

Genetic Augmentation And Future Creatures: Transhumanism In Paolo Bacigalupi's The Drowned Cities

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ABSTRACT

The Drowned Cities, a post-apocalyptic science fiction, set in future America ravaged by climate change and economic ruin is authored by the Hugo and Nebula award winning author, Paolo Bacigalupi. The effects of the rising sea level, immigrants and their effort to escape the drowned cities amidst the unending civil wars and the corporates' dark side are uncovered by Bacigalupi in The Drowned Cities. The bioengineered half human and half animal, named augments, and their role in the human world is also picturized by Bacigalupi. The research paper hone in on the augment, Tool, and his urge to save the drowned cities from destruction is focused through the lens of the Transhumanism.

Keywords: augment, bioengineering, transhumanism.

Introduction

The Drowned Cities is a dystopian novel which is authored by Paolo Bacigalupi, an American writer of science fiction and the winner of Printz Award. The Drowned Cities is set in a war-torn and a future America, ravaged by the climate change and run by war lords, where children are taken as child soldiers. Due to the rising sea level, the coastal areas are submerged in water and people are forced to live in swamps. Augments are genetically engineered to get involved in war by the corporate war mongers. They are indestructible as they are embedded with artificial intelligence and great strength. The genetically engineered half human and half animal, Tool and its imperishable nature are scrutinized in accordance with Transhumanism.

Science and technology have created a notion that it is possible to enhance and modify human genes. This notion sowed seeds for the philosophical movement called, Transhumanism. Transhumanist themes are used widely in science fiction genres and movies.

Transhumanism is a philosophical idea that aims to break the man's biological limitations with scientific and technological approaches. The term, Transhumanism was coined by the English Philosopher, Julian Huxley in 1957, in his essay, Transhumanism. It is a social movement that promotes the development and possibilities of the human enhancement. The aim of the transhumanists is to overcome the genetic limitations of human beings. It includes, cryogenic suspension, mind uploading, devising cyborgs and robots and so on. Transhuman resembles human in most aspects but possess power and strength beyond the human standards.

Transhumanism can be defined as “the intellectual and cultural movement with an eventual goal of fundamentally transforming the human condition by developing and making widely available technologies to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical and psychological capacities” (Burdett 13). The transhumanists movement got its root from the philosophy of the enlightenment when Francis Bacon published *Novum Organum*, which emphasizes the use of artificial experiments rather than prior reasoning. Other famous personality, Julian Huxley, a distinguished biologist, is the first person to use the word, Transhuman. The World Transhumanist Association was first formed by Nick Bostrom and David Pearce in 1998. It is a non-governmental organization which is designed to endorse the idea of transhumanism to public.

Tool in *The Drowned Cities*, is designed by the corporates to get involved in war. Tool is a Transhuman who is embedded with high intelligence and efficiency. Nick Bostrom is of the opinion,

The range of thoughts, feelings, experiences and activities accessible to human organisms presumably constitute only a tiny part of what is possible...the ambitions we humans have, our philosophies, the complexities of human society or the subtleties of our relationships, with one another—so we humans may lack the capacity to form a realistic intuitive understanding of what it would be like to be radically enhanced human and of thoughts, concerns, aspirations, and social relations that such humans may have. (4,5)

In the initial pages of the novel, Tool's extreme strength in contradiction to the human limitations is tinted by Bacigalupi. Tool tries to escape the clutches of his creators. He is overpowering and his masters decide to finish off him. Tool is caught, tortured and imprisoned. He rests on the ground as a meek augment while other guards try to wake him up. The prison guard warns them not to near him as he is dangerous and uncontrollable. Tool's extreme strength is evident through the prison guard's words. He says, “These things never die...you never seen the monsters fight up north, on the border...dog faces are demon spawn. The beginning of the cleansing, Saint Olmos saw them coming. They don't die until the final flood” (4,5).

Transhuman are one step ahead the human beings in their strength, intelligence, lifespan, and sensory organs. The augment, Tool is created by merging the DNAs of various organisms including human. Tool is made up of “the blood of a dozen predators pumped in its veins, a DNA cocktail of killing—tiger and dog and hyena...a perfect creature, designed from the blood up to hunt and war and kill” (6). Tool in *The Drowned Cities* can be compared with the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Emiko in *The Windup Girl* by Bacigalupi. The augments like, *Frankenstein*, Tool and Emiko are customized with high intelligence and physical power but, they are designed to be meek and obedient. Bacigalupi describes Tool as

“Tool ... was a very bad dog. His masters had told him and molded his will to match their own. They had forged him into a killer and then fit him into the killing machine that had been his pack... for a little while, he had been a good dog, and obedient.” (12).

The techniques used by the transhumanists include, nanotechnology, genetic manipulation, cybernetics, and human enhancement. “The idea of editing genes to alter a human is displayed in Frankenstein when Victor designs his monster to be more physically advanced than regular humans” (Jack Birchler). The creators of the augments design the augments to be more intelligent, stronger and to be obedient. But when the creators attempt to suppress the creation, they fight back. Frankenstein says, “how can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe...the different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body” (50, 51).

Frankenstein created the “angel of destruction” (39), after an incredible labour of days and nights. He created the monster thinking that “a new species would bless me as its creator” (47). Similarly, Tool is destined to fight and kill in the war zone like a warrior. Though, Tool is fabricated with the genes of dog, when Mouse, a teen boy in the swamps calls him a dog face he says, “Also tiger and hyena and man... I kill because it is my nature and I eat what I kill” (107). The threatening nature of the transhuman is evident when Tool threatens Mouse in the swamps. Likewise, Tool even goes to the extent of killing his own creator, General Carao, when he tries to destroy him.

