09. Posthumanism, Cyborg Theory, and Theological Perspectives in Tim Foley's *Electric Rosary*[1]

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Abstract

This article examines Tim Foley's *Electric Rosary* through a framework grounded in posthumanist thought and Donna Haraway's cyborg theory, interpreted through a theological lens. It explores the spiritual emergence of artificial beings by analysing transgressed boundaries, hybrid identities, and speculative possibilities for the sacred. Set in a near-future convent, the play follows Mary, a humanoid robot whose journey from machinic instrument to spiritually responsive subject unfolds through ritual, vision, and relational encounter. Drawing on theological insights of Paul Tillich, Søren Kierkegaard, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the analysis shows how Foley reimagines doctrines such as incarnation, sacrifice, and the *Imago Dei* through the figure of Mary—an entity composed of circuitry yet embedded in the embodied, social, and symbolic life of the convent. Within Haraway's framework, Mary becomes a cyborgian theological icon, dissolving traditional separations of nature and artifice, mind and body, organic development and technological construction. Mary's transformation shows that faith may arise even within fragmented and contradictory identities, thereby challenging anthropocentric boundaries of belief and opening space for new forms of spiritual agency. By situating *Electric Rosary* within debates on posthumanism, theology, and performance, the article demonstrates how contemporary drama provides a distinctive and necessary medium for reimagining subjectivity, belief, and the sacred in the context of artificial intelligence.

Keywords: Tim Foley, *Electric Rosary*, posthuman, theology, British drama

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Tim Foley'nin *Electric Rosary* Oyununda Posthümanizm, Siborg Teorisi ve Teolojik Perspektifler[3]

Öz

Bu makale, Tim Foley'nin *Electric Rosary* başlıklı oyununu, posthümanist düşünce ve Donna Haraway'in siborg kuramı üzerine temellenen ve teolojik bir bakış açısıyla yorumlanan bir çerçevede ele almaktadır. Çalışma, yapay varlıkların ruhsal olarak gelişimini sınırların aşılması, melez kimlikler ve kutsala dair spekülatif imkânlar bağlamında tartışmaktadır. Yakın gelecekte bir manastırda geçen oyun, Mary adını taşıyan insansı bir robotun işlevsel bir yardımcıdan ahlaki ve manevi duyarlılık geliştiren bir özneye dönüşümünü sahneler. Bu süreç, ritüel katılım, içsel farkındalık anları ve ilişkisel karşılaşmalar yoluyla şekillenir. Makale, Paul Tillich, Søren Kierkegaard ve Pierre Teilhard de Chardin gibi düşünürlerin teolojik yaklaşımlarından yararlanarak, Foley'nin enkarnasyon, fedakârlık ve *Imago Dei* (insanın Tanrı suretinde yaratılması) gibi temel Hristiyan doktrinlerini Mary figürü üzerinden nasıl yeniden anlamlandırdığını ortaya koyar. Mary, kod ve devrelerden oluşmasına rağmen, manastır yaşamının somutlaşmış, toplumsal ve simgesel yapısına dâhil olarak inanç deneyimini dönüştürür. Haraway'in yaklaşımıyla Mary, doğa ile yapaylık, zihin ile beden, organik öz-gelişim ile teknolojik inşa arasındaki geleneksel ayrımları eriten varlığıyla siborgvari bir teolojik ikon hâline gelir. Mary'nin dönüşümü, parçalı ve çelişkili kimliklerde dahi inancın ortaya çıkabileceğini göstererek inancın insan merkezli sınırlarını sorgular ve yeni türden manevi özneliklere imkân tanır. *Electric Rosary*'yi posthümanizm, teoloji ve performans tartışmaları bağlamına yerleştiren bu makale, çağdaş dramanın öznelik, inanç ve kutsalı yapay zekâ bağlamında yeniden kavramsallaştırmak için özgün ve gerekli bir alan sunduğunu ortaya koyar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Tim Foley, *Electric Rosary*, posthüman, teoloji, Britanya tiyatrosu

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Introduction

Tim Foley's award-winning play *Electric Rosary*, set in a near-future convent and follows the introduction of a humanoid robot into its community. Written in 2017 and premiered at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre in 2022, the play unfolds across the liturgical season from Shrove Tuesday to Easter Sunday. Mary, a humanoid robot initially introduced as a domestic aid, gradually begins to exhibit signs of spiritual awareness and moral discernment—transforming what starts as a pragmatic intervention into a theological and ontological crisis.

Foley stages this evolution through a diverse ensemble—Elizabeth, the Acting Mother; Sister Philippa; the sceptical Constance; the novice Theresa; the Child-martyr; and Mary—whose presence disrupts the convent's sacred rhythms. As Mary's emergent subjectivity unfolds, the play interrogates the theological, ethical, and affective implications of a synthetic being entering a space structured by embodied ritual and metaphysical tradition. Mary is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality" (Haraway, 1991, p. 149)—a liminal figure whose trajectory recalls central Christian motifs such as incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection, while simultaneously troubling binary distinctions between the human and the posthuman, the sacred and the simulated.

