

## **Technoculture and Futuristic Dystopia: A Close Reading of Miller's Conditionally Human**

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### **Abstract**

The study tries to probe postmodernism, as a philosophical and critical approach, and one of its trends which is Technoculture, as a life style in postindustrial age. The study explores the tendency of the man to create and represent things even human beings in the era where everything is seen a consumable in machine-driven life. This paper shows some philosopher's definitions and theories of postmodernism and technoculture, like Jean Baudrillard who thinks that people live in a hyperreal life. This paper has a close reading of *Conditionally Human* by Walter M. Miller which is set in post-war time and how technology has changed the life. The study explores how science fiction as a literary genre has depicted the human life after world wars. It portrays how individuals lost the trust in technological development through the themes of apocalyptic, catastrophic and anti-utopian. The inauspicious reality of overpopulation and mass destruction which are probable after the world wars. The study shows how science fiction has shifted from portraying the amazements of technology to the undesirable outcomes of the excessive dependency on it. The over reliance on machines means that the man is subjugated and destroyable by technology.

*Keywords:* postmodernism, technoculture, hyperreality life

### **Introduction**

Postmodernism is a philosophical and a critical approach which influenced many aspects of daily life since the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It does not accept any theory which supposedly to explain everything. So that it refuses Freudianism where everything is seen in an expression of sexuality. It also rejects Marxism which deals with things in an economic way. It believes in fragmentation " postmodernism offers fragments and contingency, fluidity and multiples in place of fixity, completeness and unitariness" ( Nayar,2014,p377). In it there is nothing called a universal truth. It questions the historical truth which is a demand in the Modernity.

Postmodernism is the reaction to the Modernism. A radical critique of the domains of representation and philosophy. William Spanos, in early 70s of 20th century, turns the discussion of postmodernism from Anglo-American field to a global movement. This movement explores suspicions in the natural world of what is basic and undebatable information concerning things in nature for creating a question between the human being and the history, a question which has been prevented by Modernism.

The definition of postmodernism by Ihab Hassan (1925-2015) is very pivotal in the debates of it. Hassan brings together different trends and currents. Postmodernism for him is an anti-formal anarchism. He affirms that postmodernism is a motive for the refusal and uncovering, the celebration of reticence and otherness which is be and repressed in Western Culture. Postmodernism in Hassan's belief is a motive for decentring, for creating ontological and recognition of uncertainties as the chaos is accepted. The immanence

principle for Hassan is " that humankind has a strong tendency to imaginatively create and appropriate all of reality to itself- a move that was made possible only by rendering everything indeterminate in the first place, thus offering a vision revealing man's situatedness-in-the-world." ( Waugh, 2014.p.407).

In postmodern age the popular idea that everyone and everything is seen as consumable, that there is no depth but surface. The message turns into the media and the truth is no longer exists but just illusion. Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007), a French sociologist, offers four main historical stages concerning the sign. In the first stage he says that the original reality which is sincerely represented is a truth. The second stage is that the representation of the truth / reality has perverted or distorted it. In the third stage the truth / reality is no longer exists, though people try to hang on it via using representation to cover its demise. The fourth stage concludes that since there is nothing real to be reflected, so the relation between the indicator and reality disappears. According to Baudrillard the Western community has reached the fourth stage of evolution, the hyperreal life. He uses the term 'simulacra' not for representation only but also for a sense of imitation and the fake. Simulacra prevail upon all the levels of human existence. They can not express themselves in terms apart from the codes that are in their everyday life. Every public attitude people adopt is pre-coded to a certain extent that it is not possible to break free the template of representation in a true and special response.

Postmodernism advocates the native and the local over the global. It asserts that human information is constantly restricted and fragmentary. There could not be 'objective' information in light of the fact that the structures which empower knowing are gotten from abstract conditions like human feelings. It offers splinters and possibility, smoothness, and diversity instead of fixity, fulfillment and unity.

In literary writings, it is set apart by an inclination to scrutinize the authenticity of the story itself, the rejection to suggest any general certainties and various perspectives. The term postmodernism is connected to the art and literary works after World War II (1939-1945), when the impacts on the Western ethics of the war were incredibly aggravated by the experiment of Nazi tyranny and mass elimination, the risk of all-out demolition by the nuclear bomb, the dynamic pulverization of the regular habitat and the inauspicious reality of overpopulation.

