Tracing AI, New Materialisms and Posthuman Agencies in Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous*

Dr. Rajesh Bharvad*

Mr. Vishalkumar Deshani**

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at examining Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous* through the frameworks of Posthumanism and New Materialism along with the concept of Artificial Intelligence. The novel opposes human exceptionalism by showing blurred lines between natural and artificial beings that offers readers toward novel perspectives about what it means to be both distinct and powerful. Characters like Jack and Paladin exhibit complex aspects regarding consciousness and personal freedom in the novel. It creates important questions regarding ethical rights concerning artificial intelligence and genetically modified life forms. This research paper explores intersection of Posthumanism, New Materialisms and AI in the novel and aims at illustrating how Posthumanist ideas challenges the traditional anthropocentric views of identity and human existence. With reference to various incidents of the novels, it also shows how New Materialist thought enhances our understanding of non-human agents' ability to shape human existence and realities in the world around. Additionally, the paper slightly highlights present-day social issues also linked to capitalism alongside exploitation and presents predictions regarding human-AI interface. This research mirrors the philosophical nature of how *Autonomous* presents some complex identity questions alongside ethical duties and responsibilities of advanced technology.

KEYWORDS

Autonomous, Posthumanism, New Materialisms, Artificial Intelligence, Identity, Agency, Ethics

1 | INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature demonstrates significant overlap between three disciplines: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and New Materialisms and Posthumanism. It is must to see how it develops human subjectivity and ethical standpoints because AI has become both a leading theme in contemporary fiction and a persistent discussion within society. *Autonomous* serves as an account of theme of AI highlighting the human-centric view of the Anthropocene epoch. In

* Associate Professor, Department of English, Shri Govind Guru University, Godhra, Email: rkbharvad@sggu.ac.in

** Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Shri Govind Guru University, Godhra, Email: vishalkumardeshani@gmail.com

Autonomous, Annalee Newitz creates a literary model to study the convergence of artificial intelligence and New Materialisms and Posthuman agencies through which characters explore posthuman situations derived from avant-garde principles and extensive posthumanist elements that drive current posthumanist debates.

The narrative structure of *Autonomous* integrates variations between human voice and AI dialogue which reveals moral and ethical and existential issues surrounding AI research. Through its storyline the narrative utilizes Paladin as an AI bot which functions as a virtual instrument to research difficult aspects of AI self-awareness and identity. The narrative space forms through shifting views between AI personas and humans to conduct an intellectual dialogue about AI effects on human identity formation using New Materialist perspectives. The narrative of this novel creates an opposition to human-centered understandings by showing AI entities as complex entities that transcend human ability to recreate them. The narrative portrays AI entities with divine essence that operates independently in their settings to demonstrate concepts of Posthumanism and New Materialism. According to Posthumanist principles identity serves as the central theme which gets rewritten by human-nonhuman relationships and elements of the environment within circumstances of constant advancement. By using theory this paper conducts research about how Autonomous challenges traditional human-centered concepts of identity and agency so readers can develop different ways to think about humanity's technological interaction with other species.

The foundation provided by New Materialisms helps us understand what conditions build real experiences. This belief system asserts that matter does not stay dormant because it functions to create human perceptions and experiences together with constructing self-consciousness. The novel explores the human-AI bond by illustrating how human matter and technological materials cooperate to define each other in his work. Technical advancements continuously affect human experiences thereby extending biological materials into those of technology until the distinction between them disappears. Newitz illustrates in his story as an intricate portrait of where natural ends and artificial begins. According to Donna Haraway when cyborgs unite human and AI, they influence the traditional notion of fundamental basic human aspects (Haraway 12). In *Autonomous* the formation of identity emerges from the post-human state which dissolves human-nonhuman differences thus demanding analysis of current human identities.

