Nicole Pina

ENGL 433

Professor Wai Chee Dimock

October 25, 2017

Gender and Artificial Intelligence in *Galatea 2.2*

**Relationship between *Galatea 2.2* and Posthuman Criticism:**

1. Katherine Hayles, a well-known literary critic, discusses in, *How We Became Posthuman*, the concept of the posthuman which prioritizes information over the material, but unlike cybernetic theory, acknowledges that information can only exist if recognized or contained.
   1. So, if the flesh or substrate is important, and the way we classify or attempt to control it matters as well.
2. While discussing the idea of materiality, brings up *Galatea 2.2.* 
   * 1. Humans – “First comes embodied materiality,” then interactions w/ others, then language (263).
     2. In Helen’s case, this process is reversed, “Language comes first” (263), as she lacks the senses and materiality of humans.
     3. Helen does not have a body, but why does the text decide to assign her a gender?
        1. He had just read to her, “What are little boys made of?” a nursery rhyme.
        2. Richard telling her that she is a girl when she asks what her gender is, “I should have seen. Even ungrounded intelligence had to grow self-aware eventually. To grab what it needed.” (179).
        3. Richard acknowledges that nursery rhymes and the messages they convey are an “parasitic inheritance,” a reference to Lentz’s claim that “memory is a parasite…It opportunistically used perception’s circuitry for its playback theatre” (83). Literature and language might be implicit in the parasitic nature of memory.
3. Artificial intelligence has often been gendered in pop culture
   1. Examples: *Ex Machina*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Siri.
   2. Artificial intelligence has connotation of sex, service and power dynamics in which the creator masters its creation. These ideas are compatible with traditional notions of gender roles.

**Gender in Language and Literature: Pygmalion and *Galatea 2.2***

1. The book’s title is a reference to Galatea, the sculpture created by Pygmalion in Greek Mythology.
2. Galatea is an embodiment of Pygmalion’s desires and idealizations of the female form.
   1. Does she possess agency?
   2. In original myth, she is only an object “brought to life” by Pygmalion in order to serve as his companion.
3. Many female characters in the *Galatea 2.2* are used in sometimes exploitative or objectifying ways in order to provide a service or advance an agenda for Richard or other male characters.
4. C.
   1. Like Helen, C. is also used for Richard’s writing career.
      1. He uses C.’s life and ancestry as material for a book he eventually publishes, leading to his success as an author (104).
      2. “That comfort she had shown me at the Quad—the internal calm I loved and built my own on—was dread. Paralysis. Her crumpled, engaging smile had never been more than sheer terror” (279).
5. A.
   1. A., unwilling to follow in C.’s footsteps, rebels against Richards illusions.
   2. When he confesses his love, and feels inspired as author by his affection for her, “writing…a vast, improbable fantasy for her” (315). However, A. immediately rejects him.
6. Helen
   1. Like Galatea, Helen is controlled by male entities.
   2. Richard is the instructor, has some domain over Helen’s informational development.
   3. Lentz has power over her material composition (302), though he never recognizes her as something more than machine: “She associates. She matches patterns. She makes ordered pairs. That’s not consciousness. Trust me. I built her” (274).
   4. Helen is mean to be a manifestation of male desires, often serving as a reflection of the women Richard also attempted to shape in the past.
      1. Up until she is given a name, Helen and her predecessors are named after letters, as are C. and A.
      2. Richard shows a picture of C. to Helen when she asks him what she looks like (300).
   5. Richard gives Helen texts that reinforce his own humanist philosophies, giving her traditionally male texts in his attempt to grant her consciousness and replicate his experience as a student.
      1. A.’s criticism his use of the traditional English canon, asking, “Whose English? Some eighty-year-old’s Oxbridge pederasts?” (285).
      2. Hayles points out that liberal humanism has traditionally been constructed as the “European male” (4).
   6. Even as Richard gets to see Helen as a person, he still continues to use her for his own gain.
      1. Using Helen to woe A. (283).
      2. Richard and Helen face the same philosophical crisis, but only he prevails, Helen needing to die in order for Richard to feel inspired enough to write again (324).
         1. Both Helen and Richard are being manipulated by Lentz in his quest to achieve an artificially intelligent being that can simulate human-like consciousness (318).
         2. Both face similar disillusionment; “Helen had discovered what had killed fiction for me” (319).
      3. Alternative interpretation: One may see Helen’s death and refusal to properly take exam as an attempt to rebel against Lentz and Richard’s ambitions.

**Conclusion**

As an entity that straddles the line between human and machine, Helen’s assigned gender as well as her status as a nonhuman object place her in a position of servitude, in which she is used and molded by Richard—and perhaps the novel—in an attempt to make a statement about what defines the human and humanity’s relationship with literature, language, and memory.