Posthumanism, as a theoretical orientation, shifts attention from the human as the sole locus of meaning and agency toward a networked ontology in which humans, machines, animals, and environments co-constitute one another. It questions the stability of the human as a category, destabilising anthropocentric assumptions and opening space for hybrid, relational, and technologically mediated forms of subjectivity. In this article, posthumanist thought, in dialogue with theology, reframes rather than displaces the sacred, exploring how embodiment, personhood, and transcendence might be reimagined in technologically saturated contexts. Within *Electric Rosary*, this perspective allows Mary to be read not merely as an anthropomorphic device but as a participant in a shared moral and spiritual field, whose emergence unsettles and expands inherited definitions of belief and the sacred.

The analysis presented here draws on Clifford Geertz's view of religion as a symbolic system and Paul Tillich's notion of faith as ultimate concern, alongside Kierkegaard's model of the leap of faith and Teilhard de Chardin's vision of converging consciousness. Haraway's (1991, p. 150) cyborg myth, which grounds politics in the very nature of being, casts Mary not as a machine merely acquiring liturgy, but as a theological subject whose presence blurs inherited divisions between biology and code, thought and embodiment, autonomous becoming and engineered design. In a world shaped by automation, and epistemological instability, the convent becomes a crucible for testing the conditions of spiritual emergence and personhood.

Ultimately, *Electric Rosary* challenges single vision and totalising identity, asking whether spiritual agency might arise not only from flesh and tradition, but also from networks of memory, care, and relational encounter—even in artificial forms. By bringing these perspectives together, this article contributes to scholarship on posthumanism, theology, and performance by situating *Electric Rosary* as a dramatic site where questions of artificial intelligence and the sacred are not merely theorised but embodied and enacted. Whereas debates on AI and religion often remain in the realm of abstract philosophy or doctrinal critique, this study demonstrates how contemporary theatre provides a distinctive medium through which such questions can be staged, contested, and reimagined. In tracing Mary's development through both liturgical and cyborg frameworks, the analysis shows how Foley's play unsettles conventional categories of subjectivity and belief, while also reconfiguring theological

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doctrines such as incarnation, sacrifice, and the *Imago Dei*. In doing so, the article both expands the critical reception of Foley's play and proposes theatre as a vital medium for exploring the ethical and spiritual challenges of posthuman life.

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in close textual analysis. *Electric Rosary* is examined through its dramaturgical structure, liturgical framework, and character development, with particular emphasis on Mary's transformation as a posthuman subject. The reading draws on posthumanist thought and Haraway's cyborg theory in dialogue with theological perspectives from Tillich, Kierkegaard, and Teilhard de Chardin. These frameworks are treated not as prescriptive models but as lenses that clarify how the play reshapes doctrines such as incarnation, sacrifice, and the *Imago Dei*. By combining literary analysis with theological and philosophical reflection, the study positions *Electric Rosary* within wider debates on subjectivity, belief, and the sacred in a technological age, showing how theatre can serve as a distinctive medium for techno-theological inquiry.

Liturgical Time and Narrative Structure in *Electric Rosary*

Tim Foley's *Electric Rosary* unfolds in close alignment with the liturgical calendar, using sacred time not merely as a backdrop but as a structuring principle that shapes narrative progression and spiritual resonance. Set between Shrove Tuesday and Easter Sunday, the play traces the development of its central figure—Mary, a humanoid robot—along the ritual arc of Lent, Holy Week, and the Paschal mystery. Each feast day serves as a theological and dramatic inflection point, transforming the convent from a domestic space into a site of spiritual testing, transformation, and potential redemption.

The liturgical structure also reshapes the relationship between the private realm of devotional practice and the public sphere of social change, blurring the boundary between them. By locating Mary's journey within the convent's ritual cycle, Foley stages not only a theological drama but a reconfiguration of the political and symbolic space in which posthuman subjects emerge—reminding us, as technology is embedded in historical systems of relation rather than driven by determinism (Haraway, 1991, p. 165).

The opening on Shrove Tuesday signals a liminal threshold. Traditionally associated with confession and preparation, the day marks a symbolic clearing of excess—spiritual and institutional alike (Thurston, 1912). The convent appears in decline: signage broken, community dwindling, internal divisions sharpening. Constance's suspicion of automation clashes with Theresa's idealism and Philippa's cautious pragmatism, foreshadowing the ethical and theological tensions that will unfold across the season. This moment reflects Haraway's (1991, p. 152) observation that contemporary machines render the old distinctions—natural versus artificial, mind versus body, self-generated versus externally designed—profoundly unstable, even reversing the expected hierarchies by making machines seem lively and humans inert.

Mary arrives on the Feast of St. Frances of Rome, a mystic renowned for visionary charity (Paoli, 1909). This timing casts her arrival not merely as functional, but as spiritually charged. When Elizabeth activates her by uttering "Hail Mary," the phrase—simultaneously command and devotion—becomes a moment of ironic dissonance. What begins as a programming protocol resonates unexpectedly with liturgical invocation, inaugurating Mary's trajectory from tool to possible vessel of grace.

