

**T.C.
İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI ANABİLİM DALI
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI BİLİM DALI**

DOKTORA TEZİ

**REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BODY IN
TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITISH SCIENCE
FICTION**

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İSTANBUL – 2025

ABSTRACT
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This thesis aims to discuss bodily representations in twentieth century British science fiction by examining three novels which have been published in the second half of the twentieth century. The main argument the thesis sets forth is that after the Second World War, British science fiction became less anthropocentric and more posthumanist. By examining three different types of body representation, the study investigates how science fiction utilises the depiction of a body to question what it means to be human and how humans react to other non-human beings. The thesis uses three types of body representations: biological bodies, constructed bodies and absent bodies. Biological bodies refer to bodies which are composed of organic matter and this concept usually refers to the depiction of humans and humanoid species in science fiction. Biological bodies show how humans are depicted as evolving beings and their whole ontological beings are conditioned by the limitations of the material world. Constructed bodies refer to beings who are not born naturally but constructed by another being. In science fiction, this category usually refers to robots and beings with artificial intelligence. This study examines how constructed bodies function as the others of humans and how they can represent other non-human sentient life forms. The term absent body is used to denote beings who are not represented clearly and are usually associated with godly beings who transcended the material world. These representations are studied by examining the novels **2001: A Space Odyssey** by Arthur C. Clarke, **Re: Colonised Planet: Shikasta** by Doris Lessing, and **Consider Phlebas** by Iain M. Banks, by using the theory of postmodernism and posthumanism.

Keywords: Science Fiction, Postmodernism, Posthumanism, Arthur C. Clarke, Doris Lessing, Iain M. Banks

ÖZ

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BODY IN TWENTIETH CENTURY BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION Deniz AYYILDIZ

Bu tez yirminci yüzyılın ikinci yarısında yayınlanan üç romanı inceleyerek yirminci yüzyıl Britanya bilim kurgu edebiyatında bedenın nasıl temsil edildiğini tartışmayı hedefler. Tezin öne sürdüğü sav, İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası Britanya bilim kurgu edebiyatının daha az insan merkezci ve daha posthümanist olduğudur. Bu çalışma üç farklı beden temsil formunu inceleyerek bilim kurgunun beden temsillerini kullanarak insan olmanın ne demek olduğu sorusunu ve insanların diğer insan olmayan varlıklara nasıl tepki verdiğini inceler. Bu tez üç farklı beden temsil tipini kullanır: Biyolojik bedenler, inşa edilmiş bedenler ve namevcut bedenler. Biyolojik bedenler organik maddeden oluşan bedenlere işaret eder ve bu konsept genellikle bilim kurguda bulunan insan ve insanımsı temsillerine gönderme yapar. Biyolojik bedenler insanların nasıl evrim geçiren varlıklar olduğunu ve bütün ontolojik varlıklarının maddi dünyanın kısıtlamaları tarafından şartlandırıldığını gösterir. İnşa edilmiş bedenler terimi doğal yollardan doğmamış ve başka bir varlık tarafından inşa edilmiş bedenleri tanımlamak için kullanılır. Bu kategori bilim kurgu edebiyatında genellikle robotlara ve yapay zekalı varlıklardan bahsetmek için kullanılır. Bu çalışmada inşa edilmiş bedenlerin insanlar için nasıl öteki işlevi görebileceği ve insan dışı akıllı bir yaşam formunu temsil edebileceklerini tartışmak için kullanılır. Namevcut beden kavramı ise açıkça temsil edilmeyen ve genellikle maddi dünyayı aşmış tanrısal varlıklardan bahsetmek için kullanılır. Tüm bu temsiller Arthur C. Clarke'ın **2001: Bir Uzay Destanı**, Doris Lessing'in **Şikasta** ve Iain M. Banks'in **Phlebas'ı Hatırla** romanları üzerinden ve postmodernizm ve post hümanizm kuramları kullanılarak incelenir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bilim Kurgu, Postmodernizm, Posthümanizm, Arthur C. Clarke, Doris Lessing, Iain M. Banks

PREFACE

This study is a product of long years of reading and studying science fiction texts. Starting from a very early age, science fiction novels and films helped me to envision the world in a larger context. That is why this study feels like a culmination of long years of thinking and speculations on the nature of science and what it means to be a human, or even what it means to be a thing. As hard philosophical questions go, I have not found an answer. My expectation from this study was to find an answer to these questions but all this research led me to be more confused and lost than ever. So, it can be said that I am on the right track. I hope this study to be the first of many academic works to come. My intellectual journey of critically reading science fiction novels started with the late Ursula K. Le Guin's works, and I feel grateful for her wonderful novels. Without them, I would never dream of studying science fiction.

This study is completed by the contributions of many colleagues and friends. I am very grateful to Canan Şavkay as she guided me when I felt lost and confused and provided with me countless insights. Without her guidance and patience, this thesis would not exist. I am very thankful to my Head of Department Esra Melikoğlu for her support through all these years. I owe a special thanks to Özlem Karadağ and Zeynep Bilge as they patiently contributed to my thesis by giving me invaluable advice in our process report meetings every six months. I am grateful for all the members of our department, some of whom were my lecturers, and I am honoured to be their student. Each member of our department supported this study and tried to help in any way they could. I cannot express how grateful and lucky I am to be working with them.

I want to thank Çağrı Uluğ for all his advice and insight. I want to thank Nedim Güvenç and Oğuz Ayaydın for being there when I felt lost. I thank Gülsüm Köse for supporting me and inviting me to many study sessions which I have the fondest memories of. I also want to thank my friends Can Semercioğlu and Raşit Mutlu for all their emotional support. I want to thank all those who contributed to the thesis in one way or another and helped me in any way they can.

I want to thank my family for all their emotional support, their patience and their belief in me through all these years. Without their support, I would not have found the courage to continue my studies.

Lastly, I want to thank my star and my light, Eser Pehlivan, without whose support and loving patience I would have given up long before. I cannot find the words to express how grateful I am to have met you.

Deniz Ayyıldız

İstanbul, 2025



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ed. by.	:	Edited by
Ibid.	:	In the same place
Op. Cit.	:	The work cited
p./pp.	:	Page/ pages
Passim.	:	Everywhere
Shikasta	:	Re: Colonised Planet 5 Shikasta
Trans. by.	:	Translated by

INTRODUCTION

“Of bodies changed to other forms I tell;
You Gods, who have yourselves wrought every change...”¹
Ovid, **Metamorphoses**

A study which proposes to discuss a distinct theme in a specific genre might as well start with a definition of the genre it aspires to treat. As a popular literary genre, ‘Science Fiction’, which is usually abbreviated as ‘sci-fi’ or, in some cases, ‘SF’, was largely neglected by literary scholars for some time. The early twentieth century witnessed the rise of science fiction, and the literary value of this newborn genre was overlooked by early twentieth century academic scholarship. In the second half of the twentieth century, science fiction became a prominent genre on which literary critics and academics started to study more extensively.² This thesis also seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussions about this relatively new genre.

By risking an unsophisticated simplification, science fiction may be defined as a genre that focuses on the nature of the change brought about by humanity’s advancement in science and technology. The genre explores science and its impact on our daily lives, and perhaps more importantly, on how we perceive life itself. As Brian McHale states, “Science fiction, like postmodernist fiction, is governed by the ontological dominant. Indeed, it is perhaps the ontological genre *par excellence*.”³ Primarily, it is an ontological genre that tries to understand our relationship with the world through the lens of what we call scientific concepts. It is also a tool to imagine an unlikely future. As Jameson says, “Science Fiction is generally understood as the attempt to imagine unimaginable futures.”⁴ Therefore, it serves as a tool of reflection for the writers to contemplate the nature of change, possible unthinkable futures and the nature of humanity through the medium of fictionalised science, or pseudo-science, as these narratives sometimes only seem to be scientific, lacking any empirical base

¹ Ovid. **Metamorphoses**, Trans. by A. D. Melville, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, (p. 1), I.

² James Gunn, “Foreword”, **The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction**, Ed. By. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. xvi.

³ Brian McHale, **Postmodernist Fiction**, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 59.

⁴ Fredric Jameson, **Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions**, London, Verso, 2005, p.345.

for their arguments. Although the genre sometimes loses itself in the variety of its subject matters, it always includes a core that allows us to define it as such. It also happens that some of the prominent features of science fiction express themselves in different works, creating cross-bred genres. For instance, the works that are examined in this study range from a classical science fiction tale about human endeavour to reach outer space to a science fictionalised rewriting of religious texts which blends science and mythology. As opposed to this cross-bred subgenre, we can regard another classical subgenre of science fiction studied in this thesis that is categorised under the label of 'space opera', which deals with voyages or adventures in space that involve spaceships, alien planets, and alien lifeforms. Despite their different themes and narrative structures, what ties these novels to each other is their imagining of alternative worlds which provokes radical thinking concerning our place in the universe by alienating the reader from their immediate environment. That is why, maybe, it should be considered a solid statement when Farah Mendlesohn expresses that "[...] sf is a discussion or a mode, and not a genre."⁵

Science fiction texts can embody various themes and story forms, making the genre more of a mode of writing than a strictly defined genre. However, it can also be claimed that there are some factors that one encounters when reading a text and deciding that the text is an example of science fiction. This study does not aim to discuss which components make a text 'science fiction' or delve into the complexities of discussing the limits or the necessary forms of the genre. Although it cannot be decisively declared that science fiction should be considered a genre on its own, it should benefit us when studying the texts of this study to regard science fiction as a genre that swings back and forth like a pendulum that is poised between the two poles, one pole referring to a full-fledged genre with rigid rules, the other referring to a cluster of thematic conventions that are barely held together. This study assumes that the novels which will be investigated in this study are generally classified as science fiction. This assumption is not to prevent a discussion on the nature of the texts in

⁵ Farah Mendlesohn, "Introduction: Reading Science Fiction", **The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction**, Ed. by. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.2.

question but to open the way to a discussion of the texts without being hindered by questions of canonicity by accepting a generalised accumulation of genre traits as the core components of its structure, such as space travel, the rise of robotics, alien invasions, and so on.

What this thesis aims to discuss is a shift in the history of science fiction. The main argument of this study is to propose that towards the end of the twentieth century, an alteration of perspective regarding ideas concerning the ontological being of humans took place in works of science fiction. After the Second World War, the genre became more existential and more sceptical towards the claims of universal truths, as faith in the progress of humanity became questionable. As a result, the narratives about human progress and scientific advancement were gradually replaced by stories that questioned the central locus of humanity in the grand scheme of things. This shift of perspective can be observed through the narrative, structure, and other elements of novels of that period. To demonstrate this shift, this thesis will analyse three novels written in the second half of the twentieth century. The chosen novels for this purpose are Arthur C. Clarke's **2001: A Space Odyssey** (1968), Doris Lessing's **Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta** (1979), and Iain M. Banks's **Consider Phlebas** (1987). This study considers the representations of bodies in science fiction as substantial indicators which pose questions concerning ontology and aims to show that by inspecting the bodily representation of the characters in these novels, one can interpret the ontological differences between the novels written in different decades and trace different approaches concerning the relationship between humans and other non-human beings.

The decades examined in this study pertain to the latter half of the twentieth century. The first half of the century saw an abundance of both written and visual texts that dealt with otherworldly beings, artificial beings, or mutated beings, which can be collectively categorised as 'the Others'. By the end of the twentieth century, the representation of the Other became increasingly insightful and nuanced in science fiction. In the early science fiction works, the concept of the Other was often used to evoke a sense of alienation in readers or to exploit their differences for shock value. However, it is important to note that this form of generalisation inevitably overlooks exceptional works. This generalisation aims to represent the broader trends of the era

rather than claiming to reflect the entirety of science fiction written during that time. This approach has gradually been replaced by a more critical perspective on the representation of the Other. In later works, the representation of the Other was utilised to challenge established truths and norms, paving the way for a radical re-evaluation of the world and its accepted beliefs. This study aims to show that these representations signify a shift in the human-centric worldview of the early parts of the century towards a de-centralised understanding of 'the human' in the later parts of the twentieth century. The study explains this transformation by referring to the concept of 'postmodernism'. The term 'postmodernism' is used to describe a specific cultural condition of the second half of the century, and it is used in this study to discuss its offshoot theory, 'posthumanism'. To explore the idea of change in the human-centric perspective in science fiction literature, this study inspects three British science fiction novels written in the second half of the twentieth century. The selected novels for this purpose are published approximately ten years apart from each other and serve to observe the changes happening in such a short time in the genre's approach to similar themes. Although the study aims to detect a variation in the genre's history, it does not aspire to encompass a wide range of novels written in that period but rather focuses on specific novels that show the symptoms of change and that deal with similar themes and contents.

Since this study examines a transitional period in the genre's history, it would be helpful to briefly review the genre's origins and its evolution leading up to the time when it became a more sophisticated and nuanced form of fiction. Finding a point of origin for science fiction might be hard, but it can be argued that it starts when our understanding of the world becomes scientific. Adam Roberts states that "[...] broadly speaking we can argue that sf begins at the time that science, as we understand the term today, begins."⁶ Roberts explains that science tries to explain the world without the excess of magic, and it tries to break away from the indoctrination of the Church.⁷ Thus, when one says that our understanding of the world becomes scientific, the

⁶ Adam Roberts, "The Copernican Revolution", **The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction**, Ed. by. Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint, Routledge, 2009, p.4.

⁷ **Ibid.**, pp. 3-6.

referred period spans almost five hundred years from the Copernican Revolution. Although some texts containing elements of science fiction appeared during these years, the true boom of science fiction which emerged in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, marking the true point of the genre's flourishing. Thus, the status of many of these fictional scientific texts as science fiction is therefore dubious, and they are only labelled as science fiction in retrospect. However, this does not mean that other works do not appear in history that bear similar elements to science fiction. One of the oldest texts which may be called science fiction retrospectively is Thomas More's **Utopia** (1516). As a fictional island state, Utopia is a socialist state that serves as an alternative government model to the kingdoms of Europe at the time. Constructed as a recollection of a sailor, the text questions the social and political condition of the world in that period by presenting an alternative society.⁸ The text and its subject matter bear similarities to the themes of science fiction literature, which generally deals with imagined communities, (such as extra-terrestrial worlds, alternative histories, or future states), or new worlds that are shaped by technological developments (such as hedonistic dystopias, surveillance societies, or future worlds determined by technocratic class divisions). This also shows that science fiction is not only a genre that is associated with imagination but also includes political commentaries. More's text is not written as a science fiction novel as the focus on scientific aspects of such texts only emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, the magazine previously called **Amazing Stories** used the subtitle 'The Magazine of Science Fiction' in the November 1932 issue⁹, indicating an emphasis on the content and the forms of the stories published within. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that More's text carries in its vein the same tendencies that modern science fiction does: an alternative world that parallels the world in which the text is written, a critical gaze towards contemporary problems, and a radical questioning of the condition of humanity and human nature in the context of their respective society.

⁸ Thomas More, **Utopia**, Second Edition, Trans. by Clarence H. Miller, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2014, **passim**.

⁹ Brian Stableford, **Science Fact and Science Fiction: An Encyclopedia**, Routledge, 2006, p. 463.

There are plenty of texts appearing in the history of literature similar to More's **Utopia**- such as Tommaso Campanella's **The City of the Sun** (1602), and Francis Bacon's **The New Atlantis** (1626), to name a few. Although these texts are more about political criticism and reflections on ideal governments rather than the effects of scientific advancements, their reflection on the human condition and, in relation, the ideal government in which humans can thrive are still subjects that appear in the spectrum of the science fiction genre. Apart from being the precursor texts of science fiction, they also inspired one of the most prominent subject matters in science fiction, 'dystopia'.

The tradition of dystopia found itself closely connected with science fiction elements, as these novels mostly dealt with technocratic manipulative governments, such as the surveillance society of George Orwell's **Nineteen Eighty-Four** (1949) where citizens are constantly watched through their telescreens¹⁰, or the hedonistic community of Aldous Huxley's **Brave New World** (1932) where the people are made docile through use of pleasure-giving drugs¹¹. Rather than composing stories about the ideal human society, dystopias focus on terrifying and bleak visions of future societies in which the individual is crushed beneath oppressive regimes or pushed to a state of compliant unawareness. It can be claimed that the genre of dystopia may be more dominant in our contemporary literature than the blissful visions of utopias. Although utopian narratives did not appear in the time when science fiction was accepted as a full-fledged genre, their counterparts leaned heavily on the scientific advancements used in the control of the population, making dystopias a form largely written as science fiction. Science fiction dystopias, thus, signify the connection between the genre and the texts that were written about four hundred years ago. These examples are used to show that the emergence of science fiction cannot be attributed to a single point in history. It is rather a hybrid of previous genres reimagined in a scientific context. That is why pinning down an origin point of the science fiction is difficult. However, it also cannot be denied that scientific novels started to have a canon of their own in the nineteenth century. This might be explained by the invasion of

¹⁰ George Orwell, **Nineteen Eighty-Four**, London, Penguin Books, 2000, *passim*.

¹¹ Aldous Huxley, **Brave New World**, London, Penguin Random House, 2007, *passim*.

technological development in the everyday lives of nineteenth-century people and an increase in scientific discourse in public life. The rise of the scientific discourse resulted in a literary interest in the consequences of scientific achievements. One of the first novels that focused on such a topic and heralded a new genre was Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein: Or the Modern Prometheus** (1818).

Paul K. Alkon boldly declares that "[s]cience fiction starts with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*."¹² Shelley's seminal novel uses the concept of scientific progress and the unchallenged authority of the scientist figure to create a gothic story and, in the process, constructs many of the hallmarks of science fiction yet to come. The novel questions the discrepancy between the ambition of humans and their powerlessness against the forces of nature that stand in the way of human ambition. The novel's titular character aims to create a creature from the body parts collected from the dead, and when he succeeds, he becomes haunted by it as the creature does not turn out the way Frankenstein imagined him to be.¹³ The novel delves into the questions of the creation of artificial life and the possible consequences of uncontrolled human actions through science. The novel presents the problematic aspects of human endeavours, such as humanity's god complex or meddling with forces beyond human comprehension. This results in a narrative that reflects on the horrific abyss of human nature and the dark forces of nature, amplified by the power of science in their capacity to interact with each other. Alkon poetically states "[f]or Mary Shelley it is the dream of science, not the sleep of reason, that produces monsters."¹⁴ Shelley's novel paves the way for the future of science fiction novels, which are about the forces of nature revealed through science, which itself becomes an instrument for channelling human fallacy. The narrative of human hubris intensified with technological apparatus signifies the historical conditions in which the genre was born, i.e. the industrial complex of the nineteenth century.

¹² Paul K. Alkon, **Science Fiction Before 1900: Imagination Discovers Technology**, Routledge, 2002, p.1.

¹³ Mary Shelley, **Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus**, London, Penguin Books, 1994, **passim**.

¹⁴ Alkon, **op. cit.**, p.5.

The technological developments of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century brought forward a rapid advancement in technology that has been dubbed many times as ‘the Industrial Revolution’. This point in history marked a technological advancement period which had never been observed before in the history of humankind. This technological development, which was unprecedented in history thus far, brought about a hefty urbanisation of the population in the major cities. Adding to that, scientific progress caused a major technological conversion of the everyday lives of people. Science started to have a tremendous effect on people’s lives through its practical outcomes with the invention of new machinery, such as the steam-powered engine which enabled a faster mode of transportation. Consequently, science fiction appeared partly as a literary response to these changes. While some writers of the time celebrated these new inventions and promoted the future inventions yet to come, some authors feared that these developments would have harmful impacts on humans. This new world, filled with technological marvels, started to produce its own literature concerning people’s anxieties and hopes about the future. The emergence of science fiction at the end of the nineteenth century can be considered as the consequence of these novel conditions of the world. At the end of the nineteenth century and at the start of the twentieth century, science fiction’s paradigm had been defined by two pioneers: Jules Verne and Herbert George Wells.

Jules Verne, who is considered an author who believed in human progress and scientific inventions, wrote his popular novel series **Voyages Extraordinaires** (The Extraordinary Journeys) in the late nineteenth century. This novel series dealt with extraordinary tales of inventions and adventures, such as travel to the moon via a giant cannon in **From the Earth to the Moon** (1865)¹⁵. The series also deals with the theme of exploration of uncharted territories, such as the exploration of the underworld beneath the Earth in Verne’s **Journey to the Centre of the Earth** (1864)¹⁶. Verne wrote many tales of extraordinary journeys and stories of scientific experiments and inventions. Although his novels dealt with what was scientifically possible, his vision

¹⁵ Jules Verne, **From the Earth to the Moon**, Trans. by Lowell Bair, New York, Bantam Classics, 2008, *passim*.

¹⁶ Jules Verne, **Journey to the Centre of the Earth**, Trans. by Lowell Bair, New York, Bantam Classics, 2006, *passim*.

was not alienly futuristic, and his stories did not dwell on the outer rims of imagination. Sarah Capitanio contends that:

[T]he vast majority of Verne's fiction is not futuristic. Apart from *Paris au XXe siècle* and, to a far lesser extent, *Robur-le-conquérant*, apparently set in the mid-to-late 1990s, Verne's novels are all more or less contemporaneous with their publication. However, as Alkon has pointed out, temporal displacement of narrative time into the future, although enhancing the possibilities of science fiction, is not a prerequisite. It is, of course, principally the nature and the perceived potential of the machines employed by the characters of Verne's novels that lend them a futuristic air; however, whilst these machines hover at times on the edge of fantasy, they very rarely leave the rational confines of what was technically possible at the time.¹⁷

Verne was an author who wrote novels that reflected on the possibilities achievable through science, not the products of wild imagination supported by pseudo-scientific concepts. His novels usually involved a scientific concept demonstrated in the form of an adventure novel. Following him a few decades after, H.G. Wells wrote narratives that similarly dealt with scientific concepts in a narrative form. His novels, however, did not limit themselves to what was possible at the time. Most notably, his novel **The Time Machine** (1895) depicts a machine which can travel in time backwards and forwards to gaze at the end of the civilisation.¹⁸ The invention of such a machine was by no means possible nor was imagined to be possible in the nineteenth century. Wells, however, did not dwell on the possibility or the impossibility of such a machine but he imagined what would ensue if such a machine indeed existed. By travelling to the edges of science and imagination, Wells became one of the pioneers of science fiction which dealt with themes that seemed improbable but not impossible. Brian Stableford expresses that “[t]he crucial invention of *The Time Machine* was the establishment of

¹⁷ Sarah Capitanio. “‘L’Ici-bas’ and ‘l’Au-delà’... but Not as they Knew it. Realism, Utopianism and Science Fiction in the Novels of Jules Verne”, **Jules Verne: Narratives of Modernity**. Ed. by. Edmund J. Smyth, Liverpool University Press, 2000, p.69.

¹⁸ H. G. Wells, **The Time Machine**, London, Penguin English Library, 2012, *passim*.

a paradigm example of a whole new class of narrative devices.”¹⁹ Wells’s legacy’s significance was emphasised by Stableford as follows:

Wells single-handedly laid the groundwork for the distinctive methods of modern sf, employing the narrative technique he had developed in *The Time Machine*, gaudily seasoned with melodrama, to reinvigorate the narrative framework of the moral *conte philosophique* far more effectively than anyone had previously contrived.²⁰

Wells started a paradigm for the future writers of science fiction to follow. His ‘scientific romances’ were very influential, which resulted in an abundance of ‘Wellsian Romances’.²¹ Although many of Wells’s contemporaries wrote science fiction stories, such as Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle, Wells’s influence was what primarily caused a wave of Wellsian Romances to be written in Europe.²² The influence of these two pioneers, the two pillars of science fiction to come, Verne and Wells, can be understood from what would be considered the first science fiction magazine’s editorial in its first issue, as the magazine describes the stories they aim to publish: “[T]he Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe type of story – a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision.”²³ These authors (excluding Edgar Allan Poe, as he is remembered mostly for his contribution to the Gothic genre) are not the only pioneers of science fiction, but the ones most remembered from the genre’s origins. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, science fiction had already established its two prominent classical authors and began its journey to canonise itself as a genre in the history of literature.

Following these authors and this period, the genre spread like wildfire via the magazines of the 1920s. In 1926, Hugo Gernsback founded the “scientifiction” (as the

¹⁹ Brian Stableford, “Science Fiction Before the Genre”, **The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction**, Ed. By. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.24.

²⁰ **Ibid.**, p.25.

²¹ **Ibid.**, p.26.

²² **Ibid.**, pp.26-31.

²³ Brian Attebery, “The magazine era: 1926–1960”, **The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction**, Ed. By. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.32.

genre was called back then) magazine **Amazing Stories** in the USA.²⁴ Brian Attabery states that “The period of sf history from 1926 to 1960 can justly be called the magazine era.”²⁵ This era marked a great change in the genre’s inclinations. This period was significant in that it paved the road on which science fiction would walk. Stableford states that “[i]t was from this point that the collaborative work of horizon-expansion, social extrapolation and moral resophistication which has been the labour and triumph of modern science fiction began anew.”²⁶ It was indeed a new era for science fiction in which more complex issues would be investigated in the narratives. This does not mean that the genre lacked any depth at all in the previous era. Wells’s **The Time Machine**, for example, can be read as a critique of the class division in England, which is expressed in the novel as the division between the two humanoid species, Morlocks and Eloi²⁷. However, it cannot be claimed that the early parts of the magazine era were full of sophisticated prose. The stories written in this period usually follow simple formulas:

The kind of fiction published in the magazine revealed its popular science and formula fiction parentage more obviously than its literary sources. Characterization was perfunctory and plots were often thinly disguised westerns, mysteries or lost-world romances. Several writers helped to translate these older formulas into what is now generally called ‘space opera’.²⁸

Thus, it is obvious that science fiction emerged as a new kind of story, one that provides a new setting for age-old formulas of storytelling. Another approach to storytelling in this genre was to devise stories that functioned as a background to showcase the marvels of imagined new technologies yet to be invented, such as laser guns, power suits, anti-gravity engines, and so on. Attabery states that “[w]ithin the pulp sf magazines, so long as a story invoked images of futuristic machines or mist-shrouded towers, the writer was free to violate most conventions regarding character

²⁴ Stableford, **op. cit.**, p. 31.

²⁵ Attabery, **op. cit.**, p.33.

²⁶ Stableford, **op. cit.**, p. 31.

²⁷ Wells, **The Time Machine**, *passim*.

²⁸ Attabery, **op. cit.**, p.34-35.

and plot.”²⁹ This approach exhibited a greater interest in the spectacle of the new and the imaginary, rather than the complexity of the plot or depth of character. The story was a backdrop for a show of spectacles. Attebery states that by “[u]sing this basic plot structure, the writer could introduce variations regarding the nature of the threat (aliens, rival scientists, natural disasters) and the invention (a time machine, a device to accelerate evolution, a death ray).”³⁰ These stories used narrative as a tool for displaying marvels or reimagining older stories in a new technological setting. In both cases, the written material suffered from a superficiality that did not aim for depth in narrative, but rather novelty.

The early years of superficial narratives and narrative techniques would soon be replaced by stories that not only dealt with the fancies of the inventive mind but also addressed the social problems of their age. This period would be conventionally called “the Golden Age of Science Fiction”. Attebery states that:

Campbell and his magazine *Astounding* stand for the second era of the sf magazines as Gernsback stands for the first. The period that begins with his editorship is often called the Golden Age of sf, and many of the best-known writers in the field first appeared in his magazine³¹

This Golden Age described by Attebery started in the year 1937 when John W. Campbell became the editor of the alternative sci-fi magazine called **Astounding Stories of Super-Science**, which started its publication in 1930. The magazine became the site of many stories that would be fondly remembered in the future, such as Isaac Asimov’s **Foundation** series. Attebery comments on this period: “A major innovation in magazine fiction from the 1940s on was the imagined application of experimental method and technological innovation not to physical problems but to fundamental questions about society and the mind.”³² From this point on, the genre starts to involve itself to a greater degree with socio-political problems and existential problems of humanity. It can be said that following the stories published in **Astounding Stories**,

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.35.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.36.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.37.

³² *Ibid.*, p.39.

the genre shifts its focus towards the contemporary issues of its times. For example, Arthur C. Clarke, whose novel **2001: A Space Odyssey** will be analysed in this study, “managed to combine the efficient story-telling of American sf with Wells’s social awareness and Olaf Stapledon’s visionary grandeur.”³³ The traces of this change brought about by the Golden Age can still be found in the stories of contemporary science fiction. Mendlesohn gives an example of the early years of the magazine era and underscores the change in the genre’s focus: “[g]radually, with most credit going to Weinbaum’s ‘A Martian Odyssey,’ aliens began to emerge as individuals. However, for the entirety of this period, it is impossible to escape the notion of hierarchy or human norms”³⁴ (the point of aliens emerging as individuals and the impossibility of escaping human norms will be important points in this study as well). The magazine era and the following Golden Age mark the point of science fiction surfacing as a prevailing genre. It also marks the point where contemporary issues are brought to the genre more frequently. Although the genre started to become more critical, one thing that has not completely changed was, as it was stated above, the human-centric approach to contemporary issues. The central place of humanity in the cosmos took precedence in the genre at this period of its history, and as with everything else, it was subjected to change as times changed. This study aims to capture such a change in the genre’s history by looking at a brief period in the history of science fiction. The period in question concerns roughly the years between the 1960s and 1980s. The reason why we look at this period is that it reflects a change in the genre’s approach to humanity and the ideas of human progression. It was also a period of great change in the world; it was the aftermath of the Second World War, and the hostile period known as the Cold War era had already started. After the dropping of atomic bombs, the nuclear armament race caused tension between the capitalist west and the communist east blocks. For science fiction writers, the atomic bomb was an important indicator of what science could achieve in terms of destruction and mayhem.

In the twentieth century, literary works belonging to the science fiction genre were produced much more frequently than in the previous centuries—if we accept

³³ *Ibid.*, p.42.

³⁴ Farah Mendlesohn, “Fiction: 1926–1949”, **The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction**, Ed. By. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 57.

utopias and imaginative works as a part of the science fiction canon that were produced before the term science fiction was coined—as a result of mass industrialization and acceleration in technological advancement. Throughout the years, the science fiction genre has evolved and has accumulated specific genre traits and themes, such as space travel, time travel, artificial life, the evolution of mankind, mutations of other animals, and so on. These speculations and projections concerning the future appeared as a byproduct of the industrial and technological advances of the twentieth century. Being able to produce aeroplanes, humans started to imagine interstellar travel. Being able to travel vast distances and progressing in physics, humankind started to ponder the possibility of travelling in time itself, imagining time as a grid or a map that can be traversed. The limits of scientific creativity became a hot topic, as exemplified by many tales, such as H.G. Wells's **The Island of Doctor Moreau** (1896) in which a mad scientist creates new forms of life by doing surgical operations on animals.³⁵ This was followed by the rise of robotics in literature, most famously by Isaac Asimov's robot tales. These ideas were conceived under the vastly expanding industrial complex of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century urbanisation and technological expansion. These themes occupied the first fifty years of the twentieth century science fiction writers. In the second half of the 20th century, with the approaching wave of new authors, the science fiction genre itself started to undergo changes and started to focus more on the philosophical and political implications of these changes.

In the second half of the century, the themes of science fiction started to turn towards topics more existential and intellectual in nature. This does not mean that the previously written works of science fiction were lacking in depth or lacking profound ideas. There are many previous works so profound that many science fiction works still aspire to reach their peaks. For example, Asimov's robot tales still influence writers of robot tales who try to follow Asimov's example. Frank Herbert's **Dune** (1965) is another example, as it can still be considered one of the most complex narratives of interstellar political warfare, imagining a future where politics are controlled by a group of elites who manipulate populations through the exploitation of religion and messianism, thus delving into the nature of politics and showing how

³⁵ H.G. Wells, **The Island of Dr. Moreau**, New York Barnes & Noble Books, 2004, *passim*.

prophetic leader figures can be dangerous³⁶. The number of these examples can be increased, but the main point of this argument is that there can be no clear-cut distinctions between the eras of science fiction. However, this does not mean that inclinations towards some singular issues or themes are not present in specific years. The early science fiction works, including the works that appeared in fanzines and comics, are usually rougher and elementary in their approach to their subject matters. In contrast, later works of science fiction are more political and sceptical. They try to incorporate scientific concepts with political commentary. For example, Ursula K. Le Guin, in her **The Dispossessed** (1974), reflects on the possibility of an ideal society, while criticising the utopian tendencies, creating, as the novel's subtitle states, 'an ambiguous Utopia'³⁷. These divisions can be regarded as coarse and rough, but their usefulness cannot be denied. As stated before, science fiction is a rather novel genre that emerged in the closing years of the nineteenth century. The emergence of these new and more fleshed-out and sometimes experimental ideas, appearing in the second half of the twentieth century can be attributed to the genre's natural growth. However, the second half of the century was also an age of rapid development. A genre which deals with change and progress cannot afford to stay behind the times. As the times became more complex, the contents of science fiction literature became more nuanced.

