Human-Posthuman Conflict In Pandorum: A Posthuman Gothic Study

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Abstract:

When the very identity of the human being is questioned and debated in the twenty-first century, the different forms of conflicts that arise from humans' actions in day-to-day life and environment should also be viewed as posthuman level conflicts. As technologies develop, computers and artificial intelligence progress, the world is in a transition towards a posthuman era where human beings are not the only intellectual, social, communicable, and rational beings. This posthuman era consists of other forms of posthuman beings who decenter Protogoras's idea of man as the measure of all things and occupy an even more superior position in the world. These posthumans can be divided into three categories: Evolutionary Posthuman, Transhumanist Posthuman, and Post-human. The encounters and conflicts between these posthumans and humans lead to an existential, survival crisis for humans. Pandorum is a science fiction movie that deals with space travel, hypersleep, evolution, advance science, and posthuman creatures. It also opens up the imaginable possibilities of humans building an interstellar ark carrying multitudes of people to colonize Tanis, an earth-like planet. The researchers point out the human-posthuman conflict between the human passengers of the interstellar ark, the Elysium with the gothic posthuman creatures or monsters in the spacecraft in this paper. The researchers also try to analyze the possibility of gothic posthuman beings or creatures and how the encounters between humans and these gothic posthuman creatures have become a danger to the survival and existence of humans in Pandorum movie through a posthuman gothic study.

Keywords: Gothic, Posthuman, Pandorum, Posthumanism, Hyper-sleep, Evolution, Monster, Transhumanism

Introduction

Posthuman Gothic is a recently evolved area of research in posthuman studies. It coincides with posthuman thoughts with the ideologies of post-modern gothic. It can mutually be considered as a sub-genre of both Posthumanism and Gothicism. Gothicism is a backward-looking genre that usually characterizes its fiction with a desolate setting which creates a kind of macabre effect with terrifying, mysterious incidents.

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Gothic fiction intersects fiction, death, romance, and horror usually in a pseudo-medieval setting in its plot. Whereas modern Gothicism is a genre that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century in which the gothic horror and terror created in the fiction take place in the modernistic urban present environment or setting. This modern Gothicism anticipated the dystopian possibilities due to the development of technologies and the rise of modernism in the twentieth century. Dan Brown's Origin is an excellent example of modern Gothicism in which horror and terror are created in the day-to-day environment. But post-modern gothic is a twenty-first-century gothic which opens up the possibility of futuristic opportunities in the plot which in turn creates a horrifying, terrorizing macabre effect. Post-modern gothic deals with the present-twenty first-century setting as well as open up the possibility of destructive horror in the near future. Secondly, one of the significant writers on the gothic: Fred Botting writes in his book Gothic that the postmodern gothic focuses on the postmodernism's concern over "The loss of human identity and the alienation of the self from both itself and the social bearings in which a sense of reality is secured . . . " (Botting 102).

Eventually, this loss or alteration of the human identity is represented in horrifying and terrorizing shapes in a dehumanized threatening environment. This dehumanization of the environment is a result of the emerging scientific developments and technological advancements which opens up the chances and possibilities of the present as well as a future that is beyond human understanding. Gone are the days when humans controlled machines but now humans live in a world where machines control themselves and others. Maria Beville defines "Gothic-Postmodernism" as a projection of "spectral characters, doppelgangers, hellish wastelands, and the demonized or possessed" and "the deeper issue of the lingering emotion of terror as it relates to loss of reality and self" (Beville 10). So, post-modern gothic, in general, deal with the fear of the disintegration of the human subject. Next, most of the post-modern gothic works and movies showcase the fear of threats from the external source i.e. from alien other, terrorist or technological overtaking. Whereas, posthuman gothic deals with the internal threats within humans to human identity and subjectivity. Post-modern gothic creates terror and horror from the fears of human eradication by external others or monstrous technologies but Posthuman gothic creates terror and horror from the integration of human and technologies into posthuman other. One such posthuman other is the Technium. The idea or concept of Technium was first introduced by Kevin Kelly in his book "What Technology Wants?" He calls the technium as the aggregate of all the technologies and the "Seventh Kingdom of Life." This shows the possibility of humans evolving into the posthuman other by fusing with the technology. The Technium is the superorganism of technology and the posthuman of humanity. It is the fusion of humans and technology. Posthuman gothic also creates terror and horror from the human evolving into posthuman due to bio-medical experiments, the transhumanistic possibility of posthuman and humans' creation of posthuman such as android robots and artificial intelligence.