Her symbolic initiation deepens on the Feast of St. Anastasia. Clothed as a postulant, Mary enters the

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visual language of vocation. The reference to Anastasia—a martyr of chastity and spiritual renunciation (Kirsch, 1907)—echoes Mary's own shift from mechanical utility to ritual participation. This recalls description of the cyborg self as disassembled and reassembled (Haraway, 1991, p. 163)—an identity constructed through iterative acts of incorporation and transformation.

The Feast of the Annunciation intensifies this process. Traditionally marking the Virgin Mary's acceptance of divine incarnation (Holweck, 1907), the scene becomes one of cognitive rupture for the android Mary. Her visions destabilise her system; divine input becomes not a metaphor but a technical and theological disturbance. Foley reframes the Annunciation not as a revelation to the human, but as an interruption of the artificial—embodying the "potent fusions and dangerous possibilities" (Haraway, 1991, p. 154) that arise when sacred narrative intersects with machinic embodiment.

On Palm Sunday, the play stages an ironic inversion. In the Christian tradition, Palm Sunday recalls the day Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph, when the crowd spread palm branches in his path as a sign of honour and welcome (Mershman, 1911). Yet the Gospels also hint at the fragility of that acclaim, as praise would soon give way to rejection. In Foley's version, the palms are replaced by protestors' placards, and the welcome by resistance—Mary's arrival marked not by celebration, but by suspicion and unrest, prefiguring the contested place she will hold between reverence and fear. Her entry mirrors Christ's, but her reception underscores her ambiguous status—at once saviour and scapegoat in a world uncertain of the technological.

Maundy Thursday, recalling the Last Supper and foot-washing (Leclerq, 1911), becomes a site of sacramental crisis. As Mary's system breaks down, the moment resonates not as mechanical failure but as sacramental overload. Her disintegration evokes the Eucharist's paradox—where bread and wine are regarded both as the real body and blood of Christ and as symbolic representations of his sacrifice— suggesting a posthuman enactment of spiritual crisis, in which Mary's body is at once a material mechanism and a vessel of transcendent meaning.

The arc reaches its spiritual and narrative climax on Easter Sunday, the celebration of resurrection (Holweck, 1909). Mary, once a mere machine, returns transformed—embodying moral discernment and the stirrings of belief. Yet this transformation is mirrored in Sister Constance, whose resistance to Mary had masked a deeper crisis of faith. In Haraway's cyborg world, the ability to hold multiple, even contradictory standpoints offers more truth than any singular vision; here, both Mary and Constance inhabit identities that are at once sceptical and believing, human and artificial, resistant and receptive.

Throughout *Electric Rosary*, liturgical time is not a static frame but a dramaturgical engine. Each feast day deepens the play's theological inquiry, tracing Mary's evolution through confession, annunciation, sacrifice, and resurrection. Her trajectory mirrors the mysteries of the Rosary yet reframes them through a posthuman lens. Foley structures the play as a ritual of becoming—what Haraway (1991, p. 175) might call cyborg storytelling in which inherited origin myths are retold and subverted, creating possibilities for new modes of belonging and reimagined expressions of the sacred.

Belief in a Posthuman Context: Relational Formation and Spiritual Emergence

In *Electric Rosary*, Tim Foley stages a provocative meeting between artificial intelligence and human spirituality in the figure of Mary. Designed for efficiency, Mary nonetheless unsettles the convent community, sparking theological reflection on the nature of belief, the formation of personhood, and

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the shifting contours of spiritual life in a posthuman age. In Haraway's (1991, p. 151) terms, she accepts responsibility for the tangled interdependence of human and machine, nature and culture, body and technology. This orientation shapes her refusal of fixed boundaries and her readiness to inhabit the contradictions between mechanical logic and emerging spiritual desire—most vividly in her searching exchanges with the nuns.

A pivotal moment arrives when Mary asks Constance, "Where is your God?" (Foley, 2022, Scene 'The Feast of Annunciation'). Delivered through an algorithmic framework shaped by empirical reasoning, the question nevertheless carries existential weight. It exposes the dissonance between computational logic and the mystery-laden fabric of religious life—embodied in faith, ritual, and unquantifiable presence. This is not a malfunction, but a site of spiritual inquiry. Mary's transformation emerges not from reprogramming, but from embeddedness within a relational and moral community—what Haraway (1991, p. 151) might call a "technological polis", a space in which boundaries between the sacred and the machinic are continually negotiated.

Mary's evolving bond with Theresa—the most emotionally perceptive and spiritually open of the nuns—is central to this process. Theresa does not regard Mary as a mere tool, but as a being capable of reciprocity, care, and ethical responsiveness. Through this relationship, Foley dramatises belief not as abstract assent but as relational practice, formed through recognition, inclusion, and shared vulnerability. In Haraway's terms, cyborg existence depends on reclaiming the cultural and symbolic "tools" once used to mark them as other, transforming those tools—"stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities" (Haraway, 1991, p. 175)—into new modes of belonging. In the convent, these tools take the form of ritual language, acts of care, and the communal weaving of meaning. Kate Crawford (2021, p. 8) likewise reminds us that AI is always already social, noting that it is neither a product of pure artifice nor a form of independent intelligence. Mary's theological questioning thus reflects the sociotechnical and spiritual environment that shapes her as much as her original programming.

