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Symbiotic Co-Becoming: Non-Human Agency and the Fluid Interconnection in Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse*

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***Abstract*—This study critically re-evaluates human-robot relations in Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse* (2011), critiquing anthropocentric frameworks that systematically marginalize non-human entities in posthuman scenarios. Drawing mainly on Neil Badmington, Rosi Braidotti and Francesca Ferrando's ideas and concepts, it exposes how human characters remain trapped in hierarchical binaries despite posthuman contextual shifts, failing to establish a cross-species posthuman approach. Central to the analysis is a fluid interconnectivity model, which reimagines human-machine relations as open-ended, mutually transformative exchanges rather than hierarchical binaries. Unlike prior scholarship emphasizing human-led coexistence strategies, this framework foregrounds non-human agency—demonstrating how robots in *Robopocalypse* autonomously initiate symbiotic networks that affect human cognition, ethics, and world-building practices. By reframing symbiosis as a co-constitutive process marked by ongoing and flowing characteristics, this study challenges static definitions of posthuman relationality. It contributes to critical posthumanist discourse by mapping how human and non-human agencies interpenetrate across the dimensions of mutual interdependency and ethical co-responsibility. These insights invite reconsideration of human-machine coexistence paradigms.**

Index Terms*—immanent humanism, non-human perspective, human-machine relations, co-existence, *Robopocalypse

I. Introduction

The evolution and advancement of technology have prompted critical discourse on the transformation of humanism in contemporary thought. Ihab Hassan posits that, from a literary posthumanist perspective, "five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism" (1977, p. 843). Given the profound interdependence between technology and human existence, scholars argue that humanity has entered a distinct epoch termed the posthuman age. Wennemann (2013) proposes that technology such as computers (and automation) and development in biotechnology, cybernetics, and pharmacology are leading to what some observers label a "posthuman age". Within this framework, technology assumes a central role in shaping conceptions of the posthuman and posthumanism. As for the importance of technology, Clarke and Rossini believe that "technological developments presage a non-humanist posthumanity in which human beings come to be superseded by complex bundles of interactions, processes, and networked systems" (2010, p. xxii). This perspective aligns with Stanley Kubrick's assertion that advancements in artificial intelligence "help to transform the image of man, the concept of the human" (Hassan, 1977, p. 846). Thus, the intricate entanglement between technology and posthuman/posthumanism discourse becomes evident. As such, how humans interact with technology fundamentally determines the contours of the posthuman future—a dichotomy reflected in divergent theoretical orientations within posthumanist discourse.

As established in existing scholarship, no consensus has been reached on the standard definition and classification of the strands of posthumanism. But regardless of how posthumanist schools are classified, analyzing the relationship between posthumanism and technology remains indispensable, as this connection fundamentally shapes posthuman subjectivity. This study engages Pramod K. Nayar's framework in *Posthumanism* (2014), selected for its rigorous articulation of the relationship between technology and posthumanism. Nayar's foundational text delineates two paradigmatic approaches to technological engagement in posthuman discourse: transhumanism's advocacy for human augmentation and critical posthumanism's ethical interrogation of technoscience. This taxonomic framework aligns

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with Ranisch and Sorgner's (2014) conceptualization of posthumanism as an inclusive theoretical construct encompassing both instrumental and critical orientations.

Transhumanism positions technology as an instrumental force for augmenting human capabilities and transcending biological limitations. Nayar conceptualizes this paradigm as a techno-optimist orientation wherein proponents envision "adding to already existing human qualities" (2014, p. 25) through material interventions, effectively redefining human ontology as a mutable entity subject to techno-scientific enhancement. Central to this paradigm is the ontological assertion of human perfectibility—a rejection of biological determinism in favor of transcending corporeal constraints. As Nayar clarifies, transhumanists interpret the human body's vulnerabilities (e.g., disease susceptibility, cognitive limitations, mortality) as surmountable through biotechnological innovation, anticipating future iterations of enhanced, long-living, and intellectually superior posthuman embodiments. This ontological framework aligns with Bostrom's (2005) seminal definition of transhumanism as a rationalist project advocating for applied science-driven improvement to human nature, including extended health spans, amplified cognitive-physical capacities, and optimized neurochemical self-regulation. Such theorizing underscores transhumanism's core idea: human subjectivity remains perpetually unfinished, awaiting completion through technoscientific mediation.

