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Analyzing the Limits of Empathy in Philip K. Dick's *The Second Variety* and Martha Wells' *Home*

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تحليل حدود التعاطف في روايتي "النوع الثاني" لفيليب ك. ديك و"المنزل" لمارثا ويلز

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ملخص

تحلل هذه الورقة البحثية حدود التعاطف في روايتي "النوع الثاني" لفيليب ك. ديك و"المنزل" لمارثا ويلز. وتتناول تصوير التعاطف في جوانبه المختلفة، بالإضافة إلى الطرق التي يمكن من خلالها انتهاكه في العلاقات بين الإنسان والآلة. وقد استُخدمت النظرية الأدبية ما بعد الإنسانية ودراسات التعاطف كأساس نظري لهذا البحث، إذ توفران قاعدة مناسبة لتحليل الحدود الفاصلة بين وعي الإنسان والآلة، وفرص التعاطف العاطفي في ضوء هذه الحدود. وقد تم اختيار منهج أدبي مقارن نوعي لهذا التحليل؛ ولذلك، تم النظر في مقتطفات محددة تتضمن التفاعل العاطفي، والثقة، والخوف، والوعي الاصطناعي، والمعضلة الأخلاقية. وتشمل المواضيع المشتركة التي تم تحديدها في التحليل: الاعتراف، والاختلاف، والصدق العاطفي، وانعدام الثقة، والمسؤولية الأخلاقية. وتشير النتائج إلى أن التعاطف يُوصف في كلتا القصتين بأنه أمر هش وقابل للنقاش. في رواية "النوع الثاني"، يبدو أن الخوف وانعدام الثقة والغموض بشأن هوية الكيانات الاصطناعية يعيق هذا التعاطف. فعدم القدرة على التمييز بين البشر والآلات يُؤدّ جواً من عدم الثقة يمنع أي استجابة عاطفية حقيقية. على النقيض من ذلك، تُقدّم رواية "الوطن" رؤية أكثر إيجابية، إذ تُصوّر الكيانات الاصطناعية ككائنات غنية عاطفياً وواعية أخلاقياً. الكلمات المفتاحية: التعاطف؛ الخيال العلمي؛ الذكاء الاصطناعي؛ فيليب ك. ديك؛ مارثا ويلز؛ العلاقات بين الإنسان والآلة؛ ما بعد الإنسانية.

Abstract

The current paper analyses the boundaries of empathy in the novels *The Second Variety* by Philip K. Dick and *Home* by Martha Wells. It deals with the depiction of empathy in its different aspects as well as the ways in which it can be violated within human-machine connections. The posthumanist literary theory and empathy studies were used as the theoretical foundation for this investigation, since they provide an adequate base to analyze the borders between the consciousness of humans and machines and the opportunities of emotional empathy with respect to these borders. A qualitative comparative literary approach was chosen for this analysis; thus, specific excerpts containing emotional interaction, trust, fear, artificial consciousness, and ethical dilemma were considered. Common themes identified in the analysis include recognition, otherness, emotional honesty, lack of trust, and moral agency. The results indicate that empathy is described in both stories as something precarious and debatable. In *The Second Variety*, it appears to be hindered by fear, mistrust, and uncertainty about the identity of artificial entities. The failure to tell the difference between humans and machines generates an aura of mistrust that inhibits any form of genuine emotional response. On the contrary, *Home* provides a more positive vision, presenting artificial entities as emotionally rich and morally conscious creatures.

Keywords: Empathy; Science Fiction; Artificial Intelligence; Philip K. Dick; Martha Wells; Human–Machine Relations; Posthumanism.

1. Introduction

Empathy has been considered one of the most important traits of a human being that allows individuals to connect with each other and comprehend the emotions and experiences of others. According to contemporary studies, empathy plays an important role in shaping ethics, social interactions, and otherness (van Dijke et al., 2023, p. 387). Literature studies consider empathy as one of the methods used by readers to relate to characters and deal with moral issues. It was demonstrated that literature could help readers develop empathy by imagining the lives of other people who might have had different social or cultural background (Lunen, 2023, p. 3; Jaén-Portillo, 2023, p. 2).