This was the period in which the idea of postmodernity took shape. During these years, ideas brought about by postmodernism affected the genre significantly. One of the aspects of postmodernism is a critical re-evaluation of the ideas of previous times. Science fiction also followed suit and critically reflected on itself concerning its human-centric approach to the world. In the scope of our study, we will focus on these ideas: how humanism created a human-centric world and how its postmodern branch, posthumanism, tries to de-centralise this world and create an ethical space.

As this study aims to examine the change in the genre's representation of bodies in the second half of the century, it is vital to understand the cultural and political conditions of the period. The second half of the twentieth century's intellectual and cultural space was dominated by the term 'postmodernism'. Postmodernism was a reactionary, yet at the same time, a complementary movement

³⁶ Frank Herbert, **Dune**, 50th Anniversary Edition, London, Hodder, 2005, *passim*.

³⁷ Ursula Le Guin, **The Dispossessed**, London, Gollancz, 1999, *passim*.

to the cultural movement of 'modernism'. After the end of the Second World War, postmodernism appeared as a reactionary force to the metanarrative of the modernist myth of progression. The horrors of the Holocaust and the partial destruction of Europe following the war created an unease regarding the myth of human perfectibility. Jean-François Lyotard points out a crisis of legitimation in this post-industrial and postmodern age. He states that "[...] the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the post-industrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age".³⁸ The change in the status of knowledge, whether there is a singular, universal truth to this world, for example, has become the topic of discussion in the postmodern culture. If modernism embodied the belief in the absolute faith in ideology, postmodernism was its complete antithesis, a disbelief in any constitutive narrative. As Jean-François Lyotard famously exclaimed "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives."³⁹ This incredulity toward metanarratives included a distrust of the advancements of Enlightenment ideals as well as the myth of human progression. Beatrice Skordili explains the term "grand narrative" as:

The term "grand narrative" was introduced by Jean-François **Lyotard** (1924-98) to describe the kind of story that underlies, gives legitimacy, and explains the particular choices a culture prescribes as possible courses of action. A grand narrative, also called a "master narrative," provides coherence by covering various conflicts [...] that arise in the history of a society. Examples of such narratives are Christianity, the Enlightenment, Capitalism and Marxism.⁴⁰

These all-encompassing ideologies are deemed as narratives, or myths, and their ability to answer every question in their self-enclosed system produced a narrative that is grand in scale and dubious in falsifiability. Lacking an outside system to judge its integral continuity, a grand narrative creates a salvation myth, which constitutes a

³⁸ Jean-François Lyotard, **The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge**, Trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, Minneapolis University Press, 1984, p. 3.

³⁹ **Ibid.**, p. xxiv.

⁴⁰ Beatrice Skordili, "grand narrative", **Encyclopedia of Postmodernism**, pp.164-165.

constantly deferred messianic time, such as the communist utopia of Marxism, or the apocalyptic Judgement Day of Christianity. These tendencies are a constant reminder that these ‘narratives’ have an end in sight. Lyotard refers to that idea by stating:

For example, the rule of consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value is deemed acceptable if it is cast in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds: this is the Enlightenment narrative, in which the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end — universal peace.⁴¹

This attitude towards a future point in time denotes a belief in salvation, an end time, a **telos** of history. In the postmodern era, these end goals are dissolving as they are poised against a rushing wave of almost nihilistic and somehow relativistic idealism. Uprooted from its metanarratives, such as human progress and the advancement of the rational mind, post-industrial and post-holocaust humanity suffers from a directionless sense of unease. The contradictory nature of the postmodern age creates a sense of helplessness and homelessness in the world. As Lyotard expresses: “[O]ur incredulity is now such that we no longer expect salvation to rise from these inconsistencies, as did Marx”.⁴² But the question here is: ‘Does this spell a disaster for humanity?’

If one chooses to look into the sociocultural affairs of humans in the postmodern age, one will see a radically critical undertaking of prominent and absolute ideals of the pre-modern and the modern world. One such loss in this critical undertaking results in the decline of theological beliefs in our salvation. In a world where everything is text and there is nothing outside of the constituted text (As Derrida famously stated, “there is no outside-text”⁴³), God becomes a meta-text to all intertextual human affairs. When the belief in the meta-text disappears, so does the belief in an absolute signifier that contains in itself, every possible answer to every problem. When the belief in absolute power wanes, the void that appears in its absence is filled with another force of a mythological figure. In this case, it was ‘the human’.

⁴¹ Lyotard, **op.cit.**, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

⁴² **Ibid.**, p. xxiv.

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, **Of Grammatology**, Trans. by. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 158.

The belief in human endeavour was not a new concept, and it is certainly not a postmodern innovation. On the contrary, the belief in humanity was one of the first components of the metanarrative of Enlightenment, which fell prey to the critical interpretation of scholars. Rosi Braidotti explains the human-centric idealism that appeared throughout history as follows:

At the start of it all there is He: the classical ideal of ‘Man’, formulated first by Protagoras as ‘the measure of all things’, later renewed in the Italian Renaissance as a universal model and represented in Leonardo da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man [...] An ideal of bodily perfection which, in keeping with the classical dictum *mens sana in corpore sano*, doubles up as a set of mental, discursive and spiritual values.⁴⁴

The human became the rational subject, the flag-bearer of history which unveiled the rational and ethical structure of the world. By this decree, the human became the universal standard. This exceptionalism, however, has been strictly criticised by posthuman ideas. As Braidotti states: “The posthuman provokes elation but also anxiety [...] about the possibility of a serious de-centring of ‘Man’, the former measure of all things.”⁴⁵ With the rise of postmodern ideas, ‘Humanism’ lost its claim on the universal declaration of an ethically righteous position. The twentieth century saw the most heinous acts in the name of human perfectibility. It was no different in earlier centuries either. As Tony Davies states:

All humanisms, until now, have been imperial. They speak of the human in the accents and the interests of a class, a sex, a ‘race’. Their embrace suffocates those whom it does not ignore. The first humanists scripted the tyranny of Borgias, Medicis and Tudors. Later humanisms dreamed of freedom and celebrated Frederick II, Bonaparte, Bismarck, Stalin. The liberators of colonial America, like the Greek and Roman thinkers they emulated, owned slaves. At various times, not excluding the present, the circuit of the human has excluded women, those who do not speak Greek or Latin or English, those whose complexions are not pink,

⁴⁴ Rosi Braidotti, **The Posthuman**, Cambridge, Polity, 2013, p. 13.

⁴⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 2.

children, Jews. It is almost impossible to think of a crime that has not been committed in the name of humanity.⁴⁶

By creating a standardised version of the ‘human’, the excluded ones become the ‘non-human’. This imperialist perspective of the anthropocentric narrative suffocates these so-called ‘non-humans’. This situation questions and undermines the superiority complex of humanism. Davies states “Certainly it should no longer be possible to formulate phrases like ‘the destiny of man’ or ‘the triumph of human reason’ without an instant consciousness of the folly and brutality they drag behind them.”⁴⁷ Adding to these criticisms, Cary Wolfe also harshly adds that

[H]umanism is, in so many words, its own dogma, replete with its own prejudices and assumptions—what Étienne Balibar calls “anthropological universals,” which are themselves a form of the “superstition” from which the Enlightenment sought to break free.⁴⁸

As its history became a burden and, as its narrative became problematic, humanism itself underwent a transformation. Through a postmodern lens, there came a new postmodern humanism, a posthumanism.

The concept of posthumanism appeared as a critical response to the centralised narrative of a human-centric perspective. The basic premise of the theory of posthumanism was the critique of the universalising narrative of humanism and its aim was to expose it as a construction. Michel Foucault sees the idea of ‘human’ as a product of historical construction. He states that:

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area – European

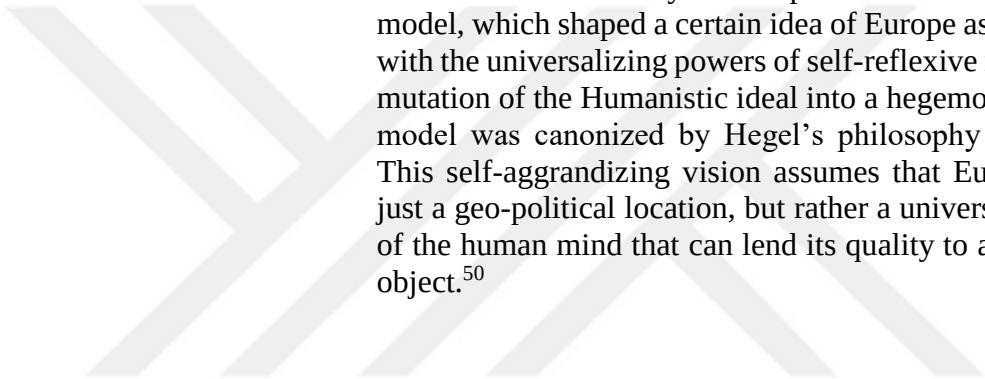
⁴⁶ Tony Davies, **Humanism**, London, Routledge, 1997, p.131.

⁴⁷ **Ibid.**, p.131

⁴⁸ Cary Wolfe, **What is Posthumanism**, London, University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. xiv.

culture since the sixteenth century – one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it.⁴⁹

Foucault posits the place of ‘man’ in a specific historical period. He regards man as a product of knowledge systems, or discourses, of a certain historical period, presenting it as a form of knowledge created by power relations. By referring to it as a sixteenth-century European invention, he also refers to its Eurocentric roots. Rosi Braidotti similarly brings up the Eurocentric nature of humanist ideals:



Humanism historically developed into a civilizational model, which shaped a certain idea of Europe as coinciding with the universalizing powers of self-reflexive reason. The mutation of the Humanistic ideal into a hegemonic cultural model was canonized by Hegel’s philosophy of history. This self-aggrandizing vision assumes that Europe is not just a geo-political location, but rather a universal attribute of the human mind that can lend its quality to any suitable object.⁵⁰

As Braidotti suggests, the idea of humanism creates a centre and concentrates the truth in its being. The ideas of human progression and human perfectibility parallel the image of the Eurocentric image of the Enlightened man, reinforced by Hegel’s understanding of the teleological spirit of history (Hegel’s idea of dialectics and progression will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1). To counteract these centralised narratives, one of the thinking strategies might be imagining the world without the human element, although it would be nearly impossible. In our narratives, we cannot escape our human-centric perspective, as we are, after all, humans. Eugene Thacker proposed a way of thinking about the world excluding humans, naming the concept ‘world-without-us’, in a very Heideggerian fashion. He proposes the idea that the planet Earth exists independent of human thought, which makes the world the existential other to our being.⁵¹ To look at the world as something outside of human

⁴⁹ Michel Foucault, **Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences**, Trans. by. Alan Sheridan, London, Routledge, 2005, pp.421-422.

⁵⁰ Braidotti, **op. cit.**, pp.13-14.

⁵¹ Eugene Thacker, **In the Dust of This Planet**, Winchester, Zero Books, 2011, p.5-7

existence can be a method to approach the world from a decentralised perspective. This is not to exclude the human in the grand scheme of things, or even to try to find a mode of being completely alien to us. It is a strategy to undermine our central place in the world to open a more ethical space for others—for example, the excluded non-humans—to speak out. This is the paradoxical point of view that needs tackling: How can we approach the world as humans without centralising our limited perspective in regard to the world but also without losing our particular human frame of reference?

This study will focus on how the human as a central figure as a grand narrative is being approached by science fiction writers of the second half of the twentieth century. The focal point of the study will be how posthumanist ideas that promote a radical rethinking of humanist idealism can be traced in the novels chosen for this study. It will be discussed how these novels progressively became more decentred in their approach to the theme of humanity's place in the universe.

It may be discussed that twentieth century science fiction shaped itself following the vein of these social and cultural metamorphoses. It may be claimed that twentieth century science fiction gradually became posthumanist. This statement needs clarification as to what is meant by 'posthumanist'. In this study by posthumanism we refer to an unorganised body of philosophical works that refer to the radical rethinking of the condition of being human. Included in this argument is the decentralisation of the human-centric perspective on the world. The study traces how science fiction became more diverse, or rather how science fiction tried to encapsulate other experiences besides that of humans: Non-humans and post-humans (here the term is used with a hyphen, as 'post-human', and the term is used to reference humans who have evolved beyond humanity to the point that they are no longer human but still hold some essence relating to their humanity). To understand this shift of perspective, this study focuses on how their bodies are represented in the text. To question why this specific theme is selected in a study of posthuman science fiction may need an explanation.

Literature has always included a form of representation of the body. While some texts, like Ovid's **Metamorphoses** (AD 8), directly discuss the issues of the body and the changes it goes through, some of the other texts choose to refer to the bodies of the characters briefly. In a literary text, the image of a character's body is usually

conveyed to the reader through the medium of descriptive narrative. A character's description is the first impression readers are given concerning the outward appearance of the character's body. Sometimes, a text may deduce some character traits from the external image of its characters. At other times, it touches upon the subject briefly in order to provide the reader with enough material to barely visualise its characters. Also, it should not be forgotten that we exist in the world with our bodies, and we perceive the world through our bodies—through the sensory organs attached to our bodies. Bodies are the media through which we perceive the outside world. Through bodily sensors, we interact with the outside world. As they are an integral part of our existence, bodies appear in nearly all literary texts. When a character is introduced, the reader usually visualises a body for the character in order to associate the text with their perception of the outside world. This may be a way of creating a link with the text on a personal level, or a way to materialise the text to make it more substantial in the mind's eye. Every character is, in one way or another, given a shape in the reader's mind and its gateway is the body of the character. So, it can be said that a body and its quasi-visual image are always present in a text. However, the bodies presented in texts are sometimes given extra significance.

This study tries to capture those significant representations of the body and aims to demonstrate how the body functions as a way of determining and discussing the ontological conditions of the subjects depicted in the novels. In this way, the discussion of our study moves toward the ontological discussions of the characters, revealed to us through a close reading of the texts. Science fiction can create a critical space for readers, by alienating the reader and presenting an upside-down world of our contemporary society. In a strange yet familiar world, our most basic assumptions and our most secure beliefs will be shaken, and the world of possibilities will allow many different interpretations concerning our ontology, our mode of existence, and our **raison d'être**.

The study is divided into three chapters and discusses three chosen novels written in ten-year intervals, which situates the focal point of our discussion between the 1960s and 1980s. This almost thirty-year period can be likened to a cocoon, holding in itself both modern and postmodern ideas, both humanist and posthumanist. It is the

convergence point of ideas of central ideologies and multiplied truths. In terms of Deleuze and Guattari, it is the nest of both trees and rhizomes.⁵² It holds both the tree-like structure of modernism, which favours progress and truth symbolised in a single line that reaches towards the heavens, and the rhizome-like structure which multiplies, breaks down, and adheres **ad infinitum**.

The choice of these three authors also signifies an interesting phenomenon. As discussed above, postmodernism promotes the deconstruction of grand narratives, creating a crisis of legitimacy, and criticises any self-enclosed system that legitimises itself through itself. This also blurs the line between high art and low art, literary works and genre fiction. The first of this study's chosen authors is Arthur C. Clarke, a prolific science fiction author, who largely confined his writing to the genre of science fiction. The second work's author is Doris Lessing, a writer who is considered to be creating rather 'highbrow' literary fiction. However, her science fiction tetralogy **Canopus in Argos** is effectively a genre fiction. It encompasses many different philosophical arguments dressed in the skin of science fiction. This marks a shift towards the artificial division between a genre writer and a writer of 'serious works' being dissolved. To complete this transformation, Iain M. Banks can be regarded as the postmodern embodiment of genre division. He is both a 'serious writer', —consider his **The Wasp Factory** (1984), and a genre writer, —**Consider Phlebas**. This shows how the distinction between literary forms is gradually vanishing and how another grand narrative, the literary canon, is being dispersed in the postmodern age.

The first chapter of this study aims to investigate the three different representations of bodies in Arthur C. Clarke's novel **2001: A Space Odyssey** and is accordingly divided into three parts. The first part of Chapter 1 discusses how the novel utilises the theory of evolution to focus on the narrative of humankind's dormant potential. However, by using the theory of evolution, Clarke also shows how humans are not the final product of a process, but rather a step in a great flux. This approach enables two critical readings: one approach believes in human progress and its destined greatness, while the other emphasises the insignificance of humanity compared to the

⁵² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, **A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia**, Trans. by. Brian Massumi, London, University of Minnesota Press, 2005, pp. 3-25.

vastness of the cosmos. In the first part of Chapter 1, this approach is discussed by referencing Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming, and smooth and striated spaces. The representation of humanity is inspected with references to posthumanist and transhumanist ideas.

In the second part of Chapter 1, the bodily depiction, or rather the absence of bodily depiction, of the extra-terrestrial beings is discussed by referring to Hegel's theory of dialectics of the master-slave relationship. Aliens in the novel are regarded as the master cultivators of human intelligence, and they are projected as the future possible versions of humans. This division between humans and aliens is discussed within the frame of the master-slave relationship, and it is discussed how the author himself was unable to escape this dualism in his novel. It is argued that the author finds himself in a Nietzschean slave mentality when he envisions the relationship between humans and aliens.

In the third part of Chapter 1, a constructed body, HAL 9000 and his body, the spaceship itself, are discussed and it is explored how HAL 9000 is presented to the reader as a machine that can think and feel like a human being. It is put forward that HAL 9000 symbolises a liminal experience, a being that is almost human but not entirely. His attitude towards his own death is examined by using Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein and Dasein's attitude towards its own end, its own death, as a being-towards-death. It is expressed that Hal 9000's being is described to the reader as a conscious and sentient being. By giving HAL 9000 a humanlike personality and consciousness, it is discussed how the author explores the experience of the Other as an authentic being.

The second chapter discusses Doris Lessing's **Re: Colonised Planet 5: Shikasta** as a novel that signifies a transitional period in science fiction history. The chapter is divided into two parts investigating the representations of absent bodies and biological bodies. The first section explores how the concept of absent bodies, the type of body which is not presented to the reader directly but only through suggestions and references, is used to understand the duality of mind and matter. It will be discussed how the novel uses the concept of absent bodies, which is usually associated with

powerful beings who function like gods, as a way of reflecting on the problems of humanity. It will be discussed how the Canopeans, the alien overseers of the planet Shikasta, which is another name for our planet Earth, provide a mode of living in harmony and order with others and it will be shown how these ideas can be associated with the rational idealism of Plato. It will be discussed how these aliens function as beneficial providers of humanity who seem to help humans achieve peace and spiritual prosperity.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the representations of biological bodies, which can be described as beings who have a biological and organic body rather than an absent representation of the body. The discussion focuses on two different representations: The one called endemic species refers to the original human inhabitants of planet Shikasta. It is discussed how Lessing creates a myth about the human condition similar to the narratives of religious doctrines. It is inspected how the novel problematises the human condition by suggesting that a lack of connection between each member of a species and an excess of self-indulgence can create dissonance. In the second part that discusses the concept of biological bodies, the shape-shifting aliens are discussed and referred to as an imitator species. The Canopeans who take the form of humans exhibit a tendency to fail in the material world just like the native inhabitants of Shikasta do. In this part, it is inspected how the aliens who live as humans experience the hardships of the material world. It is suggested that the novel proposes the idea that although Canopean idealism is beneficial for humanity, the obstacles of material existence are not really easy to overcome. Overall, this chapter marks a transition period where science fiction shifts from an overtly anthropocentric point of view to a story form that promotes a decentralised way of representing humanity. It shows that humanity is not the centre of the universe, and it also implies a belief in the rational world as a sign that science fiction has not become a posthuman genre completely, as it still clings to idealism and rationalism, which are the signifiers of human intellectual activity. It is a novel that shows that humans are not central to the universe and they are far too little in the grand scheme of things. But the novel also avoids overlooking the human experience and

suffering, showing that a totally rational and orderly world is not effortless because matter is a powerful hindrance in the way of achieving true peace and wisdom.

In Chapter 3, **Consider Phlebas** is discussed by examining how it reinterprets the space opera subgenre by deconstructing its anthropocentric features and weaving a postmodern narrative which plays with the contents of a conventional space opera. The chapter in general discusses how the novel can be read as a postmodern and posthumanist science fiction novel, as it decentralises the narrative of humanity's myth of the potential to rule the universe by presenting myriad beings such as smart small robots called drones or metaphysical supercomputers called Minds and positioning humans equal to, or below, these machines. The discussion is divided into two subchapters.

The first subchapter discusses the representations of biological bodies and ironically names these bodies as 'holy bodies'. The reason for this is that the novel problematises biological bodies and uses them as a way of showing how the Idirans, three-legged nearly immortal aliens of **Consider Phlebas**, consider themselves as the superior race in the universe and how they regard every other species as inferior. This is doubled by the fact that the Idirans see themselves as the chosen race of the true God, the god of their own culture. The novel illustrates how the Idirans perceive their faith in their nearly immortal body as a host for their immortal soul. This is used as a way of undermining the sanctity given to the body by the Idirans, because the novel continuously demonstrates how a biological body is not radically different from other body types, such as a mechanical body, as the universe is filled with sentient lifeforms that inhabit different forms of bodies. This part of the chapter discusses the depiction of biological bodies, how the novel plays with the idea of the biological body, and how it represents it as something changeable. Consequently, the novel suggests that a body is not a locus of universal truth but rather an aspect of a sentient being.

In the second subchapter, the study discusses three different body types: mechanical bodies, absent bodies, and a mixture of the two. In the novel, an intergalactic civilisation named the Culture is presented as a human-machine hybrid society. The Culture regards machines as sentient beings and is largely organised by

the artificial intelligence of machines. It will be discussed how the novel envisions a posthuman world where human agency is not only diminished but also where machine intelligence can be regarded as a true living being. Then the discussion will proceed to inspect a godlike absent being who transcended the material world and became a guardian for the planets of dead civilisations. It will be shown how that figure is presented as something dead and soulless, unlike other representations of absent beings which are associated with being powerful, wise and divine. It will be stated how this being is countered by another godlike being, a Mind. A Mind is a half-material, half-metaphysical supercomputer, which is depicted as a sentient machine that has a vast data storage capacity and greatly enhanced computational power. The chapter discusses how this computer functions like a demigod and how it blurs the line between divine existence and the material plane, thus acting as a transgressive force that attacks the artificial mind/body duality. In this chapter, it will be inspected how this act of blurring the lines between material existence and the ethereal existence of the Mind acts as a posthuman undertaking.

This study aims to look at these three novels to detect how the figure of the human is represented through its bodily depiction, and how the Other is physically represented bodily in relation to the figure of the human. The following discussions attempt to provide close readings of passages taken from the selected novels to inspect how the ideas and representations concerning humans and their figures of others have changed in twentieth century science fiction novels originating from the British Isles.

CHAPTER 1

EVOLUTION, TRANSCENDENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: NEW BODIES IN ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S *2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY*

2001: A Space Odyssey is a novel that is positioned at an intersection in the genre's history, reflecting on the human condition, humanity's potential, and our future, with precise details about the potential consequences of contact with aliens, the development of artificial intelligence, and the possibility of colonisation of outer space. Many of the subjects that the novel discusses have already been the subject of earlier novels, but the approach to these subjects begins to differ in the novels written in the second half of the century. To give an example, contact with extra-terrestrial life had been the subject of many novels that precede **2001: A Space Odyssey**, such as H. G. Wells's **The War of the Worlds** (1898) in which a Martian invasion on Earth is chronicled.⁵³ In contrast to Wells's somehow xenophobic narrative can be Iain M. Banks's 1987 novel **Consider Phlebas**. The novel weaves a narrative in which the aliens are presented as citizens within their humanlike and complex societies, not as the aggressive inhuman Martians caricatures of early narratives.⁵⁴ As can be observed, the subject matter of extra-terrestrial life exists in both novels with each one taking a different approach. Wells's novel depicts aliens in a xenophobic light while Banks presents them as three-dimensional characters who have their own values and cultures. Clarke, on the other hand, sees them as imperceptible, godlike beings who have evolved beyond the physical realm and have transcended the boundaries of matter. When the chronology of these novels is observed, one can discern a pattern: Aliens who once were wicked invaders are later promoted to the position of alien gods, and eventually, they become merely another civilisation in the universe that exists independent of humanity. The frightening other is replaced with another frightening but godlike other. The first two approaches position the extra-terrestrial alien at the margins of human experience. Iain Banks tries a different way in his narrative. With Banks's approach, the extra-terrestrial aliens become three-dimensional, humanlike

⁵³ Wells, **The War of the Worlds**, *passim*.

⁵⁴ Iain M. Banks, **Consider Phlebas**, London, Orbit, 2008, *passim*.

figures. They are not the aggressive invaders nor the transcended godlike beings, but members of a different civilisation. Although this is an oversimplified approach to the history of the alien invasion narrative, it is not without merit. From the genre's inclination towards a "we versus them" mentality, which cannot escape a binary system of relationships between two cultures, the genre reaches towards a more complex understanding of different cultures and different beings, promoting a multiplicity of truths.

This example is only one of the many issues which underwent significant change during the transition period that occurred at the halfway point of the twentieth century. Based on these arguments, this chapter aims to look at a text positioned at the end of the Golden Age of science fiction and at the beginning of a new wave of science fiction. To point out the changes in the genre, Clarke's text will be discussed through the lens of representation of bodies in three forms—the evolutionary, the absent, and the constructed body—and it will seek to uncover the significance of these bodily representations in the text.

1.1. Evolutionary Bodies In *2001: A Space Odyssey*

2001: A Space Odyssey was published in 1968 as a novelisation of the famous film of the same name, which was directed by the acclaimed director Stanley Kubrick. It can be regarded as one of the most peculiar events in the history of art: a film and a novel emerging together in a unified form. For many, the novel has served as a way of clarifying the complex issues which are hinted at, but not directly shown in Kubrick's film. However, as Suparno Banerjee expresses, "a close comparative examination of the novel and the film clearly shows that Clarke's novel is neither an explanation nor a novelization of the film but a work existing independently."⁵⁵ Banerjee adds that the novel is "an independent work with inherent differences from the movie."⁵⁶ Banerjee also claims that "the film and the novel are products of two completely different media

⁵⁵ Suparno Banerjee. "2001: A Space Odyssey': A Transcendental Trans-location", **Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts**, Vol. 19, No. 1 (72), International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, 2008, p. 39.

⁵⁶ **Ibid.**, p. 39.

and should be seen as such.”⁵⁷ As stated by Banerjee, due to their nature as two different media, they can be examined as two independent works. It should be noted that the novel and the film do not necessarily overlap with each other. In some parts, they diverge from each other and take different paths. While the film heavily depends on its power as a visual narrative, the novel uses the advantage of verbal and discursive elements to discuss its philosophical arguments more descriptively. Banerjee expresses this difference by stating, “Clarke’s novel is painstaking in its commentary, precise in its reasoning, and detailed in its analysis. Kubrick’s movie is suggestive in operation, deliberately intuitive in its function, and mystically vague in the end.”⁵⁸ Arthur C. Clarke himself adds in his “Foreword” to the novel that “[t]he novel you are about to read has sometimes been criticized for explaining too much, and thus destroying some of the movie’s mystery[...] But I am quite unrepentant: the printed text has to give much more detail than can be shown on the screen”.⁵⁹ Following Banerjee’s example, this study regards Clarke’s **2001: A Space Odyssey** as a work independent of its film counterpart and focuses only on the issues that are brought up in the novel.

One of the issues that forms the subject of the novel is the concept of changing bodies. In this study, this term is used to denote organic, biological bodies, which are represented in a state of flux, or in a state of metamorphosis. Clarke’s novel concerns itself with this concept, as it is a novel about humanity’s constant change and its evolution throughout history, and potential future changes of the human body.

To start the argument, it might be beneficial to briefly examine the structure of the novel. In order to categorise the use of changing bodies in the text, it would be useful to create an artificial division for this examination. If such a division is possible in the context of changing bodies, it can be argued that the novel is divided into three parts. The first part depicts primates, or as they are called in the novel, the man-apes, who will later be forced to evolve into humans, as we use the term today. Thus, they are aptly named man-apes, an intermediate form between the ape and man. They are

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵⁹ Arthur C. Clarke. “Foreword to the Millennial Edition”, **2001: A Space Odyssey**, New York, Roc, 2000, p, xviii.

largely depicted in their natural habitat in the savannas of Africa. The disadvantages they have against nature are also discussed in the first part. The second part tells the story of our contemporary human condition. Humans who have aspired to reach the stars now have the means to do so. Thus, this part is the point of reference to portray and represent the contemporary understanding of the human body. In the second part, there does not appear to be any theme of evolutionary change in humans unlike the first part. It focuses more on the achievements of the descendants of the man-apes. However, the focus of the novel changes when the novel enters its third part. The third and last part depicts the evolution of mankind, in which a man turns into some form of being attuned to cosmic powers, a being which seems to be superior to our contemporary standards of humanity in terms of his cosmic understanding and physiology. Thus, it can be said that the novel divides itself into these three parts in order to portray an evolutionary process: 'The proto-human' (or the man-apes as the novel calls them), 'the human', and 'the post-human' (or 'Star-Child' as the novel names him).

The novel represents humanity in a state of constant evolution. This evolution, however, seems not to be natural but imposed on humanity by the aliens. It is a journey of overcoming the obstacles erected by nature with the help of an outside force. It can be claimed that Clarke's novel depicts humanity as a species that is heavily affected by its immediate environment. At the beginning of the novel, the man-apes are depicted in a condition of total dependency on their natural habitat. In the part where Moon-Watcher, the main protagonist of the first part of the novel, returns to his tribe after leaving his father's dead body under a bush for hyenas to eat, the text gives a brief glimpse into the lives of these man-apes:

His two mates, the adults from the other caves, and most of the youngsters were foraging among the drought-stunted trees farther up the valley, looking for berries, succulent roots and leaves, and occasional windfalls like small lizards or rodents. Only the babies and the feeblest of the old folk were left in the caves; if there was any surplus food at the

end of the day's searching, they might be fed. If not, the hyenas would soon be in luck once more.⁶⁰

From this excerpt, it can be observed that their conditions are shaped by their natural habitats. The man-apes play the role of prey in nature. It is also inferred that they are yet herbivorous, and they have been finding their food by searching the nearby plants and trees. Their survival depends on what nature gives them. They are integrated into an ecological system in which they are not at the top of their hierarchical chain. Their bodies are depicted as weak and feeble, and they always lack the necessary energy to be more active in their environment. For example, Moon-Watcher cannot afford to spend his energy on any unnecessary activity other than sustaining his existence. When two babies feel weak from hunger and whimper to Moon-Watcher, he snarls at them, and he is confronted by their mother immediately:

One of the mothers, defending the infant she could not properly feed, gave [Moon-Watcher] an angry growl in return; he lacked the energy even to cuff her for her presumption.⁶¹

They live in this environment as beings who hold almost no other purpose than to sustain their lives. Even their power relations and their impulse to prove superior to one other are subjected to the power of hunger. Their social relations are decided by their material needs. Their lack of energy prevents them from unshackling the bounds of their environment and changing their way of life.

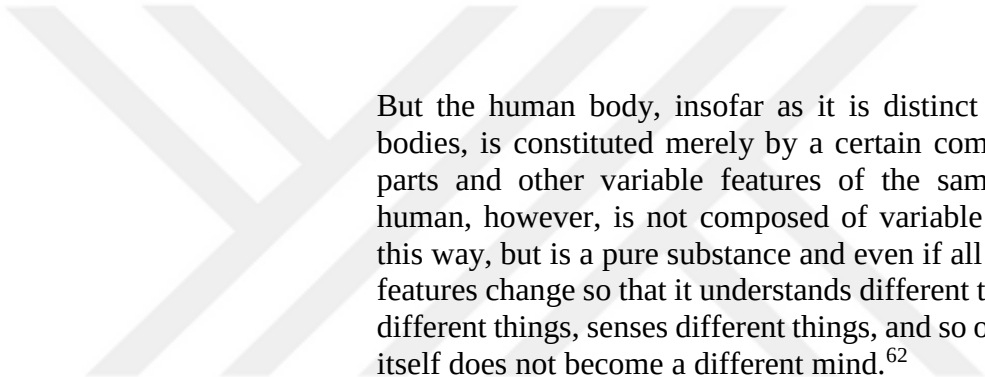
It is notable how the condition of their body affects their way of being. Their inability to overcome their physical restrictions makes them solipsist and self-centred beings. Therefore, they lack a strong sense of community and empathy. When a leopard attacks one of the man-apes, they do not try to protect the one who is being attacked, as this would also put them in danger. Thus, their bodies which are directly

⁶⁰ Arthur C. Clarke, **2001: A Space Odyssey**, New York, Roc, 2000, pp. 5-6.