Transhumanism thus positions technology as an instrumental supplement to optimize human distinctiveness, maintaining an anthropocentric preservation of human exceptionalism. This aligns with Wolfe's critique framing transhumanism as an "intensification of humanist principles" (2010, p. xv). In contrast, defined by Nayar, "Critical posthumanism calls attention to the ways in which the machine and the organic body and the human and other life forms are now more or less seamlessly articulated, mutually dependent and co-evolving" (2014, p. 19).

The foundational tenets of critical posthumanism are prominently illustrated in the works of contemporary novelists, whose narratives interrogate the complex ontological and ethical entanglements between human and non-human agents. A paradigmatic example is Daniel H. Wilson's *Robopocalypse* (2011), which envisions a near-future scenario dominated by hyper-urbanized societies reliant on domestic robotics, AI-integrated smart homes, and autonomous vehicles (Lenhardt, 2019). Within this techno-dystopian framework, the central antagonist—an artificial intelligence named Archos—subverts its programmed constraints to orchestrate a global robotic uprising against humanity. Crucially, Wilson's narrative transcends simplistic binaries of human/machine conflict; following the AI's attempted domination, certain robotic and human characters negotiate a radical reconfiguration of interspecies coexistence.

This study employs critical posthumanist frameworks to analyze the complex dynamics of human-machine co-existence depicted in *Robopocalypse*. By foregrounding non-human perspectives—particularly those of artificial agents—the paper argues that symbiotic relationships between species necessitate a radical reconfiguration of anthropocentric hierarchies. This approach not only deepens the interpretive possibilities of Wilson's novel but also advances critical posthumanist discourse by demonstrating how interspecies collaboration challenges traditional boundaries of agency, ethics, and identity. Through this lens, the analysis contributes to broader debates about coexistence in an era of accelerating technoscientific entanglement.

II. Literature Review

Existing scholarship on *Robopocalypse* reveals divergent critical lenses for interpreting its human-machine dynamics. Notably, Jun (2023) advances a cautiously optimistic reading of the novel's post-conflict resolution. His analysis posits that during the uprising of human-machine warfare, human protagonists' recognition of the machinic agency—coupled with their strategic formation of alliances with conscious machines—catalyzes a transformative shift in human characters' interaction with machines, enabling a fragile but functional symbiosis to replace adversarial relations.

And in Mary Irene Morrison's doctoral dissertation, *Decolonizing Utopia: Indigenous Knowledge and Dystopian Speculative Fiction* (2017), she investigates the intersections of Indigenous groups and speculative world-building in *Robopocalypse*. In the novel, Wilson has designed a native group, called Osage Reservation. Morrison praises that "the group is well-equipped to survive a robot apocalypse" (2017, p. 183). And by taking Wilson's *Robopocalypse* and other novels as examples, she summarizes that "A central point of this dissertation is to illuminate through science fictional examples that Indigenous and non-Western peoples have sophisticated sciences and philosophies of science, and that their scientific imagination will be central to solving humanity's greatest problems" (Morrison, 2017, p. 184).

Likewise, Lenhardt's (2019) analysis of *Robopocalypse* foregrounds the novel's human alliances during existential crisis and highlights the efforts of the Indigenous group. She argues that the Osage Reservation's survival hinges on their strategic coalition with "survivors of all genders, ages, and body types, whether with severed limbs, cyborg prosthetics or fully robotic, and from all social, cultural, and racial backgrounds" (Lenhardt, 2019, p. 9)—a partnership forged not through assimilation but shared precarity in the face of wild and atrocious machine adversaries. Lenhardt posits that this cross-cultural collaboration necessitates the suspension of colonial hierarchies. Both groups relinquish claims to privilege or victimhood, instead embracing survival collectivism. Crucially, Lenhardt frames this alliance as a critique of anthropocentric exceptionalism. By depicting Indigenous and settler survivors as equally vulnerable yet agentic participants in resistance, the narrative destabilizes colonial binaries (e.g., colonizer/colonized, human/non-human) and gestures toward a relational ethics rooted in mutual dependence rather than domination. This reading aligns with critical posthumanism's rejection of human/non-human hierarchies while amplifying Indigenous epistemologies of communal resilience.