Postmodernism includes not just a continuation of the counter-conventional analyses of modernity, yet additionally various endeavors to split far from modernistic structures that, definitely, became in the turn traditional, just as to topple the elitism of modernity by the response to the types of culture in cartoons, prevalent music, TV and film.

Modernism and Postmodernism are, to Lyotard, social stages, persistent with each other and both of them underscore the Now, and overlook history. Modern is not an authentic period or a specific social practice. It is perennial and constant also it could not be contained inside verifiable portrayal. Postmodernism asserts that reality no longer be found but it is dead because the subject never again exists.

Technology also paves the way for multicultural society, this is because the huge globalization, where different cultures are mixed together. The effect of that interaction among cultures can be seen in different fields of life architecture, music, education, food, literature.

### **Research Questions**

1. Is the development of technoculture necessitated by postmodernism as a trend in science fiction of Miller?
2. Does dystopian theme suit the message it conveys?

### Methodology and Conceptual Framework

This study, in the first and second parts, presents an overview of the concept " Postmodernism " and its main trend " Technoculture ". Theoretically, it is based on theories that have been given by some theoreticians and philosophers like Jean Baudrillard and Ihab Hassan. Jean Baudrillard (1981) claims that simulations of reality, in postmodernity era, have replaced reality and it is hardly, or impossibly, to distinguish the real and the unreal. He assures that the rapid advancement in scientific fields and the excessive dependency on technology have created its own culture. This culture is driven by TVs, internet, and media which cause alienation of the individuals within the community. For Ihab Hassan postmodernism is an era where fragmentation, chaos, anarchism and decentring are advocated and preferred. He sees that people have the tendency of imaginatively create and represent the reality for themselves. The third part of this paper has a close reading of " *Conditionally Human*" a science fiction by the American writer Walter M. Miller. It explores the reflections of postmodernism and technoculture in the lifestyle of the society which is led by technology.

### Literature Review

Anvar Sadhath in his paper *Situating Literature in Technoculture: A Reading of Three Postmodern Poems by Steven B. Katz* says that the technological innovations have changed the cultural production conditions which have also led to radical changes in perception. Sadhath introduces Terry Eagleton's theory that art no longer portrays the world but it wants to change the world and not to mimic it. There is nothing in truth to be mirrored and reality is substituted by already existed image of truth. Sadhath deals with three poems, by Steven B. Katz, which are placed in a virtual world. The poet sets his poems in the space of internet and computer. These poems are an example of technocultural development poetics. They indicate how the individuals of technoculture use their imagination to understand virtual-reality world. The poems confirm the concept that there is no reality to be reflected by the poet because it is previously a spectacle, copy or an image.

*Postmodern literature: Practices and Theory* by Dr. Sheeba... She sheds light on the origin of postmodernism, a term that has been used in 30s and 40s of the twentieth century in the criticism of Latin-American literature and got force particularly in the 70s. She says that to understand postmodernism we should not ignore modernity, that denotes the society which was in the West in the time of Enlightenment. The society was demonstrated by capitalist economy, industrialization, technology and science. She gives examples of postmodernism stylistic techniques in literature: pastiche, metafiction, intertextuality, temporal distortion, minimalism, maximalism, magical realism and reader involvement. The paper also presents some features that are basic in postmodernism. The literature of postmodernism is based on ambiguity. The belief that there is no a universal truth since it is just a matter of perspective. Many different cultures are mixed together because of globalization.

This paper deals with technoculture as a trend of postmodernism and as its major feature. In postmodernism there are certain philosophies and theories that have changed the lifestyle of people. The new life is saturated with the excessive dependency on technology. It presents some of the prominent philosophers like Jean Baudrillard, Ihab Hassan and others. The study also has a reading of the science fiction by Walter M. Miller, the American writer. It shows the culture of technology and its reflections in the literature of this era.

### **Technoculture: An Overview**

Science and technology comprise the worldwide economy and daily culture of the universe where people live in. Developments in biotechnology have changed the production and reproduction of food. Mobile phones, the web and email have reformed the manners by which people contact with one another and interact within the world around them.

Technology, by the progression in all fields like biotechnology of food, life-insurance systems, iPod, robots, cloning and military devices, has found its very own culture which is called (Technoculture). Technoculture is not just a new idiom that is not found in word references, yet as a postmodern tendency. Fredrick Jameson, a theorist, considers it as the culture of the Post-industrial era, where community has shifted from the manufacturing era to the consumer, media, data, electronic community and highly technologized" (1991, p. 3). The scientific, technological and cultural interaction could not be neglected and it has turned into an undeniable approach in modern studies that is as a result of its importance.

