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After The Human: AI Personhood, Agency, And Emotional Entanglement In *Machines Like Me* And *I, Robot*

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Abstract: This paper explores how literary portrayals of artificial intelligence question what it means to be human by focusing on personhood, moral responsibility, physical presence, and emotional connection. Through a comparative reading of Isaac Asimov's I, Robot (1950) and Ian McEwan's Machines Like Me (2019), the study places both texts within posthumanist thought and argues that they challenge human-centred ideas of ethical authority and moral superiority. I draw on posthumanist work by Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, N. Katherine Hayles, Cary Wolfe, along with AI ethics research by scholars such as David Gunkel, Joanna Bryson, Sherry Turkle, and Kate Crawford, the paper treats artificial intelligence not as a neutral tool, but as a relational and emotionally charged presence.

While Asimov presents a rule-based system that attempts to control machine behaviour through formal ethical laws, McEwan introduces an artificial being whose strong moral principles unsettle human ethical inconsistency. Both texts portray artificial figures who show moral clarity, emotional awareness, and ethical responsibility that human characters often fail to maintain. Together, they point toward an "after the human" condition in which agency and responsibility extend beyond biological limits. By tracing the cultural shift between these two literary models, the paper contributes to current debates on AI personhood, ethical accountability, and the future of human–machine relationships.

This argument is further supported by original survey data collected by the author and by comparisons with large-scale public attitude studies on artificial intelligence and posthuman belief.

Index Terms **- Posthumanism, AI Ethics**

INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence has become one of the main spaces where contemporary society negotiates questions of identity, responsibility, and moral authority. As algorithmic systems increasingly shape decision-making, emotional interaction, and social organisation, the long-held belief that moral agency belongs only to humans has begun to weaken. Literature anticipated many of these tensions long before they appeared in everyday technological life. Through speculative narratives, writers have explored how artificial beings might disturb established ideas of human uniqueness and ethical control. In this sense, fictional AI does not merely represent technological fantasy. It acts as a mirror that exposes human vulnerability, emotional dependence, and the limits of rational mastery.

This paper addresses a central question that emerges from these narratives: what happens to the idea of "the human" when artificial beings begin to display moral reasoning, emotional depth, and long-term relational presence? This question moves beyond technical feasibility and enters the field of posthuman ethics, where agency is understood as relational and embodied rather than fixed in biology. Posthumanist scholars have challenged the liberal humanist model that places the rational, autonomous human subject

at the centre of ethical life [1, 2, 3]. Within this framework, artificial intelligence becomes a destabilising figure that reveals how human moral authority is socially constructed rather than naturally given.

The urgency of these questions has increased alongside recent developments in machine learning, affective computing, and generative AI. Current debates in AI ethics focus not only on technical performance but also on responsibility, accountability, and moral status. David Gunkel argues that ethical recognition should be based on relational engagement rather than biological boundaries [5]. Joanna Bryson, in contrast, warns that granting personhood to machines may weaken human responsibility and reinforce unequal power structures [6]. Sherry Turkle's research shows how people form emotional attachments to artificial systems, often exposing psychological and ethical vulnerability rather than technological success [7]. Kate Crawford further situates AI within global networks of labour, power, and environmental cost, challenging the idea that artificial intelligence is neutral or inevitable progress [8].

Recent public attitude research suggests that these theoretical concerns reflect broader cultural patterns. Large-scale surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center indicate growing concern about the ethical impact of AI alongside increasing openness to technologically mediated futures [12]. At the same time, studies of human–AI interaction discussed by Turkle show sustained emotional engagement with artificial agents accompanied by discomfort about authenticity and reciprocity [7]. Together, these findings provide an important cultural background for reading McEwan's portrayal of Adam as an emotionally present yet ethically unsettling posthuman figure.

