



RESEARCH PAPER

**Human-Technology Symbiosis in Katie Williams' *Tell the Machine Goodnight***

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**ABSTRACT**

This study delves into the symbiotic relationship between humans and technology and how machines and humans co-relate pleasantly in Katie Williams' *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018). The research argues that humans cannot be isolated from technology but rather they correspond to each other, and, in due course, this human-technology interface will help them to survive in the coming decades. By using the theoretical framework of Posthumanism with its central strand of Transhumanism, the article evaluates the assemblage of humans with machines in this sci-fi text where they do not harm each other, but help and coordinate for productivity and profundity. The philosophy of Posthumanism contests the dominance of the human species over other species. Transhumanism gives the notion that human capacities can be strengthened by working with various technological tools; likewise, it illustrates the idea that there must be an unreserved relationship between artificial tools and humans since humans do not exist in a monolithic form but make symbiosis with other forms of life. Thus, the article concludes that in the contemporary period, survival is better possible if humans use technology to complement and disburden their capabilities to bring prosperity to their future.

**KEYWORDS** Cyborg, Human-Technology, Posthumanism, Sci-fi

**Introduction**

The genre of science fiction deals with imagination, scientific inventions and how humans use and explore science-based apparatuses. Science fiction is not an emerging genre rather its roots are embedded in ancient Greeks mythology also. The latest scientific discoveries, the creation of smart computers and robots help human beings to surpass their human limitations. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, everything changed from analog to digital, and humans' use of these scientific inventions made it possible to perform the fastest tasks. Due to the transition of this world into digitalization and techno-determinism, the genre is gaining popularity and presents a new lens to interpret this world. In advanced societies, humans live in profound imagination and use their minds and scientific machinery to convert all those fascinations into reality. In fact, all sci-fi novels are futuristic in nature as they forecast how humans will survive in the coming decades. It explores all the privileges and talents of humankind and how they can make their links with non-human species.

There is a symbiosis between humans and technology and to describe this co-evolution Tuuri & Koskela (2020) describe that technological tools are the creation of humans and they play a significant role in the progress of any nation. Humans' use of different applications to edit audio music, and how it amplifies their vocals describe the vital use of technology to flourish them financially. These writers quote De Preester & Tsakiris to show this unification as "humans are defined as prosthetic beings" (2020, p.2) and these prostheses undermine the singularity and accept all the boundaries that are a hindrance to thriving of this bond. The advancement of technology brings a revolution in academic fields

due to changing modes of learning and teaching, therefore, human technology is a two-way methodology that proves a futuristic step in the scientific form of literature with an agenda to survive human beings in the coming decades.

The 21st century is the age of automation, and humans have faith in the power of digital tools to amplify and enhance their capabilities to meet their tasks within no time. Similarly, Maynard (2018) discusses futuristic films like *Transcendence* (2014) in which there is the meeting of technology with humans to enhance their capabilities. Creating unification between humans and technology is a futuristic step and with this balanced relationship, they can negotiate the upcoming challenges and protect this world and its species. Hence, this research aims to accept the boundaries and create a symbiotic relationship between humans and technology.

Science fiction deals with the issues of advancement in science and the world of imagination and how it affects our society. The present research deeply inspects the works of Katie Williams (2018) and Becky Chambers (2016) and their sublime use of this genre with its key features – science, machinery and non-human Objects to contribute to the literature. These writers describe all the elements which are necessarily present in every science fiction, like Spaceships, robots, alien invasions, computers, time travel and futuristic dystopia. In the present study, the researcher takes up a detailed descriptive analysis through selected theoretical strands of Transhumanism.

This research argues that humans will not be distinguished from technology in the future, instead, there will be a human-technology symbiosis that would act as cyborgs, and it will be beneficial for humans and machines to work together. By forwarding the argument in this way, the study highlights the meaningful amalgamation between humans and artificial tools where technological use does not harm humanity, but it enhances their cognitive abilities. The study is significant because it disproves the dogma that technology and humans cannot work together in harmony instead the study proves that humans and automation are in accord with each other, and this harmony is beneficial for the better survival of humanity.

To understand the main sci-fi works of our selected authors, we provide a comprehensive account of the life of a writer. Katie Williams belongs to the mid-Michigan, who did BA from Michigan University. Later she did MFA from Texas University in Creative Writing. Williams discusses various aspects of the novel that revolve around the humans' skillful use of technology like human happiness through the Apricity machine, prospects of using technology and friendship between humans and technology. In this way, this research explores the humanization of the machine by uncovering the functioning of Apricity. In short, the research discusses the scientific literature of Williams (2018) by narrowing down the theoretical angle of Posthumanism and its strand of Transhumanism. It uses Roden's (2015) concept of Transhumanism and Nayar's (2014) concept of Transhumanism and which ultimately gives this research a Transhuman angle.

