



RESEARCH PAPER

Emerging Cyborg Identities: Gender, and Feminism in *Foundryside* through Gee and Haraway's Lenses

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the gender identity of cyborg character Sancia in Robert Jackson Bennett's novel *Foundryside*. Sancia represents the theoretical concept of emerging feminism as she is that part of a cyborg which can be considered as a new type of female figure. Through a close reading of *Foundryside*, this research examines Sancia's changing identity. Using Gee's (2014) discourse analysis approach, Sancia's identity and activities are analysed in the selected passages of the text. This is followed by a discussion of how Sancia's post-humanity breaks down and reconstitutes conventional feminine signs through Haraway's Lense. Findings of the study indicate that Sancia's cyborg status erases the gender binary system since it fuses simplification/ exteriorisation yet embraces an organic and mechanical. This emerging identity offers fresh perspective on how female cyborgs are constructed as self-steering, non-binary gendered characters in speculative fiction. Erasing the binary between man and machine, this research extends the framework of feminist posthumanism and opens up the scholarly discussion of gender identity in speculative fiction.

KEYWORDS Activity Building Tool, Cyborg, Emerging Identity, Feminism, Identity Building Tool

Introduction

Donna Haraway established the paradigm for thinking about cyborgs, subjectivity, and genders in her manifesto. She claimed, "cyborg is a creature in post gendered world" (Haraway,1991). Cyborgs are the subjects who are half-human and half-machine entities that violate the paradigms of gender and binary constructions by nurturing the post-gender futures. Cyborgs symbolises fluidity and struggles against the imposition of categorisation that isolates and renders subjectivity static and cellular while marking hegemonic points of identification. The idea of 'cyborg feminism' expands on this by examining how technology enables woman and ethnic/racial minorities to opt out of alien-imposed roles. In both science fiction and media contexts, cyborgs are useful figures as a way of staging debates on gender, agency, and power, which are approximately gender, power, and technology, reflecting social hopes and fears over the liberation and formation of identities. Such an approach is best illustrated in stories that set out themes of both posthuman and feminist discourses where cyborgs are often complex characters who do not fit the gender stereotype and thereby exposing the inequalities of the binaries male/female. Some of the representations depicted in science fiction shows such empowerments but others presents issues like, surveillance and control that are significant in academic discussions around autonomy and agency in technologically mediated identities (Fiveable, 2024).

The contemporary novel, *Foundryside* by Robert Jackson Bennett presents a world where the new major technology is “scrying”, an art of marking to bring revolution in the society. This process enables many-layered commands to be engraved onto objects and change some of its characteristics or even give it a new facet. So, the scryings represents artificial intelligence from the real world. The story revolves around the main character Sancia, who is a female character and has special abilities because of the scrying technology put into her brain. Her aptitudes allow her to “feel” with her faculties the scried items and influence the surroundings more than a typical human could. Hence, Sancia is a singular figure who can be examined as posthuman, especially the cyborgian aspects of human augmentation and its further development as the result of integration with technology. Sancia has what one may call a cyborg self, which means that the sociology of her enhancements cuts out for her new boundaries of identity that are irreducible to either the material or the mental. Thus, Sancia’s transhumanistic part makes one consider what it means to be a human in a world where one’s individuality is built and limited regarding the technological advancement. N. Katherine Hayles (2021) insists that posthumanism demands reconsideration of identity by the standards of technology and consciousness, according to which human nature is inextricable and post-human. According to a recent article by Gee (2022), identity is not fixed; instead, it is the lenses through which we perform social roles throughout society. The cyborg aspect of Sancia is not just physical but discursive in *Foundryside* because being a cyborg means not only being a cyborg physically but being recognized as one, which a society that despises cyborgs and fears them.

The relationship of gender identity and posthumanism is relatively understudied in many critical approaches to literature, particularly regarding the features of the cyborg subject in the contemporary Post-cyberpunk fiction. More recent works by authors such as Braidotti (2022) assert the call for subsequent studies on the shifts on the relations between gender, technology and identity in speculative fiction. Although much has been written about Haraway’s ‘feminist cyborg theory’ indeed, the application of same in analysing more contemporary texts like *Foundryside* is quite rare. In addition, there is a lack of conjunction between existing research and identity construction tools including those by Gee (2014) that could help explain the manner in which cyborg identities are negotiated in the narratives. The issue is, therefore, to mediate this division between the real and fictional world by employing a double focus on the methodology of both feminism and posthumanism on a female cyborg in *Foundryside* while evaluating how Gee’s framework dissects identity and activity.