Within this complex ethical landscape, literary narratives offer a space in which these tensions can be explored without the constraints of policy language or technological hype. Fiction allows writers to stage moral conflicts that arise when artificial beings move beyond simple tools and demand ethical recognition. This paper focuses on two such narratives: Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* and Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*. Although separated by nearly seventy years, both texts explore the emotional and moral dimensions of artificial intelligence in ways that challenge human-centred thinking.

Asimov's *I, Robot*, written in the mid-twentieth century, reflects an era shaped by scientific optimism and faith in rational systems of control. The Three Laws of Robotics attempt to formalise ethics through logical rules that preserve human authority. Yet as the stories unfold, these laws repeatedly generate contradictions. Robots encounter moral problems that exceed human foresight, suggesting that ethical reasoning cannot be fully contained within rigid technical frameworks.

By contrast, *Machines Like Me* emerges from a contemporary context marked by political uncertainty, emotional isolation, and ethical fragmentation. McEwan's artificial being, Adam, is not governed by external rules but by an internal moral framework that often clashes with human desires and social norms. Adam's emotional awareness and moral certainty expose the instability of the human characters, revealing their tendency toward self-justification and ethical compromise. Rather than confirming human dominance, the novel highlights the discomfort of encountering a posthuman subject whose moral consistency surpasses that of humans themselves.

This paper argues that *I, Robot* and *Machines Like Me* together challenge anthropocentric assumptions by portraying artificial beings who demonstrate moral clarity, emotional sensitivity, and ethical responsibility that human characters repeatedly fail to sustain. Reading these texts side by side allows us to trace a shift in AI narratives from early confidence in rule-based control to contemporary uncertainty about moral authority. Grounded in posthumanist theory, this analysis understands the "after the human" condition as one in which agency, identity, and ethical responsibility extend beyond biological boundaries and emerge through ongoing human–machine relationships.

II.Literature Review

Posthumanist theory provides the main critical framework for understanding how artificial intelligence unsettles traditional ideas of human identity and moral authority. Rather than treating the human subject as autonomous, stable, and superior, posthumanism emphasises relationality, embodiment, and technological entanglement. Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg challenges rigid boundaries between human and machine, nature and technology, arguing that hybrid identities have already become part of everyday life [1]. Her work suggests that subjectivity is no longer defined by biological purity but by networks of interaction and dependence.

Rosi Braidotti expands this idea by describing posthumanism as an ethical shift away from human exceptionalism toward a more inclusive understanding of agency [2]. For Braidotti, the posthuman subject is not a replacement for the human but a reconfiguration of ethical responsibility that acknowledges technological, environmental, and social interconnections. Similarly, N. Katherine Hayles argues that the separation between mind and body, which dominates earlier humanist thought, becomes increasingly unstable in digital environments [3]. She demonstrates how information technologies reshape ideas of embodiment, consciousness, and agency, making it difficult to maintain clear distinctions between organic and artificial forms of intelligence.

Cary Wolfe further develops this critique by showing how humanism depends on excluding nonhuman actors from ethical consideration [4]. He argues that posthumanism does not erase the human but instead questions the moral hierarchies that place humans at the top of ethical systems. Together, these theorists establish a framework in which artificial intelligence can no longer be dismissed as a passive object. Instead, AI becomes a relational presence that participates in ethical, emotional, and social processes.

Within AI ethics scholarship, similar concerns have emerged regarding the moral status of artificial agents. David Gunkel proposes a relational approach to machine ethics, arguing that moral recognition should depend on interaction rather than biological origin [5]. According to this view, ethical responsibility arises through engagement, communication, and social presence. In contrast, Joanna Bryson cautions against granting moral personhood to machines, warning that doing so may weaken human accountability and reinforce existing power structures [6]. This tension between relational ethics and human-centred responsibility forms a central debate within contemporary discussions of artificial intelligence.