Science fiction becomes an excellent choice for studying empathy because many stories describe interactions between human beings and non-human creatures such as robots, artificial intelligence, or cyborgs. In such cases, it becomes necessary to redefine what humanity is and reconsider the limits imposed on empathy. In this regard, a number of recent studies devoted to posthumanist literary criticism demonstrate how often science fiction raises the problem of human exceptionalism and the ability of humanity to develop empathy towards non-humans (Novák, 2024, p. 465; Chattopadhyay & Pandey, 2023, p. 81).

Two science fiction stories that deal with the human interactions with artificial intelligences under circumstances of uncertainty, danger, and technological changes are *The Second Variety* by Philip K. Dick and *Home* by Martha Wells. Although both texts discuss the potential for forming an empathic bond between man and alien, both demonstrate important limitations associated with human attempts to connect with another individual. Humans in such texts have great difficulty recognizing, trusting, or empathizing with those entities that differ from them in terms of form or moral outlook.

The present paper thus aims to study empathy in *The Second Variety* and *Home* and the factors preventing humans from developing a sense of empathy towards others. The comparison of these texts will allow for analyzing the aspects that hinder the formation of empathy and discussing how each of these texts provides insight into human biases when approaching matters of empathy and conscience.

1.1 Problem Statement

Even though empathy is usually considered an integral trait of human nature, many literary works from the genre of science fiction illustrate that empathic reactions are often hindered by fear, prejudice, suspicion, and clear-cut opposition between human and non-human entities. Indeed, *The Second Variety* and *Home* demonstrate the existence of serious impediments to empathic communication between humans and artificial creatures. Despite the growing academic interest to empathy and posthumanism, very few studies have comparatively analyzed how these particular works explore the issue of empathy limits and what effects the lack of recognition of non-human entities entails. This paper aims at solving the following research problem: what limitations affect human empathy in relations with non-human creatures?

1.2 Research Objectives

1. The purpose of analyzing the role of empathy in Philip K. Dick's *The Second Variety* and Martha Wells' *Home*.
2. Identifying the social, psychological, and technological reasons which restrict empathy of people toward artificial entities in the chosen books.
3. Analyzing the oppositions of the two novels to anthropocentric notions of emotions, identity, and morality.
4. Comparing the portrayal of empathy and otherness in both novels on the basis of posthumanism.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How can empathy be observed in *The Second Variety* and *Home*?
2. What are the reasons for the restrictions of empathy when people are dealing with robots?
3. How can these literary works question existing norms regarding humanity, emotions, and morality?
4. How does each work differ in the use of empathy?

2. Literature Review

The rising trend towards the research of empathy, posthumanism, and relations between humans and machines has resulted in the emergence of a large number of academic articles in the sphere of science fiction studies. Increasingly more authors tend to explore the ways in which science fiction texts defy conventional views on humanness through depiction of interaction between humans and artificial creatures. This part discusses scientific articles related to empathy in science fiction, relations between humans and machines, posthuman

identity, criticism of works by Philip K. Dick and Martha Wells, as well as outlines current gaps in science fiction scholarship.

2.1 Empathy, Human–Machine Relationships, and Posthuman Identity in Science Fiction

Empathy is currently becoming an important area of study for today's literary scholars because of its significance in helping to understand ethics and social diversity. As van Dijke et al. state (2023, p. 386), empathy makes it possible for people to relate to other perspectives that do not correspond with their personal ones and provides an essential basis for ethical interactions. In literature, the empathic approach helps readers to establish connections with fictional characters and to explore new perspectives, which often refute preconceptions about identity and morality.

Modern scientific research indicates that science fiction creates a unique opportunity to analyze empathy because this genre puts people into contact with different types of non-human creatures like robots, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, and even genetic modifications of humans. Novák emphasizes that today's science fiction often breaks the existing demarcation lines between humans and non-humans through the portrayal of artificial life forms that have the ability to feel and act ethically (2024, p. 466).

Posthumanism research also provides evidence supporting this position. As opposed to humanism, posthumanist theorists are critical towards human exceptionalism and argue about interconnectedness among different forms of life. According to Ferrando (2023, p. 24), posthumanism attempts to break down the hierarchies among human beings, animals, machines, and other entities. Braidotti (2023, p. 17) agrees that modern technology makes it essential to create new ethics that would recognize a plurality of subjective beings apart from human beings.