The synthesis of Artificial Intelligence and the concepts of New Materialisms and Posthuman agencies leads to remarkable complications in the development of Autonomous. Academic studies on the novel till now evaluate how robotic engineering engages with public bias toward gender norms based on heteronormative priorities. The novel follows Paladin's transformation from artificial intelligence robot toward socially defined gender categories which reflect the human drive to assign identities to advanced technology. It shows that in contemporary times, human and non-human beings continue to experience continuing influence from conventional gender paradigms even though their existence aims to break free from gender-based constraints. This shows how human-centric social rules influence gender constructs as well as the ethical consequences when it comes to creating artificial beings similar to human beings. So, the novel explores social equalities alongside gender-related moral concerns that emerge from technological entities which possess artificial intelligence yet remain autonomous by these defined categories.

Taking these themes into account, this research paper intends to examine how *Autonomous* employs its intricate narrative pattern and its delineating of AI to suggest a

scrutinization of human-centered hard to differentiate concepts of self. With the perspectives of AI, New Materialisms and Posthuman agencies, this paper offers to ponder upon the binaries of self, gender, and agency that reveals in what manner society and technology are equally prominent in shaping and corresponding with one another in this scientifically advanced world. By evaluating how humans and non-humans meet and cross at a point in *Autonomous*, this paper argues that *Autonomous* doesn't just challenge the conventional narratives. It also provides a revelation of posthuman time ahead in which identities are always mediated, redefined and transformed. Newitz's *Autonomous* offers a vision to look at the probabilities and challenges of posthumanism in which agency is not a mere human characteristic, but circulated athwart both human and non-human models.

Through critical analysis, this paper seeks dual contributions of identity studies of robotics and the prevailing literary discussions about posthumanism. This research also examines ethical suggestions on poetics of AI in literature through established story line materials which illustrate these results to develop our understanding of posthuman identity and interconnections between technology and societal structures. This research enhances ongoing dialog about posthumanism through knowledge that explains what artificial intelligence will create concerning self-conception and human agency in future times.

2 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The primary objective of this research is to explore the intricate interconnectedness of AI, New Materialisms and Posthuman agencies in Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous*, with theoretical standpoints of some key theorists in these field. This framework blends insights from some key thinkers, bringing in Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, and Jane Bennett to participate in the ongoing dialogues on AI, New Materialisms and Posthumanism with an aim to provide a vigorous groundwork for the critique of Newitz's *Autonomous*.

3 | AI AND POSTHUMANISM

AI emerges as the main force that affects posthumanistic views about self and agency construction. Self-understanding combined with agency has grown increasingly complex because new intellectual systems display autonomous decision-making capabilities and self-presentation behaviours. AI developed its initial functionality as either an assistive system or an alarm for well-known threats. Posthumanist inquiries led toward binary complication because they ask questions about human definition while examining perceptions of existence and consciousness. Braidotti maintains that the posthuman is "not a rejection of the human, but transformation of the human that does not begin or end with the human" (Braidotti 47). She advocates posthumanist ideas through her book *The Posthuman* that opposes rules and boundaries of human subjectivity. According to this view humans need to move past traditional human-centered definitions of identity (Braidotti 89).

In *Autonomous*, an AI robot, Paladin is an exemplary character of this change. Paladin, though having non-human origin, has consciousness, autonomy and agency as well. When *Autonomous* is looked through the lenses of Posthumanism, we can see that the traditional notions of technologies as passive is challenged through AI characters. They are presented as autonomous posthuman agents with their own sense self and consciousness which illustrates Braidotti's idea of being more inclusive of both human and non-human beings and developing

non-hierarchical cognition of different agencies by decentering the human subjectivity (Braidotti 48).

4 | AI AND NEW MATERIALISMS

New Materialisms seeks to establish a restudy of relationships between humans together with non-humans and the natural world. The initial development of New Materialisms emerged through ideas presented by Karen Barad. Jane Bennett along with Bruno Latour examined how materiality actively contributes in shaping both human identity and life experiences. New Materialisms rejects traditional materialism that sees matter as inert by showing that material entities have an active quality apart from being static. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), Karen Barad also opines that matter is not just passive background in any matter, rather it is "agential" and is of utmost prominence in the shaping of reality (Barad 205). Barad, through the idea of "agential realism", is of the view that it is impossible to draw boundaries between human and non-human, subject and object as they are continuously altered and shaped in which matter plays a very crucial role (Barad 219). In *Autonomous* Paladin undergoes development from its original non-binary AI status into a character possessing specific gender. This scenario illustrates how material objects get influenced by societal pressures and turn towards shaping identity and reality at large. These interface changes are not limited to aesthetic design features of AI technology, rather it shows how society's pressure and environmental factors significantly matter in the discursive practices.