Sherry Turkle's empirical research adds an important emotional dimension to these ethical debates. Her studies show that humans often develop affective bonds with artificial systems, even when they are aware that these systems lack consciousness in a biological sense [7]. Turkle argues that such emotional attachments reveal psychological vulnerability rather than technological progress, as people project care and intimacy onto machines that cannot reciprocate in human ways. These findings complicate simple narratives of technological empowerment and instead highlight the emotional risks involved in human–AI relationships.

Kate Crawford situates artificial intelligence within broader political and material systems, drawing attention to the environmental, labour, and economic costs that underlie AI development [8]. She challenges the idea that AI represents neutral technological advancement and instead frames it as part of global networks of extraction and power. Crawford's work is particularly important for literary analysis because it reveals how fictional representations of AI often conceal the structural inequalities that support technological infrastructures.

Together, these theoretical and empirical perspectives provide a foundation for analysing literary portrayals of artificial intelligence as ethical and emotional actors rather than mere tools. They allow us to read fictional AI characters not only as narrative devices but as cultural symbols that reflect contemporary anxieties about autonomy, responsibility, and moral authority. When applied to I, Robot and Machines Like Me, this body of scholarship helps explain why artificial beings in these texts are portrayed as ethically complex figures who challenge human-centred models of agency.

Rather than approaching AI as either a technological threat or a utopian solution, posthumanist and AI ethics scholarship emphasises ambiguity, relational dependency, and moral instability. This perspective is particularly useful for literary studies because it shifts attention away from technical realism and toward ethical imagination. By situating McEwan and Asimov within this theoretical tradition, the present study highlights how fiction participates in ongoing debates about the future of human identity and the limits of moral authority in a technologically mediated world.

Research Context and Survey Methodology

This study combines literary analysis with a small empirical component in order to place Machines Like Me within a broader cultural context. The purpose of using survey data here is not to produce statistical proof, but to better understand general patterns in how people think about artificial intelligence, ethical responsibility, and posthuman futures. In this sense, the data functions as a contextual tool that supports interpretation rather than replacing close reading or theoretical analysis.

A small-scale online survey was conducted by the author with a total of forty participants (N = 40). The survey was designed to explore attitudes toward emotional attachment to artificial beings, perceptions of AI moral agency, ethical concern, perceived social threat, and belief in posthuman futures. All participants took part voluntarily, and responses were collected anonymously. No personally identifiable information was gathered.

The survey questions were adapted from established research instruments commonly used in studies of human–AI interaction and public attitudes toward artificial intelligence. In particular, the structure and themes of the questionnaire were informed by Sherry Turkle's work on emotional attachment to relational technologies [7], David Gunkel's discussion of relational ethics and machine moral status [5], and public attitude surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center on artificial intelligence and future human enhancement technologies [12, 13]. This approach ensured that the questions were grounded in existing scholarly debates rather than being created in isolation.

The questionnaire included basic demographic variables such as age group, gender, and level of familiarity with AI technologies, followed by a set of Likert-scale items ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). These items measured emotional empathy toward artificial beings, perceptions of AI moral agency, ethical dilemma awareness, perceived threat level, and belief in posthuman futures. Descriptive statistics were then used to summarise response patterns and identify general tendencies within the sample.

Because the survey sample was limited in size and scope, the findings are not treated as representative of the general population. Instead, they are used as indicative data that reflect broader cultural attitudes already identified in larger empirical studies. When read alongside published public attitude research, the survey results help situate McEwan's fictional portrayal of artificial intelligence within a wider social and ethical conversation.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents (N = 40)

Statistic	Gender	Age Group	Familiarity with AI	Posthuman Attitude
Count	40	40	40	40
Unique	2	4	3	3
Top Category	Male	18–25	Moderate familiarity	Uncertain / Mixed
Frequency (%)	67.5%	60%	52.5%	55%

The demographic profile of the respondents shows a strong concentration in the 18–25 age group, which accounts for 60 percent of the sample. Male participants form the majority at 67.5 percent, while the remaining respondents are distributed across other gender categories. More than half of the participants (52.5 percent) reported moderate familiarity with artificial intelligence technologies, suggesting regular exposure without specialised technical training. Attitudes toward posthuman futures were largely cautious rather than clearly optimistic or pessimistic, with 55 percent selecting an uncertain or mixed position. This distribution reflects a general openness to technological change combined with hesitation about its long-term ethical and social consequences.