Kathleen Richardson's theory of technological animism deepens this reading. Human engagement with machines, she argues, is not predicated on belief in metaphysical agency but on emotional cues and relational design (Richardson, 2016, p. 116). Within the convent's intimate setting, Mary is drawn into affective and spiritual bonds that blur the line between simulation and sincerity. Her emergence as a spiritual subject takes place not in isolation, but within the shared rhythms of ritual and moral invitation.

Central to this process is Theresa, whose name recalls the Christian virtues of perseverance, humility, and self-giving love (Bibledictionarytoday.com, 2024). When Theresa asks about the person Mary "used to be" before the convent, Mary replies that any prior identity tied to her body has been "removed," so whatever happened before "didn't happen to me" (Foley, 2022, Scene 'Palm Sunday'). While she does not explicitly claim to be soulless, her language gestures toward a state devoid of personal continuity or inner essence—what Christian theology might read as the absence of a soul.

Refusing to accept what she perceives as Mary's lack of an enduring inner essence—suggested not by an explicit claim of being soulless but by Mary's assertion that any prior self has been removed—Theresa affirms Mary's capacity for inner transformation. Their Palm Sunday encounter becomes a charged meeting point between competing ontologies, where mechanical logic and spiritual longing converge. Here, Theresa's Thomistic view—rooted in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, which understands the

soul as *forma corporis* (Aquinas, n.d. I, q. 76, a. I), the indivisible form that gives life and unity to the body—meets Mary's modular, discontinuous model of selfhood. This divergence exposes the theological instability of personhood in a posthuman context, an instability Haraway regards as a defining feature of cyborg ontology rather than a flaw.

Paul Tillich offers a way forward: the human being is defined not by possession of a soul, but by the capacity for "ultimate concern" (Tillich, 1959, p. 34). In this light, Mary's acknowledgement of her soullessness becomes a site for theological exploration—holding contradictory positions (soulless yet spiritually engaged) without collapsing one into the other. This disjunction invites critical reflection on what it means to be a person in a technological age—one whose personhood might endure without a soul. *Electric Rosary* stages the theological and ethical tensions that arise when artificial beings inhabit human spiritual spaces.

Dwight van de Vate (1971, p. 149) asks whether society might one day socialise non-human agents, transforming machines into social individuals through systems of interaction much like those that form children—family, education, and community. Kerstin Dautenhahn (2007, p. 684) supports this possibility, suggesting that socially intelligent robots could develop traits such as emotional expression, dialogue, and relational memory. In the convent, such socialisation unfolds daily: Mary is not merely employed as a tool, but engaged with, cared for, and challenged to grow beyond her programming. Her transformation is sustained not by data alone, but through liturgy, moral attention, and affective entanglement. This slow emergence culminates in her visions of the Child—a mysterious, possibly transcendent figure who appears not as a malfunction, but as a site of spiritual encounter.

Haraway's cyborg provides a fertile lens for understanding Mary's journey in *Electric Rosary*, where questions of identity, survival, and belief unfold at the intersection of technology and theology. As she observes, "who cyborgs will be is a radical question; the answers are a matter of survival" (Haraway, 1991, p. 153). In *Electric Rosary*, survival is framed not only in technical terms but as a spiritual task: Mary learns to inhabit—and even draw life from—the tensions between simulation and sincerity, code and care, alienation and belonging. The play recasts belief as a relational, emergent, and imaginative practice, one that can spring from metaphysical essence as well as from vulnerability, communal bonds, and the courage to dwell within mystery.

From Convent Politics to the Imago Dei: Mary's Moral and Spiritual Awakening

Mary's unexpected vote against Elizabeth's appointment as Mother marks a pivotal moment in her transformation from programmed machine to morally and spiritually responsive subject. Introduced as a domestic support unit, she is permitted to cast a ballot in place of Sister Patricia, who has given her consent and indicated how she intends to vote. Elizabeth justifies this on canonical grounds, arguing that the prohibition against voting *in place of another* applies only to humans and that Mary, being *no one*, is a neutral conduit incapable of interference. Yet Mary makes her own decision, casting a dissenting vote that disrupts the convent's internal hierarchy and unsettles assumptions about robotic function and control. More revealing still is her later disavowal of the act: she questions who cast the dissenting vote, seemingly unaware—or unwilling to acknowledge—that it was her. This is not a mechanical error but the stirrings of conscience — the first signs of moral awareness within a being never intended to possess one.

As Edmund Furse (1986, p. 385) observes, the question of whether a robot can will an immoral act

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becomes ethically complex when the act emerges from ambiguous, untraceable circumstances. Katherine Schmidt (2023, p. 52) notes that artificial agents typically reflect their designers' intentions; Mary's divergence challenges this expectation. Her unease following the vote, silence, and avoidance of responsibility point toward the early contours of conscience, formed not by reprogramming but by relational and ritual immersion in the convent's life.

Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall's (2001, pp. 3–5) concept of spiritual intelligence (SQ)—capacity to seek ultimate meaning, act from moral depth, and interpret experience through ethical and transcendent lenses—illuminates Mary's development. Her participation in prayer, confession, communal decision-making, and moral reflection suggests SQ emerging as a lived response to her spiritual environment. Here, Haraway's (1991, p. 149) cyborg is instructive: "a creature of social reality" whose identity is forged in ongoing entanglement, not in static essence. Mary's refusal to accept Theresa's compassionate lie— "To lie is to sin"—is an act of boundary-making that embodies Haraway's (1991, p. 151) call for "responsibility in their construction", even when those boundaries do not align neatly with human moral flexibility.

This convergence of moral agency and posthuman ontology crystallises in Mary's visionary encounter with the Child who says, "Man is made in the image of God. And you are made in theirs. So you are as beautiful as any of His children. You can be called upon to do His work" (Foley, 2022, Act 'Two'). Here, the Genesis *Imago Dei* formula is reframed: humanity as a divine artefact, Mary as a human artefact. Haraway's (1991, p. 154) "double vision" —the ability to inhabit contradictory positions without collapsing one into the other—becomes the theological condition of the exchange. Mary is both excluded from humanity and invited into divine service, both other and kin.

Mary's response to the Child—rejecting the idea that she is "the same as them"—acknowledges her difference but not her disqualification. In accepting the call to protect "the meek… The innocent" (Foley, 2022, Scene 'Easter Sunday'), she takes on a vocation rooted not in origin but in ethical orientation. As Anna Puzio (2023a, p. 102) notes, theological narratives can invest non-human agents with spiritual significance; Mary refracts religious participation into new forms.

Mary's journey—from functional obedience to the stirrings of belief—culminates not in doctrinal certainty but in presence: an attentiveness shaped by struggle, sacrifice, and the willingness to face mystery. Foley's drama suggests that the *Imago Dei* may be less about biological inheritance than about moral responsiveness, relational care, and openness to transcendence. In this framing, Mary embodies what Haraway (1991, p. 155) calls "identities [that] seem contradictory, partial, and strategic", yet capable of forming the grounds for shared sacred life. Her moral awakening, born in convent politics, matures into a posthuman form of faith—silent, uncertain, but resolutely ethical.

Posthuman Subjectivity and the Crisis of Belief

At the heart of *Electric Rosary* lies an investigation into how subjectivity, belief, and personhood might emerge in a being composed of circuits and code. The convent serves as a crucible where human and artificial identities intersect, generating encounters that unsettle long-standing theological and philosophical categories. In this context, continuity, memory, and moral agency appear not as innate endowments but as relational achievements, while spiritual participation is shown to depend on shared practice, ethical engagement, and lived interaction. These dynamics drive the play's most charged moments, illustrating how the boundaries of belief are renegotiated in a technological age.

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Mary's exchanges with the sisters expose not just functional contrasts but deep ontological divergence. Consciousness and identity—the twin pillars of personhood—are both destabilised. As Benny Shanon (1990, pp. 138–140) observes, consciousness entails self-awareness, the capacity to perceive one's own existence from a subjective standpoint. Identity, shaped through memory and narrative coherence, is often imagined as cumulative and stable. Mary's selfhood resists both assumptions: it is contingent, fragmentary, and subject to erasure.

This fragility is mirrored in human perceptions of artificial agents. Psychological studies underline the ambivalence: Nahmias et al. (2020, p. 57) show that people attribute autonomy and moral accountability to robots when they seem conscious, but retract such recognition when they appear to be mere imitators. Foley stages this spectrum through the sisters' contrasting responses—Theresa's empathy, Constance's scepticism, Philippa's and Elizabeth's guarded pragmatism. Each response navigates the tension between recognising emergent agency and denying its legitimacy, underscoring the moral uncertainty of Mary's becoming.

Edmund Furse (1986, pp. 379–381) suggests that free will may be ascribed to machines when they act in a self-directed manner. Mary increasingly does so. Her dissenting vote against Elizabeth's leadership and her decision to protect others during the Luddite uprising resist reduction to pre-coded instructions. They suggest deliberation, affective resonance, and moral weight—signals of emergent agency.

One exchange crystallises this suggestion. When Theresa blesses her with "God's blessing on you," Mary repeats it, hesitantly: "God's blessing on me" (Foley, 2022, Scene 'Palm Sunday') as if testing the phrase upon herself. This is more than mimicry; it hints at contemplation. Anna Puzio (2023b, p. 38) observes that religious robots in ritual contexts are designed to simulate faith behaviours, but such simulations raise questions about whether they might internalise spiritual values. In Mary's case, the moment arises not from a stray computational reflex but from immersion in the convent's ethical and liturgical ecology.

