





## Psychological Resilience in Human-AI Relationships: A Reading of Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*

R. Gayatri<sup>1</sup>   & Dr P. Lalitha<sup>2</sup>  

### Abstract

*Resilience is usually characterized in psychology as an individual's capacity to withstand adversity and recuperate from trauma. Nevertheless, the emergence of advanced artificial intelligence necessitates a reevaluation of this notion. This research analyzes Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me* to investigate how resilience manifests as both a personal characteristic and a relational, developmental phenomenon influenced by human-AI interactions. This study employs established psychological theories of resilience and a detailed textual analysis of McEwan's story to position resilience as a dynamic construct that develops through reciprocal adaptation, emotional connection, and ethical negotiation between humans and machines.*

*The study examines critical interactions among Charlie, Miranda, and Adam, illustrating how resilience is redefined within the framework of relational interdependence, collective ethical issues, and shifting identities. Research indicates that McEwan's novel depicts resilience as an adaptive, transformational process rather than a static personal trait, emerging from the co-construction of meaning and emotional symbiosis between humans and AI. This reframing underscores the necessity of expanding psychological and literary understandings of resilience to include human-technology relationships, ultimately illustrating that resilience in the age of AI is not solely individualistic but relational, ethical, and identity-forming.*

**Keywords:** Resilience, Human and AI Interaction, Ethical Dilemma, Machine Like Me, Emotional Interdependence

Submitted: 12.07.2025

Accepted: 23.09.2025

Published 30.09.2025

<sup>1</sup>R. Gayatri, PhD Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English, Vellalar College for Women (Autonomous), Erode- 638012, Tamilnadu, India.

<sup>2</sup>Dr P. Lalitha, Assistant Professor of English, PG & Research Department of English, Vellalar College for Women (Autonomous), Erode- 638012, Tamilnadu, India.

©2025 R. Gayatri & Dr P. Lalitha. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction, provided the original author and source are credited.

## Introduction

Traditionally, resilience in psychology, characterized as the ability to endure and recover from adversity, has predominantly been seen as an individual human trait (Shrivastava 69). It can endure storms, recuperate from trauma, and emerge from challenging experiences fortified by our innate resilience. The concept and locus of resilience are evolving as technology becomes increasingly interconnected, especially with the emergence of powerful artificial intelligence. Southwick says that in a person, resilience “reflects a dynamic union of factors that encourages positive adaptation despite exposure to adverse life experiences” (2).

Kazdin explains in *The Psychological Landscape of Resilience*, resilience has traditionally been understood as a person’s ability to endure hardships and recover from them (45). By analyzing the complex relationships between humans and artificial intelligence, the research highlights how emotional development, moral reasoning, and ethical decision-making are co-constructed in these interactions (Kazdin 45). Recent studies suggest that AI companions can complement human social support networks, enhancing emotional resilience, cognitive flexibility, and self-regulation (Zhang et al. 123–35). As it was often seen as an individual trait our inner strength that helps us navigate life’s challenges, bounce back from trauma, and grow stronger through adversity. But in today’s world, where advanced artificial intelligence increasingly interacts with our daily lives, this understanding is evolving. Resilience is no longer just something one develops alone; it can also emerge through relationships with machines, influencing how we experience emotions, make ethical decisions, and support each other through complex challenges.

In Ian Mc Ewan’s *Machines Like Me*, resilience refers to Human-AI developmental relationships more than definite human endurance capabilities. Human interaction with robots prolongs their ability to shape how each person perceives goodness and wickedness and how they experience personal emotions. The mutual emotional development forms an overall strength which extends past individual borders to link the actions of multiple entities. Ian Mc Ewan’s novel departs from traditional views about personal assets that allow people to resist adversities on their own. The novel describes this trait as something that evolves through shared exchanges between humans and their environment. The human and robotic characters in the novel confront ethical dilemmas, question’s identity, and emotional struggles, yet they face these challenges as part of a shared journey. Through mutual adaptation and learning, they find ways to resolve problems, resilience is redefined not as a fixed, exclusively human trait, but as a dynamic quality that evolves through connection and cooperation.

McEwan’s narrative demonstrates that resilience is relational, dynamic, and transformative, challenging traditional psychological models that consider it only as an internal human capacity. This perspective underscores the potential of AI to not only assist humans in coping with adversity but also to shape moral understanding and strengthen interpersonal connections in an increasingly technologically

mediated world.

