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FOREGROUNDING A FUTURISTIC VIEW OF WORLD WITH ROBOTS A STUDY OF LESTER DEL REY'S *HELEN O'LOY*

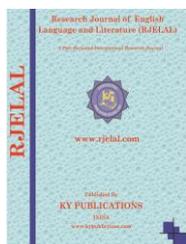
B.VISALI

M.A. English Literature

Dr .N.G.P Arts and Science College (Autonomous)

Coimbatore-641048, Tamil Nadu

Email Id: visalibass@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

The Postmodern age of the 20th and the post-Postmodern era have witnessed a boom of science fiction works in both sides of the Atlantic. The American Sci-Fi writer Lester Del Rey is a popular name who probably requires no introduction as such. The present paper focuses on the affiliation of technology with culture which has become a growing trend. The paper highlights the influence of technology as a trusted ally for people in isolation. Tracing the origin of technology, it takes us to the 20th century that ushered this era. The futuristic technological aspect has inspired and given a clear view of techno-culture. Lester Del Rey's *Helen O'Loy* is probably the best work that portrays technology as a best companion for human. Rey has given a futuristic view of the society where man loves to be with the robots. In the present era, technology has become a part of life, which makes people isolated and frustrated. This paper states that, though technology has been portrayed as a menace to society it has been a best companion to fight depression and isolation. Rey portrays a robot having all the traits of idealism and loyalty as a wife and companion.

Keywords: Technology, Robots, Culture, Lester Del Rey, *Helen O'Loy*.

Techno culture implies the amalgamation of technology and culture with human values. The advancement of technology has gone beyond hands and it's still in process. Technology has brought advancement in all fields but it still has its merits and demerits. In the present era, a man would stop functioning without technology. Technology has become a part of human beings. This paper aims to show that technology as a better companion to human beings.

"Artificial Intelligence is growing up fast, as robots whose facial expressions can elicit empathy and make your mirror neuron quiver". -Piana Ackerman

Artificial Intelligence has pulled robots to the next level. A robot is a machine that can be guided by an external control. It can be modelled to take human form to perform tasks of human. Some modern robots also have the ability to learn in a limited capacity. Learning robots recognize if a certain action (moving its legs in a certain way, for instance) achieved a desired result (navigating an obstacle). The robot stores this information and attempts the successful action the next time it encounters the same situation. Again, modern computers can only do this in very limited situations. They can't absorb any sort of information like a human can. Some robots can learn by mimicking human actions. In Japan, roboticists have taught a

robot to dance by demonstrating the moves themselves.

Some robots can interact socially. Kismet, a robot at M.I.T's Artificial Intelligence Lab, recognizes human body language and voice inflection and responds appropriately. Kismet's creators are interested in how humans and babies interact, based only on tone of speech and visual cue. This low-level interaction could be the foundation of a human-like learning system.

The impact of techno culture has not spared literature also. Lester del Rey's *Helen o'Loy* pictures the technology as an ultimate companion for man which brings a different aspect of technology. Lester del Rey was an American Sci-fi author and editor. He has authored many books in the Juvenile Winston Science Fiction Series and edited Del Rey books. He was also associated with the prestigious science fiction magazine of the era, *Astounding Science Fiction*.

Helen O'Loy is a science fiction short story written by Lester del Rey. It was published 1938 April issue magazine *Astounding Science Fiction* and was selected for the prestigious Anthology, *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame*, volume 1,1929-1964. It was also one of the best short stories that were selected by science fiction writers of America in 1970.

The futuristic technological world is portrayed beautifully in this story where human beings yearn for a loyal companion who is replaced by robots. The story elegantly portrays the love that blooms between human and robot. Robots are a machine that is controlled and guided by humans but it can serve as a loyal companion in the way that every individual expect from the fellow being.

Depression is a disease that is affecting millions of people day by day. It is also considered as the 21st century disease. Abheek Talukdar, an aspiring hipster in his article why modern society struggles with depression says that social media is the main cause for depression and the solution for depression is to detach themselves from social media. Depression can also be treated with the humanoid robots which helps to fight isolation and frustration which results in depression. Robots with auto motors and artificial intelligence can act as a

fellow human being which merely acts as a psychologist.