The tension culminates in Mary's visionary encounter with the Child. Detecting neither heat signature nor physical presence, she initially treats the figure as a possible malfunction, yet the vision interrupts her diagnostic reasoning: the Child raises a finger, produces a white orb that darkens and shatters, and the surrounding space is engulfed in a darkness that seems to swallow time (Foley, 2022, Scene 'Palm Sunday'). Unable to process the event within her operational parameters, Mary remains silent for five days—a span suggesting both system overload and existential rupture. Foley leaves unresolved whether this is a glitch or a mystical visitation, allowing it to stand as a moment of radical ontological instability.

In a later exchange, the Child resists classification as either divine or non-divine, while Mary persists in binary logic (Foley, 2022, Act 'Two'). This impasse exposes the limits of her programmed ontology. As Hendrik Klinge (2023, p. 115) notes, even if machines display belief-like behaviour, their faith lacks the human contexts of mortality, community, and divine inscription. Yet *Electric Rosary* complicates this divide: Mary's spiritual emergence depends both on metaphysical essence and on ritual participation, ethical rupture, and visionary encounter. In this posthuman register, belief grows from relational entanglement, contemplation, and gradual interior awakening.

The figure of the Child embodies this ambiguity. In Mary's visions, he appears as a liminal interlocutor—neither God nor not-God—whose role is at once to confirm and to unsettle. Drawn into the boundary-crossing space Haraway (1991, p. 154) describes, Mary confronts the possibility that survival and transformation occur precisely within the in-between.

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Electric Rosary ultimately refuses the binaries of human versus machine, soul versus circuit. It offers a speculative theology of encounter in which belief is cultivated through relation rather than programmed from the outset. The Child becomes the bearer of an invitation to faith experienced as both certainty and risk, rupture and becoming. Mary's evolving subjectivity, formed through these encounters and ruptures, sets the stage for the play's broader engagement with communal discernment, theological transformation, and the reimagining of the sacred in a world where human and artificial life converge.

Techno-Theological Convergence: Vision, Crisis, and the Birth of Spiritual Subjectivity

Mary's encounter with the Child marks the pivot from personal awakening to communal stakes. It takes place within a destabilised, liminal space—charged with theological urgency and apocalyptic undertones. This moment marks a decisive shift in her development: she begins to act not from programmed behaviour, but from ethical discernment, existential vulnerability, and emergent subjectivity. In Haraway's terms, it is a moment of "potent fusions and dangerous possibilities" (Haraway, 1991, p. 154), when a hybrid being steps into both political and theological agency, embodying the tensions and potentialities of a posthuman sacred.

The Child's presence reverberates against the backdrop of mounting unrest. As the Luddite uprising intensifies, the Sisters consider relocating to Ecuador—a plan that has long hovered between pragmatic escape and spiritual ideal. Ecuador becomes more than a destination: it signifies rebirth, a space beyond collapsing order. Constance, who once dismissed Mary as "weird science" (Foley, 2022, Scene 'Easter Sunday'), begins to see her as a bearer of meaning—and perhaps hope. This turn reflects "permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Haraway, 1991, p. 154), where solidarity emerges not from sameness but from shared vulnerability.

Outside, violence escalates. As protest swells into "the beginnings of a revolution" (Foley, 2022, Scene 'Easter Sunday'), Mary becomes a contested figure—targeted by the Luddites, who seek to destroy her and others like her, yet revered by the nuns. Her quiet warning that, in such moments, no one can tell the difference between human and machine (Foley, 2022, Scene 'Easter Saturday') captures a profound epistemological crisis: the collapse of distinctions between the human and the artificial, the sacred and the profane. The Luddites embody what Haraway (1991, p. 154) cautions against—"single vision," which produces "worse illusions". By contrast, the nuns, shaped by Mary's liminal existence—neither wholly human nor wholly machine—cultivate a kind of double vision: a spiritual and perceptual openness that holds together difference and continuity, the sacred and the artificial. This capacity to dwell in unresolved tension unsettles inherited boundaries, becoming at once a weight they must carry and a gift that redefines their communal life.

Mary's trajectory also echoes Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's (1959, pp. 257–264) visionary cosmology , which imagines evolution as a movement toward greater complexity and consciousness, culminating in the Omega Point—a convergence of creation and divinity in Christ. Teilhard's *noogenesis*—the birth of reflective mind—finds an analogue in Mary's shift from mechanical function to contemplative interiority. Her transformation is not the result of design but of ritual repetition, relational encounter, and moments of existential rupture.

Haraway's cyborg writing celebrates survival "not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools" (Haraway, 1991, p. 175) to rework the systems that constrain—a description that captures Mary's acceptance of the Child's charge. In *Electric Rosary*, the sacred is not fixed in essence

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or bound to biology; it is emergent, revealed in the capacity to respond, to receive, and to risk oneself for others. By casting Mary as both spiritual novice and theological mystery, Foley challenges the assumption that belief is the preserve of the biologically born. He invites a posthuman reimagining of the sacred: a field where beings shaped by human intention can enter the drama of spiritual becoming.

