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The Sinister Labyrinth: A Postmodern Study on Gibsonian Space in *Neuromancer*

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Abstract

The computer networking era caused a new vision or the transformation in many aspects of our lives. In 1980's Gibson changed science fiction genre forever by his classical hit *Neuromancer*. Cyber literature is a concept derived from the digital literature, that is, the literature created on the computer and presented by the means of computer. Cyberspace is a virtual space where identity is fluid. Cyberpunk fiction analyse the existent human situation with the help of new technologies even if their settings are in the future. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* deals with present human condition in the age of information. William Gibson first introduced the concept of cyberspace in his work *Neuromancer* as "a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators in every nation…" Gibson's cyberspace is a fantasy world, which is very attractive and seductive to the senses. He uses the human-machine hybrids- cyborgs, as the characters in the novel. Cyberpunk is an expression of postmodernism. According to thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson and Francois Lyotard, postmodernism as discourse is the result of an entire array of changes. The postmodern thoughts like simulacra and heterotopia are well established in *Neuromancer*. The novel portrays the hero as an antihero, not to attain victory over the evil, but to survive, by using their intelligence in the oppressive world conditions. The characters in the novel are the fictional mapping of our bodily and social reality. *Neuromancer* is the modern Robin Hood tale, in which ordinary people are empowered by the technology.

Keywords: Cyber literature, Cyborg, Cyberspace, Identity, Postmodernism.

Introduction

The 1960s and 1970s produced a radical shift in the scope of Science Fiction and it was mainly centred on sheer technology. The computer networking era caused a new vision or the transformation in many aspects of our lives. Cyberpunk writing has allowed us to dream of a better world by creating visions of future societies without prejudice. Cyber literature is a concept derived from the digital literature, that is, the literature created on the computer and presented by the means of computer. Cyberspace is a virtual space where identity is fluid. Cyberpunk fiction analyse the existent human situation with the help of new technologies even if their settings are in the future. Cyberpunk is a literary treat about contemporary high-tech culture. The prominent writers among cyberpunk writers are William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley and Lewis Shiner. Cyberpunk examines philosophical questions related to artificial intelligence and the embodiment of human minds in computers. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* is considered as the key text of the cyberpunk movement, which deals with the present human condition in the age of information. Cyberpunk fiction is the true representation of the postmodern period. Postmodernism is the condition of society after modernism and which is marked by globalization and digital means of communication. The postmodern culture denies conventional philosophy, religion and gender. The dividing lines between the natural and the artificial, cyberpunk arouse the question of alteration of the human body due to the technological advancements.

Objectives

This paper is aimed to answer two following objectives.
1. To understand the possibilities of the cyberspace in creating/recreating subjectivities in *Neuromancer*.
2. To evaluate how facts get transposed in Gibsonian space

Methodology

As this paper is of qualitative nature, library research is essential. The methodology used in this research is based on Postmodernism. In the current scenario, the studies connected with cyber world have much relevance. Cyber writing is comparatively a new area of research. In this fast changing media scenario, cyber media is an ever expanding medium. Literary studies can applied in to the cyber space. It is an interdisciplinary area where postmodern theory overlaps in to the media studies. Cyber writing has also become a booming enterprise. Cyberpunk stands out from other forms of science fiction due to its

unique vocabulary, its slang, which the uninitiated often find difficult to understand. This relatively recent offshoot of science fiction has come into its own with its recognition as a form of postmodernist writing. The fluid fragmented postmodern self has a new capacity to make itself over, to reshape and restyle elements of identity. Identity in cyberpunk is made mobile and multiplex. We can make and remake who we are endlessly, liberated from the meat of our Real Life bodies and all the identity markers they carry. Thus cyberculture enables a reconstruction of individual and collective life stories and identities.

Neuromancer

William Gibson uses new concepts that were emerging in the 1980's scenario as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cyborgs. Gibson's cyberspace is a fantasy world, which is very attractive to our eyes and more seductive to the senses. He uses the human-machine hybrids- cyborgs, as the characters in the novel. The major part of the novel *Neuromancer* is set in cyberspace. The characters move from one plane of existence to another. That is shuffling between the virtual life in the cyber world and a real life in the physical world. In Gibson's cyberspace, characters live virtually by leaving their physical bodies. Gibson's cyberspace is a combination of virtual simulation and the technology. Information plays a major role in the novel and cyber space looks like a super highway of information. The true identity is concealed in the entire novel in *Neuromancer*. The Gibsonian space is a godless world in a technological space. The reader loses the idea for reality and move out as a virtual creature in the virtual space. The work *Neuromancer* is hailed as the Bible of cyberpunk and a seminal fiction on cyberculture. Gibsonian space is a hyper capitalistic society – a fusion of fragmented spaces, building and excess of commodification. The most important example of the destructed Gibsonian space is Chiba city in *Neuromancer*, where the chief protagonist Case begins his story:

> Now he slept in the cheapest coffins, the ones nearest the port, beneath the quartz-halogen floods that lit the docks all night like vast stages; where you couldn't see the lights of Tokyo for the glare of the television sky, not even the towering hologram logo of the Fuji Electric Company, and Tokyo Bay was a black expense where gulls wheeled above drifting shoals of white Styrofoam. (Gibson,7)