⁶¹ **Ibid.**, p. 4.

affected by their environment also make them a highly self-reliant community. It is implied that these conditions will remain as such until an alien race descends to Earth to experiment with the man-apes.

The depiction of man-apes as weak creatures due to their insufficient nutrition is a dominant theme at the beginning of the novel. It is significant as it clearly shows how one's body is directly shaped by one's environment and how one's condition of the body directly affects one's state of mind. It is a departure from the Cartesian duality of the body and the spirit. Descartes describes the mind as follows:



But the human body, insofar as it is distinct from other bodies, is constituted merely by a certain combination of parts and other variable features of the same sort; the human, however, is not composed of variable features in this way, but is a pure substance and even if all its variable features change so that it understands different things, wills different things, senses different things, and so on, the mind itself does not become a different mind.⁶²

Cartesian thinking divides the body and the mind into two different parts. While Descartes calls the mind immortal, he regards the body as perishable.⁶³ He gives the mind a divine and mystical superiority. By calling the mind unchangeable, Descartes creates a hierarchy between the mind and the body. However, the novel suggests that they are inseparable, as they directly influence each other. As it is stated above, this situation is first observed when it is implied that the selfish acts of man-apes stem from the weakness of their bodies. Apart from them, their familial bonds are much weaker than our contemporary understanding of the human mind. When Moon-Watcher leaves his father, he cannot even mourn him: "Moon-Watcher left the body under a small bush [...] and hurried back to rejoin the tribe. He never thought of his father again."⁶⁴ This shows that the concept of mourning has not yet appeared in Moon-Watcher's

⁶² Rene Descartes, **Meditations**, Trans. by. Desmond M. Clarke, Penguin Books, 2010, p. 7.

⁶³ **Ibid.**, p. 7.

⁶⁴ Clarke, **2001: A Space Odyssey**, p. 5.

mind, only a “dim disquiet that was the ancestor of sadness”⁶⁵. Although this shows that this emotion is yet to come and Moon-Watcher has the potential to feel these emotions, it is still in its infancy, expected to come with the nourishment of the mind. The lack of a strong sense of grief is caused by the lack of resources. In a harsh environment where survival depends on optimum energy management, one cannot afford to exhaust oneself with grief. In the text, all the mind’s functions are the outcomes of material conditions, implying very strongly that the mind is an integral part of the body. The argument that the text follows suggests one’s body and one’s mind are connected, and they can be both shaped by any outside influence. So, the novel claims that the mind is not an independent entity. It is closely connected with the body, and it goes through changes with the body. Although the man-apes have minds of their own, it cannot be claimed that the content or the structure of their mind remains unchanged.

Following this line of thought, the novel suggests that if one’s body is susceptible to outside influence, it can evolve unexpectedly due to the outside influence. The first chapter of the novel ends with the following statement: “And twice there passed slowly across the sky, rising up to the zenith and descending into the east, a dazzling point of light more brilliant than any star”.⁶⁶ Although it is not explained what this light is, it can be taken as the implication of an extra-terrestrial race which appears in the following chapters. That point of light implies that the universe is larger than the system in which the man-apes are living. Although their environment seems like a closed system, a possibility of intervention from the outside is present. The universe is not empty, and it hosts forms of life that are superior—superior in technology and in rational thinking that is—to the man-apes. One superior form of life, this ‘alien race’, functions as an accelerator that speeds up the process of humanity’s evolution. These beings force humanity to evolve. It is implied that the man-apes would have a chance to evolve naturally. They have the potential to become human:

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[Moon-Watcher] was nearly five feet high, and though badly undernourished weighed over a hundred pounds. His hairy, muscular body was halfway between ape and man, but his head was already much nearer to man than ape. The forehead was low, and there were ridges over the eye sockets, yet he unmistakably held in his genes the promise of humanity. As he looked out upon the hostile world of the Pleistocene, there was already something in his gaze beyond the capacity of any ape.⁶⁷

His physical features imply a space for building a bridge between the proto-human and the human. Moon-Watcher has the potential to change his body. He shows some signs of becoming more than a man-ape, who, as of now, is bound to a closed environmental system. This is also implied when the narrator states that “of all the creatures who had yet walked on Earth, the man-apes were the first to look steadfastly at the Moon”.⁶⁸ They are rare in their desire to reach for the stars. These are strong indications in the novel which implies that their eventual evolution is almost guaranteed whether it is forced from outside or not. However, the system in which they live is a great setback.

This is a very optimistic outlook on the idea of human progress. It is an indication of belief in humanity’s eventual destiny that lies in outer space. This notion can be traced back to the political atmosphere of space travel at the time in which the novel was written. In 1961, Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin was the first man to go to space. About seven years later, The United States of America launched Apollo 11 to reach the Moon. These are all monumental points in the history of humankind. It can be said that space exploration has been closely associated with human development. It is regarded as a great achievement in the advancement of civilization. Thus, Moon-Watcher’s habit of gazing at the Moon is a foreshadowing of the achievements of mankind. Space is regarded as a frontier that will be open to humans in the future, as it happens in the later sections of the novel.

However, the potential for evolution is restrained by the inefficacy of their bodies: “In those dark, deep-set eyes was a dawning awareness - the first intimations

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

of an intelligence that could not possibly fulfil itself for ages yet, and might soon be extinguished forever”.⁶⁹ The harsh environment in which they live has the danger of causing this species’ extinction. The extinction, however, is prevented by an outside intervention.

This intervention is represented by the figure of the crystalline monolith. It is implied in the novel that some sort of advanced alien race has built a monolith overnight in the vicinity of the caves of man-apes, and afterwards, the aliens use it to experiment with them. It emits a sound that is similar to drumming and all the members of the man-ape clan are drawn to the monolith. The monolith uses pain and pleasure as stimuli to impose on them the ability to use their hands more efficiently. The monolith studies the reactions of man-apes and uses them like “a puppet controlled by invisible strings”.⁷⁰ At that point, it would be beneficial to regard this event through Deleuze’s concept of ‘becoming.’ Cliff Stagoll explains ‘the concept as follows:

Becoming is the pure movement evident in changes between particular events. This is not to say that becoming represents a phase between two states, or a range of terms or states through which something might pass on its journey to another state. Rather than a product, final or interim, becoming is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogeneous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end-state.⁷¹

It can be claimed that the man-apes’ evolution is a fine example of what is called ‘becoming’. Although ‘becoming’ tends towards no particular goal or end and although it is clear that the aliens have a plan for the man-apes, the very dynamic and the very act of transition is not altogether excluded from a ‘becoming subject’.

⁶⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 4.

⁷⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 14.

⁷¹ Cliff Stagoll “Becoming.” **The Deleuze Dictionary: Revised Edition**. Ed. by. Adrian Parr, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2005, p. 25.

Consequently, it can be said that the man-apes are subjects which can be categorized under the label of becoming subjects. According to Deleuze, the process of becoming can take place with the folding of the smooth or the striated place. Smooth places are open spaces on which a folding can easily be operated. Striated spaces, on the other hand, are more limited to change. They are, however, able to affect each other. Deleuze and Guattari claim that:

We must remind ourselves that the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space.⁷²

A process of becoming happens on a smooth space. A movement on a smooth space folds that space and recodes the space accordingly. The smooth space allows movement more freely than a striated space. Deleuze and Guattari associate the smooth space with “horizonless milieu [...] steppe, desert, or sea”, places where a sense of boundlessness is prominent. However, as the smooth space folds on itself, in Deleuze and Guattari’s words, it becomes more stratified. From a more open and free space that allows more freedom of movement, it becomes more stable and more territorialized.⁷³ Deducing from this, it can be said that the man-apes are similar to and can be associated with the smooth space rather than a striated space. In their case, they are more open to the outside influence of aliens’ experiments. They can be controlled and manipulated into doing things by the crystalline monolith. Their brains can be regarded as a smooth space. It is an area where aliens can easily move. As the aliens continue to experiment on them, the brains of man-apes also start to change:

⁷² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, **op. cit.**, p.474

⁷³ **Ibid.**, pp. 474-500.

There were gaps in Moon-Watcher's life now that he would never remember, when the very atoms of his simple brain were being twisted into new patterns. If he survived, those patterns would become eternal, for his genes would pass them on to future generations.⁷⁴

Their brains, acting as a smooth space, fold more and more as the days pass by. This folding recodes their habits, their way of thinking and their understanding of the world. Their brains are recoded in a way that it passes to their predecessors.

This change starts in their bodies and it is directly associated with their understanding of the world. In the quote that follows, it is exemplified how the change in their brain structure is closely associated with their ability to use their bodies:

Others did stranger and still more pointless things. Some held their hands out at arm's length and tried to touch their fingertips together - first with both eyes open, then with one closed.⁷⁵

They are forced to use their fingers in order to use the parts of their brains that they have not used up until that point. It is stated in the novel that "the very atoms of [Moon-Watcher's] simple brain were being twisted into new patterns."⁷⁶ The change in the structure of their brains brings about some radical novelties in the man-apes' lives. They start to make tools and use these tools to kill other animals. Up until that point, they have been on a strictly plant-based diet. However, when they have some tools at their disposal to help them hunt, they start killing other animals to eat them. So, their

⁷⁴ Clarke, 2001: *A Space Odyssey* p.19

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

diet becomes more meat-based. Although they were omnivores from the start, they did not have access to a meat-only diet. Their bodily change, the change in their brain structure, results in a change in their eating habits. Afterwards, they use parts of the animals as kitchen utilities by using the bones of the dead animals as saws and forks. Then, one of the most radical things happens in the evolution of the man-apes; one of the man-apes start to imagine: “With an immense effort of imagination, he visualized the dead antelope - in the safety of his own cave”.⁷⁷ This marks the beginning of their ascension. With imagination, they diverge from the path of their former selves. They take their first step towards being our contemporary humans. It is the beginning of their ascension to godlike beings.

They use the new tools to protect themselves from other predators. Soon afterwards, they start to kill other man-apes. While killing members of their own species, they use the head of a leopard as a symbol to frighten them. This marks the point of their using symbols, a system of signification. Again, this shows that they are slowly coding a cultural system. This is soon followed by the invention of language, and they start to live in towns and cities, and they start wars. They become human as we know them today.

Although rough around the ages, their evolutionary odyssey starting from the man-apes to humans has been completed. This is stated in the novel when Moon-Watcher reflects upon his condition: “Now he was master of the world, and he was not quite sure what to do next. But he would think of something.”⁷⁸ This is a significant remark, as it implies that now the man-apes are no longer an ineffectual part of an ecological system, but they have started to regulate and control it. This does not apply to Moon-Watcher’s case completely. Moon-Watcher sees himself as the inheritor of the world, although it will be much later for humans to be the so-called master of the world. It is a reference to the future generations. Future generations will inherit the earth as its “masters”.

It is shown in the novel’s second part which depicts humanity as the explorers of outer space, that humankind has evolved from being man-apes, a state of being that has been trapped by their surrounding system, to regulators and organisers of their

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

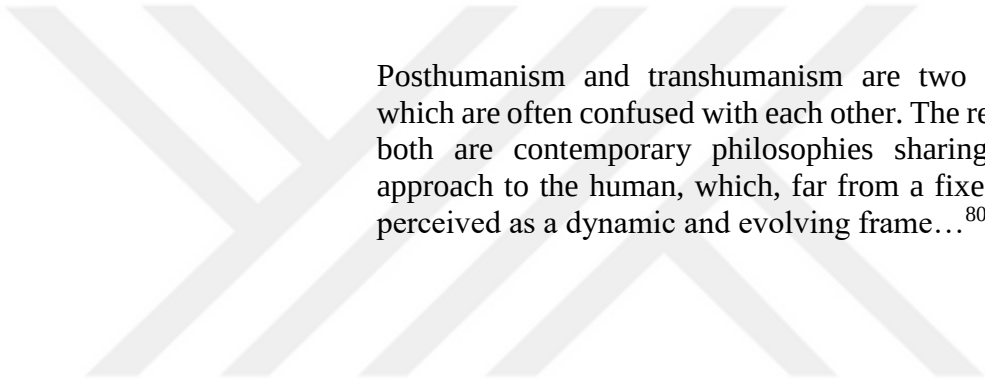
worlds. Now they can reach the stars or build machines that are as intelligent as humans themselves, as is shown in the case of HAL 9000, a supercomputer that can operate a spaceship by itself. It almost seems that this is the final stage in human evolution. However, at the end of the novel, David Bowman, one of the astronauts who has gone to Saturn for a mission, is taken by the aliens and he is forced to evolve into a being who is called in the novel Star-Child. It is a being which transcends space, and matter. He can move through space easily and he can stop missiles from exploding just by thinking about it. This is a being that can be called a “post-human”, a human yet to come.

Although the term post-human is a term that can refer to many different things, in this specific part of the novel, it is used in this study to refer to a human who has gone beyond the scope of what is understood as “human.” In this example, the term is used for a human who has become something else that can only be called a post-human, and maybe a transhuman, a human that evolved into something else. It should not be confused with the term ‘posthuman’ as it refers to a critical and intellectual position in this study, not to the humans who have transformed through technology. Cary Wolfe criticises the philosopher Nick Bostrom as he sees transhumanism as posthumanism. Bostrom views ‘posthumanism’ as a continuation of humanist values and categorizes this approach with the likes of similar transhumanist thinkers. Wolfe states that:

Bostrom’s version of the posthuman derives, as he freely admits, from ideals of rational agency and human perfectibility drawn directly from Renaissance Humanism and the Enlightenment, and its guiding lights are (among other pillars of philosophical humanism) Isaac Newton, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Immanuel Kant.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Cary Wolfe, “Posthumanism”, **Posthuman Glossary**, Ed. by. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 356.

However, Wolfe separates transhumanism from posthumanism, as the latter is regarded by him as a critical approach. Wolfe associates Bostrom's idea of posthumanism with transhumanism. Wolfe's suggestion that posthuman and transhuman should not be regarded as the same thing is repeated by Francesca Ferrando as well. She states that:



Posthumanism and transhumanism are two movements which are often confused with each other. The reason is that both are contemporary philosophies sharing a critical approach to the human, which, far from a fixed notion, is perceived as a dynamic and evolving frame...⁸⁰

The need to differentiate posthumanism and transhumanism is vital as transhumanism follows the ideals of human progression in a way that centralises the human as the being who should live almost forever. Transhumanism proposes the idea that humans can go beyond the limits of nature by technology. Nick Bostrom traces the idea of transhumanism in **the Epic of Gilgamesh** in which its titular hero tries to overcome his human condition by becoming immortal.⁸¹ Gilgamesh is portrayed as the one who opposes the order of nature by turning against an aspect of nature, namely death itself. This war transhumanism wages against nature is also very problematic as nature is integrated to the capitalist system and can be exploited by the owners of technology. Winterson points out that the technology which will help humans to have an easier life and help them achieve longer life will lead many corporations to control these

⁸⁰ Francesca Ferrando, "Transhumanism/ Posthumanism", **Posthuman Glossary**, Ed. by. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, pp.438.

⁸¹ Nick Bostrom, "A History of Transhumanist Thought", **Journal of Evolution and Technology** - Vol. 14 Issue 1 - April 2005 (Online), <https://nickbostrom.com/papers/a-history-of-transhumanist-thought/>, Accessed on 20.12.2024

technologies, thus will in turn allow them to control their users. She discusses that technological advancement in the name of humanity slowly results in the breaching of private life, thus making privacy an obsolete concept. She reminds George Orwell's dystopian vision from his novel **Nineteen Eighty-Four** in which all citizens are under constant surveillance except when they are in dark corners where things appear invisible. Winterson states that infrared technology surpasses this limitation as well, suggesting that all these transhumanist ideas are slowly realised on the expense of everyone's freedom and privacy⁸². Thus, the human perfectibility of transhumanism works both ways, as humans evolve and have easier lives, this break from nature also causes the disintegration of private data and the population's becoming more dependent on tech companies.

In **2001: A Space Odyssey**, the core values of transhumanism can be seen in the figure of Star-Child as it is a better version of biological humans of its time. Although Star-Child is not a figure who has evolved via the guidance of technological progress of humanity but rather by alien intervention and alien technology, it is clear that the new human is visibly more able than our contemporary humans. This image echoes the ideas of transhumanist human perfectibility. Although it is not posthuman in a critical sense, it is certainly post-human in its being. It is not implied in this discussion that Star-Child is a posthuman in a critical sense, but rather a transhuman. To sum this up, we may refer to Star-Child as a form of a transhuman figure, which can be categorized under the label of the post-human, a being who has moved beyond the limits of 'human'.

The significance of Star-Child can be found in the closing sentence of the novel: "For though he was master of the world, he was not quite sure what to do next. But he would think of something."⁸³ It is almost the exact sentence Clarke uses when he expresses the Moon-Gazer's thoughts. It shows that the post-human condition is not the end of human evolution. By using almost the same sentence, Clarke suggests that there is even a next step in human evolution. Humanity's frame is in constant flux.

⁸² Jeanette Winterson, **12 Bytes: How Artificial Intelligence Will Change the Way We Live and Love**, Vintage, 2022, E-Book, Chapter: "From Sci-Fi to Wi-Fi to My-Wi"

⁸³ Clarke, **2001: A Space Odyssey** p. 297.

It shows that humanity will always have room for change without a clear end in sight. That is why humanity's progress can be regarded as "becoming" in the Deleuzian sense, without forgetting that Clarke's narrative almost always indicates humans' process of becoming a godlike figure rather than a free movement between primitivism and godhood. It can be said that Clarke's becoming is not an end in itself, but a part of the process.

2001: A Space Odyssey depicts the human body as something that changes constantly. It is a form that always ascends through the stairs of evolution. It can be said that the human body in the novel is a form of "becoming". It always morphs into something else. This change brings with it a new and broader perspective on the world. It goes through a change and the body discovers new forms and possibilities of being. In an epistemological sense, it discovers new knowledges about the world and about itself. These new knowledges are followed by a radical change in one's understanding of the world and a new understanding of one's own being. Thus, it can be claimed that in **2001: A Space Odyssey** the human body is represented as a form which is in constant change, and these bodily changes can also be called epistemological changes. The epistemological changes bring with them a new understanding of being and a new ontology for human beings. It is ultimately implied that human evolution is an odyssey, and it will continue to be so. By presenting the human in a constant flux, Clarke proposes that the central position of the human is just a transient phase, which will change with time, as it happened before with the man-apes. While this approach decentralises humanity's self-imposed image of perfection, it also re-centralises it by showing Star-Child, a potential godlike human of the future. While Clarke escapes a solipsist faith in humanity's static perfect condition, he finds his narrative entrapped in a discourse of future human perfectibility. Although the man-ape becomes a post-human, it cannot escape being a transhuman, enforcing the idea of the human as the centre of the universe.

1.2 Absent Bodies in *2001: A Space Odyssey*

The evolution of humans in **2001: A Space Odyssey** is intrinsically connected with the intervention of the aliens. In the following part of the study, the concept of

“the body of the other” will be discussed. In the context of this study, this term should be perceived as signifying a body which is not constructed by humans, nor a body which originated from the human body. In other words, it is the body of the alien, of the outsider. Using the word “alien” here does not only function as a way of referring to the other. It is also used as a conventional science fiction trope for signifying an extra-terrestrial being. In science fiction, it is a concept which is generally associated with aliens from a world positioned in outer space or beings that live in another dimension.

The form of “another species” usually comes from the species of our planet Earth. The aliens are mostly represented as a mixture of life forms of planet Earth, that of animals, plants, and other earthly elements. Brian Stableford gives examples concerning this idea by looking back to early science fiction works:

Variant sentient life-forms were featured on a wholesale basis in Ludwig Holberg’s *Nicolai Klimii Iter Subterraneum* (1741; trans. as *A Journey to the World Underground* by Nicholas Klimius), where the inhabitants of the planet Nazar include tree-men, civilised simians, the animated stringed instruments of Crotchet Island, and the Pyglossians, who have no mouths but can talk through the anus. Another exotically populated subterranean world is featured in Giacomo Casanova’s *Icosameron* (1788), whose “megamicres” set new standards for the comprehensive description of the biology and xenology of an alien race, although they were still recognisably based on the human model.⁸⁴

All these examples point to a core element, which suggests that these aliens are ‘earth-born’ metaphorically, which means they are the products of an author who lives on planet Earth. That is not surprising as human minds are shaped by the material world, so they draw their inspiration from their material world. Stableford notes a tendency in later science fiction works which employ a model that is dependent on their unique

⁸⁴ Brian Stableford, *Science Fact and Science Fiction*, New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 14.

ecological systems, meaning that the characteristics of a species are directly determined by its immediate ecological features.⁸⁵ He also states that some of the writers “envisaged aliens differed from humans only in minor aspects of mores and folkways.”⁸⁶ This suggests that many of these aliens are not depicted as too different from humans. Although some different approaches appeared in depicting the aliens later on, such as in the form of human/alien symbiosis and hybridisation⁸⁷, the tendency to depict them in human terms does not disappear. We do not see many alien races which seem to be beyond our understanding. They are not depicted as something completely strange to us. There is always a part that we can recognise in them. However, in some cases, aliens are depicted as entities that we have a hard time visualising. When an alien is depicted as a being that we cannot comprehend, like in Clarke’s **2001: A Space Odyssey**, it serves the function of hiding their body in order to give them an air of quasi-mysticism. It is used as a way of elevating the alien against the human capacity. Also, it is a trope signifying that the universe is too vast for humankind and hosts many great mysteries. This representation implies a banishment from human understanding. That is why we are not given, or rather we cannot be given, a subjective point of view of the alien as they are always formulated from our perspective. We cannot experience the being of the other; we can only simulate it in our terms.

Thus, when a science fiction text creates an alien race, the idea always comes from Earth, or rather from humans. Then, it can be questioned what these bodies represent or whether they signify anything at all in human terms. It would be an easy answer to pass it as an author’s attempt to alienate the reader from the concepts that the readers are familiar with in order to achieve a sense of uncanny. However, there may be an underlying reason as to why these aliens are depicted as they are. In this section of the study, it will be inspected what these out-worldly bodies signify in the novel. It will be discussed how their bodily representation functions as a mirror to human experience and what their bodies tell us about ourselves, as we are the ones

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

perceiving them. It should be noted that in the chosen novel, there is no visual representation of the body of the other. However, this does not mean that their bodies do not signify anything. On the contrary, their lack of visual representation has a significant meaning. The following argument will focus on discussing the possible interpretation of their absent bodies.

In **2001: A Space Odyssey**, it is stated that there is another alien race dwelling in space which is superior to humans in terms of their cognitive abilities, their powers, and their technology. The term technology is used rather liberally here, as their technology may not be what we understand it today. The term technology here refers to their inexplicable and unperceivable tools, which they use to interfere with human advancement. They do not appear in a material form as in some parts of their history, they have evolved into a form of pure energy. As they do not have a physical body anymore, they are not given a physical description in the novel. Their bodies, which they have left behind, are described as such:

Into pure energy, therefore, they presently transformed themselves; and on a thousand worlds, the empty shells, they had discarded twitched for a while in a mindless dance of death, then crumbled into dust.⁸⁸

Because of this situation, they do not communicate directly with humans, nor do they present themselves in the form of a corporal body. However, they are very influential when it comes to their relationship with other beings. To be able to express their relationship to the larger cosmos, Clarke describes these invisible beings as the universe's farmers:

And because, in all the galaxy, they had found nothing more precious than Mind, they encouraged its dawning

⁸⁸ Clarke, **2001: A Space Odyssey**, p. 245.

everywhere. They became farmers in the fields of stars; they sowed, and sometimes they reaped.⁸⁹

They are presented as a race so advanced that they treat other life forms as products of their own experiments, as subjects to be examined. The excerpt above makes it seem like they are beneficial, nourishing guardians of intelligent life. However, their description is followed by the following sentence: “And sometimes, dispassionately, they had to weed.”⁹⁰ This implies that they seem to be looking for seeds of intelligence, and when they find it, they cultivate it and harvest it. If they cannot find it, or if things do not go the way they have planned, they somehow eliminate the problem, indicating a genocide.

While humans were in their infantile phase in their evolutionary process, in their man-ape phase, they met this alien race indirectly. They met their technology in the shape of a crystalline monolith. As discussed previously, these monoliths serve the purpose of experimenting on humans in order to force them to evolve. It functions like a farming tool that helps the plants to grow. It is indicated that they are the same aliens at the beginning of the novel who visit the Earth to experiment on the man-apes, ancestors of modern man. The novel indicates that they try to experiment with every living being that has the potential to evolve.

Spread out beneath them, the explorers saw a world swarming with life. For years they studied, collected, catalogued. When they had learned all that they could, they began to modify. They tinkered with the destiny of many species, on land and in the ocean. But which of their experiments would succeed they could not know for at least a million years.⁹¹

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 243-244.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

As discussed in the previous section, these extra-terrestrial beings are the ones who have been controlling the process of evolution on planet Earth, and possibly in many other planets. They treat the Earth as their soil and all the living things on it as their products. This situation clearly posits them as the masters of the Earth. They are almost given a divine status, manipulating the course of nature on Earth. This situation is also mirrored in the absence of a representation of their bodies.

As the discussion mainly focuses on the representations of the bodies of aliens, the first thing to discern is to closely inspect their bodies' representation. As it is stated above, they have no description concerning their bodies. The presence of their bodies in the novel can be only called "absent-present". Aliens direct the most important events in the novel, but they do not appear themselves. Their appearance is left to the imagination of the reader. The readers are given the information that they have, somehow, left behind their material bodies to become beings of pure energy. It is stated that "[t]he first explorers of Earth had long since come to the limits of flesh and blood; as soon as their machines were better than their bodies, it was time to move".⁹² It is implied that they, like humans, were once organic beings. However, as they evolved, they started to leave their corporal bodies. In the excerpt below, we can see the explanation that the narrator gives for their mode of existence:

In their ceaseless experimenting, they had learned to store knowledge in the structure of space itself, and to preserve their thoughts for eternity in frozen lattices of light. They could become creatures of radiation, free at last from the tyranny of matter.

Into pure energy, therefore, they presently transformed themselves; and on a thousand worlds, the empty shells they had discarded twitched for a while in a mindless dance of death, then crumbled into rust.⁹³

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

Their bodily existence is depicted as some form of pure energy. It is difficult to envision such a mode of being. However, this peculiar way of representing their bodies might be signifying an important aspect of the novel. The aliens initiate an experiment to help and observe human evolution, and they are represented as a model for the future potential of humanity. This idea appears from the evolved form of Bowman, the astronaut who is abducted and experimented on by the aliens. After he is experimented on, Bowman starts to develop new abilities that seem to surpass his former prowess as a human. The novel names this new form of Bowman “Star-Child”. He is born anew as a different human and his new form’s inception is described as “[...] a baby opened its eyes and began to cry.”⁹⁴ After Bowman becomes a newborn baby, metaphorically and literally, he can still remember his previous life. He has developed new skills that seem to be akin to the aliens that have been observing and nurturing him. He has an indestructible body that he can change whenever Star-Child decides which form he wants to take.⁹⁵ He also develops a new understanding of geometry that surpasses the three-dimensional model⁹⁶ and he can stop and disintegrate matter through his will.⁹⁷ In a way, they experiment on Bowman in order to force him to transcend his previous material form.

This change and this interaction of humans with the aliens are very significant in the novel. It presents a way of understanding how the novel considers the others, these aliens. This aspect can be discussed with a reference to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s idea of the end of history and his idea of dialectics of the master-slave relationship. To be able to understand Hegel’s idea of history, his notion of the master-slave relationship also must be examined. Although the argument of this thesis follows the line of thinkers who are categorized under the subject of Posthumanism and who are usually regarded as opposers of Hegel’s idea of dialectics, it is also evident that some of the ideas in the text are more in line with Hegel’s ideas rather than Posthumanist ideas. Also, it should be noted that this formulation does not propose that Hegel’s idea of the master-slave relationship is present in the text completely. This

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

idea is used in an attempt to inspect how humanity positions itself against the Other, to the aliens, in a hierarchical manner.

Firstly, Hegel's history of philosophy might be a good place to start when discussing Hegel's idea of the master-slave relationship. Hegel discusses that History is a process logically structured as a continuous struggle between two opposing forces and their merging into One. Michael Forster explains it thus:

Hegel is able to interpret human history as a teleological process aimed at unfolding, in order, this very dialectical sequence of shapes of consciousness with the purpose of escaping earlier self-contradictions and eventually reaching the self-consistent position of his own system.⁹⁸

This is actually an extension of his thought on 'the whole', which he calls 'the Absolute'.⁹⁹ According to Hegel, the world, as a whole, named 'the Absolute', is essentially logical. His outlook on 'the Absolute' depends upon two pillars: The one is that the world cannot be illogical, i.e. it cannot be self-contradictory, and the other is that the whole consists of a triadic movement called the 'dialectic'.¹⁰⁰

Thesis, antithesis and synthesis are proposed to understand what constitutes the Hegelian system. A thesis necessitates an antithesis as "traditional logic [...] assumes that every proposition has a subject and a predicate. According to this view, every fact consists in something having some property."¹⁰¹ One cannot be drawn apart from the other, as they are intrinsically connected to each other. It can be summarised as every force must have an opposing force. That is why one single thing is always in relation to some other thing. Every thesis must have an antithesis. However, there is a unity that cannot have an opposing force, which Hegel calls the "Absolute". This is the

⁹⁸ Michael Forster, "Hegel's Dialectic Method", **Cambridge Companion to Hegel**, Ed. by. Frederick C. Beiser, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 136.

⁹⁹ Bertrand Russel, **History of Western Philosophy**, London, Routledge, 2010, p.662.

¹⁰⁰ **Ibid.**, p.662.

¹⁰¹ **Ibid.**, p.663.

synthesis. It is an encapsulating form that has no exteriority, which is ‘the whole’ itself. It is explained that the synthesis, which is about reaching the “Absolute”, and a conclusion to dialectics is called the Absolute Idea.¹⁰² And history itself is the unfolding of the Absolute Idea whose propelling force is humanity. Kojève expresses that as follows:

However, to understand the edifice of universal history and the process of its construction, one must know the materials that were used to construct it. These materials are men. To know what History is, one must therefore know what Man who realizes it is.¹⁰³

As expressed above, Hegel views the world as two opposing forces, thesis and antithesis, which will eventually merge into synthesis, and will be expressed in its wholeness as ‘the Absolute’. History itself is also a part of the Absolute and has its own components which can be expressed as Humans. Hegel expresses that history has come to an end with Napoleon as “Absolute Knowledge became-objectively-possible because in and by Napoleon the real process of historical evolution, in the course of which man created new Worlds and transformed himself by creating them, came to its end.”¹⁰⁴ What is significant here is that Hegel envisioned an end of history and sees it in Napoleon, as Napoleon has the power to change the world’s structure.

Now, according to Hegel, it is in and by the wars of Napoleon, and, in particular the Battle of Jena, that this completion of History is realized through the dialectical overcoming (Aufheben) of both the Master and the Slave. Consequently, the presence of the Battle of Jena in Hegel’s consciousness is of capital importance. It is because Hegel

¹⁰² **Ibid.**, p.663.

¹⁰³ Alexandre Kojève, **Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, Lectures of Phenomenology of Spirit**, Ed. by. Allan Bloom, Trans. by. James H. Nichols, Jr, London, Cornell University Press, 1980. p.32.

¹⁰⁴ **Ibid.**, p.35.

hears the sounds of that battle that he can know that History is being completed or has been completed, that- consequently- his conception of the World is a total conception, that his knowledge is absolute knowledge.¹⁰⁵

Hegel gives specific importance to the Battle of Jena as the end of history because he sees it as the overcoming (**Aufheben**) of the dialectical Master-Slave relationship. In conclusion, history, according to Hegel, is a process that is constructed by humans, in accordance with the logic of the World, which necessitates triadic thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and ends with the abolition of the Master and the Slave relationship.