Jane Bennett also opines in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) that every matter, inclusive of AI, is having some undeniable "vibrancy" because of which it interrelates and influence the world and contributes in constructing realities as well (Bennett 3). Bennett focuses on the liveliness of unhuman beings which stands against the binaries of living and non-living things and looks at the world where all living and non-living things/matters have an agency of their own (Bennett 5). It is clearly evident in *Autonomous* that the AI characters, especially Paladin depicts this liveliness in formation and transformation of their milieu by being vibrant character on their own rather than being just a machine to be governed by others. This shows Newitz's development of AI characters as intricate and multifaceted self-sufficient beings having capacity to change the world they inhabit.

5 | POSTHUMANISM AND FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY

Posthumanism, as a theory, challenges conventional human-centered notions of humans as logical, independent and unchanging. In their writings N. Katherine Hayles and Donna Haraway challenge conventional anthropocentric views by deconstructing conventional human-technology divides. According to posthumanism in its broader sense, AI alongside technology and biotechnology shift the focus of creation away from human beings. Posthumanism points out that identity is always in a constant state of flux because it is shaped through our interactions with surrounding environments. The emergence of artificial intelligence and other posthuman elements conflicts with standard meanings of human nature together with explanations of "agency" and "identity".

Donna Haraway in her pivotal work, "A Cyborg Manifesto" offers a posthumanist concept of seeing human as a cyborg, an amalgam in which difference of human and non-human, nature and culture is unclear and distorted (Haraway 12). Through her of cyborg, she presents fluid transformations that disrupt timeless perception of identity to create a progressive view of complex and malleable self (Haraway 189). Newitz demonstrates this idea strongly through *Autonomous*. The way Paladin transforms its identity demonstrates Haraway's concept of posthumanist self in her research about interacting subjects and agents who evolve their identities through technological systems (Haraway 2).

N. Katherine Hayles with her prominent work, *How We Became Posthuman* supplements the standpoints of posthuman identity, investigating how cybernetics and developments in AI blur the limitations of human body, mind and consciousness (Hayles 3). Hayles maintains that posthumanism is a change from anthropocentric world view to a broader one that embraces intricate relations between technology and human beings (Hayles 287). Her views about dislocation of humans from the center of universe and blurring the boundaries between humans and non-humans, biological and technological are very vibrant in the novel as it envisions a future in which humans and AI characters(technology) live together, self and agencies are continuously transforming and growing and are of utmost importance in shaping realities around.

This integrated theoretical framework of AI, New Materialisms and Posthumanism strives to build a unified portrait of *Autonomous* and its AI and identity-related themes. The research examines complexities of human and non-human character in the novel using prevailing theoretical perspectives of Braidotti, Haraway, Barad and Bennett. *Autonomous* demonstrates how conventional anthropocentric views about identity, materiality and agency undergo transformation due to the technical blends between Artificial Intelligence and human characters which result in changes of both artificial and human identities.

6 | AI AND TECHNOLOGY IN *AUTONOMOUS*

The character Eliasz highlights issues of patent violences. In context of posthuman agencies, it probes enquiries on ethics of ownership and civil rights of intellectual assets. It shows how commercialization of life can raise issues of ethics and morality. By examining the notions of ownership in the ultra-capitalist society, the novel unveils how AI and technology can upset the traditional viewpoints of agency and possessions. The narrative also explores outcomes of technological developments, specifically in pharmacy field. Jack faces the consequences of her misdeeds as she travels across the world where the boundaries betwixt biological and technological entities become more and more blurred. The side effects of Zacuity serves the symbolism of how technological advancements impacts culture and society at large, focusing on how it can bring troublesome time which is a main theme in the discourse of AI and its implication in the technologically mediated world.

