

Woman as the Other in *Machines Like Me*

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Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* tells the story of Charlie, Miranda, and the robot Adam, and raises the question of what happens to the relationship between humans and machines when robots have emotions. Although much of women's power has been restored, discrimination against women is still common. Based on Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, this paper analyzes the state of females as the other in the novel and the spirit of the heroine to fight against inequality, so as to provide new ideas for women further awakening and liberation.

Keywords: *Machines Like Me*, the other, defiance

Introduction

Ian McEwan (1948-) won the Maugham Literary Award, the Booker Prize, and American Book Critics Association Award. *Machines Like Me* published in 2019 tells that Charlie has bought Adam, one of the first batches of synthetic humans, and he and Miranda who Charlie falls in love with co-shape the personality of Adam. Adam is different from common machines or robots because he has feelings and he claims he falls in love with Miranda.

Up to now, only a few scholars have studied *Machines Like Me*. The researches are mainly from the perspectives of ethics and the relationship between humans and machines. From the perspective of literary ethics, Shang Biwu (2020) analyzed Adam and Miranda stealing the forbidden fruit and Adam's death, arguing that the novel reveals the conflict between scientific and ethical choices. The relationship between humans and machines is also discussed. Li Yue (2021) believed that whether the machine has consciousness is the core difference between humans and machines, aiming to reflect on the preconceived human-machine relationship of humans. Scholar abroad researches machine learning. When machines start learning, hyper-rationalism can come to realize. However, there are literary blanks that can be filled. For example, the female's status and actions could be discussed. This paper discusses Mariam regards herself as the other under a patriarchal society and Miranda is passively oppressed by men. Miranda is an educated woman who has the consciousness of being her own subject, so she decides to gain liberation through fighting. Therefore, the paper provides modern women with thoughts of being subject rather than becoming men's subordinate and feasible actions to gain subjectivity.

According to Beauvoir's theory of the other, the paper analyzes the status quo of females in *Machines Like Me*. The Other is a concept formed in relation to the Self. A woman is a subordinate person, the inessential person in opposition to the essential person. The male is the subject, the absolute, and she is the other. The Other suggests the condition of the marginal, the subordinate, the inferior, the oppressed, and the excluded. Women become the other because they do not identify the self as the subject. Beauvoir, the existential feminist pioneer, stated women

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are not born, but rather formed gradually. Women could achieve their own transcendence through education and employment, so that women can cultivate subjectivity and get rid of the status of the other.

Women as the Other

After feminists struggled for years, females gained lots of rights back, like education and politics. However, women's rights in the workplace or in life are not guaranteed completely. Although the situation of women is changing, it's still in a grossly unequal position. The unfairness and injustice are shown in literary work. In *Machines Like Me*, although the heroine, Miranda is a Ph.D. candidate, she is still seemed as the other by men. Mariam, a friend of hers, suffers from rape and commits suicide at last.

Mariam's Identifying With the Subordination of Women

Beauvoir asserts that women's subordinate status tends to shape women according to social expectations of their gender while internalizing the values of patriarchal culture, because it is by shaping themselves according to men's dreams that they gain value. This not only makes women oblivious to their otherness, but also forces them to participate in the reproduction of patriarchal cultural values. Mariam thinks she will bring shame on her family if she tells the whole rape story to the policeman. Her brother would be humiliated. Her father would be destroyed if he learned what had happened (McEwan, 2019, p. 413). Mariam thinks of her brother and father first because she shapes herself according to men's dreams. She is persecuted by the patriarchy, so she believes it's men who give women values and meanings. Mariam objectifies herself and takes chastity too seriously, so she dares not tell anyone except Miranda. Miranda keeps her promise to keep it a secret because she conceives it'd pass soon. She seemed calmer, even more determined; I began to think that perhaps she was right.... This was a catastrophe but she would survive it with my help (McEwan, 2019, p. 415). Miranda considers she will recover from it. However, Mariam is resigned to her fate because the thought that men are superior to women is planted in her mind under patriarchal bringing. Female loss of Chastity is humiliated and uncommunicative. In the end, she cannot bear the complicated situation, so she decides to kill herself. After making the decision, she feels peaceful and calm, because ending her life is also ending the humiliation.

