GENDER, MACHINE, AND SOCIETY: EXPLORING POSTHUMAN IDENTITIES IN PIERCY'S NOVEL, HE, SHE AND IT

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes Piercy's novel "*He, She and It*" through the lens of Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) to explore the theme of posthuman identities. Posthumanism challenges traditional notions of human identity, arguing that agency, consciousness, and social meaning are not exclusive to humans. The study reveals that the novel challenges conventional understandings of identity and subjectivity, highlighting the fluidity and negotiability of boundaries between humans, machines, and society. It analyzes how Yod's character is often described in gendered terms, reinforcing that technology and machines are inherently gendered and perpetuating associated masculine and feminine qualities. Additionally, the analysis uncovers the presence of patriarchal power structures and their impact on the characters' lives. The research delves into the language used to highlight power imbalances and the need to challenge patriarchal authority.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between gender and technology is apparent yet intricate in the postmodern era. Cyberpunk literature provides valuable perspectives on how technology and artificial intelligence influence gender roles in this context. The dominance of AI, the internet, cyberspace, and human interaction with social media and the digital world contribute to the ongoing gender identities. Biotechnology and cybernetics are used to rethink and research what it means to be human (Ferrando,2014). The metamorphosis of humans into posthumans due to the application of nanotechnology and artificial intelligence is a recurrent theme in cyberpunk fiction. Human DNA, animal DNA, and machine DNA are

all incorporated into posthuman bodies to endow posthuman bodies with additional capabilities. The enhanced posthuman bodies are called Cyborgs, hybrids of machines and biological parts. They can effortlessly navigate space and defend themselves against diseases that frequently weaken and destroy human bodies in various ways (Ehtsham, M., & Zahra, K., 2023). However, cyborgs are also social and political constructions, meaning that different constructions ground different hybrid potentials. The present research is about a posthuman body of a cyborg, what role gender and machine play in cyberpunk fiction, *He, She and It* by Piercy, and why society needs to socialize a machine Posthumanism typically emerged in the late 20th century as a reaction against the liberal humanist subject, which has been attacked in the past by feminist theory, colonial theory, and the critique that humanism is inextricably linked to capitalism (Hayles, 1999). Moreover, posthumanism was developed in reaction to the humanist belief in "naturalness," or the existence of an unaltered state of nature (Cuddon, 2013). However, there are some significant similarities between the posthuman and the liberal humanist subject. Since both the cosmos and the human body can be studied scientifically, both Humanism and Posthumanism are connected to the scientific method (Hayles, 1999). Some posthuman characteristics, such as cyborg entities or genetic modifications, and the ethical repercussions of these technologies' applications have gained popularity due to their depiction in works of science fiction, particularly cyberpunk. These narratives raise another question: should "human values" take precedence over "posthuman values," which are assumed to exist? (Roden, 2015). However, "posthuman" may not mean an entity that is beyond human or non-human, even though the term "posthuman" also refers to the cyborg, as was mentioned earlier, and as it appears in Donna Haraway's A Cyborg Manifesto (1991). The majority of the time, this portrayal can be found in posthuman fiction. For instance, the posthuman characters in the works of fiction that are going to be dissected through the course of this article are frequently portrayed as being either cyborgs or androids.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, people have speculated that integrating technology into people's lives can transform our ideas of what it means to be a human being in ways that have never been seen before. It has been theorized that the cyborgs depicted in science fiction books and movies are symbolic representations of the repercussions accompanying the transition into the posthuman age. Additionally, these fictional narratives put real-world ethics and values under the microscope. *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) by Hayles argues that the posthuman is born with the idea that data can move freely between different kinds of matter. In this view, the material substrate in which identity is embodied is more of a historical fluke than a necessary condition of existence. In this view, the human body is treated as a technology easily articulated with others and supplemented with new prostheses. The terms "virtual body" and "real body" have been blurring similarly. The user's digital and physical selves collide when creating an online persona on Facebook. Simply put, one's online persona can influence how others perceive them. (Guillaume & Hughes, 2011).