Throughout the narrative it examines the ethical problems of surveillance with power restrictions. The theme of control and autonomy in central throughout the novel. The novel introduces Paladin as an AI agent whose actions remain under external organization control

because of their restrictions. The image symbolizes extreme capitalist social control which determines societal conduct. In these same situations Jack also faces similar obstacles. The challenges occur for interior choices as they face external boundaries in such conditions. New technologies reveal their capability to control personal freedom whereas maintaining individual autonomy which produces complex ethical situations about their moral acceptance.

Multiple characters in the book demonstrate that technical progress creates dangerous scenarios while excessive dependence on technology generates adverse effects. Scientists and technologists should maintain strong moral responsibilities throughout their work activities according to the presented scenario. During his work shift Jack encounters a critical situation that results in a severe workplace incident. It demonstrates that unrestricted technological development presents safety hazards so safety needs to be valued equally with both well-being and ethical standards during invention. Artificial intelligence and technology create direct effects that the book shows on identity with the global community. Main characters experience demanding circumstances that combine technological elements with their personal identities as well as their residence locations. Similar situations arise when both artificial intelligence and human beings interact since both systems depend on cultural foundations to develop meaningful experiences. It tackles vital inquiries about how human beings view their internal selves and mental processes as well as evaluates brain-to-computer connectivity systems. Bob Broner functions as a literary character who exhibits the union between human beings and technology to disprove normal beliefs about human existence. Inside such situations we observe dual effects between human performance improvement and identity reduction in our digital environment according to notions of posthumanism which see identity reconstructing itself using technological interfaces.

7 | *AUTONOMOUS* THROUGH NEW MATERIALISMS

The novel begins as Fang engages in unlawful medicinal drug business using Zacuity that significantly boosts human work efficiency. The illegal transactions of Zacuity reveal how human needs encounter technological advancements. AI technologies work together to speed up black market operations resulting in ambiguous boundaries between moral and immoral practices. Through his illicit Zacuity drug dealing activities, Fang demonstrates the violent capitalist system which commodifies human experiences. This leads us to New Materialist thought and reveals how non-human agents have independent powers that determine reality as well as human experiences.

Throughout the novel, the author discloses the unlawful and infringing trafficking of stolen Zacuity which occurs exclusively on First Nations monetary properties. This part examines market and technological elements of the world to uncover the conditions that ultra-capitalist nations impose on their marginalized and excluded members. By studying the illicit Zacuity trade we understand how complicated interactions of human and artificial intelligence are. These elements affect commercial realities that aligns with New Materialist concepts explaining how our experiences and realities are shaped by matter. It describes how material conditions affect people through their exposure to pharmaceutical market activities.

The material technological impact motivates Krish to choose the termination of The Billious Pills pharmaceutical business. By taking these actions, he represents advocating of standards of well-being alongside mercantile responsibility in the industry. A moral and ethical approach in trade requires examination as per perspectives of New Materialisms on how humans interact with material objects. The characters form an alliance with Jack and Krish to battle traditional obstacles through their joint work which demonstrates New Materialist concepts about linked relationships. Just like New Materialism takes into account environmental observation, the novel demonstrates the relationship between space, individuality and technology through Jack's personal emotional conflict along with her external burdens.

8 | POSTHUMAN AGENCIES IN *AUTONOMOUS*

There are predicaments of moral obligations of scientific and technological practices motivated by money and manipulation. Speculations over Jack's past and the consequences of her actions leads readers to the conflict between moral obligations and technological advancements. This further leads to the posthumanist viewpoints by challenging anthropocentric notions of science, mirroring those non-human subjects also has agency of their own. They ought to be also counted in the dialogue of science as the narrative shows profoundly entwined lives of biological and mechanical entities urging us to ponder over the part science plays in this digital era.

The novel presents AI robot characters that display human emotional attributes to show the complicated distinction between artificial systems and human beings. Through their technological experiences, these characters enact a multisided approach to the understanding of identity and autonomy. Interfaces of Jack with AI bots show the difficulties of keeping human traits in situations where technology serves as a mediator. This is suggestive of posthumanist ideas on identity and shows how characters develop relationships with AI characters that display human traits. The concept of human network demonstrates both human and technological relationships. People within technological networks experience relations that strongly influence their personality development and behavioural choices. Identity is presented as dynamic nature as stated by posthumanist scholarship because biological and mechanical connections transform human characteristics through different interactions.