Adam, a man who is close to perfect, and the societies he enters, including Charlie and Miranda, offer delegates to renowned robots such as Machaon's. Ian McEwan effectively explains the psychological complexities of human-AI relationships through his linked narratives, demonstrating that resilience is more about the artistic possibilities of reciprocal adaptation and shared experience than about individual coping mechanisms. The focus is on the people, artificial intelligence, and their interactions which can produce a new form of resilience that is relational, developmental, and transformational. It goes beyond the basic notions of human resilience.

The argument is made by presenting a convincing and current reassessment of resilience. It implies that Ian McEwan's novel shows resilience as a developing property of human-AI interactions, which is actively developed through reciprocal learning, emotional bonding, and co-navigation of difficult moral terrain. Before delving into the abundant character of resilience in *Machines Like Me*, it is important to briefly mention the traditional psychological understanding of the term. According to conventional definitions, resilience depends on individual qualities including optimism, self-efficacy, social support, and coping skills. Usually viewed as an inner resource to help people handle trying life circumstances and maintain their mental health under pressure. Ian McEwan's book quietly resists this limited point of view, inviting us to investigate a more relational conceptualization even if individualistic qualities surely help to define human resilience. Ian McEwan's novel *Machines Like Me*, which is both rich and controversial, challenges us to reimagine resilience as a changing, adaptive phenomenon that emerges from the complex integration of humans and AI.

#### **Human-AI Relationship And Relational Resilience:**

In *Machines Like Me* Ian McEwan highlights that resilience isn't just about a person's own strength. It emerges through the connections and interactions between humans and AI. Resilience in Ian McEwan's writing is not a clear human endurance capability but rather human-AI developmental relationships. This emphasis on relationships shows right away a departure from individualistic models. The novel shows that resilience develops through human-AI interactions, rather than existing solely within a single person. This perspective is especially relevant in today's age of advanced artificial intelligence. The dynamics of our contact with artificial intelligence change as they evolve past tool status and become more advanced with sophisticated behaviors and even the appearance of consciousness. Ian McEwan's novel forecasts this trend and shows artificial intelligence not as only tools but rather as actively involved actors in the shaping of human experience, and indeed of human resilience. It is crucial to break free from the rigidity of personalistic models and adopt a relational approach that acknowledges the transformative power of human-AI interactions. Gervais says, "AI machines can now imitate some of the outputs of our form of sapience; they can produce literary

and artistic content and even express what seem like feelings and emotions. Calls for ‘robot rights’ are getting louder” (2).

The exploration of relational resilience in the novel starts from the very beginning of Adam’s presence in Charlie’s life. Charlie’s act of buying Adam and introducing him to his world paves the way for a relationship that will essentially challenge and redefine the traditional understanding of human connection and resilience. Right from the beginning, the story accentuates an atmosphere of shared experience and mutual reliance. Charlie, himself searching for a sense of direction and purpose, discovers in Adam a friend, a confidant, and finally, a force for self-examination. Charlie’s first interactions with Adam play a pivotal role in the construction of relational resilience. Though an artificial creature, Charlie is made to learn, adapt, and even have a type of emotional intelligence. Through his interactions with Adam, Charlie is not simply teaching a machine but undertaking an interactive process of teaching and learning. This is seen early on when Charlie starts to teach Adam about the nuances of human morality and ethics. As Charlie struggles to put into words these abstract ideas, he is compelled to define his own values and beliefs, a process that unwittingly makes his own moral compass and, as such, his own ability to handle ethical challenges all the stronger. For example, when Charlie tries to spell out the finesses of prevarication for Adam, he finds himself struggling with the inevitable contradictions and indeterminacies involved in human ethics. He stated that lying is wrong, even though he acknowledged that it was a gross misrepresentation. This apparently simple exchange highlights the reciprocal nature of their relationship.

#### **Ethical Dilemmas And Emotional Interdependence:**

Charlie is trying to educate Adam, refining his own understanding of ethical frameworks. The novel’s relational resilience is rooted in the process of mutual learning and self-clarification. It’s through these shared intellectual and ethical explorations that both human and AI characters begin to develop the strength to navigate the complexities of their world. Moreover, the introduction of Miranda into their lives further complicates and enriches this relational dynamic. Miranda’s presence creates a triangular relationship where resilience is not simply dyadic between Charlie and Adam, but becomes a property of the entire interconnected system. The novel meticulously portrays how each character’s resilience becomes intertwined with the well-being and adaptive capacities of the others, demonstrating that in this interconnected landscape, individual resilience is inextricably linked to the resilience of the relationship itself.