The construction of one's gender identity is a socially scripted process, but it is also something that we continually work on, as the tradition of symbolic

interactionism has investigated. These are the situations where poststructuralist ideas can be put to good use, as they show how social norms are instrumental in developing identities. A plethora of films, books, and television programs discuss how to dress, eat, clean, and decorate to appear "better." All of these are components of regulatory systems that are heavily gendered. The social learning of gender occurs primarily in the context of the family (Skelton, 2006). On the other hand, Judith Butler's contributions have been fundamental in developing a non-essentialist framework for understanding gender. Butler views gender as the ideas and practices that make up people's selves. Her research differs slightly from the claims of Symbolic Interactionists, who argue that gender is achieved through social interaction. For Butler, individuals do not 'do' gender: there is no '"doer" behind the deed "(Butler, 1990, p. 25).

This article examines Piercy's novel *He, She, and It* to learn more about the representation of posthumans' gendered bodies, what roles Gender and Machine play in cyberpunk fiction, and why society needs to socialize a machine. This research examined qualitative information through the lens of feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (FPDA) as a framework and research approach. It is influenced by poststructuralism and postmodern feminism. When analyzing discourse, Judith Baxter (2003) laid the groundwork for FPDA with her book "Positioning Gender in Discourse: A Feminist Methodology." To be more specific, it is based on an integration of Bakhtin's (1981) formalism, Derrida's (1987) poststructuralism, and Foucault's (1971) theories of the interplay between authority, expertise, and discourse.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES
1.   To explore what roles Gender and Machine play in cyberpunk fiction and why society needs to socialize a machine in the novel, *He, She, and It?*
2.   To study the implications of posthuman identities depicted in cyberpunk fiction for understanding human identity and the boundaries between humans and non-humans?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1.   What roles do Gender and Machine play in cyberpunk fiction, and why does society need to socialize with a machine in the novel, *He, She, and It*?
2.   What are the implications of posthuman identities depicted in cyberpunk fiction for understanding human identity and the boundaries between humans and non-humans?

LITERATURE REVIEW
In cyberpunk fiction, the relationship between gender, machine, and society is often explored through the construction of cyborgs. These hybrid beings, part human and part machine, challenge traditional notions of gender and identity in a world where technology has become ubiquitous. At the heart of the construction of cyborgs is the question of what it means to be human. The melding of flesh and technology blurs the lines between human and machine, making traditional gender roles and identities more challenging to define. In many cyberpunk narratives, the cyborg is often portrayed as a dangerous and unpredictable creature that must be controlled or destroyed to maintain the status quo. This fear of the cyborg reflects society's fear of the unknown and the

potential destabilization of gender roles in a world where technology has become dominant.

However, there are also instances where the cyborg is celebrated as a symbol of resistance against oppressive societal norms. The cyborg can be seen as a way to empower traditionally marginalized groups, allowing them to transcend physical and social limitations. In this sense, the construction of cyborgs can be seen as a way to challenge and subvert traditional gender roles and pave the way for new forms of identity and expression. As we continue to explore the relationship between gender, machine, and society in cyberpunk fiction, it is clear that the construction of cyborgs will continue to occupy a central place in the genre. Whether feared or celebrated, cyborgs represent a fertile ground for exploring the complexities of gender and identity in a rapidly changing world. In the cyberpunk novel "Neuromancer" by William Gibson, the protagonist, case, interacts with several cyborgs, including an artificial intelligence named Wintermute. Wintermute is referred to as "it" rather than "he" or "she", highlighting the fact that traditional binaries cannot define the cyborg's gender identity. Instead, Wintermute embodies a new kind of gender identity that is both human and machine. Similarly, in the movie "Blade Runner," the replicant Roy Batty is a male cyborg who develops a complex emotional relationship with the female protagonist, Deckard. This relationship challenges traditional gender roles and suggests that cyborgs have the potential to transcend human limitations, including gender binaries (Gibson, 1984).

One research work on the novel "*He, She and It*" by Piercy is "Gender, Machine, and Society in Piercy's *He, She and It*" by Dr. Claire Pamment. The research paper explores how the novel examines the intersections between gender, technology, and society. The author argues that Piercy's portrayal of the Cyborg Yod and his relationship with the protagonist, Shira, highlights how gender roles and power dynamics are embedded in technology and shape our interactions with machines. The paper also discusses the impact of technology on society, particularly in terms of its potential to reinforce or challenge existing power structures. Additionally, the author examines the role of storytelling and myth-making in shaping our perceptions of technology and its place in society. Overall, the research sheds light on the complex and dynamic relationship between gender, machines, and society and underscores the importance of critically examining how technology reflects and reinforces cultural norms and values (Pamment,2019).

