
**THE STATE OF WOMEN IN ASIMOV'S "THE EVITABLE CONFLICT"
AND "LENNY"**

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Abstract: Science Fiction is always foreseeing what would happen in the future. Always the central question of science fiction is 'what if?' And it cannot hide the "analogous question 'what, then, becomes of us?'. In many science fiction stories one can find how human behaviours are shown as a common to both the genders and depict heroines carrying out men's work in a capable way. Thus in science fiction one can find the absolute break in the social custom and tradition and can witness how masculine qualities are attributed to women. Here in these short stories "Lenny" and "Evitable Conflict" one can find an evolution of women's role from a mother to a robot to a rational thinking female. The third story supports the idea of third wave of feminism.

Key words: Cyborg, Feminized body, Masculinised mind, Posthumanism

Literature can be called a kind of reflection and refraction of life. Writers try to write their experience or impression or imagination about life. The term 'Science Fiction' covers novels and short stories that portray what can be called imagined reality which is entirely different from nature and functioning of the ordinary world experience. Often the background would be of another planet, or imagination about the earth in future, or an imagination about the parallel universe.

Always the central question of science fiction is 'what if?' And it cannot hide the analogous question 'what, then, becomes of us?' Brian Attebery observes that "The master narrative of science has always been told in sexual terms. It represents knowledge, innovation, and even perception as masculine, while nature, the passive object of exploration, is described as feminine" (Merrick 241). Brian Attebery's observation supports the accusation of feminists about the role allotted to women in the patriarchal society but one also should be able to understand the other available option in science fiction "was to postulate a set of 'human behaviours' available to both men and women and depict female 'heroes' capably carrying out 'men's work'" (Merrick 245).

Asimov can be called the godfather of robot stories as it is difficult for any science fiction critic to speak or write about robot stories without mentioning his name. Asimov started writing robotic stories by propounding three laws for which he can be called the 'godfather' of Robot stories. They are as follows:

- 1 - A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
- 2 - A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the first law.
- 3 - A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the first (or) second law. (Asimov 8)

Asimov created and used a character named Susan Calvin, a 'Robopsychologist'. Susan Calvin acts as the

central axle in the short story collection *I, Robot* and also takes the central place in many robot stories of Asimov. She is described as a "frosty girl, plain and colourless, who protected herself against a world she disliked by a mask-like expression and hypertrophy of intellect. But as she watched and listened, she felt the strings of a cold enthusiasm" (Asimov 9). Here in this description one can find how the qualities which are usually attributed to a male are attributed to a female.

In the story, "The Evitable Conflict", Susan explains "Now the Machine understands them; and no one can stop them, since the Machines will deal with them as they are dealing with the Society - having, as they do, the greatest of weapons at their disposal, the absolute control of our economy" (EC 249). One can find the rationalizing capacity she got and she did not get panic even after knowing that the created are going to control the creator.

Patriarchal society usually attributes rationalizing capacity to men and women are supposed to be emotional but here one can find the reversal of everything. In the story, "Lenny", Susan Calvin settled the problem through her usual rationalizing style, she got a kind of emotional attachment towards the robot Lenny which was understood by Bogert and while he started explaining it he said that "Even if all she has said is perfectly true, it is only rationalization as far as she is concerned. Her motive in all this is her desire to hold on to this robot. If we pressed her... she would say it was to continue learning techniques of teaching robots, but I think she has found another use for Lenny. A rather unique one that would fit only Susan of all women" (L 175). The emotional attachment which Susan Calvin has on the robot matures into a motherly love. Because of this motherly love she went into her private lab while the important meeting was going on and

She ran to a corner of one bookcase and picked up an object of intricate metal webbery, dumbbell shaped and hollow, with variously -shaped metal pieces

inside each hollow, just too large to be able to fall out of the webbing.

As she picked it up, the metal pieces within moved and struck together, clicking pleasantly. It struck Lanning that the object was a kind of robotic version of a baby rattle.

As Susan Calvin opened the door again to pass through, Lenny's voice chimed again from within. This time, Lanning heard it clearly as it spoke the words Susan Calvin had taught it.

In heavenly celeste-like sounds, it called out, 'Mommie, I want you. I want you, Mommie.'

And the footsteps of Susan Calvin could be heard hurrying eagerly across the laboratory floor toward the only kind of baby she could ever have or love. (L 175-176)

Here by her activities one can find the true love of a mother who would do anything to pacify her child. One can also find a point which the third wave feminists emphasize often and that is a world without men. Here one can find a woman who is not married or had any relationship with men but got a robot

baby while in other science fiction one can find the concept of "(masculinised) 'mind' over (feminized) 'body'" (Merrick 250) as one can find in Susan Calvin. This concept helps one to understand Jungian concept of 'animus' or the society in which men are marginalized or eradicated as one can find in "Via the Hewitt Ray" by Margaret F. Rupert (1930) and Leslie Francis Stone's "The Conquest of Gola" (1931). Even Slavoj Zizek satirically insists "No Sex, Please, We're Post-Human!" (Hollinger 268). Thus one can enter into the understanding of "Posthumanism" and "Cyborg Theory".

Karen Fowler asked "Just ask yourself, if we weren't taught to be women, what would we be? (Ask yourself this question even if you're a man, and don't cheat by changing the words)" (Merrick 251). Thus the so long socially constructed and preserved behaviour would be no more in the future and this concept is projected and explained very well and that too in a scientifically advanced world.

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