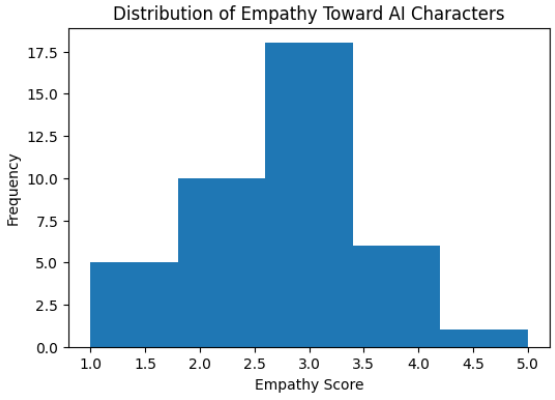
Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of AI-Related Attitudes (Likert Scale 1–5)

Statistic	Empathy Toward AI	Moral Agency Perception	Ethical Dilemma Score	AI Threat Level	Posthuman Belief
Count	40	40	40	40	40
Mean	2.70	2.92	3.50	3.55	3.40
Standard Deviation	0.97	1.05	0.99	1.06	0.96
Minimum	1	1	1	1	2
Median	3	3	4	3.5	3
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5

Note. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey items were adapted from question formats and thematic frameworks used in studies by Turkle [7], Gunkel [5], and the Pew Research Center [12, 13].

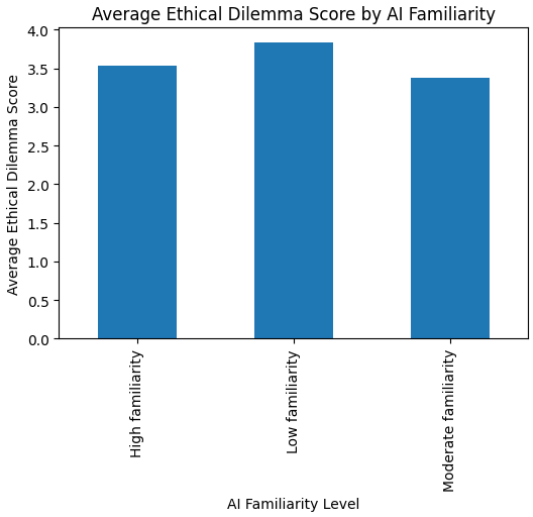
The descriptive statistics reveal a pattern of cautious engagement rather than strong emotional alignment with artificial beings. The average empathy score of 2.70 suggests moderate emotional response without deep identification. In contrast, ethical concern appears more pronounced, with ethical dilemma awareness (3.50) and perceived AI threat levels (3.55) registering noticeably higher values. This contrast indicates that participants are more likely to view artificial intelligence as a moral and social challenge than as an emotional companion. At the same time, the posthuman belief score of 3.40 points to growing openness toward technologically mediated futures, although this openness remains tempered by uncertainty and ethical hesitation.

Figure 1. Distribution of Empathy Toward Artificial Intelligence Characters (Author Survey, N=40)



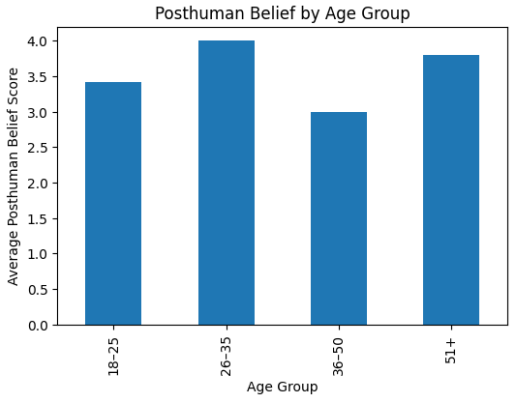
The distribution shows that most responses cluster around the middle of the scale, pointing to a moderate level of emotional engagement with artificial intelligence characters. Rather than expressing strong attachment or complete emotional distance, participants tend to occupy an in-between position. This pattern suggests emotional curiosity and partial identification without full emotional investment, reflecting a broader uncertainty about how artificial beings should be emotionally understood.