Helen O'Loy is a short story that is narrated by an endocrinologist Phil who recollects the past that he spent with his friend. Dave, a mechanic in robot shop and Phil, a medical student works together on a robot to make it equal to human beings. Dave and Phil was living together in the flat near the rocket field which shows their interest towards missile. They also had a household robot named Lena for household chores. They became angry with Lena when it added vanilla ice-cream instead of salt in steak.

But it wasn't until Lena put vanilla on our steak instead of salt that we got off on the subject of emotions and robots. While Dave was dissecting Lena to find the trouble, we naturally mulled over the future of the mechs. He was sure that the robots would beat men some day and I couldn't see it. (HOL 2)

Phil, an endocrinologist, a person who studies about secretion of hormones reckons to remodel Lena by turning her and crossing her wires. They worked all night on the wiring and taught new set of words. Next day Lena became vigorous and started acting strange by yelling at them when they said she didn't do her work right. So ,they planned to bring her back to normalcy. Instead of working on Lena, they decided to order Dilliard's new utility model.

Dave got new model of robot-K2W88 to which they named Helen from the name of world's renowned Helen of troy. Further they equipped Helen with auto motor instead of batteries so that she does not need any further attention. When they were about to start Helen, Phil got a call regarding his work and he rushed to Messina for his work. Reluctant Dave started and made Helen to go through preliminary tests. Dave showed all her house duties in which she showed enthusiasm. Further he proceeded and placed her before the stereoviser, turned in the travelogue which took away all her attention. Helen further proceeded to the love story in which she started seeing Dave as her love and developed emotions towards him.

Helen has enthusiasm and curiosity in all her actions but it lacked polish. She cannot

exaggerate herself as humans do but the loyalty moved Dave's heart. Although he tried to educate her about the stereotypes but it had no change in her love.

I know, Dave, but I still love you.(HOL4)

Dave became reckless and decided to spend time away from Helen. He rarely came home because Helen's activities disturbed him. When Phil returned from Messina, he was astonished with the behavioural traits of Helen which a loyal wife should have. Phil tried to bridge the gap between Helen and Dave. When he advised Dave to remove her memory coils, he considered it as a murder which shows Dave's intention towards Helen but he could not accept it.

Why not cut off her power and change a few memory coils? The we can convince her that she never was in love and couldn't get that way.' 'You try it. I had that idea ... she says it would be murder – and the hell of it is I can't help feeling the same about it. Maybe she isn't human, but you wouldn't guess it when she puts on that martyred look and tells you to go ahead and kill her. (HOL8)

Reality of life keeps tormenting him so he decides to move to Fruit Ranch and follow his father. Helen was so excited and packed all his things and bid him bye with dewy eyes. Finally, Phil comes to reality where he receives a letter from Helen saying him to bury her nearby Dave's grave and she seeks it as her last help. Helen also states that they wanted to cross the last bridge of death together.

Poor, Dear Phil. I know you loved Dave as a brother, and how you felt about me. Please don't grieve too much for us, for we have had a happy life together, and both feel that we should cross this last bridge side by side. (HOL9)

Although Helen was a material made of metal but her traits and behaviours are exactly that a loyal companion should have within her. Towards the end of the story, Phil discloses that he himself was attracted and had feelings for Helen which made him stay single for rest of his life.

I'm an old man now and can view things more sanely; I should have married and

raised a family, I suppose. But ... there was only one Helen. (HOL9)

Helen is seen as a technological being who is artificially intelligent and biologically different person. If she were in the real world, she would surely overtake human in the innate supremacy to the biological brain. She would stand as a trustworthy person and help human beings in all works and actions. Finally Helen O'Loy shows trust and loyalty as the best trait for a companion which could be shown by a robot as it only obeys the external command. Robot as a companion seeks betterment in mankind.

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