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Literature and Literary Theory

The seduction of AI in *iPhuck 10*

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Automata and the debate around them have been around since immemorial times: from gold and clay-made entities that came to life through divine breath to robots endowed with artificial intelligence. Viktor Pelevin imagines in *iPhuck 10* a society where sexual automata are a norm and Artificial Intelligence is seeking to overthrow the statu quo of humans.

Sexual desire and sexual behaviour become in the novel a means of manipulation all in the name of power and knowledge.

Key words: automata, AI, technology

Introduction

Viktor Pelevin's novel, *iPhuck10*, poses some sensitive questions on the relationship narrator-reader, on the condition of otherness, on the future of technology and AI, but also on the future of the concept of love, of emotional bonds and of sexual need.

The dichotomy between love as a noble feeling and love as a sexually fulfilled desire has been around since forever, being one of the central themes in philosophy, religion, psychology, literature, sociology and many other fields. In the last decades love and sexual relationships have been connected to the field of technology. From cybersex to cybrothels, from androids to gynoids, this is a new reality

we are facing and which has been explored to a certain extent by the Russian novelist in his 2017 novel.

The seduction of robots

Olga Iliina sees Maruha Cho, one of the main characters of *iPhuck10*, as the embodiment of the futuristic society presented in the book, which is “a society of victorious feminism” [4:54]. Maruha Cho appears as a woman with male characteristics (shaved hair, displaying a masculine attitude in romantic relationships) which is a clear sign of a society where the boundaries between genders were effaced. As Galina Yuzefovich states, gender becomes irrelevant in Pelevin’s new world [4:54].

There is an entire history of robots with human characteristics dating back to the 1970’s when WABOT-1 was presented in Japan [3:54] and over time scientists have perfected the technology refining it so much that robots such as Jiajia, Nadine or Sophia are extremely realistic. These humanoid robots were created to be used in sectors such as healthcare and hospitality [2], but it is necessary to highlight that the most realistic ones programmed to mirror human behavior and even feelings have female characteristics. This led, naturally, to the sexualization of female robots.

However, the robot responsible with offering sexual pleasure in Pelevin’s novel takes male characteristics. Porfiry Petrovich is an algorithm that mainly uses masculine traits and clothes but, if the situation asks, it can take up the role of a female.

There is an incessant game of seduction between Maruha Cho and Porfiry Petrovich, a seduction that mirrors that between the text and the reader. We are never to forget throughout the novel that Porfiry Petrovich is pure discourse as he describes himself. He assigns consciousness to himself at the same time as he denies his own existence.

The lack of affection can be substituted by robots to a certain degree. Although machines are programmed to imitate human behaviour and emotions, they cannot – at the moment – fully replace a person. One reason for this would be the lack of a surprise element. Human beings are unpredictable, while machines display only a learnt pattern of behaviour. Nonetheless, Pelevin goes beyond this and imagines a world where AI technology is a little bit more cunning than people. Porfiry Petrovich manages to escape Maruha’s games showing a brief success over the human race. But with all the play Porfiry Petrovich does, the ultimate conclusion he reaches is that there are too many questions we try to answer to and that in our quest to uncover the secret of life we forget to live.

At the end of the novel a question arises: why is sex so important in Viktor Pelevin’s novel? Or, rather, is sex a key-concept in *iPhuck 10*? Or is just a front to hide far more serious matters?

Sex as a tool

In Pelevin's near future society the distinction between men and women is a peripheral matter. The distinction between humans and machines is tangential in terms of emotions and pleasure. This matters only in the work field where the struggle for power is fierce. The focus is on a stimulation that goes beyond physical pleasure. The sex machines (iphucks and androgynes) are not just toys to be used in the intimacy of one's bedroom. They are storage devices that contain vital information. Therefore, the math is simple: the one who has the information, has the power. Maruha Cho is a symbol of power and of elusiveness. She is always in between, nor here, nor there, but always in charge of whatever happens in her field of work: "У нее множество ликов и личин, в том числе и «демона-искусителя», но в романе она прежде всего – человек искусства, куратор, личность, непосредственно связанная с идеей авторства и ролью творца." [1:103]. She, as all human beings, assumes the role of the creator, but Porfiry Petrovich does the same thing so a clash between the two is inevitable. In their relationship often times Maruha plays the male role, while Porfiry is forced to be the passive agent. But all this feminism discourse, as V. S. Simkina says, is just an excuse to denounce the absurdity of leading feminism and other social phenomena to the extreme [5:77].

Talking about thinking machines, Kate Devlin goes back to the Greek mythology and puts forward the idea that one of the oldest of this kind was Pandora. According to Devlin, the woman Hephaistos created was the first artificially intelligent agent [3:71]. Pandora a creation of "godly programmers" [3:71] is translated in *iPhuck 10* as the algorithmical Porfiry Petrovich who, just as the mythological woman, out of mere curiosity unleashes unstoppable events that lead to chaos. Going further, we could even say that in Pelevin's new upside-down society AI devices are just an updated version of the mythological golden maidens. Known as *kourai khryseai*, their purpose was to serve the creator but, as in Pandora's case, the more divine (in mythology) or human (in the case of AI) attributes they had, the more inclined to rebel their creator they were.

Conclusion

Viktor Pelevin's play with gender and sex automatons should not frighten us. *iPhuck 10* is not a book about a gloomy future that awaits. It is a book about the ridiculousness of the present and, at the same time, a call for temperance. The Russian author has a tradition of using trivial matters to draw attention on primordial problems and this is exactly what he does in *iPhuck 10*: a marginally subject such as sex becomes the alleged reason to discuss tolerance, acceptance and morality.

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e-mail: morar.roxana95!@yahoo.com<https://doi.org/10.52340/lac.2024.31.15>SJIF 2024: **8.268****Соблазнение ИИ в «iPhuck 10»**

Аннотация

Автоматы и споры вокруг них существуют с незапамятных времен: от созданных из золота и глины существ, оживших благодаря божественному дыханию, до роботов, наделенных искусственным интеллектом. Виктор Пелевин представляет в «iPhuck 10» общество, в котором сексуальные автоматы являются нормой, а искусственный интеллект стремится свергнуть статус-кво людей. Сексуальное желание и сексуальное поведение становятся в романе средством манипулирования во имя власти и знаний.

Ключевые слова: автоматы, ИИ, технологии**Рецензент:** профессор София Муджири