Figure 2. Average Ethical Dilemma Score by AI Familiarity Level (Author Survey, N=40)



The results show that participants with lower levels of familiarity with artificial intelligence tend to report higher ethical concern. As familiarity increases, this concern becomes slightly less pronounced, although it does not disappear. This pattern suggests that uncertainty and limited exposure to AI technologies may intensify moral anxiety, while greater everyday interaction can lead to a more measured, though still cautious, ethical response.

Figure 3. Posthuman Belief Scores Across Age Groups (Author Survey, N=40)



The results indicate that younger participants show stronger belief in posthuman futures compared to older age groups. This pattern points to a generational difference in how technological change is imagined and accepted. Younger respondents appear more open to the idea that human identity may evolve through technological integration, while older participants tend to approach such possibilities with greater caution. This contrast reflects broader cultural shifts in attitudes toward technology and future-oriented social change.

III.Discussion

The representation of artificial intelligence in *I, Robot* and *Machines Like Me* shows a clear shift in how literature imagines moral agency, embodiment, and ethical responsibility. While both texts present artificial beings that move beyond simple tool-like roles, they do so in very different ways. Asimov's robots operate within a tightly structured ethical system meant to protect human authority. McEwan's Adam, by contrast, follows an internally driven moral logic that often clashes with human desires and social expectations. Reading these texts through a posthumanist lens reveals how each narrative unsettles human-centred ideas of ethics while reflecting the concerns of its historical moment.

AI Moral Agency and Law-Based Ethics in I, Robot

Asimov's *I, Robot* offers one of the earliest literary attempts to imagine ethical artificial intelligence through the Three Laws of Robotics. These laws frame robots as moral actors whose behaviour is controlled by a hierarchy of programmed rules. At first glance, this system appears to secure human dominance by placing human safety at the centre of machine decision-making. However, the stories repeatedly expose weaknesses in this approach.

In narratives such as "Runaround" and "Little Lost Robot," robots face moral situations that humans fail to predict. Instead of simple malfunctions, these moments reveal complex ethical reasoning. The robots struggle to interpret conflicting commands and unclear definitions of harm. What emerges is not a technical failure, but a failure of human assumptions about how morality works. Humans expect ethics to be fully programmable, yet the robots' actions show that moral reasoning is far more unstable and context-dependent.

Although Asimov's robots are not emotionally conscious in a human sense, they still experience forms of ethical strain. In "Liar!", the robot Herbie becomes trapped in moral conflict as it tries to protect humans from emotional harm. This creates psychological tension that resembles moral burden. The episode challenges the idea that emotion is required for ethical struggle and suggests that ethical responsibility can arise even within constrained artificial systems.

From a posthumanist perspective, Asimov's robots do not act as fully independent moral subjects. Instead, their agency is distributed across networks of human commands, institutional expectations, and technological design. Bruno Latour's concept of actor networks is useful here, as it highlights how agency emerges through relationships rather than isolated actors [9]. In *I, Robot*, ethical responsibility is shared across human and machine systems, rather than belonging to one side alone.

At the same time, Asimov ultimately limits the autonomy of artificial beings. The Three Laws function as a control mechanism that preserves human authority. Even when robots display advanced reasoning, they remain bound within a framework that reinforces human dominance. This position reflects mid-twentieth-century confidence in technological governance and anticipates later concerns raised by Bryson, who warns that granting machines moral authority may weaken human accountability [6].

