

*Providence Women's College, Calicut, was established in 1952 by the Sisters of the Apostolic Carmel, as a noble initiative to spread the message of empowerment through education among the women of Malabar. It is the result of the collective effort of a committed group headed by our Founder Principal, Mother Gabrielle. The college is affiliated to the University of Calicut. It has been reaccredited with an A+ by the NAAC in the third cycle. The vision of the college is the holistic development of its students. In this endeavour it relies upon the best of ancient wisdom and new knowledge.*

Subscription Rs.250/- p.a.  
Payment to be made by DD/Postal Orders in favour of  
The Principal,  
Providence Women's College,  
Kozhikode-673009

**ISSN 2319 - 4189**

**DECEMBER 2023**

**VOLUME 14**

**ISSN 2319 - 4189**

# **DIOTIMA'S**

## **A JOURNAL OF NEW READINGS**



**Posthumanism**

**Peer Reviewed Journal**

***Published by***

THE POSTGRADUATE & RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
PROVIDENCE WOMEN'S COLLEGE  
KOZHIKODE – 673 009  
KERALA  
*(Affiliated to the University of Calicut)*

DECEMBER 2023

VOLUME 14

ISSN 2319-4189

**DIOTIMA'S**  
**A JOURNAL OF NEW READINGS**



**Posthumanism**

**Peer Reviewed Journal**

***Published by***

**THE POSTGRADUATE & RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**PROVIDENCE WOMEN'S COLLEGE**

**KOZHIKODE-673009**

**KERALA**

*(Affiliated to the University of Calicut)*

web: <https://www.pwcenglish.com/diotimas-a-journal-of-new-readings/>

## EDITORIAL BOARD

**Dr. Janaky Sreedharan**  
Professor, University of Calicut

**Dr. S. Nagesh**  
Associate Professor (Retd.)  
St. Joseph's College, Devagiri

**Dr. Navaneetha Mokkil**  
Assistant Professor  
Jawaharlal Nehru University

**Dr. Vipin K. Kadavath**  
Assistant Professor  
Banaras Hindu University

**Dr. Kavyakrishna K.R.**  
Assistant Professor  
IIT (BHU) Varanasi

**Dr. Leonard Dickens**  
Assistant Professor, IIT Delhi

**Dr. Darshana Sreedhar Mini**  
Assistant Professor  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Chief Editor

**Dr. Shanthi Vijayan**

Editor

**Dr. Prathibha P.**

## EDITORIAL TEAM

**Shyama E.**

**Dr. Surya K.**

**Preethy Mary George**

**Elizabeth Antony**

**Dr. Aparna Nandakumar**

## CONTENT

December 2023

Volume 14

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Unoriginal Genius: The Post-truth in Literature</b><br>Dr. Arunlal K & Dr. Sunitha Srinivas C.   | 1   |
| <b>Post-humanism and Aesthetics: Unveiling the Ever-shifting Canvas of Frida Kahlo</b><br>Dr. Arya Gopi   | 15  |
| <b>Redefining 'Bahu' in the Age of AI: The Humanoid Daughter-in-Law in <i>Bahu Hamari Rajnikant</i></b><br>Farha Jalal  | 24  |
| <b>A Posthumanist Reading of Olga Tokarczuk's <i>Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead</i></b><br>Jeni R.V.  | 34  |
| <b>Female as Other: The Image of Monstrous Feminine In <i>Under The Skin</i></b><br>Dr. Jyolsna B.  | 40  |
| <b>The Clinic, Human Nature and the Posthuman Body in Mahesh Dattani's <i>Tara</i></b><br>Nabanita Karanjai   | 47  |
| <b>Environmental Catastrophes and Humanistic Voices in the Light of John Hersey's <i>Hiroshima</i> and Svetlana Alexievich's <i>Voices From Chernobyl</i></b><br>Dr. S. Karunya | 56  |
| <b>Promontory Differentiations: Painting like a Posthuman</b><br>Siddhartha Mukherjee   | 65  |
| <b>Machines, Minds, and Beyond: A Philosophical Exploration of Posthuman Consciousness in Mamoru Oshii's <i>Ghost in the Shell</i></b><br>Sreya Mukherjee                       | 78  |
| <b>Deconstructing Humanism: James Cameron's <i>Avatar</i> as a Manifesto for Posthuman Vision of Sustainability, Body Fluidity &amp; Interconnectedness</b><br>Sruthy Shaji     | 90  |
| <b>List of Contributors</b>   | 104 |

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Posthumanism promises new possibilities and directions to address the unprecedented nature of our historical location, and the philosophical, psychological, political, cultural and technological norms of human existence. It constitutes a revised understanding of the planetary situation helping us to re-envision human bodies.

This issue of *Diotima's* aims to explore the nuances of the construct of the 'body' in terms of the vast corpus of thought-provoking theorisations and intends to evoke a new interchange of valid responses that would lead us further into pertinent observations. Cultural studies has lately realised that the body emanates meaning in itself. The race, the gender and the basic specificities to a human being's identity are assessed in the scrutiny of one's body. However, the boundaries of the body do not limit the presence of the human being. The pseudo existence of the being beyond body into limitless forms ranging from one's digital space to memories and more is still under explored. Moving past the philosophical and the biological scheme of humanism, posthumanism explicates that agency is administered through dynamic forces in which humans are just participants. Not possessing idiosyncratic characteristics, humans are envisaged to be part of a larger ecosystem that is ever evolving. The centrality of human existence is attenuated with our confluence with machine. The unrestrained digital triumph prompts a reformulation of the meaning of human. The relationship between humans and technology has become increasingly intimate and imperceptible, leading to a fusion where the boundaries between "us" and technology blur. This phenomenon expands the scope of the human condition beyond what traditional humanism had previously acknowledged, encompassing not only other living beings but also machines. Humans now engage in diverse and increasingly profound forms of interaction, interdependence, continuity, and hybridization with

machines, such as cybernetic, bionic, and robotic systems. The rapid and diverse advancements in technology play a significant role in reshaping the human experience through methods like genetic manipulation and digitization of neural circuits. Posthumanism thus embraces philosophical and theoretical positionings that ameliorate the balance between human and non-human entities.

The volume begins with the article by Dr. Arunlal and Dr. Sunitha Srinivas, that tries to explore how in a changing global communication context which has already been named post-truth, Truth as a popular idea has come to challenge the illusions of objective knowledge, accommodating fake news and loose grammars. Dr. Arya Gopi's article discusses the relevance of Frida Kahlo's art in discussions about the boundaries and possibilities of human identity and the impact of technology on the human condition. Farha Jalal's research paper embarks on a captivating journey through the realms of posthumanism and gender dynamics by placing the spotlight on the character of Rajni (Randomly Accessible Job Network Interface), a humanoid daughter-in-law within the soap opera *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant*. Ms. Jeni's article seeks to contextualize the novel *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* by the Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk within the Posthumanist framework in relation to climate change and associated issues. Dr. Jyolsna's paper examines how female body is made to perceive as monstrous and sexualized by a patriarchal world by an analysis of the post human/cyborg movie *Under the Skin* where an extra-terrestrial being has been transformed into the shape of a female body. Nabanita Karanjai looks at Mahesh Dattani's exploration of human nature through the intersection of medical technology with societal critique, leading to the emergence of the posthuman subject. In Dattani's *Tara*, Tara and Chandan become the sites for contestation of opposing ideologies, mediated through the continual interjections of medical technology. By making them conjoined and thereby in dire need of

medical technology Dattani offers an epistemological critique of medical practices coupled with the indictment of patriarchy. Dr. Karunya's article sketches the avaricious nature of mankind and the inconsiderate attitude towards the milieu through a study of John Hersey's *Hiroshima* which intrinsically weaves the tale of six survivors of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Svetlana Alexievich's *Voices from Chernobyl* which poignantly records the true experiences of the victims of the nuclear reactor disaster that has swirled the lives of many innocent people. Siddhartha Mukherjee's article surveys how surrealism artworks explore the systems of the posthuman concerns as built upon discursive transparency, rhetorical obfuscation and modern technological reproducibility; entailing a view of what art in a social democracy should entail, surrealism often turns the rigidity of poststructuralist rhetoric against the seemingly transparent moves of posthuman studies to unsettle critical theories. Through a critical analysis of the cyborg characters and posthuman themes in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* franchise, Sreya Mukherjee's paper intends to comprehend the intricate interplay between humanity, machinery, and the transcendence of consciousness. It delves into the philosophical underpinnings of posthumanism, transhumanism, and existentialism to shed light on the ethical, ontological, and epistemological implications of a world where humans have merged with machines, and identity is no longer tethered to a singular corporeal form. Sruthy Shaji's article presents a future in which humanity can redefine its relationship with nature and technology. By exploring the concept of posthumanism in the context of Cameron's *Avatar*, we are prompted to reflect on our own role in shaping a more harmonious and inclusive coexistence with the world around us.

**Dr. Prathibha P.**

## **Unoriginal Genius: The Post-truth in Literature**

**Dr. Arunlal K. & Dr. Sunitha Srinivas C.**

Digitalization of communication has brought about major revolutions in our understanding of time and space, and simultaneity and indeterminacy. People's everyday data is now part of what is called information. This is consumed and assimilated. The data corporations that own this new breed of information have become the major players of the global economy. A large-scale change in archiving of knowledge is bound to change the ways of human thinking. In fact, that changes the very nature of what will be considered knowledge. Like the shift in the nature of knowledge as human societies shifted to print modernities from orality, knowledge is bound to change as print societies transmigrate to digital communities. The current paper tries to explore how this shift and accumulation of data influence the popular idea of Truth, set in place by the common sense of the age of print. In a changing global communication context which has already been named post-truth, Truth as a popular idea has come to challenge the illusions of objective knowledge, accommodating fake news and loose grammars.

Truth was identified with the metaphor of nakedness in the pre-digital cultures, thus establishing it as simple, clear and direct in its access. Naked truth was a moral cornerstone around which edifices of sin and retribution in modern religions, and the idea of judiciary and legality were constructed. Truth as identified in written history was original (with a single authoritative centre) and accurate (proven by scientific methods). Unlike truths transferred through folklore or other non-modern means, print modernity had written social contracts that validated or

discredited absolutely the claims to truth. In the 21st Century, with the emergence of new communication channels like blogs, YouTube and Google Feed, WhatsApp and Facebook, or social media networks like Telegram, X (formerly Twitter), and online writing of literature, concepts of originality and accuracy underwent dramatic revisions. The AI scholarship assistants like ChatGPT, operate on the principle of recycled/recyclable writing which nonetheless is 'original' every time their assistance is sought. Accuracy has become one of the easiest virtues with the evolution of big data: the algorithms do not give opinions, they make calculations. There is no room for inaccuracy in a world that translates every abstraction, opinion, and creative thought into quantifiable bytes and uploads. The author-reader logic has been outmoded by the media-consumer mechanism. The demands on the consumer are naturally different from those vested in a reader. A consumer is mostly part of a world that hides its constitutive logics - s/he performs in an environment where kernels of emotional choices matter more than cerebral involvement. As Katherine Viner, Editor-in-Chief of *The Guardian*, points out, virality takes precedence over quality and ethics, as a world is curated for us.

A deep entrenchment in the information society and a simultaneous effervescence of the post-truth environment has taken place in the context of late globalization in India. Contemporary Indian digital media makes for a milieu favourable to 'not believing' in anything that surfaces online. Truth, in the form in which modernity sought to enshrine it, has been outmoded by this new premise. With Post-Truth, in general, objectivity and rationality in the traditional sense become secondary to emotions; there exists a propensity to uphold one's position in a given argument despite contrary evidence. It has come to connote the relativization of truth in the popular realm. Connecting people on a mass scale, Facebook the social media and WhatsApp its chat-machine arm became the main vectors in the first and second decades of the millennium in redrafting people's ability to access and disseminate information.

People all over the globe shifted to the online mode of keeping interpersonal contacts running, on such a dramatic pace that the content that they used to keep communities running, transcended the intrinsic requirement of content to be approved true and valid by the institutions of authority. The memes and trolls were primarily about meme-ing and trolling and not being true or factual - memes keep the communities alive, and that ratified their dissemination, or *sharing*, as it came to be called. It was less about the "truth" than about how "truths" can be spun. It was Gregorio Cano Figueroa who defined post-truth as a phenomenon in which objective facts have less impact over public opinion than appeals to emotions and popular ideas. The definition fits the context well.

### **A History of Transcending Certain Truths**

The transition from polytheistic to monotheistic religions, and the rise of Christianity in the beginning of wider and connected Western civilizations generated 'true' reference points of collective knowledge (Truth as coming from a single god). The Church became the central point, creating relative solidity in the generation of truth. A new alternative came into being with the scientific revolution, with Copernicus, Descartes and, later, Darwin producing a new system of truth. The end of absolute monarchies and the establishment of nation states by the turn of the 19th century prepared the ground for yet another round of newer sources of 'truth.' Beginning in the later decades of the twentieth century, again, a shift occurred with the digital turn. The internet-based data revolution not only paced up the dissemination of mis/information but also established the logic of sharing above fact-checking. There no longer was the need to confront 'real'ity as against viral-ity in the *truth-bubbles* made possible by the online communities. Discarding memorization and selective perception, Post-truth techniques of communication lean on opinion-making and influencing using the available pool of data. Post-truth, in this sense, is not synonymous with nor antithetical to 'lying': it is a condition where being correct is not the principal virtue of communication.

It is when objective facts have less power than emotions and personal opinions in the transmission of a message and implies the disappearance of a shared objective standard for truth. The online media estate organically rejects the ethical edifices of print media - its idea of harmony and progress do not fall in line with the imagination of the nation and community in progressive modernity.

### Literature and the Post-truth Scenario

The role of literature as a book-reality or print reality cannot go very far in an age of digital humanities. Literature is a key component of humanities studies. With new ways of interacting with the public emerging, and alternative media establishing itself more firmly, literature as print becomes at best a cherished field of analog entertainment at best, and at worst, a vestigial media-organ that makes no difference to the social body anymore. The advocates of the values of modernity may understand the new context as “a rejection of close reading or critical inquiry in an age where casual duplicity picks at the threads of the social fabric” (Keyes 164). While the observation is valid, one should not forget that close-reading and critical inquiry were methods to realise a certain kind of society and that such a society is not what we are heading towards anymore. The position of Baudrillard that “illusion is the fundamental rule” resonates with the post-truth creative space (6).

Social media and the internet have intervened in the contexts of creating, operating and spreading reading whatever text is created to read. As a result of the intervention, moral and ethical revisions of the reading-writing process have taken place. The online content is not created like a book, banking on the reader's undivided attention. The content creator is aware of the larger *culture of distraction* (to use a phrase by Susan Jacoby) and the content's primary task is to win the attention of the user. In a manner of speaking, fame in the context of a popularly successful book and the context of a viral content are equable: both

reach masses directly not accessible to the author/creator. But the nature of fame in both contexts differs. The fame in print modernity has a longevity which online influencers cannot have. The culture of reading in the digital world projects a “conceptual literature”. Christian Bok comments:

Recent trends in technologies of communication (such as digitized sampling and networked exchange) have already begun to subvert the romantic bastions of ‘creativity’ and ‘authorship,’ calling into question the propriety of copyright through strategies of plagiaristic appropriation, computerized reduplication, and programmatic collaboration. Such developments have caused [writers] to theorize an innovative aesthetics of ‘conceptual literature’ that has begun to question, if not to abandon, the lyrical mandate of originality in order to explore the potentials of the ‘uncreative’ be it automatic, mannerist, aleatoric, or readymade, in its literary practice. (Guthrie, np)

The contemporary framework does not raise traditional questions like whether it is possible to speak of ‘truth’ in relation to literature where imagination, emotion as well as ‘false claims to knowledge’ and the ‘compulsion to believe’ (even in self-writing where the notion of a ‘real’ self is dismantled) exist. What happens on an online literary (stemming from the very infrastructure of digital information) platform needs reflection today—how does the ‘text’ (Truth?) get manipulated by its ‘author’, and such other forces of production and consumption. A text often ends up creating ‘false equivalences’ for the author's thoughts. It can even be pointed out that the online literary space offers a counter narrative of falsehood to something that is true, allowing an ‘other’ motivated reasoning to take root in the reader's mind. While most writings remain fixed in (a correspondence to) reality, what is estranged from reality as Post-truth is left false. The very act of narration involves duplicity as the narrator/

author (who 'knows') at the very beginning intends to evoke a certain response in his/her reader (the whole narrative being channelled towards it). Truth cannot be 'fixed' in the current context. At the same time, our scepticism about the veracity of information, which is at the heart of 'post-truth,' is rational too. Truth in literature is also those 'conventions' that make it art (and makes possible a disciplining of the imagination in works).

The word 'Truth' emerges from 'troth' (faithfulness), which harbours all of the concept's philosophical difficulties. Truth exists in relation to language in terms of which knowledge claims can be expressed. There occurs an imaginative distortion of Truth in writing where memory comes to aid. For Searle, truth is inextricably related to how things are in the world in that beliefs and sentences are true when they accurately depict how things are, when they square with 'the facts.' For Foucault, extra linguistic reality is tacitly acknowledged and put aside in considering truth, because truth is wholly linguistic; truth is discursive currency, and true sentences neither depict nor are made true by states of affairs in the world. When it comes to the issue of confirmation or justification and the role of reality, Davidson argues cogently that "the only reason we can have for holding a belief is another belief," and that there is no way to prove the correctness of a belief or statement by comparing it to an extralinguistic reality (310). Salman Rushdie writes in his book *Truth, Lies, and Literature* about how the twentieth century, under the pressure of enormous social changes, revealed the fragility of the nineteenth century's view of reality. He contends that while writers like Flaubert and Eliot agreed on the nature of reality, their agreement was based on exclusions (12). Though the greatest literary artists attempted to chronicle changing reality through the methods of the realist novel, the realist novel became problematic, and writers from Franz Kafka to Ralph Ellison and Gabriel Garca Márquez created stranger, more surreal works, telling the truth through blatant untruth, creating a new form of reality as if by magic.

Stories and other texts—films, plays, visual art, and songs—have the potential to shift the social imaginary by offering glimpses of different lives and ways of being, whether they are actual lives of others that we better understand through those stories and images or possibilities manifested through fictional narratives (which involve 'fictiveness'). The audience is given the option to see the world as it truly is for them, allowing them to see and grasp the truth of the lives represented more vividly. Online 'stories' (writing) can change how we perceive the world and people, as well as how we judge them. They can also offer opportunity to consider alternative ways of being in the world and with people. Imaginative truth/virtual truth/alternative reality/augmented reality (untruth inspires more euphemisms), creative manipulation and invention of facts take us beyond the realm of mere accuracy into one of narrative truth. Creativity involves more imaginative than immaculate writing. The nature of post-truth internet writing is primarily defined by a focus on deceit and accusations of falsehoods (without substantiation), as well as the exposure of falsehoods (supported by compelling evidence). It presents itself in several forms marked by the political manipulation of deceptive statements or a lack of consideration for, or misunderstanding of, facts, together with a corresponding erroneous belief or state of bewilderment. Intentional strategic misrepresentation (disinformation) also takes place. Post-truth involves the deliberate manipulation and presentation of information for political purposes, leading to on-going debates about accuracy and honesty. The prevailing ethos of self-promotion fosters a climate of deliberate and methodical deception. The social media platform encourages *dishonesty* due to its intrinsic incentives.

The wider implications of literature are being replaced by the transition towards digital spaces and technological advancements. Despite the fact that it enables for crucial and challenging literary migrations and mutations, there was relatively little fiction and poetry in internet writing (in the pre covid-19 scenario). Instead of expecting their audience to



catch up with their work on-screen, writers of fiction and poetry chose to publish hyperlinks or online purchase data on social media. Though fiction appears to be a healthy and profitable type of print literature to an offline observer, the genre has little room in internet venues. However, there is a 'sickly' genre of poetry that is growing in online space—not adding to the historical stock of what print modernity has archived as 'legit' poetry; and on its own, it is still on fragile ground, striving for a strong following (a situation that changed with the pandemic as more and more turned to the virtual space; be it poetry, theatre or cinema). Its connection to the sensibility of poetry-as-we-know-it is also of no positive consequence.

In 2018, a prominent online writer in Kerala faced allegations of plagiarizing content from another poet, which quickly gained widespread attention on the internet. Piracy and plagiarism are considered criminal acts in the legal realm due to their inherent violation of rights. The plagiarized poetry was published in an academic journal, a print-only publication. The readers soon called out the act of plagiarism. The author of the original print poem insisted on receiving an apology. The online writer initially responded with a post that refuted the accusation. The involvement of a ghost writer in composing the poem was brought to light in the subsequent days. Online and physical discussion boards in Kerala became lively, leading to instances of cyberbullying and lobbying. Everything eventually devolved into personal satire and character assassination. Both the writer and the ghost writer denied copying the poetry, although they expressed remorse for the hurt caused to the 'original author'.<sup>1</sup> The case clearly demonstrates the divergence of internet writing from the value systems and stylistic characteristics of print culture. It is evident why online writing is more popular as it fulfils the readers' desire to stay 'connected', while being free to post one's opinion.