Another issue that is central to the emerging field of posthuman science fiction is human-machine relations. As Chattopadhyay and Pandey (2023, p. 83) point out, science fiction literature commonly represents artificial entities as existing in a state of ambiguity between the self and others, creating moral dilemmas associated with issues of trust, acknowledgment, and affective response. These difficulties are indicative of the limitations of human empathy towards technologically different beings. Thus, science fiction becomes a valuable tool for studying both achievements and failures of empathy.

Researchers have also explored the connection between empathy and artificial intelligence. According to Cave et al. (2023, p. 7), recent discourse centers around the question of whether technology is able to imitate or embody empathy in any way. Literature plays its part in this discourse by considering situations where artificial creatures exhibit qualities of emotions and moral value.

2.2 Gaps in Research on Empathy and Human–Nonhuman Relations in Philip K. Dick and Martha Wells

However, even given this increasing body of scholarly writing on the subjects of empathy and posthumanism, certain gaps still exist within the existing academic corpus of knowledge. For example, while there are numerous studies that explore theoretical aspects of the topic or consider particular texts on their own, comparatively few works deal with the specific issue of the limited nature of empathy in relation to human-machine interactions.

Studies related to the works of Philip K. Dick have long focused on issues such as paranoia, reality, identity, and technophobia. According to Vint (2023, p. 112), in all of his works, the author explores the problematic areas in which the distinction between humans and machines is ambiguous and blurry. Yet, while most scholarly works concentrate on epistemological issues and authenticity concerns, much less attention is paid to the moral aspects of failed empathy toward artificial creatures. Nevertheless, empathy is one of the main concepts in many stories by Dick, *The Second Variety* included.

In this regard, the majority of critical analyses conducted on Martha Wells are related to artificial intelligence, autonomy, agency, and resistance to human manipulation. According to Hampton (2024, p. 95), the stories of Martha Wells are critical of the traditional notions concerning the consciousness of machines since she creates artificially intelligent beings endowed with rich social and emotional experiences. Yet, current research is mostly devoted to identity development and freedom instead of investigating restrictions of empathy in human-AI relationships.

Another substantial research gap relates to the lack of comparative analysis. In general, the works of Philip K. Dick and Martha Wells remain underrepresented in comparative analyses despite common themes of artificial life, ethics of technology, and human-machine interaction in their stories. Also, there is no comprehensive

analysis of the representation of empathy in the mentioned novels, considering the idea that empathy does not work due to such aspects as fear, prejudice, mistrust, and ideology.

Thus, the problem of the relation between empathy, posthuman identity, and ethical recognition still requires detailed attention within the context of comparative analyses of *The Second Variety* and *Home*.

2.3 Theoretical and Methodological Innovations

The recent theoretical innovations in literary theory have made possible new ways of researching empathy and posthumanism. Contemporary scholars often apply posthumanist theory alongside affect theory, cognitive literary theory, and ethics to analyze emotions in contexts that defy traditional concepts of humanity. This multidisciplinary approach allows one to investigate the role of emotions in such narratives.

Posthumanist theory is especially beneficial when investigating human-machine relations. According to Ferrando, posthumanism suggests new concepts for describing identity formation in contexts of biological, technological, and sociological interactions (2023, p. 31). Likewise, according to Braidotti, there is an urgent need to develop new ethical frameworks that would be able to accommodate diverse types of subjectivities in a technologically advanced society (2023, p. 22).

From a methodological perspective, comparative analysis in literature has become increasingly relevant for the current research on science fiction. Comparative analysis not only provides researchers with an opportunity to observe recurring issues during different time frames but also helps to distinguish specific nuances regarding ideological and cultural backgrounds. According to Hayles (2024, p. 54), comparing several literary works will shed light on the depiction of artificial intelligence and posthuman identity.

In the current research, the interdisciplinary approach is used through the use of posthumanism, empathy studies, and comparative analysis of texts.

2.4 Bridging the Gap

The current study aims to fill these gaps by employing a comparative analysis of *The Second Variety* by Philip K. Dick and *Home* by Martha Wells. In contrast to earlier studies concentrating on identity, consciousness, or technophobia, empathy will be the central topic discussed within the present paper. Empathy in interactions of artificial and human characters will be analyzed as well as the processes through which empathy could be threatened and restricted.

