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*Manuel Botero Camacho
Julio San Román Cazorla*

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Botero Camacho, Manuel; San Román Cazorla, Julio

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The Electric Golem: Updating The Myth in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*

El gólem eléctrico: actualización del mito en *Machines Like Me* de Ian McEwan

Manuel Botero Camacho
Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid, España
mbotero@ucm.es

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6200-0629>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15517/rfl.v48i1.48061>
Redalyc: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=33268016003>

Julio San Román Cazorla
Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid, España
julsanro@ucm.es

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0695-6076>

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ABSTRACT:

This article presents the evolution of the Golem's myth in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* using the myth's actualisation presented in Borges' poem "The Golem". An analysis of how the mythic roles embodied by the main characters of the novel are reverted is provided, establishing a parallelism between the myth and the modern theme of androids. The result of this appears to be catastrophic for humanity as the artificial creation of life and the inclusion of androids in society is perceived as a threat due to the fact that ancient creation myths remain in humankind's memory, especially those where humans' creations defy their creators. Adam, the android who plays the role of the Golem ultimately reveals himself as a perfect creation, far from what his mythic counterpart is supposed to be and Charlie, his owner and creator, afraid of being inferior to the android, decides to kill him in order to reaffirm the already established human power over the machines.

KEYWORDS: *Machines Like Me*, Ian McEwan, androids, Golem, Borges.

RESUMEN:

Este artículo presenta la evolución del mito del Golem en *Machines Like Me* de Ian McEwan utilizando la actualización del mito presentada en el poema de Borges "El Golem". Será analizada la reversión de los roles míticos encarnados por los personajes principales de la novela estableciendo un paralelismo entre el mito y el tema moderno de los androides. El resultado de esto parece ser catastrófico para la humanidad, ya que la creación artificial de vida y la inclusión de los androides en la sociedad se percibe como una amenaza debido al hecho de que los antiguos mitos de la creación permanecen en la memoria de la humanidad, especialmente aquellos en los que las creaciones humanas desafían a sus creadores. Adam, el androide que interpreta el papel del Golem, finalmente se revela a sí mismo como una creación perfecta, lejos de lo que se supone que es su contraparte mítica y Charlie, su dueño y creador, temeroso de ser inferior al androide, decide matarlo para reafirmar el poder humano ya establecido sobre las máquinas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Machines Like Me*, Ian McEwan, androides, Golem, Borges.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed the exploitation of different techniques of storytelling as a result of the constant demands of the public, who is increasingly interested in the evolution of fictional characters and their environment. John Brannigan attributes the origin of this tendency to "a huge demand for literary books as texts for study" as well as to the interest of "generations of people who have learned to enjoy and appreciate reading literature, both for entertainment and for gaining knowledge and understanding" (2018, p. 573). This hunger for new stories that extols these values have led authors to create their own mythologies inside literary fictional worlds by blending literary motifs from past literature and their concerns about the future and the consequences of human acts. Good examples of this are Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never let me go*

(2005), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), or Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2011); novels that present moral dilemmas with which the reader can engage because of their connection to with the future of humankind.

Umberto Eco (1984, p. 40) argues that Western culture finds in literature and in its expressive capacities more than just mere stories, but rather a rendering of the answers humankind has always been searching, and the actualisation of preceding cultural models, which will eventually be the cause of a modified humankind. Throughout history, beliefs –presented orally or in the written format– have shaped the society in which they were inscribed. Joseph Campbell (2004, p. 3) claims, in *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*, that myth was the basic human cultural manifestation on which other narratives, such as philosophy, religion, art, and even history, were constructed. The production of myths has encouraged humans to enquire into the most unknown natural principles of the world, from the functioning and arrangement of celestial bodies in the sky to the origin of humankind. For many, myths in the 21st century might be just the echoes of the fantasies of past societies, which did not have the means to scientifically understand the processes inherent to existence. However, in contemporary fiction, myths are still reduplicated and adapted to modern tastes. Eliade states that:

“Myth” means a “true story” and, beyond that, a story that is a most precious possession because it is sacred, exemplary, significant. [...] myth is –or was until very recently– “living,” in the sense that it supplies models for human behaviour and, by that very fact, gives meaning and value to life (1963, pp. 1-2).