This research contributes to both feminist and post-humanist literary studies by providing an in-depth analysis of gender identity in speculative fiction. By applying Haraway’s feminist cyborg theory and Gee’s identity-building tools, the study offers new insights into the representation of cyborgs as complex figures that challenge binary notions of gender and humanity. The findings of this study will not only enhance our understanding of gender and technology in speculative fiction but also provide a framework for analyzing identity construction in other posthuman narratives. So this study aims to examine how the concept of gender identity is portrayed in *Foundryside* by the author through a female cyborg character.

Literature Review

Recent scholarship, such as Rosi Braidotti’s *Posthuman Feminism* (2021) and *The Posthuman Condition* (2022), continues to push the boundaries of feminist and post-humanist thought, arguing that cyborgs and other posthuman entities represent the dissolution of essentialist categories of gender and identity. These works emphasise the

cyborg as a symbol of resistance against the fixed categories that have historically constrained human identity, especially in terms of gender. In addition, scholars like Hayles (1999) and Gunkel (2022) have explored how the intersection of AI, robotics, and human identity redefines agency, subjectivity, and embodiment in posthuman contexts. These studies are crucial for understanding the broader cultural significance of cyborg identity in contemporary society.

However, despite these substantial contributions to cyborg studies and feminist posthumanism, a gap remains in the application of these theories to contemporary speculative fiction, particularly in works like Robert Jackson Bennett's *Foundryside*. While scholars such as, (Gray, 2002; Ghan, 2019; Pulé & Ourkiya, 2022; Wilson, 2020; Kümbet 2020; Gibson, 2022 and Kaifa, et. al., 2024) have explored cyborg identity in modern literature and contemporary societies, there has been limited engagement with Gee's identity-building tools in analysing cyborg characters. Furthermore, *Foundryside*, with its rich narrative of a female cyborg navigating issues of power, control, and gender, has not yet been fully examined through the dual lenses of Haraway's feminist cyborg theory and Gee's identity construction framework.

Thus, the gap for this study lies in the integration of Gee's sociolinguistic tools with feminist post-humanist theories to analyze how the identity of a female cyborg is constructed and represented in *Foundryside*. Specifically, this research explores how the protagonist's identity as a cyborg challenges traditional gender roles and power structures, contributing to both feminist and posthumanist discourses. By addressing this gap, the study offers new insights into the evolving representation of gender and technology in speculative fiction and provides a framework for future analyses of cyborg characters in contemporary literature. The section below discusses the theory adopted to interpret the results of this study.

Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto: 'Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century'* (1985) is one of the early texts of the posthuman feminist theory. Haraway employs the concept of the cyborg as an imagery of a figure who is half human and half animal, half machine and half organism, thus forcing disruption of the conventional dualisms including human/animal, human/machine, and physical/non-physical. This manifesto works against simplistic conceptions of identity and gender and opens up for a new kind of post-feminist subject which is inclusive of the border between the two categories.

Cyborg as a Metaphor: In this respect, Haraway's cyborg reflects blurred distinction between human, animals and machines. It dismisses paradigmatic categorisations of identity, it provides a framework for comprehending identity as something that can be possibly multiple, scattered, and blended. According to Haraway, the cyborg is an embodiment of a femininity that is free from gendered constraints and norms as well as freedom from technology as determinative.

Anti-Essentialism: Haraway denounces 'woman' as an identity characterised by an essentialist viewpoint, pointing to the fact that there is no one experience of 'woman' but rather gender, like any other identity, reflects the relations of technology, science and politics. This anti essentialist view of gender is in synergy with post humanism that recognizes entropy of such binary categories as gender or race.

Technological Embodiment: Contrary to many feminists, who consider technology as the male construct which oppresses women, for Haraway technology is an enabling tool. In contrast to the conventional second wave feminist thought which

perceives technology as another means of oppression by patriarchy, Haraway nullifies boundaries of the humanist subject for reconsideration of the cyborg as an opportunity for reformation of identity and flexibility with regard to patriarchal systems, and ultimately opens up a path to a postmodernist future.