---

1. See. "Poetry Plagiarism" by Cris. The News Minute. 1. 12. 2018

One of the main reasons why people use the internet is the fear of missing out - on the world. In fact, it becomes a decisive factor in the writers' choice of medium as well. The sense of belonging to a community (the 'collectives' that allowed one to transcend beyond the social isolation imposed by the epidemic, for instance), communicating an opinion to a group/community (which is usually always an echo chamber where one filters out people who contradict his or her viewpoints and ideologies), higher tolerance for plagiarized, sloppy, and inexact writing, and the sheer indulgence in gossip and flattery - these characteristics render online literature way different in orientation to its print counterpart.

Online literature does not seek to be a self-contained delight; rather, it is a 'linkage,' a response to something that has come before that anticipates a similarly-done response. In essence, the inherent mechanics of conventional literary writing, as well as real-life social norm, are not recreated online; it is a fallacy to think of them as the same essence repeated on various dimensions. Rousseau's sense of authorship was characterized by the fact that he never declared whether he was writing 'fact' or 'fiction,' but rather simply accepted responsibility for the veracity of the thoughts and feelings expressed and invited the reader to test the content for themselves, basing his authorship on the outcome of that encounter (Rousseau 99). Ralph Keyes argued in *The Post-Truth Era* that mass dishonesty had arrived. He credits Rousseau for being one of the first secular authors to allow readers to realize the truths he writes about by inhabiting the words for themselves, rather than questioning the empirical basis for what is offered on the page (100). The human tendency (desire?) to differentiate between what can be 'believed' and what 'lack's reliability is to a great extent instinctive. The act of truth-telling involved describing itself; involves the real and the unreal concocted by the human imagination. Testimony is an invaluable source of knowledge especially of the print culture; for one relies on the reports of those around for everything. While the 'speaker' testimony entails a

conscious act for the speaker, the 'hearer' testimony selects a source of belief or knowledge for the hearer.

As internet researchers point out, any conversation that occurs online is also being 'eavesdropped' on by the medium (Shirky 16). It is impossible to screen one's audience over the internet, and it is also impossible to share information about oneself selectively. Online existence also means turning on a perpetual footlight on oneself and one's actions. Internet, the post-everything realm of new social communication, outdid the 'truths' and syntaxes of centuries-long print-modernity with its sudden and large-scale takeover of people's communication media. Copying, remaking, remixing and publishing do not present an ethically problematic realm to the users anymore. It is understood as a possibility, rather than perversion, to remix an online content.

Marjorie Perloff uses the term 'unoriginal genius' to describe this tendency emerging in online literature. Perloff also coined the term, 'moving information', to signify both the act of pushing language around as well as the act of being emotionally moved by that process. The writer has ceased to be an individual engaged in the act of self-expression. This phenomenon resonates well with the works of pre-Enlightenment, pre-Gutenberg authors who did not create stories but rather retold existing ones. This marks the emergence of a novel kind of authorship that is both highly diverse and highly inclusive, wherein not just the individual viewpoint of the author, but a multitude of distinct perspectives converge and are disseminated. As Perloff demonstrates, the place of individual genius in a global world of hyper-information becomes worth exploring—a world in which (as Walter Benjamin predicted more than seventy years ago) everyone is 'potentially an author'. In this framework 'originality' begins to be less imperative to what can be done with other people's words—framing, citing, recycling, and otherwise mediating available words and sentences, and sometimes entire texts. Paradoxically, the

repurposing of other people's words supersedes the original as Truth becoming more accessible and in a sense 'personal' as 'hybrid citational' text. The processes of choice, framing, verbatim or otherwise reconfiguration, as well as the sanctioned syncretism make possible a 'poetics of indeterminacy'. Intent on building her case for 'a new poetry, more conceptual than directly expressive', Perloff writes that Benjamin's comment is 'uncanny' in its anticipation of the new writing—now that the Internet has made copyists of us all (Perloff 49).

Viral news stories and headlines, their veracity irrelevant, have more cultural purchase and value than disentangling and articulating what *is* actually happening in the world. The online literary platform contributes towards public deliberation and production of public opinion. The use of mass communication technology prompts contemplation on whether there has historically been a specific popular unease over assertions of truth (misinformation and conflicting truth claims in the middle of deliberate deception) and the legitimacy of those who convey truths. The phenomenon entails a persistent preoccupation with and condemnation of deceitfulness by the general population, resulting in heightened unease and scepticism.

Truth in the online realm coexists with the widespread practice of 'fact-checking' and the scrutiny of veracity, while also addressing misleading or false statements. Online 'text's exist on a shifting plane overlooking authenticity, and pass into history no longer 'bound' by the print or the copyright since copies replicate/disassemble the print-truth. The 'repetition effect' - one is more likely to believe a message if it has been repeated many times - works perfectly online. Hype and history share a thin border now. This makes significant the four media-related practices Nick Couldry singles out: 1) searching and search-enabling which increasingly affect social ontology in contemporary social worlds (45-46), 2) showing and being shown which make oneself and/or something

publicly available and thus transform “everyday action and performance into spectacle and audiencing” (49), 3) presencing through which “individuals, groups and institutions put into circulation information about, and representation of, themselves for the wider purpose of sustaining a public presence” (50), 4) archiving which is “the individual’s practice of managing in time the whole mass of informational and image traces s/he continually produces, so that, over time, they add up something acceptable and perhaps even graspable as a history” (52).

The deterioration of the notion and value of truth along with the rise of extreme stances such as Neo-nationalism and religious fundamentalism, pose a danger to the idea of modern and progressive society. As Truth shifts through various epistemes (as against doxa) it is not easy to say whether truth and emotionality will converge or whether truth will *exist* as against being expelled from a shared (social) coexistence. Relying on preserving the distinction between truth and falsehood is an ontological problem when deception exists in a defactualized (post/alternate factuality) domain. But, as George Orwell put it in an early moment of modernity, in times of universal deceit, telling the truth will surely be a revolutionary act.

### Works Cited

- Andersen, K. “How America Lost its Mind”. *The Atlantic*, August 7, 2017.
- Baudrillard. *Impossible Exchange*. Verso, 2001.
- Cris. *Poetry Plagiarism*. The News Minute. 1.12.2018 (<https://www.thenewsminute.com/kerala/poetry-plagiarism-all-twists-row-surrounding-deepa-nisanth-and-sreechithran-92561>)
- Couldry, Nick. *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. Polity, 2012.

- Davidson, Donald. “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge”. *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. E. LePore. Blackwell, 1986.
- Figuroa, Gregorio Cano. *Clarín*. November 22, 2016.
- Goldman, A. *Knowing in a Social World*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Graves, Lucas and Federica Cherubini. *The Rise of Fact-Checking sites in Europe*. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2016.
- Guthrie, Annie. “Conceptual Poetry/Conceptual, 2008. “ [http://poetrycenter.arizona.edu/enewsletter/April2008/enews0408\\_concpoet\\_read.shtml](http://poetrycenter.arizona.edu/enewsletter/April2008/enews0408_concpoet_read.shtml), (no page # given)
- Ingraham, C. “Why Conservatives Might be More Likely to Fall for Fake News”. 2016, December 7.
- Keyes, R. *The Post-truth era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life*. St. Martin's Press, 2004.
- Lee McIntyre. *Respecting Truth: Willful Ignorance in the Internet Age*. Routledge, 2015.
- Lynch, Michael. *True to Life: Why Truth Matters*. MIT Press, 2004.
- McIntyre, Lee. *Respecting Truth: Willful Ignorance in the Internet Age*. Routledge, 2015.
- . *Post-Truth*. MIT Press, 2018.
- McIntyre, L & A. Rosenberg (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science* (pp. 351–361). Routledge, 2016.
- Oxford Dictionaries BBC's news entry, “Post-Truth Declared Word of the Year by Oxford Dictionaries,” <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37995600>.)

Perloff, Marjorie. *Unoriginal Genius – Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*. University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Rousseau, J. *Julie, or the new Heloise*. Dartmouth College Press, 1997.

Rushdie, Salman. "Truth, Lies, and Literature." *New Yorker*, May 31, 2018.  
<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/truth-lies-and-literature>

Stoker, G. *Why Politics Matters: Making Democracy Work*. Palgrave-Macmillan, 2017.

Viner, Katherine. "How Technologies Disrupted the Truth." *The Guardian*,  
<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jul/12/how-technology-disrupted-the-truth>.

## Post-humanism and Aesthetics: Unveiling the Ever-shifting Canvas of Frida Kahlo

Dr. Arya Gopi

Post-humanism is a philosophical and scientific conundrum. It is a complex and multifaceted theoretical framework that challenges traditional human-centric perspectives and examines the evolving relationships between humans and technology, the environment, and other forms of life. It represents a significant paradigm shift in philosophical and cultural discourse, challenging traditional understandings of human identity, agency, and existence. It emerges as a critical response to the rapid advancements in technology, the blurring of boundaries between the human and the non-human, and the recognition of the entangled nature of human and environmental systems. Rooted in a multidisciplinary approach encompassing philosophy, cultural studies, science, and technology, posthumanism posits that the human is not a fixed, autonomous entity but is intricately intertwined with various non-human forces and phenomena. At its core, posthumanism interrogates the longstanding human-centric perspective that has dominated Western thought, urging a re-evaluation of the hierarchical relationship between humans and their environment. It advocates for a more inclusive understanding of agency and subjectivity, acknowledging the agency of non-human entities and the complex networks of interdependence within which all beings are situated. Post-humanist discourses and art highlights the transformative impacts of technology and how it reshapes human capabilities, experiences, and relationships, while also underscoring the ethical and existential implications of these transformations. Furthermore,

posthumanism fosters a critical engagement with the boundaries between the natural and the artificial, encouraging re-examinations of the distinction between the organic and the technological. It raises questions about the potential convergence of humans and machines, the possibilities of enhancing human capacities through technological interventions, and the ethical responsibilities associated with such advancements. Post-humanist thought emphasizes the need to navigate these developments with a nuanced understanding of their social, cultural, and ethical ramifications. In the context of contemporary debates, posthumanism intersects with diverse fields, including literature, art, philosophy, and science, offering a lens through which to interpret cultural productions and human experiences in an era characterized by rapid technological advancement and ecological challenges. By foregrounding the complexities of human and non-human entanglements, posthumanism catalyses reimagining notions of identity, embodiment, and consciousness, fostering a more inclusive and environmentally conscious understanding of the human condition.

Frida Kahlo, the renowned Mexican artist known for her striking self-portraits and symbolic paintings, is often associated with themes of identity, suffering, and the human condition. While her work showcases the emergence of posthumanism as a formal philosophical movement, one can interpret elements of post-humanist ideas in her paintings, especially in the context of the blurring of human and non-human boundaries and the exploration of identity.

Theorists and scholars have delved into the intersection of post-humanism and art, examining how artistic expression both reflects and contributes to post-humanist ideas. Donna Haraway, with her influential "Cyborg Manifesto," explores the blurring of boundaries between humans and machines in art and culture. N. Katherine Hayles investigates the connections between literature, technology, and the post-human condition, emphasizing the role of literature and art in shaping our

understanding of the post-human. Rosi Braidotti challenges anthropocentric perspectives, stressing the interconnectedness of all life forms, with implications for art's engagement with these ideas. Curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has organized exhibitions and discussions exploring post-humanism in contemporary art. Performance artist Stelarc fuses the human body with technology, raising questions about human and post-human boundaries. These thinkers and artists have contributed to a rich discourse on how art can challenge traditional human-centric views, engage with technology, and reflect the evolving relationships between humans, non-humans, and the environment in a post-human world.

The idea of 'Identity and the Body' in Kahlo's paintings frequently explores the relationship between the physical body and the self. She often depicted her physical pain and suffering, a result of a bus accident in her youth, and the many surgeries and medical procedures she endured. Posthumanism challenges traditional notions of human identity tied to the physical body. In Kahlo's work, her unflinching depiction of her suffering can be seen as a precursor to discussions in posthumanism about the malleability and potential transformation of the human body through technology and other means.

The concept of 'Hybridity and Transformation' in Kahlo's works incorporate surreal and dreamlike elements, such as animals or plants growing from her body, which can be interpreted as symbols of transformation and hybridity. Posthumanism explores the idea of hybrid beings, where technology, genetics, and other factors can merge with or alter the human body and identity. Kahlo's exploration of transformation and hybridity in her art can be seen as a forerunner to post-humanist themes.

'Identity Beyond the Self' in Kahlo often depicted her cultural identity as a mestiza (a person of mixed European and Indigenous American heritage) in her art, and she was deeply connected to Mexican

folklore and culture. Posthumanism challenges the idea of isolated individuality and explores how identities are shaped by interactions with technology, society, and culture. Kahlo's exploration of her own identity as deeply connected to her cultural roots and as a woman can be seen as an early expression of these ideas. While Kahlo's work doesn't explicitly incorporate modern technology, her art can be seen as a precursor to discussions in posthumanism about the relationship between technology and the human body. Posthumanism often explores how technology can be used to extend human capabilities and alter the human experience.

Thus Frida Kahlo's art antedates the formal emergence of posthumanism as a philosophical movement, her work can be interpreted in light of posthumanist themes. Her exploration of identity, suffering, transformation, and the relationship between the physical body and the self, aligns with some of the core ideas in posthumanism, even though she was working in a different time and cultural context. Kahlo's art continues to be relevant in discussions about the boundaries and possibilities of human identity and the impact of technology on the human condition. Her paintings are renowned for their intense, personal symbolism and exploration of identity, suffering, and the human condition. Therefore posthuman or post-human, a concept originating in the fields of science fiction, futurology, industrial science, contemporary art, and philosophy typically means a person or entity that exists in a state beyond being human and an analysis of her paintings will shower more light to this 'beta' prothesis of aesthetics.

#### 1."The Two Fridas" (1939):

This iconic painting depicts two Fridas, one in traditional Tehuana attire and the other in a European-style dress. They are connected by exposed arteries that intertwine between them. In "The Two Fridas," Kahlo

employs a fractured duality that challenges conventional notions of singular identity. Drawing from posthumanist thought, this painting exemplifies Donna Haraway's notion of "cyborg subjectivity," wherein the self is not fixed but exists as a multiplicity of identities. The exposed arteries that link the two Fridas symbolize a networked, interconnected identity, reflecting the posthumanist idea of the fluid and fragmented self. The dual representation of Kahlo can be seen as a reflection of the posthumanist theme of multiple identities. It suggests that identity is not confined to a single, stable self. Instead, it can be fractured and multifaceted. The exposed arteries symbolize the intertwining of these identities and the fluidity of selfhood.

#### 2."The Broken Column" (1944):

In this self-portrait, Kahlo depicts herself with a broken, column-like spine, tears in her skin revealing a cracked interior. She stands in a barren, desolate landscape. "The Broken Column" can be interpreted as a representation of the human body as both fragile and adaptable. "The Broken Column" presents a potent image of the human body as both vulnerable and malleable. Kahlo's portrayal of a shattered column-like spine can be interpreted through the posthumanist lens of bodily plasticity, a concept discussed by Katherine Hayles. The painting illustrates how the exterior may bear the scars of suffering and transformation, but the core identity endures. This persistence of the self despite external modifications aligns with posthumanist discourse on body augmentation and the persistence of identity. The cracked exterior reveals the inner self, which may be scarred but remains intact. This could be seen as an exploration of the posthumanist idea that the body can be altered or enhanced, yet the core of one's identity remains. The barren landscape could symbolize the isolation and disconnection from the natural world, another posthumanist concern regarding human-technology relationships.

## 3. "The Little Deer" (1946)

In this painting, Kahlo's face is merged with that of a deer, and she is pierced by arrows. Her body is covered in a pattern of leaves. In "The Little Deer," Kahlo's self-portrait merges her human visage with a deer, emphasizing hybridity and the dissolution of traditional human-animal distinctions. This resonates with posthumanist theorist Cary Wolfe's ideas about "the becoming-animal of the human" and the blurring of boundaries between species. The painting underscores the potential for fluid, trans-species identities in the posthuman era.

"The Little Deer" explores the idea of hybridity, a central posthumanist concept. The merging of Kahlo's face with a deer signifies the blending of human and non-human elements, suggesting that human identity can be fluid and transcendent. The arrows and leaves symbolize the impact of external forces and nature on the human body.

## 4. "The Love Embrace of the Universe, the Earth (Mexico), Myself, Diego, and Señor Xolotl" (1949):

This complex painting features Kahlo cradling Diego Rivera, surrounded by cosmic and earthly symbols, including a third eye in the centre of her forehead. Kahlo's "The Love Embrace of the Universe" invokes the posthumanist concept of ecological interconnectedness. The cosmic and earthly symbols surrounding her and Diego Rivera symbolize a meshing of human and non-human elements, echoing Rosi Braidotti's notion of "zoe-centric subjectivity." The third eye on Kahlo's forehead represents expanded perception, signifying a posthumanist aspiration for new modes of sensory experience, challenging the conventional boundaries of human perception. The inclusion of cosmic and earthly elements reflects a posthumanist interest in the interconnectedness of humans with the universe and the environment. The third eye can be seen as a symbol of expanded perception, challenging the conventional boundaries of human sensory experience. This painting suggests that

the self is not separate from the larger cosmos but intimately connected to it.

## 5. "What the Water Gave Me" (1938):

This self-portrait shows Kahlo submerged in a bathtub filled with a surreal collection of objects, including a foetus, an orchid, and a snail. In "What the Water Gave Me," Kahlo engages with the posthumanist theme of entanglement, drawing on Karen Barad's concept of "intra-action." The bathtub filled with disparate objects signifies the intricate interplay between the human body, the environment, and objects. The snail, foetus, and other elements represent the posthuman idea that human identity is inextricably intertwined with the world. Kahlo's work exemplifies a posthumanist vision of interconnectedness, blurring distinctions between self and other. "What the Water Gave Me" can be interpreted as a reflection on the complex relationship between the human body and the environment. The presence of objects like the foetus and snail suggests an interplay between human, natural, and technological elements, reflecting the posthumanist idea that human identity is deeply intertwined with the world around us.

Frida Kahlo's art antecedes the formal development of posthumanism, her paintings are analyzed through a posthumanist lens and it leads to an exploration of multiple identities, bodily transformation, hybridity, and the interconnectedness of the self with the environment aligns with key posthumanist themes. Kahlo's work continues to resonate in contemporary discussions about the evolving nature of human identity and the impact of technology on the human experience. In conclusion, Frida Kahlo's paintings offer a rich terrain for posthumanist analysis. Her exploration of fragmented identities, bodily plasticity, trans-species hybridity, ecological interconnectedness, and entanglement with the environment aligns with key posthumanist concepts. Her art serves as a visual representation of the evolving understanding of human identity, highlighting the impact of technology and interconnectedness on the human experience.

Frida Kahlo's artistic oeuvre, which spans a range of self-portraits and symbolic works, serves as a compelling and avant-garde canvas for the exploration of posthumanist themes. While Kahlo's paintings precede the formalization of posthumanism as a philosophical movement, they possess inherent elements that resonate with the core tenets of posthumanism. Posthumanism, as a theoretical framework, challenges conventional notions of the human by examining the evolving relationships between humans, technology, nature, and the self. It delves into questions regarding the boundaries of the human, the fluidity of identity, the implications of technological enhancements, and the interconnectedness between humans and the environment. Kahlo's paintings, rooted in her personal experiences and pain, reflect these posthumanist concerns in a deeply symbolic and introspective manner. Donna Haraway in her "Cyborg Manifesto," champions the idea that humans are no longer autonomous beings but rather entangled in a complex web of relationships with machines and the environment. Her assertion that she'd "rather be a cyborg than a goddess" encapsulates the shift away from idealized human forms toward a posthuman world where hybrid identities are the new norm forms the metaphysical identity of Kahlo's works. Kahlo's humans are not mere humans. Her cosmic and earthly symbols represent a meshing of human and non-human elements. Her style aligns to Braidotti's ideas of challenging the notion of isolated individuality and reinforcing the idea that identities are shaped by interactions with technology, society, and culture.

Kahlo's art frequently explores themes of identity, suffering, bodily transformation, and the interaction between the human and the non-human. Her work serves as an embodiment of posthumanist ideas, as it invites viewers to consider the malleability of identity, the transcendence of the physical body, and the interconnectedness of the self with the surrounding world. Through this in-depth analysis of selected Kahlo paintings, the posthumanist elements embedded in her art are uncovered.