Transhuman possesses high efficiency than humans. Nick Bostrom writes, “our own current mode of being, therefore, spans but a minute subspace of what is possible or permitted by the physical constraints of the universe” (5). But, the transhuman or enhanced humans is designed beyond human standards. For instance, Frankenstein wonders when the monster move in a high speed, he says, “I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing toward me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution; his stature, also, as he approached, seemed to exceed that of man” (7). Similarly, Tool is also created in such a way to move with high speed and a person “would rather face a dozen men with machetes than this hurricane of slaughter” (6) says the prison guard.

Transhuman is an intermediary form between human and post human. Neophilia is one of the concepts of the transhumanism philosophy. The creator of the Tool wanted to fabricate an augment which can withstand any war and killing. General Carao says, I was asked with creating a better breed-one suited to modern battlefields where augments had become the norm. a superb physical specimen was no longer sufficient. We needed creatures that were hypercompetent. Natural engines of strategy, tactics, learning, violence, stamina, fearlessness. Tolerant of poisons and chemical attacks. Resistant to fire and cold and fear and pain...Blood was a particularly fine specimen”. (157)

Tool is one of the best creations by the Mercier Corporations. General Carao created Tool with his blood full of super-clotting agents and his cells have the ability to replicate “as quickly as a kudzu grows” (166). Kudzu is usually seen in North America, a kind of perennial vines, that grows swiftly. If Tool is hurt with any sharp instruments, it would close and get healed within few minutes. Bone fractures will never slow him down and he is mentioned as “all the wonders

of our medical knowledge, and we use it to create monsters” (166). Tool has the ability to overcome almost all attacks. Ocho, the Colonel of the UPF says that Tool is able to survive in the pits for more than months without food or water. Mahlia, an immigrant decides to seek the help of Tool to escape the drowned cities.

Perfectionism is a transhumanists value which made humans to create a flawless augment free from disease and destruction. Most of the augments are designed to be obedient and usually controlled by their masters. As Tool is destined to fight in war fields, he is able to function with out the instructions of his master. He says that, people may think that he can't live without master and adds “my kind would have no business here, other than war with them” (280). When Mahlia, an immigrant asks him to save the Banyan Town from the UPF soldiers, she says, “augments like me are blood enemies to soldiers like that. They will shoot me on sight. I am their greatest nightmare. They fight my kind in the North, where the war lines bottle them up” (279). The masters of Tool wanted him to be a perfect slave. They train him with electric pods and discipline rods. When Mouse begs him to leave him alive, he says, “never beg for mercy. Accept that you have failed. Begging is for dogs and humans” (135). When Mouse refers him a coward, he says that he is not a coward and he says that when he is in army, he killed thousands of “hyenas’ men of Lagos in all their numbers, and had personally eaten the heart of the first claw” (136).

Transhumanists hate the term, unnatural and this is evident when Tool hates when people call him a dog face. He says, “you may call me Tool, or half-man or augment, but if you think to call me dog-face again, I will tear open your chest, and eat your heart” (308). They are designed in a way to survive in any occasions. Tool slaughters humans in the war field and consume their hearts. He hunts an alligator in the swamps and eats it and he is “unbothered by the miasma of carrion” (175). The augment is fabricated in a way to survive in any situations and hates to be overlooked as a dog face or an animal.

Problem solving approach while facing challenges and pragmatic attitude is favored by the transhumanists. Though Tool is a half human he is able to think wisely and practically than other characters mentioned in the novel. For instance, when Mahlia asks him to fight against the soldiers in the Town, he says that he is not ready to get indulge in a war and lose his life. He says, “I will not seek out a fight that cannot be won. And I will not suicide on any human being’s behalf” (179). Likewise, when Mahlia tries to save Mouse, her friend from the soldiers, Tool grabs her by hand and insists her “you cannot save him. You cannot survive this fight” (203). Mahlia feels bad as she is not able to save the Doctor and her friend Mouse and refers Tool as a coward for not fighting. His philosophical reply “I do not fight battles that cannot be won. Do not confuse that with cowardice” (220) is an evidence that Tool is practical and is good at problem solving.

Nick Bostrom is of the opinion that, “Transhumanism stresses the moral urgency of saving lives, or more precisely, of preventing involuntary deaths among people lives are worth living” (13). Tool is designed for destruction. But he escapes from the clutches of his master and wishes to live a life free from mastery and destruction. For instance, Tool of War is a sequence to the The Drowned Cities in which Tool emerges as a protagonist and tells the child soldiers that his desire is to reconstruct the city. He says,

Spread the word to the troops. Our new task is to rebuild...killing was easy. Any child could become a killer. But farming? The planting of seeds? Where were the people who knew these things? Where were the people who knew how to accomplish these patient, quiet things? They were dead. Or else fled. The smartest of them long gone. A fist of humans who knew how to engineer not death, but life. (4)

Tool's wish is to indulge in farming. He wanted to recreate life in the destructed land.

Paolo Bacigalupi has picturized the creatures of the futures and their role in the field of war and destruction. Though transhumanism withholds number of optimistic approaches, it also has negative traits within it. Augments like Tool from *The Drowned Cities* and Emiko from *The Windup Girl* are genetically engineered human beings and they are mastered by their creators. The half human Tool slaughters and pulls the heart of his creator and Emiko brutally murders a man who tortures her sexually. Likewise, the monster in *Frankenstein*, turns to be his own enemy. *Frankenstein* says, "Devil...Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies" (92). The human gods are slaughtered by their own creations. Though Tool is created to be a slave, he strives to be free and wish to indulge in reconstructing the city. At the same time, when the augment like Tool with high efficiency and strength is unleashed among the human beings. He may become a threat to the human community.

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