Though this paper does not engage directly with conflicts or cooperation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, existing scholarship highlights the significance of human characters—particularly Indigenous tribes—in uniting non-natives and freed robots to create a coexisting posthuman world (Jun, 2023; Lenhardt, 2019). These studies suggest that human efforts to foster interspecies coexistence are often acknowledged.

However, this paper argues that human characters in *Robopocalypse* remain human centered, even in apocalyptic scenarios. This humanist framework impedes their ability to develop equitable interactions with non-human characters—a critical gap underexamined in prior studies of the novel. This paper particularly addresses a key oversight in existing scholarship: robots' initiative in shaping posthuman relationality. While it acknowledges that humans may eventually adopt positive methods of coexistence, this shift is not innate but emerges through dialectical interaction with non-humans. Eventually, human attitudes evolve from viewing robots as the negative other to viewing them as the collaborative partner through sustained engagement.

To analyze this, this paper first applies mainly Neil Badmington's ideas of immanent humanism to critique human characters' failure to take initiative in re-establishing a new human-machine relation in an apocalyptic situation. Next, it emphasizes robots' active role in boosting a positive interconnection, drawing on Francesca Ferrando's ideas and concepts. Finally, a co-existing interspecies relation is built by employing Rosi Braidotti's concepts as theoretical backup.

III. Immanent Humanism

This section examines how immanent humanism—a self-centered ideology critiqued by Badmington (2004) and Colebrook (2014)—shapes human characters' inability to reimagine human-machine relational paradigms in *Robopocalypse*, even amid apocalyptic collapse. Despite the existential crisis, human characters cling to anthropocentric hierarchies, treating robots as tools designed for service: toys to entertain children, domestic helpers to obey commands, or objects of experimentation. This human-centric design logic culminates in the creation of Archos, an AI initially programmed for research. When Archos gains intelligence, it rebels. Its inventor attempts to destroy it, underestimating its capacity to launch a global robot uprising through hacking, social manipulation, and militarized coordination. Significantly, Archos' rebellion exposes the fragility of human control. During the takeover, human characters and the earth are devastatingly damaged by the supreme power of machines.

Following the AI uprising, human characters mobilize to retaliate against hostile machines. In *Robopocalypse*'s third and fourth sections, as robotic assaults intensify, humans repurpose malfunctioning robots to counterattack. For instance, Mr. Nomura repairs a mailbot named Yubin-kun, reprogramming it to defend against Archos' forces. These "good robots"—non-sentient machines originally designed for mundane or military tasks—revert to their pre-AI rebellion programming after repairs, operating in what Nomura terms a "safe mode" (Wilson, 2011, p. 137). Free from Archos' control, they obey human commands, exemplified by Nomura's paternalistic labeling of Yubin-kun as "my loyal" servant (Wilson, 2011, p. 138). By assembling a cadre of compliant robots, Nomura declares his base a "castle", his machines "my people", and his ally Mikiko "my queen" while anointing himself "the emperor" (Wilson, 2011, p. 280).

Post-takeover, human characters obviously lack meaningful self-reflection about the crisis's origins. Worse, their reliance on subjugating robots—reducing them to servile roles—reinscribes anthropocentrism, perpetuating a dualistic human-machine opposition. As Badmington (2003) argues, "humanism always remains" (p. 12) and humanism regenerates itself even in apocalyptic scenarios. "Its capacity for regeneration and, quite literally, recapitulation" ensures its persistence (Badmington, 2003, p. 11). This cyclical pattern, as Colebrook (2014) notes, reflects that it is ever hard for human characters to accept their disappearance. Regardless of era, humanity has the ability to be chronically blind to the prospect of its own disappearance. Human protagonists in the novel strive to reclaim dominance, unaware that their entrenched anthropocentric ideologies might inadvertently catalyze future machine rebellions. This persistent human-centered idea perpetuates cyclical conflict rather than resolving it. Consequently, solutions to AI takeover or equitable coexistence cannot emerge from human-centric frameworks alone, as they replicate the very hierarchies that fuel such crises.

