

A Study of Spatial Construction in *Machines Like Me*

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Technology has advanced quickly in recent years, cutting-edge artificial intelligence research has been conducted, and artificial intelligence is now pervasive in all aspects of our daily lives. Since its publication, *Machines Like Me* by Ian McEwan has drawn a lot of interest from people from all walks of life. Interest in AI has never been higher. The book is regarded as a sincere examination of humanity's dilemma in the future. This thesis will examine McEwan's outlook on the future of robots and his treatment of them as fellow humans by focusing on the construction of space in the book.

Keywords: Ian McEwan, *Machines Like Me*, space construction, AI

Introduction

Ian McEwan is one of the most influential writers in contemporary British literature. With his delicate, sharp, and cold writing, he specializes in drawing the inner turmoil and fear of modern people, actively exploring issues of violence, death, love and lust, good and evil. His works are mostly short stories, most of which are bizarre and absurd, and are known as "black comedy". Many of his works depict the dominance of sex over humans and the distortion of human nature as a result of sexual desire. His works' themes frequently challenge our perceptions of the world, explore existentialism, and leave readers with profound thoughts and reflections. *Machines Like Me*, McEwan's fifteenth book, is a story that takes place in a "parallel world". In 1982, when people can buy robots online that are almost indistinguishable from real people, Charlie, a Londoner, begins two new relationships: first, he falls in love with Miranda, his upstairs neighbor; second, he uses his inheritance to buy a new humanoid robot called "Adam", and with Miranda's help, Charlie reshapes the character of Adam. Charlie reshapes the character of Adam with Miranda's help, and a strange triangular relationship gradually forms.

Literature Review

Studies abroad

Foreign studies of *Machines Like Me* provide a broader perspective, encompassing mythology, ethics, philosophy, morality, and posthumanity, and have a high reference value. Manuel Botero Camacho and Julio San Román Cazorla use Borges' poem "The Golem" to present the evolution of the Golem's myth. There is an analysis of how the mythic roles embodied by the novel's main characters are reverted, establishing a parallelism between the myth and the modern theme of androids. This analysis enables readers to comprehend the symbolic roles of man and machine in modern life, as well as how McEwan's investigation of the Golem myth contributes to this comprehension. In order to connect them to Ian McEwan's examination of a protohuman and a posthuman

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mind, that of a foetus and a robot, in *Nutshell* and *Machines Like Me*, respectively, Laura Colombino sketches the philosophical theories of consciousness of the 2010s inspired by neuroscience and computer science. The article also discusses the engagement of the two novels with collective consciousness and their ethical message for readers in the twenty-first century. Colombino gives readers a special look at the concept of collective consciousness and ethics in contemporary literature by examining the philosophical ramifications of McEwan's dual protohuman and posthuman focus. Tae Wan Kim points out that artificial intelligence is just a game of imitation, it is just copying us, and the defects of robots are the defects of human existence. E. Cassirer can see from the text that the robot Adam is very similar to a human being, and even more intelligent and powerful than a normal human being, which causes Charlie's identity anxiety. Cassire believes McEwan reflects on the relationship between humans and robots, as well as human morality. McEwan, according to Cassirer, raises a number of philosophical questions about the nature of humanity and the morality of artificial intelligence. Pramod K. Nayar studies three key themes: the nonperson and the familial Other, the technoanimism of the Other, and the "Crisis of the Natural" and Emergence. These themes, along with McEwan's depiction of the posthuman uncanny, are interconnected because they create a sense of ambiguity and unease about the moral implications of machine intelligence and its existence.

