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**Betrayal, Control, and Posthuman Identity in Sarah Gailey's *The Echo Wife* and
Brian McLaren's *We Are All Machine***

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Abstract

This paper explores betrayal, control, and posthuman identity in Sarah Gailey's *The Echo Wife* and Brian McLaren's *We Are All Machine*. Literature reflects human emotions, moral dilemmas, and societal challenges, while Posthumanist theory examines how technology and systems blur the line between humans and machines. In *The Echo Wife*, Evelyn Caldwell experiences intimate betrayal when her husband creates a clone of her, challenging her autonomy and ethical judgment. *We Are All Machine* shows societal betrayal where technology dictates behavior, limiting freedom and moral responsibility. Applying theorists such as Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Rosi Braidotti, this paper examines how Posthumanist ideas are reflected in literature and their relevance to modern ethical and technological concerns. It emphasizes literature's role in fostering moral reflection, ethical awareness, and human-centered strategies for navigating posthuman realities.

Keywords: *Posthumanism, Betrayal, Control, Literature, Identities*

Literature acts as a mirror to human life, reflecting emotions, choices, and ethical dilemmas. Posthumanist literature extends this by revealing how technology, cloning, and systems challenge identity and freedom. Posthumanism investigates human-machine integration, moral responsibility, and the consequences of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and automation (Hayles 5). Sarah Gailey's *The Echo Wife* and Brian McLaren's *We Are All Machine* explore betrayal and control, whether personal or systemic, highlighting how humans are shaped and constrained by technological influence. In *The Echo Wife*, betrayal is within the home and intimate. Evelyn's sense of self is shaken when she learns about a clone of herself. In *We Are All Machine*, betrayal is societal, with humans unknowingly following routines programmed by technology. Despite these differences, both novels focus on the tension between human agency and technological influence. Through these narratives, Posthumanist literature helps readers understand contemporary ethical dilemmas and the moral challenges of living in technologically mediated worlds. Evelyn Caldwell experiences personal betrayal when her husband secretly creates Martine, a clone of herself.

Martine was not just a copy of me. She had my voice, my gestures, the way I tilted my head when I was thinking, but she moved through the world with a certainty I never had. She could charm, manipulate, and act without hesitation. I watched her and realized I had never truly known myself. Every action she took reflected both me and the life I had failed to live. And yet, she was not me; she was something else entirely, something I had never imagined. (Gailey 57) This passage highlights Evelyn's internal struggle and identity crisis. Gailey intends to show how cloning creates a mirror of oneself that is both familiar and threatening, challenging the very notion of individuality. Evelyn reflects further: "She moves like me, speaks like me, but I do not recognize myself in her." (Gailey 79) This shows her growing confusion and inability to connect with her own identity when mirrored by Martine. Her confrontation with her husband, "I cannot allow you to play God with my life." (Gailey 112), emphasizes her struggle for ethical control and moral autonomy. Evelyn realizes the betrayal goes beyond physical replication: "Every decision he made about me was a decision against me." (Gailey 145) Her awareness highlights the psychological and ethical consequences of technological replication.

Posthumanist theory helps explain Evelyn's struggle. Hayles states that technology challenges

traditional ideas of identity and agency (Hayles 5). Evelyn's interactions with Martine show how human individuality becomes unstable in the face of technological replication. She later ponders: "If I destroy her, who am I destroying? Myself, or the possibility I never lived?" (Gailey 189). This shows Evelyn's moral dilemma and the blurred line between self and creation. Gailey intends to raise questions about ethical responsibility when humans interact with advanced technology.

Evelyn also notices how Martine interacts with the world confidently, unlike her own cautious approach: "She navigates situations with ease, making choices I never dared to make, living the life I imagined only in fleeting thoughts." (Gailey 200). This highlights the challenges between human limitations and the freedom that technology can create. Gailey intends for readers to question whether the clone's actions diminish or enhance human identity.

The novel *We Are All Machine* explores systemic betrayal and how technology influences human life. We follow the routines that have been programmed into us, thinking they are our own. Every decision we make, every step we take, is influenced by the machine in ways we do not perceive. Our emotions, our desires, even our dreams are shaped by algorithms that know us better than we know ourselves. We have traded our freedom for efficiency, comfort, and speed. And yet we do not see the loss. We believe we are alive, when in truth, we are extensions of the system we serve." (McLaren 22)

This highlights that technology controls society to a large extent and how humans mistakenly perceive freedom while their decisions are influenced by systems. It continues with the challenges between control and awareness: "The machine decides faster, better, and colder than we ever could." (McLaren 64) This emphasizes human reliance on systems, sometimes at the cost of ethical decision-making. "Even our choices are algorithms in disguise." (McLaren 88). This illustrates the invisibility of systemic control and questions human agency in a technologically dominated world.

Some characters remember freedom: "Some of us still remember what it means to decide for ourselves." (McLaren 105) While others are unaware, ethical dangers persist: "Efficiency masks the loss of autonomy." (McLaren 133) and "When humans become extensions of machines, ethics becomes optional." (McLaren 152). McLaren intends to warn readers about losing moral awareness in a world dominated by technological efficiency. These quotes collectively reveal the tension between systemic control and human responsibility.

Posthumanist theory helps explain this scenario. Haraway's cyborg theory highlights the blurred boundary between human and machine (Haraway 149). Braidotti stresses ethical reflection in posthuman worlds (*The Posthuman* 72). The novel illustrates the importance of resisting technological control and reclaiming human moral agency. The two novels provide complementary perspectives on betrayal and control. In *The Echo Wife*, betrayal is personal; identity and autonomy are challenged by cloning. In *We Are All Machine*, betrayal is societal; humans unknowingly follow technological programs. Both highlight Posthumanist concerns about the human-machine relationship, autonomy, and ethics. Literature becomes a tool for moral reflection, showing the consequences of neglecting ethical responsibility. The novels together reveal that Posthumanist literature helps readers understand moral dilemmas in personal and societal contexts. In Evelyn's case, betrayal forces reflection on self-identity and ethical responsibility. In McLaren's narrative, societal betrayal raises questions about freedom, awareness, and resistance in a technologically controlled world. Both show the moral and philosophical importance of literature in a posthuman era. It is related to modern concerns, such as cloning, artificial intelligence, automation, and algorithmic governance. Evelyn's experience reflects personal challenges in genetic and technological innovation, while McLaren highlights societal risks of algorithmic systems. Solutions include ethical oversight, human-centered design, narrative empathy, and awareness of technological influence. Literature allows moral reflection, helping society create policies that respect human dignity and autonomy. Posthumanist theory emphasizes ongoing ethical



engagement as humans navigate technological advancement. Sarah Gailey's *The Echo Wife* and Brian McLaren's *We Are All Machine* show how Posthumanist literature reflects human concerns in technologically mediated worlds. Gailey focuses on personal dilemmas created by cloning, while McLaren examines societal challenges from algorithmic control. This paper demonstrates how literature explores betrayal, control, and identity in posthuman contexts. These novels offer critical insights into morality, human agency, and ethical responsibility, providing readers with tools to navigate posthuman realities.

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