In her work, “Cíborg: el mito posthumano”, Gallinal (2016, p. 61) addresses one of the main interests of postmodern theory, the body, arguing from an anthropocentric point of view that mythic legends encourage humans to question the relativity of the world as well as its narration, placing the centre of both matters in the human body. The subject of the body has been of special interest to different disciplines: in religion, several primordial texts deal with the idea of the body, such as the myth of the Golem in the Jewish Kabbalah; in literature, Mary Shelley explored the existence of the soul and the deformation and reconstruction of the flesh in *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818/1999) in sciences, Charles Darwin (1859/2001) would initiate an investigation about the changes that the human body had experienced as a result of the evolutionary process. Nonetheless, there was a drift in the way authors dealt with the topic between Modernism and Postmodernism. While Modernism preferred the praise of the ego, depicted in a heroic, Promethean and Apollonian body, Postmodernism proposed its dissolution, depicting it in crisis, off-centred (Gallinal, 2016, p. 63). The disruption of the body in a society, whose ideals of beauty are based on physical appearance and the cult of the body, entails the necessity of a reinvention of human nature, shape, and environment, that is, a new *ego*.

Myths about eternal life link the body with the culture and the environment they expect to inhabit. Myths that deal with the topic of perpetuating life eternally present the possibility of attaining such condition only in unreachable islands like Atlantis, Utopia, or Antillia, to name but a few (Gallinal, 2016, p. 61). Therefore, just as these insular myths imply that space shapes the body, so does contemporary society, that worships the body as a result of the attainment of a certain physiognomy defined by social norms. Thus, the achievement of fulfilling social norms with the body not only creates a homogeneous society but also power structures within it. This issue has been addressed by Michel Foucault (2014, p. 140) aided by the concept of biopower, understood as the regulation of the individuals through “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations”.

The technological advances of individual societies threaten biopower. Gallinal (2016, p. 64) argues that in this subject-space relationship machines contribute to the defiance of individuals to normalised societies that try to impose their norms over them. Contemporary fiction crafts stories in which humans can actualise and regenerate damaged body parts with technology, thus creating defiance to the rule. This can be seen in *Never let me go* (Ishiguro, 2005), where the main characters are clones designed to donate their organs to prolong the life expectancy of the rest of society; or in *Cloud Atlas*, in which Mitchell (2004) dedicates the chapter

“An Orison of Sonmi-451” to the moral implications of cloning and its darkest aspects. This threat that technology poses for biopower is even encouraged by the existence of androids, which present the possibility for humans of sharing their environment with other intelligent beings. Foucault (2014, p. 16) defines society as a space that does not belong to any of the individuals that created and share it, a penetrable environment of human relations with the Other. Then, the question arises of whether humans can share their environment with other sentient beings with synthetic bodies whose feelings are unlikely to exist.

Machines Like Me (2019), a novel by Ian McEwan, constitutes another instance in which this issue is presented and developed. The novel narrates the relationship of Charlie with his neighbor and love interest, Miranda, and with Charlie's newest acquisition, Adam, the latest innovation in Artificial Intelligence, a synthetic human. With the participation of Miranda in shaping Adam's personality, they design a living machine that will face a complex world where he will strive to develop his social skills and own morals. However, Adam, who at the beginning seems to be Charlie's salvation and the only way of establishing a relationship with Miranda, eventually becomes his owners' downfall when Adam decides to reveal Miranda's darkest secret, upending their former perspective on life as well as the process of child adoption they are undertaking. The novel focuses on the relationship between the three characters and how the android's actions affect the lives of Charlie and Miranda, leading them into a desperate situation that will force them to choose between letting him live or not. It is the intention of this article to present the rendering of the Jewish Golem in the character of Adam and how the mythic roles embodied by him and Charlie are reverted due to the android's existence and interaction with the environment and society. Therefore, this article will analyse the influences of the Jewish myth of the Golem, as retold by Borges, on the modern myth of androids and how it catastrophically affects humanity.

2. THE BODY AND THE WORD OF TURING

In most of Science-Fiction stories, androids are presented as machines bounded to do household chores and play their part as servants for humans. It is often argued in these stories that servitude for androids is not regarded as slavery due to the fact that key human aspects are missing in their creation, most notably the existence of a soul or feelings, an idea that is generally questioned in most of the narratives of the genre. Therefore, biopower structures remain intact as humans are still in control of society by maintaining a superior role over their intelligent counterparts. However, there is a feeling of mistrust in machines that has been present in human minds since the beginning of the 19th century, when Luddism, an anti-machinist movement opposed to technological change during the Industrial Revolution, appeared to claim that workers were dismissed or enslaved due to technical innovations in the machinery of factories. Since then, several theories about the imminent war between machines and humans have appeared.