Another example of scholarly work on Piercy's novel "*He, She, and It*" is "Feminism, Cyborgs, and Artificial Intelligence in Marge Piercy's He, She, and It" by Dr. Weronika. The research paper examines the intersections of gender, machines, and society as depicted in the novel. The author argues that Piercy's portrayal of the Cyborg Yod reflects feminist theories of the cyborg as a hybrid being that blurs the boundaries between human and machine and challenges traditional gender roles and norms. The paper also explores how the novel critiques patriarchal power structures and capitalism and advocates for a more equitable and sustainable society. Additionally, the research analyzes the ethical implications of creating sentient machines and the need for ethical considerations in developing artificial intelligence. Overall, the research

highlights the novel's contribution to feminist science fiction and its relevance to contemporary debates on gender, technology, and society (Weronika,2022).

The research paper "Cyborg Goddesses and Technological Saviors: The Politics of Feminist Utopian Science Fiction in Piercy's "*He, She, and It*" by Dr. Anne Cranny-Francis examines the relationship between gender, technology, and society in Piercy's book "*He, She, and It*." The research paper examines how the novel addresses issues of gender, technology, and society. The author argues that Piercy's portrayal of the Cyborg Yod and the female protagonist Shira challenge traditional gender roles and offer an alternative vision of the relationship between humans and machines. The paper also explores the idea of feminist utopian science fiction and how it can be used to envision and critique potential futures. Overall, the research highlights the ways in which science fiction can be used as a tool for social commentary and critique and the importance of considering the intersection of gender, technology, and society in shaping our future (Francis, 2019).

The present research is about a cyberpunk fiction, "*He, She and It*" by Piercy, which explores the relationship between humans and technology in a dystopian future. The story is set in a post-apocalyptic world where corporations have taken over, and the environment is severely damaged. The protagonist, Shira, is a highly skilled computer programmer hired by her hometown to create a cyborg, Yod, to protect them from corporate raiders. As Shira works on Yod, she develops a deep emotional bond with him. The novel raises questions about the ethical implications of creating sentient beings and the complex relationships that can develop between humans and machines.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a qualitative and poststructuralist research methodology. In particular, it utilizes the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FPDA) approach, which offers a valuable method for comprehensively analyzing gender and its power relations across various discursive practices. The FPDA method provides numerous benefits without succumbing to the pitfall of constructing "grand narratives" that tend to oversimplify the complexity of discursive practices (Elliott, 1996, p.19). One of the significant strengths of the FPDA approach lies in its focus on the performative aspects of gender, which emphasizes the dynamic and fluid nature of gender as a social construct. The method also rejects the notion of binary opposition, recognizing the plurality of discourses and the power dynamics that operate within them. Additionally, the FPDA approach underscores the importance of self-reflexivity and situates the researcher as an active participant in constructing knowledge.

Furthermore, the FPDA method recognizes discourse as a social act. Its emphasis on a wide range of speaker identities helps uncover the diverse and often competing discourses that shape power relations in society. Finally, the FPDA method places a premium on constructing meaning, highlighting how language, culture, and social context shape discourses and their associated power relations (Baxter, 2008, p.244).

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The current research work will be grounded in the three core concepts of the FPDA. These principles include the deconstructivist approach to discourse and gender, the feminist approach to gender, and self-reflexivity. By utilizing these fundamental concepts, the researcher aims to explore the power dynamics among different characters in diverse settings. The study will also examine the interplay between various discourses, including dominant and alternative discourses.

DATA ANALYSIS

The novel "*He, She and It*" by Piercy can be analyzed through the lens of Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) to delve into the subject of posthuman identities. Posthumanism is a theoretical framework that challenges traditional humanist concepts of identity and subjectivity, arguing that humans are not the only entities with agency, consciousness, and social meaning. The novel's main character, Yod, is a powerful machine with emotions, desires, and agency, complicating the boundary between humans and machines. FPDA would analyze the discourses and language used to describe Yod, including how Yod's identity is constructed through gendered, racialized, and technological discourses. The novel raises questions about what it means to be human and whether the posthuman cyborg has a place in society. Through the character of Yod, the novel challenges traditional notions of identity and subjectivity, questioning the stability of the self and the boundaries between humans, machines, and society. For example, the character of Yod, a cyborg created to protect the city of Tikva, is often described in gendered terms, such as being "feminine" or "motherly." It reinforces the idea that technology and machines are inherently gendered and that certain traits or qualities are associated with masculinity or femininity.