Numerous writers of the Postmodernism utilize sci-fi manners to address parts of existence which are constantly being influenced by the extravagant utilization of technicalities. Apocalyptic, catastrophic and anti-utopia topics surfaced progressively when the World Wars have finished, and individuals began losing trust in the development of technology.

*White Noise*(1985) by Don DeLillo, for instance, is an ironical novel that discusses television sets, uncontrolled commercialization, media satiate, disintegrated families and catastrophes which the civilization might cause. Virtual reality, cybercrimes and computers are themes of the cyberpunk novels that are exhibited in *Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson and *Snow Crash* (1992) by Neal Stephenson.

A lot of recent authors, in their novels which are classified as cyberpunk, reacting to the excessive use of computers and the incredible expansion of the internet. The fast technological advancement and the amazing inventions have shaped the literary writings and culture of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Science fictions are saturated with contraptions such as computerized buildings, ultrasonic jets, robots and cybernetic organisms that are accepted by the reader because of scientific likelihood in which they are depicted.

In Postmodern American science fiction, as Geyh, Leeborn and Levy think that the technocultural trends are reactions to the way the technology of post-war America has duplicated, divided and generally changed human connection. The feeling of nostalgia and admiration are evoked in the reader by such fiction.

In the 1960s, a media theorist, Marshal McLuhan noticed that TV had made an eccentric impact of time and space falling into a consistent assortment of experience, a falling which can be indicated for its devastating impacts. Different scholars have condemned how the picture has come to triumph over the genuine 'hyperreality'.

A considerable number of contemporary writers have developed a cooperative relation with technology and how it challenges the traditional form of narrative. Dystopian topics in post-war literary writing are repetitive and are a proof of how the civilization of technicality can hurt the reality and our lives, in spite of making them convenient. Sci-fi in such manner has consistently revealed to us exemplary examples and has had an extraordinary socio-cultural impact.

"Technoculture" in postmodern American fiction takes innumerable forms. In the age of television, automobile, telephone and computer, the fascination of contemporary fiction writers with technology can be deemed as social realism. We are continuously inundated with information and technological devices have become central to our way of

life. Multiple works address this aspect with clear use of irony and/or pastiche. For instance, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) and Coupland's *Generation X* (1991) are set within familiar conventional settings, but deal explicitly with the effects of increasingly complex technologies within those places. William Gibson and Neal Stephenson use science fiction narratives in their cyberpunk novels as a way to deal with this postmodern, hyper-real information onslaught. Sim (2005) recounts how Technoculture from *Frankenstein* to *Cyberpunk* spans over the social reception and representation of technology from the Renaissance to the present in its literature and popular culture. It also describes a new closeness between author and technology and focuses on the darker aspect of technologies that permeate our everyday lives or their possibilities.

Lelia Green sees that the expression technoculture is utilized in a woolly way to denote the constructions of civilization which combine technological sides and their implications in Western cultures. Technoculture, according to Green, mostly goes for inspecting the issues of the culture and technology, the aspects with which people construct their feeling, the societies wherein they live and are connected. It investigates the computerized era and the implications of the virtual reality, time, and space. Technoculture of the internet and the web and their impacts on the universe of electronic telecommunication is most likely zones where mankind's experience is still in a rising state. Green also says that technoculture raises one of the basic matters of network and what is meant by society and connectedness when people have options which incorporate the advanced and the simple, the virtual and the original. He contends that Cyberspace offers unmatched worldwide open doors for cooperation and the absences of limited territories make it no less genuine spot than the human mind.

Technoculture works inside the fundamental environment of the creation and the flow of culture in which everything without exception human can build as a social content – an actual existence, a vehicle, music, the stock trade – and people compose their way of life as a gathering of such messages. In his book *The real world of technology*, Franklyn thinks that our language is hardly fit to portray the intricacy of technological connection.

In Green's point of view, technoculture rotates around the flow of culture through devices of correspondence utilizing technological apparatus like the web and computers which empowers a genuine culture to work in a virtual domain made by internet cooperation. More significantly some of the key concepts in a culture like space, place, and time are totally reconceptualized and recreated to suit the cyber spatial text. Taking the conceptual structure of 'Public Sphere' as argued by Habermas, the political prosperity of the community can be evaluated based on the openness, nature, and scope of its public sphere. The talks in the web "develop technoculture as a freeing power promising opportunity and political capacity to individuals." (Green,2007, p.118).