Miranda's Passively Becoming the Other

In patriarchal societies, any laws and customs that relate to family relations are governed by the male perspective. The male establishes his subjectivity in opposition to the Other. The female, the Other becomes the instrument and means of self-realization of the male subject. One of the roles that a woman must play is to be graceful: Her beauty, her charm, and elegance are all obvious outward signs of her husband's wealth. In *Machines Like Me*, when thinking of Miranda, what occurs to Charlie is her beauty and charm most of the time. She was beautiful, with pale brown hair and a long thin face, and eyes that often appeared narrowed by suppressed mirth (McEwan, 2019, p. 24). Almost every time Charlie thinks of or sees Miranda, the first thing that occurs in Charlie's mind is her gorgeous appearance rather than her intelligence or anything else. Charlie is the subject in the book, seeing Miranda as the Other. Miranda as the other is the mean of self-realization of Charlie himself. If Charlie and Miranda are in a relationship, Charlie would take Miranda's beauty as his wealth. Charlie regards himself as the subject in his mind. Miranda did not "belong" to me (McEwan, 2019, p. 235). "Belong" shows that Charlie wanted Miranda to be his. The female's belonging is able to let him achieve self-realization.

Beauvoir believes that the female self was under the gaze of others and that men are accustomed to judging women's qualities, demanding femininity in order to serve their purpose of appreciation. Overhead, I heard

Miranda cross the room, her steps muffled, as though barefoot, preparing to take a shower, getting ready (McEwan, 2019, p. 82). Charlie is concerned and observes Miranda so many times that he knows her steps clearly and which direction she walks towards. Charlie gazes at Miranda subconsciously, because in his mind, he is the subject. In Charlie's gaze, Miranda automatically turned into the object who is gazed at by Charlie. I saw him kissing her longer and deeper than I had ever kissed her. ... I hated him (MacEwan, 2019, p. 227). When Charlie hears their sound, he secretly follows their steps. At this time, he becomes a spy and a controller through his gaze on Miranda. His action has objectified Miranda. Charlie feels angry, because he thinks Miranda is his and subordinate to him in his mind.

Female's Defiance: Miranda's Fighting Against the Otherness of Female

Beauvoir pointed out that the first thing women have to do to get out of otherness and regain their subjectivity is to eliminate the internalized sense of otherness. So, women should first change their consciousness, recognize their own situation, bravely take responsibility, and finally obtain their own liberation. In *Machines Like Me*, the heroine, Miranda has a sober mind. She is the subject in her mind. She has sex with Adam and does not feel sorry for Charlie because she regards herself as a free subject. She witnesses inequality, so she wants to fight against it. Miranda pursues justice for her best friend Mariam from Pakistan. After being raped by Peter Goering, Mariam commits suicide by slitting her wrists in order to defend some crazy family glory she has imagined in her head. Miranda, in order to revenge for Mariam, seduces Peter Gorringer to have sex with her and calls the police to have Gorringer imprisoned for rape. I bear responsibility for Mariam's death. ... I think I could have gone under completely that year if it had not been for my ambition in life-justice (McEwan, 2019, p. 421). The reason why Mariam thinks of family glory is that the status of women is low. That is the social gender that is shaped by society. The second sex of women is shaped by culture. In the preface to *The Second Sex*, she says, "Today, women are not slaves to men, but they are always dependent on them". These two different genders of human beings have never shared the world equally. Under the influence of the feminist movement, the status gap between men and women has gradually narrowed. For Miranda, she believed that everyone is equal and women should stand up and speak for selves. She thinks women's subjects are themselves and not the other. Throughout the process of revenge, Miranda puts herself in the position of the subject, demonstrates the subject status of women with her actions, and goes forward to work for the liberation of women.

Conclusion

For thousands of years, an important reason for the dominant position of women in society has been the innate disadvantage of women's physical characteristics. Beauvoir points out that women's physical characteristics are only an objective reality, which does not determine the nature of women. Women are fully capable of overcoming their biological weaknesses and achieving their own transcendence. Beauvoir believes that human beings are interdependent and that they are both subject and object. Therefore, both sexes should strive to create a mutually respectful way of life, where both women and men are in a mutual relationship in which each is a subject. Women should rebuild their subjectivity. Miranda's minds and actions show us that women have gradually established their status. They are no longer depending on men but on themselves. Thus, it reminds females of getting rid of the status of the other and suggests modern women should make sure of their subjectivity through education and economic independence.

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