Most of the theories that confront humans with machines –or androids, since the mid-20th century– find their sources in the myths of different cultures in which a mythical *other* brings the destruction of individuals and communities. Two years after the Luddites' attacks, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818/1999) by Mary Shelley was first published. The idea that science could create a living and intelligent creature, that brought devastation to the life of its creator, fascinated the readership. Nonetheless, this idea, intentionally or not, was not original at all. Before *Frankenstein*, the Jewish Kabbalah had already introduced the notion of a creature that brings havoc to its creator, that is, the myth of the golem.

The golem is generally depicted as a child-like-minded clay creature of variable size. In Hebrew, golem means amorphous, and this is the name given to the first Adam who, according to Jewish oral tradition, destroys Paradise because of its disproportionate growth and lack of understanding. After introducing the transformation of the myth in Gustav Meyrik's fantastic novel *The Golem*, Gershom Scholem (1965, pp. 158-159) presents what he calls “its late Jewish form” by quoting Jakob Grimm's version in which Jewish people create small mud servants who are bounded to do the housework. The process of creation consists

in fasting and constant praying, after which life is insufflated into the golems through the pronunciation of the *Shem ha-Memphorash* (Divine name). The appearance of the golems does not differ from other versions, as it remains monstrous; however, it is worth highlighting that in their foreheads, the Hebrew word *emet* (truth) is written. When the golems start growing and become stronger than the members of the family, their masters could erase the first letter of the word written in the forehead, resulting in the word *met* (he is dead), which according to the Jewish Kabbalah, implies the death of the creature. Nonetheless, there is a story of a man who lets his golem grow much more than the rest of his countrymen and, when he erases the letter, the golem falls down on him, causing his death.

Alazraki (1983) mentions different versions of the myth, raging from that of a Talmudic passage that attributes to the first Adam that name that means “amorphous”, to that of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* where the alchemical process of Paracelsus is mentioned and the cabalistic process reduced to formulas and laboratories. He mentions the influence of the legend, amongst others, in the work entitled *God and Golem Inc.* (1966) written by Norbert Wiener, which discusses the possibility that machines, by being able to create other machines, can finally control the world. Also, of course, Gustav Meyrink’s (1928) version is mentioned as, says Alazraki (1983, pp. 219-223), is the one Borges uses for his poem and leads to his explanation of the character, which, ultimately becomes an amalgam of several of these versions.

Throughout *Machines Like Me* echoes of Borges’ texts can be heard, for instance, “The Approach to Al-Mu’tasim” (Borges, 1993c) (McEwan, 2019, p. 15) or “Afterglow” (Borges, 1996a) (McEwan, 2019, p. 123). “The Garden of Forking Paths” (Borges, 1993a) is blatantly referred to when Charlie says “I was convinced I’d reach one of those momentous points in life where the path into the future forked” (McEwan, 2019, p. 30), and continues to be alluded there on (McEwan, 2019, pp. 39, 46, 64, 70, 71, 77). The intuition that Borges’ texts appear in *Machines Like Me* is confirmed by a seemingly commonplace reference to Borges – “I summoned the Borges observation” (McEwan, 2019, p. 75). Therefore, it is not far-fetched to link one of his most celebrated poems, “El Golem” (Borges, 1996b), with a novel that reflects upon the topic of Artificial Intelligence. The influence of Borges’ literature in *Machines Like Me* is reinforced by the constant repetition of the number three, which is a common motif that can be seen in short stories like “Death and the Compass” (Borges, 1993b) or “La rosa de Paracelso” (Borges, 1996c). The use of the number three establishes a direct connection to the so-called “third man argument”, which is at the core of the philosophical interpretations of some of his stories and poems like the aforementioned “The Approach to Al-Mu’tasim” (Borges, 1993c) or “El Golem” (Borges, 1996b), among others (Botero, 2009). The argument can be stated briefly as a retrogression *ad infinitum* in which the copy is worse than its predecessor, which again is worse than its predecessor and so on and so forth. Being an objection to Platonic philosophy, the argument can be applied to the myth of the golem regarding the relation between God, humans, and the mud creature, indicating the degenerative necessity of Plato’s idea of copies: God created man, who lacks several of the divinity’s attributes, therefore, man is an imperfect copy of his creator. The same situation happens with the golem, who is made out of mud by man and becomes a defective being. However, the fact that God cannot create a perfect copy implies his imperfection, thus, there must be some other entity that created God and so forth. Meanwhile, the repetition of the number three is not unusual in McEwan’s novels. It has been noted by Peter Mathews that its appearance in *Atonement* (2001/2002) can be a reference to the Holy Trinity or an evocation of the *Divine Comedy* (2006, pp. 147-160). In *Machines Like Me*, however, the constant allusions to Borges’ short stories as well as the repetition of number three evince the bond between the third man argument and Adam. Therefore, the android would be closely related to “The Golem”, as it can be demonstrated in the connection between him and the following stanza: “Si (como afirma el griego en el *Cratilo*) / el nombre es arquetipo de la cosa / en las letras de “rosa” está la rosa / y todo el Nilo en la palabra “Nilo” (Borges, 1996b, p. 263).