Anya Heise-von Der Lippe in her article titled "Posthuman Gothic" writes that posthuman gothic deals with humanity's anxiousness over our technological and biomedical experiments "and their capability to alter our perceptions of what it means to be a human. It revolves around our fear of becoming Other, of losing ourselves in a multitude of corporeal as well as discursive possibilities" (Lippe Ch.15). Posthuman Gothic fiction explores the scientific and technological developments on cyborgs, android robots, Frankensteinian creatures, vampires, zombies, and bioengineered transhumans in a Post-modern gothic environment which gives a scary, possible Posthuman future. This Posthuman future may or may not include the human in it or alter human identity. Posthuman Gothic is a genre of fiction whereas Gothic Posthumans are different types of terrorizing, horrifying, haunting, mysterious Posthuman characters that come in the Posthuman Gothic genre. It explores different types of Posthuman characters like cyborgs, android robots, Frankenstein creatures, vampires, zombies, and bioengineered transhumans in a gothic environment which gives a scary, possible Posthuman future.

Posthuman Gothic texts contain the monstrous 'Posthuman others' mentioned above and also offer different vantage points from which these Posthumans in gothic settings can be mapped, researched, and explored.

Furthermore, Inbaraj and Dr. Abdul Mohammed Ali Jinnah in their article "Posthuman Gothic and Monstrosity in Ahmed Saadawi's Frankenstein in Baghdad" taxonomically classified the notion of posthuman into three types. They write:

> It should be understood that Posthuman is not just a by-product of "Posthumanism" critical theory alone. The notion of posthuman can also be seen in Transhumanist critical theory. In fact, Posthuman can be classified into three types: Posthuman, Transhumanist-Posthuman, and Post-human. The first type of Posthuman the researcher classifies is evolutionary Posthuman which Rosi Braidotti talks about. This posthuman can be a human evolving into a posthuman, a machine becoming posthuman, an animal becoming posthuman and even earth becoming posthuman. The posthuman here may replace "the human" rather than one for a radically, biologically, physically enhanced human. The second type of posthuman is the transhumanist-posthuman. Transhumanism is one of the emerging critical theories which propounds that technology can help human beings to transcend their biological, physical, and intellectual limitations. It affirms the radical transformation of human beings' biological, intellectual capabilities and their social conditions with the help of technologies. It aims to enhance human characteristics, identity, and life from a very basic level that it brings about a life form with completely different characteristics to be called the 'Posthuman Other'. This Posthuman can be called as Transhumanist-posthuman. The third type of posthuman is medical, scientific experiments, and supernatural creations like zombies, vampires, Frankenstein monsters. (387-388)

In Pandorum, it is the evolutionary Posthumans that is humans who evolved into posthumans, who threaten the life, survival, and existence of humans in an interstellar ark, the Elysium which creates a horrifying and terrorizing effect on the audience. Pandorum is a science fiction horror movie directed by Christian Alvart and released in 2009. This movie can be viewed through the posthuman gothic lens. It deals with the conflict between humans and cannibalistic posthumans. The movie deals with the elements of horror and survival adventure in a spaceship. When the movie begins, it is revealed that it is a story about humans finding an earth-like planet and sending sixty thousand people in an interstellar ship, the Elysium to colonize Tanis. All the passengers in the spaceship are placed in hypersleep in hyper-bunks. As it is estimated that it takes around a hundred and twenty-three years to reach Tanis, a rotating crew is dutied to run the spaceship for every two years. After eight years of the space journey, the ship receives a final message from the earth that they are all that's left of humanity and the earth explodes. After this one of the flight crew, Corporal Gallo goes insane. He suffers from Pandorum or orbital dysfunctional syndrome. It is a psychological breakdown faced by humans who have been for a long time in deep-space hibernation. He got convinced that the spaceship got cursed and evil and killed his crew. He also woke up people from their hyper-sleep. These humans who were awoke started developing Pandorum and starts evolving into cannibalistic, violent monsters or posthuman creatures. This evolution is due to an enzyme that was injected into the passengers of the spaceship to enable them to adapt and adjust to the environment or living conditions in Tanis. But, as they were awakened from their hyper-sleep they started to evolve and adapt themselves to the spaceship's environment into a new breed of tribal, cannibalistic posthumans. It is here, that the researchers find the ordinary environment of a spaceship turns into a post-modern gothic environment. Also, it is posthuman gothic as the movie is set in a futuristic era of sending humans in a spaceship to colonize an earth-like planet and the very

