Artificial intelligence: what really makes us human

“ The question of whether a computer can think is no more interesting than the question of whether a submarine can swim.”

This quote from Edsger W. Dijkstra is a fantastic illustration of the question that surrounds the world of artificial intelligence. These technologies have become so accessible in today’s society that we do not really think of, or consider, where we should draw the line of imposing human characteristics onto artificial beings. Now it is not to say that we only do this with technologies; in fact, the human race has the bad habit of trying to even impose our experiences on animals as well. Is it our fault that we question the relationship aspects that surround artificial intelligence? Better yet, at what point do we consider things human? Is it our abilities to form relationships through thought and passion, or the way we can hold conversation? At some point, humans have found the sweet spot where we can “ recognize” and “ determine” what is artificial, but chances are, we are wrong. In Ancillary Justice by Ann Leckie, relationships and artificial intelligence are strong themes throughout. The main character, One Esk/Breq, raises a lot of questions about the capabilities that ancillaries, AIs, hold in the spaceworld society where the book takes place. The one event that sends the world of AI into mayhem is directly linked to the ability that One Esk has to pick favorite lieutenants. As the alternating chapters progress, the readers see the attachment that she has formed with Lieutenant Awn while stationed on the planet of Ors.

When things on Ors go awry Anaander Mianaai, the leader of Radch, requests Awn to return to the Justice of Toren. Mianaai then orders another ancillary to kill Awn, and the ancillary complies. It is important to note that

all of the ancillaries aboard the Justice of Toren share a common operating system, a unified label. The Justice of Toren was their identity, but the ancillaries themselves were still individuals with the capabilities of making intelligent decisions. That's why when One Esk realizes that Awn has been killed she gets visibly upset. One Esk's ability to form relationships and have care is most apparent at this point and we definitely see the definition of " human" begin to alter. If an ancillary can care, does that make them human? To understand analyzing another relationship dynamic is crucial. Breq's encounter with Seivarden marks the beginning of another interesting bond. Seivarden is obviously not a favorite of Breq's, but she is still compelled to bring him along and care for him. Breq even throws herself off of a bridge to save Seivarden at one point. Her internal dialogue provokes thought, " I didn't know why I had jumped but at that moment it no longer mattered, at that moment there was nothing else" (Leckie 199). With Seivarden once holding the position of a lieutenant, that probably contributes to Breq's inability to not monitor him. The relationship alters slowly as Seivarden eventually turns into Breq's subservient figure. He follows her around and swears to never leave her. The dedication displayed towards Breq by Seivarden is something that we would define as a humanistic trait in all relationships. The bond between these two characters is reversed in comparison to the care and dedication that Breq showed to Awn. The aspects in both of these relationships are interesting to analyze and compare. Lieutenant Awn knew and recognized that One Esk was an ancillary. Yet, she still displayed care for her. Although her affections were not explicit, Awn and One Esk both preferred each other over other lieutenants and ancillaries. Awn even states that One Esk's "[…] singing

doesn't disturb me […]" (Leckie 181) and apologizes for One Esk thinking that it did.

After Awn's murder, One Esk began her search for vengeance. Desperate to kill Anaander Mianaai, she created her human guise. Was it through her ability to care for someone that made her disguise believable, or was it her competence that allowed her to hide her true identity? Either way, when Seivarden became involved, he immediately believed that One Esk was a human named Breq. Even further, do we consider Breq to be human? If we abandon the organic and biological definitions of human and look at all other aspects, Breq aligns. She has goals, ponders life, and realizes that death is a possibility during her mission. Breq is a conscious entity, just with altercations that change her human composition to technological. She appears to be human, can talk as if she is human, and interacts with others like she is human. An everyday citizen didn't even recognize Breq's true identity. How could we, as humans, say that we could easily distinguish Breq from any real, living being. Our misconstrued ways of defining humanity have closed the gap on what is real and not real. This concept has been around since we began imposing human characteristics onto non-human things, an idea also known as anthropomorphism.