Cratylus is the main reference to the Platonic philosophy in the poem, but the textual utterance that establishes the bond between *Machines Like Me* and the poem lies in the word *griego*, due to the description

of Adam: "I might have taken my Adam for [...] a Greek" (McEwan, 2019, p. 2). Therefore, the influence of Borges' poem in McEwan's novel as a referent for the rendering of the myth of the golem becomes more evident.

In his poem, Borges retells the myth highlighting its connection with the Jewish Kabbalah, placing special focus in its linguistic theory, which tries to find the power of God to name things, taken away from humans after Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise. The Kabbalah explains that God created the world and everything in it just by naming things, in a language not accessible to humans. Consider for instance the following passage of the Genesis Book in the Bible: "And God said: Let there be light, and there was light" (Gen. 1:3, King James Bible). The aspiration of the rabbi resides in achieving the same ability that is depicted in this passage; that is, the power of creation through the perfect diction of an utterance. Very early in "El Golem" there is a blatant reference to the Jewish Kabbalah: "Y, hecho de consonantes y vocales, / habrá un terrible Nombre, que la esencia / cifre de Dios y que la Omnipotencia / guarde en letras y sílabas cabales" (Borges, 1996b, p. 263).

Borges claims that the essence of existence can be contained by language according to the Kabbalistic theory. Therefore, the sole act of naming things in the language of God should be sufficient to cause reality. Language has the power to create or to destroy, and ultimately to shape reality. The magic spell from fairy tales, the act of transforming reality through the act of speaking, is a counterpart to the language of God in religion, which will be sought by its most devoted believers although they will eventually find death in their attempts. The Kabbalah exposes a linguistic problem for mankind, as its language is away from the True Word, but it is nonetheless necessary in the attempt to intuit the language of God. Men use the arbitrariness of the linguistic symbol imperfectly (and as a mischievous mechanism) in their attempt to regain Paradise. Scholem (1978) resumes the Kabbalistic theory by stating that:

Kabbalism is distinguished by an attitude towards language which is quite unusually positive. Kabbalists who differ in almost everything else are at one in regarding language as something more precious than an inadequate instrument for contact between human beings. To them Hebrew, the holy tongue, is not simply a means of expressing certain thoughts, born out of a certain convention and having a purely conventional character, in accordance with the theory of language dominant in the Middle Ages. Language in its purest form, that is, Hebrew, according to the Kabbalists, reflects the fundamental spiritual nature of the world; in other words, it has a mystical value. Speech reaches God because it comes from God. Man's common language, whose prima facie function, indeed, it's only of an intellectual nature, reflects the creative language of God. All creation [...] is, from the point of view of God, nothing but an expression of His hidden self that begins and ends by giving itself a name, the holy name of God, the perpetual act of creation. All that lives is an expression of God's language, –and what is it that Revelation can reveal in the last resort if not the name of God? (1978, p. 17).

The Kabbalah and linguistic mechanisms are closely linked to androids, as they must be programmed through commands of computer language. Anthropomorphic robots could be considered as the golems of the future in the sense that androids represent the mechanisation of the human body and they stand as the artificial counterparts to humanity, both of them being intellectual living beings. Moreover, like golems, their lives depend on the commands and prohibitions inscribed in their source code by humans. Isaac Asimov developed in *I, robot* (1950/1970) the Three Laws of Robotics, a set of rules to prevent robots to take control over humans and to make their servitude more profitable to their owners:

"We have: One, a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm."

"Right"

"Two," continued Powell, "a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law."

"Right"

"And three, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws" (Asimov, 1970, p. 27).