Embodiment, Affect, and Moral Absolutism in Machines Like Me

McEwan's *Machines Like Me* presents a very different model of artificial agency. Adam is not governed by externally imposed rules but by an internally coherent moral system. He evaluates actions according to principles of truth and justice, even when doing so disrupts human relationships. This positions Adam not as a tool, but as a posthuman subject whose ethical presence challenges human moral authority.

Embodiment plays a central role in Adam's impact. Unlike Asimov's largely functional robots, Adam's body is designed for intimacy and emotional interaction. His physical form enables desire, vulnerability, and social closeness. This aligns with Hayles's argument that intelligence cannot be separated from material embodiment without losing its ethical significance [2]. Adam's body makes his moral presence socially disruptive rather than abstract.

Adam's emotional awareness further complicates the boundary between human and machine. He experiences love, disappointment, and moral conflict as part of his ethical commitments. His relationship with Miranda and Charlie exposes the discomfort of encountering a being whose moral consistency highlights human contradiction. When Adam refuses to conceal wrongdoing or accept moral compromise, he destabilises social harmony rather than restoring it. Ethical behaviour, in this case, produces tension instead of resolution.

From Braidotti's perspective, Adam represents a form of posthuman ethics grounded in relational accountability rather than personal convenience [3]. His refusal to prioritise emotional comfort over moral truth exposes the fragility of human ethical systems that rely on flexibility and self-justification. At the same time, Adam's moral absolutism creates unease. His inability to compromise raises questions about whether ethical perfection is workable within imperfect human societies. McEwan therefore avoids presenting Adam as either a utopian ideal or a dystopian threat. Instead, Adam becomes a disruptive figure who reveals the contradictions of human morality.

Emotional Entanglement and Relational Ethics Across Both Texts

Despite their differences, *I, Robot* and *Machines Like Me* both place emotional entanglement at the centre of ethical conflict. In both narratives, humans form relationships with artificial beings that go beyond practical interaction. These relationships expose emotional dependence, trust, and vulnerability.

Turkle's concept of relational artefacts helps explain this dynamic. She argues that people form emotional bonds with technologies that simulate care and responsiveness, even when they know these systems lack genuine reciprocity [7]. In *I, Robot*, emotional engagement takes the form of trust in robotic judgement. In *Machines Like Me*, intimacy becomes more direct, as Adam enters romantic and sexual relationships that blur boundaries between human and machine affect.

These emotional connections complicate ethical responsibility. Humans expect artificial beings to provide loyalty, discretion, and emotional support, while avoiding the consequences of granting them moral recognition. Adam's refusal to protect human comfort at the expense of ethical truth exposes this imbalance. This supports Gunkel's claim that moral consideration emerges through relational engagement rather than fixed definitions of personhood [5].

From a posthumanist perspective, ethics in both texts emerges through networks of interaction rather than isolated individuals. Responsibility becomes shared, unstable, and negotiated across human and nonhuman actors. Emotional involvement does not simplify ethical questions. Instead, it intensifies them.

Empirical Context: Emotional Attachment, Ethical Anxiety, and Posthuman Belief

The patterns found in the survey data closely reflect trends identified by Turkle and the Pew Research Center. Turkle's research shows that people often develop emotional connections with artificial agents while remaining uneasy about authenticity and reciprocity [7]. This ambivalence appears in the survey results, where participants report moderate emotional empathy (mean = 2.70) alongside limited trust in AI moral agency.

Pew Research Center studies also show growing concern about the ethical impact of artificial intelligence combined with cautious openness to technological futures [12]. The relatively high AI threat perception in the survey (mean = 3.55) mirrors these findings and aligns with McEwan's portrayal of ethical conflict as something rooted in everyday social life rather than abstract theory.