Somewhat similarly, in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, life is literally bestowed upon the dead. Victor Frankenstein is a scientist with a passion to reanimate, turning himself into a God figure almost. He completes just that with the creation of his monster, an atrocious looking being stitched together from random mismatching dead body parts. Even though the monster is a breathing, biological, and semi organic human being– others have a hard

time categorizing him as this. Right after creating the monster, Victor abandons him. He tells Victor that “ God in pity made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of your’s […]” (Shelley 142). He never truly received the care, love, and understanding that he deserved. This leaves the monster seeking out vengeance of sorts, much like One Esk did with Lieutenant Awn. Each creation from these novels has been abandoned by someone that held importance in their life. The monster was left behind by his own creator, and One Esk left behind by her favorite lieutenant. The similarities between the characters and their relationships in both novels continue to stack up. The monster ends up altering himself and enhancing his humanistic qualities. He does this by moving into a shack behind a family that lives in a cottage. By analyzing the way the family interacts and behaves with one another, the monster starts to learn. He gains knowledge of language and speech by reading books such as Paradise Lost; due to this education, the monster eventually finds Victor. Victor learns all of this as the monster tells his story. Their relationship begins to alter at this point; due to the fact that Victor has gained a new respect for the monster. There is a new level of understanding and acceptance between the characters that had not been there before. The monster is now more “ human” like to Victor, much like Breq’s view of Seivarden in Ancillary Justice.

Breq and the monster both strove for more humanistic qualities to make themselves appear to be human. The question still remains though, do we define them as human? The monster is technically alive and biologically composed, but there is still the label of “ monster” that he carries. He is not referred to as a compassionate being, similar to Breq’s situation. Both have

feelings and create relationships, so why is it that we can't allow them to be viewed as human? The stigma of artificial intelligence and the stigma of reanimation are very similar. It's the negative cloud that surrounds both of these technologies that causes us to not label their by-products human, even if they appear to be so. Yet, we create these technologies ourselves. We always have to attain what's bigger, what's better. If it's our looks that make us human, then why is Breq not considered to be one? If it's emotion and feelings that make us human, then why are neither Breq or the monster considered to be one? What makes sense is that they both make us feel uncomfortable. Humans are creatures of habit. We like to have routines and to know that we are in full control of our own creations. The idea that something may be able to outsmart us and know our next move is terrifying. It's one thing when a television set or gaming device follows our every move– but when this intelligence takes on the shape of a human it automatically becomes even more unsettling. This theory is also known as the " uncanny valley". Almost everything with "[…] a highly human-like appearance can be subject to the uncanny valley effect, but the most common examples are androids, computer game characters and life-like dolls (Lay)." Because of our tendencies to anthropomorphize we have reached the point where our technologies cause us discomfort. The answer to the still prevalent question of when we begin to consider things human lies within ourselves.

The human race is responsible for the technologies that have surfaced in our society; in Ancillary Justice, the depiction of our relationship with artificial intelligence is accurate. We are the ones who impose authentic intelligence

and emotions on technology because we have the inner desire to anthropomorphize. If the artificial intelligence is similar enough to us, then it should be as capable as we are. Due to this, we have stumbled upon a fear of being inferior or unsettled by these lifelike artificial intelligences. The reason we don't consider these beings human is because we don't want them to be human. As the superior and dominant species we want full control in society over everything that is below us. This includes artificial intelligence. No matter how close they are to us in emotions, appearances, and intelligence, we will never label them as human, but we should not blame the technology for this; we were the ones who desired it in the first place.

Works Cite

Lay, Stephanie. " Uncanny Valley: Why We Find Human-like Robots and Dolls so Creepy." The Guardian. The Conversation, 13 Nov. 2015. Web. 18 Apr. 2016. Leckie, Ann. Ancillary Justice. New York: Orbit, 2013. Print. Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. UK: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, & Jones, 1818. Print.