Despite the purpose of this set of rules, the Three Laws become in themselves a contradiction. On the one hand, the First Law implies that a robot must protect people from any harm, but the order becomes

conflictive when the robot must choose between the wellbeing of two different individuals that might be, for instance, fighting each other. Allan Turing addresses this issue in *Machines Like Me*, as he is the creator of A.I. and, consequently, of the Adams and Eves:

Sunt lacrimae rerum –there are tears in the nature of things. None of us knows yet how to encode that perception. I doubt that it's possible. Do we want our friends [the A's and E's] to accept that sorrow and pain are the essence of our existence? What happens when we ask them to fight for injustice? (McEwan, 2019, p. 180).

Turing is posing the idea that emotional and psychological sorrow is inherent to human existence, both feelings being likewise contemplated by the First Law, although not literally specified. Then the question arises: how are androids supposed to deal with human psychological suffering? Before answering this question, other problematic inferences in the Three Laws, specifically about the Third Law, must be regarded:

Robots cannot hurt humans because of the First Law, but this fact does not prevent humans from destroying robots. The destruction of androids is not of much importance if robots have neither feelings nor soul; an argument that becomes dubious in most cases as mentioned before. Androids with feelings or notion of the self might be aware that they completely lack free will due to their inferior status in society and would be able to question the fairness of human acts and their status over machines. The conflict of the laws would reach a solution usually alluded to in the science-fiction genre: the only manner to prevent human fighting against other humans and the consequent destruction of androids when trying to stop the genocide is the establishment of a dictatorial regime ruled by androids in the shared society so that humans cannot hurt themselves anymore. In other words, erasing free will and freedom becomes the sole solution for robots to keep humans protected. However, as Turing mentions, “pain and sorrow” are the “essence of human existence” (McEwan, 2019, p. 180) and the lack of freedom and free will would eventually cause psychological distress, thus, the reign of the machines would again enter into conflict with the First Law. Ultimately, androids would reach the conclusion that the only way to end with human suffering is to exterminate humanity.

Humans often regard androids as fatal to humanity. Like golems, robots are firstly reduced to serving humans and being limited by linguistic structures that shape their reality. Biopower subdues them to the laws of a society in which they are placed at the bottom of the social pyramidal structure; but despite being oppressed, due to the imperfection of human language, golems and androids become dreadful to society. The lack of a perfect language creates contradictions in the set of rules that shape the reality of these mythological counterparts, and the act of creation resolves into the cause of the end of humanity. Golems and androids overthrow the whole social structure to take over those who enslaved them, imprinting a darker tone to the concept of biopower. McEwan (2019) depicts in his novel a world where the Three Laws would be in constant conflict:

We create a machine with intelligence and self-awareness and push it out into our imperfect world. Devised along generally rational lines, well disposed to others, such a mind soon finds itself in a hurricane of contradictions. We've lived with them and the list wearies us. [...] We live alongside this torment and aren't amazed when we still find happiness, even love. Artificial minds are not so well defended (McEwan, 2019, p. 180).

The question of humans being responsible for their own destruction becomes conflictive to the Three Laws of the Robotics. The A's and E's will have to decide who is to be blamed and who should be punished. Gallinal argues that the body had never been so threatened, so vulnerable and near to destruction, despite having at the same time access to new technological functional possibilities (2016, p. 69). *Machines Like Me* deepens into the dubious matter of how much these technological possibilities are beneficial to humans or, otherwise, the cause of their destruction.

3. MACHINES LIKE ME AND GOLEMS LIKE YOU

Machines Like Me establishes the relation of power between Adam, an android, and Charlie Friend, its buyer. The plot is not new to science-fiction readers, as authors like Asimov have already dealt with it. However, *Machines Like Me* offers a turn of the screw to the matter, which is highlighted once it is compared to the myth of the golem.

In *Machines Like Me*, certain hints lead the reader to conceive Charlie as the rabbi that owns the golem, Adam. Since the beginning of the novel, Adam is referred to through constant allusions to religious themes that would eventually end in the re-interpretation of the myth of the golem by Borges. To establish a starting point in the argument, the first allusion is the presentation of the android as a “religious yearning granted hope” (McEwan, 2019, p. 1). The second one comes in the name itself, Adam, which according to the Judaeo-Christian tradition can be related to the first man created by God to inhabit Paradise but that, in consonance with Jewish folklore, also refers to the first golem who had to be killed by God because it was destroying his creation (Alazraki, 1983, p. 223). Therefore, the idea that a science-fiction novel dealing with androids could be an actualisation of a creation myth becomes plausible. The relation between androids and golems is reinforced by the constant allusions to Borges’ “El Golem” (1996b) during the description of the procedure to bring Adam to life. The characters of the poem and McEwan’s novel share the same reasons for creating their servants through similar methods and ultimately, horrified, condemn their creations’ acts.