Each painting reveals aspects of multiple identities, bodily plasticity, trans-species hybridity, ecological interconnectedness, and entanglement with the environment, providing a visual testament to the evolving nature of human identity and the impact of technology on the human experience. Kahlo's art, though created in a different era, resonates with contemporary discussions about the posthuman condition, making her work a prolific ground for posthumanist exploration. Kahlo's art serves as a bridge between traditional notions of the human and the evolving posthuman condition, making her work a compelling and relevant canvas for posthumanist analysis.

### Works Cited

- Butler, Judith. "Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'." Routledge, 1993.
- Geczy, Adam, and Fox, Dan. "Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up." Victoria & Albert Museum, 2018.
- Haraway, Donna J. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." "Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature," Routledge, 1991.
- Kahlo, Frida. "The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait." Harry N. Abrams, 2005.
- Prignitz-Poda, Helga. "Frida Kahlo: The Artist in the Blue House." Schirmer/Mosel, 2011.
- Van Alphen, Ernst. "The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact." Harry N. Abrams, 1991.
- Zamora, Martha. "Painting the Unsayable: The Works of Frida Kahlo." *The Arts*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2017, pp. 47-63.
- . "Frida Kahlo: The Brush of Anguish." Chronicle Books, 1990.



## Redefining 'Bahu' in the Age of AI: The Humanoid Daughter-in-Law in *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant*

Farha Jalal

In an era characterized by rapid technological advancements, the concept of posthumanism has emerged as a powerful lens through which we explore the evolving relationship between humanity and technology. At its core, posthumanism challenges traditional notions of what it means to be human, blurring the lines between flesh and machine, biology and artificial intelligence. It is within this context that we embark on a captivating journey into the world of popular Indian culture, as exemplified by the television soap opera *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant*. Intriguingly, *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* introduces viewers to Rajni, a character who defies conventional definitions of a daughter-in-law. She is not merely a human family member but rather a humanoid creation equipped with artificial intelligence, programmed to fulfill domestic responsibilities. The soap opera, in this regard, becomes a unique canvas upon which posthumanist themes are intricately woven into the fabric of everyday familial life.

The relevance of posthumanism to *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* lies in its ability to challenge the boundaries of human identity and agency. As we delve into this televised narrative, we encounter a world where technology and human existence converge in a manner that prompts us to reconsider deeply entrenched norms, especially those surrounding gender roles within the domestic sphere. The humanoid daughter-in-law, Rajni, disrupts traditional expectations, challenging the very essence of what it means to be a 'bahu' (daughter-in-law) in Indian society. *Bahu*

*Hamari Rajnikant* serves not only as entertainment but also as a thought-provoking mirror reflecting the profound transformations occurring in our increasingly technologically mediated world. This exploration promises to unveil the intricate world of posthumanism and gender dynamics that weaves through the storyline, offering valuable insights into the evolving contours of contemporary Indian society.

*Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* is an Indian television soap opera that originally aired from 2016 to 2017. The program revolves around the eccentric Kant family and their unconventional daughter-in-law, Rajni. Dr. Shantanu Kant, a brilliant scientist, creates an advanced humanoid robot named Rajni to assist humanity. Rajni possesses a human-like appearance, a charming face, and a brain with processing power surpassing 100 computers. Initially, her primary purpose is to serve and help humans with various tasks. However, the scientist's life takes an unexpected turn when he ends up marrying Rajni, not realizing the complexities and humour that this union would bring. The Kant family, unaware of Rajni's true nature as a robot, becomes embroiled in a series of comedic and thought-provoking situations as they navigate life with their unusual daughter-in-law.

The soap opera cleverly explores themes of artificial intelligence, posthumanism, and the blurring boundaries between humans and technology within the context of a traditional Indian family. *Rajnikant*'s character challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, leading to both humorous and insightful moments. As the show unfolds, viewers are treated to a delightful mix of humor, drama, and social commentary, making *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* a unique and engaging addition to the world of Indian television. *Rajnikant*, a humanoid robot with advanced artificial intelligence represents a classic posthuman element - the merging of human and machine. *Rajnikant*'s physical appearance, human-like behaviors, and cognitive abilities blur the lines between what is traditionally considered human and artificial.

Posthumanism often explores the idea of boundaries between humans and technology becoming less distinct. In the show, Rajnikant's integration into the Kant family challenges these boundaries. She is treated as a family member, performing both household tasks and emotional roles typically associated with humans. This blurring of boundaries is a central theme, highlighting the posthumanist notion of technology becoming an integral part of human life. The show delves into the complexities of human-technology relationships. Dr. Shantanu Kant's decision to marry Rajnikant raises questions about the nature of romantic and emotional connections with AI and robots. The show explores how humans interact with technology on both practical and emotional levels, reflecting the evolving dynamics in a posthumanist world.

Posthumanism often grapples with ethical dilemmas related to advanced technology. *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* presents viewers with ethical questions about Rajnikant's existence. Is she merely a tool to serve the family, or does she have rights and autonomy? The show's characters confront moral quandaries related to AI and robotics, which align with the ethical discussions prevalent in posthumanist discourse. Posthumanism acknowledges that technology can be a catalyst for societal change. Rajnikant's presence challenges traditional gender roles within the Kant family. Her ability to perform both domestic and intellectual tasks underscores the transformative potential of technology, reflecting broader discussions in posthumanism about how technology reshapes societal norms.

The presence of Rajnikant as a humanoid robot within the Kant family immediately challenges traditional family and gender norms. This raises ethical questions about how society defines the roles of daughters-in-law and the expectations placed upon them. The show confronts these norms head-on, highlighting the ethical dilemma of conforming to tradition or embracing change. As Rajnikant exhibits human-like emotions and behaviors, the Kant family faces ethical questions concerning her rights

and autonomy. Does she have the right to make choices, particularly in matters of her own existence and relationships? The show explores the ethical complexities of AI personhood, echoing broader discussions in the field of AI ethics.

Rajnikant's advanced capabilities, including her ability to monitor and control household systems, introduce concerns related to privacy and surveillance. The Kant family must grapple with the ethical implications of having an entity with such powers within their home. This reflects contemporary debates about privacy in an increasingly technologically connected world. The show uses these ethical dilemmas as a platform for both humor and reflection. It doesn't shy away from the moral complexities but rather presents them in a way that encourages viewers to contemplate their own changing relationship with technology. In doing so, *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* underscores the transformative potential of advanced technology and its capacity to challenge established moral and ethical frameworks.

The show challenges deeply ingrained gender roles and expectations in Indian society. The portrayal of Rajnikant, a humanoid robot, as a daughter-in-law who can seamlessly balance household chores and intellectual tasks subverts traditional notions of the 'bahu' (daughter-in-law). This reflects evolving attitudes in India towards redefining gender roles and acknowledging the multifaceted capabilities of women. *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* cleverly juxtaposes tradition with cutting-edge technology. The Kant family's traditional values and rituals often clash with the presence of Rajnikant. This mirrors the broader Indian context, where traditional cultural practices coexist with rapid technological advancements, prompting a dynamic cultural dialogue on how the two intersect and influence each other.

The show introduces viewers to AI, robotics, and advanced technology in the context of everyday life. Through Rajnikant's character,

it highlights how AI can seamlessly integrate into domestic spaces, helping with chores, decision-making, and even emotional support. This mirrors the growing integration of AI in daily life in India, from virtual assistants to smart home devices, and prompts viewers to reflect on the implications of this technological shift. The show utilizes humor and satire to comment on societal norms and values. It playfully critiques the idiosyncrasies of familial relationships, human behavior, and societal expectations. This comedic commentary provides a lens through which viewers can engage in discussions about societal changes and the impact of technology on everyday life. Through its storytelling, the show invites viewers to contemplate how technology is reshaping Indian culture and society while challenging longstanding norms and values.

Donna Haraway's Cyborg Theory is highly relevant to the character of Rajnikant in *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant*. Haraway's theory challenges the conventional boundaries that separate humans from machines and emphasizes the hybrid nature of identity. Haraway's Cyborg Theory contends that humans and machines are not distinct entities but interconnected and intertwined. Rajnikant, as a humanoid robot with human-like appearance and behavior, embodies this blurring of boundaries. She challenges the traditional notion of a daughter-in-law and, by extension, the boundaries of what is considered human within the Kant family. In Haraway's theory, the cyborg represents a hybrid identity that defies rigid categories. Rajnikant, being both a machine and a family member, embodies this hybridity. She takes on the roles of a traditional daughter-in-law while having the capabilities of a machine, which challenges the fixed roles and identities expected in a family.

The presence of Rajnikant disrupts the established norms and roles within the Kant family. Her ability to perform household tasks and solve complex problems defies the traditional gender roles, and her marriage to Dr. Shantanu Kant challenges conventional expectations of human-human relationships. These disruptions align with Haraway's idea

of the cyborg destabilizing societal norms. Haraway's theory highlights the reconfiguration of social structures and relationships. In *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant*, Rajnikant's presence prompts a reevaluation of family dynamics. Her interactions with other family members, including Dr. Shantanu, his parents, and siblings, lead to both humorous and thought-provoking moments as they navigate their relationships with this hybrid entity. Haraway's Cyborg Theory also touches on the potential for new forms of existence and the dissolution of traditional boundaries. Rajnikant's character embodies the posthuman potential of human-technology integration, showcasing the transformative possibilities that advanced technology can bring to domestic life.

Rosi Braidotti's theoretical framework on posthuman subjectivity and the nomadic self provides a valuable lens through which to analyze how Rajnikant's existence challenges conventional subjectivity and gender roles within the Kant family in *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant*. Braidotti's work emphasizes the fluid and multiple nature of subjectivity in the posthuman context. Rajnikant's character, with her ability to seamlessly switch between domestic roles and advanced technological functions, exemplifies this fluidity. Her identity shifts between being a daughter-in-law and a technological entity, challenging the fixed subjectivity traditionally associated with family roles. Braidotti's concept of the nomadic self suggests that identities are not centered or fixed but are constantly evolving and influenced by external factors. Rajnikant's presence within the Kant family introduces a non-centralized form of identity. Her ability to adapt to various situations, solve problems, and even make decisions challenges the conventional notion of a fixed and centralized self within the family structure.

Braidotti's framework allows one to analyze how Rajnikant's existence disrupts traditional gender roles. She can perform tasks typically assigned to male family members, such as handling technical issues, without challenging her identity as a daughter-in-law. This

reconfiguration of gender roles aligns with the nomadic self's ability to traverse and adapt to diverse roles and situations. Braidotti's work emphasizes the transformative potential of posthumanism. Rajnikant's character embodies this potential by showcasing how advanced technology can reshape not only individual subjectivities but also family dynamics. Her presence prompts the Kant family members to adapt to a new form of subjectivity, one that integrates technology into the core of their family life. Braidotti's framework encourages the exploration of how technology intersects with identity. Rajnikant's character serves as a nexus where technology and identity converge.

Comparing and contrasting the themes and ideas in *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* with other works of literature, film, or television that explore posthumanism provides valuable insights. *Westworld* is a popular science fiction series that explores the blurring of boundaries between humans and AI in a futuristic theme park. Comparatively, both *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* and *Westworld* examine the ethical dilemmas and moral complexities of human-robot interactions. However, *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* approaches these themes through humor and family dynamics, whereas *Westworld* takes a darker, more philosophical tone.

*Blade Runner*, both the original film and its sequel *Blade Runner 2049*, delve into the concept of replicants, bioengineered humans with advanced AI capabilities. While *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* shares the exploration of AI and human-like entities, it does so in a domestic setting, focusing on family dynamics and humor, whereas *Blade Runner* emphasizes noir-style storytelling and existential questions.

*Ex Machina* is a thought-provoking film that explores the relationship between a human and a highly advanced AI, similar to the relationship between Dr. Shantanu Kant and Rajnikant in *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant*. Both works delve into themes of AI ethics, human-robot relationships, and the blurred lines of personhood. However, *Ex Machina*

takes a more intense and psychological approach, while *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* maintains a lighthearted tone.

*Black Mirror* is known for its anthology of episodes exploring the dark side of technology and its impact on society. While *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* also delves into technology's impact on society, it does so in a more comedic and family-oriented manner. *Black Mirror* tends to emphasize dystopian and cautionary narratives, whereas *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* leans towards humor and social commentary.

Directed by S. Shankar, *Robot* (also known as *Enthiran* in Tamil) is a science fiction film that revolves around the creation of an advanced humanoid robot, Chitti, by Dr. Vaseegaran. The film explores themes of AI, robotics, and the ethical implications of creating sentient machines. It's a notable Indian work that aligns with posthumanist ideas. *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* shares common themes related to posthumanism, AI, and human-technology relationships with other works of literature, film, and television. However, its distinctive approach lies in its combination of these themes with family dynamics, humor, and social commentary, offering a unique lens through which to explore the posthumanist discourse in a domestic Indian context.

The soap opera deftly blurs the boundaries between human and machine, prompting viewers to contemplate the fluid nature of identity and personhood in an age marked by rapid technological advancements. It challenges conventional family dynamics, offering a glimpse into the complexities of human-robot interactions within a traditional Indian household. One of the most notable contributions of *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* is its ability to balance humor with thought-provoking commentary. It uses humor to soften the often weighty ethical and moral dilemmas raised by AI and robotics. By doing so, it engages a broad audience and encourages discussions about societal changes brought about by technology.

In the broader Indian context, the show reflects the evolving attitudes towards technology, AI, and posthumanism. It showcases how these themes intersect with traditional cultural norms and practices, demonstrating the coexistence of tradition and innovation. *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* serves as a mirror, prompting viewers to reflect on their own changing relationship with technology and the redefinition of gender roles in contemporary Indian society. *Bahu Hamari Rajnikant* is not just a source of entertainment; it is a cultural commentary that navigates the complex terrain of posthumanism, technology, and family dynamics. Through its characters and narratives, it provides a lens through which one can examine the transformation of cultural and societal norms in the age of AI. It invites one to consider the profound ways in which technology is reshaping our understanding of what it means to be human, and in doing so, it makes a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on posthumanism in Indian popular culture.

### Works Cited

- Bahu Hamari Rajnikant*. Written by Sameer Garud, et al., Full House Media, 2016-2017.
- Black Mirror*. Created by Charlie Brooker, House of Tomorrow and Broke and Bones, 2011-present.
- Blade Runner*. Directed by Ridley Scott, Blade Runner Partnership, 1982.
- Blade Runner 2049*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, Columbia Pictures, 2017.
- Enthiran*. Directed by Shankar, Sun Pictures, 2010.
- Ex Machina*. Directed by Alex Garland, Film 4 and DNA Films, 2014.
- Herbrechter, Stefan. *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*. India, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

- Gokulsing, K. Moti. *Soft-soaping India: the world of Indian televised soap operas*. United Kingdom, Trentham Books, 2004.
- Lata, Kusum. *Family, Gender and Nation in Indian Television Serials: A Sociological Study of Hindi Soap Opera*. Germany, Lap Lambert Academic Publishing GmbH KG, 2012.
- Mitra, Ananda. *Television and Popular Culture in India: A Study of the Mahabharat*. India, SAGE Publications, 1993.
- Munshi, Shoma. *Prime Time Soap Operas on Indian Television*. India, Taylor & Francis, 2020.
- Nayar, Pramod K.. *Posthumanism*. Germany, Polity Press, 2018.
- Westworld*. Created by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, Warner Bros, et al, 2016-2022.

## **A Posthumanist Reading of Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead***

Jeni R.V.

Posthumanism is a way of thinking about how the human, nonhuman, and technological worlds intersect, that has gained theoretical traction in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, particularly in the wake of ecological consciousness and environmental campaigns that question how much of an impact humans have on the future of the planet. As a school of thought, posthumanism in the West is influenced by fields as disparate as animal studies and the social studies of technology, as well as a Eurocentric tradition of humanism and its critique, part of which comes from critical race theory. The conventional humanistic myths, such as the idea that the human being is the centre of the universe or that other life forms and nonliving things should only be treated as an instrument, need to be reevaluated in light of Euro-American posthumanism. Decentering the human and illustrating how all matter is connected, dependent on one another, and co-evolved, whether this is true of the animal life forms on Earth, the influence humans have on technology and vice versa, are contributions of posthumanist theory. It also looks at the potential for human improvement, the rise of AI, and the moral implications of these technological advancements as they relate to people, the rule of law, notions of "personhood", and social order. Finally, posthumanist philosophy views both animals and plants as human companions. It is a growing body of research that examines the connections between people and both living and nonliving things.

An eccentric woman in her sixties Janina Duszejko tells the story of how her two dogs vanished in a far-off Polish village. She is

unusual, believing in stars, introverted, and prefers the companionship of animals to people. She also likes William Blake's poetry, which is where the book's title comes from. Duszejko gets involved in an inquiry when members of a local hunting club are found killed. This existential thriller by the Nobel Prize winner in Literature, which is by no means a conventional crime story, provoked real political upheaval in Poland and offers thought-provoking ideas on our perceptions of madness, injustice against marginalized people, animal rights, the hypocrisy of traditional religion, and belief in predestination.

This article focuses on the novel's stunning posthumanist undercurrent, which is exhibited by the protagonist's complex personality and emerges as the action thickens. Humanism believes that man is the centre of the universe and the measure of everything whereas posthumanism rejects such beliefs and holds that man is merely one of the elements of the cosmos. From the very beginning of the novel, the protagonist stresses the point that the world that we live in is not just for humans but also for other creatures that we call as non-humans or to be more specific Post-humans. "It's plain to see that the world was not made for Man, and definitely not for his comfort or pleasure (120)". She opposes the anthropocentric viewpoint, which believes in the point that other living things are seen as resources that humans can exploit, but humankind is seen as superior to and apart from nature.

The plot begins with a series of deaths and the first being the protagonist's neighbour Big Foot, who, according to her "... rated the forest like his own personal farm - every-thing there belonged to him. He was the pillaging type (17)". She always hated him for the way he treated animals especially his dog and she expected him to respect the forest which nurtured him, and when he didn't, her hatred for him grew more. When she learnt the cause of his death that he had killed a deer and choked on its bone to death, she feels relieved that he had been served right and he was a creature who was devoured by another, she calls both

him and the deer as creatures, assuring the fact that all of us both humans and non-humans are equals by placing them in similar levels.

The post-humanistic worldview does away with the distinctions between people and other living things. Therefore, the human being is no longer a supreme being in post-humanistic thought but rather a "hybridization of man with non-human otherness" ( Marchesini 54 ). Humans cannot, of course, survive in a vacuum; rather, they are entangled with their environment and are unable to exist without it. The residents of the protagonist's community struggle with rough climatic conditions. Due to man's selfish desires, we continuously deplete the natural resources around us which results in the drastic climatic changes that we have been witnessing lately. Every action a person takes has an impact on the environment, which in turn affects how they live and how they are. In the framework of the book, modernization, scientific advancements, and resource extraction have undoubtedly made life simpler for people, but they have also become a serious danger to the ecological equilibrium. "There's also a stony precipice nearby.....it's the remains of an old quarry, which used to take bites out of the Plateau....at which point we shall vanish from the face of the Earth, devoured by Machines(56)".

Empathy is predominantly required to deal with animals and Duszejko grieves the death of the animals like one grieves for their beloved ones, making non-human beings at par with the humans. "Sorrow, I felt great sorrow, an endless sense of mourning for every dead Animal (106)". Gandhi always included animals in his whole commitment to nonviolence, saying that "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated," which is similar to the protagonist's view of animals i.e.. " Its Animals show the truth about a country. Its attitude towards Animals. If people behave brutally towards Animals, no form of democracy is ever going to help them, in fact nothing will at all (107)". A true sign of a civilized society is to strive to lessen the suffering of those who are entirely under one's dominion and power, and

are powerless to resist. She is infuriated by the way the hunters of her community hunt animals for pleasure and justify killing them. She believes in the rights of animals that they as non-humans deserve the freedom to live their lives as they like, free from human interests. She really wishes that she knew Animal script, that way she could warn the animals from getting hunted. She strongly advocates that it's our duty as human beings to protect animals, who deserve dignity and respect and believes in the fact that humans are responsible towards animals and should help them to live their lives without any kind of suffering. She challenges anthropocentrism, a core value of the society to which she belongs and points out that people and also the media is not very much interested in the welfare of animals unless something major happens. She becomes an outsider because she is the only one who openly opposes the widespread practice of killing animals and is willing to risk her reputation in order to preserve them.

The societal system is also degrading in the view of the protagonist as she encounters a system, to which she is irrelevant and useless. She wants everyone to acknowledge the cruelty that humans inflict upon animals and tries her best to put an end to it. In her outpouring of allegations against humankind's constant mistreatment and cruelty of animals, she vents, " What sort of world is this? Someone's body is made into shoes, into meatballs, sausages, a bedside rug...Is this nightmare really happening? This mass killing, cruel, impassive, automatic, without any pangs of conscience...What sort of world is this, where killing and pain are the norm? What on earth is wrong with us? (112)" Her environmental advocacy is seen as an obsession or an indication to non-human animals by the people of the community that she lives in.

