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POSTHUMANISM IN TWO FANFICTION STORIES: THE CYBORG AND CYBORG

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Abstract

Since the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has widely spread in many sectors of humans' life, the studies of posthumanism where humans ask critically about their existence are needed. Knowing that, this research will deal with posthumanism (Herbrechter, 2015) drawn from two fanfiction stories entitled *The Cyborg* and *Cyborg*. Both stories are written by different authors from different countries. This study is a library research which applies comparative study as part of data analysis technique and the result of data analysis will be presented qualitatively. Preliminary result that is taken from first reading of the two stories deals with young authors who think that cyborgs have more humanistic values when they are being compared to humans. The researcher hopes that this study has insightful effect to pre-service students in dealing with the development of technology in this revolution industry 4.0.

Keywords: cyborg, posthumanism, fanfict

Introduction

Industrial Revolution 4.0 does not only affect some sectors in the way we communicate, educate our students or use recent technological devices. It also influences the world of literature. In the past, classic literary works such as Shakespearean plays or Romanticism poems became the central discussion and analysis. Previous researches also discuss some literary works by applying recent perspective (Aristia, 2019; Indriyanto, 2019; Manggong, 2020). Although nowadays, some classic literary works still exist, the emergence of 'new form' of literature should be discussed deeply since its number increases significantly.

Some conferences on literature that were held in 2019 underlined the shift of the world literature from the classic form into more millennials one. For example, new writers or poets can be known fast by having some posts on social media or certain websites. In this case, some websites also accommodate young writers and readers to write, to read or even to give direct comment on the works. This kind of literary work is called fan fiction.

Two fan fiction stories are selected due to some reasons. The first deals with the title of the work which has a similar theme. We know that the development of technology in industrial revolution 4.0 has created an implanted human creature between a human and a technological stuff that is called a cyborg. Second reason is the writers of the stories. Both

writers are young and beginners. Besides, they are from different countries. The first writer is from Australia while the second writer is not from English spoken countries. A comparative study which connects two stories from different countries enriches cross cultural understanding. The last is the source of those two stories which are taken from two websites namely Wattpad and Write 4 Fun. Both stories are in form of fanfiction.

In short, this research deals with recent kind of literature which is popular nowadays called fanfiction in relation to the central theme of industrial revolution that is the emergence of AI and cyborg. Posthumanism phenomenon will be the central discussion drawn from two stories. Based on the explanation above, the question is formulated as follow: How is posthumanism portrayed in two fanfiction stories *Cyborg* and *The Cyborg*? It is expected that this article will be beneficial for those who want to understand some new concepts such as fanfiction, cyborg, and posthumanism since the study of posthumanism is quite new if it is being compared to previous studies. Moreover, those terms are relatable to real context that happens recently. In addition to that, young writers who read the result of this research can write more about the development of industrial revolution in the light of posthumanism context.

As this study relates to cyborg, posthumanism is applied. There are some experts of posthumanism who write about this subject. Wolfe (2010) in his book entitled *What is Posthumanism?* criticizes the notion 'human' as the central discussion. He underlines that humans cannot stand alone without the presence of other beings. Besides, the concept of 'human' has been constructed.

Actually, we cannot merely describe that posthumanism is the condition after humanism nor we relate this term to the relation between humans and some objects such as animal, plants, technologies, media, and etc. Posthumanism is actually the critical perspective that lies beyond the relation of them. "It challenges the traditional point of view of basic humanity value" (Mulatsih, 2020, p. 112). Some people may also consider that cyborg or artificial intelligence is the central discussion of this field, but we can have more than that. Analyzing critically the connection of the constructed 'human' concept together with some other creatures is the aim of posthumanism. In short, the study of posthumanism discusses more the critical idea to show the deconstruction of human concept rather than the object of posthumanism.

There are some studies which include posthumanism as the center discussion. Wolfe (2010) questions the term of human first because analyzing posthumanism perspective from a literary work, a researcher should set a clear boundary of the term humanism. The concept of good human has been created culturally, sociologically, biologically. Humanist is seen where human can control universe. For example, the white people justified slavery to black one. While posthumanism deals with the connection of other things and humans. Posthumanism is dynamic and situated in certain context. It challenges the traditional concept of 'humanism'.