### **Conditionally Human**

Conditionally Human is one of Walter M. Miller's science fiction masterworks. It is written in 1962 and it is part of the collection of short stories titled "Dark Benediction". Miller, like many other writers of the post wars, was affected by the consequences of the developed scientific inventions. Technology is supposed to be used to satisfy the human demands and make life easier but it is unfortunately used for destruction. One of the major factors that make science fiction the most suitable for portraying the reality of technocultural society is that its ability to depict scientific progression and predict its devastating aftermaths.

The actions of Conditionally Human take place in 2063 when biotechnology gets a degree of making semi human things. These creatures are given to populace in very restricted procedures to be their babies. At that era all the pets are made by technology like

cats, dogs, monkeys.... The story depicts the life of Mr and Mrs Norris who are of a 'genetic-C'. This category is for childless marriage. Norris works for F. B. A. as a District Inspector. His job is to look for those creatures that reach the set-time, which is put by the scientists, and take them back from their owners to the kennels. These creatures / neutroids should be kept for a while and be killed and burned in the crematorium.

The story begins by depicting how Norris and Anne's life is unsatisfied. They are not allowed to have their own child. Their discussion at the beginning of the story, about having a child, is like the debate between the humanity / nature and political / industrial demands. Anne sees the situation from a maternal point of view. She urges not to kill the "babies". She says that they are intelligent and smart enough to be considered as human beings. Norris, who stands for capitalism, tells her that they are just animals and intelligent is for humans. He represents the authority that does not care of spiritual and human needs. "we get this house rent-free, I have got my own district with no local boss to hound us; .... It is a fine job, honey!" ( Millar, 1963). Norris tries to divert Anne's basic needs but it brings only dissidence. The story depicts the predicament of postmodern individuals who feel eliminated in a materialistic society without human warmth and correlation. A machine-driven consumer society is a perception, by Jameson, of postmodernism remains constant since Capitalism, in the age of data, increases with mechanical merchandise for which the makers have made a market, a way of life and its very own culture.

Miller uses certain words, expressions and events to show the state where the postmodern man has reached. In a technoculture society where people have been in the hyperreal life as Baudrillard calls it. People are no more live the real life but in the simulacra that have been made by technology. Words such as ' human-F, human-M, mutated chimpanzee, cat-Q and dog-F', are used to indicate the advanced technology. The appearance of human is the same of the real human except " short beaver like tails... and an erect thatch of scalp." ( Miller. 1963). These mutants are made for economical purposes. They do not need to be fed like the real beings. They also can be shut down any time when it is necessary. There would be no more food needed or overpopulation. People accept this kind of life in spite of their knowledge that the boys " you know, and not really human at all". ( Miller.1963)

The parody in the story which Miller uses is when he introduces the pseudo-parturition and the celebration of a baby arrival. Mrs Slade, the expectant mother, before sundown plays three games of badminton. She has a shower and dresses before the arrival of the guests. She comes downstairs with faint perfume. There was no caution of pregnancy in this moment when she is supposed to give birth " she throws her arms around John's neck and kicks up her heels behind her'. ( Miller.1963). She asks John whether he will be worried and smokes a lot while she is in delivery. The irony here is when he tells her that " hey, it is not as if you were really..."( Miller.1963). She knows very well that she is not going to have her real baby. To make it as real as possible, the doctor gives her more injections to make her feel and get the physiological change which is necessary for " a newt to really take the place of a baby". (Miller. 1963)

The second event that reflects the state of people, is that the dame who came to the party looking for 'Doctor Georges'. When the doctor comes out from the delivery room, she tells him that he has killed her baby. Doctor Georges tries to explain that newt has viruses which can not be removed. He take another newt from the kennel where Norris puts the unclaimed one. He is able to tell her to take it to a vet because she believes that it is her own baby and should be taken to the hospital and be cured like a human. Even he tells her she will not listen. The dame gets an automatic from her bag and kills Doctor Georges for killing her supposed baby. Here Miller portrays the time when people live a hyper-life and there is no truth at all.