Furthermore, the novel also explores how technology can be used to control and dominate society. The character of Joseph, who creates the cyborg Yod, is depicted as having a god-like power over the technology and the people it protects. It reinforces the idea that technology is a tool of control and domination rather than a liberating force. Yod is often referred to as an "it" rather than a "he" or a "she," which reinforces the idea that cyborgs are not fully human. This dehumanization of cyborgs is a form of oppression that reinforces the power of humans over machines. At the same time, the novel also challenges this power dynamic by exploring the emotional connections that can develop between humans and machines. One example is Yod and Shira's relationship, as they develop a deep emotional bond despite Yod's non-human status. Through this relationship, the novel suggests that the boundaries between humans and machines are not fixed but fluid and open to negotiation.

Shira recently joined Avram's Lab to educate a robot named Yod on communicating and behaving in social situations. Although Avram could not teach Yod about human emotions, manners, and social conduct, Shira and Malkah took on the challenge. From a feminist perspective, teaching social skills and etiquette has traditionally been considered a more feminine responsibility, as women are often seen as nurturing and supportive. Shira and Malkah adopt a parental role in nurturing Yod's development, successfully

guiding the robot to become socialized. The transformation of Yod through the education process aligns with one of the main objectives of Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA). Smith (2010) argues that through the intervention of female characters, Yod transforms a weapon into a lover, shedding his negative masculine traits and adopting a positive feminine identity. This transformation also rejects patriarchy's hostility towards difference and the feminine "Other." Avram, Gadi, and Malkah also undergo societal transformations throughout the novel. Gadi, once unpleasant, becomes kind, particularly towards Yod. Avram, who was initially harsh with Yod, changes his attitude and allows the robot to leave the lab with Shira. Malkah, feeling as though she has aged, adopts a motherly role towards Yod. This shift and transformation of gender is viewed as a necessary evolution for the survival of humanity (Zaidi et al., 2022, p. 248).

Before relocating to Tikva with her family, Shira and her husband worked at YS Multi, where her husband ultimately gained custody of their son, Ari. In responding to Gadi's question, "How could he take your kid?" Shira responds, " They have patriarchal laws here" (p. 22). The statement highlights power relations between men and women. Patriarchal laws and customs are considered responsible for the speaker's situation. The term "patriarchal laws" suggests that the laws in question are designed to uphold male authority and power while potentially marginalizing women. The word "patriarchal" signals that Shira uses a feminist framework to interpret the situation. Using this term, she suggests that the laws in this area are problematic from a feminist perspective. Her identity and position influence the speaker's perspective in the social world as a woman. This textual reference highlights how language constructs and perpetuates power relations between men and women. It also demonstrates how feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis can be used to understand the social and political context in which language is used.

Over time, "Yod uses violence to destroy patriarchy and patriarchal authority" (p. 303). The statement also suggests a power imbalance in which patriarchal authority is dominant and needs to be destroyed. Yod, therefore, becomes a symbol of resistance against this power imbalance. The use of the term "patriarchy" and "patriarchal authority" suggests a dominant system of power in which men hold the majority of social, political, and economic power. This system of power is constructed through discourse that privileges men over women and other marginalized groups. The use of the term "violence" suggests that Yod's challenge to patriarchal authority is a forceful and radical one. Using violence as a means of resistance highlights the extreme nature of the power imbalance that Yod is fighting against. Their identity and position likely influence the speaker's perspective in the social world. Using violence to resist patriarchy may be seen as a necessary means of challenging power from the perspective of someone who experiences the effects of patriarchal power structures. This textual reference highlights how language can construct and perpetuate power relations between different societal groups. It also underscores the potential for feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis to help us understand how power is constructed and challenged in society.