Herbrechter (2015, p. 2) also adds that "a posthumanism is not unduly excited about cyborgs, AI, or indeed animals, plants and minerals, technologies, media and their convergences, but it takes the time to remember, to reread and reconnect, in short which is 'critical'". In line with that argument, Ferrando (2013) underlines that the concept of human and cyborg has blurred. We can improve human's ability by using other things such as technology (phone, eye glasses, microchip, etc). The connection between human and other technological objects in form of a creature is called cyborg.

The term of cyborg is actually an abbreviation from two words: cybernetic and organism. There was also historical exclusivism of human because they don't follow the 'rule'. To sum up, posthumanism is against post centrism where everything is hybrid, we discuss not the human but its existence together with the connection with other things. Interestingly, Huang (2019) who has posthumanism in the relation to Asian racial issue

also classifies posthumanist scholarship into two groups. The first discusses the development of science to empower humans and the second underlines the implications on political and other areas. He defines posthumanist readings clearly by giving the boundary of the text. When certain text examines humans which are not considered as fully humans because of their disability, gender, race, and etc. He builds the connection between posthumanism and Said's orientalism. To sum up, he wrote "there have always been humans that have been less than human—this is not a novel or radically different relation, although the ways in which it is articulated can be new".

In addition to those previous theories, Iovino (2016) states that posthumanism does not have a clear boundary. It can set the connection with other fields of study such as biology, ecology, cultural studies, even politics. She also adds that "posthumanist studies help us take wider views of the universe beyond 'the egotism of the race' is, however, not simply by finding refuge in a wilderness 'out there', but by exploring the recesses of the 'in-house' wilderness within an across the human" (p. 13). In her article entitled *Posthumanism in Literature and Ecocriticism*, she reviews some studies that show a strong connection between posthumanism and ecocriticism.

Huang (2019) shows some examples on how posthumanism concept in relation to humans' race is withdrawn from some literary works. One of them is taken from Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002). Some words are analyzed as slave labor together with the characterization of the main character. Other example is taken from Ken Liu's *The algorithms for Love* (2004). This work can be considered as a critic toward the concept of human as viewed by intelligent dolls.

In addition to that, Wolfe (2010) states that posthumanism is "a continuation of the poststructuralist critique of the prevalent humanism in literary criticism throughout most of the 20th century and the idea that literature and the study of it should be a defense of the human, or the nature and value of humanity, against the perceived scientific and economic onslaught."

Carretero-Gonzalez (2016) in her essay *The Posthuman that Could Have Been: Marry Shelley's Creature* shows how Dr. Frankenstein as the creature reflects the transition of transhumanism to posthumanism. Moreover, Amberson & Past (2018) demonstrate the connection of posthumanism and ecocriticism in their work entitled *Gadda's "Pasticciaccio" and the Knotted Posthuman Household*. They explain that this literary work has connected the concept of humanism to posthumanism in the environment called "oikos" a Greek word of 'household'. Not only ecocriticism, Phoca (2004) adds that the study of posthumanism can be related to feminism and gender.

From previous reviews, we know that posthumanism has been discussed worldwide from different countries that included different literary works which were analyzed from different perspectives. This article is considered to be a different study due to its different object from previous studies and its comparative method that is applied. Previous studies have not mentioned any popular literary work that is included to fanfiction which is written by a young writer. Besides, this article does not only discuss one fanfiction story. It focuses on the similarities and differences of two fanfiction stories.

Method

Since this study is a library research, it deals with document analysis. Data are gathered from two selected fanfiction stories and classified by using theory of posthumanism. The explanation of intrinsic elements of both stories is included too. The classification of those data will be analyzed more deeply through applying comparative study. Basically, when the researcher applies this comparative study, the researcher finds some similarities and differences. Due to that reason, this research will find some

similarities and differences in both fanfiction short stories to portray posthumanism content in both stories. Based on this explanation, this research is a library study by applying document analysis.

