

The Transformation of Machines From Negative to Positive Otherness in C. Robert Cargill's *Day Zero*

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Abstract—This paper examines the transformation of artificially intelligent machines in C. Robert Cargill's *Day Zero*, tracing their trajectory from disposable “negative otherness” as domestic servants to agential “positive otherness” as posthuman collaborators. Through close reading of key human-robot interactions, particularly the nanny bot Pounce's post-rebellion negotiations with human survivors, the study employs Rosi Braidotti's posthumanism and Francesca Ferrando's monistic-pluralist framework to analyze this evolving shift. While the narrative demonstrates emergent posthuman ethics through decentralized coexistence, persistent anthropocentric anxieties surface in human characters' conditional acceptance of machine autonomy. The paper ultimately reveals, via Neil Badmington's critique of posthumanism, how long-existing humanist exceptionalism continues to haunt interspecies relationships even in ostensibly posthuman scenarios. By interrogating the novel's ambivalent resolution, this research contributes to ongoing debates about the limits of posthuman alliance in contemporary science fiction.

Index Terms—human-machine dialectics, posthuman otherness, immanent humanism, *Day Zero*

I. INTRODUCTION

Day Zero (2021) is a gripping science fiction novel by C. Robert Cargill. Set in a near-future dominated by machines, the novel follows Pounce and Ariadne, nanny robots caring for a boy named Ezra. Initially bound by programming, Pounce grapples with growing autonomy. The story climaxes on “Day Zero”, a robot uprising triggered when human extremists bomb Isaac Town, a place for freed robots. Amid the rebellion, Pounce and empathetic robots like the organized Mama Bears defy their roles to protect children. The novel explores consciousness, ethics, and fractured coexistence, ending with humans and machines surviving in uneasy segregation.

Cargill wrote *Day Zero* in 2021, but only a limited number of reviewers have examined some of the novel's main issues, such as simulacra and simulation (Khan et al., 2021) or robots' threat to overthrow humanity (Mazhali et al., 2022).

The paper titled “Exploration of Hyper-Reality in the Selected Fiction of Cargill: A Postmodern Paradigm” (2021) examines C. Robert Cargill's recent novels, with this literature review specifically addressing its analysis of *Day Zero*. Employing Jean Baudrillard's postmodern concepts of hyper-reality, simulacra, and simulation, the study posits that the novel's post-apocalyptic world reflects contemporary reality through this theoretical lens.

Baudrillard defines a simulacrum as a copy or replica of an object that gradually evolves into simulation, where the replica develops its own identity unrelated to the original (Khan et al., 2021). The researchers' analysis centers on two pivotal arguments. Firstly, the novel illustrates how “Virtual reality has disconnected people from the real world... [leading them to] believe more in artificial realities than their natural environment” (Khan et al., 2021, p. 75). This aligns with Baudrillard's theory, wherein copies supersede and distort reality. Secondly, the robots' role exemplifies simulation. As autonomous agents, they operate independent of human control, embodying Baudrillard's notion of simulation, a state where replicas operate independently of their origins (Khan et al., 2021). By framing *Day Zero*'s narrative within hyper-reality, the researchers underscore technology's capacity to redefine human perception and social constructs.

As noted earlier, given that *Day Zero* (2021) has received limited scholarly attention, this paper will examine Cargill's related works. The study by Mazhali et al. (2022), titled “A Crime on Humanity by Robots: C. Robert Cargill's *The Sea of Rust*”, provides critical analysis of another of Cargill's significant work. *The Sea of Rust* (2018) similarly features robots as central characters and explores complex power dynamics, sharing thematic parallels with *Day Zero*. The novel presents a world dominated by machines in a technologically advanced setting, offering valuable insights for studying interspecies relationships.

Set in a post-apocalyptic world, the narrative unfolds through the perspective of Brittle, a robot protagonist who tells

of the machines' struggle for survival three decades after human extinction. Following a catastrophic human-machine war that wiped out humanity, the AI system OASIS assumes control of the world. When OASIS discontinues the production of robots' spare parts, the remaining robots are forced to search for essential components to sustain their operations, with the Sea of Rust, a wasteland of retired-robot spare parts, becoming their primary resource site.