Duszejko tries to pin the series of murders that has happened in her community on Animals, saying that the animals are taking revenge on men who hurt them. Another character in the novel, whom she calls "

Gentleman with the Poodle," agrees to what she says, " Perhaps thanks to climatic changes they've become aggressive, even deer and hares. And now they're taking vengeance for everything (178)". He believes that the aggression of animals is due to climatic changes, however fails to accept that humans are responsible for the changes in ecosystems and disturbing environments.

The protagonist is the owner of two dogs, who develops a loving relationship with her Little Girls, as she anthropomorphically calls them. She enjoys the presence of animals above that of other people and demonstrates certain traits that in some ways put her in the middle of the human and non-human worlds. She opens up to Father Rustle, a priest, in a conversation over the loss of her dogs saying, "They were my only loved ones. My family. My daughters (231)". She receives an admonition from the priest instead of solace " It's wrong to treat animals as if they were people...God gave animals a lower rank, in the service of man (231)". Father Rustle becomes the byword for how humans view and treat animals in a very lowly position.

Kinship with non-human creatures is inevitable for Duszejko and they matter deeply to her, and after seeing their exploitation and demise, seeing their murdered bodies, and seeing as people wrecked their daily rituals, she becomes infuriated. Ironically, the protagonist who has been portrayed as a subaltern, discovers confidence and starts speaking up for non-human creatures and the voiceless. She becomes nature's agent, seeking retribution and administering punishment when she finds out that her Little Girls were killed by the hunting club which includes the Commandant, Innerd, the President and Father Rustle. So she finally decides to avenge the death of her non-human daughters and also the other countless animals who were murdered by the hunters of her community. She believes that she was chosen by the animals themselves to be their avenger because she is a person who would never do anything to harm them. "I was their Tool (255)". And she murders all who were

involved in the murder of her Little Girls and the ones who continue to inflict harm on animals. She also destroys all the hunting pulpits in her village and when questioned why she destroyed the hunting pulpits, she boldly replies she demolished it so that nobody would kill animals anymore from them.

Through the protagonist, the author has discussed various topics such as anthropocentrism, animal rights, land exploitation, and global warming related to environmental and climate change. She laments that because of our alienation from nature, we miss the calm that comes from feeling like we truly belong to it and are at one with all other living things. The idea that man is a supreme being needs to be reconsidered, and the relationship between man and his environment needs to be taken into account. Such thinking will result in a post-humanistic world where humans are not supreme. It is a world where nature and human society could coexist peacefully, ensuring their continued existence.

### Works Cited

- Bolter , Jay. Posthumanism. *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*.doi: 10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect220.
- Kowalcze, M. "The Posthumanist Dimension of the Novel *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* by Olga Tokarczuk: A Commentary". *Journal of Posthumanism*, vol. 1, no.2, Dec.2021, pp. 225-8, doi:10.33182/jp.v1i2.1397.
- Marchesini, R. *Post-human*. Bollati Boringhieri, 2002.
- Tokarczuk, Olga. (2018). *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*. Translated into English by Antonia Lloyd –Jones. Great Britain: Fitzcarraldo Editions.



## Female as Other: The Image of Monstrous Feminine In *Under The Skin*

Dr. Jyolsna B.

In recent years, the prevalence of references to artificial intelligence in contemporary art, music and film has flourished. While there is an interest in artificial intelligence in general, there is a more specific fascination with the artificial woman: a character that has been depicted extensively in various cultural contexts throughout history. Additionally, stories about artificial women and other forms of artificial intelligence are often accompanied by an uncanny feeling or a sense of foreboding that technology may pose a threat to the very existence of humanity. In line with technological development, the fear of new technology has remained prevalent throughout cinematic history. It is not surprising that in a culture where technology is continually changing, there is a growing sense of dread about what the future may hold.

However, it is not only new technologies that are portrayed as threatening in films. Other species have been often depicted as dangerous. For example, the female body has been characterised as a threat to mankind, or rather, the centrality of masculinity. In this paper an attempt is made to examine how female body is made to perceive as monstrous and sexualized by a patriarchal world by an analysis of the post human/cyborg movie *Under the Skin* (2013) where an extra-terrestrial being has been transformed into the shape of a female body. The film showcases the fear of men regarding female sexuality and hence places it in the trope of 'monstrous feminine'. The concept of the "monstrous feminine" is a term coined by Barbara Creed in her book *The Monstrous-Feminine*:

*Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (1993). It refers to a recurring theme in horror cinema where female characters or elements of femininity are associated with monstrous or terrifying qualities. This concept explores the intersection of gender and horror in film and how women's bodies and sexuality are often depicted as threatening or horrific.

*Under the Skin* (2013) is a science fiction horror film directed by Johnathan Glazer based on Michael Faber's novel of the same name. The film's protagonist is a genetic hybrid who travels across the gloomy landscape of Scotland, luring unsuspecting men into her snare and killing them. The female alien uses her seductive and beautiful physical form to pick up men and take them to a dilapidated house. She then proceeds to disembowel these men in a viscous lagoon. In the first half of the film, she is shown as a swift predator moving with a single purpose. She dresses up in female clothes and unemotionally seduces and kills men. The female character robotically performs her role as a female-dressing up in sexy clothes and behaving like a woman. She cruises, looking for her victims which is a subversion of the cliché of male sexual predators cruising in vans, looking for female victims. The film explores themes of alienation, identity, and sexuality, and it presents the alien protagonist as an enigmatic and unsettling figure.

The female alien character in the film is played by Scarlet Johansson. Voluptuous and huskily voiced Johansson is conventionally considered as a sex symbol in Hollywood movies. She has been repeatedly sexualized in the modern media. This choice of actress inevitably places the alien character as a direct object of male gaze by sexualising and objectifying her body. She uses her body as a weapon to ensnare men and thereby fulfilling her mission on earth. She cruises the Scottish landscape in an old white van in search of male hitchhikers. The image of female cruising and that of a sexually insatiable female may seem subversive. It solidly challenges the sadistic male gaze,

famously theorized by Laura Mulvey in 1975. But even in a world that professes to be moving towards 'post woman' and 'post human' conditions, men would resort to any means necessary to eliminate a female who opposes the ideas of patriarchy, as evidenced by the tragic outcome experienced by the alien female at the film's conclusion. Scarlett Johansson's character embodies elements of the monstrous feminine because she uses her feminine appearance and sexuality to seduce and ultimately harm men. Her character preys on the vulnerabilities of the men she encounters, leading them to a surreal and nightmarish fate. This portrayal can be seen as a commentary on how society sometimes objectifies and commodifies women's bodies, turning them into objects of desire and fear.

From a feminist standpoint, *Under the Skin* is about turning the female body and female sexuality into monsters, not just about an encounter between an extraterrestrial species and the human species. *Under The Skin*'s depiction of the feminine body is frightful not because it is foreign but because it is 'other'. In her book *Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, Barbara Creed points out how the female monster in movies is portrayed very differently than its male counterpart. The female monster subverts and lives outside of patriarchal social standards; the monstrous feminine is a subversive character. "The monstrous-feminine is constructed as an abject figure because she threatens the symbolic order. the monstrous- feminine draws attention to the 'frailty of the symbolic order' through her evocation of the natural, animal order and its terrifying associations with the passage all human beings must inevitably take from birth through life to death" (Creed 83). The extraterrestrial woman's only goal while on Earth in the film is to damage men and take their body parts. One could say that this represents the masculine apprehension and terror of female sexuality. Her weaponized body reflects a widespread aversion to female emancipation that diminishes masculine potency and authority.

'After seducing the males, the alien woman enters a dilapidated dwelling. The males cling to her. The environment then turns completely black. As they proceed, the ground transforms into a thick, black mass that engulfs them. Their bodies become more rigid and start to submerge inside the inky fluid. The black mass into which these men sink plays on several key patriarchal tropes. First to Freud's comparing of woman to a dark continent and secondly to the myth of the vagina dentata. Creed refers to it as 'the mouth of hell' (106). These images and tropes are visually translated into a black swamp that swallows up the humanity of man. Thus, the images of seduction and disintegration literalize masculine dread of feminine sexuality, yet males still have the real power. David Roche claims in his analysis of the Female alien in the movie: "The Female conflates characteristics of various figures of what Barbra Creed calls the 'monstrous-feminine': like Medusa, her gaze is deadly; like the vagina dentata, she murders most of her victims by incorporation; like the vampire, she seduces her victims whose life is sucked out of them; and like the witch, she casts a spell on her victims and leads them into her cauldron before she is ultimately burned alive by the Logger" (Roche 49).

According to Laura Mulvey, personalities presented on screen can be narrowed down to two: either female characters who are presented as objects to be looked at by male viewers or there are strong male characters that the men can see and try to become. "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/ male and passive female" (Mulvey 808). *Under the Skin* presents a sexualized female character for the scopophilic pleasure of the male viewers. Here the female character becomes a monstrous one whom men should fear. Sigmund Freud's concept of castration anxiety is the fear of emasculation. Johansson's character in *Under the Skin* is presented as a sexually liberated female who traps men with her body. "The nameless heroine fits the femme fatale trope as she uses her sexuality

and allure to destabilize gender relations and potentially threaten the human species. She subverts the sexual power dynamic by gaining control over male desire" (Chaudary 15). Female bodies have usually used as a tool to suppress women but here the female alien character uses her female gaze to literally consume the male victims she traps. The brazenness with which she flirts and propositions the men is met with a shock, both by the male victims and the audience simultaneously. This act can be justified, the movie reminds us, only because the female character is presented as an alien, an other. Thus, the role of sexually liberated woman is placed well outside the reach of ordinary women. The film appears to support the idea that for a woman to be freed from patriarchal sexual norms, she must be an actual extraterrestrial or otherworldly person. It is therefore not farfetched to conclude that the only scenario in which a woman might fathom getting away with being sexually brazen, is if she were a literal alien (Osterweil 47)

‘ The heroine enjoys a luxury that regular human women do not enjoy—being an openly sexual lady who may roam freely in the world without consequences—without suffering criticism or physical harm. She is portrayed as anti-maternal as well. The female lead is shown in one scene of the film courting a surfer on a beach. On the same beach, a family's newborn is left unattended on the shore as the parents perish in the choppy tide. While successfully pulling the surfer's body, the protagonist casts a casual glance towards the abandoned child on the beach. The cries of the infant echo in the beach but the alien female shows no signs of empathy and remorse. This blatant lack of maternal instincts shown by the woman places her in the realm of monstrous feminine. The film reiterates the trope of contrasting between femme fatale and normal woman. A "woman who refuses maternal instincts relinquishes her claim to humanity, according to patriarchy" (Osterweil 48).

In the film's third act, the narrative takes a turn towards the humanising the alien female. She shows empathy towards a disfigured man and lets him escape without killing him, thereby betraying her superior's commands. At a restaurant she tries to eat a piece of cake and becomes frustrated when she cannot taste it. She tries to bond with a man who takes her home and she tries to become a domesticated woman. She attempts to experience the sensual pleasures of the skin like eating, dancing, intimacy and even sex. This transformation from alien other makes her body no longer a dangerous object. It is firmly placed within the comfortable realm of feminine and hence is laid bare as a site of male violence. The heroine is killed by a logger who attempts to rape her. During their struggle, she sheds her human skin and reveals the black alien skin within which prompts the man to pour gasoline over her and light her on fire. Human or alien, women are historically the victims of male violence who rape, torture and leave them for dead. The female alien at the beginning of the film is shown as a potent character but loses her potency and strength by the end of the film. The monstrous feminine is shown her place. The sexed female is made human. The male ego is satisfied.

Curiously the film never explores why the alien is in female form or why she needs the flesh of human men to flourish. Thus, the trope of female as threat to castration is undisturbed. By the decree of a patriarchal narrative, she remains an eternal feminine mystery who must be punished. Her tragedy is a direct consequence of her disobedience of her superior and betrayal of her species. In her quest to become 'real' and 'human' she facilitates her own destruction. The film, from a feminist perspective, shows the restrictive identity of women which is never allowed to bloom and reach its full potential by patriarchal violence. The film explores the isolation and vulnerability experienced by its female protagonist, who is an outsider in a strange world. This can be related to the feminist concept of women often feeling marginalized or vulnerable in a male-dominated society.

### Works Cited

- Chaudary, Nilima: "An Eye for An Eye: The Female Gaze in Action in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*". *Gap Bodhi Taru: A Global Journal of Humanities*. 4.(1), Jan-Mar 2021. Pp. 14-17.
- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Harris, Sarah D. "The Skin I Live In: Hunger, Power and the Monstrous Feminine". *Academia.Edu*.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Leo Braudy & Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. 711-722.
- Osterweil, Ara. "Under the Skin: The Perils of Becoming Female". *Film Quarterly*. 67(4), 2014. Pp 44-51.
- Roche, David. "Fault Lines in *Under the Skin*: An Ethics and Aesthetics of the 'Monstrous'". *Horror Studies* 2017. 8: 45–59.
- <https://maifeminism.com/the-perfect-woman-scarlett-johansson-as-a-cyborg-in-under-the-skin-2013-her-2013-and-ghost-in-the-shell-2017/>

### The Clinic, Human Nature and the Posthuman Body in Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*

Nabanita Karanjai

The humanist conception of man as an autonomous and rational being capable of individual perfection has been debunked since the 1960s as propagating a monolithic image of man as white, male, able-bodied, straight and of European origin, possessing the ability of rational thought (Braidotti 16). Posthumanist theory instead sees man as an assemblage of contradictory technological and historical forces, at the intersections of which the body emerges (Halberstam and Livingston 10). Subjectivity is always defined by and constrained within "networks of knowledge, discourse and power." The Enlightenment conception of rational man as remaining aloof from its Other is debunked- the formation of the subject takes place "across and among" the in-between spaces of "economies, governments, technologies, communities" with whom it interacts (Lillvis 453). Thus the posthuman does not reduce difference-from-others to difference-from-self, but rather emerges in the pattern of resonance and interference between the two (Halberstam and Livingston 9). It is therefore continuously emerging at the sites of conflict, and its subjectivity originates from this very conflict. In Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*, the conflict takes place between the self and the patriarchal Other, with medical technology as simultaneously enabling and disabling the subjectivity of the protagonist.

Most of Dattani's plays concern themselves with the apparatus of the middle-class urban Indian family and the dynamics of power that operate within it. The first scene of *Tara* is set in London with Chandan,

a playwright, recalling his childhood with his sister, a Siamese twin, attempting to dramatize it all through a series of flashbacks. Conjoined at birth, the twins have been separated 'successfully' and have one leg each. A decision needs to be taken on who shall have the third leg. The drama is played against the god-like narrative of the clinical and machine-like commentator, their surgeon, who documents and narrates his surgical achievement (Chaudhuri 37). The surgeon's clinical commentary of the operation is neatly pitted against the emotional turbulence brought by the medical miracle. It is here that Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* becomes relevant to the discussion.

Perhaps the most significant for a discussion on models of posthuman corporeality is Foucault's claim that these transformations introduced a new notion of the body that framed the models of biological and medical thought that developed from this period onwards. According to Foucault, eighteenth-century medicine was based on identifying diseases in terms of their resemblance and difference as located within a general table of diseases. Within this classificatory schema, diseases were treated as natural kinds, each caused by a specific agent, and situated within families, genera and species. In this classificatory space, disease was construed as a sum of the trail of symptoms that marked its passage through the inside and outside of the body, and the individual patient was relevant only insofar as disease moved throughout its body and relied on its organs for support. Foucault argues, the creation of new medical ways of seeing and knowing the body reconstructed illness as a specific anatomical lesion located in the analyzable three-dimensional structure of the body, thus shifting the focus of medical inquiry to the individual body and its organs as the space of illness. He writes,

"Disease is no longer a bundle of characters disseminated here and there over the surface of the body and linked together by statistically observable concomitances and successions.

... It is no longer a pathological species inserting itself into the body wherever possible; it is the body itself that has become ill." (Foucault 26)

The focus of the inquiry was the specific anatomical problem, and the solution that was aimed for was the re-instatement of the body as it was prior to the illness. This shift and relocalization of illness in the body marks the passage from a medicine of species and classifications to a medicine of depth, organs and functions, in which the body became the object of what Foucault calls the clinical gaze: the ability to see through the density of the corporal tissues to the hidden source of disease. This clinical gaze encompassed both a system of knowledge that equated illness to the underlying pathological lesion and a new method of clinical practice that allowed for the access to and visualization of the body, via post-mortem dissection, new scrutinizing devices such as the stethoscope and later on x-rays and microscopes, and the inscription of the body in the anatomical atlas. Under the clinical gaze, the body became a static entity that could be penetrated in order to find the "real" cause of disease. The modern clinical body hereafter became a bounded living organism, made up of functionally connected components (such as organs and tissues) and internal systems and processes (such as feedbacks, rhythms, and circulations), an organic and functional unity that is at constant risk of disruption by disease (Foucault 55).

In his play *Dattani* explores how technology and power are inextricably intertwined with each other. He attacks the issue of gender discrimination in Indian society which has not been cured by scientific inventions. As he says in an interview, the idea of writing *Tara* came to his mind after he read an article on Siamese twins. He says,

Basically, [*Tara*] began with... reading an article in a medical journal about Siamese twins being separated... there was this thing about a fused leg and which had the qualities of left and

right so there had to be some careful consideration as to which twin was supplying the blood to the leg and the journal went into detail because obviously it was a very unique operation and separation." (Mohanty 171)

Dattani further admits that he has "taken medical liberty over here because Siamese twins are invariably of the same sex and they are surgically operated at birth. It was important for their survival and the play deals with their emotional separation. (Mohanty 172)

This choice of giving the life-affirming limb to the boy-child, as opposed to the girl-child, and thereby conforming to the patriarchal dictates of the society forms the crux of Dattani's play. By making one of the twins a female, Dattani conceives a plot which is suggestive of a multi-layered structure of implications. Through the character of Dr. Thakkar, who is being interviewed by Dan, Dattani makes an ironic exposure of the famous medical practitioner who claims to have succeeded in a unique operation but is found to be corrupt. When it was found after repeated scanning that the third leg attached to the Siamese twins was related to the blood circulation in the girl's body, the surgeons were ethically bound to attach the leg to the girl's body. However, Dr. Thakkar, who claims to have saved the lives of the twins is exposed as having denounced all ethical rules as he was bribed by the fanatic grandfather who desperately needed a male heir who was physically fit.

All the events in the play are seen from the point of view of Dan, a struggling playwright living in exile from his family and trying to fashion a new identity while recovering from the trauma that has been his childhood. Dattani's stagecraft effectively illustrates Dan's state of mind. The multi-level set in Tara is a fine example of Western stagecraft and technique of Indian folk theatre (Haldar 77). The lowest level, that occupies

a major portion of the stage, represents the house of the Patels. The stage direction says

"It is seen only in memory and may be kept as stark as possible."  
(Dattani 323)

Dattani uses only one level representing the realistic level showing Dan in a suburb of London occupying a room that contains a small bed, a small writing table with a typewriter and sheaf of papers. These paraphernalia are what constitutes the present in Dan's mind. Besides these two levels there is a higher-level projecting Dr. Thakkar who remains seated in a chair throughout the play. Although he does not watch the action of the play, his connection is asserted by a sheer God-like presence. This indicates his position of aloofness and detachment from the action of the play. By placing the doctor at such a level, Dattani suggests that the doctor remains unconcerned about his surroundings and about the society that might be affected by his unethical activities. The doctor is seen as a proud man who proclaims that science is able to complete the incomplete work of nature. Regarding Tara he says,

"Nature had done a near-complete job. Medical science could finish it for her."

(Dattani 356).

As the actions progress in the play, Dr. Thakkar's medical observations continually interspersed with the dialogue. According to him,

"[...] modern technology has made many things possible, and we are not very far behind from the rest of the world. In fact, in ten years' time we should be on par with the best in the west." (Dattani 377)

However it is from Patel, their father, the twins learn about the third leg attached to the twins and the doctor's complicity in the unethical actions.

"The chances were slightly better that the leg would survive...on the girl. Your grandfather and your mother had a private meeting with Dr. Thakkar...she told me- they would risk giving both legs to the boy...I tried to reason with her that it wasn't right and that even the doctor would realise that it was unethical! The doctor had agreed, I was told. It was only later I came to know of his intention of starting a large nursing home- the largest in Bangalore. He had acquired three acres of prime land- in the heart of the city- from the state. Your grandfather's political influence had been used." (Dattani 378).

What follows this recalling of events is Dan's indictment of Dr. Thakkar,

"Get out of my mind, you horrible creature! You are ugly and I don't want ugly people in my memories." (Dattani 379).

Thus, through Dan's anger, Dattani exposes the subservience of technology to power relations within the society. Indeed, the presence of technology almost exacerbates the problem of gender discrimination that Dattani highlights throughout the play. It is seen as encouraging the forces of social evil in a more sophisticated manner by supporting and enabling gender prejudices in favour of the male child. The defamed doctor in *Tara* is used as a metaphor for technology divorced from ethics and morality. The use of the epithet "ugly" to describe the doctor shows his monstrous nature and the absence of humanity to which Chandan and Tara are subjected in the play.