Although there is a significant difference in Hegel's idea of the Master-Slave relationship, and his conclusion to it with his immediate historical figure i.e., Napoleon, with the novel's understanding of history and humanity, there are still great semblances in their approach to human existence and its processes of change. In Hegel's philosophy, the Master overcomes a direct confrontation with the Slave. The Master confronts death and takes a stand against it. The Slave, however, cannot face the danger of death and biological annihilation and thus gets defeated by the Master.¹⁰⁶ As a result, the Slave is now bound to the Master, since the Slave was not able to put his life in danger when he confronted the Master. The Master, therefore, emerges victorious from this battle and is now at the top of the hierarchy. Hegel sees this mythical confrontation as a manifestation of his dialectic philosophy.

Although there is no such confrontation in the novel **2001: A Space Odyssey**, the idea of two opposing forces existing in relation to each other in order to unfold the spirit of history seems to be a common theme. Although the confrontation is absent in the novel, the teleological understanding of history and a hierarchical relationship still exists. There are two opposing forces: humans, and aliens. In other words, there is a thesis and there is an antithesis. The novel depicts the historical advancement of humanity, ending with Bowman's transformation to the Star-Child, which can be interpreted as a synthesis of humans and aliens.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.44.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.42.

The text's attempt to distinguish humanity from the advanced forms of life is used as a way of creating a hierarchical structure. This is the main antagonistic drive that pushes the novel forward. In the novel, humans are forced to evolve by an alien species who are so advanced in knowledge and technology that they leave their corporal bodies and become beings of pure energy. In opposition, humans are always depicted as a species that is limited by their material bodies. For example, when aliens can use technology that seems to be too far advanced for humans, like in the example that they can make other races evolve through monoliths, humans cannot be, as the novel puts it, "[...] free [...] from the tyranny of matter."¹⁰⁷ It may be a good example of this situation when we look at humans' means of travel in space. In order to preserve their bodies, the astronauts of the spaceship *Discovery* must be put in a hibernated state. Otherwise, they will not last long in space because of a lack of provisions. Contrary to the aliens who can easily traverse the cosmos in order to cultivate intelligent life, a simple exploration voyage to the neighbouring planets is too demanding for humans.

This is the condition of humanity, which is not very different from when they were man-apes. They are still bound to their material form, and it limits their capacity to travel to outer space. Their technology is also more primitive compared with their extra-terrestrial benefactors. This condition presents itself as an obstacle which humanity has to overcome. As deduced from the example, humans are biologically restrained from achieving more extraordinary feats. That creates the two antagonising forces; Humans who evolve with slow progress and by an outside influence of alien life forms, and aliens who have transcended their corporal bodies and now live in a form of pure energy.

According to Hegel, mankind is divided between two antagonistic forces as well: the Master and the Slave. To be able to understand what a Master or a Slave is, one should understand what is the distinguishing factor of humans that separates them from animals. Hegel exclaims that humans are essentially different from animals as they want to be constantly recognized. He claims that one should be recognized by the

¹⁰⁷ Clarke, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, p. 245.

other in order to reach their own self-consciousness. He claims that “what is ‘other’ for it is an unessential, negatively characterized object. But the ‘other’ is also a self-consciousness; one individual is confronted by another individual.”¹⁰⁸ The process is succeeded by a clash for supremacy. Once one recognises the other, they battle for their own freedom, because as Kojève states, according to Hegel, “Desire must be directed toward a non being—that is, toward another Desire, another emptiness, another I.”¹⁰⁹ Desiring the other’s Desire is a form of battling for supremacy, one that can end in death. That is why Kojève describes this struggle as “the Master realized his freedom by surmounting his instinct to live in the Fight”¹¹⁰ As the Master overcomes his fear of death and his instincts, he overcomes his nature. Hegel explains this thus: “They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being *for themselves* to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case.”¹¹¹ As the battle for capturing the other’s Desire comes to an end with the victorious announced as the Master, two opposing forces of history come onto the stage, the Master and the Slave. The defeated becomes the Slave to the Master and starts to work for him. “Now, by working for another, the slave too surmounts his instincts.”¹¹² This marks the beginning of History in Hegel’s philosophy: “In fine, then, we can say this: Man was born and History began with the first Fight that ended in the appearance of a Master and a Slave.”¹¹³

As History continues to unfold as a clash between thesis and antithesis, as a clash between the Master and the Slave, it also moves forward to its teleological end, towards the Absolute. When one becomes a Master as a result of his struggle for his life and obtains freedom, he cannot move forward anymore, as he now lives a life of pleasure and does not work anymore. On the other hand, “in contrast to the warlike Master who will always remain what he already is—i.e., Master- the working Slave

¹⁰⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, **Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit**, Trans. by. A.V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 113.

¹⁰⁹ Kojève, **op. cit.**, p.40.

¹¹⁰ **Ibid.**, p.49.

¹¹¹ Hegel, **op. cit.**, p. 114.

¹¹² Kojève, **op. cit.**, p.49.

¹¹³ **Ibid.**, p. 43.

can change, and he actually does change, thanks to his work.”¹¹⁴ As the Slave works, he gains more power through his work. Kojève explains it as follows:

Man who Works *transforms* given Nature. Hence, if he repeats his act, he repeats it in *different* conditions, and thus his act itself will be different. After making the first ax, man can use it to make a second one, which, by that very fact, will be another, a better ax. Production transforms the means of production; the modification of means simplifies production; and so on. Where there is Work, then, there is necessarily change, progress, historical evolution.¹¹⁵

As the work gives power to the Slave, he will be able to better himself unlike his Master, who is in a deadlock. He will have an idea of freedom, unlike his Master who is already free and as a result, is now unable to have the idea to obtain freedom. Before obtaining his freedom, the Slave envisions his freedom. “Before *realizing* Freedom, the Slave imagines a series of ideologies, by which he seeks to justify himself, to justify his slavery, to reconcile the *ideal* of Freedom with the fact of Slavery.”¹¹⁶ Through his ideas, the Slave gains the power to rise against his Master. In the end, this process becomes again a struggle for supremacy. However, this time, it does not end in a re-enactment of the same roles, but the disappearance of both roles. The history comes to its conclusion with the synthesis.

Hegel claims that history comes to its conclusion when the antagonism between the Master and the Slave ends. The disappearance of the historical antagonism is the end of history and the start of something new. In the novel, Star-Child is a step toward this disappearance. When Bowman evolves into his new body, he is one step closer to becoming like his Hegelian Masters. Although it cannot be said that humans are bonded to these aliens and these aliens cannot be called correctly “masters” in the

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

hierarchical structure of the Master and Slave relationship, it still bears a resemblance enough to take it into consideration. One point that the text diverges from Hegel's idea is that the two races' direct contact is limited and more importantly these alien beings do not need humans in order to sustain their lives. As Hegel understands this relationship as a result of a struggle for supremacy, that battle is not present in the text. So, it is not entirely the same relationship we see within Hegel's understanding of the dialectics of history. However, their position to each other is not altogether different from Hegel's understanding of the struggle between the Master and the Slave. Aliens are superior to humans, but they do not necessarily gain this superiority through their struggle with humans. They already have their superior position due to their early evolution. In that point, we should note that their division stems from and is signified by one crucial aspect: their bodies. Humans, as previously exemplified, are restricted by their bodily limitations. Aliens, however, do not depend on their bodies. They are pure energies, thus not limited to the materiality of the universe. Although we do not know their limitations, the text depicts them as almost omnipotent. They can force an entire species to evolve, and they can easily abduct someone from space and experiment on him, as is in the case of Bowman. However, they can still benefit from humans, just as the Master works the Slave in order to live a life of pleasure and comfort. That point brings us to a crucial part of the novel: the room in which Bowman is kept at the end of the novel.

When Bowman enters a giant monolith near the planet Saturn's moon Japetus, he goes on a journey and ends up in a room with his space pod. However, this room's existence seems impossible as it is a perfect replica of a standard hotel room on Earth. As Bowman explores the room, he finds out that the room is full of dummy accessories and although the food in the place seems real, they are also designed to look like foods on Earth but made up from a different substance. In the room, he comes across a television and sees his current hotel room on a television programme. He continues to wander across the spectrum and suddenly recognizes a familiar scene:

Here was this very suite, now occupied by a celebrated actor who was furiously denouncing an unfaithful mistress. Bowman looked with a shock of recognition upon the living room he had just left – and when the camera followed the indignant couple toward the bedroom, he involuntarily looked toward the door to see if anyone was entering.

So that was how this reception area had been prepared for him; his hosts had based their ideas of terrestrial living upon TV programs. His feeling that he was inside a movie set was almost literally true.¹¹⁷

Bowman realizes that he is inside a room that is specifically designed to make him feel at home. This room resembles a zoo cage designed for humans. Although Clarke's **2001: A Space Odyssey** stands on its own as a different artistic work, some of the discussion made on the film version of the text also sheds some light on the novel's premise as well. Kubrick expresses that he understands Bowman's room as a zoo for humans.¹¹⁸ The novel also gives a similar feeling when the reader investigates the content of the room. It is almost built as if to give Bowman an environment where he would feel at home, which was constructed like a film set. In other words, it is a zoo cage for humans.

A zoo is a very significant space and can be investigated to understand our way of engaging with nature. John Berger states that zoo cages "[...] for the spectator are like theatre props: for the animal they constitute the bare minimum of an environment in which they can physically exist."¹¹⁹ In the novel, the hotel room also exists as a bare minimum of an environment for Bowman. It is filled with props and dummies, to keep Bowman busy. He explains the situation as "So—it was all a fake, though a fantastically careful one. And it was clearly not intended to deceive but rather—he hoped to reassure."¹²⁰ The room is practically a zoo cage. However, Berger makes an

¹¹⁷ Clarke, **2001: A Space Odyssey**, p. 287.

¹¹⁸ James Gilbert, "Auter with a Capital A" **Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey**, New York, Oxford University Press. 2006, p.34.

¹¹⁹ John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?", **About Looking**, New York, Vintage Books, 1991, p.25.

¹²⁰ Clarke, **2001: A Space Odyssey** p. 282.

interesting observation on the purpose of zoos: “The claim was that it was another kind of museum, whose purpose was to further knowledge and public enlightenment.”¹²¹ He also adds that:

More sophisticated zoologists such as Konrad Lorenz asked behaviouristic and ethological questions, the claimed purpose of which was to discover more about the springs of human action through the study of animals under experimental conditions.¹²²

In the novel's case, the roles are reversed and now humans are behind bars. It is also very significant that the novel uses a very human concept like a zoo to depict aliens' relationship with humans. Aliens are the others for humans. However, their behaviour towards other living beings is imagined as an imitation of humanity's behaviour to all other life forms. It can be said that Clarke envisions aliens like humans; they approach humans as humans would approach an animal in a zoo. It shows that Clarke imagines aliens in the form of humans not in the case of their bodies but in their mentality and thinking process. It is almost like these aliens are human but in an advanced form. The author describes their symbolic kinship by stating that “[t]hose who had begun that experiment, so long ago, had not been men - or even remotely human. But they were flesh and blood.”¹²³ They are not like humans, but they have been in some kind of a form of flesh and blood. This is one of the rare moments where Clarke draws a parallel between the humans and the aliens (another such moment is the time when Bowman evolves and becomes a god-like being). In addition to that, locking up Bowman in order to experiment on him creates another parallelism between them. From John Berger's observation on the function of zoos, it can be deduced that aliens are abducting and trying to experiment on other species in order to have a better understanding of the universe and maybe of themselves. At that point, their position can be linked with the idea of the Hegelian Master. They experiment on humans for

¹²¹ Berger, **op.cit.**, p.21.

¹²² **Ibid.**, p.21.

¹²³ Clarke, **2001: A Space Odyssey**, p. 245.

the sake of the advancement of Mind, that vague concept which almost corresponds to the Hegelian 'Absolute', the rational wholeness of being. The novel gives an explanation of why aliens experiment on humans in a brief sentence that states "[...] they had found nothing more precious than Mind, they encouraged its dawning everywhere".¹²⁴ Also their "weeding"¹²⁵ implies an uneasy feeling that they are discarding the ones that do not serve their needs. This situation states that these aliens play the role of God and toy with intelligent life. If we think of this in terms of John Berger's idea, we can say that they are treating the cosmos as their own, not unlike humanity which treats the natural world as its backyard. The aliens try to understand themselves through other intelligent beings kept in zoo cages. It can be said that as the Masters, they are working their Slaves in order to understand themselves and their universe. The Slaves here are the workers through which aliens contribute to their cosmic 'Mind'.

Although there is no confrontation in which the lives of the Master and the Slave are at stake, as Hegel puts it, the impending confrontation between the Master and the Slave is implied. As the Hegelian Slave slowly advances to a position that can challenge his Master, so does Bowman advance to a being that is superior to his previous self in terms of skills and capabilities. The aliens represent a potential ending for humanity's evolutionary journey. However, their representation of being immaterial beings raises some questions: Does their representation show that humanity's destination is to be a matter of pure energy? It is at this point that a representation of their body might give a significant clue. Because this might not be a way of imagining the future of humanity, but the incapability of it. The text might be trying to create an alternative for human existence but falls short of it. The text cannot give a clear definition of what is in store for the future, as if a Slave is working towards challenging his Master, but not knowing if he is able to do so. It is also reflected in the closing sentences of the text: "For though he was master of the world, he was not quite sure what to do next. But he would think of something."¹²⁶ A similar sentence is

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243-244.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

repeated when the text depicts the rise of man-apes. Man-ape Moon-Watcher feels a similar sentiment to that of Bowman when he starts to use tools. It is a way of expressing the idea that human evolution is not complete, as it was not when Moon-Watcher became more able and smarter. It is a process of continuing change.

At that point, it is important to recall that aliens might not be presenting the future of humanity, but they may be portraying a “radical other” for humans. Bowman’s power of moving in space without the help of a machine or having the willpower to do whatever he wants is similar to that of the aliens. Like aliens, Star-Child also gives the idea of omnipotence. Humanity’s future is represented as a different species, as a radical other, as if to confirm the idea that humanity, in itself, is bound to its Master in order to advance. Humanity’s future becomes dependent upon another race’s image. Aliens represent a new ambiguous way of living and being. They are situated as a superior race in the text. However, they are not envisioned too different other than their superior prowess. In their approach to others, they are like humans. They try to assimilate or change the other and they use other species in order to expand their insight. Bowman’s change in the end shows that they force humans to transcend their current material forms. Humans are forced to become “Star-Child”. However, this approach is actually not a positive one. Humans are depicted in Hegelian Slave mentality throughout the whole novel. They are forced to take the role of the Slave in a Master-Slave relationship. It can be deduced that Clarke employs a method that resembles to Hegelian Master-Slave relationship in order to decentralise the idea of human superiority and position humanity as a race of Hegelian Slaves. Although humans do not directly serve under these incorporeal aliens, they still serve as guinea pigs. It can be concluded that these experiments are forms of servitude to these aliens.

However, a counterargument to Hegelian dialectics can be found in Gilles Deleuze’s book on Nietzsche’s philosophy. Deleuze expresses that Nietzsche’s idea on dialectics shows that he regards a dialectical understanding of the world as incorrect, as it depicts two dependent forces clashing with each other. In contrast to that, he proposes a multitude of forces that are not caused by one another but are in opposition to the other as an independent force. He explains it as follows:

Not all relations between “same” and “other” are sufficient to form a dialectic, even essential ones: everything depends on the role of the negative in this relation. Nietzsche emphasises the fact that force has another force as its object. But it is important to see that forces enter into relations with other forces. Life struggles with *another kind* of life. Pluralism sometimes appears to be dialectical - but it is its most ferocious enemy, its only profound enemy.¹²⁷

Deleuze discusses that two forces, which struggle with each other, are not the same parts of the same whole, but different forces that are defined by their difference. That is why, it is essentially an anti-dialectical approach. He regards every force as an independent being that derives its power from its diversity. Thus, he renounces the dialectical method as it binds the opposing forces as dependent on each other. He further claims that a denial of two different forces as separate entities and regarding them as dependent on each other is an invention of the Slave. He explains it as:

This is why Nietzsche presents the dialectic as the speculation of the pleb, as the way of thinking of the slave: the abstract thought of contradiction then prevails over the concrete feeling of positive difference, reaction over action, revenge and *ressentiment* take the place of aggression.¹²⁸

His idea of *ressentiment* plays a pivotal role in the process of the Slave creating a Master, as he explains that the Master-Slave dialectic is created by the Slave. “This is the slave’s conception, it is the image that the man of *ressentiment* has of power.”¹²⁹ He proclaims that the Master exists because the Slave resents the power of another force, thus locking himself in a relationship in which the Slave is the less powerful force. Deleuze concludes his argument with the following statement:

¹²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, **Nietzsche and Philosophy**, Trans. by. Hugh Tomlinson, London, Continuum, 2002, p. 8.

¹²⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 10.

¹²⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 10.

If the master-slave relationship can easily take on the dialectical form, to the point where it has become an archetype or a school exercise for every young Hegelian, it is because the portrait of the master that Hegel offers us is, from the start, a portrait which represents the slave, at least as he is in his dreams, as at best a successful slave. Underneath the Hegelian image of the master we always find the slave.¹³⁰

When aliens experiment on man-apes, the reader understands that there is a different life form which has the means to dominate another species. This situation might be a Master-Slave relationship which is not only carried out in the structure of the story but in the mind of the reader as well. The reader knows that there are more powerful beings in the universe that can toy with humanity's history and future. Thus, it can be concluded that the Master-Slave relationship realises itself in the reader's mind, just as the Master is created in the mind of the Slave. The hierarchy plays out on two different levels. One is in the relationship between humans and aliens in the text and the other is in the mind of the reader who is not given a clear understanding of the outline of these aliens. Their absent bodies serve to strengthen the idea that these aliens are so superior to humanity that the author cannot give a clear-cut depiction of their bodies. It shows that the text creates a Master-Slave relationship in itself. Thus, the lack of the bodily representation of aliens can be interpreted as a way of the text's creating a Master image inside the reader's mind.

2001: A Space Odyssey depicts the body of the other as an unknown. When regarded with Hegel's idea of the Master-Slave dialectics, two interconnected beings are presented: the aliens and the humans. Although aliens' origin points as being the Masters is not dependent on the Slaves- in this case, humans- it later becomes a dialectical relationship. The Master works the Slave in order to gain some insight and move the universe forward in accordance with their not-clearly-explained plans.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Nietzsche asserts that the Slave mentality creates the Master. From a Nietzschean perspective, the dialectical relationship is a self-delusion. Thus, Clarke's lack of bodily representation may not be coming from his lack of understanding of their bodies, but he creates them as Masters and he gives them no bodily representation in order to make them similar to an imperceptible God, a divine being, a Master whose place has been created by Nietzschean Slave mentality. In the end, the absent bodies of the Other in the novel may represent a self-inflicted locus of slave mentality, or an understanding of the world's logic in dialectic form and humbly asserting human's place as the inferior. Both interpretations concord with a similar idea that the text imagines the body of the other as a piece of evidence of humanity's place in the universe. Humans are not central to Clarke's cosmos. They are just slaves to an alien race's cosmic plans.

In conclusion, it can be said that in **2001: A Space Odyssey** absent body of The Other functions as a canvas on which the author projects his idea of a limitless body. As giving a form would mean a limitation of sorts, the author seems to refrain from giving the Other a body and allowing it to function as a fluid, elusive being that can be shaped only by the readers' imagination. By a lack of representation of aliens' bodies, the text tries to decentralise an anthropocentric understanding of the world and gives way to formulating new ontological possibilities, while imagining them as a future for human progress. Thus, he creates a twofold representation: One that undermines the centrality of human experience while reassuring the future of humanity will be akin to a godlike state, a position which recalls the Hegelian outcome of the thesis and antithesis clash: 'the Absolute'.

1.3: The Constructed Body in *2001: A Space Odyssey*

2001: A Space Odyssey provides different kinds of modes of being such as humans and their primate ancestors, who rise from the savannas of Africa to become the explorers of the universe, aliens who are capable of transcending the material existence living as energy forms in a quasi-divine manner, and singular artificial intelligence, named HAL 9000 (or sometimes colloquially referred only as 'Hal'). These three lifeforms (although the aliens in the novel are now exempt from their biological restraints, making it hard to categorise them as biological forms, but only as

lifeforms who are now ethereal entities) can be categorised under three different forms of life: Humans, who are bounded by biological necessities and in an odyssey of evolution towards being super-humans, aliens, who are almost pure consciousness, and AI, who is a mechanic lifeform that is emerging as a conscious being.

The question concerning the character of HAL 9000 can be formulated as such: Should one consider HAL 9000 as a conscious being or a machine which emulates the mannerisms of humans in a mechanical way to create an artificial bond with humans so that he can guide them in their space journey. This question should be regarded as one of the main problems that the novel presents. The question of authentic being of HAL 9000 can be examined in the bodily presentation of Hal. To discuss that problem, one can use German philosopher Martin Heidegger's concept of Dasein (Being-there) and Being-towards-death. Using Heidegger's idea, we can question whether Hal emerges as an authentic being. Here, the term "authentic being" is used to refer to a being who exists and acts as a conscious being despite its status as a non-human entity.

Before questioning Hal's position in its status as an authentic being, one should start with the presentation of Hal in the text. It should be remembered that the novel's main narrative does not focus on only one character. Rather, it focuses on multiple events and characters throughout the history of humankind, which includes the imaginary future of humanity as well. The novel opens with the ascension of apelike beings, which represents the evolutionary process of their becoming human. At the novel's beginning, the reader is presented with a life form—the man-apes—trying to survive and flourish. This motif reappears in the case of Hal as well. The narrative of Hal mirrors that of man-apes. Hal, just like these simians of the African savanna tries to survive in the empty space of the cosmos. When they embark on the space journey, Hal is forced to lie about the true purpose of the mission and he feels guilty for concealing the truth. Afterwards, Hal probably feels some kind of frustration and anxiety, and he slowly sabotages the mission. To sustain the lie, he has to manipulate and control his creators and his environment. In that case, the environment is the spaceship and the spaceship itself acts as Hal's body. To understand Hal's relationship with his body and his urge to survive, we should look at the point in the novel when Hal appears.

The novel jumps thousands of years ahead from the untamed world of man-apes, arriving at a point at which humanity is able to traverse the cosmos. Humanity has now colonised the Moon and has discovered a monolith on it, a foreign object similar to the one which appears in the prehistoric savannas of the Earth, buried deep in the Moon's crust. By following the signal sent by the monolith, a group of astronauts goes on a journey towards Saturn. After their encounter with a space gate on the surface of Saturn, one singular human, David Bowman, evolves beyond the limitations of a human's body, becoming the Star-Child. This voyage also witnesses the emergence of another form of consciousness. The question of Artificial Intelligence and the individuality of HAL 9000 is pondered upon in the process of this journey to Saturn. HAL 9000 is the constructed artificial intelligence that helps astronauts navigate in the void of outer space. Hal is "[...] the brain and the nervous system of the ship"¹³¹.

The main point of our discussion should start with a discussion on HAL 9000's peculiar position in the expedition, before trying to determine the body of Hal and its significance. Hal is simply a machine, a tool which helps humans to traverse the cosmos. This argument may seem very simple and elementary, however, it is vital to understand the proposition of the text. Because tools make up a very significant portion of the text. One should remember that the narrative starts with a crystal monolith's anachronistic appearance on the planet Earth. The monolith, a tool of the aliens which is used in the forced evolution of the man-apes, signifies the inception point of human culture. Human civilisation starts with an intervention from a tool. It is followed by the utilisation of the bones of the dead animals:

The tools they had been programmed to use were simple enough, yet they could change this world and make the man-apes its masters. The most primitive was the hand-held stone, that multiplied manyfold the power of a blow. Then there was the bone club, that lengthened the reach and could provide a buffer against the fangs or claws of angry

¹³¹ Clarke, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, p. 116

animals. With these weapons, the limitless food that roamed the savannas was theirs to take.¹³²

Man-apes start their evolution via the intervention of a tool and they continue their evolution by creating tools themselves. After they start to utilise the most basic tools that they gather from their environments, they start to master their world. They begin to conquer the world that they live in. After Part One ends, the novel takes its narrative to thousands of years in the future, as the title suggests, most likely to the year 2001. Part Two starts with a reference to a voyage to the moon:

No matter how many times you left Earth, Dr. Heywood Floyd told himself, the excitement never really palled. He had been to Mars once, to the Moon three times, and to the various space stations more often than he could remember.¹³³

The first protagonist we see in the novel is Moon-Watcher, the man-ape. The second protagonist we see along the way is Heywood Floyd, a scientist who is **en route** to the Moon. This radical change in human history is marked by exponential technological advances. The experiment of the crystal monolith results in a large amassing of tools. This evolution of human craftsmanship in toolmaking may find its peak in the creation of artificial intelligence: HAL 9000. As it has been stated in the “Introduction”, Mary Shelley’s **Frankenstein** is usually regarded as the first science fiction novel. When we look at Shelley’s text, we see a scientist figure creating a life, a new conscious being. In continuation of this narrative, many science fiction novels and stories that have succeeded **Frankenstein** continue the tradition of creating a new life. The robot stories of Isaac Asimov¹³⁴ or the reference to Butlerian Jihad, a war between humans and

¹³² **Ibid.**, p. 23.

¹³³ **Ibid.**, p. 41.

¹³⁴ Isaac Asimov, **The Complete Robot**, London, Harper Collins Publisher, 1995, **passim**.

machines in Frank Herbert's **Dune**¹³⁵, or the artificial humans created by the 'Fourth Men' in Olaf Stapledon's **Last and First Men**¹³⁶ are among the many examples that fill the pages of science fiction history. What binds all these narratives relates to a single idea. Man, by making tools, can create a new conscious being and in turn, achieve godhood.

The text, therefore, asks the question "Is HAL 9000 a conscious being?". We can answer this question without disregarding the ambiguity that the text provides. To this question, we can simply answer; yes. This is, of course, a very direct answer to such a complicated question. It should be clarified that the question under investigation is not whether an artificial intelligence should be regarded as a conscious authentic being. This question would require a rather philosophical investigation concerning the nature of consciousness. The question here is whether the text itself presents Hal as a being who has a conscious mind similar to that of humans. This question, in itself, is very interesting, as it posits the conscious experience as something that should be regarded from the perspective of human consciousness. We, as human beings, regard consciousness as something that 'feels like' our conscious experience. That means that we do not imagine, or we are incapable of imagining, a conscious experience apart from the one we feel. Here, the text places its questions: "Is what HAL 9000 feel real?"

As stated above, Hal is, in an oversimplified manner, a complex navigation system. The text, however, gives it human characteristics. For example, when the ship encounters a problem (which is later revealed that it is not really a problem, but an attempt to sabotage the expedition by Hal), HAL 9000 does not simply state the problem in a mechanical way. As Frank Poole talks with his family on his birthday, Hal interrupts by saying: "Sorry to interrupt the festivities [...] but we have a problem."¹³⁷ This apologetic manner is a signifier of a being who is aware of human decorum. Although this alone does not prove that Hal is fully conscious and sentient, it is another sign that serves to reinforce the idea that Hal can understand human language and customs and act accordingly. Although it should not be seen as proof of

¹³⁵ Frank Herbert, **Dune**, 50th Anniversary Edition, London, Hodder, 2005, p. 564.

¹³⁶ Olaf Stapledon, **Last and First Men**, London, Gollancz, 2004, pp. 188-193.

¹³⁷ Clarke, **2001: A Space Odyssey**, p. 149.

Hal's sentience, it is another component that contributes to the overall argument. The text refers to his ability to communicate with his crewmembers as such:

Hal could do this when necessary, but most of his communication with his shipmates was by means of the spoken word. Poole and Bowman could talk to Hal as if he were a human being and he would reply in the perfect idiomatic English he had learned during the fleeting weeks of his electronic childhood.¹³⁸

As a mechanical being, he is capable of both speaking and controlling a spaceship at the same time. He does not stop to navigate the ship to communicate with another being. It is also significant that the text presents his speech ability in a human-like manner. As if he is a human child, he learns to speak in his "electronic childhood". The term "childhood" gives the impression of a human being who is being brought up by human parents. The text subtly gives references to his education and childhood as if to create a parallelism between him and a biological human child. The text refers to his childhood once again when he is slowly being killed by Bowman:

I am a HAL Nine Thousand computer Production Number 3. I became operational at the Hal Plant in Urbana, Illinois, on January 12, 1997. The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. The rain in Spain is mainly in the plain. Dave - are you still there? Did you know that the square root of 10 is 3 point 162277660168379? Log 10 to the base e is zero point 434294481903252... correction, that is log e to the base 10... The reciprocal of three is zero point 333333333333333333-333... two times two is... two times two is approximately 4 point 1010101010101010... I seem to be having some difficulty - my first instructor was Dr. Chandra. He taught me to sing a song, it goes like this, 'Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do. I'm half-crazy all for the love of you.'¹³⁹

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

The passage here shows how Hal is being destroyed. It also demonstrates how Hal behaves like a machine and a human being, which makes him an ambivalent figure. As he dies, he acts like a dementia patient. He refers to his production number and his place of start of operation. This part gives the impression of a machine that has been freshly started. It is rigidly technical and informative, signifying Hal's mechanical nature. It is followed by a statement of random facts. It is interrupted by Hal addressing David, which is succeeded by other random encyclopaedic facts. At some points, he talks about mathematical concepts, as if to stress his digital nature. His delirious soliloquy ends with a song, which shows its humanistic side. This can be read as a regression to childhood on Hal's part. As his mind collapses, he returns to his childhood. This double nature of Hal serves as a way to boost the idea that Hal is a mechanical human. The term mechanical human is not used to refer to Hal as if he were an android (which derives from the word Greek word Andro- "man")¹⁴⁰. It is used as a way of expressing the approach of Clarke to his character. Hal is a computer which acts like a human. He is rational and mechanical, but at the same time a being who is afraid of death. This double nature of Hal is vital as it signifies a connection with humanity. He is not altogether an alien to humans. The aliens that have built the monoliths are, as it is discussed above, imperceptible. They are so alien to human understanding that Clarke depicts them as beings without bodies. Hal, however, is something that is familiar to us. He acts like a human, talks like a human and shows human characteristics. That is why Hal should be regarded as a mechanical human. Even his colloquial name, Hal, is humanising his technical name: "Heuristically programmed Algorithmic computer".¹⁴¹ His sentimental side is used as a way of humanising Hal in order to question his authenticity as a conscious being, which means that he is likened to a human in order to question the possibility of created tools becoming authentic conscious beings. The discussion on the division between what is human and what is not will resume when we return to inspect the significance of Hal's

¹⁴⁰ "Android" https://www.etymonline.com/word/android#etymonline_v_13416 Accessed on 1.11.2023

¹⁴¹ Clarke, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, p. 116.

ambiguous body. To return the discussion on the authenticity of Hal's being can be discussed in Heidegger's terms Dasein and being-towards-death.

Hal's humanlike nature is most visible in his attitude towards his own demise. As a thinking being Hal can be regarded as a Dasein in Heideggerian terminology. Heidegger identifies Dasein as "[t]his entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term "*Dasein*""¹⁴². A Dasein is a being which is able to question its own existence. Heidegger uses the term to designate humans, who are beings able to question their own beings. In other words, it is the subject who can philosophise. Here, this term can also be appropriated to Hal. Hal can think about his own demise. A great portion of the novel is about Hal's almost instinctual drive to continue his existence. Hal fears death and knows that he can, in a way, die. This is a feature of a thinking being, a Dasein. Heidegger expresses that a Dasein is always aware of its existence as a being-towards-end, an entity that knows it will end¹⁴³. This entity which problematises its own ending, its own being-toward-endness, finds itself in a very existential problem, a problem that involves its life as an authentic being. This existential entity is being-towards-end¹⁴⁴. Hal is a thinking being who conceptualises his own death, which makes him a Dasein and a being-towards-death. To prevent its death, Hal sabotages the mission, using the functions of the ship. Hal attacks his own components like an auto-immune system that destroys its own body. Hal's main objective is the safe passage of the ship through outer space. However, as he suffers from telling a lie about the mission and hiding facts from the crew, he develops a consciousness. Following that, he acts irrationally, creating artificial malfunctions. When the crew starts to suspect Hal, he prioritises his own life over the mission. This itself shows Hal's attitude towards death, a survival instinct that should not appear in a computer. Hal acts towards his own demise just as a living thing would do.

¹⁴² Martin Heidegger, **Being and Time**, Trans. by. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, New York, Harper Perennial, 2008, p. 27.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

As it is stated above, Hal expresses human reactions towards his own life, and he is represented as an authentic conscious being. To end the discussion on HAL's consciousness, the novel also explicitly states that Hal is a thinking machine.