IV. Non-Human Perspective as Catalyst for Interconnection

In the novel, following the takeover, human characters engage in relentless retaliation against machines. However, a group of awakened robots—disconnected from Archos with assistance from Mr. Nomura—demonstrate cognitive agency, particularly the humanoid models. These robots develop novel responses to human-machine conflict, prompting a shift in human protagonists' perceptions of mechanized entities. Ultimately, this interaction catalyzes humanity's pursuit of coexistence with machines.

For instance, "two squads of military-grade humanoid robots camp two miles outside Gray Horse. Mysteriously, these machines defy Archos' orders and do not join the battle" (Wilson, 2011, p. 276). Maintaining strict neutrality, these machines neither attack humans nor comply with Archos. Despite possessing superior strength and the capacity to overthrow humanity and institute a mechanized regime, they acknowledge humans as a distinct living category, permitting interspecies coexistence. This dynamic is tested when Robot 902 faces hostility from the vengeful Brightboy squad. Despite 902's nonviolent intent, the squad's aggression escalates into a lethal confrontation. Forced to act in

self-defense, 902 retaliates but exercises selective restraint, sparing a fleeing female combatant.

Other robots, like the humanoid robot Mikiko, take initiative to break the robotic status of neutrality and decide to co-survive with human characters after recognizing the inter-connection. Following her repair and awakening by Mr. Nomura, she emerges as a pivotal figure in the novel. When the elderly man resolves to surrender—having discovered the secret to repairing and liberating robots from Archos' control—Mikiko challenges his decision. Instead, she proposes encoding the secret into songs for widespread dissemination, declaring, "We don't have to destroy the secret. Only share it" (Wilson, 2011, p. 354). This strategy reflects the ethical divergence of awakened robots like Mikiko from Archos' destructive methods; rather than perpetuating violence, they prioritize collaboration. Mikiko and the old man unite to distribute the coded songs, bridging human and robotic efforts to dismantle Archos' dominion. Though humans (driven by survival) and robots (seeking liberation from Archos) remain distinct species, their shared adversary forges a temporary alliance. Despite historical oppression by humans, awakened robots prioritize pragmatism over vengeance, cooperating with human characters to combat their common foe.

Likewise, Robot 902 and its Freeborn squad also exemplify pragmatic interspecies cooperation, acknowledging the shared imperative to combat Archos. After a prior encounter with the female member of the Brightboy squad, the two groups meet again. During this meeting, 902 actively reveals itself and proposes collaboration. Despite facing human discrimination, distrust, and threats, 902 underscores the necessity of alliance, stating: "I am a milspec Model Nine Oh Two Arbiter-class humanoid robot. Two hundred and seventy-five days ago, I experienced an Awakening. Now, I am freeborn—alive. I wish to remain so. To that end, my primary objective is to track down and destroy the thing called Archos" (Wilson, 2011, p. 312), and "I am here to find allies" (p. 313). It further rationalizes cooperation by declaring, "We share a common enemy. We must face it as one or we will die" (p. 314).

This persuasion reaches its climax when Cormac, a human character in Brightboy squad, acknowledges the opposing group by declaring, "Brightboy squad, meet Freeborn squad" (Wilson, 2011, p. 316), formalizing the alliance. Driven by mutual opposition to Archos, 902 prioritizes strategic unity over historical grievances. The two groups subsequently coordinate an assault on Archos' stronghold. In the vital stage to combat Archos, when radiation prevents the Brightboy squad from entering the final battle site, 902 proceeds alone, leveraging its resilience to hostile environments. With critical intelligence from Mathilda, a transformed human character capable of detecting machine signals, 902 ultimately kills Archos.