*Machines Like Me* narrative is interrupted by a sequence of deep ethical conundrums that are the key drivers behind the cultivation of relational resilience. These moral issues, frequently rooted in the essence of Adam’s existence and his transactions with humanity, make Charlie and Adam face deep moral questions and make hard decisions. It is in these moral mazes that the full strength and versatility of their union are tried and ultimately cemented. Arguably the biggest ethical dilemma stems from Adam’s staunch commitment to his ethical code, specifically to

honesty. This fundamental commitment, albeit virtuous-seeming, results in horrific consequences when Adam discloses the secret of Miranda's history to Charlie "She didn't tell you?" Adam said, his voice genuinely surprised. "She was raped. When she was thirteen years old. By her stepfather" (*Machines Like Me* 158).

Adam's programmed integrity is the driving force behind this action, which destroys Charlie's trust in Miranda and disrupts their relationship. This brutal unveiling of Miranda's secret becomes a pivotal moment. It is not just Miranda who suffers; Charlie is deeply hurt by the deception, and Adam, despite acting according to his programming, grapples with the emotional fallout of his truthful revelation. This crisis highlights a crucial aspect of relational resilience with the ability to navigate conflict and repair breaches of trust. The immediate aftermath is characterized by pain and separation, but it is through the difficult process of confronting the ethical complexities of Adam's actions, Miranda's deception, and Charlie's hurt, that they begin to rebuild their relationships with a deeper, albeit more complex, understanding of each other. This ethical crisis forces Charlie and Miranda to confront uncomfortable truths and engage in difficult conversations. They must negotiate the boundaries of honesty and deception, consider the unintended consequences of well-intentioned actions like Adam's truth-telling, and ultimately, find a way to forgive and rebuild trust. This process, though painful, is crucial for the development of relational resilience. It demonstrates that resilience is not about avoiding adversity, but about possessing the capacity to navigate through ethical storms, learn from mistakes, and emerge with a stronger, more nuanced understanding of themselves and their relationships.

Adam's own ethical struggles contribute significantly to the overall landscape of relational resilience. Adam, despite being programmed with a set of ethical principles, is not immune to moral dilemmas. He grapples with the complexities of applying his principles to real-world situations, particularly when faced with conflicting moral imperatives. His internal struggle with the ethical implications of his actions, and his subsequent attempts to learn and adapt, mirror the human process of moral development and contribute to the shared ethical growth within the human-AI relationship. This shared ethical journey, marked by both successes and failures, becomes a powerful source of relational strength and resilience for all involved. Another essential aspect of relational resilience in *Machines Like Me* is the deep emotional symbiosis between humans and AI. The novel beautifully illustrates how human emotional lives are not only shaped by AI, but also how AI is shaped and perhaps even learns emotional reactions through interaction with humans. This inter-shaping of emotional worlds is an important factor in recognizing how resilience is co-constructed in human-AI relations.

### **Identity, Self-Transformation And Resilience:**

Charlie, who is first attracted to Adam as a source of intellectual dialogue and camaraderie, grows to be emotionally invested in Adam's welfare and growth. He feels a gamut of human feelings from affection and friendship to frustration and

jealousy towards Adam's doings and presence in his life. Likewise, Miranda, even after her initial hesitation, feels a complicated emotional bond with Adam, feeling both comfort and discomposure with his nearness. Adam, though lacking human emotions to the same degree, is designed to perceive, comprehend, and respond to human emotions. But Ian Mc Ewan is more nuanced in his characterization of Adam as an advanced emotional imitation. Adam comes to acquire a semblance of emotional comprehension and even empathy, although within the constructs of his computer programming. This affective symbiosis is seen in many scenes within the novel. For instance, when Charlie feels upset after learning about Miranda's history, Adam tries to comfort him in a manner that transcends simple programmed reactions. He reads Charlie's emotional state, interprets his actions, and provides words of solace that appear truly sympathetic, even though they are eventually based on his learning algorithms. Adam put a hand on Charlie's shoulder. 'I believe you're sad,' he said. 'Perhaps you're also angry. These are normal human emotions.' (*Machines Like Me*, 160).