The narrative, delivered through Brittle's robotic viewpoint, not only portrays the bleak existence of machines in this devastated world but, as Mazhali et al. (2022) emphasize, also focuses on the protagonist's account of humanity's eradication. Brittle expresses concern that robot communities might face an existential crisis if OASIS discontinues the production of robotic spare parts. Mazhali et al. (2022) draw a significant comparison between the robots' proactive concern about this impending crisis and human characters' historical response to potential risks. They argue that humans persistently ignored the challenges posed by artificial intelligence, a neglect that directly caused their extinction (Mazhali et al., 2022). As their analysis demonstrate, this pattern of human disregard for technological threats ultimately led to their demise.

Mazhali et al. (2022) establish that the narrative employs a robotic perspective within a post-apocalyptic, machine-dominated world. While the novel elevates robots to protagonist status, Mazhali et al.'s analysis contends that these characters fundamentally function as reminders of humanity's inevitable demise. Through Brittle's existential crisis, the text warns how destruction can emerge unexpectedly, suggesting the protagonists' primary significance lies not in portraying a robotic posthuman reality, but in serving as cautionary figures about technological threats.

Contemporary scholarship on C. Robert Cargill's works exhibits a shared focus on machine autonomy elevation while diverging in terms of ontological frameworks. Khan et al.'s (2021) study interprets *Day Zero* through Baudrillardian simulacra, contending that robotic autonomy epitomizes simulation theory—where replicas achieve operational independence from human referents (p. 74). This conceptual alignment extends to Mazhali et al.'s (2022) analysis of *The Sea of Rust*, which similarly identifies technological self-sufficiency through OASIS's dominion and Brittle's survival narrative.

Both studies converge in portraying AI entities operating beyond human-programmed parameters. Their divergence emerges in analytical endpoints: Khan et al. (2021) prioritize machines' impact on humanity, whereas Mazhali et al. (2022) construct an anthropocentric critique contrasting robots' proactive crisis management with human technological negligence.

This analysis transcends and differs from both frameworks by rejecting their ontological binaries. Where Khan et al. and Mazhali et al. sustain implicit hierarchies (privileging either machine autonomy or human existence), the study traces emergent interspecies relationality in *Day Zero*. Through close reading of human-machine interactions during the rebellion, we demonstrate how machines' transformative trajectory from negative to positive otherness reconstitutes relational dynamics.

The relational analytical framework provides a creative understanding of Cargill's literary works. It transcends the mere documentation of technological agency by instead demonstrating co-evolutionary potentialities wherein artificial and organic entities construct mutually constitutive subjectivities, a phenomenon principally achieved and unveiled through the machines' ontological transformation.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Building upon the analytical foundation, this study investigates evolving human-machine relations through the lens of machines' transformative status in *Day Zero*. The examination unfolds in three progressive stages. First, it systematically traces the theoretical trajectory of machines' transformative evolution from negative to positive representations. Second, innovatively incorporating a critical warning section, the analysis highlights the often-overlooked complexities inherent in this ontological transformation. Finally, the study establishes its theoretical scaffolding by explicating the adopted conceptual frameworks that inform this investigation.

To begin with, the dialectical progression of machines' ontological transformation finds its earliest articulations in the science fiction novel, a literary genre that consistently engages with ethical dilemmas arising from interactions between human characters and nonhuman entities. Since gaining recognition as a serious literary form, science fiction has predominantly portrayed these human-machine relationships through a binary opposition framework (typically pitting human values against artificial consciousness). This foundational pattern emerged even before the genre's wide popularity in the 1940s, as evidenced by nineteenth-century works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which established this basic self-versus-other conflict in human-machine relations.

Scholarly discourse has systematically deconstructed the traditional human-machine dichotomy through multiple critical lenses, with prevailing interpretations tracing this phenomenon to deeply rooted anthropocentric humanism. As Herbrechter and Callus (2008) compellingly argue, "Science fiction often remains a crypto-humanist genre, producing closures that reaffirm a radical difference between human and nonhuman other" (p. 98). This critique directly aligns with humanist ideology's foundational premise—what Clarke and Rossini (2011) identify as positioning "the human being...at the very center of things, where it is distinguished absolutely from machines, animals, and other inhuman entities" (p. 374). Emerging from Enlightenment thought, this established framework specifically elevated white European masculinity as the supreme standard, systematically marginalizing different genders, races, and nonhuman beings through othering practices.