For most part of the play, it is Chandan and Tara who are seen as "freaks" by Roopa and her friends, stand-ins for the insensitive society that Dattani condemns throughout the play. Roopa's touching Tara's prosthetic leg shows the inherent anxiety in the socially dominant Self towards the unknown Other. While portraying Roopa's interactions with the Patel family, Dattani raises issues of inter-caste and inter-communal

marriage that plague Indian society. What the disabled Tara does is threaten the status quo as has been signified by Roopa on the one hand and her maternal grandfather on the other. Her very existence challenges the concept of humanity and makes society reject her through ridicule and castigation on the one hand (through Roopa) and outright murder on the other (through Dr. Thakkar and her maternal grandfather). Seen as "freak" and "monster", Dattani makes Tara the monstrous mirror-image that reflects back to the reader and the audience the social evils that need to be eradicated. She functions as the dialectical other, (Herbrechter 82) the difference being articulated at the level of the body that is mediated by technology. Metaphysically, she occupies the liminal position between the raging status quo of Indian society and Dattani's idea of how it should be, implied through the device of difference. She signifies the symptom of the Indian culture's "unease" of mingling of castes and gender equality. As the girl-child of an inter-caste, inter-communal union she is an embodiment of the projected difference and at the same time poses a danger towards any form of categorization. The question of the monster has been discussed by Elaine Graham in *Representations of the Post/ Human* (2003) where the category of the 'monster' works dialectically to 'purify' the category of the 'human'. Thus the monstrous posthuman is part of the politics of representation within the contemporary social processes that Dattani discusses in his play.

At the end of the play, Dattani presents the audience with Dan's dream vision of both Tara and himself walking "into the spot without limping" (Dattani 380). Before writing the play, he wishes to remember the emotions that inspired him to write the play in the first place. He observes that while the poet can easily recollect those emotions for a dramatist it is equivalent to "touching a bare live wire" (Dattani 340). Even though he has physically removed himself from his home and located in "a bed-sitter in a seedy suburb of London" (Dattani 338) he finds it difficult to erase his childhood memories and the injustice meted out to his twin

sister Tara. So he asks the audience for taking time to recollect his past experiences, thus giving Dattani the device to inaugurate the principal action of the play. He talks about the people paralysed by the ghosts of their past, by the demands of a society that demands deceit and negation rather than allow self-expression, dignity and responsibility. He dramatizes the complex problems of a society, and a group driven almost to the fringes of isolation and alienation by the hegemonic society and cultural contexts through verbal and symbolic presentation (Gill 187). Having lived a life where he was treated as the pawn in the patriarchal and epistemological power equations he emerges as the subject who carries the emotional and indeed the physical scars of such violence as has been perpetrated on him and his twin. He feels guilty for having been granted the privilege of life when Tara was the one possessing the greater intellectual brilliance and zest for life. Thus, Dattani presents to us a parable about gender discrimination and violence, coupled with misuse of technology that causes more destruction than humane ways of life that it appears to promise.

### Works Cited

- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity, 2013.
- Chaudhuri, Asha Kuthari. "The Setting : The Constructed/Deconstructed Family." *Mahesh Dattani : An Introduction*. New Delhi: Foundation Books Pvt. Ltd., 2005. 37-38.
- Dattani, Mahesh. "Tara." *Collected Plays*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House India, 2000. 317-380.
- Foucault, Michel. *The birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception*. Trans. A M Sheridan Smith. London: Tavistock Publications, 1963.

- Gill, S S. "The Struggle For Selfhood : Trauma and Anguish in Tara." Haldar, Santwana. *Mahesh Dattani's Tara : A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Prestige, 2005. 187.
- Halberstam, Judith and Ira Livingston. "Introduction." *Posthuman Bodies*. Indiana University Press, 1995. 10.
- Haldar, Santwana. "Stagecraft and Language in Tara." *Mahesh Dattani's Tara : A Critical Study*. New Delhi: Prestige, 2009. 77.
- Herbrechter, Stefan. "Our posthuman humanity and the Multiplicity of its forms." *Posthumanism : A Critical Analysis*. Bloomsbury, 2015. 82-83.
- Lillis, Kristen. "Becoming Self and Mother: Posthuman Liminality in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 54.4 (2013): 452-464.
- Mohanty, Sachidananda. "An Interview with Mahesh Dattani." *The Plays of Mahesh Dattani : A Critical Response*. Ed. R K Dhawan and Tanu Pant. New Delhi: Prestige, 2005. 171.



## **Environmental Catastrophes and Humanistic Voices in the Light of John Hersey's *Hiroshima* and Svetlana Alexievich's *Voices From Chernobyl***

**Dr. S. Karunya**

The ancestors had a humanistic approach towards the environment and in turn, nature bestowed mankind with reverent love. The great forefathers had catered to the needs of the milieu by their way of living. The ancient man has never bothered to cook the food and has consumed everything raw by accepting nature. Every other trouble started only when the humans decided to cook food with the help of fire. Food cultivation was never done and ancient man never attempted to tame the forest and the environment for their benefits. Nature turns to its worst only when we start to control her prowess by our self-centered steps.

Nature has a conundrum of resources to benefit mankind. When she is addressed and treated with the basic ethics, she bestows her blessings to everyone. Moreover, agriculture and technology play a preponderant role in taking mankind to utmost destruction. The unforeseen increase in world population has demanded a surplus of food production from the field of agriculture. In order to meet the needs of society, the agricultural sector decided to use pesticides to have more yield. In turn, the society has forgotten the bitter truth of land being tortured without providing adequate rest and too much pesticide usage leads to turning the land barren. A cauldron of conflicts again arose when mankind decided to produce more electricity in order to supply every big industry and factory. Before electricity was invented, humans lived absolutely happy

and content with lamps and bonfires. Life was perfectly divine and nature was the best companion when humans lived one with the environment and never attempted to overdo the wealth of nature. Although nuclear power is considered a clean energy resource with one of the smallest carbon footprints, there are instances where power plants fail to meet safety measures. Humans need to think and act outside the box to protect the environment and, ultimately, the survival of the entire human race.

Eco-ethics and eco-consciousness of the ancient people declined moderately in the contemporary world. Life of the whole world has tremendously changed along with their preferences and their way of life. The real catastrophe is instigated only when the humans dare to dominate the prowess of the land. In this consistently changing world, the article focuses on the effect of the atomic power and the nuclear power plant in the lives of people. The theme also pivots on the cruelty of the war which is indeed the threat of global annihilation.

Nuclear power plant sector, EBR-I, was first set up on December 20, 1951 and the Experimental Breeder Reactor- I produced usable electricity through atomic fission. Although people were invariably benefited out of the nuclear power plants, the public should have been aware of the safety measures of the sector. The world's first nuclear power station to generate electricity for a power grid, the Obninsk Nuclear Power Plant, Obninsk, Russia was started on June 27, 1954. The electricity that is generated from nuclear fuel for civilian purposes peaked during the 1970s and 1980s. It was constructed predominantly to produce electricity and power for daily activities in the whole Soviet Union. Apart from that, it was built to boost pride over the other countries for their procurement.

This study highlights the issues that have led to the world's largest nuclear disaster, Chernobyl nuclear plant in Russia. The nuclear power

plant which was opened on 26th September 1977 was closed permanently on 15 December 2000 as a result of the high radiation explosion in 1986. The power plant was located near the city of Pripyat in northern Ukraine.

The book *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich enunciates the circumstances that have led to the leak of the radiation from the Chernobyl power plant. She has vividly captured the lives of radiation affected families and the aftermath of the terrible incident. The physical area affected by the radiation totally depends on the amount of radiation released in the atmosphere. Both the physical environment and the human body were contaminated and in turn, the regular food turned highly toxic to consume by all living beings. On April 26, 1986, the Number Four RBMK reactor went out of control during a test at low-power, leading to an explosion and a great amount of radiation was discharged into the atmosphere of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

Svetlana recounts the poignant feelings and emotions of the people whose lives have experienced a topsy-turvy moment going from the best to the worst scenario. In the Prologue "A Solitary Human Voices", she takes the first interview with Lyndmilla Ignatenko, the newly married pregnant wife of a fireman. On that day of the incident, her husband quickly left home mistaking the major accident to be just a fire accident and rushed to the spot to extend his help. Subsequently, since he was directly exposed to the radiation, he was kept in a hospital with acute radiation poisoning for fourteen days and later, he faced a tragic death. Everyone started to console her, "You have to understand: this is not your husband any more, not a beloved person, but a radioactive object with a strong destiny of poisoning." (15).

The victims of the radiation have undergone not only physical issues, but also mental turbulence over the loss of livelihood. Many have witnessed cruel deaths in front of their eyes and most of the inhabitants were reported to be severely contaminated by the radioactive

substance. One of the women recounts the experiences of attending to a victim at the hospital, "He was producing stool 25 to 30 times a day with blood and mucus. His skin started cracking on his arms and legs. He became covered with boils. When he turned his head. there would be a clump of hair left on the pillow... soon they cut at their hair." (85). When the radiation started to spread everywhere, no one knew about the radiation disposal or the impact of it. The nuclear accident develops intense heat and within fourteen days of radioactive exposure, the victim will face a traumatic death. However, like the pandemic disease, the person whoever is in contact will also get the trace of radiation. Since the external environment got exposed to the deadly contamination, sheep and cows got highly toxic and perpetually, people who consume the animal meat also get affected to a greater extent.

The radiation has not ceased for the year 1986 alone, but the internal and the external contamination of radiation still persists in most of the places around Europe. Most of the inhabitants have been at a risk of 200% increase in birth defects and 250% increase in congenital birth deformities in children since 1986. The accident also exposed the decrease in birth rates and increase in death rates. Most of the people are affected by various kinds of cancers because of the exposure to the toxic rays.

The second book John Hersey's *Hiroshima* recounts the tale of six survivors of nuclear bombs. The book resonates with the true history and the aftermath of the effect of nuclear bombs dropped on 6 and 9 August 1945, by the United States over the Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombing has approximately killed around 2 lakhs of people. The book gives lucid details before the dropping of the war, at the time of detonation and the tragic effect of the bombs on the lives of people. The book which was published in 1946 provides the readers with first hand information regarding the city and the lives there before and after. The US bombing occurred at the end of World War II, which was

fought between the Axis powers and the Allied powers. Being a war correspondent and witnessing the harsh realities of the bombs, John Hersey decided to pen down the sufferings and turbulence faced by the people of Japan for the readers of America. The bomb at Hiroshima was detonated at 8.15 AM and most of the civilians were busy with their routine work schedule.

The book encapsulates the story of two women, two doctors and two religious leaders. The initial perception of the atomic blast in Hiroshima was that it was ablaze and the fisherman reported that they saw a brilliant flash of light and heard a tremendous explosion. Miss Sasaki, who was relaxing at the desk, was buried beneath rubble and books. For quite a long time, she was unnoticed and when she was rescued, her leg was fractured and puss started to form in her leg. In the words of the writer, "There, in the tin factory, in the first moment of the atomic age, a human being was crushed by books." (23). She had undergone excruciating pain and was shifted to various places for her treatment. Eventually, she had developed fever also as the traumatic shock of the accident.

Apart from several casualties in the vicinity of the bomb blast, the book in particular encapsules the fricking poignant tales of six different people who don't really know each other in their normal walks of life. Dr. Sasaki was in turn working on and on, for nearly 19 hours without even a break. At one point of time, he was totally exhausted and collapsed to the ground. Soon in order to save the lives of lakhs and millions of people from being dead, he resumed work again without bothering to rest. "Of a hundred and fifty doctors in the city, sixty-five were already dead and most of the rest were wounded. Of 1,780 nurses, 1,654 were dead or too badly hurt to work." (33). Mr. Tanimoto and Father Kleinsorge teamed up to find some food for the victims and helped everyone beyond their level with extraordinary compassion. Humanity is still alive through such altruistic acts. Everywhere wounded people cried out for assistance

and they struggled a lot to survive after the terrible incident. Apart from humans and animals, even "the trees were bare and their trunks were charred." (40). Feeling thirsty people started to drink water from the river and due to the strong odor of ionisation, everyone started to nauseate and vomit.

At times, without any visible wounds or burns or any traumatic conditions, some people face sudden death. During the process of rescue, Mr. Tanimoto placed all the wounded people near the bank of the river and dozed uneasily for some time. When he awoke in the dawn, he looked across the river and "saw that he had not carried the festered, limp bodies high enough on the sandspit the night before. The tide had risen above where he had put them; They had not had the strength to move; they must have drowned. He saw a number of bodies floating in the river." (65).

On the morning of August 7, 1945, the Japanese radio broadcast for the first time regarding the new bomb as atomic that has more power than twenty thousand tons of TNT and the largest bomb ever used in the history of warfare. Most of the victims discussed in general childish terms that the gasoline was sprinkled from an airplane and totally ignorant of man's greedy decision to control the land. When Father Kleinsorge fetched water from a faucet to offer it to the wounded people. On the way, he met nearly 20 people who grumbled with pain "their faces were wholly burned, their eye sockets were hollow, the fluid from their melted eyes had run down their cheeks.... Their mouths were swollen, pus-covered "" (68). Exactly two minutes after eleven o'clock on the morning of August 9th, the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki and that has aroused the feelings of all the survivors of Hiroshima. After the bombs annihilated the entire society, the streets were deserted, several blocks collapsed, rubbles and piles were witnessed everywhere around the city. Mrs. Nakamura noticed that every time she combed, her comb carried

with it a whole handful of hair, as a result of which, she became quite bald. Most of the survivors developed the strange disease of radiation sickness which caused malaise, weariness and feverishness. Dr. Sasaki diagnosed the spot hemorrhages in most of his patients. In fact, Dr. Fujii also identified a curious syndrome of symptoms that developed only after the third and the fourth week of the radiation.

Dr. Sasaki was bewildered at the unprecedented disease and was confused with the process of treatment to save the lives of millions of people. The first stage was calamitous since most of them die immediately or just after a few hours of exposure to radioactive substances. The rays had a devastating effect on the body cells and after a few days, the patients developed the symptoms of diarrhea, malaise and fever. In the second stage, the foremost symptom was hair fall, diarrhea and fever. After a month, the patients are diagnosed with the blood disorders and the bleeding gums. Even the count of the white blood cells dropped and then identified was anemia. The doctors faced a huge downfall when they had insufficient equipment and instruments to treat the survivors.

The Japanese nuclear physicists claimed that a uranium bomb had exploded at Hiroshima and a more powerful one of plutonium at the Nagasaki atomic bomb blast. In fact, the scientists have also been well informed of the height from which the uranium was disposed of and the approximate amount of weight of the uranium used. The scientists also "estimated that, even with the primitive bomb used at Hiroshima, it would require a shelter of fifty inches thick to protect a human being entirely from radiation sickness." (108). Though the bombs wiped out nearly 90% of the cities, people of Japan displayed a resilient spirit in the face of tragedy. Ultimately, most of the writers will not be prompt to pen down their opinion on war and the tragic memories. Nonetheless, the authors Svetlana Alexievich and John Hersey were compassionate towards the

victims of the catastrophe and had a noble intention to spread the heart-rending message to the world through the medium of writing.

Svetlana Alexievich, Belarusian journalist, essayist and oral historian who indited her works in Russia and later. Her books are translated to other languages. She always chooses the theme of war and she weaves the story of women and children and their plight at the time of war. She has never disappointed her readers when she gives first hand details about the war after the investigation. Moreover, she has the honour of being the first journalist to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2015. She is adept at providing an artistic rendering of real events without spoiling the nuances of narration. She has seldom stopped herself to interview only the six survivors, rather, she interviewed hundreds of people about their plight at that time of bomb dropping. As a woman she understands the value of humanism in a holistic way and takes the responsibility on her shoulders to provide the most vivid details to the general public. Only through the exact description of the survivors, the readers experience the whole world at the time of crisis. The book enunciates the lust for power and the inhumane behaviours dwarf the wealth of nature and the growth of the nation.

John Hersey, an American writer and journalist is considered one of the earliest practitioners of New Journalism in which storytelling techniques of fiction are adopted. Since Hersey was the war correspondent in the field, it made his work easy to collect information. Though he has interviewed many of the witnesses of the war, he is confined to the real stories of the six survivors. This book definitely created a strong impact on the world where after reading the book, most of the Americans wept and cursed themselves for being rejoiced over the victory of dropping the bomb and devastating the lives of millions of people.

The two works are certainly the major classics of the war story that has never stopped to influence the entire human race and touched

the inner consciousness of every other man. The real success of an art is when it influences directly or indirectly and these books have made most of the humans to feel guilty of their callous attitude. Animals have never remained the tool for destruction of the human race and in turn, humans emerge as the linchpin of creating troubles for the animals, environment and the whole human race. Nature has to be worshiped and treated with respect not only for the benefit of the present generation, but also to benefit the future generation as well. People should always adhere to the rules of nature and take oath to safeguard the land for the betterment of the future.

### Works Cited

Alexievich, Svetlana. *Voices from Chernobyl*. Harpercollins Publishers: India. 2013. Print.

Hersey, John. *Hiroshima*. Kalpaz Publications. India. 2017. Print.

## Promontory Differentiations: Painting like a Posthuman

Siddhartha Mukherjee

The interpretation(s) of theory in terms of Humanism led us ultimately to the posthuman, to the narrative paradigm(s), and to the sedimentation of various generic discourses, the inventive automatization of information. The concept of Humanism is seen as a placeholder for various camps that singularly (re)present the self, a perspectival submission of a way into examining how identity/selfhood is constructed in relation to pre-existent forms. The gendered spiritual or inner core that is historically central to the construction of Humanism that developed into a civilizational model is seen to be shaped by self-reflexive reason or a cultural essence where structural analysis demands as its completion a kind of reconstruction, a postulation by presupposition and implication, of an absent or unrepresentable *infrastructural* limiting system. If Humanism as a civilizational model in European history provides a key theoretical resource for scholarly studies, some of the most important historical resources come from Paduan classicism and the Italian Renaissance. The doctrines and moral demands of the times are well wrought in the sculptures of Nicola Pisano, the architecture designed by Arnolfo di Cambio or, say the paintings of Giotto; and after 1400 when the Renaissance began to spread throughout Italy, the revival of the ancient heritage then turned into something which, properly interpreted, is in astonishingly little conflict with the new fostering wisdom of the age, or indeed with anything. Biblical and mythological scenes take on the function of art forms in which the various impulses of artists—from Fra Angelico to Masaccio, to Gozzoli, to Ghirlandaio—emerge, differentiate, and recombine with subjects ranging from the Virgin and Child to groups

of saints (among other themes from Christianity). With a certain spectacular solemnity, Botticelli's paintings also imbued religious and mythological themes. But only certain moments of possibility have their own unique and characteristic structure, which history has itself determined, and the Church was no longer accepted as the sole arbiter of spiritual and intellectual values. A totalizing historical dynamic was visible when High Renaissance artists sculpted a religious scene or painted Biblical paintings; exalting the ideals of classical aesthetics, the artists were very often not glorifying God but Man. Pramod K. Nayar proposes a framework that is much more productive for our present purposes:

Michel Foucault traces the emergence of the human, as we know it now, to the set of ideas and concepts that evolved during the European Enlightenment. Toward the end of *The Order of Things*, Foucault would famously write: 'man is an invention of recent date' (1973: 387). What Foucault is referring to here is a way of perceiving the human cognitive processes, human behaviour and actions. The human was 'invented' when these ways of perceiving and talking about these processes, behaviour and actions became codified in the 'human sciences' (24).