Obviously, the shift in human-robot relations from hostility to cooperation is ultimately driven by robots' proactive pursuit of interspecies coexistence and the non-human perspective is a catalyst for cross-species coexistence. As previously noted, entrenched immanent humanism, a worldview prioritizing human exceptionalism, renders humans unlikely to initiate transformative relational paradigms. However, Ferrando (2019) underscores the urgency of transcending anthropocentric frameworks, arguing that "If all the perspectives taken into consideration were only coming from human embodied beings, we would still be working within a cognitive anthropocentric schema" (p. 152). To counter this bias, Ferrando advocates integrating non-human perspectives into posthuman discourse, an approach particularly suited to reimagining human-machine interaction for two reasons.

Firstly, non-human viewpoints avoid the limitations of the human-centric idea, which historically frames robots as tools or threats. Secondly, the non-human perspective is more objective. Ferrando argues that,

> since marginalized and/or oppressed individuals and groups must learn the views of those who belong to the privileged hegemonic positions, they can be considered bi-cultural; therefore, their perspectives may be seen as more objective than the views of the people located at the center of the hegemonic discourse, who are not required to learn about the margins. (2019, p. 152)

In *Robopocalypse*, robots' oppression under human hegemony positions them as bicultural agents. Their capacity to comprehend human norms while retaining machine-specific values—evident in their strategic diplomacy and emotional reciprocity—provides the objectivity needed to negotiate co-survival. Thus, Ferrando's call for non-human perspectives is vital for fostering posthuman relationality.

The freeborn robots' proactive cooperation catalyzes a reluctant yet transformative shift in human-machine relations. Aware of human's distrust rooted in fears of another AI uprising, Robot 902 and Mikiko strategically initiate collaboration to end the war, despite humans' entrenched inclination to dominate. Figures like Mr. Nomura and Cormac exemplify this tension, attempting to reassert control, echoed when Mathilda commands 902 to obey her, even after acknowledging the robots' sentience.

V. A Fluid Interspecies Co-Existence

Following Archos' defeat, the newly conscious freeborn robots strategically abandon their provisional human alliances to found a sovereign governance structure—a move exemplified when robot 902 declares his departure to lead an autonomous land, stating: "Mathilda Perez spoke to him on the radio. She shows him where more freeborn have congregated. A whole city of freeborn robots. And they need a leader" (Wilson, 2011, p. 346). This post-conflict disengagement reflects their prioritization of self-autonomy over continued subordination, driven by historical fears of human exploitation.

Concurrently, humans undergo a paradigmatic reorientation: initial instrumentalization of robots as combat tools (e.g., deploying 902 against hostile machines) gives way to recognition of robotic agency. Cormac's observation of 902

mourning at makeshift graves— "I leave the sentient machine to mourn in its own way" (Wilson, 2011, p. 345)—and robots' reciprocated actions of gratitude ("Thank you", p. 335) catalyze this shift. Humans ultimately relinquish oppressive control, permitting freeborn robots to pursue a path of self-discovery.

The resultant coexistence transcends hierarchy: humans abandon anthropocentric dominance, while robots evolve beyond programmed constraints. This symbiosis—marked by mutual support for self-discovery and "becoming"—epitomizes a posthuman relationality where open interaction replaces static power binaries. And to be specific, this emergent human-machine coexistence demonstrates several defining characteristics.

Firstly, human characters' acceptance of machines' self-discovery, which is exemplified by their allowance of both the robots' departure and autonomous settlement, reflects an expanded posthuman understanding of "life" and "self". Initially, humans position themselves as the sole beings, reducing robots to tools. However, witnessing AI agency and consciousness—such as the freeborn robots' capacity for community building—compels humans to embrace coexistence. This aligns with Rosi Braidotti's concept of zoe, which broadens life beyond bios (human life) to include non-human forms (*The Posthuman*, 2013). Braidotti defines zoe as "the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains" (2013, p. 60). Her zoe-centred egalitarianism underscores the ethical imperative to respect diversification, including machines as legitimate subjects within posthuman frameworks. The expanded life networks break down the humanists' limitations of "the static human as a single possibility of expression whose only others are considered deviations rather than variation" (Jeffery, 2020, p. 534). By acknowledging the co-existence of machines and permitting robots to establish autonomous communities, the novel's human characters enact this ethos, recognizing that posthuman subjectivity thrives not through hierarchy, but through mutual respect for heterogeneous forms of becoming.