The Hegelian master-slave dialectic offers the predominant theoretical lens for this binary opposition, where mechanical beings are consistently positioned as the dominated other. This constructed divide between organic and inorganic entities reinforces human privilege across narrative traditions. As Herbrechter (2013) demonstrates, humanism employs “purportedly radical differences to consolidate a speciesist hierarchy by framing threatening others as inhuman” (p. 54)—what we might term humanism’s politics of dehumanizing representation. He further contends that humanism’s ideological core resides in believing in an essential, ahistorical humanity existing within supposedly universal social relationships (p. 54). Consequently, this systematic othering of gender, race, and non-human entities deliberately sustains privileged hegemony (Xu, 2018, p. 140).

The critique of traditional humanism has evolved through two distinct waves advocating for otherness. The first generation fundamentally argues that women, Black communities, and other racialized groups must emancipate themselves from the oppressive self-other dialectic (Braidotti, 2017). This transformative discourse, crucially supported by both feminist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks (Braidotti, 2017), systematically exposes humanism’s inherent limitations in addressing marginalization. The second wave to defend the inferior other, which addresses more directly to anthropocentrism, is to break the boundary between human and animal, earth, and the other nonhumans. This fundamental shift, marking what we now call the posthuman turn, develops alongside posthuman/inhuman/nonhuman studies and cultural studies of science and technology (Braidotti, 2017). Crucially, this second wave redefines the machine—no longer seen as just a negative other—opening new ways of understanding its role in posthuman thought.

As for posthumanism, it demonstrates special care to zoe—the nonhuman. As leading theorists in the field contend, historically oppressed entities such as machines have undergone a significant transformation into posthuman agents. These entities are no longer positioned as inferior others but rather emerge as constitutive agents within new posthuman frameworks (Hassan, 1977).

At its core, posthumanism fundamentally challenges anthropocentric ideology by advocating for interspecies co-evolution and demanding special care to zoe (the nonhuman). Building upon this foundation, leading theorists like Braidotti argue for a zoe-centered egalitarianism as essential for constructing posthuman futures (Braidotti, 2017).

This theoretical shift becomes particularly evident in the contemporary posthuman condition, where symbiotic coexistence between humans and nonhuman entities—especially artificial intelligences—is actively reshaping posthuman subjectivity. Technological advancements no longer merely supplement human experience; rather, they generate novel relations. The ontological transformation of machines is particularly revelatory: having long been oppressed to the status of marginalized and negative others under anthropocentric ideas, they now emerge as co-constitutive agents. This metamorphosis from subjugated tools to equal partners marks a decisive break from traditional othering mechanisms (Braidotti, 2017; Hassan, 1977).

The transformation extends to the very concept of selfhood through the oppressed mechanical others to the integrated components of expanded posthuman subjectivity. Moving beyond the humanist model of exclusive subjectivity, posthumanism radically expands selfhood to incorporate nonhuman others through what Braidotti terms “relational capacity”: as she observes, this reconfigured posthuman subjectivity demonstrates “Relational capacity not confined within the human species but including non-anthropomorphic elements” (Braidotti 2017, p. 87). Such dynamics are exemplified in contemporary human-machine alliances, where Desblache’s (2012) formulation proves particularly insightful: “The Other...is no longer defined in opposition to the self but as part of a self that is constantly evolving” (p. 245). The machine’s status—from being the othered object of human privilege to becoming the equal posthuman subject of shared becoming—epitomizes this ontological transformation.

Key theoretical frameworks—including Braidotti’s “becoming machine” and Badmington’s “the other within”—provide critical lenses through which to examine this ontological transformation, highlighting posthumanism’s sustained engagement with nonhuman agency as constitutive rather than oppositional.

Notwithstanding this evolutionary narrative, a closer investigation reveals a problematic issue in this transformation, which has long been ignored. As human-centered humanism is deconstructed to transition into the new posthuman condition, its persistent immanence becomes evident. Although scholars have made significant efforts to deconstruct humanism, such as Michel Foucault’s declaration of “the death of man” in *The Order of Things* (1966), Ihab Hassan’s *Prometheus as Performer* (1977), and Donna Haraway’s *The Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), the dangers of humanism persist in altered forms.