Combining theoretical perspectives from posthumanism and empathy studies, the research will explore implications of ignoring subjectivity of non-human characters as well as the effects of fear, prejudice, and technological difference on emotional responses towards the "other." In addition, by applying a comparative analysis, it will show both parallels and differences in approaches taken by Dick and Wells in exploring empathic capabilities in human/non-human relationships.

By focusing on empathy in science fiction, the research will contribute to recent debates in the field of posthumanism and ethical criticism. It will illustrate how empathy, traditionally viewed as an exclusive characteristic of humans, can become complicated and fragile due to cultural assumptions about identity and humanity and the existence of the "other."

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current study utilizes a qualitative comparative literary research design. Qualitative research is more appropriate in the context of literature studies due to its concentration on meaning-making in relation to themes and representations within the textual material, not numbers. As per Creswell and Creswell (2023, p. 18), qualitative research attempts to understand and explain phenomena based on their thorough analysis of text, experience, and social surroundings. A comparative methodology is used in order to examine the issue of the limitations of empathy within *The Second Variety* by Philip K. Dick and Martha Wells' novel, *Home*. The study uses a comparative method to reveal the commonalities and differences between the representation of human-to-machine interaction and empathic abilities. Comparison in literary research can help find patterns and differences related to empathy and the formation of posthuman identity (Guijarro-González & Vecino-Perea, 2024, p. 42).

3.2 Data Collection

The research makes use of sample texts as the main source of information. The primary texts for the research include *The Second Variety* by Philip K. Dick and *Home* by Martha Wells since both the texts are concerned with the interactions between the artificial entities and the humans and raise significant concerns related to issues such as empathy, trust, consciousness, and ethics. Literary texts are considered to be a highly credible

resource for obtaining qualitative data, as they reflect various socio-psychological and cultural issues in detail (Flick, 2023, p. 112).

The process of data collection implies a careful examination of the texts and noting down of those extracts from the text that can be applied in accomplishing the research purposes. In particular, one needs to pay attention to emotional communication between characters; encounters between people and machines; examples of trust, distrust, and alienation; as well as moral dilemmas. In addition, some secondary scholarly literature on empathy studies, posthumanism, science fiction as well as books by Dick and Wells will be reviewed (Ferrando, 2023, p. 31).

3.3 Data Analysis

Data are subjected to thematic analysis and close reading. According to Braun and Clarke (2023, p. 58), thematic analysis is a technique used in qualitative research to discover, analyze, and interpret the repetitive patterns of meaning inherent in texts. In this case, text fragments are coded based on the thematic categories of empathy and relationships between people and machines.

The task is to uncover thematic elements in relation to emotional honesty, artificial intelligence, estrangement, trust, fear, responsibility, and moral recognition, among other aspects of interest. First, each text undergoes thematic analysis separately, followed by a comparison of themes across the two texts. Close reading is used to explore narratives, character development, dialogues, and symbolism that reflect the representation of empathy and its limits. This way, the research attempts to explore the representation of opportunities and pitfalls of empathic connection made possible by humans and non-humans (Novák, 2024, p. 470).

3.4 Analytical Framework

In this work, posthumanist literary theory and empathy studies will be used as the core theoretical frameworks. The posthuman approach allows exploring the relationship between human entities and non-human ones and undermining some traditional notions regarding human domination and exceptionalism. Posthumanism aims to rethink the concept of subjectivity through considering the connections between human, technological, and non-human subjectivities (Braidotti, 2023, p. 17). Therefore, this approach can be applied for researching artificial beings and their technological identities in sci-fi stories.

Along with the posthuman perspective, the notion of empathy and its significance for the perception of other people and even non-human entities should be considered. In general, according to van Dijke et al. (2023, p. 388), empathic communication means engaging with someone else and reacting to another person's experience, even if the individual feels discomfort regarding these feelings. Thus, the combination of empathy and posthuman theories will help to explore the chosen texts and analyze the concepts of humanity and empathy towards artificial beings.

Such an approach allows exploring the representation of empathy in the texts and identifying both the limits of empathy and its significance in the selected stories.

