



EXPLORING IDENTITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN RICHARD K MORGAN'S *ALTERED CARBON* A TRANS HUMANIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This research depicts the themes of consciousness and identity in Richard K. Morgan's Altered Carbon through a transhumanist point of view. This research examines the novel which set in a future where human memory and consciousness can be transferred digitally and stored between bodies, or in "sleeves,". The novel challenges and puts forth the traditional concept of selfhood, personal continuity and embodiment. Through this philosophical theory of identity, this study investigates the personal identity which remains stable while being detached from a biological and singular form. The paper shows the notion of the self which is no longer bound in one physical body. This research analysis showcases this transferring self through novel's protagonist, Takeshi Kovacs. His frequent transferring and resleeving shows the tension between embodied experience and psychological continuity. By highlighting Kovacs' identity shifts from one body to another; this paper interrogates the idea of selfhood which extends beyond materiality. This embodiment becomes a crucial determinant and source of human experience. Moreover, the research places Altered Carbon within broader and wide transhumanist discourse. It is addressing the digital immortality, portrayal of human enhancement, body commodification and the ethical implications. The novel's presentation of a society where the wealthy control access to use technology for their own use also becomes a critique of techno-utopian ideals. This paper further exposes the social and economic inequalities that emerge when technology starts using identity as a tradable asset.

Ultimately, this paper investigates that Altered Carbon acts as both a reflection on the implications of scientific advancements and an exposition of transhumanist possibilities. The intersections of selfhood, technology and embodiment, this study contributes to the debates on the future of identity in an era of technological evolution.

Keywords: Altered Carbon, transhumanism, identity, consciousness, embodiment, digital immortality

Introduction

This research paper is the clear demonstration of the Trans-humanistic examination of the novel *Altered Carbon* by Richard K. Morgan. Morgan presents the futuristic society in which the suicidal cases get the recognition of being called murder due to the technological advancement of saving the consciousness of the dead person. Trans humanism is the philosophical term transcending the use of technology in the formation of human identity by deconstructing the notion of fixed human existence. *Altered Carbon* is an exorbitant novel which demonstrates the indulgence of digital surveillances in the lives of the characters. The use of the imaginative device stake for storing and transferring the consciousness of one person to the other. The bodily augmentation of switching the bodies and the idea of near mortality are the key factors depicting Trans-humanistic interpretation of the novel. This paper further recognizes post humanistic vision through breaking the centrality of human identity. It manifests the notion that human identity is not static rather it is the interconnected series of experiences. The novel presents the preservation of one man's consciousness in three personalities which is the illustration of the decentralization of human consciousness. It leads to the collectiveness of the human identity that is intermingled with the elements of technology. The novel is the critique of the inequality and unjust attitudes in the society, and

the trans humanistic notion develops this argument that technology is useful in signifying the reshaping of the societal structures and human relationships. From a transhumanist perspective, *Altered Carbon* presents a dystopian vision of a world where the boundaries between the biological and the technological blur. It forces readers to question the essence of what it means to be human. This introduction sets the stage for a deeper investigation that Morgan's novel critiques the transhumanist dream of transcending human limitations while highlighting the psychological and existential dilemmas that arise from such technological advancements.

Research objectives:

This study aims to:

- 1: Examine the concept of identity in a transhuman world
- 2: Analyse the impact of technology on human consciousness
- 3: Investigate themes of immortality and its effects on identity

Research Questions :

- 1: How is the concept of personal identity redefined in a trans human society where consciousness can be transferred between bodies?
- 2: How does *Altered Carbon* defines the impact of technology on human consciousness?
- 3: What are the factors that provide the ability to achieve immortality through consciousness transfer which effects individual's identity?

Literature review

This chapter is the analysis of the previous works done on the novel *Altered Carbon*. These articles will show the basic reviews of the different authors and research about the novel. In this way, it will enhance the knowledge about the existant reserches and the distinction of the research done in this paper.

In an article titled, Human Subjectivity and Technology in Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon*, Shahizah Ismail Hamdan demonstrates the idea of inequality in the post human world in which the biological limitations are suspeded by the rich people. He proves in his article that although the science is the way to immortality but this privalge can only be used only by the rich and the elites. This article finally highlights this idea that the exporation of individual's subjectivity is useful for humanity but at the same time it mars the collectiveness of the objectiveness of the people.

Thsi novel is about the technological advances which makes life of human beings flourishing but at the same time miserable. As an article, Cyberpunks not dead Richard Morgan *Altered Carbon* by Morgan by A Kečan is a serious eleboration of the dominance of technology but with the fragmanetation of the societal factors. These technological factors question the power structure of the society and spark existential thinking. The idea of the tranfering of the consiousness to the other human brain in the novel is the highlight of the cyberpunks which destroys the idea of human identity.