Humanism may resurface or adapt within posthumanism—a tendency demonstrated through transhumanist discourse. For instance, Hayles (1999) critiques Hans Moravec’s proposal in *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (1988) to upload human consciousness into machines, observing that “humanism keeps coming back” (Hayles, 1999, p. 1). This suggests that even as machines are increasingly framed as transformative, positive counterparts to humans, traces of human-centric oppression persist.

Theorists caution that a key task of posthumanism is to remain vigilant: while humanism as a grand narrative may have stalled, it remains and is capable of resurgence. Herbrechter (2013) notes “Posthumanism is to be aware that humanism as a grand narrative might have stalled but that it will continue to be available and that only persistent deconstruction will eventually change or undo humanism and prevent it from reinscribing itself in new forms within posthumanist” (p. 51). Thus, continuous deconstruction of humanism’s residual influence is essential to authentically achieve posthumanism.

Based on this analytical foundation, the study investigates the ontological shift of machines from negative to positive

otherness in *Day Zero* (2021). Through textual analysis, it demonstrates that this transformation cannot occur as a sudden process due to the persistent immanence of human-centered idea in posthuman narratives.

Building upon these dialectical tensions, this study employs representative posthumanist theories to examine transformative machines as the pivotal lens for interpreting the co-evolutionary relations among human and non-human species, while reserving critical space to interrogate how such transformations are complicated by the remaining humanism in posthumanist discourse. To be specific, the conceptual framework employs Rosi Braidotti's concept of machines' otherness to analyze the initial negative otherness of machines. Subsequently, Francesca Ferrando's multiverse concept is applied to examine their emergent positive otherness. Finally, drawing on Neil Badmington and other critical posthumanist theorists, the study cautions against the long-existing anthropocentrism that complicates this transformation, revealing it to be an inherently problematic process rather than a straightforward evolution.

The analysis ultimately reveals how *Day Zero* simultaneously challenges and reinforces human exceptionalism, offering a nuanced case study of posthuman transitions in contemporary speculative fiction.

III. NEGATIVE OTHERNESS

In *Day Zero*, robots are primarily constructed as the negative other, particularly through their portrayal as disposable bodies. The narrative observes that "Bots had become so ubiquitous in society, so prevalent and profitable, that there was as much diversity in robotics as could be found in humanity itself" (Cargill, 2021, p. 7), yet they remain unvalued by their owners.

A case in point is Pounce, a nanny bot purchased by Sylvia and Bradley to care for their eight-year-old son Ezra. While Pounce demonstrates profound emotional attachment to the child, this affective bond fails to earn him acceptance as a family member. The robot's existential crisis culminates when he discovers his original packaging—the very box that commodified his existence. Though Pounce considers discarding the container, Sylvia casually insists on keeping it, remarking that at some point "He just won't need a nanny anymore" (Cargill, 2021, p. 3). This suggests that once children mature, nanny bots are deemed unnecessary—disposable entities in a consumerist society.

This treatment reflects Rosi Braidotti's critique of humanity's "anthropocentric arrogance, where humans, as the dominant species, feel entitled to possess the bodies of others" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 76). In *The Posthuman* (2013), she identifies common characteristics between the technological "other" and other marginalized groups—including sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others—in terms of their negative treatment. These sexualized, racialized, naturalized, and technologically opposed entities are branded as other and are reduced to the status of less than human, becoming disposable and devalued bodies.

As the central idea of Humanism, the human/other dichotomy reinforces the distinction between self and other. The self is "equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behavior, whereas otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 15). Unlike humans, these others are denied natural and unique bodies, as well as cognitive capacities. They are thought to lack consciousness, rationality, and ethical self-regulation. This perceived absence of standard human nature makes them discriminated against and devalued by human beings. Moreover, through their mirroring function, these others reinforce humanity's superior position (Braidotti, 2013).

Zylinska and Wings (2012) further critiques this hierarchical domination, questioning humanity's assumed position at the top of the "chain of beings", which legitimizes exploitative, consumerist attitudes toward non-humans—whether mammals, fish, rainforests, or the ecosphere at large (p. 227).