Gibson's characters adapt these anarchic urban spaces and to cope with the dangerous streets of the city they rely on technology and cyborg implants. Gibson conveys

so many contemporary issues that are the results of advancement of technology and speculating on the changes in human identity and the way of perceiving reality. The novel starts introducing Case, a cyberspace hacker who before betrayed his employees and poisoned with mycotoxin that severely damaged his nervous system, losing his ability to connect with the cyberspace.   The novel is about how man uses its technological creations and how the technology changes man. The protagonist's obsession with the cyberspace shows how the machine is ruling over the psychological space in the industrial society of *Neuromancer.*

According to John Christie in " Of AIs and Other's: William Gibson's Transit", " *Neuromancer* tells the story of how a cast of human characters is assembled and manipulated by an AI in order that it may combine with its other, separate half, and so form a fully autonomous being. *Neuromancer* is a book of becoming, the climax the fusion of two AIs, Wintermute and Neuromancer."(Christie, 171). Virtual reality is a mathematical creation of binary construction of zeros and ones. In virtual world there is no uncertainty. With mathematical accuracy everything is counted and predicted. For example Case knows he is in simulation, he rely on his dead girlfriend's construct. Later they talk and have sex. The sexual attraction boosted up by the construct cheats Case's contempt for the flesh. Cyberspace is a networked and wired society, the most of the characters in the novel jacked in to the cyberspace. The world which is depicted by Gibson is a melding of humanity and technology. It is a world of infinite possibilities. Gibson's narrative technique switches from one story to another just like a filmic technique.

Cyborgs

Donna Haraway, the most prominent figure of the third wave feminism about the cyborg entity in her essay *"The Cyborg Manifesto"*. The definition of cyborg according to dictionary is a fictional or hypothetical person whose physical abilities are extended beyond normal human limitations by mechanical elements built into the body. In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Haraway explained that the cyborg is "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction" (Haraway, 149). In Gibson's Neuromancer, almost all of the characters have modified their bodies. The protagonist, Case, is a hacker whose brain is impaired chemically. Molly, whose sunglasses are implanted into her cheeks, which enables her to see in the dark, and her fingernails are also modified to be retractable steel, razor-like weapons. Gibson depicts human characters

are cyborgs with enhanced bodies; he also introduces machine characters who act like humans.

Postmodernism

Cyberpunk is an expression of postmodernism. According to thinkers like Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson and Francois Lyotard, postmodernism as discourse is the result of an entire array of changes. The concept of identity became more free and fragmented. The major concept of postmodern fiction is the rejection of ultimate sources of meaning and truth. If there is no ultimate meaning and truth the division between high and low culture turns to disappear. Baudrillard argues for the idea that people no longer distinguish between reality and a constructed representation of reality or a simulacrum. He talks about the power of images and symbols to subvert reality. The simulacrum is real, and that the false image is just as real as the true icon. In Gibsonian cyberspace reality is replaced by virtuality. Heterotopia is a concept introduced by Michel Foucault, to describe the manner in which defined spaces which surround the subject in social existence can reduce his/her autonomy and even his/her sense of identity. The heterotopia according to him is of the mirror which is at once absolutely real, relating with the real space surrounding it, and absolutely unreal, creating a virtual image. The same thing happens in Gibson's cyberspace. Jean Baudrillard's idea of simulation provides us with a vantage point to get an overview of the cyber world. Simulation, according to Baudrillard, is an effect of the proliferation of media images in society through which our idea of what is real gets progressively eroded. We ourselves become mediatized and end up in such a state where the distinction between real and imagined, surface and depth, or reality and illusion can no longer be used. Baudrillard draws on the theory of semiotics, especially on the theory of the relation between sign and what it represents, and suggests that in postmodernity signs have disconnected from reality. Instead of representation, what we have is simulation. Postmodern theory applicable to cyber literature, argues for an intensification of the process of simulation.

Findings

Gibsonian space is ultimately working in the service of larger corporate powers and free of their direct control. In *Neuromancer* the identities are constructed. The cyberspace is not representing the worldly identities but exhibiting manipulated identities. William Gibson introduced the concept of cyberspace in his work Neuromancer as:

> A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts . . . A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. (Gibson, 51)

Gibson's characters are uniquely layered, constantly shifting, and constantly modifying themselves to adapt to changes in the environment. Gibsonian space is a menagerie of extreme mutations, which offer no strong space for identity. The characters are placed in alien settings. In Gibson's cyberspace the subjectivities are created/recreated. The title Neuromancer carries pun. The first word "neuro" comes from Greek neuron which means nerve. The second word "mancer" denotes magician. So the title carries the meaning that 'one who works his magic on the nervous system, attaining knowledge from it and manipulating it'. The facts are getting transposed in Gibsonian space. He wisely used the idea of Artificial Intelligence. Gibson's *Neuromancer* is a fusion of human and technology, focusing the romance for machine.

Conclusion

Cyberpunk challenges us with the things we fear, but in an exaggerated, and more terrifying manner. The novel *Neuromancer* portrays the hero as an antihero, not to attain victory over the evil, but to survive, by using their intelligence in the oppressive world conditions. The characters in the novel are the fictional mapping of our bodily and social reality. The ambiguous and complex environment of cyberspace in cyberpunk writing becomes a new arena for the articulation of the politics of recognition, gendering hybrid collective forms. *Neuromancer* is the modern Robin Hood tale, in which ordinary people are empowered by the technology. *Neuromancer* is considered "the archetypal cyberpunk work".

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