Furthurmore another article entitled, Transhumanism, Ethics and Religion in" *Altered Carbon*" by Richard K. Morgan by N Foršek provides the deep insight about the clash of technological idea of immortality and the religious idea of morality and the transfer of soul. Forsek pinpoints that science advancement is a threat to the old traditional beliefs. The novel *Altered Carbon* is the good illustration of the interrogation of the delimmas of ethich and identity caused by the ongoing success of technology.

J Wally and Anglia in an article, Narrative Conflict and Implied Value Conflict: An Analysis of Aspects of the Implied Worldview of Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* (2002) and Hanif Kureishi's *The Body* is the comparative study of the both novels and examines the idea of immortality. It furthurs explains that conflict between technological advancements and the identity crisis. This article is the good menifestration of the questions that interrogate the

philosophical and ethical implications of the idea of immortality and the transference of consciousness.

In another one, Fiction to TV Series-An Investigation of Series Adaptation of Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* and its effects on Spectors by A BAVATHARANI, K PRABHA – BODH shows the basic information regarding the adaptation of the novel into series. This article provides the broader vision about the visual representation. It demonstrates this idea that adaptation proves to be the sequel to the critical lens to the distortion done by technological advancement. It also manifests that visual implication presents the philosophical exploration of social injustice and human identity by creating a suspense which can not be suspended by the audience.

In an article, encountering disability through mind uploading, Inbaraj and Ravikumar talks about disability as a humanistic and biological fault. They show that science has made the humans to escape the limitation of disability by transferring the consciousness into their bodies. This article is showing the effect of science in individuals lives. It predicts the further illustration regarding the indulgence of science in the lives of the characters.

The concept of digitalisation is being discussed by Gonzalez in his research. He depicts this idea that even digitalisation becomes a tool in elite class. They start using immortality as a commodity. The rich class take this idea of scientific research as a source to enjoy the luxuries of life for their desired time. The social inequality takes the idea of science only for themselves. He shows that digitisation, capitalism and technology transects and affects deeply the human identity and existence.

Research Gap

The above-mentioned articles are the illustration of the basic themes of the novel *Altered Carbon*. These articles provide the themes of the immortality, the social inequality, trans human world. Technological advancement and its demerits, identity crisis and the distortion of traditional beliefs. In this way, my research will prove to be the main stream in bringing forth the idea of trans Humanism in the novel *Altered carbon*. This research highlights the basic idea of the transference of the consciousness and the overcoming of the biological limits by the theory of Trans humanism by Julian Huxley.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research paper. The primary source is *Altered Carbon* by Richard Morgan. The theoretical framework is the trans Humanism by Julian Huxley in the collection of essays, *New Bottles for New Wine*. It is an intellectual and philosophical movement. It shows the usage of technology to overcome the limitations like aging, immortality and disease. It shows the utopian future where these illnesses will not destroy the human existence. This theory is the illustration of these basic points. Humans are evolution through the scientific knowledge. This scientific research has made the humans to transcend their biological terms. It further shows that technological tools are the basic highlight for the human evolution in scientific terms. It has transcended human real qualities. In this manner, it is taking away the old paths which have made humans to be productive. The process of overcoming the basic human traits and limitations, science has taken the basic humanistic abilities. It has started handling the future. Trans humanism is a theory which shows the change in identity of the characters and their consciousness. Moreover, it is pinpointing the corruption and social inequality due to these usages of science in the daily lives.

Limitations

1. Scope of analysis: this study puts focus primarily on the novel *Altered Carbon*, which limits the research to the other dystopian and science fiction novels.
2. Limited Theoretical scope: the theoretical structure is basically highlighting the idea of post humanism, which focuses on the intersection of technology and human limits.

It is valuable for the research study of the novel *Altered Carbon*. It will also put highlight on the other themes like social inequality and the religious beliefs.

3. Contextual Limitations; this research does not delve into the historical contextualization of the novel since its publication. This paper takes itself away from the global and cultural trends during the time of its publication. It limits the external influence on the text.

Delimitation

1. Focus on the single text: this research is the deep analysis of the only primary source which is *Altered Carbon*. In this way, it provides the deep insight of the basic idea of the novel and investigates the desired interpretation of the novel.
2. Posthumanism as primary theoretical framework. The usage of the only framework gives this research a detailed vision of the novel. It helps in the deep understanding of the coherent intersection of the identity and technology in the novel.
3. Narrative focus: this research focuses on the basic idea of identity, technology and the idea of transcending biological limits. The secondary ideas like social injustice and the hegemony of the powerful structures of the society are acknowledged but are not explored in depth. It makes this research to be focused on its central theme.