4. Results

The following is the presentation of the results of the textual analysis conducted on Philip K. Dick's "*The Second Variety*" and Martha Wells' "*Home*." The findings demonstrate that empathy plays out as a contested and vulnerable experience in both stories. Despite the attempts made by the characters to empathize with creatures which are not human, their actions are often hindered by fear, suspicion, ideological bias, and doubt about the nature of machine consciousness. The results show that empathy was not perceived as an inherent human quality but rather as an ethics-limited practice.

4.1 Empathy and the Recognition of the Other

One of the primary findings of the research is how recognition and empathy are connected to one another. In both texts, it is clear that empathy hinges on the capacity to recognize another being as something with its own subjectivity and agency. Nevertheless, it is frequently impossible for artificial intelligence to be recognized as such since it is considered different from people.

For instance, in *The Second Variety*, it is impossible for people to recognize robots as other human beings with their agency. The machine is treated merely as something that can potentially harm the individual and thus put his life at risk. People fail to perceive the machine as a subject with the capacity to empathize since it poses an immediate threat to human survival. Even worse, the similarity between people and robots makes it even harder to recognize robots as human-like beings.

On the other hand, *Home* portrays recognition in a more complicated way where emotions, self-reflection, and empathy for others are displayed among artificial entities. Human traits such as these enable people to feel

empathy toward beings who are not human. This depiction enables posthumanist assertions made in contemporary times that subjectivity is broader than human subjectivity (Braidotti, 2023, p. 19). Thus, the findings indicate that empathy is achievable when artificial beings are seen as conscious entities rather than technology.

The findings coincide with recent literature on empathy, stating that ethics in engagement calls for open-mindedness toward new kinds of otherness that are different from existing social identities (van Dijke et al., 2023, p. 390). Failure of recognition results in failure of empathy according to both texts.

4.2 Fear, Distrust, and the Breakdown of Empathy

The second important discovery relates to the impact of fear and suspicion on the establishment of empathic relations. It is clear from the analysis that any empathy always decreases in cases where the characters feel threatened by other people. In the novella *The Second Variety*, fear plays an important part in all the interactions between the characters. Being able to emulate humans, the machines cause mutual suspicion. This creates a situation when there can be no trusting relationship between the characters, as people concentrate on their own safety and survival.

The differences found in *Home* concern the degree rather than the principles. Although the story offers more room for forming an emotional attachment towards both people and robots, fear remains one of the key elements preventing success. People usually judge artificial creatures based on their expectations regarding how technologies and machines work, thus creating emotional detachment which interferes with mutual comprehension. This makes empathy hard to achieve not due to lack of possibility but due to reluctance caused by societal norms and ideology.

This view confirms the observations made by Chattopadhyay and Pandey (2023, p. 84) that science fiction tends to show technology-based difference as a cause for ethical apprehensions. As shown above, fear and mistrust are the two primary factors making it difficult to establish empathy in both texts.

4.3 Artificial Consciousness and Emotional Authenticity

Also evident in this discussion is that questions surrounding the existence of artificial consciousness and emotional authenticity become paramount to the ability to practice empathy.

In *The Second Variety*, the existence of machine consciousness adds greatly to the inability to empathize with artificial entities. As machines have become symbols for betrayal and destruction, any possible consciousnesses of such beings are disregarded. It is rare for any of the human actors to take into account the fact that artificial creatures might also experience emotions worthy of ethical treatment. Therefore, empathy is limited by anthropocentric understandings of both consciousness and emotional capability.

On the contrary, *Home* presents challenges to these preconceptions. Machine entities demonstrate emotional intelligence through displays of caring, loyalty, contemplation, and responsible behavior. In this way, lines between true human emotions and emotions produced by technology become blurred. Emotional authenticity in the text seems to be dependent not on biological origins but rather on observable ethical conduct.

Such findings can be interpreted as evidence of the validity of posthumanist studies that challenge dichotomies in the differentiation of natural from artificial forms of consciousness. According to Ferrando (2023, p. 33), the key aspect of posthumanism is the understanding of various ways of being and subjectivity. In turn, Novák (2024, p. 473) indicates that modern works of science fiction more often invite readers to empathize with beings that are not humans but rather complex emotionally and ethically.