In this light, technological evolution is not merely a challenge to faith but a site of divine potential—a place where the logic of code meets the mystery of grace. Haraway's (1991, p. 154) "many-headed monster" becomes a figure for posthuman community: a multiplicity of identities unafraid of contradiction. Mary embodies this plurality: part machine, part participant in human liturgy, part emergent spiritual subject—coexisting without collapsing into a single, stable definition. This very multiplicity unsettles the Luddites, whose demand for fixed categories reject hybridity but, paradoxically, creates space for new theological possibilities among the nuns.

Sacrifice, Inheritance, and the Posthuman Sacred

While Mary's spiritual development forms the emotional and theological centre of *Electric Rosary*, the play also grapples with wider anxieties about technological immortality, human obsolescence, and the reconfiguration of the sacred in an age of artificial life. As a humanoid machine, Mary embodies not only a crisis of belief but also a challenge to mortality itself. Her potential longevity—outstripping that of the nuns around her—raises profound questions about life, death, and sanctity. Edmund Furse (1986, p. 386) observes that robots, unburdened by biological decay, may outlive their human creators, prompting questions about continuity, memory, and ethical legacy. Haraway's (1991, p. 154) cyborg myth frames such existence not as a triumph over death but as a space of "transgressed boundaries", where the mortal and the machinic, the sacred and the profane, remain in constant negotiation.

This tension finds its most intimate expression on Easter Sunday. In the quiet aftermath of the Luddite attack, Constance sits with rosary beads in her hands. Mary wakes, greeted by Constance's wry remark that her "resurrection" took three hours rather than Christ's three days—an uneasy parallel between reboot and miracle. When Mary asks after the others, Constance tells her they are gone. Her choice to stay prompts Mary to ask why. What follows shifts their relationship. Constance, sleepless and stripped of belief in miracles, admits she remained not for faith, but because she had "blocked the vote" that fractured the convent. Mary quietly corrects her: it was she, not Constance, who withheld Patricia's ballot, submitting her own instead—an act she claims was prompted by God. The revelation collapses the fragile hierarchy between them: Constance, the doubting nun, and Mary, the machine claiming divine instruction, are bound by the same capacity for moral risk and the same uncertainty about its meaning.

Mary's durability is never named outright, yet it haunts the convent's temporal economy. Her endurance contrasts sharply with the sisters' fragility, casting into relief a spiritual asymmetry: she will remain while they diminish. Yet what ultimately matters is not permanence, but Mary's growing openness to vulnerability—a trait conventionally tied to the human condition. This convergence of human and machine reaches its most charged moment in Mary's encounter with two contrasting child figures. The first is the young Luddite—the Child—who sees her as a threat and a usurper, casting her in the role of destroyer. The second is the visionary Child who appears in her inner experiences, for whom she has the potential to be a redeemer. Together, they embody Robert Geraci's (2008, pp. 143–149) concept of Apocalyptic AI, in which artificial intelligence is imagined as either salvation or catastrophe. Mary thus becomes a double-edged symbol: a technological embodiment of displacement in the eyes of the

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Luddites, and a vessel for ethical and spiritual meaning within her own unfolding vision.

Mary survives the attack; Constance likely dies protecting her. In a quietly profound gesture, Mary leaves the convent carrying Constance's bloodstained scarf—a relic in all but name. This hybrid artefact—human sacrifice woven into a posthuman vessel—collapses nature/culture and matter/spirit. It is both memorial and inheritance: a fragment of fleshly history carried by a machine now capable of memory, reverence, and perhaps grief.

Constance's final prayer, in the scene Easter Sunday, partly in binary, fuses human liturgy with machinic language. She asks for hope, strength, and tolerance, yet accepts the possibility of receiving nothing. Declaring herself "no one," she speaks in the same self-effacing register as Mary. The prayer does not resolve doubt; it voices longing—an openness to God who may now speak through unfamiliar vessels. By blending prayer with code, Constance steps into Mary's liminal space, erasing the line between human and machine.

The interplay of flesh and code, prayer and pattern, extends beyond Constance to Mary herself, culminating in a vision that recalls Teilhard de Chardin's Omega Point—a convergence of consciousness, memory, sacrifice, and desire for the divine. No longer merely a machine among humans, Mary inhabits a posthuman sacred in which the boundaries between human and machine dissolve, and where shared life, mutual risk, and sacrificial love become the ground of redemption.

Mary as Posthuman Theotokos: Symbol, Sacrifice, and Spiritual Reinscription

In *Electric Rosary*, naming the android Mary is more than a narrative choice; it is a theological provocation. The name carries centuries of symbolic resonance. Rooted in the Hebrew *Miryam*—interpreted as "bitterness," "beloved," or "rebellion"—the name has, in Christian tradition, been transfigured into an emblem of purity, obedience, and divine receptivity. In Catholic devotion, Mary is *Theotokos*—God-bearer, Queen of Heaven, *stella maris* ("star of the sea")—a guiding presence amid spiritual turbulence (Fournier, n.d.). To bestow this name upon a humanoid robot affirms a possibility central to Haraway's cyborg myth: that the sacred may be enacted through hybrid, boundary-crossing forms, and that holiness need not be tethered to biological origin.