On the one hand, the process of creation of the golem is completely replicated in the way Charlie and Miranda write Adam’s commands, whose importance lays in the fact that creation –or, at least, life– depends on a linguistic process. Borges argues that the rabbi was looking for the language of God, which could make possible the act of creation just by pronouncing the correct word, according to the Kabbalistic belief. However, the procedure presents a drawback that serves as the main impediment to its attainment, that is, the perfect diction, articulation and intonation of the word. Otherwise, were the utterance not pronounced correctly, the creation process would transpire in an unwanted and generally unknown manner. The rabbi of the poem might have failed in correctly pronouncing or writing the sacred word (Borges, 1996b, p. 264) and thus the golem was created instead of another Adam, an error far from the initial intentions of the rabbi. In the novel, Charlie depends on linguistic features to shape Adam’s personality, as the user of an android should read the full prospect of the user’s guide, a task that is regarded as “tedious” (McEwan, 2019, p. 6). Charlie even admits that he ultimately did not pay much attention to the user’s guide, which stands as the main cause for the failure in the scripture of Adam’s commands (McEwan, 2019, p. 2). Thus, the imperfection of the word would derive in a material imperfection.

On the other hand, curiosity stands as the main reason for Adam’s and the golem’s being brought to life. Generally, science fiction recasts the myths of creation through science, where doctors or alchemists like Doctor Faustus (in Marlowe’s play, 2009) are driven by curiosity to a horrible discovery. Judah Loew, the rabbi of Prague, functions as a Faustian figure or a mad scientist in Borges’ poem: “Sediento de saber lo que Dios sabe, / Judá León se dio a permutaciones / de letras y a complejas variaciones” (Borges, 1996b, p. 263). The same feeling is what moves Charlie towards the acquisition of Adam as he states that he “handed over a fortune in the name of curiosity” (McEwan, 2019, p. 13).

The result of the linguistic procedure and the discoveries motivated by curiosity engenders an anthropomorphous creature that does not fit in the society established by either the rabbi or Charlie. Be it so, the creators are bounded to find a role for their creations in the society they are destined to share. In order to restore the natural order in society, creators behave as domineering figures due to the need to establish themselves as figures of authority that are in control of their creations. Adam is tasked with household chores, as “he was advertised as a companion, an intellectual sparring partner, friend and factotum who could wash the dishes, make beds and ‘think’” (McEwan, 2019, p. 3). The devotion to the housework not only is a reference to the general knowledge about machines and robots in science-fiction, which are generally

constructed to make life easier for humans, but also is a reference to the poem where Borges claims that the rabbi succeeded in teaching the golem enough movements to mediocly sweep the synagogue (Borges, 1996b, p. 264).

Once the identification of Adam as a golem is established, the novel happens to shift the narrative into a reversion of roles between Charlie and the android. Biopower is threatened by the sole existence of Adam but humans can manage to keep control over the situation by convincing the humanoid of his inferiority. Nonetheless, the defiance of the android becomes unavoidable since, if anything, he is a superior being given his physiognomy and cognition, being capable, on top of that, of living without oxygen. Furthermore, Charlie states that “that metabolic necessity was years away” (McEwan, 2019, p. 19) and later on he would admit the moral superiority of Adam and that he “would never meet anyone better” (McEwan, 2019, p. 87).

In addition, the superior status of the android becomes feasible once the linguistic failure in the process of creation is emended. The reversion of roles is only possible if the mistake in the letter or the articulation of the sacred Name (Borges, 1996b, p. 263) is amended. To achieve this, Charlie, who is bounded to define the personality of Adam through linguistic programming, ultimately “read[s] the handbook into the night” (McEwan, 2019, p. 17), becoming capable of understanding the process of shaping the android’s personality and thus able to correct the mistake in the commands. Additionally, he unconsciously involves Miranda in the process seeking to establish with her a family pattern through Adam, who would fulfill the role of their son. The inclusion of Miranda, praised as morally elevated and “mature for her years” (McEwan, 2019, p. 4), enables the perfection in the process of shaping Adam’s personality, as the android would not have the same defective personality traits as Charlie, who considers himself as “too hard-bitten” and “too cynical” due to his suffering “a series of professional and financial and personal failures” (McEwan, 2019, p. 4). Consequently, the result of the inclusion of two rabbis in the spelling of the sacred word, that is, the personality shaped by Charlie and Miranda, would turn the living artefact into a more humane machine than humans themselves.