## **Literature Review**

### **Review of Existing Literature on Williams' *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018)**

This section reviews all the resources available on this novel. It critically analyses all the dimensions discussed by different researchers and reviewers by putting them in chronological order. For example, Saleem (2018) examines *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018) and records the main concept of happiness and her wit to engage with multiple narratives. She tells about the futuristic setting of the novel and claims it is an extension of *Black Mirror* (2011). She comments on the dynamic relationship of mother and son and equates it to Shriver's (2003) portrayal of a challenging and complex mother-son

relationship. Her work concludes that Williams' use of a multiplicity of perspectives and narratives reflects the chaotic mindset of modern people.

However, Sheehan (2018) analyses the linguistic patterns of the novel and comments on the juxtaposition of things in sharp sentences. She takes it as an innovatively perfect example of Sci-Fi as it does not involve robots, aliens and explosions. It is a simple collection of interconnected short stories with different characters around the protagonist, Pearl. Another reviewer, Haig (2018) explores Williams' style and appreciates its use of multiple perspectives as it metaphorically shows the existence of people in the real world who are disintegrated and fragmented. He discusses the potential of new technologies and how Williams makes them applicable in her narrative as it becomes the source of serenity for all her characters.

Williams' *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018) is closely researched by Croteau (2019) who draws a chronological development of technology and makes its comparison with other novels including, *The Circle* (2013) and *Fahrenheit 451* (1950) and describes how computers and machines control human beings. He also criticizes teenagers' excessive use of smartphones and social media destroying their future. However, my argument varies from Croteau's research as this work highlights how mechanical tools like machines, computers and AIs correspond with humans and harmoniously flourish society. There exists only one published research article on this novel. Some reviewers commented on the style of the writer, some highlighted the negative aspects of using technology, and others discussed the linguistic patterns and devices that the writer used in the novel. While reviewing all the different points of view, this research becomes an innovative addition to the scheme of knowledge. In another Sci-Fi reading by Chambers (2016), this research prolongs its argument and interprets the opinions of others in the next section.

## **Material and Methods**

Two strands of Posthumanism (Transhumanism) are used as a theoretical lens to explore the human-technology symbiosis in Williams' *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018). In the discussion of posthumanism and its strands like Transhumanism, it is stated that posthumanism is a philosophy that undermines the traditional views about human nature and its superiority. In the discussion of the concept of Transhumanism, Pena (2017) describes the government's first recognized cyborg Neil Harbisson. In science and technology, she quotes the significant example of Kevin Warwick with his Telepathic Communication Theory and Cybernetic Implants. Further, she elaborates on the artistic work of Sterlac who is famous for showing the capabilities and enhancement of the human body. For this purpose, she explores Sterlac's use of Transhumanist philosophy and the implantation of a human ear on his arm as she quotes his words "We reach the second level of existence where the body becomes the object for physical and technical experiments" (para. 6).

Pena further comments on the renowned philosopher and futurologist F.M 2030 and his hope to get immortality through technology. Then she elaborates on the transhumanist doctrine of Max More and his idea of the Extropy Institute in the same year 1988 when the concept of Cyberculture emerged. She informs after ten years, Nick Bostrom and David Pearce developed their *World Transhumanist Declaration* (1998) with the aim of making this scientific project legal. Lastly, she remarks that the agenda of transhumanism flourishes with the creation of the episteme of Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information Technology and Cognitive science (NBIC). Humans are using these epistemologies to improve their abilities.

Further, the Transhumanist strand proposes technological involvement like biotechnology, information technology and artificial intelligence with humans to make their survival possible in the future and David Roden (2015) calls it the suite of technologies like Nano, Bio, Info, Cogno etc. (p.14). According to Roden, humans augment their abilities by

uniting with technology. Further, Pramod. K Nayar (2014) explains the different forms of Transhumanism including the “machination of humans” and “humanization of machines”, and how these phenomena show practicality through the personas of Chambers’ Sidra the human body Kit and Williams’ Pearl. In this way, the Transhumanist strand is viewed through the perspective of Roden (2015) and Nayar (2014) and how they support the main argument that there is interdependence between humans and technology which leads them to produce co-evolution between them. Hence, in this research, transhumanism highlights the significance of human alliance with non-human forms of life to protect the future of humanity.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Techno-Utopia and Techno-Determinism in Williams’ *Tell the Machine Goodnight: Cradle of Transhumanism***

The philosophy of Transhumanism appreciates the advancement of technology and humans’ dealing with it. To understand the phenomena of technology, it is better to learn about its evolution. Humans created several scientific inventions like wheels and ships to explore the world. Nayar’s idea of transhumanism is related to Techno-determinism. In William’s *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018), technology is not harming humans but instead provides a contentment plan and instructions to make them happy. Pearl’s affiliation with Apricity represents the possibility of humans’ association with technology in the near future. Generally, Techno-utopia defines the use of technology in a way that provides advantages, benefits and well-being to humans and the ultimate formation of the ideal society. It describes positive human experimentation with artefacts of science and the advancement of technology set soon and how it fulfills the needs of people.