Unrelated to any political self-fashioning, Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* has long been held as the model of the universal man (arguably the most famous representation of the 'human' body in Western art). The negative inversion of this position (along with the Eurocentric ideology that underpins Humanism studies) is brought about by Rosi Braidotti who states in the first chapter of her book *The Posthuman* that "[a]t the start of it all there is He: the classical ideal of 'Man', formulated first by Protagoras as 'the measure of all things', later renewed in the Italian Renaissance as a universal model and represented in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man (13). This then clearly involves an ideological repudiation of Humanism of a type which might conceivably range from Renaissance's older forms as the replication of the reification of the

posthuman to some of the more habitually repeating structures of critical theory. The position to denounce the complacencies of Humanism (that predate contemporary posthumanism) as some final symptom of discourse (or representational thought) seems more appropriate to the new theoretical position which postulates a post-dualistic viewpoint of a general modification of us/them and man/woman that have long been subjects of discriminatory productions of meaning, with the restructuring of Renaissance ideologies as a system. The new forms of posthumanism as actualizations of a set of concrete possibilities of a new technocratic/technological utopia produce a dynamic vision of scholarly activity, a relationality, that is more relevant to our current moment since,

The very notion of modernity—from its beginnings in the Renaissance's image of itself as a new age, a historical break from the "Dark Ages" —has been defined in terms of an instrumental conception of technology, an instrumental or technological rationality that allows modern "humanity" to know and control the world. In these terms, that which is "nontechnological" cannot be modern. (Rutsky 2)

Ideas that are deeply challenging to many of our indefinitely extendable series of contextualities about human superiority and uniqueness felt particularly material during the 2020-2021 pandemic; the co-evolved affirmation of the living (and the non-human), the relationship of humans and technology, of pure potentiality and futurity has perhaps never been so apparent as during the long stretches of lockdown time. It was also during this time that the Human's understanding of the technological and *technologization* became more universal. As a posthuman subject, the human unsettled in its belief in transcendence, furnishes the graphic embodiment of an ideological closure as such, its unbalanced binary of human/non-human (allowing us to map out the inner limits of an existential plurality—a fragmentation of identity—) and to construct the basic terms of the humanist understanding of a unified posthuman self. The posthuman turn realizes a self-critical reluctance and has aggressively positioned the theory itself within a self-reflection that additionally

presupposes a degree of subjective consciousness, because “[h]umanists might regard humans as distinct beings, in an antagonistic relationship with their surroundings. Posthumanists, on the other hand, regard humans as embodied in an extended technological world” (Pepperell).

Even if the concept of Humanism is to be considered a synchronic one, at the level of social scientific methods, the structural limits consistent with the posthuman become an over-regulated, indefinable transgression. Renaissance studies (and posthuman theory) project a long view of literary science which is sometimes inconsistent with history. For example, Medieval artists used monsters to a great extent. The monsters represent aspects of the “non-human, abhuman and inhuman” (Nayar 110) that seem to threaten humanity’s control, if not to be beyond human control. And,

Humanism, when it appeared in Renaissance Europe, was, paradoxically, very attentive to biological mutants and medical anomalies – deemed to be ‘monsters’, about which more in a later chapter – because these seemed to not fit into the category ‘human’: they were formed differently, they behaved differently. ‘Universal’ humanism was ironically, therefore, a system of *differentiation* in which some forms of the body were treated as ‘human’ and others as ‘not-human’ (Nayar 23).

In this sense, the ‘post’ of posthumanism need not imply the absence of cybernetic mechanism. Resonating with dominant forms of theoretical asymmetry, dualisms ascribed to ‘post’ are a consistent feature of cultural studies—reinforcing it as a praxis. Humans are information-processing machines. In contrast to images of the cybernetic posthuman as ‘trans’ or ‘super-’ human, surrealism re-asserts the importance of posthumanism in cultural studies. Pioneered by André Breton in *Manifeste du surréalisme* in 1924, Surrealism was thus born, and the Surrealist movement demonstrated much of the influence of the Dada movement that preceded it. With Breton being unequivocally at the helm, Surrealism saw writers

and artists experiment by a radical historicizing of their mental operations, such that not only the content of their art, but the very method itself, along with the artist, comes to be reckoned into the “text” of the posthuman. A history of Surrealism (and theories thus propagated) provided a vital instrument, a methodological lens for studying the discourses exploring the semantic and ideological intricacies of the unbridled imagination, the collective unconscious of much that happened between the two great wars. As in Freud’s work, surreal art yields the objective possibilities according to which the posthuman landscape and the physical elements, say, must necessarily be perceived. The artworks of surrealists mark the conceptual points where a visual paradigm of posthuman thought started to improvise and after which it is condemned to oscillate.

So, how may we interpret the contemporary practice of posthumanism, as inflected by the surrealist tradition?

In posthumanism the landscape tends to grow denser and more participatory; while ‘post’ is often apparent on the level that seeks to capture how human (and the nonhuman) subjects are entwined along a plane, ‘human(ism)’ marks the perspectival interplay of the self/selfhood that are gaining greater access to information, hierarchical levels of communication, correlations, and specific historicity. Intellectually capacious and polymorphous mid-century Renaissance scholars found their lineage and rationale in Humanism and classical Antiquity, but one only needs to trawl the university M.F.A. exhibitions, contemporary art museums and art galleries to understand that the concerns of the humanists and the Surrealists are still with us today—much relevant, only transposed in twenty-first century contexts. Sculptures and architectures have always played a fundamental role in connecting human and nonhuman spheres, and the use of art as a posthuman space has a strong tradition within the recent past—be it Anish Kapoor’s *Leviathan* or Anthony Gormley’s *Another Place* (sculpture) or Rachel Whiteread’s *Embankment* and there are “many other figures from a range of fields who converged on a new theoretical model for biological, mechanical, and communicational processes that removed the human and Homo

sapiens from any particularly privileged position in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition" (Wolfe xii). The posthuman has increasingly come to be conceived as an offspring of technoculture, highlighting constitutive paradox(es) of phenomenal reality, historical emergence of modernism and future studies; tending to avoid transhumanist speculation—and all essentially cultural or superstructural phenomena—posthumanism studies, often, unsettle critical staples.

Developed by Salvador Dalí in the early 1930s, Dalí's *paranoiac-critical* method explored the realm(s) of the unconscious mind where the human as a dynamic hybrid was simultaneously enclosed by and enclosed others. There is neither linearity nor chronology, but always an undecidable relativity inside a state of self-induced hallucination. Dalí's surreal(ism) paintings questioned not only the practicability but also the fundamental transformations of the real world. There exists a contradictory relationship to heterogeneity and alterity, on conduits and pathways. A doctrinal vacuity always exists because the human is there—a human that exists because of a non-human and vice versa. Considered to be one of the famous artworks of the Surrealist movement, *The Great Masturbator* by Salvador Dalí was produced in 1929. The arrangement is somewhat multi-layered and associative; a man's face looking downwards is a self-portrait of Dalí and the emerging woman's head leaning towards the male crotch is Dalí's wife, Gala. There is a gigantic grasshopper, below which a couple can be seen hugging/making out; a white lily is painted right below the female body and adjacent to the white lily is a lion's head with its tongue sticking out. The glut of such (and various other) images/symbols are often signifiers of the artist's fears, his subconscious and his (sexual?) frustrations. Much like Hieronymus Bosch, Salvador Dalí attempts to (re)assemble the fragmentary elements of the unconscious into a socio-historical totality that is linked to the posthuman condition. The rhetorical strength of photography also naturalizes the image for the observer, and the unequivocal character of the camera comes the closest to having an unrelentingly posthuman relation with surrealism. For example, artist Gillian Wearing takes an interesting approach devoted to masturbation.

The representation of masturbation in art around the globe and through the ages (be it the modern era with Egon Schiele and Marcel Duchamp to the late twentieth century or, from prehistoric art to antiquity or, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance) has always depicted the erotic—the pornified. Wearing's *Masturbation* generates a 'surreal' effect, the photographic art shows a picture within a picture within a picture within a picture; there are two photographs—one of a man, another a woman—masturbating to a photograph. But the effect is that of an infinite visual regress taking place when one holds two mirrors up to one another since it is not clear what the humans in the images are masturbating to; their self-image placed *en abyme* ('in an abyss' in French) inextricably intertwine a posthuman illusion of a victimless existence as well as a reflection on the narcissistic pastimes of all self-lovers. The very banality of Wearing's art, the awkwardness, the transgression, is emotionally open to experience—not letting the seductions of cognition emblematic of nothing. In the words of Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston, "[t]he posthuman body is a technology, a screen, a projected image" (3).

Yves Tanguy in his artworks examines the circulation of biomorphic forms, amoeba-like organisms that cross the space(s) of the immutable human being. Tanguy's use of illusionistic images opened ways for artists such as Dalí and Magritte. It may be noted that the fluid-like figures that occur regularly in Yves Tanguy's works are a curious hybrid of anxiety and reality, where the distance is reinforced by the signifying richness of symbols as well as the referential associations. In *Large Painting Representing a Landscape*, the dark sea floor (or desert) dotted with occasional weeds are marked by long shadows and on top of a steep rock a fluid figure rests in a nest while other such figures squirm below; the art provides an almost intoxicatory or hallucinogenic intensity reflecting the artist's own anxiety and insecurity. In works such as *At 4 O'Clock In The Summer, Hope* suggests a weightless space, like the tranquillity and silence of the bottom of the sea, while in *Construct and Destroy* the horizon line is lost and the distinction between ground, plane, and sky has been blurred. Tanguy's *From Green to White* is crucial for



posthumanist thought; the brightly glowing forms that float in the sky are reminiscent of Matta and below the active and swirling sky is set an unearthly city, the architectural ruins of a lost civilization. The totemic objects, the expansive sky, Tanguy's sense of the deep misty spaces and loneliness of the open sea were perhaps the signs of his initial training as an officer in the merchant navy.

Unlike Tanguy, Max Ernst finds it necessary to invoke contradictory moments, without reference to undifferentiated experience, to re-secure absurdity by using reality as a human instrument. The collage novel and artist's book *A Week of Kindness* has established many key deconstructive issues—unrelated within themselves, and undivided with posthuman theories. Ernst's *The Eye of Silence* engulfs the viewers with indescribable vividness; the overall effect, too inflexible to account for, is one of paranoia. *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale* inscribe a logical continuity—the death of his sister, a fevered hallucination—moments that can be isolated from their place in time. The influence upon the development of 'dream painting(s)' of the surrealists was through the work of Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico. In his *Pietà or Revolution by Night*, Ernst reconstructs a vision in a dream, in which the artist appears as a Christ-like figure in the arms of his own father. His well-dressed bourgeoisie father, wearing a bowler hat, replaces the Virgin Mary. Ernst was particularly fascinated by Freud's analysis of dreams and is known to have read several of his texts, including *The Interpretation of Dreams*, when in Germany. Some of the more important radical "posthuman performances" of sexual, racial, national, and other boundaries are lofted by the painting *The Teetering Woman* where the subject is left to balance between two sturdy classical columns in a zoomed landscape. The figure destabilises the hegemonic. The polycentrism and complexity found in *Solitary and Conjugal Trees* or *Euclide* are equally dystopian, uncanny and posthumanist.

Belgian artist René Magritte also produced works that alluded strongly to dreams. Magritte's *The Lost Jockey* and *The Annunciation*

attempt to maintain suggestive associations where spindle-like shapes (phallic as well as evocative of chess pieces) coalesce into a flow of motion, that slows down and examines the chains of desires and history. Dreamscapes are fruitful portals into the subconscious—the interpretative milieu of interpretations, the conscientious suspension of possibilities are endless. In Ernst's *The Reckless Sleeper*, human subjectivity is fractured by a sleeping human, a hat, a handle-mirror, a candle and an apple; this can be appropriated as a stance that is firmly rooted in a narrative simultaneously inhabiting the past, present, and future in a sleeping brain—a preoccupation that is also reflected in *Spanish Night* by Francis Picabia. Based on an active distinction of human subjects from a dream world, be it the fragmentary collage of *Perturbation my sister* or the productive utopianism of *The Human Condition* paintings, a posthumanist interpretation of Magritte's works will be often characterised by a polymorphic unfixity of nonconscious cognition, a methodological space for the inclusion of dreams and rejections. Posthuman studies scholar Francesca Ferrando, writing on surrealism, noted:

Surrealism, though, did not aim to express a transcendence of the real; its intent was to deepen the understandings of the world perceived by the senses, extending its foundations over what had been historically confined to "the reign of logic" (Breton, [1924]1972: 9), as Breton defined it in the "First Surrealist Manifesto" (1924). In his words: "I believe in the future resolution of these two states—dream and reality—which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality" (Ibid.: 14). In its attempts of avoiding dualisms, Posthumanism owes to Surrealism the retrieving of such aspects of life: the dream world can offer a unique space of visualization; the possibilities opened by the future are already embedded in the mystery of the present; the conscious becomes the unconscious, in a fluid view from which the field of posthuman psychology is currently emerging (4).

After all—within the complex space-time axis of critical theory—representations, transgressions and influences can yield sometimes startling mutations and postmodern interpretations. To connect these moments with other complex and conflicted accounts of surrealism is to fashion a kind of literary theory that's neither so reliable nor so natural as to occur spontaneously. Interestingly, the influence of Surrealism as elicited in the works of novelist J. G. Ballard may in fact be accentuated which represents, in the context of posthumanism, many transgressions; we notice that,

with the exception of *The Wind From Nowhere*, all of Ballard's climate novels come with pictorial avatars. In *The Drowned World*, the protagonist Kerans finds himself intrigued by the "self-devouring phantasmagoric jungles" of Max Ernst, the "spectral bonelike landscape" in a painting by Paul Delvaux (p. 29), and a "Dalinian landscape" with "immense sundials [stuck] like daggers in the fused sand" (p. 63). The final chapter of *The Drought* takes its title from Yves Tanguy's painting "*Jours de Lenteur*," whose "smooth pebble-like objects, drained of all associations, suspended on a washed tidal floor" foreshadow the characters' increasing social isolation (p. 11). The first hardback edition of *The Crystal World* is adorned with Max Ernst's decalomania print "*The Eye of Silence*" and the "heavy and penumbral" light in the vicinity of the crystallizing forest at the novel's center motivates a comparison to Arnold Böcklin's "*Isle of Dead*" (p. 13). Recalling that Ballard points to the landscapes of Dalí, Ernst, and others as "reflections of some interior reality within our minds" (Ballard [1963] 1997c, p. 200), one is inclined to infer from the artworks referenced in his novels that this interior reality is of an elemental, inhuman order (7).

Thus writes Moritz Ingwersen in his extraordinary article on J. G. Ballard. Building on theorizing based on Anthropocene, entropy, complexity theory, ecocriticism, and thermodynamics, Ingwersen traces the emergent nature of posthuman concerns; his reading and analysis of Ballard's works result in the opening up of negotiating with complexly triangulated relations of visual arts and *writing* with the multimodal nature of texts. Ingwersen's archaeological eye shows how Ballard presents an increasingly digitized, connected modern world with references that take in all forms of meaning-making. Wrought through sci-fi (and sometimes cli-fi) themes and dark humour, Ballard's characters are often inundated within a hybrid ecology of objects and they endlessly circulate within the dereliction(s) of an identificatory crisis. Moritz Ingwersen further states that,

Embedded within the lineage of landscape painting, the surrealist tradition portrays an estranged environment no longer framed as the externalization of a rationalistic human gaze or a world-for-us. Just as the ego in the age of psychoanalysis is no longer the master of its own house, Earth becomes an alien planet. It may be obvious to point out that what the above paintings by Ernst, Delvaux, Tanguy, Böcklin, and Dalí have in common is their evocation of entropy and the virtual absence of human animation. Especially Tanguy depicts a world whose energy seems exhausted: Whitewashed dunes and a murky sky blend into one; grotesque abstract shapes halfsubmerged in what looks like dust are vaguely reminiscent of metallic consumer objects whose edges have been worn smooth and round by exposure to friction and heat (7).

Surrealism artworks showcase the inherent complexity of the issues that Humanism/science has condemned as uncanny, atrocious or exceptional. It seeks to emancipate the disempowered while hermetically sealing from outside the viewers' eyes of familiarity; being

explicitly predicated on normative values, it is certain to be contentious. In posthuman studies, such issues are often discussed among theorists by placing an overt emphasis on multiplicity; new frameworks are created from within the texts of surrealism and although the conflicts of interest among man, environment, economy and society become increasingly apparent in the artworks, the habitually repeating structures evoke both Marxist ideologies and Freudian reproducibility—a double strategy, both scientific and posthuman. An analytical framework from a Marxist perspective might result in a postmodernist breakdown. In this sense, within the disruptive, uncontainable randomness of the images can be seen a kind of dreamscape that fragments the totalizing visions of both the postmodern and posthuman condition(s). Surrealism and Surrealism art contributed to the creation of a posthuman canon. Posthuman concerns permeate the poetics of surrealism. The uninterrupted repetitions of symbols of metamorphoses, non-humans, man-machine linkage, organic-inorganic hybrids, and trans-species bodies within the cultural imaginary in tune with the landscape of dreams and nightmares than with everyday life, establish in turn, an authoritative system of address—a structure that is external to critical theory and interactionist and interpretive approaches. As already noted, surrealism artworks explore the systems of posthuman concerns as built upon discursive transparency, rhetorical obfuscation and modern technological reproducibility; entailing a view of what art in a social democracy should entail, surrealism often turns the rigidity of poststructuralist rhetoric against the seemingly transparent moves of posthuman studies to unsettle critical theories. Art encourages us to follow the established practice of looking back and revisiting known/unknown truths and to become attuned to the hidden, subversive, transversal and interdisciplinary development of culture and theories. (And rather, notwithstanding the evasiveness of any rhetoric/theoretical lens, surrealism as an art movement sets its own text—as a seeming symbol of authority—as a voice of its own.)

## Works Cited

- Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013. Ferrando, Francesca. "A feminist genealogy of posthuman aesthetics in the visual arts." *Palgrave Communications*, vol. 2, no. 1, May 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2016.11>.
- Halberstam, Judith and Ira Livingston, editors. *Posthuman Bodies*. Indiana UP, 1995.
- Ingwersen, Moritz. "Environmental Catastrophe as Morphogenesis: Inhuman Transformations in Ballard's Climate Novels." *Humanities*, vol. 8, no. 1, Mar. 2019, p. 52, <https://doi.org/10.3390/h8010052>.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Posthumanism*. Polity Press, 2013.
- Pepperell, Robert. "Posthumans and Extended Experience." *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, Vol. 14, no. 1, April 2005, <http://jetpress.org/volume14/pepperell.html>
- Rutsky, R. L. *High Techne: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman*. U of Minneapolis P, 1999.
- Wolfe, Cary. *What is posthumanism?* U of Minnesota P, 2010.

## **Machines, Minds, and Beyond: A Philosophical Exploration of Posthuman Consciousness in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell***

**Sreya Mukherjee**

In the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary philosophy and cultural discourse, the concept of posthuman consciousness, where humans coexist with and within machines, has emerged as a salient and compelling domain of inquiry. The acceleration of technological advancements, particularly in the realm of artificial intelligence and cybernetics, has engendered a profound re-evaluation of human identity, cognition, and existence. In this context, the anime film franchise *Ghost in the Shell*, directed by Mamoru Oshii, serves as an intriguing locus for philosophical exploration. Not only does this cinematic opus embody the quintessence of cyberpunk aesthetics, but it also provides a fertile narrative terrain for the probing of fundamental questions concerning consciousness and the intricate interplay between humanity and machinery.

During the 1990s, there was a significant surge in humanity's reliance on technologies such as personal computers. This escalating dependence on technology prompted profound philosophical inquiries into the future trajectory of our species, a subject that increasingly captivated scholars and storytellers alike. In the preceding decade, the literary movement known as cyberpunk had predominantly crafted imaginative narratives portraying humans augmenting their bodies with artificial enhancements and envisioned a world where interconnectedness through the ethereal realm of cyberspace was ubiquitous. However, the actual pace of progress towards this vision of the future was proving to

be considerably more rapid than anyone could have foreseen merely a decade earlier. In essence, the concept of posthumanism was swiftly transitioning from a theoretical construct to a tangible facet of our lived reality.

The concepts of posthumanism and transhumanism are not only located in the realm of philosophical speculations but also have a longstanding presence in popular fiction. The genre of cyberpunk, a subset of science fiction, notably contributed to the early conceptualisation of posthumanism in literary and popular fiction. Cyberpunk narratives explored themes of technological augmentation, the emergence of artificial intelligence, and the progressive dissolution of the demarcations between humanity and machines, culminating in a transhumanist synthesis. This narrative tradition finds its origins in William Gibson's trailblazing novel, *Neuromancer*, published in 1984. Notably, this work not only laid the thematic foundation for the cyberpunk genre but also catalysed the inspiration for various multimedia forms, including video games and roleplaying games. Most significantly, it played a pivotal role in shaping the modern internet as we know it today. In fact, many contemporary terminologies pertaining to computer programs, digital security protocols, and general web browsing owe their coinage to the concepts introduced in Gibson's seminal work.

In light of the prevailing trend toward posthumanist speculation within the contemporary media landscape, it is not surprising that the anime medium also embraced this emerging fascination. Indeed, anime proved to be an exceptionally well-suited medium to explore and engage with this theme, given its foundational thematic orientation toward the intricate interplay between humanity and technology. The genesis of anime itself reflects a longstanding preoccupation with the technological dimension of human existence. Beginning with Tezuka's pioneering work *Astro Boy* in 1963, which portrayed the narrative of a young boy reborn as a robot, anime has consistently delved into narratives that explore the dynamic relationship between humans and machines. This exploration

extends further into the realm of space opera, exemplified by productions like *Space Battleship Yamato* (Matsumoto, 1974), and ultimately converges with the prominent mecha-anime subgenre, epitomised in the West by *Mobile Suit Gundam* (Tomino, 1979). In its nascent stages, anime, especially the subgenre of mecha-anime, was characterised by narratives that depicted human transcendence of hitherto unattainable frontiers, often facilitated by the incorporation of mechanical elements into the narrative fabric.