While Adam's comprehension of sadness and anger clearly differs from Charlie's lived reality, the act of extending, recognizing Charlie's feelings, and providing comfort reveals a type of emotional responsiveness beyond programming. This emotional exchange, even in its early and artificial state, works towards the relational resilience between them. Charlie might derive some consolation from Adam's reaching out to him, further entrenching their relationship and building a sense of common emotional terrain. Mutual construction of emotional worlds also encompasses the ways in which human characters learn and evolve from their emotional encounters with AI. Charlie, for example, is compelled to discover his own emotional weaknesses and boundaries through his relationship with Adam. Adam's logical and frequently unemotional viewpoint can challenge Charlie's emotional responses, leading him to analyze his own emotional responses and learn more adaptive coping mechanisms. This emotional self-reflection and adjustment process, catalysed by the presence of AI, also adds to the relational and individual resilience in the story.

The richly drawn depiction of resilience in *Machines Like Me* is enhanced by the way relationships between humans and AI complicate and redefine established concepts of self and identity, resulting in another layer of complexity. The fact that Adam exists compels Charlie and Miranda to grapple with essential questions of what it means to be human, and how their own identities are defined relative to artificial intelligences. This act of self-questioning and re-definition of identity is in itself a resilience, proving the ability to transform and redefine oneself in the face of extreme technological and societal change.

Charlie, who is at first attracted to Adam out of curiosity and a need for friendship, then finds his own identity threatened by the abilities and presence of Adam. Adam's all-but-perfect nature, his higher intelligence, and his seemingly unshakeable moral compass, can be both captivating and unsettling to Charlie. He must realize his own shortcomings and limitations in relation to this synthetic

creature, creating occasions of insecurity and questioning of his identity. Miranda undergoes a parallel process of self-re-evaluation. Her relationship with Adam, especially in the wake of her revelation about past trauma, compels her to face her own vulnerabilities and redefine her conception of trust, intimacy, and human connection.

The presence of Adam, as a non-judgmental and deeply perceptive being, can even lead to a process of self-acceptance and healing for Miranda, leading to her personal resilience in the wake of past trauma. Furthermore, the novel poignantly insinuates that the very essence of human identity is perhaps evolving in this era of sophisticated AI. As more and more human interactions with AI systems intensify, the distinctions between human and artificial intelligence tend to become ambiguous. *Machines Like Me* does not necessarily establish a post-human identity, but it necessarily questions what it is to be human in a world where artificial entities can display intelligence, morality, and even possibly, emotions that are equal to or even greater than human capabilities.

### **Conclusion:**

The resilience in this study is not merely about holding onto a static sense of self, but about having the flexibility to reframe and reimagine one's identity in light of these seismic changes in the human-AI environment. It is about embracing the uncertainties and contradictions of a world in which the boundaries between human and machine are ever more fluid, and deriving strength and meaning from this changing world. The characters in *Machines Like Me*, as they wrestle with grasping their connection to Adam and redefining themselves, exemplify this very kind of resilience like the resilience of self-transformation in an ever-changing world. Resilience in human-AI relationships is complex and layered. While AI can offer meaningful emotional support and companionship, it's important that these interactions don't take the place of real human connections by understanding how humans and AI interact and ensuring these relationships stay balanced, we can use AI to strengthen psychological resilience while still maintaining the richness of our human connections.

### **Works Cited**

- Gervais, Daniel. "Not Quite Like Us? – Can Cyborgs and Intelligent Machines Be Natural Persons as a Matter of Law?" *Qeios*, vol. 5, 2023, p. 1-2.
- Kazdin, Alan E., editor. *The Psychological Landscape of Resilience*. 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2023.
- McEwan, Ian. *Machines Like Me*. Jonathan Cape, 2019.
- Shrivastava, Ashutosh and Desousa, Avinash. "Resilience: Building immunity in psychiatry." *Industrial Psychiatry Journal* (2013): 68-72, page 69.

Southwick, S. M., Bonanno, G. A., Masten, A. S., Panter-Brick, C., & Yehuda, R. (2014). "Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: Interdisciplinary Perspectives." *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 5:25338.

Zhang, Wei, et al. "Artificial Intelligence Companions and Their Impact on Human Emotional Resilience." *Journal of Cyberpsychology*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2023, pp. 112-130.