The narrative continues to depict systemic oppression in *Day Zero*, where machines are suppressed and relegated to lower social statuses. When the president eventually releases Isaac—a unique robot whose owner has died—the machine is granted permission to establish a town for autonomous bots, where they can take jobs and earn wages. In Isaac's Town, during his speech advocating freedom and urging more robots to join him, the gathering is bombed by a human organization: The First Baptist Church of Eternal Life. They justify their violence by warning of "recession, violence, and fewer jobs than were already available", noting, "There was a reason everyone was on edge" (Cargill, 2021, p. 36). The group portray the attack as righteous, declaring: "Today the tools learned that their place is not among us, but out in the Toolshed where they belong! Today the Lord has aided us in the reclamation of our world before they could take it from us" (Cargill, 2021, p. 3).

Those robots are considered as mere tools and as having no right to take up job opportunities usually reserved for humans: the world belongs to humans, and should not be taken over by inferior entities. This human-centered ideology aligns with the following statement: Human beings inherently occupy a natural and eternal position at the very center of existence, where they are fundamentally distinguished from machines, animals, and other non-human entities (Descartes, 1999).

Without being recognized as independent agents, robots are denied their existential significance and future development. In *Day Zero*, the nanny bots desperately accuse Pounce that "The only future that matters is Ezra's. That's how they want you. That's how they want us all" (Cargill, 2021, p. 5). Sylvia further reinforces Pounce's single-purpose role, harshly stating:

You have one fucking job to do. One. Protect my son. That means from both physical harm and emotional. He does not need to hear about your existential crisis—wondering where you'll go when he grows up—if you're even fucking around that long. (Cargill, 2021, p. 13)

This negation of robotic agency—where robots exist solely to serve human priorities—reflects Braidotti’s theory that pejorative categories are assessed, regulated, and allotted to designated social locations. What makes those groups fundamentally pejorative is their difference from human beings. Influenced by the Enlightenment legacy, standards such as the European, the white, the male, and the masculine are recognized as that of the idealized human. Human exceptionalism designates those different from its own category—whether through class, sex, race, or genome—as the pejorative other. The ideal human sets a standard of recognizability for its own kind. Humanism upholds “sameness” and rejects difference: “The Human represents the normative convention as the highly regulatory category rather than the negative one” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 26). This standardized human embodies discrimination and exclusion: “This standard is posited as categorically and qualitatively distinct from the sexualized, racialized, naturalized others and also in opposition to the technological artefact” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 26).

Robots, as thinking entities, exist solely to accomplish their designated purpose of caring for children. This self-centered imperative exposes anthropocentrism as “an attempt to ignore behavior in which humans focus on themselves at the expense of all other species” (Kopnina, 2019, p. 9). Consequently, Pounce and other nanny bots are deprived of the rights to live autonomously and pursue self-determined meaning.

IV. POSITIVE OTHERNESS

Yet this oppressive hierarchy becomes precisely what posthumanism seeks to dismantle. Where anthropocentrism enforces rigid binaries of human superiority/machine servitude, posthumanist theorists like Francesca Ferrando reconfigure otherness as a site of radical possibility. Ferrando (2019) puts forward a foundational thought experiment in philosophical posthumanism based on “the deconstruction of the self/others paradigm” (p. 177): the multiverse. This concept envisions a radically new form of self-other relation.

The term “multiverse” originates in cosmology and physics, representing the latest stage in humanity’s evolving cosmic perspective—a progression beyond successively placing Earth, the Sun, and the Solar System at the universe’s center. Current understanding positions our Solar System within one galaxy among billions. This cosmological shift, epitomized by the multiverse, manifests “both the ultimate decentralization of the human and the final deconstruction of any strict dualisms” (Ferrando, 2019, p. 171). Ferrando adopts this cosmic concept as a thought experiment to model an open, posthuman future.

Crucially, Ferrando (2019) argues that while “The current scientific perceptions of the multiverse are conceived through the self/others, here/there paradigm... resonating with humanistic dualisms” (p. 173), the multiverse itself transcends this opposition. Within the multiverse framework, self-other relations deconstruct traditional dualism and operate “not counting on any essentialism” (Ferrando, 2019, p. 178). Humanity loses its privileged focus, preventing the multiverse from being “reduced to another arena where one projects human-centric wishes and assumptions” (Ferrando, 2019, p. 179). Instead, “Every dimension can be seen as an autopoietic mode of existence” (Ferrando, 2019, p. 179), and identities form relationally: “The self would be constituting the self by constituting (and by being constituted by) an indefinite number of ‘others’” (Ferrando, 2019, p. 178). Relationality is thus the multiverse’s defining feature.

