p. 259). He also comments Adam's "put[ting] on gardening gloves to pull up nettles. [as] Mere mimicry" (McEwan, 2019, p. 95). Similar to the process of a human in society, he performs his role as a man by emulating a role model from his gender. As for Paladin, at first, he just performs his duty as a military robot because he is expected to do so, yet in contact with his partner Eliasz, he is expected more and more to be a woman. Being together with Eliasz and feeling the need to satisfy his desires necessitate his performance as a woman. Paladin's situation can be described most suitably with the help of Irigaray's words; Paladin does her best to enact Eliasz's desires and that is only a "masochistic prostitution of her body" (1985, p. 25) for a desire that does not belong to her. In both novels, regardless of their being mechanical productions, the bodies of Adam and Paladin appear to be sites on which anthropocentric cultural and social values are inscribed.

What emerges from the analyses of the novels above is that no entity is immune to the oppressive impetus of heteronormative and anthropocentric societies. Although gender roles are socially constructed for humans, they are also projected onto robots produced in certain societies, resulting in the binary gender identities of females and males. In both novels, patriarchal cultural meanings are inscribed on the robotic bodies. While Adams and Eves in *Machines Like Me* are produced as male and female robots in appearance, Paladin in *Autonomous* is a warrior bot that has been attributed feminine characteristics by its partner. As argued by feminist critics, gender is a social construction that is established prediscursively and is a performance. In oppressive societies, both women and men are forced to conform to heterosexuality as the only acceptable sexual orientation. The theme of forced heterosexuality is evident in *Autonomous* through the relationship between Paladin and its human partner Eliasz. Much as the latter has a deep passion for Paladin, he struggles to come to terms with his own sexuality because he assumes that Paladin is a male bot and that same-sex desire is not acceptable in society. When he learns that Paladin has a female brain, he devises a plan to take Paladin to Mars, where they can love each other more freely, away from restrictions regarding gender and sexuality. The gender identities of males and females are also inextricably linked with heteronormativity; while women are often expected to exhibit compassion and passivity, men are often expected to be more agentic and aggressive. In this respect, humanoids successfully play their gender roles: Adam is an agentic and violent man while Eve is passive and submissive.; Paladin is rendered as a violent military robot, yet he is expected to be more passive and submissive when Eliasz starts hailing him "she." As exemplified in these novels, compulsory heterosexuality is used as a tool of oppression and is extended to the robots, limiting as well as shaping the ontology of both robots and humans. Ultimately, as I have argued throughout this study, the robots represented in these novels are forced into heterosexuality, which is an anthropocentric construct, and they have to conform to gender stereotypes depending on either their appearances or the humans they interacted with, which evinces that the imposition of heteronormativity is pervasive and extends even to nonhumans. Rather than a reconsideration of the position of humans, these novels provide stories of humans who are unable to give up their anthropocentrism and force nonhumans to behave according to their own value systems. As represented in these novels, ensuring a posthumanist notion of performativity would require a lot more time, devotion, and perseverance. It should also

be noted that although nonhuman entities are narrated from a humanocentric viewpoint, their central position in both narratives is promising in terms of going beyond anthropocentric narratives.

References

Åsberg, C. & Braidotti, R. (2018). Feminist posthumanities: An introduction. In C. Åsberg & R. Braidotti (Eds.), *A feminist companion to the posthumanities* (pp. 1-22). Springer.

Balsamo, A. (1996). *Technologies of the gendered body: Reading cyborg women*. Duke UP.

Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs*, 28(3), 801-831.

Butchvarov, P. (2015). *Anthropocentrism in philosophy: Realism, antirealism, semirealism.* De Gruyter.

Butler, J. (1986). Sex and gender in Simone De Beauvoir's Second Sex. Yale French Studies, 72, 35-49.

Butler, J. (1994). Gender as performance: An interview with Judith Butler, *Radical Philosophy,* 67, 32-39.

Butler, J. (1996). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). Imitation and gender subordination. In S. Salih & and J. Butler (Eds), *The Judith Butler reader* (pp. 119-137). Blackwell Publishing.

Büyükgebiz, M. (2021). Posthuman experiences of men and masculinities in Ian Mcewan's machines like me. *Masculinities Journal of Culture and Society,* 16, 59-72.

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman.* Polity Press.

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. University of California Press.

De Beauvoir, S. (1973). *The Second Sex.* (H. M. Parshley, Trans.). Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.) Vintage Books.

Haraway, D. (1990). *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*. Free Association Press.

Haraway, D. (2016). A Cyborg Manifesto In *Manifestly Haraway*, Minnesota UP.

Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How we became posthuman: Virtual bodies in cybernetics, literature, and informatics*. University of Chicago Press.

Hayles, N. K. (2023). Subversion of the human aura: A crisis in representation. *American Literature*, 95(2), 255-279. http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/00029831-10575063

Irigaray, L. (1985). *This sex which is not one* (C. Porter & C. Burke, Trans.). Cornell UP.

McDuff D., Kodra E., Kaliouby R. & LaFrance, M. (2017). A large-scale analysis of sex differences in facial expressions. *PLoS ONE* 12(4), 1-11. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0173942

McEwan, I. (2022). *Machines Like Me.* Jonathan Cape.

Meyerson, D. & Kolb, D. (2000). Moving out of the 'armchair': Developing a framework to bridge the gap between feminist theory and practice. *Organization*, 7, 553-571.

Newitz, A. (2019). *Autonomous.* Tor.

Pitts, V. (2005). Feminism, technology and body projects. *Women's Studies,* 34 (3-4), 229-247. https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870590964129

Rich, A. C. (2003). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Journal of Women's History*, 15 (3), 11-48. https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2003.0079

Tolman, D. L (2006). In a different position: Conceptualizing female adolescent sexuality development within compulsory heterosexuality. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development,* 112, 71-89. https://doi.org/10.1002/cd.163

Wiggert N., Wilhelm F. H., Derntl B. & Blechert J. (2015). Gender differences in experiential and facial reactivity to approval and disapproval during emotional social interactions. *Front. Psychol*. 6:1372, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01372

Wittig, M. (1992). *The straight mind and other essays*. Beacon Press.

Wood, W. & Eagly A. H. (2010). *Gender.* In S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey *Handbook of social psychology*, (5th ed., pp. 629-667). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.