ordinary environment of a spaceship becomes terrorizing, haunting, and horrifying after the awakened humans start evolving into tribal, cannibalistic, gothic posthumans.

Firstly, as the researchers discussed in the introductory paragraph, it could be understood that when the post-modern gothic which opens up the possibility of destructive horror in the near future (for instance, as in the movie, a future with the possibility of sending humans to colonize space) intersects with the ideas of gothic posthumans forms Posthuman Gothic. Secondly, "Posthuman Gothic deals with humanity's anxiousness over our technological and biomedical experiments and their capability to alter our perceptions of what it means to be a human" (Lippe Ch. 15). The cause of terror in the posthuman Gothic is not in the fear of humans' death but in the uncertainty of what we will become and what will be left of humans after the change. It centres our fear of becoming the Posthuman 'Other'. Here, in the movie, this human anxiousness or fear over the alteration of human identity and subjectivity and becoming a posthuman 'other' becomes a reality. And these evloutionized posthumans become a threat to the life and survival of the remaining humans in the spaceship. They are gothic posthumans. As mentioned above, Posthuman Gothic is a genre of fiction whereas Gothic Posthumans are different types of terrorizing, horrifying, haunting, mysterious Posthuman characters that come in the Posthuman Gothic genre. Thirdly, the researchers find in the movie a conflict between the remaining humans and the gothic posthumans. "The Posthuman gothic often threaten us with critically framed encounters, conflicts between the human and the Posthuman, and the consequences of these encounters beyond the imaginable boundaries" (Inbaraj and Mohammed Ali Jinnah 388). The researchers find these types of threatening encounters and conflicts between the cannibalistic, evolutionized Posthumans and the humans in the interstellar spaceship, the Elysium. During these encounters, the gothic posthumans kill humans. So, the researchers find a kind of posthuman conflict between the humans and monstrous posthumans in the spaceship in the movie. So, in Pandorum, the evolutionized posthumans are the gothic Posthumans who threaten the life, survival, and existence of humans in the spaceship. Thus the movie gives a scary, apocalyptic posthuman future.

Finally, the movie Pandorum interconnects these posthuman thoughts and possibilities with Post-modern Gothicism creating Posthuman Gothic. Traditional Gothic Fiction is a backward-looking genre usually with a pseudo-medieval setting and haunted castles to create a macabre effect, whereas post-modern Gothicism is a forward-looking genre that creates the same horror and terror in the twenty-first-century setting or in the near future. All through the movie, the researchers find how the normal environment of a spaceship turns into a post-modern gothic setting that terrorized us a little with its interiors. The gothic ambiance could be found all through the movie right from the beginning to the end. But the gothic effect is found in the transformation of ordinary spaceship interiors into a gothic setting rather than like the traditional gothic settings which need abandoned, haunted castles, and pseudo-medieval settings. Subsequently, causes of fear in the Posthuman Gothic are not only external but also internal. This fear is created through the ordinary setting transforms it into a gothic setting. This external gothic setting creates gothic terror present in the plot of the movie and also creates an internal horror to the audience. So, the terror of the threat from the gothic setting mixes with the horror of the threat from the plot.

Therefore, the Posthuman Gothic elements can be found in Christian Alvart's movie Pandorum. The researchers identified the interconnection between the Post-modern Gothic and Posthuman thoughts with the Possibility of humans evolving into the Posthuman other in the movie. The researchers also analyzed the possibility of gothic posthuman beings or creatures and how the encounters and conflicts between humans and these gothic posthuman creatures have become a threat to the survival, existence, and life of human beings in the interstellar ark, the Elysium in the Pandorum movie through a posthuman gothic study.

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