Finding and analysis

Examine the concept of identity in a transhuman world

The *Altered Carbon* by Richard K Morgan is about a futuristic society where the identity is no more fixed. This study takes the term of transhumanism coined by the biologist Julian Huxley in his book *The New Bottles for New Wines* in which he gave the concept that humans can evolve beyond its present limits and he must expand its qualities not on smaller level but on a vast ground where he must break the societal boundaries and must show its abilities beyond his limits which Huxley calls transhumanism. "You're nothing but a pattern of data with a long string of memory and a few dubious impulses" (Morgan, 2002, p.193) These lines show that how the identity of man is nothing, the man is only designed like a man but technology has even changed the biological shape of the person. This quote further throws light on the devaluation of the biological form, where even man's identity has been faded. Morgan painted a society where there is a kingdom of technology and science, and the identity is fluid. As Tokashi Kovac the protagonist of the novel who has been hired as an investigator by Laurence Bancroft, a wealthy businessman to investigate the murder of Bancroft himself. This study aims to explore the meaning of identity in a transhumanist world where identity is not fixed, not same. It is a society where consciousness can be transferred from one body to another through the help of device called sleeves. It's a kind of cortical stacks which stores the memory of a person and later on it can shift to one person to another. This sleeve questions the existence of identity which shifts from one body to another. This research also questions the relation of mind and body and about the existence of man, where his identity is absurd and ambiguous. This study explores the concept of self in a mechanical world which can be transferred and stored in many bodies which is making the meaning of identity fragmented. The protagonist Tokashi Kovac experienced multiple bodies throughout the novel as the line shows this 'I know. I've done this before.' Shows his habit of doing it. Although Kovac experienced switching multiple bodies still he is attached with his past memories and incidents which indicates that identity is mostly tied to memories and personal continuity rather than the physical form. This research further highlights the importance of identity in a technological world where identity is commodified, the wealthy rich called Meths (short for Methuselahs) can switch their bodies multiple times but the poor class is deprived from that privilege. This creates a class division where rich

can achieve mortality because of wealth and the poor have to die. “When you can live forever, what do u live for” (Morgan,2002,p.247). This quote raises question about the purpose of living for a long time that Meths due to power and money are increasing the longevity of their lives but their memories which are keep on moving from one body to another is they are comfortable in their new forms or not? This is what happened in the novel that Lauren’s bancroft have wealth and because of this power he hired an envoy from Mars to investigate his murder. This thing questions the meaning of real death, whether a man dies in a an advanced world or not? Bancroft multiple resleeving just faded the original self of him as from centuries his memory is switching from one body to another, here the question raises whether that body shifting is preserving their identity or it is just devaluing and decreases the beauty of their original self, where their own identity have become alien they are in someone’s else body which actually dont have any connection to their real selfs. Moreover this study also throws light on the unjust attitudes of dehumanising the bodies by transferring them into cloned and rented sleeves. The body is decreases to the level of a mera vessel which challenges the traditional idea of physical identity.” It’s just a rental, Kovac. You can walk from it any time.”(Morgan,2002,p.91) These lines shows the worth of the rental or cloned bodies which is of no significance. So Basically this study explores the meaning of identity in a transhumanist world, where the meaning of death has changed and there’s a boundary between real and fake.

Analyse the impact of technology on human consciousness

Technology in the novel plays a vital role in reshaping the lives of the people, Morgan presented a society where the technology is having dominance over the lives of people and how it reshapes the identity of people. This research explores the concept of biological body and the digital body where the technology has snatched the meaning of real self. The consciousness and the memory of a person is no longer their own rather it is being attached to their body through the digital machine called cortical stacks a tiny device which has been attached with the skull of the body and then it can be transferred to any other bodies even the multiple ones. “ You believe that consciousness can be contained in the mind. But the mind is just software running on wetware.” (Morgan,2002,p.96) . This line throws light on the transhumanist view which believe that biological consciousness is not tied to the brain rather it is ever moving, coping and even it can be altered. This study further shows the psychological conflict of resleeving into numerous different bodies creating existential confusion who we are? What are our real selfs? “ I closed my eyes and tried to remember what my own face looked like. It took longer than I liked” (Morgan,2002,p.57). This quote shows that how technology leave deep impacts on human consciousness on its identity. Like kovac in the novel is trying to remember his own existence his real self which has been lost in that advanced world. His identity has been distorted and it is hard to recognise their own physical form. Throughout the novel Kovac experienced different incidents which gives him a chance to think about his own self his own biological form. The protagonist moves from different scenarios which him a chance of self discovery as well. Another impact of technology on human consciousness is like a sense of victory for the the rich to defeat death in that mechanical land. Bancroft constant shining from one body to another gives him power to mock the actual death which cannot touch the Meths but on the otherhand it also throws light on the purpose of living for a long time.” When you can live forever,what do u live for?” (Morgan,2002,p.247) These lines giving the realistic stance of living forever a meaningful activity which is of use. The longevity of living for a long time is only creating confusion and making the lives of these people complex where they are struggling hard to search their true bodies. Bancroft continuously switching of bodies is