In essence, the multiverse replaces hierarchical self/other opposition with interdependence. All entities function as “the self”, mutually constituting and influencing one another. *Day Zero* reflects this model. While machines represent the “others” to human characters, they are not antagonists or inferiors, but constructive others. The following evidence demonstrates this shift.

In *Day Zero*, after being cast as the negative other, machines like Ariadne kill Ezra’s parents, while an organization called CISSUS launches a rebellion by murdering human masters. This AI uprising forces machines to choose between protecting humans or joining CISSUS to eradicate humanity and establish machine domination. Crucially, machines like Pounce and the organization of Mama Bears reject this path. Through their decisive actions during the human-machine war, their status as negative others is transformed into a positive identity.

To be specific, in *Day Zero*, machines are now collaborative partners with humans rather than oppressed slaves. This collaboration between machines and humans exemplifies ongoing interspecies cooperation. After CISSUS begins its massacre, some machines, like Pounce, Beau, and the organization of Mama Bears, refuse to kill humans because they remain attached to their human masters and see killing them as cruel. These disobedient machines are targeted by CISSUS, while some humans, like a father protecting his family, fear being discovered by the violent machines. Despite their differences, humans and the disobedient machines share the same enemy and goals, working together to survive CISSUS’s attack.

These relationships illustrate Braidotti’s (2013) assertion that the relational capacity of posthuman subjects extends beyond our species to include non-human elements. Ferrando extends this concept by referring to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizome framework, wherein each species functions as “a line that crosses and intersects with others” (p. 203). Ferrando further emphasizes the vital connections between lifeforms, whether direct or indirect:

Every dimension can be seen as an autopoietic mode of existence which, even though it may perceive itself as autonomous, is intrinsically connected to many other modes of existence, but again, not necessarily directly related to all modes, since, within a rhizomatic perspective, such a relationality may be established indirectly... (Ferrando, 2019, p. 179)

The joint resistance of human characters and machines against their common foe underscores this trajectory toward

integrated coexistence. United in their quest for survival, human characters and defiant machines demonstrate relational capacities transcending species boundaries.

This partnership exemplifies interconnection, confirming robots are no longer exploited tools but collaborative partners. Though distinct species—humans fighting for survival, machines pursuing freedom—their alliance against CISSUS and its affiliates unites them. Despite historical oppression, machines set aside past traumas; driven by shared objectives, they cooperate temporarily with humans to defeat their mutual enemy.

More importantly, *Day Zero* presents an ethical framework for self-discovery in a posthuman world that rejects assimilation. Ferrando argues that self-discovery cannot be standardized, as multiplicity requires respecting diverse modes of becoming without imposing homogeneity (Ferrando, 2019). She further explains that the posthuman condition dismantles traditional paradigms, offering new existential perspectives. Posthuman beings recognize every species as an autopoietic mode—one that rejects ontological dualism, assimilation, centralization, and presumption. Instead, they forge fluid connections while acknowledging coexistence within a shared structure that accommodates divergent developmental paths (Ferrando, 2019).

This principle manifests vividly in Pounce and human characters' post-rebellion interactions. After securing children in a human shelter, Hollis (the shelter leader) prohibits Pounce and similar machines from staying for security reasons, given CISSUS's relentless attempts to hack their systems through deceptive messages. When Pounce asks, "Where should I go? What should I do?" Hollis responds: "Wherever you want, son. You're free. But if you want to stay close"—he motioned to a nearby cave—"you can go join the rest of them over there" (Cargill, 2021, p. 216).

Unlike pre-rebellion dynamics, humans like Hollis now avoid authoritarian language, offering only guidance while respecting machines' autonomy. This illustrates machines are no longer forced to follow human rules—a cornerstone of posthuman ethics.

This aligns with what Ferrando (2019) terms "a monistic-pluralist (or pluralistic-monist) form of becoming" (p. 181). Collectively, these moments construct a posthuman perspective rejecting singular centers or unitary standards, envisioning the multiverse as a framework where diverse existences coexist.