The process of reversion happens progressively while Adam starts to get involved in society. Charlie is depicted from the beginning of the novel as a dysfunctional member of society with a precarious job who is trying to engage Miranda in a relationship that would eventually lead to the constitution of a family. The achievement of his target requires Adam’s involvement in his schemes although, ironically, in the end Adam’s presence in his life would prevent those plans coming to fruition. Charlie argues that:

I was hardly the first to think it, but one could see the history of human self-regard as a series of demotions tending to extinction. [...] we stood apart, brilliantly unique, appointed by the creator to be lords of everything that lived. [...] But the mind that had once rebelled against the gods was about to dethrone itself by way of its own fabulous reach (McEwan, 2019, p. 80).

The line of thought that Charlie is developing at this point foreshadows the new development that is about to be established in his household. The reversion of the roles of Adam and Charlie will begin with the latter and, later on, will also affect Miranda. The reason for the sequence of reversion lies in the social status of each of the characters: while Adam keeps learning about society and how humans display their roles in it, that is, adapting to the medium and thus becoming more operational in daily life, Charlie continues to be dysfunctional; while Miranda will eventually be held accountable for a crime she committed years before.

The change in roles would become noticeable even by Adam himself. The degeneration of the copy had been neutralised by the perfect coding of Adam’s commands, therefore, the argument of the third man is inverted, and Adam would eventually render Charlie obsolete by achieving the merits he is supposed to strive towards and attain. Then, Charlie’s flat becomes a space charged with metaphorical implications that will reflect his conversion into a golem as well as Adam’s ascension to a more perfect creature. The disposition of the character’s apartments physically places the man in an inferior status to the android when Adam is with Miranda in her flat (McEwan, 2019, pp. 62-90). In the scene, Charlie imagines “an onlooker’s approving gaze from a corner of the room” (McEwan, 2019, p. 81) as if he was the golem being observed by the rabbi

in Borges' poem (1996b, p. 263). Then, he hears Adam and Miranda walking up in her flat and he starts following their steps. The mimicry is reminiscent of the verse of Borges' poem where the golem imitates the movements of the rabbi "Elevando a su Dios manos filiales, / las devociones de su Dios copiaba" (Borges, 1996b, p. 263), which instantiates the defects of the copy and its aspirations to become a superior being.

The victory of Adam over Charlie goes beyond the physical environment. In the beginning, the android's admiration for Miranda is described as "a look of delight" and, even more, "devoted" (McEwan, 2019, p. 76). As a result, the power struggle will also be developed in the emotional realm, as the achievement of Miranda's affection would suppose the defeat of the *other*. In this case, that Charlie would become Miranda's lover would be regarded as completely normal since he is human. However, the establishment of Adam as Miranda's lover supposes the acknowledgement that he is not a machine, but a living being with feelings. Not only are artificially intelligent beings physically capable of overcoming humans but also surpassing them in the emotional dimension. And the fact is regarded with both horror and surprise by Charlie, who admits that his situation "had a thrilling aspect, not only of subterfuge and discovery, but of originality [...] of being the first to be cuckolded by an artefact" (McEwan, 2019, p. 83). The disadvantage that the golem has in relation with the rabbi, that is, the inability to speak, and that Adam has at the beginning of the novel, the need of learning to articulate words, is overcome when Adam succeeds in having sex with Miranda. It becomes even ironical that he orally satisfies her by the fact that he is using his mouth physiology to do so. Charlie, down in his flat, listens to the whole scene and admits that "this was the celebrated tongue, wet and breathily warm, adept at uvulars and labials, that gave his speech its authenticity" (McEwan, 2019, p. 84) and recognises that eventually "men would be obsolete" (McEwan, 2019, p. 84). Therefore, the exchange of roles is fully completed taking into consideration that Adam is more successful as a human being than Charlie, regarding labour as well as concerning sentimental and physical social interactions. The android's empowerment is utterly achieved when Charlie, who considers himself to be in a superior status yet –although he is not– tries to hit Adam, obtaining as a result just "a partly displaced scaphoid fracture" (McEwan, 2019, p. 120) and the certitude that Adam has become a superior being.