Studies at home

Domestic research perspectives are few in comparison to foreign multidisciplinary research directions, with most scholars taking an ethical stance. In *The Conflict of Scientific and Ethical Choices: Artificial Intelligence and Brain Text in McEwan's Machines Like Me*, Shang Biwu contends that man is the product of natural and ethical selection, while robot is the product of scientific selection, based on a literary-ethical analysis of the two narrative fragments of Adam and Miranda's "forbidden fruit" and Adam's death. This is an earlier study of *Machines Like Me* that merits a more detailed and in depth examination of the relationship between technology and ethics. A year later, he wrote another article. The article focuses on McEwan's literary rewriting of Turing's test on the basis of analyzing the conflicts and contradictions caused by the robot Adam's intervention in human life. The article argues that Adam and Charlie's differing perspectives on Miranda's lie reflect the different demands of robots and humans on truth and lies, contradicting Asimov's three laws of robotics, and McEwan implicitly agrees with Turing's criticism of Charlie's act of destroying Adam, introducing the thoughtful proposition of whether humans should be responsible for the lives of robots. McEwan's literary rewriting of Turing's test introduces the thought-provoking question of whether humans should be held accountable for the lives of robots, even when those robots violate Asimov's Three Laws. Chen Dawei examines the ethical choices faced by Charlie, Miranda, and the robot Adam, as well as the human-machine conflict caused by the gradual imbalance of the Sphinx factor in the process of ethical choices among the three. He believes that the imbalance of the Sphinx factor caused by technological advancement eventually led to an irreconcilable conflict between humans and machines, which is a novel concept. There are other articles from post-human and cultural aspects. Chen Xiujie contends that modern commercial capital values have shaped robots that are superior to humans in all aspects as the subjects of an ideal post-human society, and that androids are satisfying and catering to human preferences while quietly changing human ethical values, and that such a daring act of creation necessitates the creation of a social synergy system and an emotional social community. Xia Zhongyu examines the novel's hidden meanings behind the political backdrop through the lens of cultural memory. Xia believes it alludes to

Britain's current fragile civilization, namely the lack of personal cultural memory, as well as people's confusion, worry, and desire to rebuild their spiritual home for the future of Britain.

Thesis Statement

This thesis aims to delve into the author's own attitude toward artificial intelligence by analyzing the spatial construction of *Machines Like Me*.

Structure of the thesis

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section will introduce the two spatial components in *Machines Like Me*: the novel's real space and Charlie's consciousness space. The novel's parallel worlds that differ from our own, the political situation in England at the time, and Turing, who "came back from the dead" will be explored in the second part. The final section will bring the previous sections to a close.

The novel world in *Machines Like Me*

The Real Space

Charlie begins the novel by purchasing one of the first robots, "Adam", and carrying him upstairs with his neighbor Miranda. Charlie and Miranda are neighbors, but their relationship is much more complicated than that. Charlie has a crush on Miranda, a Ph.D. student in social history ten years his junior, but he feels unworthy of Miranda, so he does not confess his feelings and instead treats him as a friendly neighbor and friend. Charlie initially treats Adam as a "child" and invites Miranda to help him create Adam's character. As a result, Charlie and Miranda's relationship evolves as they learn more about one another. Adam is a robot who looks exactly like a human, as "his lifelike skin was warm to the touch and as smooth as a child's" (McEwan, 2019, p. 11), "he was capable of sex" (McEwan, 2019, p. 12), "He was advertised as a companion, an intellectual sparring partner, friend and factotum who could wash dishes, make beds and 'think'" (McEwan, 2019, p. 12). Charlie and Miranda slept together the night Adam awoke, shattering their original relationship, but it was only physical; the two did not form a definite relationship. Miranda slept with Adam after they disagreed on political issues. Charlie is left feeling betrayed and confused because his feelings for Miranda appear to be unanswered, but Miranda tells him that she sees Adam as a "vibrator", while Adam tells Charlie that he is "in love" with Miranda, and a love triangle between the three has since formed. This is the primary line in the novel's realistic space. It serves as the story's backbone, allowing for a more realistic approach to exploring the characters and their relationships with one another. There is also a story set in the fictional reality space. Charlie wants to know everything about Miranda and her father, and Adam's words hint at a crime Miranda once committed. Miranda had a good friend named Mariam who once told Miranda that she had been raped by Peter Gorringer but asked Miranda to keep it a secret for her because Mariam's family was Muslim. Miranda promised to keep her secret hidden in the hopes that Mariam would come out of the shadows, but to her surprise, Mariam slit her wrists and committed suicide while Miranda was away. Miranda was so depressed and guilty that she is willing to exact revenge on her friend. Miranda devised a series of plans to actively seduce Peter Gorringer, reported him to the police and falsely accused him of rape in court. The plan was successful and Gorringer was sentenced to prison. Miranda is terrified that Gorringer will come over and kill her now that he is out of prison, and Charlie is ready to settle the matter with Miranda. They went to see Miranda's father with Adam, while keeping an eye on Gorringer's attitude. In the midst

of this, Charlie made a direct proposal, to which Miranda agreed. The dust appears to have settled after they gathered evidence of Gorringer's own confession to raping Mariam. Adam dealt them a crushing blow just as they thought they were on their way to a nice, happy life. Adam gave the police a copy of Miranda's criminal materials and donated all of his earnings. Charlie "murdered" Adam. Miranda will be tried by the law in the end, while Charlie will be subjected to moral scrutiny.