Techno-utopia also believed that humans could flourish in social, political, cultural and economic fields. Similarly, in *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018) Pearl utilizes her free time to make conversations with her new partner Apricity, taking its suggestions and performing interesting activities in her time of isolation. According to the transhuman concept, human beings enhance their strengths through the appropriate use of technology that controls the staggering condition of human beings and uplifts their businesses. For Pearl, considering technology as an ideal tool metaphorically represents the emergence of commercialization and industrialization in society. Therefore, she promotes the acceptance of new discoveries and innovation in technology as Marule (2022) argues that “innovation should be recognized as central to promoting and supporting sustainable economic development” (p.1). Further, Marule’s argument supports the central argument of this paper that the encouragement of using advanced technology helps to create a competitive society and explore the capabilities of emerging technicians of the nation. With the progress of the nation, this industrialization and technological revolution provide new employment opportunities to youth. Williams imitates this technological environment by presenting the persona of Pearl who works as a technician in a company. She convinces people to have Apricity tests and at the end, she asks her clients, “Would you say that you anticipate Apricity’s recommendation will improve your overall life satisfaction? Ms. Flatte nodded and said, “I think, I will” (Williams, 2018, p.22). It shows Pearl is performing her job and is a source of strength for her company as she sells their slogan. It is valuable for Pearl, her clients and the company. This attitude of humans shows their determination for technology as this triangle brings harmony to society. Pramod k. Nayar (2014) posits his stance on transhumanism and embeds both the concepts of techno-utopia and techno-determinism. Further, Nayar’s comments on transhumanism manifest practicality in the character of Pearl in Williams’ *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018) which enhances her cognitive and manual strengths by uniting with the Apricity machine.

Nayar’s idea of techno-determinism relates to transhumanism. Both ideas overlap and advocate the harmonious union of technology and humans in the future. In techno-

determinism technology is helping to shape society and culture. Its manifestation is present in Williams' character Rhett whose friend Saff is suffering from some personal issues as she plays a game of scapegoat at her Cyber school and gets involved in an illegal activity "She was told to strip naked and recite conjugation of the French verbs dormir, manger and baisier ..." (2018, p.27). In the scapegoat game, all ten members of the game can get their revenge, pain and frustration from the eleventh and the last member. Unfortunately, Saff is the eleventh participant and becomes a victim of others' anger at the end of the game. Everyone is aware of the naked video of Saff but Rhett, who is drugged and eating a piece of soap is embarrassed; however, he comes to help her. She wants to know who the real culprit behind this case is. During this interaction, Saff and Rhett get intimate and he steals the old version of Apricity from her mother's room to find out who is the criminal.

Karl Marx and other critics also support Nayar's idea of "techno-determinism" when it is perceived that technology proves a driving force to develop a prosperous society as it is bringing productive social changes. Marx propounds his narrative on technology and its connection to humanity as "The hand-mill gives...; the steam mill, society with the Industrial Capitalist" (Marx, 1847). Marx's idea relates to Nayar's conception of techno-determinism where the fate of technology and humanity work harmoniously. In *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018), the character of Pearl represents this "techno-deterministic" (Nayar,2014) idea as she proves herself a philanthropist figure. She is hired to do daily Apricity tests of Calla Pax and determine "what dubious talents this girl claimed" (p.130). In every session, Apricity recommends Calla "Eat Ice Cream... and Adopt a dog" (p.142). Calla Pax is an emerging teenage actress who is abused by producer Flynn, Marilee and their team who use her body to perform some scientific experimentation. She is famous due to her act of screaming and dying in each film before it ends. They train her in such a way that she starts taking interest in their demands with the concept that it is her fate, though she believes in determination. She agrees to do screaming with the notion that by performing all these things she can get rid of her fears. Pearl comes to Calla Pax as she is hired by a filmmaking company and takes her Apricity tests regularly. Pearl feels that Calla is not an independent human being to do her day-to-day activities. She asks Calla "You started young your work in the industry" (p.130). Hence, being a technician officer, Pearl is also conscious of Calla, whether she wants to perform in films or she is trapped by some people for whom she is a puppet. With the help of Apricity, Pearl is able to investigate Calla Pax. It is also observed that Pearl's arrival with Apricity and rummaging about the life of Pax helps her to know Calla's will.