There are some steps done in conducting this research. The first is data gathering. This process is done by reading two stories for several times and underlining some parts that relate to posthumanism concept. Elements of story such as plot, characters, theme become the main data. After data are gathered, the researcher classifies the data based on the theories stated in previous studies. The data that have been classified are analyzed critically by applying document analysis. In this process, the researcher also finds some similarities and differences from both stories. Then, the researcher presents the result in a qualitative way by retelling the plot of the story in order to be able to follow easily.

Findings and Discussion

There are two parts in this findings and discussion. The first deals with the similarities of posthumanism found in both stories. The second discusses the differences of posthumanism in both stories. Before having the explanation of each part, a brief summary of each story is provided.

Using first person point of view, Rowan Tan's *The Cyborg* develops the story of a cyborg who begins to be awake after long period of surgery. The character realizes that he/she is not a fully human again. From his/her thought that is stated from the sentences "They told me they were saving my life. It wasn't long until I realized the truth. They weren't saving my life, they were stealing it, trying to create the perfect soldier, half human, and half machine.", readers know that actually the character does not want to live to be a cyborg. There is a tendency that being a cyborg is less worthy than being a fully human. The story then continues to the presence of a 'bad' character that is characterized as a leader of terrorist organization. Explicitly, the main character does not agree to the concept of cybernetics that seems to save someone's life. He thinks that this technological and scientific development is used to fulfil humans' desire. In this case, it is relatable with political power to conquer other areas where there is no one who has same values. The 'bad' character says that the war is not caused by them, it is the government who has the responsibility. The reason of having the war based on the 'bad' character is men, women, and even children beg and plead to be saved. The cyborg after knowing some effects of government action decides to expose the truth about the Government.

The story of *Cyborg* also has first person point of view. Readers can feel some experiences that the main character has. This cyborg is created to destroy human beings by a man named Dan Whiz. Different from the creator's wish, this cyborg decides to run away and lives as a normal human. This cyborg is so happy when she lives together with her step mother, experiences going to school and feels different to a teenager who has opposite sex. The story then continues to the event where her step mom knows that she is a cyborg. Not long after that, her creator kidnaps her step mother and her close friend, she has to meet her creator and surrender for saving Liz and Mike. The story ends with the optimistic feeling from Liz that Lisa (the cyborg) can be together with her again.

Similarities of Posthumanism Drawn from Both Stories

The concept of cyborg from two stories is similar in form of the construction between human and technological stuff. The first cyborg is presented in a half human and half robot creature, meanwhile Lisa cyborg is presented as a human which has a robotic body inside. Lisa's description looks like the female cyborg creature that is created in real world named Sophia. This cyborg is completed with Artificial Intelligence (Risam, 2019).

As Wolfe states that posthumanism is more to critical idea that lies behind the relation of cyborg, both stories also criticize human actions in destroying other human beings. In *The Cyborg*, the author writes the description of the situation after government's attack as

follow: “The air was putrid, the smell of decaying, rotting meat was overwhelming. I looked down at the streets and nearly vomited. There were bullet-riddled bodies everywhere. Huge piles of carcasses surrounded by massive swarms of flies dotted the streets.” The government that should have protected citizens kill them all. Implicitly, this story criticizes government’s policy that can cause harm effect toward the citizens. Similar to the first story, Cyborg also criticizes the power of a creator that is used negatively. These following sentences which are taken from the work are able to represent the critics toward humans’ bad intention: “I’m not going back to him. My master. My creator. I don’t what to be what I was created for. I was created for world domination. To rid the humans. I didn’t want that though. I wanted to prove him wrong”.

From those two stories, the similarity of posthumanism is in term of constructing the concept of human. The main character in each story that is a cyborg tries to show that the cyborg has more humanistic values than real human beings. Both stories show critical perspective toward the notion of human concept.