The text demonstrates how individuals possess more than one identity through its depiction. Jack and Krish struggle with different aspects of their self. The characters demonstrate posthumanist features of endless self-negotiation through the use of modern technological mediation. The novel depicts Paladin and other characters who embody posthumanist critiques against corporate control because they are shown as AI robots fighting to achieve independence from corporate restrictions. It uses Autonomy Key as a metaphoric symbol for characters who seek to break free from the control of extreme capitalist forces. Paladin and Eliasz plan to establish a residence on Mars because they want to eliminate corporate authority while Jack fights against extreme capitalist powers to establish her

independence. It shows how the posthumanist concept of independence emerges through these acts in the technologically advanced society.

9 | INTERSECTION OF AI, NEW MATERIALISMS AND POSTHUMAN AGENCIES IN *AUTONOMOUS*

The novel demonstrates how technology influences both human physical forms and personal identity. Black market distribution of the drug Zacuity provides Jack a way to sell his engineered version to people who cannot obtain it through the legal system. The selling of Zacuity illegally creates troubles for Jack yet the drug's presence propels posthumanist ideas that explore our evolving human identity beyond normative anthropocentrism because technology and substances force us to question the definition of humanity in a technologically advanced world. It also finds its parallel with New Materialisms showing how human and non-human things both contribute in constructing realities and human experiences.

In terms of New Materialism, there is interplay between reality and illusion, specifically in the matters where technology plays an active role in constructing realities and experiences of the characters. They experience simulated environments which aligns with posthumanist features showing how technology also plays a very crucial role in constructing realities around. Perspectives of AI, New Materialism and Posthumanism intersect as Jack goes through this lively yet illusional surroundings that encounters her perceptions of agency, identity and reality in the technologically mediated world.

The relationship between artificial intelligence along with technology and marketing techniques demonstrates their effects on both physical realities and social dynamics of people leading to posthumanist critique of consumer culture and its capacity to modify experiences and realities. New Materialist thinking about reality construction becomes evident throughout the text because of Jack's advertising tactics that distort character identities in consumer markets.

10 | CONCLUSION

Through its narrative structure Newitz's *Autonomous* illustrates the combination of AI, New Materialisms and Posthumanism views. Overall, the narrative combines the different tenants of these frameworks when it reveals Paladin and Fang with Eliasz and Jack while demonstrating technological effects that continuously alter identity definitions and machine distinctions. The novel displays how technology along with artificial intelligence transforms human reality while delivering morally complex results. When biological systems operate alongside mechanical ones it leads to a fundamental test of our core world understanding related to moral responsibilities. New Materialist principles emphasize the continuous reshaping effect of inter-actions on both realities and environments because they show that understanding relations of human and non-human entity remains paramount in our technologically advanced societies.

WORKS CITED

Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Duke University Press, 2006.

Barad, Karen. "Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter." *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 28.3 (2003): 801-831.

Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Polity Press, 2013.

Demir, Yağmur Sönmez. "Gendering Robotic Bodies in Ian McEwan's Machines Like Me and Annalee Newitz's Autonomous." *Cankaya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 17.2 (2023): 274-286.

Ferrando, Francesca. *Philosophical Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury, 2019.

Gomel, Elana. "Science (fiction) and posthuman ethics: Redefining the human." *The European Legacy* 16.3 (2011): 339-354.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991, pp. 149–181.

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman*. 74th ed., University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Newitz, Annalee. *Autonomous*. Tor Books, 2017.

Nouari, Wafa, Samia Mouas, and Hraki Mohamed El Amine. "The Portrayal of the Posthuman Self Through Narrative Techniques: A Comparative Analysis in Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun and Newitz's Autonomous." *Midad Al-Adab Refereed Journal* 1. English Department Confrence (2024).

Romero, María Torres. "Encountering the Machine: Towards a Posthumanist Ethics and Relational Moral Paradigm in Ian Mcewan's" Machines Like Me"." *Journal of English Studies* 22 (2024): 299-319.