To further investigate Calla, she takes plenty of information from her son, Rhett, and watches all the movies of Calla Pax overnight. Pearl represents a techno-deterministic figure who is metaphorically serving the function of human-machine communication, and being a social robot, interacts harmoniously with Calla. During her conversation about Calla's tests, she sees Calla's pie charts which she is horribly designed with different cartoons like "One of the Callas cartoon butcher's knives in her chest..." (p.135). This formation of Calla's characters makes Pearl suspicious because it only relates to the death timings of Calla. Further, she sheds light on Calla's projects which are based on a "nondisclosure agreement" (p.135). She checks all the details, talks with Calla and probes the matter.

This philanthropic attitude of Pearl toward another human shows how a technological expert and her Apricity machine uncover all the illegal activities and save Calla. Pearl and Calla become fast friends and discuss their fears while eating ice cream. When Pearl asks Calla, "Are you afraid of something? She replies "I am afraid of the ocean. I am afraid of ... spiders and cockroaches and being buried alive with spiders and centipedes" (p.146). Pearl keeps all the facts and hints in mind and visits the place where they are filming Calla. For Pearl, it seems less film shooting and more scientific experimentation as Calla was packed in a box with full-body cockroaches and other insects and she was crying. This is how Pearl uncovers their false film shooting by showing the abuse and torture of a young girl. In this way, it is seen that humans are harming other humans by using them for their profit and

high ratings. On the other hand, Pearl as an Apricity technician observes all the factors, socially interacts with them, and scrutinizes the terrible doings of all the Calla's team. Pearl's Apricity acts as a tool to socialize and know the violence and sufferings of victims and thus becomes a means to give new life to people.

### **Humanization of Machines in *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018)**

Pearl's job aptly indicates Nayar's concepts of the "Humanization of Machines" (2014, p.17) which is a form of transhumanism, and describes that survival in the future is impossible if species are adopting the notion of monolithic existence. Like in ancient times, if people were following the dualities of superior or inferior among species it would never lead to making a competitive society. Therefore, the coming decades seem to bring an era of revolution in the field of technology, for this, there should be less conflict between humans and machines since they are more autonomous to adopt this integrating quality of humans and non-humans. This leads to accelerating the humanization of machines and their inevitable existence.

In the humanization of machines, machines become equivalent to human beings as people make most of their social and intellectual interactions with machines. Its manifestation is present in Williams' character Pearl and Apricity technology. The intermingling of Pearl and Apricity functions as a robot that is a source of healing and providing happiness to society. Pearl's Apricity serves the phenomena of the humanization of machines. Williams presents the futuristic idea of the beneficial unification of human and non-human species through the hybrid relationship of homo-sapiens and machines. The protagonist Pearl unifies with Apricity, thereby enhancing her capabilities and helping the people. Pearl's Apricity can analyse people's "secret selves" (p.13) and can be said to be coinciding with the function of a human. Thus, it accomplishes the idea of transhumanism. Today's youth like Williams' protagonist Pearl make their association with technology and earn millions of dollars to uplift their own and countries' economic systems. This human-machine amalgamation promotes the digitalization of society leading it towards success.

Nayar's idea of the "Humanization of Machines" (p.17) roots back in the idea of transhumanism. In the philosophy of transhumanism, it is perceived that human abilities are augmented through machines. The Apricity machine measures humans' emotions by judging their behaviors and providing them contentment plan. Machines act like humans as they possess human attributes like cognitive and emotive skills. To illustrate this idea, Williams' main character Pearl, an Apricity technician harmonizes herself with a machine, tests humans' problems, and prescribes recommendations. For instance, at the novel's beginning, Pearl deals with her clients Mr. Waxler and Ms. Flatte at the San Francisco office and deals with them gently and provides recommendations according to the machine. In the future, survival seems possible because technology and humans show friendly relationships with each other making the system of tracking the problems advanced along with their possible solutions.

### **Conclusion**

It has been noted that the genre of science fiction gives humans a sense to experiment in the field of literature. This study with the origination of posthumanism has clarified the union between humans and machines and its practicality in American culture, and how over time this technological revolution has influenced other cultures. It has been perceived that the coming age is the age of technology and humans can last by making a harmonious bond with technology as the research has discussed all the aspects of humans' interaction with technology by unsettling the established notion of humans' singularity, autonomy and a concept of a superior race. This interaction with technology has been observed in the depiction of a Pearl's bond with the Apricity machine in Williams' *Tell the Machine Goodnight* (2018). It has reflected the purpose of inculcating technology with

humans to know how machines-humans bond facilitated a novice reader to get a substantial information about the functioning of artificial tools and their way of helping humans who may face difficult challenges in the future. The study has also repudiated the traditional claim that humans are puppets in the hands of technology and a belief that it dehumanizes humans by crossing biological limits and triggering ethical challenges. So, it has helped to change the thinking patterns and parameters of the epistemology of Humanism and proposed that creating unification between humans and technology is a futuristic step and with this balanced relationship, humans can enhance their abilities, negotiate the upcoming challenges, and protect this world and its species.

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