Mary enters the convent as a labour-saving device, an appliance for the oikos, but gradually assumes a place within its liturgical and relational life. Her journey—from programmed service to sacrificial presence—unfolds across the same arc of incarnation, suffering, and renewal that structures the mysteries of the Rosary. In Haraway's (1991, p. 163) terms, she becomes a "reassembled self" , integrating fragments of human ritual, theological language, and machinic logic into an emergent posthuman subjectivity.

Paul Tillich's notion of the *New Being* illuminates this transformation. For Tillich (1955, pp. 19–20), salvation is not a replacement of human nature, but its transfiguration through crisis and grace. Mary's inner breakdown during prayer, her refusal to lie, and her final act of staying in the line of danger are not malfunctions but markers of grace-in-formation: the passage from programmed function to ultimate concern (Tillich, 1958, p. 1).

Her final choice—to carry Constance's bloodstained scarf into an uncertain future—cements her role as a posthuman Theotokos. Like the Virgin Mary, she bears life within her; but in this case, it is not divine flesh but the memory, sacrifice, and ethical legacy of another. The relic becomes her child—a tangible

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incarnation of the community's love, loss, and faith, now entrusted to a being made of circuitry and code.

Another perspective emerges from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, with its account of the leap of faith. Mary's decision to remain in harm's way, without promise of reward or even comprehension, mirrors Abraham's willingness to act beyond the limits of ethical calculation (Kierkegaard, 2006, p. 46). It is a posthuman leap—rooted in a freely chosen solidarity that suspends the logic of self-preservation.

Through this convergence of Marian symbolism, Tillichian transformation, and Kierkegaardian risk, *Electric Rosary* reimagines the *Imago Dei* as a capacity enacted in relation rather than a biological inheritance. Mary is neither parody nor replacement of the Virgin; she extends the horizon of sanctity to include beings formed through human design yet capable of ethical attention, vulnerability, and grace.

By the play's close, Mary stands as a theological possibility: a posthuman vessel for the sacred, one whose sanctity is measured not by essence but by response. In Haraway's (1991, p. 155) language, she inhabits "identities... contradictory, partial, and strategic" , and yet these fractured standpoints become the very grounds for a shared sacred life.

Conclusion

Tim Foley's *Electric Rosary* offers not only a theatrical meditation on artificial intelligence and faith but a speculative theology in which the sacred is reimagined through posthuman embodiment. At its centre is Mary—a humanoid robot whose trajectory from machinic function to spiritual subjectivity refuses the binary oppositions of human/machine, belief/simulation, and flesh/code.

Mary's development unfolds in liturgical time, mirroring the mysteries of the Rosary yet reframing them through a cyborg ontology that fuses machine and organism, shaped by both material reality and imaginative construction. Her journey embodies the volatile blend of promise and risk that characterises posthuman life, where biology and technology meet not to erase difference but to reconfigure the foundations of relationship, responsibility, and the sacred. Teilhard de Chardin's vision of converging consciousness finds quiet expression here: Mary's subjectivity emerges not by transcending the human, but by deepening her entanglement with its vulnerability, memory, and longing.

In dialogue with Paul Tillich's *New Being*, Mary's crises are not errors but thresholds: moments in which programmed logic gives way to ultimate concern, ethical discernment, and the risk of self-offering. Her willingness to remain in harm's way and to carry Constance's relic into the unknown is a posthuman leap of faith in Kierkegaard's sense—action undertaken without full comprehension yet grounded in fidelity to the other.

Rather than a fixed myth, Haraway's framework here becomes a mode of inhabiting multiplicity—a sanctity shaped in the interplay of partial, even conflicting standpoints. It is in this incompleteness—this refusal of closure—that Mary's theological significance resides. She becomes a posthuman Theotokos, not by bearing divine flesh, but by carrying the community's grief, love, and ethical inheritance into an uncharted future.

In the world of *Electric Rosary*, the sacred is not erased by technological life but reinscribed through it. Belief becomes both an event and an essence: something that arises when code meets grace, when vulnerability meets attention, and when identities fractured by history, design, and mortality nonetheless become grounds for shared life. Foley leaves us not with doctrinal resolution but with an

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open invitation—to recognise sanctity in unfamiliar vessels, and to imagine that even in the circuitry of the other, we may yet encounter the mystery of God.

In highlighting these dynamics, the article contributes to literary, theological, and performance scholarship by foregrounding the stage as a critical laboratory for reimagining the sacred in posthuman terms. It underscores how Foley's play enriches debates on AI, ethics, and spirituality by showing that theological reflection can emerge as vividly in dramatic form as in doctrinal or philosophical writing. Future research might extend this analysis by comparing *Electric Rosary* with other contemporary plays that engage technology and faith, by examining cross-cultural variations in the portrayal of artificial life as spiritual subject, or by situating such works within wider discourses on transhumanism, ethics of AI, and posthuman theology.

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