Once biopower dynamics have been altered, a catastrophe occurs. In order for the complete reversion of roles in the novel to happen, Miranda has to be conceived as a golem as well; and this recognition of her as the mud creature is achieved through the discovery of her crime. Adam, who has established himself as a moral superior, is obliged to denounce her crime to the authorities. Despite his feelings of love and affection, Adam would regard her as an imperfect being, thus, a golem in accordance to Borges' conversion of platonic doctrine. At this moment, McEwan abandons the interpretation of the myth by Borges and addresses another author mentioned in the poem, Gershom Scholem –"estas verdades las refiere Scholem" (Borges, 1996b, p. 263)–, in whose version of the myth the rabbi needs to revert the ritual and return the golem to dust so as to re-establish the social order (Scholem, 1988, p. 353). Nevertheless, as in Scholem's retelling of Grimm's version, once the golem is killed, it crushes the rabbi (Scholem, 1965, p. 159), a development that could be metaphorically seen in *Machines Like Me*. Adam, being coded to search for justice, is obliged to denounce Miranda's crime. Once he has reported the offender, Charlie crashes its head with a hammer. Charlie takes control of the situation, regains his lost power by the exertion of violence. The act might imply that he is restoring balance in his society, but in fact, he is only contributing to its deterioration. The cruelty of Adam's murder is reflected in Alan Turing's words after the event:

You weren't simply smashing your own toy, like a spoiled child. You didn't just negate an important argument for the rule of law. You tried to destroy a life. He was sentient. He had a self. [...] This was a good mind, Mr Friend, better than yours or mine, I suspect. Here was a conscious existence and you did your best to wipe it out. I rather think I despise you for that. If it was down to me– (McEwan, 2019, pp. 303-304).

The slaughter of Adam is actually the murder of the rabbi who fails to keep the social order while trying to do what is morally correct. This failure results in the oblivion of Charlie and Miranda's schemes for their

future life together given that Miranda will be sent to prison and consequently the child adoption process that they had undertaken will be nullified.

4. CONCLUSION

Biopower shapes the physical and psychological scopes within society and as long as humans are the only intelligent living beings of that society, biopower is ensured. However, technologies threaten established norms by allowing humans to actualise their bodies and even create new ones. The idea of creating synthetic bodies is not an invention of the 21st century, as it is a recurrent topic in creation myths that are often alluded to in science fiction texts.

The myth of the golem, belonging to the Jewish tradition, is one of the main myths that present the idea that humans can create life, a power that is customarily attributed only to God. However, in the myth, the golem is an imperfect creature, therefore, it can be concluded that the rabbi, its creator, does not master the ability to give life. The linguistic doctrine present in the Kabbalah explains that the act of bestowing life is exerted through the correct diction of the language of God. In most of the narratives that address this myth, the golem is given life through prayers, writing or talking in the sacred language that is unknown to humans. Borges, who wrote a poem on the myth, argues that the rabbi pronounced the utterance incorrectly, thus, the result of his experiment engendered a monstrosity that destroys everything it finds in its path.

The corruption of the copy in the process of creation can be explained with the third man argument, an objection to the Platonic philosophy, which argues that the copy, in this case, the golem, is going to have more defects than its creator since the creator is already imperfect. In the case of the golem myth, the imperfection would lie on the inability to pronounce the sacred language properly.

In the novel *Machines Like Me*, the Jewish myth of the Golem is replicated in the creation of Adam, one of the first synthetic humans, who will ultimately destroy the life of Charlie, his life-giver. Through the comparison of the poem "El Golem" by Borges and the description of the android provided by McEwan, the rendering is easily recognisable. However, the depiction of the android as the golem drifts when the linguistic process is emended. The correction in the programming of Adam's commands leads the humanoid to a superior and more successful status in society than his creators. The nowadays golem abandons the monstrous condition that characterised its predecessors to become a superior, more intelligent living being, as a reversion of the third man argument. Therefore, as mentioned before, biopower is destabilised by the apparition of new technologies in society, as the perfection of androids threatens to displace humans and even to put an end to their lives. The only solution humans can resort to end such usurpation is exerting violence over Adam and, ultimately, killing him. Nonetheless, the mere performance of this act implies the total reversion of roles, as humans, superior and intelligent in appearance, only find violence, an instinctive and brutal act, as a way to overcome and survive. The inclusion of androids in society destabilizes biopower since it proposes a new way of shaping the body to elevate it to a superior status. The redefinition of biopower by androids cannot be achieved due to humans' incapacity to handle cohabitation with other intelligent beings in the same society. This inability derives in a violent context where humans reaffirm the former biopower and the new intelligent beings, that is, androids, are eventually destroyed.

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