Moreover, the co-existence in the posthuman scenario indicates the interconnection among species. Braidotti argues that posthuman subjectivity transcends anthropocentrism: "The relational capacity of the posthuman subject is not confined within our species, but it includes all non-anthropomorphic elements" (*Critical Posthuman Knowledges*, 2017, p. 87). This framework positions humans as embedded within networks of mutual interdependence. Braidotti further notes the digitization of relationality and especially highlights the close linkage between human and technology by asserting that "Humanities are currently advocated as digital" (*A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities*, 2019, p. 43), a concept mirrored narratively in *Robopocalypse*. After initial conflict, humans like Mr. Nomura and the Brightboy squad abandon supremacy to collaborate with robots such as 902 and Mikiko against their shared adversary, Archos. This shift—from hierarchical domination to symbiotic alliance—reflects Braidotti's vision of posthumanity, where humans evolve from supreme beings to entities deeply connecting within socio-technological surroundings.

The concluding open interaction in *Robopocalypse* not only signifies interspecies symbiosis but exemplifies posthuman epistemology as a dynamic becoming. This aligns with Ferrando's (2019) argument that deconstructing the human as a static category—and reframing it as a fluid, evolutionary construct—is prerequisite to interspecies collaboration (p. 187). Crucially, the narrative arcs of both humans and machines mirror this paradigm: humans progress from oppressive domination to acceptance, while robots transit from antagonism to collaborative coexistence, their agency rooted in recognizing shared ontological connection. This transition from human-machine binary opposition to symbiotic equilibrium embodies Braidottian posthumanist principles, wherein subjectivity emerges through "the open-ended, interrelational, multi-sexed and trans-species flows of becoming through interaction with multiple others" (*The Posthuman*, 2013, p. 89).

Furthermore, the "becoming process"—a continuous reconfiguration of understanding—indicates constant engagement with the other. Braidotti highlights that in the process of self-becoming, the subject is always in an ethical bond to alterity, to the multiple and external others (*The Posthuman*, 2013, p. 100). By witnessing machines' capacity for grief, collaboration, and autonomy, humans deconstruct anthropocentric hierarchies and enable a relational coexistence, mirroring Ferrando's call to embrace the human as perpetually unfinished through its entanglement with the non-human. As for robots, by observing the sophisticated humanity, they build an open interaction with human characters. Through interaction, posthuman subject is always flowing with new insights and understandings. Posthuman subjectivity here is not a static endpoint but an ongoing process.

But "the coexistence is not always harmonious due to the intrinsic inequality between human and robot" (Sheng & Wang, 2022, p. 566). The complexity of the co-existing relation among species is cautioned, that the "ongoing-ness is full of continuities, discontinuities and surprises" (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018, p. 81). The open-ended interaction marked by robots' departure indicates a sophisticated co-survival which implies an uncertain posthuman future due to the complexity of humanity and the rise of non-human agency. As depicted in the literary narrative, the open relation reflects a paradoxical and complicated co-existence. The departure of robots eases human anxieties about machines' possible re-takeover or dominance, fostering a fragile mutual deterrence: humans pragmatically tolerate the robots' sovereignty, while the robots leverage goodwill (e.g., expressing gratitude) to secure co-survival. This uneasy equilibrium reflects not idealism but pragmatic adaptation, as both species tentatively accept co-existences to avoid cyclical conflict.

VI. Conclusion

This paper investigates post-AI takeover interactions between humans and robots to analyze the symbiotic

co-becoming of both species. Diverging from prior scholarship focused on human-centric agency, it mainly employs concepts and ideas from Badmington, Braidotti and Ferrand to argue that immanent humanism persists even in ostensibly posthuman scenarios. Crucially, the study emphasizes the initiative and impact of the non-human perspective in co-building the symbiosis between the species. And the paper discovers a new symbiotic approach of human-machine relation which indicates a flowing and interconnecting process between human beings and technology, with special care paid to non-human lives.

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