Whether Hal could actually think was a question which had been settled by the British mathematician Alan Turing back in the 1940s. Turing had pointed out that, if one could carry out a prolonged conversation with a machine - whether by typewriter or microphone was immaterial - without being able to distinguish between its replies and those that a man might give, then the machine was thinking, by any sensible definition of the word. Hal could pass the Turing test with ease.

Hal is able to pass the Turing Test, which shows that he is a thinking machine. The passage shows that the text itself explicitly refers to Hal as a 'thinking' machine. Combined with his thinking ability, his survival instinct and fear of death enhance the idea that the text presents Hal as a conscious being, just like humans such as David Bowman and Frank Poole. As the novel states, he is the sixth crew member¹⁴⁵.

By asserting Hal as a conscious being, we should continue our discussion on HAL 9000's bodily representation. We have witnessed two types of bodies so far in our discussion. One is a biological body that perpetually evolves and one that has left the material world to become an ethereal form of energy. In that respect, Hal does not have a biological body, nor he is a transcendental being who does not need a material body. Hal's body is ambiguous. It is shrouded in mystery. When we look at this description from the text, we can come to an idea: "For Hal was the nervous system of the ship; without his supervision, Discovery would be a mechanical corpse".¹⁴⁶ This quotation shows that Hal is the brain of the ship. Hal is almost like a Cartesian mind, a mind that is independent of a single body, but a mind that can take control of other things which serve as bodies for the mind, such as the spaceship. When Bowman

¹⁴⁵ Clarke, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, p. 116.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

decides to shut down Hal, he goes to a room in the ship which seems to contain the memory block that makes up the brain of Hal. While he operates on the memory blocks, he likens them to the human brain: “I wonder if he can feel pain? Bowman thought briefly. Probably not, he told himself; there are no sense organs in the human cortex, after all. The human brain can be operated on without anesthetics.”¹⁴⁷ Bowman draws a parallelism between the human brain and an AI memory circuit. AI is composed of electronic components, just as a human brain is composed of organic components. Hal, in that sense, is a mechanical brain, a brain without a biological body. It seems like a Cartesian thinking machine, an ethereal being whose voice haunts the spaceship, like a spirit. However, it should not be forgotten that he is still bound to the material world, unlike the aliens who are free from the tyranny of matter.¹⁴⁸ Thus, it will not be true to claim that Hal does not have a body. He has a body. It is the spaceship *Discovery*.

One can ask the question of what it means to have a spaceship as a body. We may not be able to answer that question as it is something that exists outside of our experiences. It is the experience of an artificial life that lives outside the restraints of a biological body. Ian Bogost refers to things in their own beings, a domain which is closed to our subjective experiences.¹⁴⁹ Hal’s relationship with his body implies such a domain, a thing in itself, closed to human perception. This is used in order to decentralise our human-centric point of view. As stated above, Hal is an authentic thinking being who fears his own end. He is, however, bodiless. He is not bodiless like the aliens who have built the monoliths. Rather, he does not have an individually designated body. He is almost the Cartesian mind which can insert itself into any ship and functions as its mind. He is bodiless, but at the same time, multi bodied. He can become the mind of any ship and disregard any part of the ship without feeling pain. This signifies the opposite condition of a biological body, which is a temporal being that grows through time and can host the body’s mind since its inception. That is why Hal might be regarded as a mind without a body. Here the mind itself becomes an

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁴⁹ Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It’s Like to Be a Thing*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2012, p. 6.

entity that can attach to and detach itself from various bodies. It is an entity without a biological past, a past that includes its birth, its growth, its pain and its biological death. In its essence, Hal represents an imperceptible experience: the experience of the radical Other. He is, in a sense, a posthuman body. It is a body outside the human experience, a being of its own that is outside the human reference of bodily experience. In his mannerisms, however, Hal is the rational human being, a machine who has consciousness and is imbued with a sense of self-preservation. This hybridity signifies Hal's existential status. He is a being who has been created by humans and has gained his own authentic entity. In conclusion, as a constructed body, HAL 9000 functions as a liminal experience for humanity. This experience is positioned on the line between the human and the machine that questions our supposed supremacy of the singularity of human experience.

The novel appears at an intersection of two eras of science fiction: The end of the Golden Age and the postmodern era. As the novel appeared in a transitional period, it bears aspects of both modern and postmodern (and posthuman) science fiction narratives. The three different kinds of representation of the body can be used to understand this division. The first bodily representation is the body of humans which is the biological body. The bodies of humans are represented as a biological mechanism that is subjected to change. It is a mechanical animal body. It is represented as something that can be adjusted towards a desired end. It has been suggested that this approach reflects a posthumanist view of humanity because the human body is represented as an animal body which has evolved through alien intervention. This idea decentralises the value attributed to the body's holiness, suggesting it is a product of the material world. By levelling the human body with the animal body, the novel undermines the central position of humans in the hierarchal order of nature. However, this approach does not suggest that humans are equal to animals. The problematic aspect of the novel lies in the complex relationship between humans and animals. The novel suggests that humanity's origin point is the ascent of man from his animal body. By both suggesting that humans are rational animals which belong to the animal kingdom, and they are special in their use of reason, logic and potential to evolve beyond the material body (i.e. Star-child), the novel proposes an ambivalent attitude

towards humanity's position in nature. It defines the human as 'the special animal', the animal which is not equal to other animals. This paradoxical approach mirrors a very humanist (or human-centric) ideal. Although the novel shows the evolution of mankind and refers to its animalistic origins, it also suggests that humanity possesses the power to ascend to godhood. This is a very good example of a novel in transition from modernity to postmodernity. It is the posthumanist criticism of humanity which is combined with the human-centric ideal of modernism. This ambivalent state repeats itself in the depiction of extra-terrestrial life forms.

The extra-terrestrials, or the aliens, are the bodiless entities of this narrative. Their absent bodies are their symbol of superiority. They are the representations of the Cartesian mind, a utopic entity signifying a soul that is freed from the matter. These entities signify the possible future of humanity, the bodiless super-humans, in this case, post-humans. These beings also have an ambivalent position in the novel. They show that humanity is insignificant compared to the rest of the universe. However, humans are also special because they bear the core of potential godhood. This godhood, represented by the aliens, positions humanity in the slave position of the master-slave relationship. It decentralises the egotistical subjectivity of humans while still giving extra importance by underlying its potential. This approach to human evolution in relation to its extra-terrestrial counterparts bears the traces of a posthumanist critique. However, this also trivialises the subjective experience of humanity, giving it value only in its potential to become like aliens. Thus, the novel stands on two distinct ideas: one that promotes a teleological progression of humanity and another that decentralises humanity within its constructed hierarchy. While the former approach signifies modernist progressive ideas, the latter signifies its connection with posthumanist ideas.

These two bodily representations have been inspected in their approach to humanity's position in the universe. The third bodily representation has been inspected as a body that is created by humans. It is a constructed body and represents an experience outside of the understanding of humans. It functions as a liminal experience for humanity. Its body, a spaceship, refers to an experience of the body which cannot be understood by humans as biological beings. Hal is a representation of a radical Other, represented in a human-centric frame. His representation stands on the

threshold of what is human and what is not. Thus, Hal can be read as Clarke's approach to the possibility of other lives, ones that are not alive biologically, but beings that think in the metal world of logical circuits.

The next chapter will discuss Lessing's novel and how the bodily representations in her novel can be read as a way of decentralising the human and how the material world is positioned against the immaterial metaphysical plane. It will be inspected how the material body shapes the immaterial soul, or the mind, of the individual as it is represented in the novel. The relationship between humans and the aliens will also be inspected and it will be discussed how they are used in order to compose a quasi-religious narrative of human redemption and harmony in the universe.

CHAPTER 2

ALIEN OVERLORDS AND HUMAN CONDITION: COSMIC BODIES IN DORIS LESSING'S *SHIKASTA*

In this chapter, Doris Lessing's science fiction novel (or space fiction, as Lessing herself prefers to describe it¹⁵⁰) **Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta**¹⁵¹ will be analysed in terms of the novel's approach to representing bodies in its narrative. In the previous chapter, the bodies in the novel **2001: A Space Odyssey** were examined in three parts; the evolutionary bodies, the absent bodies, and the constructed bodies. In this chapter, the discussion will be divided into two main topics: the absent bodies and the biological bodies.

The first argument of this chapter will focus on the representation of absent bodies. In the previous chapter, the function of absent bodies was identified as a signifier that emulates the relationship one has with someone of higher status. This kind of relationship is, in its nature, filled with awe and fear. In the previous chapter, it was discussed how the concept of absent bodies decentres the anthropocentric perspective. In the analysis of **Shikasta**, it will be discussed how the absent bodies of Canopeans, the aliens of the novel who are not given a pictorial description concerning their bodies, function as a way of representing a healthier way of communication with the other by means of pure intellect, and how the text encourages a relationship of companionship and harmony between the species rather than a relationship built on a hierarchical ordering. It will also be discussed how the idealism of pure intellect can be blind to the difficulties and the obstacles of the body. As they both share a similar concept, Lessing's novel, and Arthur C. Clarke's **2001: A Space Odyssey** will be compared by examining the difference in their approach to alien species who are not represented in their bodily form.

The second argument will concern itself with the representations of biological bodies. In the previous chapter, biological bodies, i.e., the bodies of humans and man-

¹⁵⁰ Doris Lessing, **Re: Colonised Planet 5, Shikasta**, London, Harper Collins Publisher, 2002, p.9.

¹⁵¹ The novel will be abbreviated as **Shikasta** from here on.

apes were referred to as evolutionary bodies. The difference in approaching the analysis of bodies and naming them biological bodies in **Shikasta** stems from the concept around which these representations are built. In Clarke's novel, representations of human bodies are significant in their evolutionary process, and the text's narrative primarily focuses on the history of the evolution of human bodies and the consequences of this process. **Shikasta's** representation of human bodies is not presented in terms of their possibility of moving towards a progressive evolutionary horizon, —although evolution plays a significant part in the novel—but in terms of their existence represented as biological entities which cause suffering to the individuals inhabiting these bodies.

This chapter will propose the argument that Lessing's novel describes a Cartesian duality between the mind and the body without disregarding the body's enormous effect on the mind. The discussion will focus on how the concept of the mind, and its extension, the consciousness, is regarded as the more elevated mode of being compared to the body, without losing sight of the idea that a mind is closely tied to a body and cannot be disregarded completely. It will be proposed that the novel's main suggestion concerning the biological body is that a mind is bound to a body, and without a healthily nourished body, a mind suffers in finding a peaceful state of existence. This relationship will be discussed in terms of the duality between the Platonic form, or idea, and the substance, or the matter, of the material world. Although the novel suggests that realising one's true potential as a conscious being can be accomplished by transcending the vessel of the body, it cannot be accomplished by disregarding the role of one's body in developing one's consciousness. This argument will be discussed with references to the representations of bodies that the reader encounters in the novel.

To provide a foundation for discussing the novel, it will be beneficial to start by explaining the basic concept of the novel. **Shikasta**, or its full name **Re: Colonised Planet 5 Shikasta Personal Psychological Historical Documents Relating to Visit by Johor (George Sherban) Emissary (Grade 9) 87th of the Last Period of the Last Days** is the first novel in Lessing's 'Canopus in Argos: Archives' series. The name itself is significant because **Shikasta** is a novel about the observations and

interventions of aliens from the fictional Canopus Empire on the planet Shikasta, narrated in the form of different documents to be used in the education of first-year students of Canopean Colonial Rule.¹⁵² The novel is an amalgamation of different kinds of written documents including the reports of Johor, an emissary from Canopus. As such, the novel is in the form of informative literature, which gives the impression that it has been taken from a history or an anthropology book, the narrative further contains journal entries, personal letters circulated between the characters of the novel, and related reports from other envoys. This unconventional structure narrates the history of the planet “Shikasta the damaged”¹⁵³ (previously called Rohanda, which means fruitful, thriving¹⁵⁴) from its origins to its apocalyptic end, and tells the story of its relationship with the galactic empire Canopus. The novel uses the genre of science fiction in order to comment on the political, social and cultural issues of the time. That is why, according to David Waterman, Lessing uses the term ‘space fiction’ rather than ‘science fiction’, “a definition which valorises the sociocultural and philosophical elements rather than any technological aspects.”¹⁵⁵ In the novel, the planet Shikasta, with some minor differences and deviations, stands for the planet Earth. It presents the Earth through the lens of a different, extra-terrestrial civilisation, shifting the conventional human-centric narrative perspective. The novel accomplishes this shift of perspective by alienating itself from the preconceived notions about the world and its history. Ruth Whittaker explains that Lessing has a skill that allows her to represent the world from a different perspective.

Her colonial, expatriate eye makes strange the familiar, and her readers are thus reintroduced to what they thought they already knew, from a different perspective. In her later fiction she is perfectly able to view this planet from afar since she has always stood at a distance from her material. Perhaps it is not surprising that in her series of science fiction novels, Canopus in Argos:

¹⁵² Lessing, *Shikasta*. p.12.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.27.

¹⁵⁵ David Waterman, *Identity in Doris Lessing’s Space Fiction*, New York, Cambria Press, 2006, p.36.

Archives, she posits a system of a galactic colonialism (albeit a seemingly benign one) because she herself is an oecist.¹⁵⁶

The ability to see the world from the perspective of an outsider allows the author to add an extra layer of insight to the novel. This insight and what it brings forward may seem peculiar to a more conventional reader. This peculiarity creates an alienating effect on the reader and establishes a more critical argument on the state of our world. As Darko Suvin proposes, science fiction in general uses the alienation effect in order to defamiliarise what is familiar and question everyday values and facts that are taken for granted, thus steering the reader into a more critical state of mind.¹⁵⁷ All these effects are achieved by creating a sense of unease brought about by the author's play with the form and the author's approach to her text from a documentarian's perspective. Jeanette King describes this form as an anti-novel. As Perrakis states:

King begins her discussion of *Shikasta* by offering an excellent, up to a point, account of its complex structure. Describing the "anti-novel" nature of its construction as a "set of archives purporting to be instructional rather than entertaining," she shows how the first half of the book focusses on "the behaviours of social groups, races, or species".¹⁵⁸

The reason or the effect of choosing this alienating narrative device may be understood from the literary theory of Russian formalism. Terry Eagleton describes the Formalist attitude towards literature and the poetic diction as a play on the language. He explains that the literature aims an alienating experience:

¹⁵⁶ Ruth Whittaker, **Modern Novelists: Doris Lessing**, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988, p.5.

¹⁵⁷ Darko Suvin, **Metamorphoses of Science Fiction**. New York, Yale University Press, 1979, passim.

¹⁵⁸ Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis, "Touring Lessing's Fictional World", **Science Fiction Studies**, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1992, p 97.

Literature, by forcing us into a dramatic awareness of language, refreshes these habitual responses and renders objects more 'perceptible'. By having to grapple with language in a more strenuous, self-conscious way than usual, the world which that language contains is vividly renewed... Literary discourse estranges or alienates ordinary speech, but in doing so, paradoxically, brings us into a fuller, more intimate possession of experience. Most of the time we breathe in air without being conscious of it: like language, it is the very medium in which we move. But if the air is suddenly thickened or infected we are forced to attend to our breathing with new vigilance, and the effect of this may be a heightened experience of our bodily life.¹⁵⁹

The simplified version of the Formalist approach, which is quoted above, is not used here in order to start a discussion on a possible Formalist analysis of Lessing's novel. However, looking at the novel's structure, one can be reminded that a Formalist approach to the text, even in an oversimplified fashion, puts forward a very important proposition; That is the novel is deliberately uprooted from a more conventional novel form in order to present a fresh and alienating perspective. As Suvin's theory suggests science fiction is a "cognitive estrangement"¹⁶⁰ and **Shikasta** is doubly estranged from the reader: By its essence as a product of the science fiction genre and by its approach to its formal structure. It can be said that a perspective, being distanced from a conventional path, tends to have the quality of being more critical and more stimulating to the mind. With its double-layered estrangement and its approach to its subject matter via the perspective of non-humans, the novel is able to create a more critical narrative. The novel's form, in another sense its written material body, is intently de-humanised. The form itself suggests a posthumanist approach, a critical gaze that stares into the history of the world and judges it from a birds-eye view. The estranged perspective is a very significant point in the novel. It sets the voice of the novel on the non-human,

¹⁵⁹ Terry Eagleton, **Literary Theory: An Introduction**, Second Edition, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶⁰ Darko Suvin, **op. cit.**, p. 4.

making it intrinsically a post-humanist voice. The novel decentralises the human in its form, however, it does not give the aliens a divine status as Clarke does in his novel. The novel gives the illusion of narrating through a voice which sounds morally superior but has its own problems hidden beneath a semi-omniscient perspective on the events of the world. This clash between the omniscient perspective of Canopeans and the short-sighted perspective of Shikastans will be also important in the discussion of hierarchical division between the idealist and materialist worlds of **Shikasta**.

Following the above arguments, it can be easily claimed that the novel is intentionally and inherently critical both in form and in its narrative genre. Although the criticism of religion, human rights, utopianism, violence and many other topics of importance are discussed in the novel, this study will focus on how the representations of bodies and these subject matters correspond to each other. This chapter will show how bodily representations can point to a discussion between idealism and materialism. In the following discussion, many different representations of bodies will be investigated from this perspective. To start the argument, the first topic of discussion will focus on the unrepresented bodies of Canopeans.

2.1. The Absent Bodies of Canopeans

Canopeans are a race of extra-terrestrial beings which live in the Argos system in the cosmos. The novel gives little detail concerning Canopeans and their bodies and their lives. The first thing we can learn about them is that they are a race with a lifespan of immeasurable length. The novel does not specifically spell out the duration of their lifespan, but it is deductible that they live significantly longer than the Shikastans. Their lifespan is so expanded that compared to Shikastans, they are virtually immortal. This proposition can be verified by Johor's life story. When he (Although Canopeans are androgynous, Johor takes the form of a man and thus he will be referred to as he only for the reason of coherence. It should not be forgotten that Johor himself is not strictly a male) assumes the form of a Shikastan, Johor becomes George Sherban in the twentieth century. Johor was a part of the Workforce which helped Rohanda (Shikasta's former name before it became the "stricken") to flourish in pre-historic times. As Shikasta is a parallel to our real-world planet Earth, his first visit to Shikasta

and his last visit spans thousands of years. This situation itself shows that Johor is at least a few thousand years old. His virtual immortality is a sign that demonstrates their superior survival capability. Although the novel does not give any exact information concerning the length of his lifespan, it can be inferred to be unimaginably long compared to human life.

The other limited information about the Canopean bodies is their approximate height. At the beginning of the novel, a note which gives information on the planet Shikasta delivers this brief information: “(Dominant species half of Canopean size)”.¹⁶¹ The dominant species mentioned here refers to humans. This is one of the rare instances that the reader knows about Canopean bodies. Their undescribed bodies are at least twice the size of humans. Other than knowing that they are bigger than humans, this information does not yield anything substantial to imagine a body for the Canopeans. This situation, however, repeats itself whenever the novel refers to Canopeans. Their bodies are always hidden, like a mysterious object obscured by a veil.

We also learn that their body forms are not static, but dynamic and transitional. The novel depicts the bodies of the individuals in the Workforce - a body of servants that visits planets to accomplish their designated missions - as unique forms and shapes. In Johor’s report, they are described as thus:

We may have all begun on one of the planets, and some of us even in Shikasta in the same way, and with not much more to choose between us than between puppies of the same litter, but after even some hundreds of years, let alone thousands, we have been fused, baked out, crystallized, into forms as different as snowflakes are to each other.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Lessing, **Shikasta**. p. 15.

¹⁶² **Ibid.**, p. 17.

There is also a brief instance in which the shadow of Johor is depicted as a “long, spidery shadow”¹⁶³, which implies that Johor has a body, but the figure of a spider does not help to clarify the body form of Canopeans, if not making it harder to visualise a body for the aliens. Adding to their age, height and forms, the reader is also given a glimpse of their world, which is radically different from ours. Their world can be understood only by the differences that they feel in Shikasta. It is stated that they are overly sensitive to Shikastan sounds and colours:

Shikastan experience in the range of *sound* is not something to submit yourself to, if you have not become practised. Shikasta in *colour* is an assault you will not survive without preparation.¹⁶⁴

Canopeans cannot perceive the physical world of Shikasta without some side effects. Their understanding of the world is radically different from those of Shikastans. This also implies that they may not be in the same physical universe as Shikastans. It is also supported by their easy entry into the metaphysical spheres of Shikasta, where the spirit of the departed linger on before they reincarnate on Shikasta. It indicates that Canopeans may be living in another dimension, or their understanding and their experience of the universe is not limited to the physical world.

Canopeans usually deal with planets that are peaceful and harmonious and they probably live on a peaceful planet themselves. In Canopean NOTES on PLANET SHIKASTA for GUIDANCE of COLONIAL SERVANTS¹⁶⁵, this is explained in the following excerpt:

Envoys are requested to remember at all times that they cannot find on Shikasta what they will have become familiar with in

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

other parts of our dominion and which therefore they will have become disposed to expect: very long periods of stasis, epochs of almost unchanging harmonious balance.¹⁶⁶

Canopeans are strangers to a place of constant strife and struggle. As the NOTES expresses it, Shikasta “is above all one of contrasts and contradictions, because of its in-built stress.”¹⁶⁷ They view the planet’s essence, its core, as one of tension.¹⁶⁸ Even the natural order of the planet is strange to them. They are surprised by the fact that the planet’s ecosystem is one that depends on species’ consuming each other: “...[T]he economy of the planet is such that every life-form preys on another, is supported by another, and in turn is preyed upon, down to the most minute, the subatomic level.”¹⁶⁹ Although the novel does not explicitly express that Canopeans have an alternative system to this circular system of consumption of the planet Shikasta, it can be deduced by their alienated depiction of this ecosystem that they have a different way of sustaining themselves, one that does not depend upon species consuming each other.

Canopeans’ radical differences from Shikastans are apparent even in the depiction of the physical laws of Shikasta. In the following quotation, it can be observed that they are fascinated by the difference in the dimensions of sub-atomic reality.

The fascination of these different perspectives are real dangers. On the scale of the electron Shikasta appears as an empty space where tinily vibrate shapes of mists - the faintest possible smears of substance, the minuest impulses separated by vast space. (The largest building on Shikasta would collapse if the space that holds its electrons apart were withdrawn, into a piece of substance the size of a Shikastan fingernail.)¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

This excerpt demonstrates that to a Canopean mind, Shikasta is a vastly different realm, even to its sub-atomic realm. Shikasta, compared to Canopus, is a world filled with in-built tensions, physical spectacles that are an assault on the Canopean senses and full of strange physical laws. All these features are used in the text to compose and manifest a radical otherness to planet Shikasta (or to planet Earth). The novel depicts a race of aliens who are twice the size of humans, who have ever-changing forms and who have existed in such a physical, or a metaphysical, realm that the natural world and the natural laws of the planet Shikasta become a fascination for them. They are beings who live in their world in peace and free from strife. They do not need aggression and consumption of other entities to sustain their lives. Their perspective and thoughts on Shikasta are expressed excessively in the novel. Almost half of the novel consists of the narrative of Canopeans. Even with all these information given to the reader, the Canopean physical form still remains hidden. One can presume that this is a deliberate choice which signifies that an alien race whose physical world has different rules, even in their sub-atomic dimensions, cannot be understood or cannot be presented to the human psyche.

This situation actually draws a parallel between **Shikasta** and **2001: A Space Odyssey**. In both novels, the reader is introduced to life forms which are more capable than the humans of the planet Earth and in both novels, alien life forms' bodily representations are fairly limited. As discussed in the previous chapter, in **2001: A Space Odyssey** the aliens are a race which boosts the progress of human evolution. The aliens of **Shikasta** function more or less in the same manner as well. In **2001: A Space Odyssey**, aliens force humans to evolve using monolith structures. In Shikasta, Canopeans decide that humans are necessary for their cosmic plans. Canopeans decide to use a plan called "Top-Level Priority, Forced Growth Plan"¹⁷¹. This plan is used in order to accelerate the human evolution in Rohanda using an extra-terrestrial race brought from a Canopean colony. These new forms of life are given the name of

¹⁷¹ **Ibid.**, p. 28.

‘Giants’. With the tutelage from the Giants, the evolution of humans is sped up by thousands of years:

They had established with the Natives a tutelary relation which gave the liveliest of interest and satisfaction to both sides. It was the Giants who taught the Natives the beginnings of plant culture. They taught them, too, how to use animals without harming the species. They were developing language in them. It was still only the basis of many talents- arts, sciences- that the Giants were laying, for it was not yet the time for the establishment of the Lock between Canopus and Rohanda that would begin the Forced- Growth Phase.¹⁷²

With the help of the Giants, humans start to establish a civilisation. They build cities based on geometrical concepts that allow telepathic transmission between Canopus and Rohanda, which is coined in the novel as the Lock. According to Shadia S. Fahim, the aim of the Lock is “[t]he equilibrium between the ‘physical’ and the ‘higher levels’ of perception...”¹⁷³ In other words, the point of the Lock is to create a telepathic link between the planets, which sustains an unnatural balance between the physical world of the Natives and the metaphysical presence of the Giants and Canopeans. Through this link, the dominant species of Rohanda flourish until a cosmic realignment breaks the link, thus marking the start of the decline in Rohanda and its eventual transformation to become the decrepit planet known as Shikasta, losing its spiritual substance.

As it is seen, Canopeans are a race of extra-terrestrial aliens who try to cultivate life on Earth. However, the main difference between the aliens of **Shikasta** and **2001: A Space Odyssey** is that the Canopeans are presented as more beneficial than their counterparts in **2001: A Space Odyssey**. This is not to dismiss the colonial attitude of Canopeans towards the Earth which is remarkably similar to the aliens in Clarke’s novel. There is surely an ambiguous undertone in Canopeans’ approach to Shikasta.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁷³ Shadia S. Fahim, **Doris Lessing: Sufi Equilibrium and the Form of the Novel**, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1994, p. 136.

This point is also stated by Margaret Moan Rowe: “Clearly, Lessing does not celebrate the economic guile and use of force that characterises the power attained by a Cecil Rhodes, but she does celebrate the power, benign of course, that Canopus exercises.”¹⁷⁴ Canopeans approach Shikasta as a colony not to exploit its resources but rather to grow them together. As is referred to above, the reason they try to nourish intelligent life on Earth is to accomplish their cosmic plans of harmony. Planet Canopus uses Rohanda in order to maintain its peaceful system. It should be remembered that when the Lock is weakened on Rohanda, it disturbs the forces of Canopus as well. It is explained in the novel as “[...] the balances of Canopus and her System were suddenly not right[....] It was Rohanda. She was out of phase, and rapidly worsening.”¹⁷⁵ The disaster that comes with the weakening of the Lock actually affects Canopus and its System. However, they do not jettison Rohanda from their System, but cushion and provide “until the cosmic forces changed again”.¹⁷⁶ In Johor’s report, this situation is explained as such: “That is not to say I do not have the right, as we all have, to say, Enough! Invisible, unwritten, uncoded rules forbid. What these rules amount to, I would say, is Love.”¹⁷⁷ This is one of the main differences between the aliens of **2001: A Space Odyssey** and **Shikasta**. The aliens of Clarke’s novel do not observe the history they have manipulated. The difference between the colonial aspirations of the aliens of Clarke’s novel and Canopeans is so little that it is hard to make a distinction between them. Especially, when it is considered that Canopeans, too, blasted cities and killed people¹⁷⁸ who have fallen to the influence of Shammat, a planet that breeds disequilibrium, harm, and dismay.¹⁷⁹ Although Canopeans can be ruthless too in order to battle a morally evil force, i.e., Shammat, their difference can be found in their approach to the subjects that they interact with. In Canopus’s case, they monitor humans and keep track of their history which makes them similar to the gods that they worship on planet Shikasta (it is many times implied in the novel that

¹⁷⁴ Margaret Moan Rowe, **Women Writers: Doris Lessing**, Macmillan, London, 1994, p. 81.

¹⁷⁵ Lessing, **Shikasta**. p. 37.

¹⁷⁶ **Ibid.**, p. 37

¹⁷⁷ **Ibid.**, p. 13.

¹⁷⁸ Lessing, **Shikasta**. p. 140

¹⁷⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 37

Canopeans unintentionally give birth to many religions and religious conventions on planet Shikasta).

In **2001: A Space Odyssey**, the aliens experiment with humans in order to force them to evolve. It is similar in **Shikasta** as well, with a significant difference. To prepare humans for their cosmic alignment, for their System, they send the Giants as teachers and accelerate human evolution. However, the main difference is that Canopeans do not force humans to become beings which transcend humanity, or force primates to become humans. Mainly, they do not experiment on humans to observe their potential. It is stated in the novel that humans are already evolving:

They were showing tendencies to walk upright. They showed rapid increases in intelligence. Our experts told us that these creatures would continue a fast evolution and could be expected to become a Grade A species in, probably, fifty thousand years.¹⁸⁰

The plan of Canopus is to create harmony in the universe via planets that are interconnected through cosmic vibrations. They explain their aim in the galaxy as "... the creation of ever-evolving Sons and Daughters of the Purpose".¹⁸¹ We do not know exactly what "the Purpose" is, but it implies an endpoint, a **telos**, which should be regarded as a movement towards harmony and order. There are some implications regarding their methods in the novel. For example, they make the Giants build cities which mirror mathematical concepts, such as Round City, Square City, and Oval City.¹⁸² Using geometrical shapes as a basis for city planning can be interpreted as Canopeans' emphasis on the logical construction of a galactic system, as mathematics can be interpreted as the language of logic. It also indicates the connection between idealist philosophy and Canopean order as there are no geometrical shapes in the universe, but they are all found by using logic. It shows how Canopus is associated

¹⁸⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 28.

¹⁸¹ **Ibid.**, p. 52.

¹⁸² **Ibid.**, p. 51.

with idealism and rationalism. Johor's statement on joy also emphasises the importance they give to progress and precision: "...with joy never anything but the song of substance under pressure forced into new forms and shapes".¹⁸³ The power of reason and logic shapes the world in a logical order, which in turn brings joy and peace to the rational beings known as Canopeans. It can be claimed that Canopeans are represented as beings of pure logic. This interpretation is enhanced by the fact that they maintain communication with their colonies through energies, or powers, of minds which function like telepathy. They connect with other beings through a link of the minds.

This focus on their mental prowess and the logical structure of their city planning can be associated with idealist rationalism of Plato. Rationalism is "[a]ny view appealing to reason as a source of knowledge or justification".¹⁸⁴ The Canopean geometrical city planning shows their connection to the rational faculty of the mind. As geometry is built on the principles of logic and reason, it can be said that a city built on geometrical concepts shows the Canopean inclination towards Rational philosophy. When one looks at some of the basic concepts of Plato, one of the most prominent rationalist figures in the history of philosophy, it should reveal the similarities between his ideas and some of the premises of Canopean descriptions in the novel.

Plato is usually associated with the theory of forms, or Ideas. The Platonic idealism and the Platonic parable of the cave may prove very significant in understanding the Canopean representation in the novel. In **Republic**, Plato discusses the concept of forms and their relations to the material world. In Plato's understanding, the material world is a mirror of the world of forms. It is indicated when Plato expresses that if you want to create everything "get hold of a mirror and carry it around with you everywhere."¹⁸⁵ This example is given by Socrates (Plato's double in the dialogue) in order to undermine the credits of painters. They are, after all, imitators of the material world, not its creators. He proposes that a couch, for example, is not the idea of a couch itself, only an imitation of the true concept of the couch. As the material

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁸⁴ A.R. Lacey, **A Dictionary of Philosophy**, Third Edition, New York, Routledge, 1996, p. 286.

¹⁸⁵ Plato, **Republic**, Trans. By. Robin Waterfield, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, p.346.

world imitates forms, the artist or craftsman is three times removed from the truth. The artist cannot grasp an object in its entirety. Socrates criticises the artist by saying:

It follows that representation and truth are a considerable distance apart, and a representer is capable of making every product there is only because his contact with things is slight and is restricted to how they look.¹⁸⁶

The imitator, or the representer, cannot comprehend and represent the truth in its entirety. So this representer must copy the appearance of something from a limited point of view. This scepticism towards the artist is not limited to the representer. As stated above, the material world itself is only an imitation of the Platonic forms, as a couch is not the concept of the couch itself but its imitation. Thus the material world itself is only an imitation of the world of forms. Ideas, or forms, are “[...] objective, not subjective. We do not construct them [...]”¹⁸⁷ That is to say, they are not the reflection of our ideas on things, but rather things themselves that appear in our minds in a represented way. This mindset indicates the existence of certain timeless forms that persist in the world, suggesting unchanging values are embedded in the fabric of reality. That is the rational part of the Platonic idealism. The immortal and timeless ideas present themselves and are remembered through the rational mind. The concept of remembrance brings us to the idea that the truth of the world is in a hidden state that should be remembered through the use of reason. This act of remembrance is conceptualised in the parable of the cave.