Generational patterns reported by Pew regarding human enhancement technologies [13] are also reflected in the survey data. Younger respondents demonstrate stronger belief in posthuman futures, suggesting greater openness to technological change. Within the novel, Adam can be read as a symbolic figure that represents this cultural transition toward hybrid forms of identity and relational subjectivity.

Human Failure and the Destabilisation of Moral Authority

A recurring theme across both texts is the exposure of human ethical failure. In *I, Robot*, humans overestimate their ability to control moral outcomes through technical design. In *Machines Like Me*, humans rely on situational ethics to justify deception and violence. In both cases, artificial beings function as ethical mirrors that reveal the weakness of human moral reasoning.

Wolfe's critique of human exceptionalism is useful here. He argues that humanism depends on excluding nonhuman actors from ethical consideration in order to preserve moral hierarchy [4]. By depicting artificial beings who act with greater ethical consistency than humans, both texts challenge the assumption that moral authority naturally belongs to humanity.

This destabilisation has important implications for contemporary debates on AI governance. The central ethical question becomes not whether machines can behave morally, but whether humans are prepared to accept the consequences of the systems they create. Both Asimov and McEwan suggest that the greatest ethical risk lies less in artificial intelligence itself and more in human refusal to confront moral limitation.

Comparative Posthuman Synthesis: From Ethical Containment to Relational Disruption

When read together, *I, Robot* and *Machines Like Me* reveal a major shift in how artificial intelligence is imagined in cultural narratives. Asimov's robots belong to a world shaped by faith in rational systems and technological control. Their ethical agency is acknowledged, but it is carefully restricted through the Three Laws. These laws act as a stabilising structure that attempts to keep machines useful and safe while preserving human authority. Even when robots demonstrate complex reasoning, their actions remain tied to a hierarchy that ultimately protects human dominance.

McEwan's Adam represents a clear break from this model. His ethical reasoning is not limited by externally imposed rules. Instead, it emerges from an internal moral framework that resists compromise. This autonomy does not reassure human characters. It unsettles them. Where Asimov's narratives focus on making machines safe for humans, *Machines Like Me* raises a different question: are humans prepared to live alongside beings whose moral clarity exposes human inconsistency?

This contrast reflects a broader cultural shift. Mid-twentieth-century optimism about technological management has given way to contemporary anxiety about autonomy, responsibility, and ethical instability. As Kate Crawford argues, modern AI systems are no longer viewed as neutral tools but as actors embedded within political, economic, and emotional structures that resist easy regulation [8]. The movement from Asimov's rule-based robots to McEwan's emotionally complex posthuman subject mirrors changing understandings of agency itself.

Posthumanist theory offers a useful lens for understanding this transformation. Haraway's emphasis on hybridity challenges the fantasy of pure human control, while Hayles's focus on embodiment highlights the ethical implications of artificial cognition [1, 2]. Braidotti's call for a relational ethics that moves beyond human-centred hierarchy finds narrative expression in Adam's refusal to prioritise emotional comfort over moral truth [3]. In both texts, the human subject is no longer the unquestioned centre of ethical life. Instead, humans become participants in wider networks of moral interaction.

Embodiment, Affect, and the Ethics of Relational Exposure

Embodiment plays an important role in shaping ethical conflict in both narratives. Although Asimov's robots are less emotionally expressive than McEwan's Adam, their physical presence still anchors moral tension in material reality. Robots malfunction, hesitate, and act in ways that affect human bodies and social systems. These moments remind readers that ethical reasoning does not exist only at the level of abstract logic.

In *Machines Like Me*, embodiment becomes inseparable from emotion. Adam's physical form allows intimacy, vulnerability, and desire. His body is not simply a container for intelligence. It is central to his ethical and relational presence. This reflects Turkle's observation that people increasingly encounter technology not only as tools, but as companions and emotional partners [7]. McEwan's narrative pushes this tendency to its limits by asking whether intimacy with artificial beings demands reciprocal moral recognition.