making him alienated from his own true identity. Another impact of technology on consciousness shift is the possibility of duplication when one consciousness exists in many different bodies as in one incident Bancroft's backup copy is revived which creates the confusion of existence of one consciousness in two fifteenth bodies. "If I was him, and he was me, which one of us was real?" (Morgan, 2002, p. 312) this line shows a boundary between the real and fake and also states that technological advancement may cause fragmentation and may create complexity. This research further sheds light on treating bodies as commodities, consciousness is no longer sacred rather it has become a commodity. The poor are forced to remain in their own sleeves which creates inequity in society. The rich called Meths have the chance of choosing in whatever body they want to shift. "Abeula, don't look at yourself in the mirror. Just trust me". (Morgan, 2002, p. 209). This shows the loss of bodily autonomy where the poor are forced to select the undesirable body. The technology is also been treated as a tool of oppression where the poor community cannot enjoy the privilege of forever living. "They sold bodies like cars, leased out lives like real estates. And no one asked if the tenants belonged there" (Morgan, 2002, p. 174). This line further elaborates the impact of advanced technology on human consciousness where technology has become a tool for oppression on the poor. Where the only poor are suffering. So *Altered Carbon* presents a dystopian land which is having the dominance of technology and science on the lives of people, and because of these excessive technology the humanity is suffering it is making it hard for people to recognise their true identities and it also creates chaos and leaves deep impacts on human consciousness as well. So the aim of this study is to pinpoint the ideas that how and where this technology is influencing and also destroying the consciousness.

Investigate themes of immortality and its effects on identity.

Richard K Morgan portrays a future land where advanced technology can beat the death making people immortal. The purpose of this study is to tell the themes of immortality and how it is affecting the identity. The thing which makes people immortal is the digital device called cortical stacks which has been implanted by birth which aims to store and save the consciousness of one's person. So if a person faces actual death so his stack can be transferred to someone else's body which makes him immortal forever. This digital immortality aligns with the biological mortality which has changed the meaning of biological death, and making a physical death a kind of meaningless thing. "You are nothing but a pattern of data, held in storage. A long chain of ones and zeroes that can be transmitted at will." (Morgan, 2002, p. 36). This line raises questions about human existence about his authenticity, the meaning of existence, his purpose of living. This study further throws light on the constant resleeving due to which a person faces psychological fragmentation. Constant resleeving may come in broken, distorted personality. "You hop bodies the way I change clothes. How much of you is really you anymore?" (Morgan, 2002, p. 182). This refers to the instability of identity which keeps on floating in different bodies. The Meths because of their money try to achieve immortality. There are some ultra elite people who make a duplicate copy of themselves trying to switch their body to their copy body which further makes it more complicated to identify the one's true self. "I saw myself staring back at me. Same face, same memories, but was it really me?" (Morgan, 2002, p. 274) this challenges the notion of multiple duplicates which makes it difficult to come to know about the real identity. This novel also critiques on the unjust attitudes which are prevailing in the society. Because of this inequality the rich people can achieve immortality in this mortal world. The rich is being treated as a chooser who can choose his desirable life by resleeving multiple times while the poor are deprived from that privilege forced to resleeve in the rental or shared bodies. "A body

is just a vessel, if you can pay, you get a new one” (Morgan, 2002, p. 119). This line shows the societal in which the poor are bound. Although all are liberated but still the technology is being used as a sort of oppression to rule over the poor and to give benefit to the elites. This research also shows the psychological burden of living for centuries as well. As Bancroft because of switching his body multiple times faces detachment from his own self. In the crowded world he is finding the meaning of his teal existence that who he is? This shows their struggle to find out their purpose of living for centuries. “I have lived so long that nothing matters anymore. Faves blurs, lives fade. Time becomes an endless loop” (Morgan, 2002, p. 312). So basically this study shows the cons of living immortal life which even blurs the meaning of their existence and makes their life miserable. In *Altered Carbon* Richard K Morgan highlights the things which can make a person immortal, he painted a land where machines are ruling over men and physical death has lost its meaning. This study shows how the immortality affects the individual's identity in many different ways. The protagonist Tokashi Kovac and even the meth Laurence Bancroft all are entrapped in a Web of technology.

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