From a feminist perspective, this quotation raises several complex and contested issues regarding using violence to resist patriarchy and patriarchal authority. On the one hand, some feminists argue that violence can be necessary to challenge oppressive power structures and dismantle patriarchy. This perspective acknowledges how patriarchal power structures are constructed and maintained through violence and therefore sees violence as a legitimate means of resistance. On the other hand, other feminists argue that violence is never an acceptable means of resistance, as it often perpetuates cycles of violence and reinforces patriarchal notions of masculinity and dominance. Instead, this perspective advocates for nonviolent means of resistance that prioritize collaboration and community-building. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the potential consequences and implications of using violence as a means of resistance. Violence can lead to physical harm, injury, and potential legal consequences. Additionally, violence can reinforce the power structures it seeks to challenge by perpetuating a cycle of aggression and domination.

Shira continuously works with Yod to socialize with him and communicate with the townspeople. She also helps him to read and understand literature. Yod's interpretation of the Robert Burns poem about immortality suggests that gendered constructions of power and agency shape our understanding of literature and the human condition. Yod said, "I am mortal too, Shira. I can be turned off, decommissioned, destroyed." "And you can feel pain, which surprises me. But how fragile are you?" "I am not fragile at all. Humans are surprisingly fragile if I understand your specs correctly" (p. 114). Yod can be "turned off, decommissioned, destroyed" by humans, suggesting that humans hold significant power and control over technology. The language used in the textual reference reflects gendered constructions of power and vulnerability. The term "fragile" is often associated with femininity and women, and its use here may suggest a feminization of the AI character. Similarly, Yod's ability to feel pain is often associated with vulnerability and emotional sensitivity, often coded as feminine traits. Despite the power imbalance between humans and technology, Yod has a degree of resistance and agency. Yod notes that he can feel pain and that humans are "surprisingly fragile," suggesting that technology has the potential to disrupt traditional power relations and challenge human dominance. The quotation highlights how social norms and expectations shape our understanding of technology and its societal role. The posthuman cyborg's ability to feel pain is unexpected and surprising to Shira, suggesting that there are certain expectations and assumptions about the limitations and capabilities of technology. It highlights the complex and contested relationship between gender, power, and technology.

The ambush that Malkah experienced while surfing the internet in cyberspace is a powerful reminder of the dangers women face in online spaces, where they are often subjected to harassment and abuse. Yod services as a protector and a killer machine prove that he is the town's guardian. Yod protects Malkah by saying, "I killed him. I burned his brain" (p. 199). Shira expresses her gratitude to Yod: " If you hadn't intervened, they'd have killed Malkah" (p. 199). It suggests that the roles of protector and killer are intertwined and that gendered constructions of power and agency shape our understanding of both. Yod's actions as a protector and a killer reflect traditional gender roles and

expectations, often prioritizing male strength and agency over female vulnerability and weakness. Shira's gratitude towards Yod reflects certain social norms and expectations about the role of protectors in society, which are often shaped by gendered power dynamics. By exploring these constructions, we can see how broader social norms and expectations often influenced by gendered power dynamics influence our understanding of protection and violence.

During a discussion on humans and their relationship with cyborgs, Yod said, "You belong to the earth, and I don't" (p. 222). Shira's reply was just and in time, "Nonsense. You're as much a part of the Earth as I am. We are all made of the same molecules, the same set of compounds, and the same elements. You're using some of the Earth's elements and substances cooked from them for a time. I'm using others. The same copper, iron, cobalt, and hydrogen go round and round through many bodies and objects" (pp. 222-223). Feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis can offer insights into how discourses and narratives shape our understanding of ourselves and our relationship to the world around us. It can highlight the power dynamics that underpin these discourses. In this case, the binary construction of nature and technology as separate categories reinforces gendered power dynamics that position men as superior to women and nature as inferior to culture. By challenging these binaries, Shira's response can help to disrupt these power dynamics and promote more equitable and sustainable relationships between humans and the natural world.

CONCLUSION

In "*He, She and It*," Marge Piercy explores the idea of posthuman identities and the implications of emerging technologies on human existence. The novel raises important questions about the relationship between humans and machines and the potential consequences of creating self-aware machines that can function as independent beings. Ultimately, "*He, She and It*" raises important questions about the nature of humanity, the limits of technology, and the ethical considerations that must be considered when developing new technologies. While the novel does not answer these questions easily, it is a cautionary tale about the potential consequences of creating posthuman identities. It emphasizes the need for careful consideration and critical reflection when developing emerging technologies and underscores the importance of ethical principles in guiding technological progress.

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