The Consciousness Space of Charlie

Because the novel is written in Charlie's first person, large portions of it are based on what he sees, hears, and feels, allowing for Charlie's consciousness. This allows readers to gain insight into Charlie's character and comprehend his actions and motivations. Charlie's feelings for Miranda are obvious, and he appears to fall into the feeling that this feeling gives him. He also states at the outset that both sides have family and educational backgrounds, and that he feels unworthy of the other side and is only prepared to be the best neighbor and friend, but then, in the blink of an eye, he feels close enough to the other side to want to get closer. He imagined all the reactions he would receive if he confessed his feelings for the other person: "Or she'd be horrified. Or, just possibly, overjoyed to hear the one thing she had longed for, or to say herself but dreaded rejection" (McEwan, 2019, p. 25). He was nervous and apprehensive because he didn't know what the outcome of his confession would be. He imagined a future with Miranda without Adam and wanted to use the money he spent on Adam to create a happy future for him and Miranda, but he bought the robot on the spur of the moment and couldn't bear the thought of destroying it because of the money. He can't stop thinking about Miranda, and when she isn't around, he imagines what she was up to. Whatever Charlie is doing, he can not help but think of Miranda, exactly as a man in love would. Charlie is no longer the irresponsible young man he once was, but rather a mature and devoted partner seeking to improve his and Miranda's lives. Miranda seems to have completely taken over his consciousness space at this point. Even when he isn't in her company, he finds himself thinking about her; their conversations plays over and over in his head, and all of his decisions seems to revolve around what she will think. After Adam informed him that Miranda might be lying and that he should not completely trust her, Charlie became enraged and curses Adam inwardly: "Who or what was this idiot machine? Why should I tolerate it?" (McEwan, 2019, p. 35), but in an instant, he begins to secretly investigate Miranda again. He imagined Miranda and Adam sleeping together in his conscious mind after hearing the sound of them sleeping together, at which point he treated Adam as a kindred spirit, a love interest, and no longer as a non-human robot. He had only seen Adam as an object; a thing to be commanded up until that point. As Charlie slammed the hammer on the top of Adam's head, "The sound was not of hard plastic cracking or of metal, but the muffled thud, as of bone" (McEwan, 2019, p. 249). Obviously, in Charlie's subconscious, he treated Adam as "human", so when he "killed" Adam, he heard the "sound of bones". After Adam's "death", Charlie and Miranda frequently reminisce about their time with Adam, and they are missing him. Adam as a "person" is missed. McEwan appears to be expressing an opinion on the future of AI based on Charlie's thought: "As artificial people became more like us, then became us, then became more than us, we could never tire of them. They were bound to surprise us. They might fail us in ways that were beyond our imagining" (McEwan, 2019, p. 14).