Critique of Dualisms: In page 295, Haraway raised her dislike on the duality approach found within the Western philosophy (man/woman, humans/animals, mind/body and so on) that supported patriarchal structures for most of history. In this regard, the cyborg negates them in as much as it offers better and sophisticated ways of understanding gender, race, and self-identity.

Socialist-Feminism and Politics: Socio-political perspective is also evident in Haraway's cyborg fallen out of the paradise garden where the cyborg becomes an instrument of socialist-feminism where technology and science are used not to oppress or maintain the oppressive system but to overthrow it. She advocates for creating solidarity across different social movements and does not allow for the concept of purity in favor of saying that people should have compound identities and partnerships.

Material and Methods

This is a qualitative study using linguistic analysis as its primary method. The research involved a close reading of *Foundryside*, focusing on passages that relate to the construction and representation of the female cyborg's identity. Gee's (2014) identity building tool and activity building tool served as analytical framework of this study. According to Gee (2022), identity is not only fluid, but rather it is created through interaction, communication and discourses. Language use constructs the identity of subjects, which is complex phenomenon as it involves the process of becoming. This means that another dimension of the process of identity construction is constituted by social aspects such as roles, culture and structure. It says how people construct their image in discourse, what subject positions they take and how others acknowledge them. Activity building tool revolves on the use of language to perform certain activities or practices. It looks at how the use of words and the manner of engaging in conversations assists in building and performing situated activities. Discourse is again analysed in relation to the positions that are assumed while performing these activities. It looks into how some forms of language correspond with specific action or position within the society. Part of the way that activities are constructed is according to the ways in which people engage each other, the manner in which they position themselves and the ways they conduct themselves within those positions. After applying these tools the emerging thematic conversations about cyborg identity are analysed. The theoretical frameworks of Haraway guided the interpretation of these conversations, with particular attention paid to the intersections of gender, technology, and posthumanism. This framework looks at how language forms and mediates identities. It is mainly concerned with how people or particular parties, make displays, engage in role play and bargain out their self-images within specific milieu of human agumentation.

Data Analysis

The data is analysed through the lens of Gee's identity-building tool, identifying how the female cyborg's identity is constructed in relation to both her human and machine components. A thorough analysis of identity building tool revealed that descriptive sentences, pronouns and adjectives are significant to construct Sancia's identity as one belonging to the lower social class, entitled as thief and unhappy cyborg because of her forced augmentation. An analysis of activity building tool revealed that

Sancia is prompt and action oriented, she is decisive and determined, she utilises her powers (fruit of her augmentation) to survive and change her class status. Activity building tool also revealed that she can't reveal her identity as cyborg and society does not allow augmenting human. So, her emerging identity as powerful female cyborg is revealed through the analysis of identity and activity building tools. This identity is discussed through the lense of Haraway in subsequent section.

Table 4
Illustration of Analysis Identity building Tool and Activity Building tool

Identity Building Tool	Activity Building Tool
Pronoun (Her and It) Conveys duality of her identity as cyborg and her forced augmentation	Passive Voice and Past tense Implies her forced augmentation as a cyborg
Adjective (grimy girl, thief, Little Girl) Conveys undermined social class and marginalised feminine identity	Adverbs Indicate her prompt decisive actions
Descriptive Sentences Presents elaboration of her outer action and inner turmoil thus conveying her dual identity	Action and Emotive Verbs Action verbs Convey her activity level, her dominant role over her fellow men. Emotive verbs Conveys insights into her human Psyche and impacts of augmentation on her own perception of her identity.
Slangs (Holly Holly Shit) Conveys her class identity, her confidence and determination	Prepositional Phrases Convey her enhanced perceptions

Results and Discussion

Sancia as a female cyborg character in *Foundryside* subverts female tropes and can be best defined with reference to Haraway's cyborg theory, an agent who challenges traditional gendered binaries. Haraway characterises the cyborg as existing in 'a post-gender world' (Haraway, 1991, p.150), a being that cannot readily be contained by such linear classifications as male/female, but can contain within itself both. Augmented body, rebellion against oppressors for gender and other related attributes, and the ambiguous attitude towards positive metamorphosis make Sancia an ideal candidate to be the protagonist that Haraway mentioned in her proposition about techno-industrial international feminine new mode of identity.