Drawing the limitation of posthumanism concept, both stories can only be classified as posthumanism due to this main character as a cyborg but the storyline of both stories does not include the presence of other beings such as animals, plants, and etc. The centre of the story is actually still related with human although the main character is characterized as a cyborg. Besides, both stories underline the negative side of human emotion that is criticized by the cyborgs in a moving forward plot with a flash back part.

Differences of Posthumanism Drawn from Both Stories

In this part, there are three differences that will be explained further. They are the theme of the story, the main character’s characterization, and the gender of each cyborg. Those differences are related to posthumanism concept.

Discussing the theme of the story, in *The Cyborg*, the main character is created in the scope of a war where strong creatures will conquer the weak ones. Political situation is the dominant aspect. In line with Huang’s (2019) discussion, this cyborg story depicts the power relation that is tried to be fought. This posthumanism notion is intended to criticize the action of the authority which has power. Indeed, it can be connected to Marxism theory of class. It is different from *Cyborg* story. The main character of *Cyborg* is created to show the power of love where a cyborg can feel to love humans and being loved. In a nutshell, posthumanism in the first story has a close relation to political background while the second story has more emotional aspect.

Although those two cyborgs in two stories are similar in term of the mixture between human and technological stuff that have been discussed in the previous part, a cyborg in *The Cyborg* clearly represents human’s body with additional cybernetics as stated in the statement: “I looked down to see half my body replaced with mechanical limbs and body parts.” When we see a cyborg in story *Cyborg*, the main character is described as a fully human in relation to its appearance. Some characters do not know that the creature is not a human.

“You see I’m not like other girls.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m designed for the destruction of human kind. I have built in combat skills and technology to read peoples data. Martin designed me to take over the world. I choose a different path though.”

She stares at me wide eyed and weirdly. It’s like she doesn’t believe me.

“You don’t believe me do you.” I say sadly.

“Well l-l-“She stutters. I sigh and take an apple from a fruit bowl that was on the kitchen table.

“Watch and you might want to step back.” I warn her. She nods and backs away. I toss the apple in the air. Then I use my laser eyes. The apple turns into ash as stream

risers. She looks at me widen eyes and falls over a chair.

Some previous lines are taken before Lisa's step mother knows that actually she is a cyborg. They strengthen the point that Lisa's identity cannot be seen with two bare eyes. It means that Lisa has same appearance like other girls. Thus, the physical appearance of both cyborgs is different. The first cyborg is clearly seen as a cyborg while the second cyborg is not.

This difference on physical appearance also has an impact on characterization of each cyborg. The first cyborg has a clear description of the cyborg and personal trait. This cyborg does not want to keep silent during the war that has been created. He wants to create a better world for all by fighting back. The second cyborg does not have a clear description for its appearance and personal trait directly. Lisa as the cyborg in the second story even questions how she can have a feeling like a human. From that explanation, it can be concluded that the concept of posthumanism especially the cyborg as the object or central discussion cannot be restricted. An author has his or her own style to represent the concept of a cyborg. One that differentiates the cyborg is author's ability to present it clearly or not.

From gender perspective, the first cyborg is not clearly described as a male or female cyborg. The beginning of the story where the cyborg experiences a battle before the surgery has the tendency to create a male cyborg in readers' mind. However, the author does not explicitly write it. The cyborg from the second story is female. The author also states that her name is Lisa. Previous studies discuss that posthumanism can have the connection with gender and feminism. In the second story, Lisa is characterized as the only female cyborg who has humans' feelings, strong commitment, and is powerful. She can deny her creator's will to destroy humans. This posthumanism concept has blended with feminism concept to criticize the negative side of humans' negative will.

Conclusion

Posthumanism concept that is found in both stories is still around the object that is a cyborg. Although both stories criticize the power that humans have to destroy their own race, the absence of nature and other creatures is one thing that needs to be added so that human will not forever be the central discussion. Luckily, both stories challenge the concept of human from physical creature into more philosophical idea. From those two stories, we can learn that humans should be aware of themselves to realize their negative side that can destroy their own race. Some differences that are found in both stories tend to have the connection with each writer's style and interest but both young writers are able to deconstruct and to question humans' values comparing to their cyborgs.

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