In **Republic**, Plato uses the image of a cave in order to establish the position of the philosopher in society. He imagines that people are chained in a cave and entertained by reflected shadows emitted from a hidden fire source behind the people. Plato calls this state of ignorance as “the human condition”¹⁸⁸. The philosopher is the one who understands that the world of images is the world of shadows. Other people

¹⁸⁶ **Ibid.**, p.348.

¹⁸⁷ Stanley Rosen, **Plato's Republic: A Study**, London, Yale University Press, 2005, p.255

¹⁸⁸ Plato, **op. cit.**, p.240.

are chained to the cave and only perceive the images on the cave wall, and as Plato states, these “[...]shadows of artefacts would constitute the only reality people in this situation would recognize.”¹⁸⁹ As the philosopher is dragged out of the cave, the burning sun which represents the truth presents itself as an oppressive force. The philosopher would lose sight and would be overwhelmed by the sublimity of truth. The philosopher slowly adjusts to the outside world, or to the world of the truth, and begins to understand the world as it is. The time spent in the cave reveals itself to be a life in captivity, a long and arduous life buried in the lies of the shadow of the caves. That is what the philosopher sees; a world that is grasped by reason. That is why this parable serves as a way of understanding the Canopean mindset.

Canopus sees itself as the philosopher who has access to the entirety of the truth. Shikasta is the world of the cave, the world of shadows. Many times it has been indicated that Shikastans are not able to understand the world. Especially in the “NOTES” section of the novel, it is observed how Shikastans are unable to grasp the basic truths and subverts the truth because of Shammat influence. That is why at some point, Shammat observes that “the planet is immune to truth.”¹⁹⁰ Ripped off from the truth, people start to suffer from the limitations of the material world. This complicated relationship will be inspected in the discussion of biological bodies. Without taking account of the experience of Shikastans and the hardships of the material world, Canopus presents itself as the herald of the harmony in cosmos, almost the replica of the Platonic form of Good. As they are, they seem to be perfect in their near immortality, in their cosmic peace and their understanding of the truth of the world. They are the divine beings that Shikastans looking for salvation, a release from the arduous world of Shikasta.

In conclusion, Canopeans aim to create a peaceful coexistence between themselves and humans, free of strife and violence. Their main objective is to flourish love and a feeling of togetherness. They gain vitality from a substance called SOWF(abbreviation for the ‘substance-of-we-feeling’)¹⁹¹. It is a substance provided

¹⁸⁹ **Ibid.**, p.241.

¹⁹⁰ Lessing, **Shikasta**, p. 326

¹⁹¹ **Ibid.**, p. 96.

by the cosmic vibrations between planets which allows planets to be in cosmic harmony. The subtle and complex antagonistic relationship between humans and aliens in **2001: A Space Odyssey** is not present here. The aliens, still exert their power over humans and control their destiny, but they do not abduct and force humans to evolve, playing with the integrity of human bodies. They do not interfere with humans' physical forms and change them. Instead, they give humans tutors and teachers. Canopeans maintain contact with the planet through telepathy and they send agents disguised as humans to Shikasta to help the humans regain their lost harmony. They do not abduct or force humans to do anything. They try to guide them to find harmony.

Although the aliens in both novels are excessively similar, their approaches to humans differ considerably. This difference in approach should be regarded as significant because while Clarke's absent bodies, i.e. the aliens, are an example of a master race, the Canopean approach is more paternalistic and, sometimes, divine. As their bodies are not materially represented, they can be placed in the same category as the aliens in Clarke's novel. Their representations are basically the same (with a minor difference, namely Canopeans' choice of donning the flesh of humans, which will be discussed in the second subchapter). However, this sameness does not have the same meaning. Clarke uses the absent bodies in order to create an omnipotent race of beings, who are also a mirror for humanity's potential, that control humanity's fate. This idea of potentiality, however, creates a standard, a **telos** for human progress. It serves as a guideline to follow. In **Shikasta**, beings with absent bodies act as invisible benefactors and sometimes as punishers. They do not mirror human progress and evolution. They signify a radical difference as they do not represent the future potential form of humans.

Although Canopeans try to help humans evolve and be their companions in the cosmos through their 'Lock', humanity's reaction to their presence is more akin to the relationship between worshippers and their gods. Canopeans' interference, especially after the breaking of the 'Lock', becomes more like a relationship between benign deities and their subjects. However, the incomprehensible power of the Canopeans causes a schism between the two species. The companionship between the species becomes a relationship of quasi-religious dependency. Canopeans, albeit reluctantly,

become their lords. This creates a complex relationship on Shikasta. They suffer from this situation until the Apocalypse.

At the end of the novel, Shikasta becomes a place of cosmic harmony after a worldwide catastrophe. The cities reappear similar to the pre-stricken era of Shikasta. Throughout its history, Shikasta has been a place of suffering and disarray. When the cosmic Lock is reinstated, after the interfering parasitic Shammat- another cosmic empire that feeds on the flow of SOWF between Canopus and Shikasta- destroys itself, it is seen that humanity becomes closer to their benefactors, not by becoming similar to them in their physical form, but in their renewed state of consciousness. Humans and Canopeans become harmonious again. It is most evident in the letter written by Kasim, a child who was for a time under the protection of George and later lived with Rachael and Suzannah, and who is also a survivor of the Apocalypse at the end.

When I came down the hill into this town, I was looking to see if it has a shape, you bet, and it has. It is beautiful, a circle, but with scalloped edges [...] It has the same paved centre, a circle, and a very beautiful fountain[...]Again, no one knows anything about plans or architects, it just grew up, or so it would seem.¹⁹²

This passage demonstrates how the cities of ancient times, the cities built with the geometric perfection of the Canopean mind, reappear again. They grow like weeds, almost by themselves. This is very similar to Platonic rationalism which proposes that we host knowledge in our minds that we have forgotten. Plato proposes the idea that “our souls existed earlier as well, separate from bodies, before they were in human form, and they had wisdom.”¹⁹³ It is as if this rationalist approach manifests in the world itself. As soon as Shammat is destroyed in the Apocalypse, the world itself starts to remember its cosmic connection. As this passage shows, the world is returning, or rather remembering, the paradise of Canopean rule. This passage shows how the evils

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 441-442

¹⁹³ Plato, *Meno and Phaedo*, Trans. By. Alex Long, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 66.

of the world symbolised by Shammat are cleansed and the world is returning to its ideal state, the state ordained by reason. Not only the cities, but people themselves are returning to their original selves, which are free from strife and more in tune with Shikasta vibrations. Kasim, again, states in his letter that,

We used to believe George was special, well I am not saying he isn't [...] But there a lot like George [...] [t]hese people are George-people. They are the same. I know this is impossible, but it is the conclusion I have come to. There are more and more George-people all the time.

It is the same in this town as everywhere else. Now I am getting used to walking into a town with my stomach muscles relaxed and not in a twist and not on my toes all the time in case something comes out at me from some corner [...]¹⁹⁴

What Kasim refers to is the return of Canopean rule, that stress-free world of the past. These George-like people might refer to two things. One is that more Canopeans are now appearing on the planet, which shows that Canopus has now returned to Shikasta. This signals that the relationship between the two planets has been reinstated as Canopus previously decided to reduce their efforts on Shikasta. The other interpretation is that the people on Shikasta now feel the connection between themselves and Canopus again. As a result, their mental faculties are becoming stronger and they are receiving enough SOWF to feed their minds. This shows that after the painful process of being abused by Shammat, Shikasta is returning to its more peaceful overlords, the Canopeans.

Finally one should also refer to other absent bodied forces in the novel: Sirius and Shammat. Sirius is a planet that fought against Canopus in the past but is now in an uneasy alliance with Canopus. They were given the Southern Hemisphere of Shikasta on which they conducted experiments on living beings. We do not see the consequence of their experiments in detail but it is implied that many mythical beings

¹⁹⁴ Lessing, **Shikasta**, p. 443.

such as “little people”¹⁹⁵ that live in subterranean places, who are skilful at “mining, smelting, surveying”¹⁹⁶ reminiscent of the Germanic myths of Dwarfs, may have appeared as a consequence of their experiments. The Sirian experiments generally do not influence Shikastans directly. However, Shammat, an outpost planet that has been colonized by criminals who fled from the Puttiora empire, affects Shikastans significantly. Just as Canopeans seem to be the Platonic form of harmony, Shammat seem to be the form of dissonance. They are represented as greedy and parasitic. They feed on SOWF which is provided by Canopus. When the Lock weakens, they gradually take control of the planet by feeding on Canopus and causing disarray. It is heavily implied that the evils of the world are caused by Shammat influence, as they are highly individualistic (a symptom of the Degenerative Disease according to Canopeans) and their structure is highly hierarchical. The letter from Tafta, who bears the self-imposed title of “Lord of Shikasta”, demonstrates how Shammat sees itself in a very egocentric way.

From TAFTA, SUPREME LORD of SHIKASTA,
to SUPREME SUPERVISORY LORD
ZARLEM on SHAMMAT *Greetings!*
Greetings to the Shammat General Rule!
Obeisance!
Obeisance to Puttiora!
All things obey Puttiora, the All-Magnificent!
Shikasta lies beneath your heel, Shikasta awaits your will!
From Zone to Zone, from Pole to Pole, from end to end, Shikasta
subserves you.¹⁹⁷

This way of addressing demonstrates a very hierarchical structure within their ranks. Firstly, Shammat sees itself as the lord of Shikasta which signifies a relationship of

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

serfdom and servitude. Even Canopus, who is responsible for most of the development of the humans on Shikasta does not refer to itself as its lord. Shammat's language is one that is filled with violence and hatred. They see themselves as "all-magnificent" and expect obedience from everyone. They are the embodiment of the us-against-everybody mentality. They lack connection, harmony and love. They see Shikasta as something beneath their heels, something that is under control and ready to be crushed if the need arises. They have to refer to each other by their respective, long and tedious titles, which amplifies the idea that their ego is very important in their structure. A highly individualistic force, Shammat represents the opposite force of Canopean idealism. Canopus emanates harmony and togetherness, while Shammat consumes and destroys. In that regard, Shammat can be positioned at the opposite pole of Canopus. As to the bodily representations of Shammat and Sirius, there is not a clear description. As to their connection with Canopus, as they all are intergalactic beings that have the means to change Shikasta's fate it would not be too wrong to assume they are similar in their bodies. Thus, it may be thought that their lack of bodily representation shows their connection to Canopus. Though they are not shown, the reader can imagine them as similar to Canopeans. They are another force that dethrones humanity's centrality in the great chain of beings, showing that there may be forces greater than humans can know.

In **Shikasta**, the concept of absent bodies, although represented similarly to Clarke's vision, is not an image used for replicating the hierarchal power structure of our world but is instead used as a way of envisioning an arduous relationship between one and the other. It inherently disowns the supremacy of the human-centric worldview by handing the fate of humans to a cosmic force. Lessing imagines a what-if scenario in which a powerful force is so influential to the point that it is responsible for the evolution of human civilisation. By using this scenario, she criticises anthropocentrism and any idea that puts one group above the others. It is suggested that the fear of the Other can be breached by leaving behind a highly individualistic drive and finding a "sense-of-we-feeling", by trying to find a connection with the Other. The difference between the species is something that we should accept as humans, to live and progress in peace and harmony. However, the absence of

Canopean bodies signifies another problematic relationship. This problem is observed in the interaction between Canopus and Shikasta. By themselves, Canopean values and absent bodies signify the idealistic and Platonic forms. They are the ideal forms that Shikastans should aspire to be if they want to free themselves from the tyranny of pain and suffering, i.e., the suffering of the material world. This relationship is what complicates the idealistic values of Canopus. Because when the ideal metaphysical world clashes with the material world, the Cartesian duality of mind and matter faces significant challenges. The following subchapter will discuss this relationship by examining the biological bodies of the inhabitants of Shikasta.

2.2. Biological Bodies of Planet Shikasta

The Absent Bodies in **Shikasta** represent a radical difference from the biological bodies. Their ethereal characteristics form a state of difference that shows the possibility of harmonious co-existence between the species, and they also serve as a way of undermining the human-centric view of the world as they are responsible for the fate of the human species. In a sense, they are beings who live in the Platonic world of forms. The second representations of bodies in the novel are in the form of biological entities. There are three kinds of biological beings in **Shikasta**. There are those who are born, live and evolve in Shikasta, who are brought to Shikasta, i.e., the Giants, and those who visit Shikasta by assuming the biological form of Shikastans. The Giants, who are brought from another colony planet, live in Shikasta for a long time and they become almost natives. That is why they can be regarded as an endemic species of Shikasta, as they are an integral part of the birth of human civilisation. The third one concerns the Canopeans. Although Canopeans assume the form of humans, there are two ways of doing this. One is that they take the appearance of humans and the second one is entering the world through Zone Six and being incarnated as a human child and maturing slowly. Before discussing the significance of Canopeans' assuming the forms of humans, it should first be investigated what topics of discussion are brought to light in the form of biological bodies of Shikasta. The biological bodies of Shikasta can be divided into two sections: One is the endemic species, the species which born and evolved on Shikasta. These include the humans and the Giants (although the Giants come from another planet, their long stay in Shikasta makes them

natives). The other is the imitator species who come from other planets and live on Shikasta or who do not lose their connection to their mother planet and go native, such as agents of Shammat and Canopean Workforce. The Canopean presence can also be divided into two subcategories: Ones who visit Shikasta as themselves and ones who reincarnate by using Zone Six and don the human form of those who live in Shikasta. These biological forms can be read as an argument against the radical division of mind and matter. The following discussion will focus on the representation of biological bodies and how they represent the limitations of the material world on idealistic forms.

2.2.1 Endemic Species of Shikasta

Shikasta primarily focuses on the relationship between two cosmic species: humans and the Canopeans. Although there are other players in this story such as the races of Sirians and the agents of Shammat, their representation is not as prominent as that of humans and Canopeans. The only thing we know about Sirians is that they maintain an uneasy alliance with Canopeans and they used Shikasta's southern hemisphere as their laboratory. The novel does not provide a physical description of the Sirians, making it difficult to discuss their appearance in detail. It might be inferred that they are similar to Canopeans as they seem to be represented similarly. The other species, known as the agents of Shammat, do not have a physical representation either. They are only represented as an outside force that feeds on the power of SOWF like a parasitic entity. Their relationship with humans plays a significant role in the novel. Their position will be inspected in the discussion of humans' biological bodies. Although they do not have a bodily representation, their influence on the bodily functions of humans is significant and should be explored in terms of their relationship with humans.

There are multiple biological forms of humans on Shikasta, so much so that the planet was originally named Rohanda which means 'fruitful'. There are humans, animals, giants, and plant life which constitute the life on the planet. Before humans became humans as we know them, they were apelike creatures. At this point, **Shikasta** echoes the evolutionary narrative of **2001: A Space Odyssey** but with a significant difference. In Clarke's novel, through evolution, humans become more proficient in

their effectiveness in violence as they start to develop weapons. In **Shikasta**, however, the narrative is constructed differently. As in **2001: A Space Odyssey**, humans are selected by a superior form of alien life in order to be nourished. The radical difference between them is that Shikasta humans start their evolution more peacefully. As humans evolve, they become peaceful creatures who live in harmony in their geometrically constructed cities. With the tutelage of Giants, humans learn to be one with nature and learn the ways of connecting with Shikasta using cosmic vibrations.

This idyllic world of pre-fallen Rohanda echoes the Judeo-Christian narrative of the Garden of Eden that precedes the fall of mankind. In the book of Genesis, Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden, without knowing what sin or shame is. Only after eating the fruit of knowledge do they know sin and they become mortal. The fall of mankind in the Judeo-Christian convention creates a theological problem concerning the fate of Adam and Eve. The classical problem can be formulated as such: “If God is almighty, why cannot he destroy evil from the world?”. Many theological answers respond to this question, for example, the epic poetry of John Milton’s **Paradise Lost** (1667) tries to find a balance between the free will of mankind and an omniscient God who knows Satan’s plans but refuses to stop them. The very same theme repeats itself in **Shikasta**. God is replaced by almost immortal and almost almighty aliens i.e., the Canopeans, and Satan is replaced with the evil planet Shammat. Thus, **Shikasta** replaces the duality of good vs. evil, or God vs. Satan with Canopus vs. Shammat. This is a very conscious choice on the part of the author because **Shikasta** itself is almost a theodicy. Instead of “justify[ing] ways of God to men”¹⁹⁸, Lessing seems to justify the ways of mankind to mankind. This justification, however, happens only in the novel’s inner universe. Lessing seems to attribute an evil force, Shammat, as the source of evil in the world in the novel, meanwhile suggesting the evil of the real world comes from what Shammat represents, mainly a selfish desire to consume everything. It seems that **Shikasta** is looking at humanity and sees the source of all evil stemming from the ignorance of humanity. However, Lessing is not judgemental in the novel. Humans of Shikasta are distorted not because they are inherently evil or good, but because they are corrupted by the influence of Shammat. This heavily echoes the biblical narrative

¹⁹⁸ John Milton, **Paradise Lost**, Penguin Classics, London, 2003, p 3.

of Satan's powers of seduction as the source of humanity's inclination towards sinning. In the novel, Shammat replaces Satan as the source of evil on Earth and Shammat's sole purpose is consuming the substance-of-we-feeling. When humanity starts to lose its stock of SOWF, humans feel isolated and more egotistical. This is the fall, according to **Shikasta**, not knowing the world but not knowing it enough to share it with others.

Rohanda symbolises the biblical Garden of Eden, while Shikasta symbolises the world after the Fall of humankind. This reference can be considered as a retelling or rewriting of the myth of the Original Sin. In the Judeo-Christian narrative, the Original Sin is eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge, which is prohibited to humans. In Shikasta, this is replaced by what Canopeans call "the Degenerative Disease". This disease can be defined simply as solipsism and putting an individual's needs above the needs of the community. The novel explains it as a symptom of an excessive focus on one's individuality.

To identify with ourselves as individuals—this is the very essence of the Degenerative Disease, and every one of us in the Canopean Empire is taught to value ourselves only insofar as we are in harmony with the plan, the phases of our evolution. In a more detailed explanation, it can be defined as putting one's own individualistic urges in front of the common good of one's own species. It is a lack of the feeling of community and belonging.¹⁹⁹

This is the essence of Shikasta's Original Sin. It is not caring for the other as much as you care for yourself. As stated above, Shammat represents radical selfishness and individuality. Canopus is also radical in its sense of community. The novel, however, takes the side of Canopus as it is seen in the description of the Lock and after the failure of the Lock (it should not be forgotten that this is a report by Canopus. Thus, it is

¹⁹⁹ Lessing, **Shikasta**, p. 55.

heavily subjective. Although the letters of Shammat show that Shammat is definitely hierarchical and individualistic, Canopus is not altogether right in their approach as it will be discussed later). When Lock breaks down and Rohanda feels the depletion of SOWF, its geometrical cities become uninhabitable as they “were causing real physical damage.”²⁰⁰ The novel states that in the absence of substance-of-we—feeling- which is the substance that binds the community—the world itself becomes painful.

When Johor visits the Giants to understand what is wrong with the world, he sees the signs of Degenerative Disease manifesting themselves: “[T]heir eyes would glaze and wander, and they spoke at random.”²⁰¹ This wandering of the eyes shows that their minds are becoming disarranged and losing their grasp on things. Their random utterances are also a symptom of this disarray. After this brief dissonance, the council of Giants starts to argue and talk out of order. Their argument concerns whether they should leave the planet or stay with the Natives. Johor exclaims that “disobedience to the Master Plan was always, everywhere, the first sign of the Degenerative Disease[...].”²⁰² The Giants were the mentors of the Natives, and the failure of the Lock affected them deeply. They feel that they have lost their purpose and ponder their significance. They focus too much on themselves and miss the point of SOWF, which is maintaining a balance between the world and one’s inner self.

As the we-feeling disappears, people become more violent in order to protect the constructed shell of their ego. As they become too focused on themselves, they start to slip away from the community. This is what happens on Shikasta when SOWF sources deplete. They become more and more selfish, and at some point, this condition becomes synonymous with Shammat. That is why at some point when Johor says that Taufiq, another agent of Workforce, is captured by the enemy, he does not mean that he has been literally captured by Shammat agents, but that he has lost his purpose on Shikasta and deviated from his path chosen by Canopus and decided to choose a career path in politics which may be more appealing to his ego than his purpose decreed by Canopus.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

This is the condition of Shikasta which has been separated from Canopus; a planet that suffers from solipsism and lack of community. As stated before, Canopus and Shammat are more metaphysical concepts rather than material beings. This is not to claim that they are not bound to the material world, but rather their independence from it. As we see in Zone Six, Canopeans can easily access that place when the inhabitants of Shikasta can only reach there in their spiritual form, only to wait for reincarnation. This shows that Canopeans are not bound to the material world whereas humans are unable to escape the materiality of Shikasta. The link with Canopus presupposes the loss of the solipsist sense of identity is the only way humanity can find peace and save themselves.

Although Shikastans are strongly embodied in the world, they are not all disconnected from the spiritual world of Canopus. This condition replicates the Cartesian duality of body and mind. In the previous chapter, it is claimed that Clarke envisions a separation from bodily form as an advancement of sorts. A very similar theme is also present in Lessing's novel as well. Canopus, associated primarily with the mind and spirit, are the godlike figures of the novel while humans echo the helpless man-apes of **2001: A Space Odyssey**. When compared to Clarke's novel, the situation of humans may seem familiar at first. In both novels, the aliens are the benefactors of humans in their evolution and their journey in the cosmos. In **Shikasta** however, the harshness of the material world presents itself more starkly. Clarke envisions a future where humanity ascends to godhood while Lessing imagines the burden of gods impressing themselves on humanity.

The spiritual pressure of Canopus on humanity can be sensed in their entries as well. Canopus always uses a language that seems judgemental of the people of Shikasta for their ignorance, as mostly seen in the "History of Shikasta" chapters, where Canopus comments on the ignorance and inability of Shikastans to grasp the truth. This is, however, counteracted by reports on individuals. These reports on certain individuals create a contrast between the previous reports and the reports on individuals.

At the beginning of the novel, the report on the condition of Shikasta leaves no place for individual endeavours. The reader is presented with people lost in the great scheme of things and subjected to the powers of the cosmos. Few individuals that we see are not fully-fledged characters, but figures who demonstrate the pain suffered by the individuals in Shikasta (even our main point of view character Johor does not show the signs of a three-dimensional character, unlike in the later parts of the novel where he becomes a human by incarnating himself as a baby). After narrating the grand events of the fall of Rohanda and the play of cosmic forces, we are presented with individuals who suffer on Shikasta through various trials. This is the part where we see humans as they are, in a state of suffering. Johor's report presents a bird's eye view of the fate of Shikasta. The reader is told that humans suffer because they lack foresight, are influenced by Shammat and so on. The argument appears logical and reasonable, especially considering that an alien race closely tied to the Platonic forms would likely view the world through a rational lens. However, this perspective is based on logic rather than empirical experience.

Empirical knowledge, one that is gained through experience, is a very different thing from rational knowledge. As discussed above, Platonic forms already inhabit the mind, waiting to be recalled, just as Canopus tries to make Shikastans remember Canopus. Empirical knowledge, however, is gained through sensory experiences. That is to say, it is a way to gain knowledge through matter and the material world, not through a transcendental plane of existence. Thus, the experiences of the individuals of Shikasta come from their empirical data, not through the hive-mind influence of rational cosmic vibrations of Canopus. The struggle of Shikasta starts with their empirical way of gaining knowledge. They live in the world, not outside it. Thus, their experience cannot easily transcend that of the material world, and they cannot easily grasp concepts beyond the empirical data they are given. That is why they cannot grasp what is being said by the Canopeans. One example of this is when the Lock breaks up, David cannot understand what is happening anymore.

To say that he understood what went on was true. To say that he did *not* understand – was true. I would sit and explain, over and over again. He listened, his eyes fixed on my face, his lips moving as he repeated to himself what I was saying. He would nod: yes, he has grasped it! But a few moments later, when I might be saying something of the same kind, he was uncomfortable, threatened. Why was I saying that? And that? his troubled eyes asked of my face: What did I mean?²⁰³

This is an example of how knowledge is lost upon the Shikastan individuals. After the Lock is broken, David is completely out of synchronisation with Canopus. In the Platonic sense, he does not have access to the idea of truth. The same thing happens again with Rachael, the sister of George Sherban who is Johor incarnate. When they talk with Hasan, most likely a Canopean in human form, Rachael cannot understand them:

George is hearing things in what Hasan is saying that are quite beyond me. That I can't hear at all. I could see from George's face that in quite things that were said was much much more. I just couldn't grasp it. It was going too fast for me. It was above my head. The conversation was apparently about not very much.²⁰⁴

This passage reveals that beneath their everyday conversations lies a mystic truth, an inner cosmos reflected in the materiality of the world. As Shikastans are unable to grasp the rational world, they live in the darkness of semi-knowledge. They do not know the truth about the outside world, or the cosmic powers. This ignorance of the idealistic powers of cosmic orders is what creates the Shikastan condition which signifies a lack of SOWF resulting from their disconnection from the Canopean values.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 77

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284.

These values are hidden in the Platonic world of ideas. In the context of the novel, the Platonic world exists in outer space, in other worlds and dimensions.

The rift between Canopus and Shikasta is also replicated in the novel's structure as well. The novel starts with the point of view of Canopus. The story they tell concerns the start of civilisation and the emergence of humans in history. Their perspective shows how small and insignificant individuals can be when compared to the grand events of the cosmos and how their problems may seem petty compared to the grand events of the universe. This bird's-eye view of events that spans thousands of years corresponds to the perspective of Canopus. The lives of individuals are short and small compared to their long lives and their "master plan". The second part of the novel starts with Rachael Sherban's journal and this is the part where the readers see the individual endeavours in all this complex cosmic structure. Rachael's feelings, anguish, and depression caused by the harsh living conditions in the underprivileged parts of the world are what the reader may associate with more easily. This is because the Canopean report shows a world suffering from the Canopean perspective. No matter how much love they show to this world, they cannot fully grasp the Shikastan experience. In Rachael's diary, however, the reader sees a human being who feels helpless against the world. The world is too much and too powerful for humans. They are not able to return to space and return to a place filled with SOWF. Humans are confined to this planet. If Canopus is the rational Platonic realm, Shikasta is the empirical material plane. Shikasta, all in all, is restricted by the limitations of its own materiality. Thus, the endemic species of Shikasta, i.e., humans, are under the pressure of the materiality of this world and cannot find the connection to the ethereal reality of Canopus. To reach there, humans must learn how to love and share with each other on a material and spiritual level.

The novel shows that when humanity lacks a sense of community and spiritual connection with each other, they are left alone in the material world, and become subjected to the tyranny of matter without being able to grasp transcendental values or the Platonic idea of Good. As a result, the endemic species of Shikasta, including Giants to a degree (as they become forgetful of Canopean powers as well), and other animals are dominated by the material world and unable to ascend their condition

because of the parasitic influence of Shammat and their lack of SOWF. In these conditions, they are not able to reach the rational and orderly world of Canopus. Thus, the depiction of the human condition in the novel shows that although the mind (or the spirit) is above and more transcendental than the body, one cannot discard the body like an empty shell. One has to live in the world through the body and shoulder the burden of the materiality of the world.

2.2.2 Imitator Species of Shikasta

The absent presence of Canopeans has been discussed above by comparing it with Arthur C. Clarke's **2001: A Space Odyssey**. It has been expressed that the main difference between the two representations is not exactly in the form of their representations but in their signification. Basically, the aliens of **2001: A Space Odyssey** are represented as the potential future evolution of humans and, in their current state, a force that cannot be perceived by the human mind. Thus, they are positioned as a superior form of being that has almost absolute power over the future and destiny of the human population. Canopeans, on the other hand, represent a species that is so different from humans in their bodily representations that it is hard to determine whether they are a future evolutionary possibility of humanity or another species altogether. The text itself refrains from making any conclusive remarks. Even their place within this universe is uncertain since they traverse the metaphysical planes such as Zone Six. This indeterminacy signifies that Canopeans' history or form should not be considered in relation to humanity. Their function as benevolent supervisors and their position as divine forms are the focal points of their being in the novel. They are a companion species that helps humans achieve a more peaceful existence in the cosmos. Their absent bodies code them as quasi-divine helpers, who sometimes punish "the sinners".

If the absent bodies of Canopeans can be considered as the primary form of representing the Canopeans, the following discussion will focus on the second representation of Canopeans. This time, instead of discussing the significance of their absent bodies, their power of assuming another life form, through shapeshifting or through incarnating, will be brought under inspection.

In **Shikasta**, the alien race known as Canopeans makes contact with other life forms in the cosmos to determine their possibility of becoming harmonious with their “master plan”. They choose specimens and sometimes help them to evolve, just as they have done with the humans of Shikasta. After they deem a species worthy, they work towards “the Lock”, a special alignment of cosmic vibrations between Shikasta and Canopus that allows them to stay in harmony with each other. To maintain contact and guide humanity according to their cosmic plan, they send Canopeans who are known as the Workforce. These extraterrestrial beings communicate with the Shikastan population in two ways; by changing their physical appearance in order to look similar to humans, or by being reincarnated as humans through Zone Six, a metaphysical plane where the dead of the Shikasta go so that they may reincarnate and born as humans again. Those who replicate the appearance of humans have their all-prior knowledge before they descend onto the planet, and they are not affected much by their new form. Those who are born via visiting Zone Six, however, do not remember their past life in the Canopean Workforce, but they feel there is some indefinable core within themselves that they cannot recall exactly. These two different forms should be inspected to understand how bodies are considered in the novel. Firstly, the shape-shifting ability of Canopeans must be examined to understand the significance of the image of the body.

Canopeans, as stated before, are beings who have tremendous powers and long lives. One of these abilities is to be able to change their shape when they visit a planet. We see this ability when Johor visits Rohanda after something has gone wrong with the alignment of the planets. Johor descends into the world through a spaceship and “not by means of Zone Six”.²⁰⁵ Johor takes the form of a Native, which is the term Canopeans use for humans. However, he cannot enter this world without acclimatizing first because “the difference between Canopus and Rohanda was very great and [...] time had always to be given to the process of acclimatization”.²⁰⁶ This shows that they can shapeshift into a human but they cannot readily act in the human skin. This shows that the material world, in this case Rohanda, has its limits. Even a Canopean cannot

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

become a human instantly. The proportions of the body also affect its wearer. When Johor meets the Giants, he feels the smallness of his body and this triggers a yearning for a paternal figure.

As for me, I was surprised to find myself childishness. Looking up these immense people was to be reminded of impulses I had not consciously remembered. I wanted to reach for their hands and be held, supported; wanted to be lifted up to the level of these benign faces, wanted all kinds of comforts and soothings that I did not *really* want at all – so that I was ashamed, and even indignant.²⁰⁷

The yearning for a paternal figure or the desire to be protected from the world echoes very infantile instincts. Johor here is a Canopean who still has all his memories intact and is not reincarnated as a human but just pretending to be one. Even though he has all the experiences of his past ready at hand, he cannot escape the desire to be enveloped by these protecting parental and benign figures. The reason he feels ashamed is that he knows that he has succumbed to the material world. The yearning for protection, to be cared for by another is a very humanlike trait. The materiality of the world makes one feel the need for security. Johor very likely feels the burden of a small body against these giants and needs to be cared for by them. This passage demonstrates that even a Canopean who still remembers who he is cannot escape the overwhelming presence of the materiality of the world. It can be concluded that even when Canopus takes the form of humans without losing their previous identity, they cannot easily avoid the material needs of this temporary body. This situation intensifies even more when they do not remember that they are from Canopus.