Sancia is a "grimy girl", a thief who becomes a powerful character in *Foundryside*, poisoned against normative feminine role. This correlates with how postmodern feminist scholars claim that cyborg subjects challenge the tradition of 'proper' female depiction through placing female cyborgs in militant, assertive, and very dangerous roles usually set aside for male characters (Fernández, 2021). Miah, 2008 describes Sancia as a cyborg in the style of Harawayan due to her ability to control and navigate the scrivings, or the magical-technical language of the world she inhabits. Her power dislodges a male-centric system of power dynamics, placing her in a commanding location while still being a woman.

The attitude that Sancia has towards her augmentations is complex and that is portrayed by the author's use of emotive verbs, past participle and passive voice to describe her perception of her augmentation. Sancia is a cyborg and has no body control to cherish intimacy, the state that some feminists like Rosi Braidotti talk of as the posthumanity era in which the body is an area of emancipation and domination (Braidotti, 2013). This double experience is, for instance, at the heart of Sancia's construction as a character: she is both a survivor of dangerous situations, learning to regain control over her body through physical and psychological endurance yet she still

never stages, a fully empowered and fully integrated body, a never fully exorcised otherness (Graham, 2002). Her survival is an important message against Haraway's statement that "cyborgs need not be doomed to destruction" though they are alienated (Haraway, 1991, p. 151).

Sancia also differs among other characters by her distinct approach to the technological patriarchy in the novel – that is, she has soft corner for Gregor, a male cyborg. While both have technical upgrades, it is Sancia who assimilates solutions, emphasising the main aspect to the text, that is, that Gregor cannot apply his learning in a radical capacity that Sancia does. This dynamic shows her as a 'situated' knowing subject; knowledge is situated in the subject's experience; a foundational concept in postmodern feminism that undermines the idea of universal, male-produced forms of knowing (Haraway, 1988). Thus, Sancia's resistance should be seen as a feminist one since Grosz (1994) emphasized that feminist cyborgs use the powers of the system that tries to define them, turning their alienation into their power.

It means that Sancia and her augmentations can be associated with the so-called feminist cyborg as a new type of heroine. This literature has suggested that cyborg narratives enable female characters, especially in these particularly misogynistic societies, to assume self-determining subjects, to invent the self in the context of post-industrialism (Wolmark, 2013; Toffoletti, 2007). Sancia's transformation from being reluctant to be strong greatly symbolises what a cyborg in Haraway's vision represents – a monstrous world without gender (Haraway, 1991, p.154). Her body is in a sense neutered or de-sexed and is the site of struggle and potential for the Bennet's empowering, transformational narrative.

Conclusion

Gender as a cyborg in *Foundryside* is presented through the character of Sancia. Her character portrays a struggle between alienation and empowerment as revealed through the linguistic analysis of text Pronouns, descriptive sentences, eotive verbs, action verbs, past tense and prepositional phrases are significant linguistic elements utilised in the text to construct Sancia's gender identity as unhappy, powerful, determined, action-oriented cyborg. This resonates with post-gender cyborg idea in the work of Haraway. On the one hand, Sancia creates a new gender when she becomes a cyborg, but on the other she is alienated from her new gender as she hides her new identity and can't enjoy intimacy. Despite the violent guidance of the narrative, Sancia's character is undoubtedly empowered gender because she violates feminine submission by occupying male gender roles of violence, agency, and technologically mediated mastery. She is half augmented half human, and her role demonstrates how one can navigate and challenge patriarchy as per Haraway's cyborg thesis of being a production of technoscience and resistance against it. Sancia's transition from her discomfort with her augmentations, to strength, embodies a posthuman feminist perspective, in which her subjects are affirming technology and embodying it to the best of her abilities for her benefits. This self-acceptance and redefinition position her as a new kind of heroine: one who regains control and becomes successful turning the otherness of the body into a strength. Therefore, Sancia's transformation as cyborg enables her to resist gender/social/physical norms, to start a new type of post-feminist paradigm of female determination.

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