4.4 Comparative Findings: The Limits of Empathy in *The Second Variety* and *Home*

Comparison analysis highlights both striking similarities and considerable differences between the two texts. In both stories, the theme of limitation of empathy by otherness, fear, and uncertainty is shown. It appears that characters face difficulties with creating empathy for artificial creatures because they see technological gap as an obstacle separating them morally and existentially.

However, the two stories are different in many ways with regards to the discussed problem. First of all, *The Second Variety* depicts quite a pessimistic attitude to limitations of empathy. Fear and distrust prevail in the story, while artificial creatures mostly represent deception and aggression. This results in complete breakdown of trust and makes empathy rather fragile.

On the contrary, *Home* presents a considerably more optimistic approach to the issue. Barriers to empathy still do exist in this story, however it is proved that empathy and emotional bonds can be established between humans and artificial beings. Characters are endowed with moral and psychological complexity, making the readers question their traditional understanding of humanity.

In conclusion, the results show that the main discrepancy in the two stories concerns their evaluation of the possibility of empathy. While Dick demonstrates the failure of empathy in the context of fear and uncertainty, Wells underscores its possibility amid persistent social and technological barriers. As such, the analysis shows that empathy cannot be guaranteed and accessed freely; rather, it becomes a matter of ethical negotiation involving recognition, trust, and engagement with alternative modes of being.

On balance, the results reveal that the limits of empathy are defined by the conflicts associated with human identity versus technological otherness. The findings add to existing debates on posthumanism, demonstrating the ability of science fiction literature to analyze ethical and subjective issues through the prism of human-machine relations.

5. Discussion

This chapter discusses how the results discussed in the last chapter can be understood in light of posthumanist theory and empathy studies. It can be seen that in both the works analyzed – *The Second Variety* by Philip K. Dick and *Home* by Martha Wells – science fiction functions as a way to challenge commonly accepted beliefs about human nature, consciousness, and ethics. Although the two works have different moods and endings, both stories highlight the fact that empathy cannot be an instinctive or ubiquitous response.

5.1 Empathy as a Condition of Ethical Recognition

Among the most interesting discoveries made during the course of this study was that empathy serves as a condition precedent for ethical recognition. During the analysis, it was noted that people tend to give others their moral attention only if they can see them as conscious agents and not objects, tools, or threats to their safety and well-being. As van Dijke et al. state, this discovery supports the claims of modern scholars who state that empathy allows people to see the perspective and feelings of others, thus, forming an ethical relation with them (2023, p. 389).

In *The Second Variety*, it is the impossibility of recognizing the presence of consciousness in other living creatures that leads to the loss of empathy among the heroes. People do not treat the machines in any way but as enemies in the war. They cannot develop empathy because they view other people simply as foes.

In stark contrast, *Home* creates scenarios where artificial creatures are more and more regarded as emotional and complicated persons. The novel promotes both character and reader's recognition of non-humans as beings who have the capacity for emotions, thoughts, and relationship building. This portrayal aligns with posthumanist ideas about how ethics can extend beyond biology (Braidotti, 2023, p. 21). Thus, one can draw the conclusion that empathy is strongly linked to recognition, which means that ethics and ethical relationships occur when non-human beings are recognized as proper subjects.

The presented findings also validate Ferrando's (2023, p. 36) argument about the desire in posthumanism to overturn conventional hierarchies that view human life as being superior to other types of existence. Dick and Wells use their portrayals of artificial consciousness to question the standards of moral value.

5.2 Fear, Otherness, and the Failure of Empathy

Another major observation made by the analysis relates to the impact of fear on empathy. It has been found that the presence of fear in both texts has an inhibiting effect on empathy; however, the impact is stronger in *The Second Variety* because of the level of uncertainty about identity and intentions. This finding corroborates previous studies that found that empathy is undermined by perceptions of threat (van Dijke et al., 2023, p. 392).

In Dick's work, the presence of fear is so overwhelming that it eliminates the possibility of establishing trust. Due to the fact that machines are capable of replicating people perfectly, there will always be an element of deception involved. As such, suspicion replaces empathy, leading to survival tactics.