The Parallel Worlds in Machines

Britain's Political Context

The novel is set in 1982 in London, England, when artificial intelligence research has far surpassed our current level of development, resulting in humanoid robots like “Adam” and “Eve” that are programmed to produce Thinking and creating. In the real world, a second generation of industrial robots with only basic sensory functions was developed in the early 1980s. So far, humanoid robots exist in reality, but there are no advanced humanoid robots like the fictional “Adam” and “Eve”. Nonetheless, the novel’s depiction of advanced artificial intelligence and humanoid robots serves as a provocative warning about the potential consequences of AI technology, as well as an insight into the ethics and implications of this rapidly developing field. The Malvinas War, also known as the Isle of Man War, erupted between the United Kingdom and Argentina over sovereignty over the Malvinas Islands between April and June 1982. The Malvinas War is regarded as the Cold War’s largest and most fierce combined air, land, and sea war, as well as a classic example of strategic maritime delivery. The British reclaimed control of the island after a fierce and hard-fought battle, but Argentina has yet to relinquish its claim to the island. The war had a huge political impact on both sides. Argentina’s defeat sparked a larger anti-government movement, which eventually led to the military government’s demise. Strong patriotic feelings swept the United Kingdom. The British Conservative Party won the 1983 general election, bolstering the authority of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s government. However, the novel depicts the war in an entirely different light than reality. Britain was defeated in the war, and Margaret Thatcher resigned. Tony Benn rose through the ranks of the opposition to become Prime Minister, only to be assassinated during his brief tenure. In short, the fictional Britain experiences ups and downs in political changes and is negotiating whether or not to leave the EU. While the novel’s fictional events are obviously different from those that occurred in history, there are clear parallels that can be drawn.

Turing's Life and Death

Alan Matheson Turing is regarded as the father of computer science and artificial intelligence. Turing was convicted of homosexual orientation by the British government in 1952, and he was then chemically castrated (estrogen injection). Turing died of cyanide poisoning on June 7, 1954, at the age of 42. Although the Queen eventually granted Turing a royal pardon, the humiliation of his final life and the regret he brought to the world were irreparable. Turing’s death was not only a tragedy for those who knew him, but it was also a significant loss for the rest of the world. McEwan, however, altered Turing’s fate in the novel. Turing appears in the novel. Turing is given a second chance in McEwan’s novel, and his fate is changed for the better. “I’d made a reckless decision, but I was encouraged by reports that Sir Alan Turing, war hero and presiding genius of the digital age, had taken delivery of the same model” (McEwan, 2019, p. 11). Charlie purchased the robot because of Turing at the beginning of the novel, so he also consumed the same model on impulse. The novel also tells the legend of Turing, listing all of his accomplishments. Turing has also been open about his relationship with Tom Reah. Turing is given a happy life in the novel that he does not have in reality. Turing was able to achieve a level of contentment that he could not have achieved otherwise by having his lover by his side. The novel in several places Turing’s views are presented. “But Alan Turing himself had often said and written in his youth that the moment we couldn’t tell the difference in behaviour between machine and person was when we must confer

humanity on the machine” (McEwan, 2019, p. 82). Turing believes that if human-like robots are given human nature, the robots will be very similar to humans, if not fully equal to humans. It is possible to blur the lines between what we consider human and machine by making machines intelligent and capable of human-like reasoning. When Charlie and Miranda had dinner together, they happened to be in the same restaurant as Turing and his lover Reah. Charlie mustered the courage to approach Turing before leaving the restaurant, but he was ignored. As a result, Charlie left his card on the table. Afterward, to Charlie’s surprise, Turing called to request a meeting so they could talk about Charlie’s Adam. The brains of these Adam and Eve were of great interest to Turing. He thought that the artificial mind is not as powerful as human beings due to the constant instances of Adam and Eve’s “suicide”. Similar to Charlie’s Adam at the conclusion of the book, even though he “really loves” Miranda, Adam did not hesitate to turn over the proof of Miranda’s guilt because he had a perfect moral code. Additionally, according to Turing, robots’ flawless moral principles prevent them from understanding humans, primarily because “we couldn’t understand ourselves. Their learning programs couldn’t accommodate us” (McEwan, 2019, p. 268).

Conclusion

In *Machines Like Me*, McEwan actually expresses his vision and attitude towards the future of robots through the mouths of two people, Charlie and Turing. In 1982, unlike in the real world, the development of artificial intelligence has created humanoid robots like “Adam”. Charlie, as the main character in the novel, observes “Adam” up close, and McEwan creates a Charlie with a rich space of consciousness, showing us Charlie’s changing attitude toward “Adam” from beginning to end as a human being. And Turing, as the scientist with the title of “Father of Artificial Intelligence”, has been devoted to the research of humanoid robots like “Adam”, and has put forward a lot of ideas for humanoid robots. As a humanoid robot, Adam’s appearance is already almost no different from that of humans, and he is set up with many programs that allow him to live a real life as a human, to think, and to love people. However, the problem is that he is too perfect, and humans are not perfect, so he will not be a real human.

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