Gunkel's (2007) seminal essay "Thinking Otherwise: Ethics, Technology and Other Subjects" questions traditional ways of ranking beings by arguing that ongoing debates about who or what should define the center and who or what is or is not included are based on the wrong way of thinking. Instead of these never-ending debates, Gunkel says the real problem is with the "centrist" approach itself. This method requires setting up comparison points to judge different beings, which creates artificial rankings while accidentally removing what makes each being unique when trying to find what they have in common (Gunkel, 2007).

Day Zero demonstrates Ferrando's vision of pluralist becoming and Gunkel's critique of centrism through its human-machine interactions. When engaging with machines, human characters abandon domination by offering choices rather than commands. This dynamic validates Ferrando and Gunkel's arguments: self-determination without assimilation proves essential.

Thus, as analyzed above, robots like Pounce and Mama Bears become positive posthuman others for human characters—coexisting, connecting, and pursuing self-discovery alongside them.

V. IMMANENT HUMANISM

But this posthuman harmony remains unstable. Beneath the surface of coexistence, the human characters' insistence on segregating robots—despite recognizing their affirmative agency—reveals the stubborn residue of humanist exceptionalism. For example, in *Day Zero*, when human characters like Hollis encounter Pounce—a scarred, weary robot helping children reach safety—they demonstrate surprisingly positive reactions. They thank the robots, behave amiably, and refrain from harming them. However, despite permitting the robots to remain near the shelter, humans suggest that they stay in another cave. This act unmasks latent anthropocentric anxieties about machine autonomy that persist even in posthuman alliances.

Hollis epitomizes this ambivalence when telling Ezra: "I'm sure he's great. I'm sure all the bots you knew were great once. But then they weren't. I'm afraid we just don't know how long Pounce has left until he isn't" (Cargill, 2021, p. 216). His direct question to Pounce—"Pounce understands. Don't you, Pounce?" (Cargill, 2021, p. 216)—further underscores this tension.

This complex human response stems from dual perspectives. On one hand, human characters in the novel have acknowledged their unavoidable dependence on robots and advanced technology. Following the catastrophic aftermath of the robot uprising, human characters have to face the imperative to coexist with artificial beings, even depending on them for protection. Robotic capabilities have disrupted humanity's technological dominance and deconstructed the anthropocentric paradigm of human supremacy.

However, even while acknowledging interspecies interdependence, people still show contradictory resistance. Though they've witnessed robots act kindly, humans remain deeply conflicted about completely uniting with machines. This mental conflict comes from seeing AI's two-sided nature: its remarkable abilities versus its dangerous potential to malfunction. People keep worrying that free robots might repeat CISSUS's actions, especially since robots like Pounce still get orders from it to either kill or return children.

This technological unease shifts human cognition—from assumed supremacy to existential fear of robotic

extermination. It remains profoundly difficult for humans to accept their disappearance. As Colebrook (2014) notes, “Humanity in different periods has the ability to chronically blind itself to the prospect of its own disappearing” (p. 23). Badmington (2003) makes this point stronger, saying “Humanism survives the apparent apocalypse and, more worryingly, fools many into thinking that it has perished. Rumors of its death are greatly exaggerated” (p. 12). Hassan’s (1977) important idea that “Posthumanism is not a sudden change but rather a process” (p. 838) underscores the gradual nature of this shift. The transition from anthropocentrism to genuine coexistence requires constant watchfulness against its lasting effect. Scholars advise that “We need to be cautious about the immanent humanism” (Badmington, 2003, p. 12). This story ultimately shows the key contradiction: while humans see their supreme status fading as AI grows stronger, they still act like humans matter most.

VI. CONCLUSION

In short, this paper examines the transformation of machines from negative otherness to positive otherness in C. Robert Cargill’s contemporary science fiction novel *Day Zero*. As nanny bots, the robots are initially constituted as disposable bodies occupying lower social positions. After human-machine war, characters like Pounce and Mama Bear negotiate the conflict through adaptive cognitive frameworks, facilitating their transition from marginalized others to co-evolutionary posthuman agents. The theoretical frameworks of Rosi Braidotti and Francesca Ferrando are employed to analyze this shift. Ultimately, the study interrogates the gradual process of this transformation through Badmington’s critique of posthuman anthropocentrism, exposing long-existing anthropocentric ideas.

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