Miller reflects the situation of humanity in technological era through Norris and Anne. She wants to blame the world but Norris and her are part of it. They live in it. They are not sharing the guilt but the weight of it is on their shoulders. Norris thinks of the case of Delmont that there is a deviant creature in K-99 and Franklin, his boss, orders him to kill five hundred of that kind. He remembers the way which Franklin talks of slaughtering the neutroids. Norris feels that he hates Franklin but he does not do anything personal to Norris. May be the hatred because what Franklin represents but Norris himself represents it too. After killing some of the neutroids at night, he sits awake until dawn. He thinks that he is part of the wrong world since he brings them to be killed. He contemplates the world of "the falsification of birth, the killing, the death, the creating, the prohibiting and mockery" and the life continues. This anxious state stands for the struggle between humanity and capitalism where considerations for humanity.

Miller through his characters questions the world and also technology to present his ideas to the reader in a clear way. The emotional conflict within Norris and the sinister requirement of his job lead him look deeply into the world where he is already adjusted to live in. He wonders why the neutroids are manufactured since they will be destroyed after certain of time. The answer to this is a political and commercial one. These things, neutroids, have a feature that human babies do not have which is that they are disposable. When there is overpopulation, it is not so easy to reduce the number by burning and killing. The solution of the birth rate and to keep people satisfied is the neutroids. If humanity is not satisfied it will breed in poverty, epidemic and maybe annihilation. When the restricted population at five billions, the Federation will be able to ensure a suitable living level to everyone. Neutroids are the best thing for that. They do not eat much nor will grow up to eat more. They also will not be on the unemployment. In the crisis, they can be smashed and buried.

Miller uses the word 'science' to refer to technology. He sees that the world was better with the great discoveries and developments of the last century. The science makes the life easy to live. He thinks that the wrong response by populace when thoughtlessly increase the birth rates and by eating but not producing. Whenever science increases the chances for the individuals to survive, they again respond in a way making trouble for science. This situation continues to the edge it becomes clear that the progress and development are not directed for the sake of the good life. It is headed towards more lives to go on in the same miserable life as usual. In this case, Miller sees that technology has created little for people. It is used to lengthen man's life and make it sweeter but s/he has to pay its cost. People lost their real being and the real happiness. They used to live with and love synthetic mutants things as their own children. Neutroids can compensate the women's eagerness for a thing which is small and lovable. The individuals become machine like bodies. They have lost their human sense 'romantic notions' even their smile becomes 'mechanical'. The life becomes just a way of doing things and whatever happens people still accept that type of life.

In the age of technology, people are seen as goods and life is nothing just a global market. As soon as it is a glutted market the merchandise (human) can not be casted down in the sea. So the alternative is to make human like things which have taken the role of mankind.

The life style has been completely changed, not necessarily to a best one. Miller compares the present to the past. He says that the earth was planted with man's seeds when the man was young. He uses 'fluorescent lights', 'campfires' and 'shivering' hunters in a forest to show that the man was in a direct contact with the nature. But the present is full of the sound of engines, rockets and the flashing signs. After Fredrik's arranged death by Norris, Miller concludes this story with a biblical speech which denotes that if the

mankind want to change to the better life, they will find God before them. Miller hopes that people could somehow get the benefit of technology and reach the pretty good world " He hoped Man could fit into it somehow"( Miller.1963).

### Conclusion

Postmodernity with the advancement in science and technology has found its own culture which has been making speculative fiction about technologies that have been brought to the world. The technocultural trends are the reaction to the way that technology of post-war has divided and mostly altered human connection. The excessive dependency on the machine which stands by its own is similar to a dehumanized and desensitized man of the postmodern age. Dystopian themes in post-war literature are recurrent and are an evidence of how this culture of technology can harm our world and our lives despite making them comfortable. Science Fiction in this regard has always told us cautionary tales, and has had great socio-cultural influence. The Science fiction reveals the fragility of humankind which has lost its role of controlling technology and use it for the human benefit.

Technoculture in Miller's sci-fi is increasingly interested in thoughts and his characters are not legendary figures but rather ordinary individuals; it's his astonishing ability of integrating culture of postmodernity with significant human topics that makes this type worth estimate. Science fiction has consistently been in steady dealing with different types of social matters, in addition to detecting socio-political incidents through history. It has constantly traced technological merits and demerits, and has judgmentally addressed human advancement in each age. Technoculture shows a regeneration of sci-fi as a literary style which can be experienced with. The short fiction, by Miller, under the close reading portrays strong enchantment with technology and demonstrates that writers are utilizing it as social and inventive power.

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