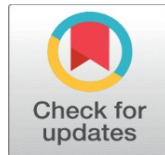


AQUEOUS POSTHUMAN FEMINISM IN PAOLO BACIGALUPI'S THE WATER KNIFE

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ABSTRACT

Climate fiction has intractably delved into the ecological dismay about the imminent disastrous repercussions of anthropogenic climate change. The posthuman propensities of these texts actualized by the depiction of imaginative worlds digressing from manifest conditions subvert anthropocentric standpoints and point out nonhuman agencies. Detailed analysis of climate fictions by employing feminist posthumanist figurations foregrounding a feminist ethic of difference, mutuality and care can bring to light their potential to offer imaginative realms outside the fallacies of human supremacy. The present work endeavours a watery incursion into Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* and attempts to view it through posthumanist feminist aqueous imagery put forward by the cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis. It also explores how water in the novel engenders a fresh imaginative space through its diversified techniques.

Keywords: Climate Fiction, Ecology, Posthumanism, Anthropocentrism, Ecology and Ecofeminism, Aqueous Imagery

1. INTRODUCTION

The environmental vicissitudes effectuated by anthropogenic climate change have vitalised novel posthumanist and post anthropocentric facets of cogitation that incorporate a vigorous and persistent consideration of the naturalised nonhuman entities. Posthumanism proclaims an avowal of epistemologies and research methods rooted in indubitably rigid and inherent collection of categories such as human/nonhuman, nature/culture etc. which disconnects and disproportionately disperses rumination and practice. The proposition of dissociation from anthropocentric standards to advance alongside a fresh standpoint is an elementary methodological means of posthuman postulation.

Posthuman feminist theories have furnished novel concepts and methodologies that take account of complex and multidirectional human-nonhuman relationality

thereby mobilizing a posthuman ethical translocation based on a feminist ethic of difference and care. The emphasis on an extended relational self that performs in a nature-culture continuum and the advancement of the radical immanence of embeddedness and embodiment fosters a non-anthropocentric egalitarianism and facilitates the reinforcement of affirmative ethical viewpoints which constitute the gist of posthuman feminist thought.

Theorist Astrida Neimanis advocates for a reorientation of embodiment in terms of a watery constitution and articulates a phenomenal sharedness in which individual human bodies are intensively tangled in a planetary hydro commons. Neimanis makes a profound claim that this understanding of human bodies as permeable and indeterminate matter that is continually in uninterrupted enmeshment in planetary water flows allows us to reenvision responsibility and care in the light of current climate crisis. Our watery embodiment that drips into and extracts from other bodies of water not assuredly human pose a challenge to the dominant Western paradigm of discrete bodies and unsettles anthropocentrism by asserting that “the human is always also more-than-human” (Neimanis 2).

Neimanis dislodges the notion of autonomous human bodies by construing a posthuman aqueous facilitative capacity in which watery bodies both human and non human are milieus for other bodies and modes of life never wholly discernible. She points out that bodies of water are different even when they delve for convergence as they trickle into one another. The aqueous formation of human bodies infuses them with a specific situatedness which Astrida Neimanis proclaims as a watered politics of location. The multiscalar and multitemporal dimensions of this aqueous politics of location makes it post human.

Paolo Bacigalupi, a creditable American science fiction author has preoccupied his works with environmental deterioration due to climate change. His fictions depict existing and impending ecological and socio-political plights of the human kind by highlighting the embedded position of humans within the planetary natural sphere. Bacigalupi's novel *The Water Knife* presents a dismantled near future Southwest America shattered by irreversible climate change and swiftly declining water reserves. Relentless droughts and capricious water security have impelled the states in the region to set in motion fierce conflicts for the rights on the residual water of the Colorado river which is the crux of life for people in these States. Pervasive water paucity has spawned a brutally ruined world strained by large migrations, refugee tents and massively policed and sealed borders in which Texas has utterly disintegrated, Arizona and Phoenix are wrestling for existence, the Central Arizona project (CAP) being their precarious reprieve and Nevada and California are conspicuously better off due to their appropriation of water supplies.

The ventures of Angel, who is employed as a ‘water knife’ for Catherine Case, disrupting water supplies of antagonistic States on her orders; Lucy, who is a Pulitzer winning journalist attempting to expose the under currents of water politics, and Maria, who is a refugee from Texas striving to generate means so as to enable her to move out of the shattering state of Phoenix, get entwined with each other in quest for watery requisites. Arcologies built by the Chinese and the powerful corporates shield the rich and the elite while the underprivileged are left to the mercy of Red Cross pumps selling water at enormous prices. As the novel highlights the indispensability of water to human life and livelihood, it unravels how water assumes peculiar expressions in human bodies as a constituent of their unassailable materiality.