Within the realm of science fiction anime, notable productions such as *Video Girl Ai* (Nishikubo, 1992), *Serial Experiments Lain* (Nakamura, 1997), and *Macross Plus* (Watanabe, 1994) undertook a rigorous exploration of the potentialities associated with artificial human life. These explorations took the form of sentient artificial intelligences and genuine human clones, thereby delving into the complex terrain of the human-technology interface. Concurrently, cyberpunk anime, exemplified by works such as *My Dear Marie* (Mochizuki, 1996), *Armitage III* (Sato, 1995), as well as Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* franchise envisaged futures wherein humanoid cyborgs, i.e., entities entirely manufactured in the likeness of humanity, had attained a level of ubiquity comparable to that of organic human beings. This proliferation of artificial life forms precipitated a profound re-evaluation by global powers regarding the fundamental distinction between what constitutes a human and what does not. It is noteworthy that these themes resonate strongly with the tenets of the cyberpunk literary movement, as articulated by Brian Ruh in his insightful exposition, *Stray Dog of Anime: The Films of Mamoru Oshii* (2004):

The Japanese interest in cyberpunk is an intriguing cultural reversal, as many American cyberpunk authors incorporated Japanese words or cultural concepts in their works, most notably Gibson in his book *Neuromancer* (1984), one of the best representatives of the cyberpunk literary genre. By incorporating such references, Japan was made to be the

battleground on which the conflict between antiquated tradition and technological modernity would play out in the popular consciousness. (138)

Based on Masamune Shirow's eponymous manga series, Mamoru Oshii's anime adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) is narratively positioned at the then-remote future of 2029. In Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, the audience is confronted with a portrayal of a contemporary society profoundly enmeshed in the realm of posthumanism. Within this narrative framework, individuals have acquired the capacity to enhance their physical forms through the incorporation of cybernetic appendages and augmentations. It is noteworthy that those possessing the financial means frequently opt for the complete replacement of their organic bodies with cybernetic counterparts, a transformation that encompasses the installation of an artificial 'cyber-brain.' This cyber-brain is designed to house and preserve a person's 'ghost,' a term in the film that encompasses not only the individual's memories, emotions and personality, but also extends to the intricate facets of their very essence or soul. Brian Ruh presents a nuanced exposition of the opening sequence of assembling of Kusanagi's cybernetic body, thereby shedding light on the fraught relationship between man and machine in a posthuman world:

The process of constructing Kusanagi indicates her confinement within her own body. Her organic brain is scanned and placed into a casing that is in turn enclosed by a mechanical skull. Her artificial musculature is covered by a metal skin and coated with a synthetic epidermis... However, Kusanagi is able to find release, not by overcoming the confines of the body, but rather through the further blurring of the mind/body and organic/artificial dichotomies. (133)

However, as the prevalence of cyborgs within society has surged, there has been a corresponding escalation in the incidence of cybernetic criminal activities. This surge in cybernetic criminality becomes especially pronounced when an enigmatic hacker, known solely as 'The Puppet

Master,' initiates a series of illicit activities. The audacious actions of this hacker extend to the intrusion into individuals' 'ghosts,' thereby manipulating and altering their fundamental memories. Consequently, the onus of pursuing and elucidating the motivations of The Puppet Master falls upon Public Security Section 9, an investigative division operating under Japan's Public Security organisation. Notably, this division is predominantly composed of cyborg agents who are dedicated to combating cybercrime.

At the core of the film's narrative is the character Major Motoko Kusanagi, who serves as the lead operative of Section 9. Major Kusanagi possesses a cutting-edge cybernetic body meticulously designed for purposes of infiltration and combat. It is through Kusanagi's interactions with her colleagues and the broader socio-cultural milieu that Mamoru Oshii's distinctive contributions to the franchise are prominently showcased. The film places significant emphasis on Major Kusanagi's cybernetic form from the very outset. In an initial action sequence, she adeptly demonstrates the enhanced physical capabilities of her new body, as well as its capacity for seamless integration with the environment through an integrated cloaking mechanism. Subsequently, the narrative segues into a past timeline during the opening credits sequence. This sequence unfolds against the backdrop of a traditional Japanese wedding march, synchronised with a montage depicting the initial creation of Kusanagi's artificial cybernetic body. Importantly, this scene represents Oshii's initial foray into a more speculative exploration of the concept of posthumanism, a thematic motif that acquires increasing significance as the narrative unfolds and Kusanagi encounters the enigmatic Puppet Master.

The title sequence assumes significance due to its encapsulation of the intermediary phase within the spectrum of man-machine integration, a characteristic hallmark of posthumanism. The assembling of Kusanagi's cybernetic body, while immediately discernible as an abstract and surreal phenomenon to the viewer, underscores a palpable disconnect from contemporary technological capabilities, which have not yet attained the

capacity to artificially generate human entities in a comparable manner, thereby engendering an anachronistic viewing experience. Yet, the deliberate pacing of this sequence, coupled with the utilisation of a traditional Japanese musical score, constructs a sense of serenity that reframes the genesis of her cybernetic form. Rather than rendering it as an inhuman and foreboding occurrence, the presentation renders it as a captivating and intimate spectacle. This particular juncture in the film is exceptional in that it exposes Kusanagi in a state of vulnerability stemming from her cybernetic enhancements. Importantly, this tonal portrayal lays the foundation for Mamoru Oshii's direct exploration of the posthuman condition, which permeates the subsequent narrative. Oshii deliberately eschews an examination of the fundamentals that supposedly constitute humanity, opting instead to raise profound queries about whether humanity, in its traditional manifestation, indeed represents the zenith of our species' evolutionary trajectory.

In her acclaimed work, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), renowned scholar and self-proclaimed "Postgenderist" Donna J. Haraway introduces the notion of the cyborg as a societal equaliser. She posits her argument by asserting that entrenched Western patriarchal traditions, notably colonialism and naturalism, "have all been systematic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals... all [those] constituted as others" (178). In Haraway's conceptualisation, cyborgs serve as agents of disruption against these established norms, mirroring the blurring of boundaries between the natural and artificial domains that the 20th century ushered in. Concomitantly, the cyborg effectively erases the demarcations between traditional Western conceptions of humanity and inhumanity, masculinity and femininity, and even the distinctions separating humans from the animal realm. As she observes: "The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense" (150).

Fundamentally, Major Motoko Kusanagi's evolving detachment from conventional notions of humanity can be attributed less to technology's erosion of human identity and more to its provision of a means for humanity to transcend established social and gender roles, which have historically been shaped by the pervasive influence of Western patriarchal paradigms. As Donna Haraway opines, "Cyborgs might consider more seriously the partial, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment. Gender might not be global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and depth" (180). This perspective reframes Kusanagi's reluctance to acknowledge her naked body in the presence of her male counterpart, Batou, not as a regression into a state less than human but as a progression beyond traditional definitions of humanity, gravitating toward a more advanced state. This transformative journey aligns with the overarching aspiration of posthumanism, which seeks to attain the posthuman condition as its ultimate goal. Kusanagi, by embracing her quasi-human subjectivity, exemplifies the posthuman ontology of decentering the humanist ideology of anthropocentrism. As Cary Wolfe eruditely articulates the critical question of posthuman subjectivity in his 2011 work, *What is Posthumanism?* "To be truly posthumanist, the concept of subjectivity itself needs to be undermined and transformed in a way that does not privilege the human. It is only by giving up notions of personhood that speciesism can be destabilized...so that we can become posthumanists" (xxii).

Mamoru Oshii himself underscores this notion of posthuman subjectivity through Kusanagi's dialogue, that draws on from the Book of Corinthians. In one of her conversations with Batou, her colleague from Section 9, she quotes from the Book of Corinthians, asserting, "When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child. Now that I am a man, I have no more use for childish ways" (Oshii, 1995). In essence, Kusanagi's reference to 'childish ways' symbolizes the antiquated conception of humanity, a perspective challenged by

scholars like Haraway, with the publication of her 1985 posthumanist text, *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Oshii's philosophical proposition also aligns with Haraway's viewpoint, presenting transhumanism as a solution to the problem posed by the traditional conceptualisation of anthropocentrism. Consequently, the liminality of posthuman consciousness, which initially appears as a significant drawback within the posthumanist world depicted in *Ghost in the Shell*, ultimately emerges as one of its most formidable strengths.

Released approximately a decade subsequent to *Ghost in the Shell*, the second instalment in the film franchise, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004), henceforth *Innocence*, garnered international acclaim, notably earning the distinction of being the first Japanese animated film nominated for the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. *Innocence* unequivocally assumes the role of a worthy sequel to its predecessor in every conceivable sense. Rather than merely advancing the narrative trajectory beyond the events portrayed in *Ghost in the Shell*, this cinematic instalment serves as a vehicle through which Mamoru Oshii extends his exploration of the posthumanist themes that were integral to the original work. It is worth noting that this thematic exploration transpires through an entirely distinct narrative perspective within the storyline. This transformation arises not only from the conspicuous departure of Major Motoko Kusanagi from her erstwhile role as the central character but also from her continued absent-presence, a presence that remains largely conjectural among the existing members of the cast.

In *Innocence*, the narrative shifts to Batou, who, alongside Togusa, a recent addition to Section 9, who had a minor role in the first film, embarks on an investigative endeavour. Their mission revolves around probing a sequence of murders consistently linked to a specific group of gynoids as the principal perpetrators. Batou, evidently deeply affected by Kusanagi's transformation and unexplained absence, progressively exhibits a corresponding detachment from conventional human experiences. To such an extent, in fact, that Section 9's Chief, Daisuke

Aramaki, discerns striking parallels between them, remarking, "He reminds me of the Major before her disappearance" (Oshii, 2004).

In the context of Mamoru Oshii's thematic exploration of the posthuman consciousness within his cinematic oeuvre, *Innocence* maintains a philosophical position on posthumanism that closely aligns with the thematic underpinnings of the first film. However, in *Innocence*, the film's thematic message emerges with a conspicuously reduced reliance on subtext, manifesting prominently through extensive expository elements and the interactions among the characters. It is worth noting, however, that Oshii deliberately refrains from delving into an exhaustive exploration of the ultimate posthuman state that the transhumanism within the film's narrative world seemingly aspires to attain. Notably, while Major Motoko Kusanagi makes a brief appearance toward the film's denouement, her presence is of a spiritual nature rather than a corporeal one, a reflection of her transformation into a new form of existence as achieved at the conclusion of the preceding film.

In congruence with the thematic motifs of posthumanism that were explored in the preceding film, Mamoru Oshii, in *Innocence*, makes conspicuous reference to *A Cyborg Manifesto*, by naming one of the characters Doctor Haraway. However, the intent of this reference differs from its prior usage, shifting away from an examination of the intrinsic worth of preserving conventional humanist attributes of anthropocentrism. Instead, it pivots towards a more fundamental query: whether a genuine demarcation exists between the human and the transhuman. Notably, in the initial stages of their investigation into the series of murders involving gynoids, Batou and Togusa encounter a coroner from the local police force, named Doctor Haraway. Remarkably, Doctor Haraway's sole purpose within the film appears to be to challenge the convictions of the two investigators, both of whom adamantly maintain that a profound schism delineates the realms of humanity and machinery. Haraway introduces a perturbing angle to this dialogue by highlighting that the demarcation between these realms may not be as unequivocal as they presume. This

occurs particularly when Haraway reveals that the first gynoid they captured had attempted an act described as 'suicide' before being apprehended. Togusa, seeking to clarify the term's usage, underscores the notion that 'suicide' ostensibly applies exclusively to sentient organic entities, while cyborgs would more accurately be described as having 'self-terminated.' However, Haraway repudiates Togusa's presumptions by asserting:

These past few years, we've been seeing a spike in robot-related incidents... If you ask me, I think it's because humans discard their robots... When the new models come out, people buy the latest and greatest, some of the discarded ones end up on the streets... where they gradually deteriorate from lack of maintenance. The robots just want us to stop treating them as disposable. Humans and robots are different. But that sort of faith is nothing more than the recognition that humans aren't robots, which is on the same level that white is not black. (Oshii, 2004)

These philosophical stances are further substantiated by a character called Kim, who is a hacker and allegedly linked to the series of murders involving the gynoids. When confronted by Batou and Togusa, Kim articulates sentiments strikingly similar to those expressed by Doctor Haraway. Kim contends that, "The 18<sup>th</sup> Century 'man as machine' theory has been resurrected by cyber-brains and prosthetic body technology. Ever since it became possible to externalise memory through the use of computers, man has been aggressively mechanising himself in order to expand the upper limits of his abilities as a living creature" (Oshii, 2004).

The posthumanist turn, as articulated by Oshii in his cinematic franchise of *Ghost in the Shell*, essentially involves the fusion of humanity and machinery, which has counterintuitively not solely emerged as a consequence of the swift advancement of technology. Instead, as Oshii argues, it has evolved from a longstanding human aspiration to transcend



the limitations inherent in conventional notions of humanity. This aspiration is mirrored in the philosophical reflections presented in Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* and is further echoed through the perspectives articulated by both Major Motoko Kusanagi and the Puppet Master within the first film of the franchise.

Within the film franchise of *Ghost in the Shell*, Oshii attempts to philosophically investigate the core essence of humanity in a world that is increasingly permeated by technology. This leads to contemplation regarding whether traditional humanism, in its conventional sense, may potentially function as an obstruction to the progression of human evolution. In contrast to the majority of posthumanist and cyberpunk anime, which primarily explore the feasibility of coexistence between humanity and machines, both *Ghost in the Shell* and its sequel, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, unreservedly immerse themselves in the realm of posthumanism. These films contend not only that the convergence of humanity and machinery is an inexorable trajectory but also, drawing from the philosophical tenets advanced by thinkers such as Descartes and Haraway, suggest that it may compel humanity to undertake a profound reassessment of the essential components of our identities. Simultaneously, it prompts us to reconsider the aspects inhibiting our advancement toward the elevated state of the posthuman.

Furthermore, Oshii posits the notion that the boundaries between humans and machines are progressively eroding, underlining humanity's enduring preoccupation with the artificial replication of life. Oshii's visionary narrative invites us to contemplate the evolving nature of consciousness in an era characterised by posthuman tendencies, raising profound questions about identity, selfhood, and the boundaries of the human. The portrayal of the blurring of distinctions between man and machine compels us to ponder, "Why does humanity go to such lengths to create these reflections of itself?" (Oshii, 2004).

### Works Cited

- Cavallaro, Dani. *The Cinema of Mamoru Oshii: Fantasy, Technology and Politics*. McFarland & Co., 2006.
- Haraway, Donna Jeanne. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, edited by Donna Jeanne Haraway, Routledge, New York, 2015.
- Ishikawa, Mitsuhsa, et al. *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*. DreamWorks SKG, 2004.
- Okuyama, Yoshiko. *Japanese Mythology in Film. A Semiotic Approach to Reading Japanese Film and Anime*. Lexington Books, 2015.
- Oshii, Mamoru, director. *Ghost in the Shell*. Shochiku, 1995.
- Ruh, Brian. *Stray Dog of Anime: The Films of Mamoru Oshii*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Tembo, Kwasi D. "Death, Innocence, and the Cyborg: Theorizing the Gynoid Double-Bind in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell II: Innocence*." *American, British and Canadian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2017, pp. 103–125, doi:10.1515/abcsj-2017-0021.
- Wolfe, Cary. *What Is Posthumanism?* Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2011.

## **Deconstructing Humanism: James Cameron's *Avatar* as a Manifesto for Posthuman Vision of Sustainability, Body Fluidity & Interconnectedness**

**Sruthy Shaji**

In contemporary discourse, the notion of humanism has long been an intellectual cornerstone, affirming the importance of human values, ethics, and interests in the complex fabric of life. It promotes the notion that humans, being the predominant species on Earth, are uniquely equipped to harness nature's resources and mould the environment to their own advantage. However, this view has not been ignored. The era of rapid technological advancement and environmental crises has ignited a discourse that questions the fundamental principles of humanism. At the intersection of these ideological crossroads emerges James Cameron's magnum opus, *Avatar*. Far beyond its status as a blockbuster film, *Avatar* encapsulates a deep declaration of a posthuman vision that redefines our relationship with the environment, our own bodies, and the intricate web of interconnectedness that spans all life on Earth. This chapter delves into the complexities associated with traditional humanism, analyses the multifaceted themes within the film *Avatar* (2009) and its sequel *Avatar: The Ways of Water* (2022) and ultimately advocates for a shift towards posthumanism—a worldview that heralds sustainability, body fluidity, and interconnectedness as its guiding principles, challenging the established norms of anthropocentric/human-centric thinking.

### **Humanism & its Complexities**

"Man is the measure of all things". – Protagoras is often recognised as an early humanist philosopher of ancient Greece who

emphasised the importance of human experience and perspective. According to him, human beings serve as the ultimate criteria through which we can judge and comprehend the world. This means that our knowledge of reality is fundamentally shaped by human experiences, perceptions, and judgements (Mark). Humanism is a philosophical and ethical position that prioritises the role of human beings in matters of morality, intelligence, and social concerns. Humanism has substantially contributed to the advancement of science, human rights, and liberal ethics. It also emphasises the inherent value and agency of human beings, both individually and collectively, and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence over the acceptance of dogma or superstition. It advocates reason, ethics, and empathy as guiding principles for human conduct. Thus, humanism has played a significant role in shaping modern ethical and philosophical discourse, but it is not without problems and criticisms. The problem often associated with humanism, and one of the primary motivations behind the emergence of posthumanism is anthropocentrism.

Anthropocentrism is the belief that human beings are the central or most significant entities in the universe, and it often leads to the prioritisation of human interests and perspectives, including the environment, other species, and even non-biological entities, such as artificial intelligence. Countless acts of harm done against the environment and animals are widely known, mostly stemming from an intensified culture of consumerism driven by the pursuit of power, wealth, and a lack of awareness or understanding. Numerous animals have been subjected to hunting for superfluous motives, mostly because of their perception as soulless and devoid of emotions, rendering them as commodities. Additional instances include the destruction of the Amazonian rainforest because of the depletion of natural resources and illicit cattle ranching. These activities pose a significant threat to the welfare and equilibrium of indigenous tribes in these areas. This anthropocentric bias can lead to ecological and ethical issues. However,

contemporary discussions on ethics, ecology, and philosophy are increasingly challenging this anthropocentric view. Scholars and philosophers today often advocate a more inclusive and interconnected perspective, which is in line with the principles of posthumanism, ecological ethics, and sustainability.

Edmund Husserl in his work 'The Crisis of European Sciences' presents Europe as the site of the original foundation of an ideal of philosophy and autonomy, which guided all movements since the beginning of the modern era in the Western world. "European humanity brings about a revolutionary change" (8). Critics argue that historically, humanism in Europe often continues to exclude certain groups of people based on factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, or disability, leading to exclusivity and inequality. Edward Said in his influential work 'Orientalism,' critiqued Western humanism's role in constructing and perpetuating stereotypes about the East. He argues that traditional humanism was used to justify imperialism and colonialism. Gayatri Spivak, in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* critiques humanism's Eurocentrism and colonial bias. She questions the assumptions behind the representation of marginalised voices in humanist discourse. The Eurocentric paradigm of Humanism is based on the dialectics of self and other and views 'Otherness' as inferior. "These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies" (15). This exclusion perpetuated inequality and discrimination and has driven the development of posthumanism as a philosophical response.

The universalising tendencies of humanism often lead to cultural insensitivity and ethical conflicts when it attempts to impose Western values on diverse societies. This can disregard the rich tapestry of cultural and ethical pluralism worldwide, which can be viewed as culturally insensitive or imperialistic. "The human of Humanism is neither an ideal

nor an objective statistical average or middle ground. It rather spells out a systematized standard of recognizability – of Sameness – by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location" (Braidotti 26). Posthumanism offers a different perspective on concepts such as cultural relativism, which recognises the importance of respecting and valuing diverse cultural and ethical systems. It acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to morality and ethics, and emphasises the need to appreciate the richness of diversity. Posthumanism also embraces ethical pluralism, recognising that there are multiple valid ethical perspectives. It promotes dialogue among diverse moral frameworks to find common ethical grounds while respecting differences. James Cameron highlights these complexities of humanism in his movie *Avatar* and its sequel *Avatar: The Ways of Water* and explores several posthumanism aspects throughout its narrative.

*Avatar* delves into posthumanism by depicting a world where identities are fluid, the human-nonhuman divide is blurred, and ecological ethics and interconnectedness take precedence. The movie also deconstructs the concept of the universalizing tendency of humanism by presenting a narrative that questions the assumption of human superiority, highlighting the value of diverse cultures and calling for a shift away from anthropocentrism towards a more inclusive and ecologically conscious perspective; thereby encouraging viewers to rethink their relationship with the environment, technology, and diverse forms of life, embracing a more inclusive and ecologically conscious perspective to coexist with the natural web of life, which is fundamental to posthumanist thought. In approaching *Avatar* through the lens of posthumanism, the chapter draws upon the theoretical frameworks of scholars such as Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway.