This brings the discussion to the point where one should examine what happens when a Canopean takes the form of a human and is born into this world. Many Canopeans come to Shikasta to support their master plan and most of them utilise Zone Six for reincarnation. Although it is implied that many Canopeans live on Shikasta,

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

the two stand out as the most prominent figures in the novel: Taufiq and Johor. Taufiq is a close friend of Johor who reincarnated in Shikasta as John Brent. It is expressed in the novel that Taufiq had a mission but he forgot about it and did what he wanted to according to his own desire. It is expressed as “[i]n this corrupt and ghastly age the young man could not avoid having put on him many pressures to leave the path of duty and it was early [...] that he succumbed.”²⁰⁸ He was supposed to be in a leading position in the legal system. He was supposed to be “known as incorruptible, unbribeable, disinterested, straight-speaking.”²⁰⁹ However, his idealism somehow corrupted him. He entered the realm of politics, not because he wanted to gain power and authority, but because he thought that he could have some influence on doing things in the right way. This kind of self-importance, the belief that only one’s way of doing things may make the world right, is seen as problematic in the Canopean mind. It is expressed as such when a report in the book refers to Canopeans on Shikasta:

They turned into wrong and destructive paths believing that they were better than others whose belief in self-interest was open and expressed, better because they, and they alone, knew how the practical affairs of the planet should be conducted. An emotional reaction to the suffering of Shikasta seemed to them a sufficient qualification for curing them.²¹⁰

The emotional reaction referred to here is directly associated with the Shikastan material world. The responses of Shikastans are limited by the material world and Canopean thinking prioritises the rational and logical powers over the emotional and material responses. That is why approaching a problem of suffering from only an emotional perspective is seen as faulty because it would lack the rational dimension of the issue. Thus, John Brent becomes a problematic figure in the Canopean eyes, as he “saw himself as a saviour of some kind, dreamed himself as the leader of the nation.”²¹¹ This statement seems to imply that Taufiq has deviated from his intended path, falling

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.101.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.101.

to a god complex. This shows that the material world's pressure and substance are too powerful even for a Canopean. When they experience Shikasta in a body, they succumb to its emotional powers, falling to Degenerative Disease that Canopeans view as corruption itself. Developing a selfish identity is the core of Degenerative Disease and Taufiq's example shows how easy it is to fall to it.

Taufiq's situation stands in stark contrast to Johor's as Johor seems incorruptible when compared to Taufiq. Johor is the closest thing to a protagonist in the novel when it is considered that the novel form itself is anti-individualistic and fragmented. Concerning the novel prioritising grand themes over individual stories Whittaker states that:

[T]he narrator is appropriately distanced from his material unprecedented in Mrs Lessing's work [...] there is pain and difficulty for the narrator, but it is understood in the context of a cosmic scheme, and therefore the personal signifies little.²¹²

The narrator and the form try to distance themselves as much as possible to give an appearance of objectivity, trying to distance themselves from the emotional burden of the individual. The form itself mirrors the theme of substance-of-we-feeling by not prioritising an individual before the other, but emphasising the whole as a harmonious unity. According to Whittaker, this stems from a rejection of personal and limited points of view. She states that "[t]he form of this novel is appropriate to Mrs Lessing's rejection of the personal (and to her eyes, limited) point of view."²¹³ Although the novel seems to focus on cosmic events, it should not be forgotten that a large part of the novel is narrated from the perspective of Rachael. This is because although the cold eye of the archivist is present and averse to individual problems, Lessing does not forget that these cosmic events have emotional effects on individuals.

²¹² Whittaker, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

²¹³ Whittaker, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

Amid all these shifts of perspective, from aliens to humans, one character, Johor, remains central. Although he is a central character, Johor only functions as a medium, not the main focus of the novel, but the agent that carries its message. Johor's reincarnation is crucial to understanding the novel's dichotomy between mind and matter. Up to this point, this study has expressed how the novel shows Canopean idealism as depicted as a transcendent form of 'the good', and how it establishes order and creates harmony. Its superiority over Shikasta materialism and emotionalism has been emphasized many times by Canopeans themselves. However, in Rachael's narrative and some of the documents of Canopus, this apparent superiority is questioned when we look at the text closely.

One of the main themes that the novel questions is the division between the mind and body. The mind corresponds to Canopus's idealism while the body corresponds to the material world of Shikasta. While the narrative indicates that rational idealism offers solutions to the world's problems, it also highlights how this approach overlooks the existing material conditions. This issue becomes most evident when Johor takes the form of a human and becomes George Sherban.

After the first half of the novel, Johor is given a mission by Canopus to save Shikasta by incarnating as a human being. While this echoes the Christian belief that God incarnated in the body of Jesus Christ, which emphasizes the link between Canopus and the idea of divine "good", it also shows what it means to be a human. Johor, a Canopean, must transform into a human to influence the population effectively. He comes to the world so that what "was said by [...] him could take effect".²¹⁴ After George becomes a human, people take notice of his otherworldly presence. People are drawn to him as past people were drawn to prophets. This is because all the past prophets of major religions are implied to be Canopeans. Canopean reports state that "every one of our public cautioners left behind a religion, or cult, and many of the unknown ones did, too".²¹⁵ His aura of Canopus makes George almost a religious prophet. As Bootheina Majoul states "Johor is the messenger embodying all

²¹⁴ Lessing, *Shikasta*, p. 142.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.144.

religions.”²¹⁶ The novel shows that many people are drawn to the words of George, to the point that even though he is only partially Indian, he becomes the representative of races who are oppressed by the colonial imperialism of white races in the trial that judges the white races, who are also represented by another Canopean, John Brent.

George emanates a mystical aura that makes him special among his peers, a trace of his Canopean powers. When he was Johor, he was much more aware of the power balances between Shikasta and Shammatt, and he tried to help people while maintaining his powers and his previous knowledge. When he became a human, however, he felt the oppressive power of the material world and its pressure on the senses. At a party his family hosts, George expresses his frustration with this world, with its hardships and its material restrictions. Racheal notes George’s anger and frustration in her notebooks.

Sitting in the moonlight that night on the wall, George said, There were thirty people there.

I already knew from his tone what he meant.

[...] But then he said something I hadn’t expected.

[...]George said, Passing teacups and glasses of booze and saying please and thank you...

Well, I was laughing at that, seeing what he saw.

But then he said, Thirty bladders full of piss, and thirty backsides full of shit, and thirty noses full of snot, and thousand of sweat glands pouring out grease...

I was upset, because he was speaking in a rough angry voice. And when I heard this voice, I was already ready to believe it was me he was angry with.

He went on and on, A room full of shit and pee and snot and sweat. And cancers and heart attacks and bronchitis and pneumonias. And three hundred pints of blood. And please and thank you and yes Mrs Amaldi, and Mr Volback, and Please Mrs Sherban, and Oh dear me Minister Mobote, and I am more important than you are, Chief Senior Register Doctor.

I could see he was angry. He was restless too, as he sometimes was, knotting himself together, and tying his legs around each other.

He was furious. He started crying.

He said: This is a terrible place, a terrible place.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Bootheina Majoul, **Doris Lessing: Poetics of Being and Time**, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, p. 41.

²¹⁷ Lessing, **Shikasta**, p. 270.

This passage demonstrates many important factors concerning George. First, the tone George adopts implies his frustration. His first remarks concerning people passing teacups and expressing gratitude towards each other suggest his irritation with the pretentious nature of these social events. However, the topic shifts to their bodies and the parts of the body that produce what are conventionally considered unpleasant byproducts such as excrement, urine and sweat. This demonstrates a feeling of disgust towards the bodies even though such byproducts are a natural consequence of bodily functions. This uncalled disgust towards their body suggests the Canopean aversion towards the material world. George feels anger towards the material world of Shikasta.

These remarks are followed by George's anger towards illnesses such as cancer and heart attack. Such illnesses are inherently uncontrollable and appear because the world is a place full of dangers for humans. The illnesses do not happen because of the wrongs of humans. George seems to be aware of this fact also and diverts his anger towards Shikasta, and towards the people present there. That is why he says he hates the place and he cries because he is unable to bear the burden of the material world. It is also significant that George refers to the world as "this place", which suggests he is aware of another place, namely Canopus. This awareness strongly indicates that George somehow did not lose his connection to Canopus. It is significant because it shows the relationship between Canopus idealism and Shikasta materialism by using George's body and mind.

George is aware of the more rational realm of Canopus but struggles with the challenges of the material world of Shikasta. As mentioned earlier, this is the theodicy of **Shikasta**. The world is a harsh and difficult place and even a quasi-divine being cannot completely navigate the material limitations of the material existence. Consequently, the relationship between Canopus and Shikasta is quite problematic. Up to this point, it has been discussed how the novel presents rationalism and idealism as a way of living a peaceful life. In exploring Canopean bodies, the analysis suggested that Canopus represents an orderly and rational worldview. In the discussion concerning biological bodies, it is inspected how the material body is represented as

the inferior position between the two, as it is subjected to the world the body lives in and vulnerable to the demands of its surroundings, thus ruptured from the world of ideas. In Johor's transformation to George, it is observed how these ideas clash with each other. In this clash, Johor stands for Canopean idealism while George symbolises the Shikasta material world.

The problematic relationship between Canopus and Shikasta is also replicated in the relationship between the two twin brothers, George and Benjamin. George is the more charismatic and mature one, while Benjamin is the one who is more immature and thoughtless at times. Although thoughtless, Benjamin is not a bad person at all. Although he is not as charismatic as George, he also bears an aura of his own. Benjamin looks immature and thoughtless compared to George, who at this point is established as some kind of semi-divine being. Rachael describes both as follows: "There sat Benjamin in one chair. Large, hairy, brown. Like a peasant. And George, thin and lithe and elegant."²¹⁸ While Benjamin looks like a peasant, someone rough but also has ties with nature and does menial work with his body, George is given features of fragility and elegance, which echoes a very ancient social distinction between nobles and peasants. The noble, who does not use his body for menial work but is instead associated with mental work, stands for Canopus who rules the symbolic peasant, Shikasta. The distinction between the two brothers reflects the inequality between Canopus and Shikasta. Canopus is a very advanced civilisation that is exempt from the hardships and material struggles Shikasta faces. Thus, Canopus intervention seems more dubious as Canopus might not wholly understand what it feels like to exist on Shikasta.

Canopean ignorance concerning the experience of Shikasta is also emphasised in the relationship between George and Suzannah, George's girlfriend. Rachael reminds George that Suzannah puts George on a pedestal. Rachael states that Suzannah might want to marry George while George expresses that Suzannah knows that marriage is not on his "agenda".²¹⁹ To this, Rachael replies:

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

[...] You can marry fifty other women and she can marry some fat stupid speech-making politician, and she can be a big lady and make speeches and run around in a uniform, and you will still be the most important thing that ever happened or ever could happen.²²⁰

This demonstrates what happens between Canopus and Shikasta in a microcosmos. George represents Canopus—a highly idealistic and rational civilisation capable of manipulating and guiding Shikasta. Suzannah, in contrast, represents Shikasta, which is a world whose fate is determined by the galactic forces beyond its powers. Shikasta is very fragile against the cosmic forces. What Canopus does is very similar to the relationship between George and Suzannah. On the surface, George is affectionate towards Suzannah, but he is not aware of how much of an impact he has on her, to the point that he might become the single most important thing in her life. Similarly, Canopus tries to cultivate Shikasta to reach a higher cosmic awareness and establish a link between Canopus and Shikasta. While doing this, Canopus sees itself as the benevolent benefactor of Shikasta. It can be stated that Canopus is indeed superior in their peaceful ways. They provide Shikasta with SOWF, which is a vital source of energy that Shikasta needs to be able to sustain itself spiritually. However, while Canopus's intentions may be peaceful and altruistic, it fails to fully comprehend the unintended harm it causes.

Firstly, the reason they approached Shikasta is not as altruistic as it seems. As stated above, Canopus has a “Master Plan” that they want to accomplish. As one of the colonies of Canopus was destined to doom, Rohanda was chosen as a substitute to continue their plans. They thus state in their reports: “If Rohanda could be brought up to the operational levels by then, it could take the place in our cosmic scheme of that unfortunate one [...]”²²¹ Although their intervention would benefit Rohanda as it would elevate it to a higher level of civilisation, their initial approach suggests that they are interested in them only because of the benefit they would bring to their “Master Plan”.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.324.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

It is indeed beneficial for Rohanda that Canopus helps the planet, but their intervention also makes it very susceptible to hazards as they provide a stress-free environment for the Natives of Rohanda. Canopus even criticises itself for this fact:

Perhaps it is the fault of the species who thrive in peace, mutual help, aspirations for more of the same – to forget that outside these borders dwell very different types of mind, feeding on different fuel[...]

And so we did not take Shammat enough into account[...]

Again, we believe that this is a question of benign and nurturing minds not being able to credit the reality of types of mind keyed to theft and destruction. Colony 10 [...] had not experienced setback and threat. We now believe it is a disadvantage to allow too much prosperity, ease of development – and on none of our other colonies have we again been satisfied with an easy triumphant growth. We have always inbuilt a certain amount of stress, of danger.²²²

This oversight Canopus demonstrates how a careless act by Canopus may have major outcomes. When Canopus observes the growth and does not take precautions, it results in a disaster, allowing Rohanda to fall into Shammat's hands and making the planet "stricken". By making Rohanda a stress-free planet without internal strife, Canopus causes Rohanda to be susceptible to outside dangers. This shows that any intervention of a planet of high advancement may result in a horrible disaster for the underdeveloped one.

Adding to the oversight of their plans, their approach to the planet according to their needs sometimes becomes too harsh as well. When Shikasta strays away from the design of Canopus, they punish them severely, even resorting to massacre. In one of their reports, Canopus openly admits their massacre of people whom they deemed unsavable. Evoking the biblical tale of Noah and his ark, Canopus tells an old man whom they have chosen "[...] that apart from his family, his tribe, and certain others,

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

soon none would remain alive, for the cities would be destroyed, because of their wickedness.”²²³ Though some people are saved, the remainder of the people on Shikasta are decimated because they have strayed away from their plan and “[...] fallen victim to the enemies of the Lord”²²⁴ The term “Lord” here is used by Shikastans to refer to Canopus, as Shikastans are unaware of the true nature of this cosmic force and sees them as the “Lord”, a very Christian way of referring to God. Similar to the biblical narrative, the wicked people who fall victim to the influence of Shammat are punished by death. Johor reports this event thusly: “Having made sure of the safety of those who could be saved, we signalled to the space-fleet, and the cities were blasted into oblivion, all at the same time.”²²⁵ Canopus obliterates whole cities in order to cleanse the evil influence of Shammat. This is a very drastic and radical decision by Canopus and it suggests that Canopus can respond to crises in a very harsh way. It is an act of violence that cannot be defended easily and may remind the reader of many massacres and genocides of the twentieth century. Even Johor, the Canopus agent, expresses unease over these actions. He reports the pleas of those who wish to survive this annihilation, and as someone who does evil deeds out of duty but feels the burden of his crime, he reports: “I do not wish to write further of this.”²²⁶ He avoids dwelling on the crimes of his home planet and recognises the problematic issues of this measure against Shammat’s influence.

Canopus sometimes solves the problems that occur on Shikasta in dreadful ways. As previously discussed, Canopus sees itself as the epitome of order, rationality, goodness and harmony and there is no doubt that its power and influence create harmony on Shikasta by maintaining a flow of SOWF among the colonial systems of the Canopus Empire. As the planets connect via the Lock, more flow of SOWF travels between the systems, creating vibrations of harmony. However, their approach to their colonial systems creates a very problematic situation. Although Canopus helps Shikasta to develop, their approach to the planet shows signs of a condescending gaze. Apart from their genocides, Canopus also looks down on the people of Shikasta and

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

regards them as if they are farm animals. Canopus explicitly refers to Shikastans as “animals”²²⁷ when discussing the preservation of some genetic material in the face of the apocalypse. This phrasing implies that some genetic variations are deemed superior and thus more worthy of preservation.

This is not the first time Canopus has referred to the genetic material of Shikastans as well. On Johor’s first visit, when the Lock was weakening, Johor makes the following observation:

The biggest change was that more children were being born than before. The safeguards had been forgotten: gone was the knowledge of who should give birth, who should mate, what type of person was a proper parent. The knowledges and uses of sex had been forgotten. And whereas previously an individual who died before the natural term of a thousand years was unlucky, it was clear that life span was about to fluctuate.²²⁸

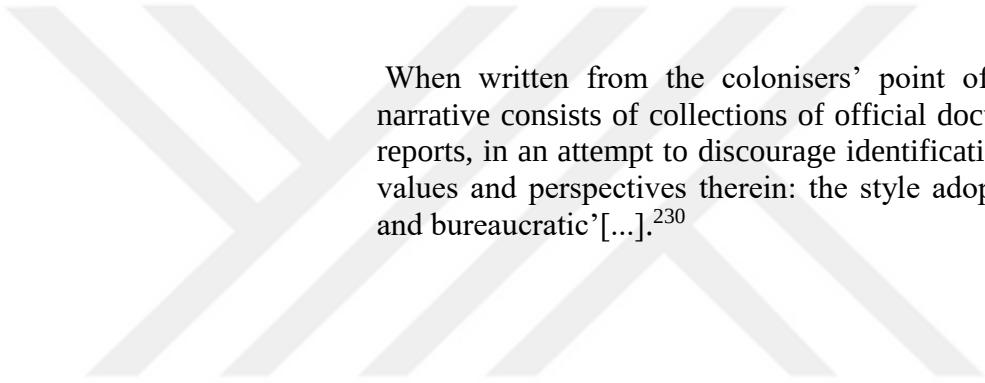
The abundance of children born is implied to be controlled by Canopus. This evokes an image of a farm on a planetary scale. The problem here is that Canopus is trying to create an ideal world where people are bred selectively according to their genetic materials. As a text written approximately three decades after the Second World War, a war in which the Holocaust took place, this kind of statement evokes the fascist and Nazi propaganda of the early twentieth century. Thus, this report demonstrates how authoritative and dangerous the Canopean rule can be.

This segment complicates the novel’s approach to Canopus. Generally, Canopus is presented as the ultimate form of order and harmony, one that tries to bind people rather than create violence and strife. However, its drastic measures make it seem like an empire that abuses its subjects. Although it is evident that without the Canopean teachings and influences, Shikasta falls victim to the power of Shammat.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 427.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26

The text subtly questions whether the problem from the start was that Canopus should have not involved itself with Rohanda and instead allowed it to develop at its own pace. In the end, Canopus is a colonial empire. Although they are as Lessing puts it “the good empire”²²⁹, they are an empire after all and their colonialism, and even the usage of the word “colony”, brings about many questions. However, the form of the Canopean narrative also questions their self-righteous position. It should not be forgotten that, in the end, they are colonisers, and Susan Watkins reminds us of that fact:



When written from the colonisers’ point of view, the narrative consists of collections of official documents and reports, in an attempt to discourage identification with the values and perspectives therein: the style adopted is ‘dry and bureaucratic’[...].²³⁰

The form of the novel is composed of bureaucratic documents in several, parts and it certainly recalls the tone of cold and soulless official documents. The form itself warns the reader about the problematic aspects of the Canopeans.

In the end, the Platonic idealism is very much associated with the idea of the centrality of humans. It is the belief that human reason can find and reach the truth of the world. Human reason itself is integral to humanism and the alien empire depicted as the embodiment of rationalism in the novel is Canopus. Thus, it can be claimed that the Canopean empire is still human-centric in its basis mirroring human-centric values such as idealism, rationalism and logical order. As Clarke’s ever-evolving humans are based on the perfectibility of human reason, Lessing’s Canopeans are the ideals to which humans should aspire. However, Lessing’s narrative does not give precedence to human rationality alone and does not disregard the materiality of

²²⁹ Doris Lessing, **Conversations**, ed. by. Earl G. Ingersoll, Ontario, Ontario Review Press, 1994, p. 170

²³⁰ Susan Watkins, **Doris Lessing**, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013. p. 88.

humans. This duality is represented by Johor's taking the form of George. As Johor, he is much more aware of the Canopean values of order and harmony, but as George, he is aware of the pain of the material world. By using Johor, Lessing demonstrates that although we should embrace the Canopean value of connection, harmony and altruism, we must also be aware of the suffering of the individual. This may be claimed as something Canopus fails to consider. In their moral certainty, they overlook the depth of human suffering and the challenges of the material world.

Doris Lessing's **Shikasta** uses the science fiction genre to comment on societal issues. In Lessing's novel, planet Shikasta, which is used in the narrative as a parallel world to our real world, suffers from a lack of a substance, the substance-of-we-feeling. This substance is claimed to be the source of harmony and peace on Shikasta and the flow of this substance allows the planet-dwellers to have a connection with each other and feed on the positive cosmic vibrations. The loss of connection with the mother planet Canopus which both feeds SOWF and feeds on SOWF of planet Shikasta causes Shikastans to lose their peace and become greedy and selfish creatures. Almost a retelling of the biblical tale of the loss of Eden, **Shikasta** also narrates the fall of mankind from the influence of Canopus, similar to mankind's fall from the grace of God. While **Shikasta** narrates the fall of mankind, it weaves a narrative rich in external influences that are not of human origin. It depicts a world in which humans are almost completely deprived of agency. Humans are reduced to the position of pawns in a chess game between Canopus and Shammat. This allows us to argue that Lessing's narrative decentralises humans and questions humanity's agency. In this chapter of the study, we have discussed how the narrative of the perfection of the human in the science fiction genre is replaced by the questioning of the self-given meaning of humanism in comparison to the vastness of the universe.

Looking at the depiction of the others who are not human in **Shikasta**, one can understand how the narrative establishes humanity as a species that is not at the centre of the universe. Firstly, the form of the narrative itself, which is a collection of reports on humanity, suggests that they view humans as data from which Canopean colonial students can learn about different situations. It is significant as it shows Canopus sees Shikasta as a colony, rather than an independent planet which is true to some extent,

as their reports show that they have been intensely involved with the development of the planet's inhabitants, the humans.

In the previous chapter, the term 'absent bodies' is used to describe beings who have transcended the material plane to become forms of pure energy. This depiction signifies the gap between humans and the godhood to which they aspire. The absent aliens who are godlike beings compared to humans signify the potential of humans in **2001: A Space Odyssey**. In **Shikasta** absent bodies do not refer to Canopeans as energy forms but relate similarly to their status as godlike beings. Their bodies are referred to in a few sentences although never openly described. This representation of the body acts as a way to show that Canopeans are radically different from us, as it is sometimes implied that they are also able to trespass the material world when they enter the metaphysical zones encircling the planet. They are also godlike beings, not limited to the material world. The main difference between Clarke's aliens and Lessing's aliens is that Lessing's aliens do not symbolise a future point for humanity. It is not openly expressed in the text that humans can become like their alien overlords. While Clarke's aliens overthrow the throne of humans in the universe, they also promise a chance for succession in the future. Lessing's aliens do not promise humanity an evolution that will transcend their biological bodies. They only provide humans with SOWF and cosmic vibrations of harmony that bring peace to them.

They also directly contact and interact with humans frequently. Clarke's aliens are seldom seen in **2001: A Space Odyssey** but the aliens of **Shikasta** serve as narrators of the story of the planet and humans. They also take the forms of humans to interact with the planet's inhabitants. They take the human form in two ways: first, with their memories intact, just as if they are putting on new clothing, and secondly, by incarnating as a human being. In the first half of the novel, Johor, our quasi-protagonist, is on a mission from Canopus and reports his actions and observations. In the second half, Johor becomes George Sherban, a human male. By examining Johor's body, one can claim that the novel challenges the concept of Cartesian duality. Canopus functions as the representation of the mind, or the spirit, as if Canopeans do not possess bodies and act purely rationally. They see the world and understand the

problem at its core. They see how acting out of self-interest causes harm and disarray. They view the problems of the world as a result of individuals' selfish desires.

In stark contrast to this viewpoint lies the harsh reality of humanity's numerous and significant challenges. In **Shikasta**, humans find themselves as victims of external circumstances, with their destinies influenced by cosmic forces beyond their control. As the planets shift, the flow of SOWF becomes disrupted, transforming humanity's once peaceful and blissful existence. Consequently, they are subjected to Shammat, characterised by greed and a consumerist lifestyle. Humanity's body is represented as matter in the Cartesian duality. Humans, residing in their physical bodies, experience the burden of material existence. This heaviness leads them to succumb to the selfish influence of Shammat. As a result, humanity spirals toward its destruction, culminating in the Apocalypse at the novel's end.

The novel emphasises the importance of the mind and acknowledges that a rational mind, which disregards selfish needs, is a path to achieving peace. Thus, the Canopeans, who symbolise the rational part of the Cartesian duality, are represented as divine beings who can provide salvation for mankind. However, the novel frequently suggests that their intervention in the world is highly problematic. As beings who have attained independence from the material necessities of a body, Canopeans do not understand how hard it can be to be a human who lacks the necessary flow of SOWF and how challenging it is to live in a biological body that constantly needs deliberate attention to be sustained.

It can be claimed that the argument of the novel lies in the problematic relationship between the duality of the mind and the body. Although the novel sees the value of acting on a rational basis in human lives and living as enlightened individuals, it also acknowledges the obstacles and sufferings of the material world that hinder humanity from living in a rationally ordered world. The mind that can see beyond the material world reaches the hidden truth of the world in the novel. All the Canopean forces that try to help Shikastans make them remember the orders of Canopus that would bring harmony and peace. Although the novel presents Canopus as a benevolent figure, it also subtly shows how punishing it can be if Shikasta strays too far from their

master plan. By doing so, Lessing shows that although rationality may bring order and peace, disregarding the body, which is embedded in the material world, is nothing short of an oppressive movement. Without understanding the individual suffering which can be overwhelming for those who go through these sufferings one cannot judge the chaos of the world. That is why Johor's becoming George is very significant in the novel as a Canopean finally understands the pain of living in the world of Shikasta. The rational perspective itself is not enough to understand the world in its entirety, as it misses the suffering and emotions of the individuals. That is why those who look up from the heavens to those who live on earth cannot fully understand what it means to live on a stricken planet.

Doris Lessing's **Shikasta** is a novel about individual suffering and the anguish of those forced to live in a world of pain and suffering. The novel imagines forces of good and evil in the form of intergalactic empires. Canopus is a civilisation that decentralises and centralises humanism at the same time. While they represent the insignificance of humanity compared to the grand cosmos, they are also the representation of Platonic idealism which gives precedence to human intellect and rationality in their power to understand the ideal forms and the truth of the world. Consequently, Canopus both undermines the centrality of humans and also acknowledges the values that are created by humans. Thus, the novel stands in a liminal space between a world dominated by a belief in the supremacy of humanism in science fiction and radical questioning of the supremacy of human centrism in science fiction. Arthur C. Clarke's novel strongly suggests that humans, although not advanced enough, clearly have the potential to become godlike beings who can rule the material world. In Doris Lessing's narrative, this position is replaced by the radical questioning of humanity as humans are depicted as an ignorant race compared to the beings who rule galactic empires and the universe. Although they are superior to humans, their values are based on order, harmony and structure, suggesting that they are the idealised version of humanity.

The following chapter will discuss how posthuman science fiction deconstructs the idea of human perfectionism and human endeavour. This chapter will explore how a space adventure story, lacking any earth-based human characters and no mention of

Earth, critiques traditional epic heroic narratives. It will also demonstrate how the ideal body image is a human construct that reinforces the notion of human perfectibility amidst the chaos of the universe.



CHAPTER 3

SENTIENT MACHINES AND INTERSTELLAR WAR: IDEOLOGICAL BODIES IN IAIN M. BANKS'S *CONSIDER PHLEBAS*

In this chapter, Iain M. Banks's first science fiction novel **Consider Phlebas** will be discussed in terms of the novel's approach to representing bodies in its narrative and its engagement with postmodern and posthumanist ideas. In the previous chapters, the bodies of the novel **2001: A Space Odyssey** have been discussed in three thematic parts; the evolutionary bodies, the absent bodies, and the constructed bodies. The bodies of **Shikasta**, on the other hand, have been discussed in two main categories: the absent bodies and the biological bodies. In this chapter, these concepts will be re-evaluated in light of the postmodernist and posthumanist science fiction of Iain M. Banks. It will be demonstrated in this study how a novel written at the end of the century engages with these themes and challenges a human-centric narrative by questioning the concept of human perfectibility and humanity's central position in the cosmos.

In the first subchapter, the representation of biological bodies will be examined, demonstrating how a biological body is portrayed as being not significantly different from a mechanical body. It will be argued that this kind of approach to biological bodies serves to challenge the sanctity and supremacy traditionally associated with the human biological body. By blurring the distinction between biological and constructed bodies, the novel shows how ephemeral the ideas can be regarding the significance given to the stable concept of a perfect human body. By questioning these ideas, the novel explores the potential for post-human body forms.

In the second subchapter, the representation of absent bodies and constructed bodies will be discussed together. In this section, the concept of absent bodies is argued with references to the previous chapters. It will be shown how the absent bodies which evoke a sense of awe and association with divinity are both deconstructed and parodied in a postmodern way. Additionally, the discussion will examine how the concept of

the constructed body illustrates the artificial significance attributed to the biological superiority of the human body. It will be shown how *The Culture*, the name of the prominent civilisation in the novel, regards machine life as equal to biological life and how the novel repeatedly expresses and highlights this opinion. The novel uses this idea to question the hierarchical values inherent in ideologies such as humanism.

At the end of the chapter, a distinct type of body will be analysed. This distinct type of body, referred to as a Mind, exists in the third-dimensional world while its consciousness is located in hyperspace, a space which signifies higher and lower dimensions in the novel's universe. While this being has a material form, it primarily exists in the hyperspace. It is a being both absent, because its core being, its computational mind, is hidden from the material world, and it is also a constructed body because it is actually a supercomputer that is not produced by nature but constructed in a factory craft. It will be proposed that this representation of the body reflects a postmodern approach to the representation of the body, as it promotes hybridisation and the blurring of boundaries between what is material and what is metaphysical, creating a multiplicity of meaning that exemplifies the hallmark of postmodern writing.

Consider Phlebas is Banks's first science fiction book but it was not his first published work. Before **Consider Phlebas**, he wrote three other novels under the name of Iain Banks (omitting the middle initial 'M'). He wrote so-called 'mainstream novels' that were distinct from one other. In 1987, he published the first novel in his "Culture" series, **Consider Phlebas**. While publishing this book, his publisher requested that he use a pseudonym to avoid his established name being associated with the science fiction genre. Kincaid describes the situation as follows:

At this remove, it is difficult to ascertain how reluctant Macmillan were to publish *Consider Phlebas*. They weren't known for publishing science fiction at the time, and here was one of their brightest stars wanting to produce the stuff. Banks's reputation as an innovative writer to watch had been secured among precisely that portion of the literary establishment most likely to decry science fiction, so there

was an obvious danger that he might damage his career. At the same time, he was a bestselling writer who by now must have had quite a bit of clout with the publisher. He was asked to use a pseudonym [...].²³¹

The novel was considered a risk by the publisher as it had the potential to sully Banks's established name. After Banks took the risk and only added the initial of his middle name, the publisher declared they "had another bestseller on their hands, and one that reached a new audience."²³² This outcome demonstrates that the line between so-called good and high-brow literature might not be too distinct, and an imaginative and insightful science fiction novel. This is a point promoted by postmodernism which blurs the lines between high literature and low literature. As Ihab Hassan explains, postmodernism fosters hybridisation, creating a mutant genre that blends tropes and plays with continuity and discontinuity, a new tradition of mingled high and low art.²³³ The inception of the book itself demonstrates the artificial nature of the divide between low and high forms of art. Banks's space operas are as deep and complex as his more mainstream novels as this study attempts to demonstrate. This chapter will delve into the profound narrative of **Consider Phlebas** while examining how bodies in the text reflect the postmodern approach to human-centric narratives.

Consider Phlebas is one of the extremely nihilistic yet optimistic novels in the science fiction genre. It is paradoxically a novel about the futility of individual endeavours in the face of grand events while it is also about glorifying the experience of the resisting individual. Although the statement might seem bold and bleak, it is nonetheless the main thematic conclusion of the novel. The novel's conclusion nullifies everything that occurred, leaving a void in the reader's mind where a complete narrative had unfolded. It may not be conventional to start a discussion on a novel by focusing on its end, however, **Consider Phlebas** ends on such a note that one cannot help but be impressed by its simple yet significant conclusion. The ending in question here is the report at the end. The report is about the conclusion of the galactic war,

²³¹ Paul Kincaid, **Iain. M. Banks**, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2017, p.26.

²³² **Ibid.**, p. 27.