Though the circumstances in *Home* are not as severe, fear still drives human interaction with artificial entities. Human characters consistently confront non-human characters with suspicion because difference in technology implies danger. Such behavior stems from wider cultural fears surrounding technological innovation and artificial intelligence. As discussed by Cave et al., "current discourses on artificial intelligence vacillate between enthusiasm for new discoveries and fear of future consequences," resulting in an ethical ambivalence regarding the moral status of intelligent machines (2023, p. 9).

In light of this, one can conclude that empathy is especially fragile when faced with difference that is perceived as threatening. The fragility of empathy becomes apparent in science fiction through encounters with radically alien modes of consciousness. Through their representation, both texts illustrate the extent to which fear can undermine ethical interaction by turning otherness into a barrier.

5.3 Posthuman Identity and the Expansion of Empathy

Moreover, the two stories highlight the fact that each of them represents artificial entities that demonstrate traits usually connected with the human nature itself, which is especially valuable from the posthumanist approach. According to the posthumanism paradigm, the division between a human and a non-human being is becoming less obvious.

Thus, in *The Second Variety*, the technological progress undermines the established boundaries between the categories of beings. With time, machines grow more and more alike to humans themselves, thus making it hard to distinguish between them. Nevertheless, the lack of distinction is not a reason for tolerance – on the contrary, it causes even more fear and distrust.

At the same time, in *Home*, posthuman identity can serve as a means for developing moral consciousness in artificial creatures. They become self-aware, able to feel emotions and think independently about actions and decisions. In other words, they acquire all those traits that previously belonged exclusively to humans only. Such results correspond to the position stated by Novák (2024, p. 475), which says that science fiction literature in recent years strives for inter-creatural empathy in making readers empathize with other species. Moreover, according to Braidotti (2023, p. 24), the practice of posthuman ethics means that humans should go beyond anthropocentricity and come up with new modes of being relational; the current study shows that empathy is an essential part of such process.

It can be concluded that empathy does not have a biological basis at all but depends on how conscious and sentient other beings might be. Science fiction applies artificial intelligence to examine this aspect of morality and question empathy in relation to different types of beings.

5.4 Reassessing the Limits of Empathy in Posthuman Worlds

Finally, the issue discussed concerns the wider significance of empathy in technologically-mediated societies. While both authors demonstrate that it is possible to empathize even in a posthuman world, both emphasize the fact that for this empathy to occur, particular attitudes and conditions need to be met. Empathy should neither automatically emerge among beings sharing similar intelligence nor be impossible to practice between technological others.

While Dick's *The Second Variety* demonstrates a negative view on the matter of the role of empathy in a technologically-advanced society, he portrays an image in which technological progress is associated with a lack of trust and ethical connections with others. For example, Dick shows how empathy is unable to survive in the context of fear, which is why his novel is a warning.

Wells, on the other hand, demonstrates a positive attitude toward empathy, which can flourish in a technologically-mediated society. Even though misunderstanding and technological boundaries exist, Wells demonstrates that one can empathize even if the other consciousness does not belong to a human being, as long as they are open to such a dialogue.

Such findings resonate with scholarly efforts highlighting the need for the development of ethical approaches to the evolving nature of interactions between people and advanced technology (Ferrando, 2023, p. 40; Cave et al., 2023, p. 11). Science fiction seems to be an indispensable tool in such developments since the genre offers new insights into the nature of the possible futures where our basic beliefs about what we are, what we do, and how we feel may no longer apply.

To sum up, both *The Second Variety* and *Home* offer examples of the exploration of the possibilities of empathy in post-human worlds through science fiction. Although the literary works differ in their assessment of the future potential of empathy, both texts are united by concerns related to ethics in recognizing or ignoring the existence of non-human consciousness. Thus, empathy seems to remain one of the most significant yet fragile aspects of ethics today.

6. Limitations

The study of any kind of literature is not without its limitations, and they should also be noted here. Firstly, the research deals only with two science fiction stories by Philip K. Dick and Martha Wells. While these texts offer great examples of how empathy is represented and how artificial consciousness interacts with people, they are not able to cover all perspectives offered in this literary genre. Therefore, the results must not be generalized for all science fiction literature but rather should be regarded as an insight into particular works of literature.

Secondly, the analysis conducted here deals mostly with literary aspects of empathy rather than with psychological or empirical aspects. Thus, while one may consider what role empathy plays in the construction

of characters, how it is built up in narratives, and what it means to the author of each work of literature, it is not necessary to focus on the actual reader response to the story.