Bacigalupi opens his novel with a recountal of a person's location ingrained in an embodied sweaty materiality. Sweat instils in embodied watery human bodies, their own politics of location within distinctive ecological and political contexts:

The sweat of a woman bent double in an onion field, working fourteen hours under the hot sun, was different from the sweat of a man as he approached a checkpoint in Mexico, praying to La Santa Muerte that they *federales* weren't on the payroll of the enemies he was fleeing. The sweat of a ten-year-old boy staring into the barrel of a SIG Sauer was different from the sweat of a woman struggling across the desert and praying to the Virgin that a water cache was going to turn out to be exactly where her coyote's map told her it would be. (1)

Sweat as "body's history" (Bacigalupi 1) exposing "how a person had ended up in the right place at the wrong time" (1) and evincing an appreciation of watery body pertaining to multiple scales divulges a feminist post human aqueous politics of location. The putrid sweat and urine of Texan refugee bodies express the agonizing life of trepidation and deprivation which constrained them to over crowd near Red Cross relief pumps. According to the author, tears that emitted from the eyes of Simon Yu as his domain of water system is broken down, talked about his particular situatedness. Water and bile that gushes from Maria's accused body after her friend Sara and the hydrologist Ratan were murdered, reveal her situation of panic and anguish and lethal assault. The recognition of human bodies as watery helps in making comprehension of the embeddedness of these bodies in currents of power and bio matter. Narratives of brutality make intrusions into the watery abysses of human bodies. The view of the Colorado river that protracted like a serpent across the desert fills Angel with amazement as he aviated about the "black ribbon of water" (11).

The ability of water to facilitate all forms of life sways his rumination. He appreciates how the Colorado river in its heyday induced life wherever it touched. The trait of water to gestate life forms infiltrates Angel's consideration on another occasion as he flew South across the desert Mojave. The waters pumped up from aquifers generated greenery and growth to several places like Kansas and Texas. Later, water scarcity dismantled all the splendour of these regions. Even in the desert, creosote and yucca blossomed on a meagre fall of winter rain and all other life curled up along the banks of its capillary rivers. Angel later recounts Lake Mead as the life line of Las Vegas. All life forms are created in a watery milieu. Bacigalupi traces the capacity of water to coalesce or erode in the depiction of waters that burst through the Blue Mesa Dam when it shattered into a deluge of furious water. He outlines the transformational potential of water that amalgamates life aback into its milieu of planetarity. "It would rush down through canyons, cross state lines, inundate towns, sweep away all traces of human activity along its margins" (Bacigalupi 228) .

The minerals of mined water spotted across the top of Angel's coffee cup in a diner on his way to Phoenix that were to drift into his body suggests the communicative logic of water. The circulation of water in Taiyang arcology inducts human bodies of water into intricate linkages with other bodies of water in digestors, carp ponds, snail beds and vertical farms, thereby manifesting water as a material means of communication. Angel and Maria feel a part of the life world in the water treatment systems of the arcology where the flow of waters link human and non-human bodies of water. "Below them, the water pooled out, spreading and spilling down into tanks. They were in a huge cavern, redolent with the smell of fish and growing things. Mosses and algae choked the waters. Fish flashed in the shallows. A whole huge cavern, full of water and life" (Bacigalupi 266).

Here human “wet matters are in constant process of intake, transformation and exchange” (Neimanis 2). This veritable enmeshment of human bodies in other geophysical and biospheric aqueous bodies made possible through water recycling can make life pleasant “even in Hell” (Bacigalupi 422) as Lucy opines to Angel. Shortly before the closure of the novel, Maria encounters aqueous communication when breathing the evening air near the river felt like consuming the river and holding it inside. Moving within such circuits, water expresses difference in each of its materialisations. Water that enables the inter permeation of bodies also formulates them differently. Angel observes that the lack of water has brought forth a lack of difference. “It was striking to Angel how similar every town looked after it lost its water” (Bacigalupi 60).

Maria strives to traverse the Carver City reservoir in order to flee to another city during which she stumbles upon the engravings on its rocks. Watery embodiment facilitates her appraisal of the repositories of the past by the sinking waters of the reservoir. As Neimanis emphasizes, “water remembers” (32). The commentators on the television who announce and list out the details of the towns that are susceptible to the surging waters of the tumbling dam frightfully hint at the unknowability of water that defies all efforts to gain mastery of it with knowledge systems: “We just don't know how far it will go!” (Bacigalupi 227)

Bacigalupi's inclusion of water's specificity, gestationally, communicative ability, difference, memory and unknowability has opened up a space for a new aqueous ecological imaginary that bolsters alternative orientations in human relations with the material world. These modalities of water have helped in the articulation of the manifold entanglements of human and non-human bodies in a watery world that is ontologically averse to absolute appropriation. The arduous water deficit in the novel has afforded leeway to articulations of embodied experiences of wateriness serving as a revealer of a more than human embodiment that “interrupt a comfortable human sense of a bodily self” (Neimanis 50). Such liquid expressions foster consonance with more than humanness of humans and augment the affirmation of potentialities of their embodied dissemination.

To conclude, Paolo Bacigalupi, in his novel *The Water knife*, has incorporated elements of post human aqueous feminism proposed by Astrida Neimanis. The novel lucidly highlights the inseparability of human bodies from flows of water. The writer imagines the survival of characters in the fiction through the interconnectedness of their bodies with other non-human bodies of water in the form of water recycling systems in arcologies for the privileged or reservoir water that enables swimming to haven in the case of the underprivileged. The emphasis on the reciprocity between human and non-human water bodies seeks to uncover porosity of borders between nature/ culture, human/ non-human and upset the individualistic perception of discrete selfhood. The exploration of aqueous politics of location and various hydro-logics that percolate through all facets of material existence of human and non-human bodies has provided new imaginative means for reimagining the watery world that foils prevalent efforts towards regulation.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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