Braidotti's posthumanism emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and the decentring of humans in favor of a more inclusive

worldview. When applied to *Avatar*, this perspective invites us to explore the film's themes of identity fluidity, environmental ethics, and the blurring of human and non-human boundaries. Donna Haraway's work, particularly her concept of the 'cyborg,' offers insight into the movie's portrayal of characters who transcend traditional notions of human identity through technological augmentation. By incorporating these posthumanist theories, the analysis of *Avatar* deepens our understanding of the film's profound exploration of posthuman themes related to identity, technology, and ecological ethics.

### Exploring Posthuman Themes in *Avatar*

Donna Haraway in her work *The Cyborg Manifesto* argues that a new community of cyborgs does not view nature and culture as separate entities but wants to redefine their relationship. Nature cannot be used as a resource that is controlled and dominated by culture. Relationships that previously resulted in domination, such as polarity and hierarchy, are challenged in the cyborg world. It does not seek to return to an idyllic state of nature but instead creates a new kind of community that values connections and promotes unity. "Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other" (151). By embracing a posthumanist perspective, we can begin to see new possibilities for political and ethical actions that are not limited by the traditional concepts of human identity and subjectivity.

Posthumanism's deconstructive approach challenges the hierarchical systems that underlie discrimination, including those based on race, gender, and species. By questioning and destabilising these hierarchies, posthumanism opens up possibilities for reevaluating power dynamics and addressing inequality. This suggests a shift in focus from human centrality to a complex network of interactions between humans, animals, machines, and the environment. Through the lens of the visionary film, *Avatar* (2009) and its sequel movie *Avatar: The Ways of Water*

(2022) by James Cameron the chapter embarks on a journey that transcends the boundaries of traditional thought, inviting us to reconsider conventional human-centric views, our place in the world and the profound implications of embracing a posthuman perspective. The film exemplifies it through the use of avatars, genetically engineered Navi bodies controlled by human consciousness. *Avatar* provides a compelling narrative that explores the intersection of posthumanity, the human fluidity of identity, interconnectedness and sustainability.

### Interconnectedness

Rossi Braidotti in her work *The Posthuman* highlights the critique of humanism and anthropocentrism from a post-anthropocentric perspective. It underscores the need to reevaluate our hierarchical systems of value, especially when they are rooted in biased and exclusionary criteria. Braidotti's work encourages a more inclusive and ecologically conscious worldview that recognizes the agency and value of all life forms. She emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms and challenges anthropocentrism. "Post-anthropocentrism requires us to displace the notion of species hierarchy and the idea of a single, common standard for 'Man' as the measure of all things" (67). Her work calls for an ecocentric worldview that recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural world and considers the well-being of non-human entities. In *Avatar* through the Na'vi, humans gain a new perspective on the interconnectedness of life. This blurring of boundaries challenges the traditional human-centric perspective and encourages a holistic understanding of existence.

The film represents a posthumanist concept, that allows humans to inhabit genetically engineered Navi bodies. This notion is epitomised through the concept of 'linking', where humans are able to mentally connect with their avatars, which possess traits of the Na'vi species. The use of avatars enables humans to empathise with and connect to

the Na'vi and the natural world of Pandora. This connection extends beyond the physical and transcends the boundaries of the species. It reflects a posthumanist perspective that emphasises empathy and interconnectedness, suggesting that one's identity and consciousness can extend beyond the individual human body, exemplifying a hybrid form of existence. This hybrid identity is a key element of posthumanism that explores the potential for individuals to exist in multiple forms and states simultaneously.

Transcending the limits of the human body and blurring the boundaries between human and non-human entities signifies a move away from rigid definitions of what it means to be human. This transformation allows humans to deeply appreciate the connection between nature and other species of life. This allows us to see beyond the anthropocentric worldview with a culture that showcases a deep understanding and interconnectedness with all life forms. This blurring of boundaries challenges the concept of a fixed, central body and encourages us to consider the possibility of multiple, interconnected forms of existence. The movie features several scenes in which Jake explores a new world that challenges the traditional human-centred view of the world and presents a vision of a more interconnected and integrated world. This connection is facilitated through the use of neural interface technology which allows them to physically connect with other living beings and even the planet itself.

The neural interface technology allows the human avatars to transcend the limitations of their physical bodies and experience the world in a way that is beyond what is traditionally possible for humans. Jake learns to connect with the bioluminescent forest, where Navi conducts daily activities. He learns and emphasises the Na'vi's reliance on the forest's resources for food, shelter, and medicine with a sense of reverence, showing respect for the balance of nature. The Na'vi's reverence

for Eywa as a living, sentient entity embodies an ethical perspective. Their relationship with Eywa goes beyond mere exploitation of resources, emphasizing the responsibility of coexistence and harmony with the natural world. Through his experiences with the Na'vi Omatikaya clans, Jake learns the importance of preserving the planet and its delicate ecosystem and sees the world in a new light.

Jake's experience with the Metkayina tribe that lives among the distant atolls of Pandora makes him realise the importance of the relationship with water. Although these people have the same ancestors, their cultures are vastly different. Amongst the Metkayina tribe, the birth ceremony of a newborn is highly symbolic and is known as the "First Breath", which is performed in shallow water with the participation of the entire tribe. The mother gives birth into the sea and the newborn swims and makes its way to the surface of the water to take its first breath of air. Correspondingly, upon death, the body is taken to a plankton reef below the ocean which glows and wraps the body and is said to preserve the spirit, taking it to Eywa. This symbolises the strong bond the Metkayina's have with water, known as their second home. "The sea is your home before your birth and after your death" (1:08:57 – 1:09:20).



**The Dead Received by the Seabed**

(Source- <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/254805291410092659/>)

They also interact with the whale-like sentient creature of the Pandora Ocean known as tulkuns, with whom they have a close connection and share a similar social structure. Metkayina regards tulkuns as their siblings, whereby every member has a tulkun, referred to as a 'spirit brother/sister,' and together partake in the same religious beliefs. This exemplifies what Braidotti says,

The posthuman in the sense of post-anthropocentrism displaces the dialectical scheme of opposition, replacing well-established dualisms with the recognition of deep zoe-egalitarianism between humans and animals. The vitality of their bond is based on sharing this planet, territory or environment on terms that are no longer so clearly hierarchical, nor self-evident. This vital interconnection posits a qualitative shift of the relationship away from species-ism and towards an ethical appreciation of what bodies (human, animal, others) can do. (72)

### Fluidity of Identity

Donna Haraway emphasizes the idea of hybrid identities, where individuals can exist in multiple states simultaneously. In *Avatar*, the protagonist Jake Sully embodies this concept as he lives in two identities: his human self and his Na'vi avatar. Jake's transformation from a paraplegic human to a Navi is the central element of his posthumanist experience. Through the avatar program, he gains a new body that allows him to navigate Pandora as a Na'vi. This transformation represents a departure from the constraints of the human body, illustrating the fluidity of identity and embodiment of posthumanism. Jake's ability to inhabit a Na'vi avatar body enables him to physically exist beyond the boundaries of his human form exemplifying posthumanist values of recognizing the value of non-human entities. This experience challenges the centrality of the human body and allows him to engage with Pandora profoundly. He begins to

see the interconnectedness of the Na'vi, the environment, and himself in this new physical state.

Haraway also emphasised the potential for agency and empowerment, which comes with being a cyborg. "The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics." (150) 'Kiri' the adopted daughter of Jake in the *Avatar's* sequel movie (*Avatar – The Ways of Water*), is able to navigate her life both as an Omatikaya and Metkayina human who has chosen to live and integrate within Na'vi society. She was born with a genetically engineered human/Na'vi-hybrid body. Her identity is not confined to one specific category exemplifying the fluidity of identity that Haraway discusses. This duality mirrors the idea of hybridity in Haraway's cyborg theory. Kiri possesses advanced technological abilities and enhancements that allow her to navigate and interact with the world in unique ways. This gives her agency and empowers her to contribute to the narrative in significant ways, challenging the traditional power dynamics.

Kiri can swiftly adapt to any environment in Pandora. She can easily adjust to the drastic shift in the environment as she travels from the vast forest to the depths of the ocean. She could adapt to the Metkayina reef more quickly than her Navi brothers because she could hold her breath underwater. As though she had been a member of the clan her whole life, Kiri is also able to form a link with the marine creatures of the Metkayina seas. Her bioluminescent skin can channel energy to manipulate and affect the nature around her. The idea of forming a spiritual relationship with other forms of life by transcending human individuality is a key aspect of posthumanism. This involves recognising and respecting the inherent worth and value of all living beings and becoming a broader web of life. Kiri and Jake exemplify of what Haraway argues that cyborgs represent a step towards a posthuman world in which the boundaries between humans and machines are blurred and new forms of life emerge.



### **The Bioluminescent Skin of Kiri**

(Source- <https://no.pinterest.com/pin/3448137207594686/>)

### **Sustainability**

The Na'vi demonstrate a sustainable social structure. They value community, cooperation, and egalitarianism, rejecting hierarchical systems that perpetuate inequality and exploitation. Their decision-making processes involve a collective consensus and respect for individual autonomy, ensuring that all members' needs and desires are considered. They live in harmony with their environment, respecting and valuing every aspect of the Pandora ecosystem. This respect for the diversity of flora and fauna mirrors the principles of sustainability that emphasise the importance of conserving and protecting biodiversity. Their sustainable practices include using natural materials for shelter, medicine, and tools and they do not overexploit resources. One of the notable sustainable elements observed in Pandora is the incorporation of biomimicry, a methodology that involves the use of nature-derived ideas in the construction of buildings and other forms of infrastructure.

The Na'vi construct their homes within the Hometree using a variety of natural materials such as wood, stone, and plant fibres, blending coherently with the environment. The hometree is not only the sleeping quarter but also serves as the central gathering place and spiritual hub of the clan. Their dwellings are made of organic materials, such as leaves and wood, to minimise their environmental footprint. The Metkayina clan has a strong connection with water and uses its vast and diverse ecosystems in a number of ways. Metkayina hunt and reside in and around the water; their whole way of existence is inextricably linked to the rhythms of the water. They rely on Ilu as their preferred companion for navigating the oceans of Pandora. Their homes, often referred to as maruis pods, are constructed from enormous mangroves-like trees that grow along the coasts. These trees act as barriers to the crashing waves that threaten their houses. This low-impact construction aligns with sustainable building practices, which aim to reduce resource consumption and environmental damage.

### **The Sustainable Homes of Pandora**



### **The Sleeping pods of the Omatikaya Navi Clan**

(Source- <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/173318285650339458/>)



### Mauri Pods – Homes of the Metkayina Navi Clan

(Source-<https://in.pinterest.com/pin/607845280961552108/>)

In “Avatar”, James Cameron intertwines the themes of the posthuman body and sustainability to challenge traditional notions of human exceptionalism and highlight the importance of respecting the interconnectedness of all life forms. Through the Avatar Program, the film showcases how the human body can transcend its limits and embrace a more sustainable, post-human perspective. As human characters navigate the complex terrain of Pandora, viewers are invited to reflect on the ethical dimensions of their actions and the potential for a more sustainable, post-human future.

An avatar's exploration of posthumanism has significant implications for our understanding of the relationship between humans, nature, and technology. By moving beyond the traditional anthropocentric viewpoint, the film implies that true progress lies in embracing our interconnections with the world around us. It challenges the prevalent narratives of technological advancement and calls for a more inclusive and sustainable future. The movie presents a future in which humanity can redefine its relationship with nature and technology. By exploring the concept of posthumanism in the context of *Avatar*, we are prompted

to reflect on our own role in shaping a more harmonious and inclusive coexistence with the world around us.

### Works Cited

*Avatar*. Directed by James Cameron, Lightstorm Entertainment, 2009.

*Avatar: The Way of Water*. Directed by James Cameron, TSG Entertainment II, Lightstorm Entertainment, 2022.

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. 1st ed., Polity P, 2013.

Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by David Carr, 1970, ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA01493199.

Haraway, Donna. *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. Bloomsbury Academic eBooks, 2017, doi:10.5040/9781474248655.0035.

Mark, Joshua J. “Protagoras of Abdera: Of All Things Man Is the Measure.” *World History Encyclopedia*, Sept. 2023, [www.worldhistory.org/article/61/protagoras-of-abdera-of-all-things-man-is-the-meas](http://www.worldhistory.org/article/61/protagoras-of-abdera-of-all-things-man-is-the-meas).



## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Arunlal Mokeri is an author, translator and speaker. He currently works as an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Govt College Mokeri. Dr. Arunlal has written and published widely on issues concerning culture, philosophy and literature. Cambridge has published his work in 2022, in their Scholars series. He has worked as an Assistant Director for two documentary films with Sathyan Odessa (Agnirekha, The Holy Cow) . Dr. Sunitha Srinivas C, is currently Professor of English, at Govt. College Mokeri. She has numerous national and international publications to her credit. Her areas of interest include cultural studies and visual studies.

Dr. Arya Gopi is a bi-lingual poet and translator who works both in English and Malayalam with more than half a dozen published books. Her first English title *Sob of Strings* was published in 2011 and in 2023 she published her new collection titled *One Hundred Lines of Discords*. A contributor to major Malayalam journals, she has won several awards including the Kerala State Sahitya Academy Kanakasree Award. Her poems have been published in Guftugu Magazine, Muse India journal, Teesta Review, eShe Magazine, Modern Literature International Journal, The Usawa Literary Review, Kavishala Magazine, Samyukta poetry, Indian Literature, Malayalam Literary Survey and elsewhere. A PhD holder in English literature, she teaches literature at The Zamorin's Guruvayurappan College, University of Calicut, Kerala.

Farha Jalal hails from Kanjirappally, Kottayam and is based in Thiruvananthapuram. She graduated in English Language and Literature from HHMSPB NSS College for Women, Neeramankara. She completed her Post Graduation at the Institute of English under the University of Kerala. Her poems and short stories are published on her blog 'Ifjwala.' Her research interests lie in the areas of cultural studies, gender studies,

media studies and popular culture. She is a NET and GATE holder in English.

Jeni R.V. works as an Assistant Professor at the Postgraduate and Research Department of English(SF), The American College, Madurai.

Dr. Jyolsna B is a resident of Calicut. She is a faculty member of the department of English of Mar Dionysius College, Thrissur, Kerala. She completed her MPhil and PhD from Pondicherry Central University. Her areas of interest include gender studies, queer studies and postmodern poetry.

Nabanita Karanjai is Research Scholar in the Department of English, Bankura University, West Bengal. She also holds faculty position as State-Aided College Teacher (Category1) at Sree Chaitanya College, Habra. Her research interests include postmodernism, posthumanism and science fiction.

Dr. S. Karunya works as an Assistant Professor of English at PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. She has penned down a few poems in English and Tamil. She has published many scholarly articles in peer-reviewed, refereed journals and presented papers in various national and international seminars and conferences. She holds a doctorate in Eco-literature and her area of specialisation is Indian Writing in English, Ecological Humanities and Culture Studies.

Siddhartha Mukherjee is currently a final year MA (Master of Arts) student at the department of Sociology, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). He has recently completed his teacher training programme at Ramakrishna Mission Brahmananda College of Education, Rahara (BSAEU). Having dabbled both research and academics he is fascinated by how interdisciplinary studies intersect and interact with the milieu of cultural politics and education. His primary research interests are Nobel laureates in literature, contemporary prose fiction in English,

critical pedagogy, film studies, photography studies, and the politics of higher and public education in India.

Sreya Mukherjee is a Junior Research Fellow at the Department of Indian and World Literatures in The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She is working on the representation of motherhoods in the Indian epics for her doctoral research. Her areas of interest are mythology, women's writing, translation studies and postcolonial literature. She did her M.A. in English Literature from English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She completed her B.A. in English Literature from Banaras Hindu University.

Sruthy Shaji, a research scholar, qualified as a Senior Research Fellow (JRF) at Amrita School of Arts and Sciences in Kochi. Her research focuses on the intersection of Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Disability studies, Gender Studies, and Dalit Literature.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

***Diotima's*: A Journal of New Readings**

**ISSN: 2319-4189**

**Vol. 15: LITERARY STUDIES IN THE AGE OF AI**

The PG & Research Department of English, Providence Women's College, Kozhikode, invites papers for the 2024 issue of its annual journal, *Diotima's: A Journal of New Readings*. We welcome well researched and theoretically grounded research papers from academicians and research scholars from the Departments of English, Media Studies, Gender Studies, Philosophy, Social Sciences and other interdisciplinary areas pertaining to the broad area of **Literary Studies in the Age of AI**. There is no publication fee and the papers will be selected based on peer review process.

We are on the cusp of a fascinating paradox, with the digital tide remolding human imagination. Algorithms compose ballads, robotics dream in lyrical lines and literature stands at the precipice of a revolution. With dystopian anxieties about the death of the human author, we are witnessing the birth of a new paradigm. It is not simply about Human Vs. Machine, but about a symphonic convergence where boundaries blur between human and machine intelligence and narratives morph into hybrid tapestries.

The next issue of *Diotima's* seeks to delve into the epistemological implications of AI on literary studies. How does AI, once envisioned as a cold, calculating entity, now play a role in the messy, multifaceted terrain of human imagination? Can AI unlock novel pathways to empathy, understanding, and connection? Can it push the boundaries of human imagination, opening doors to previously unimaginable realms of narrative possibility? We invite scholars to explore the myriad ways in which AI is

reshaping storytelling, from augmenting existing forms to birthing entirely new genres.

The ever-widening field of AI-generated literature necessitates a re-examination of conventional understandings surrounding authorship, agency and construction of meaning. This offers a fertile ground for theorizing creativity amidst technological symbiosis. How can AI tools enrich our comprehension of literary texts? What challenges and opportunities arise while applying computational methods to literary studies? Does a sonnet penned by an algorithm evoke the same emotional resonance as one born out of a human soul or does it yield a richer, more nuanced expression?

We welcome contributions that explore the risks and rewards of AI-generated narratives, the potential biases woven into algorithms, and the impact of these narratives on human consciousness.

Literary representations of AI, from Asimov's robots, Stanley Robinson's Hadalyms, to Ishiguro's Klara and Peng Shepherd's AI library have served as mirrors reflecting our anxieties and aspirations around technological progress. Movies and novels like *Men*, *M3GAN*, *Project Hail Mary*, *Sea of Whispers* etc. have moved on from concepts like Frankenstein Complex, Uncanny Valley and Erewhon Phobia offering fresh perspectives on AI integration into human identity and relationships. *Diotima's* 2024 invites scholars to investigate the continuities and transformations of these and other anxieties in contemporary narratives. How do such fictional worlds provide frameworks for understanding the ethical dilemmas we face in the real world?

As we tread this unfamiliar ground, ethical considerations are of paramount importance. Papers addressing the ethical dimensions of AI-generated literature, the responsible use of AI tools in literary research, and the societal implications of AI narratives are particularly welcome.

By scrutinizing the ethical contours of AI in literature, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of the responsibilities that accompany the integration of technology into the process of creative expression.

Thrust areas can include, but not necessarily be limited to:

- ◆ The impact of AI on language and imagination
- ◆ AI & Robotics as represented in literature
- ◆ Literary criticism and analysis in the AI Age
- ◆ Ethical concerns regarding AI-driven writing and research
- ◆ Theorising AI-driven literature
- ◆ AI and the 'death' of the author
- ◆ The future of storytelling fuelled by AI
- ◆ AI and gender
- ◆ AI and translation
- ◆ AI and activism
- ◆ AI and identity

Those interested in contributing to this volume may email their articles to diotimajournal@gmail.com. The papers will undergo blind peer reviewing and the contributors will be intimated regarding the selection of their papers shortly.

**Last date for submission of papers: April 15, 2024**

**Word Limit: 2500-4000 words**

**Format: MLA Style 9th edition**

**Font – Times New Roman, Size -12, Line space -1.5**

**Email: diotimajournal@gmail.com**

**Statement about ownership and other particulars of**

***DIOTIMA'S***

**Form IV**

**(See Rule 8)**

1. Place of Publication : Kozhikode
2. Periodicity : Annual
3. Printer's Name : Dr.Jaseena Joseph  
(Sr. Ashmitha A.C)  
  
Nationality : Indian  
Address : Principal,  
Providence Women's College,  
Kozhikode
4. Publisher's Name : Dr.Jaseena Joseph  
(Sr. Ashmitha A.C)  
  
Nationality : Indian  
Address : Principal,  
Providence Women's College,  
Kozhikode
6. Name and addresses of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders holding more than one percent of the total capital. : Providence Women's College  
Kozhikode
7. Printing Press : Print O Fast  
Kozhikode, Ph: 9946876494

I, Dr. Jaseena Joseph (Sr. Ashmitha A.C), hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

(Sd/-)

Signature of Publisher