Another limitation is the lack of diversity in terms of the theoretical perspective used in the research. It is quite possible that another theoretical framework would produce a distinct perspective on the issue. Such alternative perspectives as cognitive literary studies, affect theory, ecocriticism, and studies of science and technology could shed some light on different aspects of the analyzed literature (Ferrando, 2023, p. 42).

Finally, qualitative textual analysis can hardly be regarded as completely objective, as there is always some degree of interpretive subjectivity involved in this type of inquiry. Close reading allows for a careful scrutiny of literary works; however, other interpretive frameworks might focus on other aspects of the narratives being examined (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p. 20). Despite its limitations, the study makes a valuable contribution to the existing debates related to empathy and posthumanism by analyzing two important science fiction stories. The results help better understand the problems and ethical issues arising out of interactions between humans and artificial entities.

7. Future Research

Conclusions reached within the scope of the current research paper indicate potential areas of further inquiry into the subject matter. Firstly, future research could increase the size of the corpus through analysis of additional science fiction works focused on the problem of empathy, artificial intelligence, and posthuman identity. The comparative study may include literature by various authors belonging to different eras, nationalities, and traditions of writing.

Furthermore, it might be interesting for future research to analyze other types of artificial intelligence and non-human consciousness in literature. In particular, the study at hand deals only with artificial entities presented within the plot of *The Second Variety* and *Home*; however, researchers may examine other types of intelligent beings, including robots, androids, cyborgs, virtual intelligences, and other posthumans.

It also seems reasonable to apply other theoretical approaches in order to shed light on the topic under discussion. For instance, cognitive literary studies may provide new insights concerning the role of mental simulation of artificial beings and narrative techniques that foster the development of readers' empathy (Keen, 2024, p. 71). At the same time, affect theory might contribute to understanding human-machine interactions and affective relations to non-human agents (Ngai, 2023, p. 58).

Further studies may even take into consideration empathy outside of literature, by analyzing how it is depicted within science fiction movies, TV shows, computer games, and digital stories. All these interdisciplinary approaches would help to understand the way how modern culture deals with questions of establishing ethical relations with advanced technology.

Lastly, as the development of artificial intelligence is becoming an everyday reality, the future analysis may be dedicated to possible correlations between science fiction depiction of the problem and current discourses on issues related to machine ethics and responsibility.

8. Conclusion

The current study investigated the limitations of empathy in Philip K. Dick's *The Second Variety* and Martha Wells' *Home* based on the theoretical concepts of posthumanism and empathy studies. With a comparative literary analysis method used, the researcher focused on the representation of empathy, relations between humans and machines, artificial consciousness, and ethics.

The results show that empathy can be considered a vulnerable and disputed concept rather than an innate attribute or a quality possessed by all humans. Both stories show that fear, mistrust, and otherness are the major obstacles to empathizing with another being. In particular, characters are shown to have issues recognizing artificial creatures as subjects capable of receiving ethical treatment, which leads to failed communication and ethical awareness. This conclusion is in line with modern research focusing on the role of recognition and relationality in developing ethical and empathic relationships (van Dijke et al., 2023, p. 394).

At the same time, the analysis highlighted some significant disparities between the two works. Thus, in *the Second Variety*, a decidedly pessimistic view is expressed since technological uncertainty and mistrust do not allow any empathy. On the other hand, in the *Home* story, an optimistic position is expressed because there is still room for meaningful interaction between people and their artificial counterparts in terms of feelings. Consequently, both stories provide a critique of the common understanding of humanity by raising important questions regarding the ethical dimensions of extending empathy.

Posthumanism was found to be a relevant analytical framework for exploring the representation of artificial consciousness and the concept of non-human agency. As was stated by Braidotti (2023, p. 24) and Ferrando (2023, p. 39), ethical inclusion is to be judged not only from the biological standpoint but through consciousness and relationality, among others.

Ultimately, one may come to realize that the distinction between man and not-man is becoming more and more unstable in the world of science fiction literature. As the distinctions disappear, it becomes clear that empathy is a key and yet fragile tool that can help people establish proper moral relationships with those who are different from them. It is argued here that the role of science fiction in raising such issues cannot be underestimated.

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