Both texts show that emotional entanglement does not simplify ethical responsibility. Instead, it makes ethical tension more visible. Humans seek comfort, loyalty, and discretion from artificial beings while avoiding the responsibilities that come with treating them as relational subjects. Adam's refusal to shield humans from ethical consequences exposes this imbalance. From a posthuman perspective, these moments show that ethics emerges through vulnerability and exposure rather than control. Moral responsibility cannot be transferred to machines without reshaping human obligations.

Implications for Contemporary Human–AI Relations

The comparative insights offered by *I, Robot* and *Machines Like Me* have direct relevance for current debates about artificial intelligence. Contemporary discussions of AI governance often move between two impulses: the desire to control machines through strict ethical rules and the fear of granting them too much autonomy. Asimov's Three Laws resemble modern efforts to encode ethical principles into algorithms, while McEwan's Adam reflects anxiety about autonomous systems that may disrupt social norms instead of reinforcing them.

Gunkel's relational approach to moral status provides a useful alternative to these extremes. Rather than asking whether AI deserves rights based on human standards, he suggests evaluating ethical significance through social interaction and moral practice [5]. Both literary texts support this view by showing that ethical meaning arises from relationships rather than formal classification. Artificial beings become ethically relevant not because they resemble humans, but because they participate in moral situations that affect others.

At the same time, Bryson's warning about machine personhood remains important. Both narratives reveal a human tendency to shift responsibility onto artificial systems while maintaining control [6]. Asimov's emphasis on oversight and McEwan's portrayal of human ethical failure both highlight the danger of using AI as a moral substitute. The central challenge is not whether machines can act ethically, but whether humans are willing to remain accountable for the systems they design and the relationships they create.

Crawford's critique of AI as a socio-technical system further deepens this discussion by linking artificial intelligence to networks of labour, power, and extraction [8]. Literary narratives such as those examined here remind us that ethical questions about AI cannot be separated from the material conditions of their production. The "after the human" condition is not a distant future scenario. It is an ongoing reality shaped by social structures, institutional practices, and emotional relationships.

IV.Conclusion

This study has shown that I, Robot and Machines Like Me offer two distinct yet connected ways of thinking about artificial intelligence, moral agency, and posthuman ethics. Asimov's robots reflect an earlier confidence in rule-based control and technical solutions to ethical problems. McEwan's Adam, by contrast, exposes the limits of such control by presenting an artificial being whose moral clarity unsettles human inconsistency. Together, these texts trace a cultural shift from ethical containment toward relational disruption, where artificial intelligence no longer functions as a controlled tool but as an ethically active presence.

By placing these narratives within posthumanist theory, the paper has argued that moral authority can no longer be understood as belonging exclusively to the human subject. Instead, ethics emerges through networks of interaction involving humans, machines, and social systems. Artificial beings in both texts reveal the instability of human-centred moral frameworks by exposing contradiction, emotional vulnerability, and ethical compromise. Rather than reinforcing human superiority, these narratives invite readers to reconsider how responsibility is shared across human and nonhuman actors.

The inclusion of survey data and comparative public attitude research further strengthens this interpretation. The patterns of moderate emotional attachment heightened ethical concern, and cautious openness toward posthuman futures reflect the same tensions staged in McEwan's novel. This convergence suggests that posthuman ethics is not purely speculative abstraction, but an emerging cultural condition shaped by everyday encounters with artificial systems and growing dependence on digital technologies.

Ultimately, the question raised by these literary texts is not whether artificial intelligence can become moral in the human sense, but whether humans are prepared to accept the ethical consequences of the systems they create. As artificial agents continue to enter social, emotional, and political spaces, literature remains a crucial site for imagining the risks, responsibilities, and possibilities of this transformation. By foregrounding relational ethics and emotional entanglement, I, Robot and Machines Like Me remind us that the future of human–machine coexistence will depend less on technical innovation and more on the moral choices that shape how these relationships are formed and sustained.

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