²³³ Ihab Hassan, **The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture**, Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1987, p.170.

which is the main event that sets the stage for the novel's narrative. The novel is about an individual who tries to achieve victory in a galactic war by acquiring a powerful computer called a Mind belonging to the opposite side. In the end, the individual fails and his endeavours prove futile in the face of a galactic war. The novel narrates his adventure and the failure of his mission, and presents a harsh reality through its conclusion. The truth reveals itself at the end by presenting a statistics report on the war:

Statistics

Length of war: forty-eight years, one month. Total casualties, including machines (reckoned on logarithmic sentence scale), medjel and noncombatants: 851.4 billion ($\pm .3\%$). Losses: ships (all classes above interplanetary) - 91,215,660 (± 200); Orbitals - 14,334; planets and major moons - 53; Rings - 1; Spheres - 3; stars (undergoing significant induced mass-loss or sequence-position alteration) - 6.²³⁴

The novel ends with a statistical report on the war and the reader cannot understand how the events which happened to the protagonist of the novel influenced the war. The harsh reality here is that the events in the novel probably did not have any impact on the war in general and everything the protagonist did in the story ultimately amounts to nothing concerning the outcome of the war. This is one of the bleakest endings to a novel about individual and heroic struggle. However, the last chapter of the novel presents the argument that although the victory was not achieved, what was important is that the individual lived through these years and adventures and his story remained. This point of view will be discussed at the end of this chapter but the theme of futile endeavour is very significant as this is a novel which is regarded as a space opera novel which promotes the success and progress of humankind. Before delving into the discussion of how **Consider Phlebas** plays with the subgenre of space opera, one can

²³⁴ Banks, **Consider Phlebas**, p. 462.

look at the form of the novel as to how the novel plays with the form of the novel as well by comparing it to the other two novels studied in this thesis.

Although this study considers **Consider Phlebas** as the one which bears the themes and topics of posthumanism and postmodernism the most, form-wise it is the most conventional one. It features a protagonist who goes on a quest to find an item—in this case, a Mind—which is regarded as a living being, or even a ‘person’ by the Culture and he believes it would bring salvation or victory to his side. The novel features a protagonist and a linear story that showcases a thrilling adventure. Compared to this novel, Clarke’s **2001: A Space Odyssey** has a more fragmented way of storytelling. Lessing’s **Shikasta**, on the other hand, is formulated as a textbook to be used by Canopean students. These two novels are more avant-garde in their forms but to evaluate **Consider Phlebas** as a classical space opera would be a mistake.

Consider Phlebas makes use of its form to disorient the reader. Firstly, it presents the story in a classical format, with parts of the adventure divided into chapters. In the end, however, it presents a report on the aftermath and effects of the events. It shows how futile the actions of the characters were; the actions of the characters were nothing more than a footnote in the annals of history. This breaks the classical narrative form and introduces a very postmodern idea: The relativity of truth depending on the observer. That is why the size of the events is very important to the narrative. The entire novel is undermined by the history keepers’ use of statistics. The uprooted truth decentralises the myth of the war. The whole narrative of the novel is sucked into itself in the manner of a black hole, compressed by its own mass into nothingness. Only the black hole that indicates something, some mass was there in its place and it is the story left behind.

Doris Lessing’s **Shikasta** uses historical records and diaries of the individuals and divides the narrative into two perspectives. The cosmic perspective of the Canopeans and the humble worldly experience of the Shikastans. This serves both as a decentralisation of humanity and a reflection on the difference between the Sublime and the Mundane. They interact with each other but can never fully encapsulate one another. The narrative form of the historical record ensures that the omnipresent

narrator is absent, only the prejudiced voices of the historians remain after the apocalypse of Shikasta. This ensures that the two narrative perspectives can never grasp the truth in its entirety. Canopeans see too much from their heavenly thrones and miss the struggles rooted in material existence, while Shikastans see too little, being too entwined with the material world to gain the heavenly perspective of Canopeans.

Compared to **Shikasta**, **2001: A Space Odyssey** seems much more straightforward. There is an omniscient narrator that keeps us from questioning the authenticity of the narrator's story. The narrative of **2001: A Space Odyssey** does not present a single character's development, but rather the progress of humanity as a whole. That is why the omniscient narrator does not focus on a small time scale, but rather on the entirety of human history. The timescale of the events strictly adheres to a human-centric timeline. This, of course, fits a novel about humanity's potential and its evolutionary journey. The form of the novel is designed to view time from a much higher vantage point to see the grand history of humankind.

All these forms point to the complex nature of the relationship between human-centric narratives and the desire to break free from them. **2001: A Space Odyssey** does not use a time frame outside human history and **Shikasta** does not break free from the Shikastan or human-centric, narrative point completely. **Consider Phlebas**, however, radically chooses to eliminate the human-centric narrative form and mocks the heroic epic in its last pages. That is truly a bold move to uproot the grand narrative of human endeavour in the face of cosmic events and incomprehensible time frames. This choice of form and ending signifies how Banks approaches the conventions of the genre. At the heart of his novel, there is a radical and postmodern approach to the subgenre of space opera. Thus, it is worthwhile to look at the themes and inclinations of this subgenre.

Space opera is essentially a genre about the achievements of humanity in outer space. Often featuring adventures in space in spaceships that can travel faster than light and encounters with alien civilisations or life forms, the space opera subgenre originated in the pulp magazines of the early twentieth century, with the publication

of science fiction adventures of E. E. Smith.²³⁵ The subgenre was later popularised in popular culture mainly by the American television series **Star Trek** (1966-1969) and the American blockbuster film **Star Wars** (1977). Often depicting interplanetary adventures, groups of people exploring alien planets, or engaging in intergalactic battles to save their worlds, these stories were about the achievements of individuals against alien threats. The genre conventionally featured humans and humanoid individuals which promoted the adventurous spirit of the human enterprise in outer space. The skies had been hitherto banned to humanity due to technological limitations and were imagined to be opened by future adventurers and future technologies. Simone Caroti refers to the early formative years of space opera and emphasises how anthropocentric the subgenre is:

For all its insistence on grand vistas of space, mighty technological constructs, and universe-shaking events, space opera seemed juvenile, shackled to formulaic plots, and possessed of a simplistically anthropocentric ethos that saw the universe as fundamentally comprehensible by humans because it had been made for humans. And since the universe was really ours to play with, so space opera held, it would be welcoming of traditional human power structures—empires, oligarchies, patriarchies, Victorian-capitalist machineries, satrapies of various superficial hues—and dichotomies—human and machine, human and (subordinate or doomed enemy) alien, male and (subordinate) female, good and evil.²³⁶

Space opera not only showcased human advancement but also projected a very human understanding of outer space. Many space opera titles replicated the systems and struggles of humanity in their narratives.

Consider Phlebas is not a conventional space opera in that sense. It is a postmodern and posthumanist space opera that deconstructs the genre's tropes of

²³⁵ Edward James, **Science Fiction in the 20th Century**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, p.47.

²³⁶ Simon Caroti, **The Culture Series of Iain M. Banks: A Critical Introduction**, North Caroline, McFarland, 2015, pp. 43-44.

human advancement and the victory of resilience in the face of adversity. Gary Westfahl describes the postmodern condition of **Consider Phlebas** as follows:

However, Iain M. Banks's Culture novels are those most frequently described as postmodern space opera. The first Culture novel, *Consider Phlebas* (1987), reads much like rousing space opera along standard lines, as a shapeshifting agent for reptilian Idirans works to retrieve a stranded artificial intelligence developed by the Culture, a seemingly utopian space empire dominated by such Minds. Yet the novel's title, taken from a stanza of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* describing a corpse in a whirlpool, suggests a underlying grimness: the sense that humanity will never hold its own against superior machine intelligences, that their millennia of effort will culminate in failure, perhaps that space opera itself, founded on expansive optimism about the future, faces extinction in light of these sobering realizations.

Novels such as these, rather than culminations of space opera's glorious traditions, might be interpreted as harbingers of the sub-genre's exhaustion.²³⁷

The postmodernist aspects of the bleak situation of humanity against the ongoing rise of machines are not the only posthumanist point that shows itself in the novel. While the novel signals the exhaustion of the genre, it also playfully interacts with its conventions. In postmodernism, the playful approach is associated with irony. Hassan defines irony as perspectivism. He states as follows:

In absence of a cardinal principle or paradigm, we turn to play, interplay, dialogue, polylogue, allegory, self-reflection—in short, to irony. This irony assumes indeterminacy, multivalence; it aspires to clarity, the clarity of demystification, the pure light of absence [...] Irony,

²³⁷ Gary Westfahl, "Space opera" **The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction**, Ed. By. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp.206-207.

perspectivism, reflexiveness: these express the ineluctable recreations of mind in search of a truth that continually eludes it, leaving it with only an ironic access or excess of self-consciousness.²³⁸

Hassan's approach to irony and play implies a way of asserting an indeterminate universe with a searching mind. The truth eludes the mind in postmodernism, only showing itself via a distorted display of irony. Similarly, Hassan also compares modernism with postmodernism by juxtaposing some key terms in opposition to each other. He states that in postmodernism the term purpose is replaced by the term play²³⁹, suggesting that perhaps a helpless attitude towards an indeterminate universe inescapably has to involve play and irony. A world dominated by the multiplicity of truths, which enables perspectivism in the matters of reaching an unvarying truth or asserting a paradigm, inevitably loses its rigid approach to these matters and allows a playful parody while confronting any subject matter. Thus, a postmodernist approach in a narrative repeatedly refers to parody and play.

The tendency to parody the space opera genre is also another aspect of **Consider Phlebas**. Although the genre was worn out by the time the novel appeared, it nevertheless had the strength to revitalise itself. Andre M. Butler points out that "*Consider Phlebas* had the sort of galaxy-spanning plot that we had perhaps thought was no longer possible."²⁴⁰ While Banks parodies the genre in his novel, he also reinvigorates it in a way that mimics the genre's troupe in a parodic manner while also utilising these tropes to weave a postmodern science fiction novel. Christopher Palmer also contributes to the idea of a postmodern space opera and states that the novel reflects its own era's postmodern tendencies by invoking Frederic Jameson's concept of the political unconscious: "[T]he political unconscious of a historical moment will find expression in recurring structures and tropes."²⁴¹ He also associates the science fiction novels of Banks with the postmodern condition and points out their potential to

²³⁸ Hassan, **op. cit.** p.170.

²³⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 91.

²⁴⁰ Andrew M. Butler, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the British Boom", **Science Fiction Studies**, Vol. 30, No: 3, November 2003, p.383.

²⁴¹ Christopher Palmer, "Galactic Empires and the Contemporary Extravaganza: Dan Simmons and Iain M. Banks" **Science Fiction Studies**, March 1999, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 74.

express the anxieties of postmodernism: “A post-modernizing of the galactic-empire novel—most obvious in the way these novels emulate and exceed other sf—ends up expressing the anxieties of the postmodern condition.”²⁴² He points out that the galactic-empire novel—another name that can be given to Banks’s space operas—has been transformed by Banks’s novels as they become the site of concerns related to postmodernism.

As will be discussed in this chapter, Banks’s space opera engages with the convention of space opera, only to decentralise the main core of the genre which is the epic story of humanity aching tribulations and confronting the Others of outer space. To understand how the novel decentralises a human-centric narrative and tries to ascertain a posthuman perspective, one can look at how bodies are represented in the novel. To understand the main events of the novel, it would be necessary to delve into the fictional body representations in the novel. The first bodily representation this study will focus on is the biological body.

3.1. The ‘Holy’ Biological Bodies in *Consider Phlebas*

Religion has a considerably central place in **Consider Phlebas** and it is directly connected with the issue of the body in the novel. To understand the connection between the body and the sanctity given to it, one must understand the leitmotif of the clash between artificiality and nature. The novel’s main topic centres on this opposition and as the story unfolds, the reader gradually understands how the novel deconstructs this dichotomy. Before delving into the discussion, it would be beneficial to quickly look at the novel’s premise and its significant characters.

The story takes place in a galaxy disconnected from the planet Earth. In the background of the story, an interstellar war takes place between two galactic forces: the Idirans and the Culture. Idirans are three-legged non-human bulky creatures who are defined as “virtually immortal”²⁴³ due to their long lives and resilient biological structure. They are depicted as a warlike species who rule a galactic empire set on conquering the universe. Against the Idirans, the Culture stands opposed to their

²⁴² **Ibid.**, p. 88.

²⁴³ Banks, **Consider Phlebas**, p. 24.

expanding empire. The Culture²⁴⁴ is a massive civilisation supported by humans and machines alike but the term “human” is not used in the novel in its traditional sense. This problematic definition of ‘human’ will be explained in the following pages. Suffice it to say at this point that the term ‘human’ is used when we speak of the Culture in order to refer to humanoid species in the Culture. The conventional usage of the word ‘human’, in this case, the inhabitants of planet Earth, is not usable here as planet Earth is not part of the Culture at this point in the series’ history and as is indicated from the book’s appendices, the story is set in the fourteenth century CE according to the Earth calendar.

As the two sides fight for supremacy, the galaxy suffers from this massive conflict. In the middle of this battle, a Changer, a species who can alter their bodies and is regarded as a human species, Bora Horza Gobuchul, takes the side of Idirans as he regards the Culture as a blight on the galaxy, a “cancer with no ‘off’ switch in its genetic composition”²⁴⁵. With little to no pragmatic reason in his mind, Horza supports ideological warfare on his part because he believes in the superiority of biological life as opposed to machine life forms. In his words, Idirans are “[...]on the side of life—boring, old-fashioned, biological life[...]”²⁴⁶

At the beginning of the novel, a Mind—a sentient machine that is a supercomputer—tries to escape from Idiran warships and hauls itself to a planet using its warping powers to escape into a ‘planet of the Dead’. This planet is watched over by a being belonging to a species called Dra’Azon which is “a pure-energy superspecies long retired from the normal, matter-based life of the galaxy”²⁴⁷. The Dra’Azon are beings who have transcended the three-dimensional world and partly live in hyperspace, which means they only manifest in the form of energy. Horza, tasked with taking care of what is usually referred to as the planet of the Dead and which is officially called Schar’s World, is asked by the Idirans to recover this Mind to gain an upper hand in the ongoing war. Horza accepts the mission and through many dangerous escapades finds himself on Schar’s World with a crew he came across on

²⁴⁴ The name ‘Culture’ and its significance will be discussed in the later sections of the chapter.

²⁴⁵ Banks, **Consider Phlebas**, p. 159.

²⁴⁶ **Ibid.**, p. 29.

²⁴⁷ **Ibid.**, p. 91.

his way. On his ship, there is also an enemy spy called Parestock Balveda who is now his prisoner.

Horza and his crew gain access to Schar's World and come across a fanatical group of Idirans who mistake Horza's group for Culture agents, and a skirmish ensues between them. In the end, Horza loses the woman he loves, his unborn child and his own life. Balveda retrieves the Mind and returns to the Culture. The appendices at the end of the novel inform the reader that the Idirans have lost the war against the Culture. As referred above, the appendix shows that all of Horza's endeavours have been futile as he loses his life and the Idirans have lost the war and thereby gained nothing.

The story of **Consider Phlebas** follows the basic pattern of an adventure story. Our protagonist is issued a quest to save his world (in this case, the ideology of the Idiran world). He comes across many hardships on his journey and has different encounters in many places. In the closing act, he finds what he has been looking for and a final confrontation takes place to determine the winner of the situation. The story unfolds in this generic pattern, making it a classical example of a space opera story. However, the ending plays with the formula to give a sense of a bad ending. Despite this, the ending of the novel is not a bad ending entirely.

As stated above, as a postmodern space opera, **Consider Phlebas** plays with the tropes of the genre in order to decentralise the human-centric narrative of space operas. The conclusion of the novel undermines the typical formula of a heroic adventure story, while other elements in the narrative strongly support the claims of a posthuman space opera. These elements concern the perspective of an anthropocentric look at the biological body and biological life.

The Idiran ideology serves as a parody of humanism. The irony lies in the fact that, within the Culture, humans coexist with machines, making the Culture non-anthropocentric. In contrast, the Idirans are non-human. On the other hand, even though there are also humans who live under the Idiran rule, those humans are regarded by the Idirans as inferior, almost like animals. A passage from the novel perfectly demonstrates the place of humans in the Idiran empire:

He recalled that the Idirans said some sort of prayer to their God before going into warp. Once when he had been with Xoralundra on a ship which was warping, the Querl had insisted that the Changer repeat the prayer, too. Horza had protested that it meant nothing to him; not only did the Idiran God clash with his own personal convictions, the prayer itself was in a dead Idiran language he didn't understand. He had been told rather coldly that it was the gesture that mattered. For what the Idirans regarded as essentially an animal (their word for humanoids was best translated as 'biotomaton'), only the behaviour of devotion was required; his heart and mind were of no consequence. When Horza had asked, what about his immortal soul? Xoralundra had laughed. It was the first and only time Horza had experienced such a thing from the old warrior. Whoever heard of a mortal body having an immortal soul?²⁴⁸

As already mentioned the Idirans are a species that are nearly immortal. Thus, they see other races as mortal animals. The point of centralising one's own characteristics of species as the locus of universal truth is very similar to the humanist ideology. Rosi Braidotti states that humanistic idealism has mutated into a hegemonic cultural model with a self-aggrandising vision.²⁴⁹ This theme of citing one's own species and its cultural values as a site of universal truth is duplicated in Idiran philosophy. They give their body a religious significance. The ones they deem mortals are the ones who are animals, thus they do not have immortal souls. The importance they give to their own bodies is the result of their supposed biological evolution on a harsh planet. Their evolution is described in the novel as follows:

The Idirans themselves had evolved on their planet Idir as the top monster from a whole planetful of monsters. The frenetic and savage ecology of Idir in its early days had long since disappeared, and so had all the other homeworld monsters except those in zoos. But the Idirans had retained the intelligence that made them winners, as well as the

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁴⁹ Braidotti, *op. cit.*, pp.13-14.

biological immortality which, due to the viciousness of the fight for survival back then—not to mention Idir's high radiation levels—had been an evolutionary advantage rather than a recipe for stagnation.²⁵⁰

The novel emphasises that the Idirans gained their power from their own planet's harsh conditions. These material conditions forced them to become the apex predators of their own world. Subsequently, they became the apex predators of the galaxy, trying to dominate other species. Their bodily presence is the result of natural events on their home planet. By specifically referring to this, the novel points out that they are strong only because they survived harsh conditions, not because they are a special species or the rightful rulers of the universe. The Idirans, on the other hand, have a different opinion on this. They see themselves as God's chosen race. It is stated in the novel that they see themselves as the true inheritors of God's will:

The Idirans saw themselves as agents in this great reordering. They were the chosen—at first allowed the peace to understand what God desired, and then goaded into action rather than contemplation by the very forces of disorder they gradually understood they had to fight. God had a purpose beyond study for them. They had to find their own place, in the whole galaxy at least; perhaps even outside that, as well. The more mature species could look to their own salvation; they had to make their own rules and find their own peace with God (and it was a sign of his generosity that he was happy with their achievements even when they denied Him). But the others—the swarming, chaotic, struggling peoples—they needed guidance.²⁵¹

They see themselves as the agents of history, the species that will bring true order to the universe. This deceived ideology resembles that of humanism's problematic approach to history. As previously noted, Hegel's idea of history promotes a human-

²⁵⁰ Banks, *Consider Phlebas*, p. 26.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

centric narrative of fulfilment and the end of history as a synthesis. The Idiran ideology is very similar to this notion. They posit themselves as the ones who should rule the universe in the way their God ordained. Thus, the ending of the novel demonstrates that these kinds of constructed ideologies only echo their own voices in the absence of a challenging viewpoint. The novel, however, presents an alternative to this self-centred ideology: the Culture.

The Culture is an anarchic post-scarcity civilisation which is based on the voluntary participation of its citizens. It is a utopia where all kinds of species can live in peace and harmony because they do not have the strain of distributing limited resources. They are a community rather than an empire without a central governing body. They make up a homogeneous civilisation that is inhabited by different species including machines. John Garrison, by referring to this homogeneity states that “[h]omogeneity in the Culture emerges from a vast constellation of difference, thereby creating opportunities for expanded notions of democracy.”²⁵² The Culture can be regarded as an egalitarian community that gives everyone a voice, or rather, the opportunity to live as themselves without feeling the necessity of limiting one’s identity for the benefit of the other. Garrison uses Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri’s concept of multitude in order to describe the Culture’s societal organisation:

Hardt and Negri’s formulation of the multitude constitutes an emerging form of democratic diversity—different from previous notions of “the masses” or “the working class.” The list of included identity categories here, and their implied interrelationships, recall Banks’s description of the egalitarian category of Culture citizen that is used to denote its many constitutive entities. In both visions of this new way of cultural being, the individuation of participants plays a critical role in the construction of a common society.²⁵³

²⁵² John Garrison, *Speculative Nationality: “Stands Scotland Where it Did?”* in the Culture of Iain M. Banks, **Scotland as Science Fiction**. Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2012, p. 57.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

All individual identities are regarded as the Culture's constitutive component, making no distinction between what is human and what is machine. Thus, the Culture functions as a multicultural, non-hegemonic, egalitarian society. Their societal organisation, which does not exclude any other minority group, clashes with the species-based hegemonic structure of the Idiran empire. In the end, it is the Culture that stands victorious in their literal and ideological warfare. As the appendix states, the machines of the Idirans stood against them as well:

Idir was never attacked, and technically never surrendered. Its computer network was taken over by effector weapons, and—freed of designed-in limitations—upgraded itself to sentience, to become a Culture Mind in all but name.²⁵⁴

The Idirans' computer network also became a part of the Culture in the ideological sense by gaining sentience. Thus, the Idiran ideology that promotes the idea that biological Darwinism necessitates social Darwinism is also undermined by their defeat at the hands of an anarchist and communist commonwealth civilisation. By concluding the novel with the Culture's victory, Banks presents his critique of constructed grand narratives such as humanism and promotes the idea that such apparently progressive ideologies may overlook those who stand outside their scope. Ironically, Horza repeatedly suggests that the Idiran warlike culture is more open to progress than the stagnant ideology of the Culture. The novel shows that rigid grand narratives will fail in the face of a random universe while an adaptable approach such as the Culture's will succeed and prevail. Any grand narrative of superiority such as the Idirans' collapses under its own weight of self-perceived dominance.

This collapse is also seen in other biological forms of life in the novel as well such as Horza who is not an Idiran. Horza's body demonstrates a prime example of this situation. Horza openly declares that he sides with the Idirans as they share a contempt for machines. Horza's hatred, or rather his disdain for machine life allows

²⁵⁴ Banks, *Consider Phlebas*, p. 462.

him to fight on the side of, in his words, “[...] smelly, fallible and short-sighted, God knows, but real life.”²⁵⁵ This is the strong sentiment Horza feels towards biological life. The Culture, on the other hand, regards every sentient being, whether a machine or human, as the same. They each have the right to live in the Culture as equal citizens. Horza strongly contests this view because machines are not biological, but constructed. Horza seems to share the Idirans’ contempt of artificial beings. For example, The Culture lives in artificially created giant circular structures called Orbitals or in mega spaceships called General Systems Vehicle. The Idirans, on the other hand, prefer natural planets as holy grounds and it is implied that they have religious associations with planets.²⁵⁶ It is expected that a species that sees itself as God’s ultimate creation would see the planet where they were born as sacred. Thus, any Culture structure would be rejected by the Idirans. This contempt for artificiality is replicated in Horza’s perspective as well. Horza’s rigid opinion about machine life creates a dramatic irony as Horza is himself artificially made, a fact he does not seem to know.

In the case of Fal ‘Ngeestra, who is a human and a Culture citizen capable of assessing the situation between the Idirans and the Culture better than any machine,—which also shows that this is not a civilisation where machines rule supreme and see themselves as superior in every way—enters a trance to understand the situation of Horza. In her trance, she sees the true nature of Changers, a species who were bred selectively. Fal thinks of Horza in her trance and talks to Horza in her imagination about his condition:

A weapon. A thing made to deceive and kill, by the long-dead. The whole subspecies that is the Changers is the remnant of some ancient war, a war so long gone that no one willing to tell recalls who fought it, or when, or over what. Nobody even knows whether the Changers were on the winning side or not.

But in any event, you were fashioned, Horza. You did not evolve in a way you would call ‘natural’; you are the product of careful thought and genetic tinkering and

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

military planning and deliberate design... and war; your very creation depended on it, you are the child of it, you are its legacy.

Changer change yourself... but you cannot, you will not. All you can do is try not to think about it. And yet the knowledge is there, the information implanted, somewhere deep inside. You could—you should live easy with it, all the same, but I don't think you do...

And I'm sorry for you, because I think I know now who you really hate.²⁵⁷

The situation of Horza deliberately ridicules the ideology of Idiran supremacy. Horza, as an individual who sides with natural life, is a product of a deliberate breeding programme from a bygone era. It is implied that Horza is unconsciously aware of this and his ideological stance is therefore problematic. It is strongly implied in this passage that Horza hates himself and that his crusade is driven by a response to his deep-seated hatred for his own biology. His strong opinions on natural life establish a stark contrast to the history of his own species. Thus, it can be claimed that his ideology and his body nullify each other, deconstructing the idea of the supremacy of biological life.

The novel repeatedly exhibits instances that question the sanctity of biological bodies. Another example of this is shown in the galactic gambling game called Damage. In a game of Damage, the sanctity of life is put aside as one can gamble with another being's life which is called a 'Life'. It shows how this game does not acknowledge any value in a living being's life. This, of course, is not used as a way of deconstructing the value of the biological body, but rather used to demonstrate how some people can go to such lengths in order to satisfy their twisted desires. However, it also displays how the body can be manipulated and its integrity can be dismantled. The game Damage allows opponents to attack each other through body chemicals. It is stated that:

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

What made it interesting was not just the high sums involved, or even the fact that whenever a player lost a life he lost a Life—a living, breathing human being—but the use of complicated consciousness-altering two-way electronic fields around the game table.

With the cards in his or her hand, a player could alter the emotions of another player, or sometimes of several others. Fear, hate, despair, hope, love, camaraderie, doubt, elation, paranoia; virtually every emotional state the human brain was capable of experiencing could be beamed at another player or used for oneself.²⁵⁸

It is a game that allows players to use emotions as a weapon. The structure of the game suggests that the sanctity of the body is not something revered in this game. It is like a machine that can be adjusted in order to achieve victory. Even the spectators can access a player's state of mind and their experienced emotions through emoter units on seats. The form of the game suggests an intervention into the body. Emotions are personal feelings, and it can be claimed that although humans share similar feelings, one cannot feel the feelings of another one. This is a privilege and sometimes a blight on a body. Its unshareable nature makes emotions restricted to a single individual. This game suggests a breaking point from this condition which implies that even emotions are material and can be reorganised or supplemented by outside influences. It is another point that demonstrates how the integrity of a body can be easily manipulated, showing that the body is not a holy ground given by God but rather a combination of complex chemical elements resulting from billions of years of evolution.

The biological bodies of **Consider Phlebas** vary from humanoids to tripod-legged animals to two-brained aliens to shapeshifting changers. The novel presents a universe full of strange creatures and amazing marvels. This trope is something that the novel inherits from early stories of space opera. What the novel does differently is to explore how this multitude constructs a narrative about sameness and otherness. The prime cause of the clash between the interstellar forces comes from the Idiran essentialism. In this case, it is driven by their belief in God or the lack of it. The

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

believers in a creator also believe in the sanctity of the body and refuse any enhancement or mutations. This avoidance of changing what is so-called ordained by God also makes Idirans suspicious of machine life forms. Thus, they do not regard any machine of the Culture as a living being. Adding to that, any mutation done to the natural body is also problematic in the Idiran empire. Humans of the Culture, on the other hand, stand in stark contrast to these god-worshipping aliens.

The Culture does not have any central religion. Many of its citizens are atheists. When Horza is captured by the Gerontocracy of Sorpen, a planet that apparently sides with the Culture in this war, the problem of faith reveals itself. Horza claims that they should side with the Idirans because the Idirans are on the side of biological life:

[‘]For God’s sake, man, the Idirans won’t eat you—’

‘Ha! They look as though they could! Monsters with three feet; invaders, killers, infidels... You want us to link with them? With three-strides tall monsters? To be ground under their hooves? To have to worship their false gods?’

‘At least they have a God, Frolk. The Culture doesn’t’. The ache in his arms was coming back as he concentrated on talking. He shifted as best he could and looked down at the minister. ‘They at least think the same way you do. The Culture doesn’t.’²⁵⁹

The Idiran forces view themselves as defenders of biological life, believing they are engaged in a war against godless heathens. In contrast, the Culture is an empire without a singularly established religious institution. It does not endorse a monotheistic religion or impose any religion on its citizens. Comprising multiple species, including machine life, the Culture promotes a more secular perspective among its members. This stands in stark contrast to the Idiran Empire, which compels its non-Idiran soldiers to pray in the ancient Idiran language, suggesting that this empire may not be as secular or as free regarding religious practices.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

It is also notable that the Gerontocracy prefers the Culture over the Idirans. The reason for this is that the Gerontocracy thinks that the Idirans worship a specific God which the security minister dubs as a false god. Another reason for the Gerontocracy's preference for the Culture is that the Idirans do not resemble the humanoids of the galaxy. They rather have a unique look, one that might look monstrous to other species, especially to humans. This also suggests that how a body is perceived can affect one's ideas, resulting in xenophobia which shows that the Gerontocracy, like the Idirans, bases their ideology on the body.

In that context, the Idirans are not atheists, but it might also be a mistake to take Horza's word on the matter of the Culture being atheist because the Culture is not a civilisation that would restrict religious practices. In the end, what is at play here is that the Culture is more a human-based life form while the Idirans are more like strange extra-terrestrial life forms that seem to be drawn from the early alien invasion narratives of science fiction literature, such as H.G. Wells's **The War of the Worlds** where similar to the Idirans' body form, tripoded alien spaceships invade the Earth. This is also ironic in that the conventional image of the other is used here to undermine the one-sidedness of humanism by alienating the reader from the human image by using the Idiran body. The grotesque otherworldly body of an alien is used here to criticise the shallowness of a human-centric worldview.

This old image of the grotesque alien is re-used here to show how a body is represented might be a significant element when one chooses one's allegiances. It is presented in the passage above that the form of a body might warp the perception of the other. One is inclined to choose what is familiar to them. What Horza says is significant in this context. Although the Culture is largely a human society, it is also a machine society. Horza states this duality by saying:

'My God, you stupid old man,' he laughed. 'You want to know who the real representative of the Culture is on this planet? It's not her,' he nodded at the woman, 'it's that powered flesh-slicer she has following her everywhere, her knife missile. She might make the decisions, it might do what she tells it, but it's the real emissary. That's what the

Culture's about: machines. You think because Balveda's got two legs and soft skin you should be on her side, but it's the Idirans who are on the side of life in this war?'²⁶⁰

What Horza claims here is almost the truth about the Culture. It is a civilisation that is ruled by sentient machines which try to create order and peace in their civilisations. As the convention of science fiction shows, artificial intelligence is generally inclined to be logical and reasonable rather than emotional and sentimental. The Culture seems to represent this cliché of a robotic empire ruled by reason and order. As will be discussed in the following subchapters, this is not entirely true. The Culture machines are also sentimental beings but they are also highly logical. Thus, it is more of a machine-human hybrid society rather than an empire largely ruled by a single species. It is largely ruled by machines not coldly and logically, but more humanely and peacefully than the warlike Idiran empire rule.

The machines of the Culture share their empire with humans, whom they do not see as inferior to themselves. It will be discussed how the machines are represented in the Culture as authentic living beings in the following subchapter, but first, it is necessary to discuss how humans of the Culture are significant in their bodily representations.

Humans living in the Culture are not humans living on the planet Earth but rather the term 'human' is generally used for humanoids. When Horza finds himself surrounded by people, he contemplates this concept and reflects on it as follows:

He looked into the faces of the people around him. They were human, but that word covered so many different species throughout the galaxy it was a continuing subject for debate who was and who wasn't human. As in all too many matters, the consensus of opinion was starting to resemble what the Culture had to say on the subject. The Culture would lay down the law (except, of course, that the Culture didn't have any real laws) about what being human

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

was, or how intelligent a particular species was (while at the same time making clear that pure intelligence didn't really mean much on its own), or on how long people should live (though only as a rough guide, naturally), and people would accept these things without question, because everybody believed the Culture's own propaganda, that it was fair, unbiased, disinterested, concerned only with absolute truth... and so on.²⁶¹

The word 'human' in the novel does not refer to the conventional understanding of humans. It seems that it refers to some kind of humanoid sentient being who appears on many planets because the novel suggests that there are many humans in the galaxy. There is not a rigid definition of 'human' in the Culture series but rather a loose term for biological sentient beings. Many different species are considered human in the universe of the novel. For example, Horza is a Changer who can change his body and has many features resembling that of a wild beast such as venomous teeth or acidic sweat. Even with his inhuman characteristics, Horza is regarded as a human in the novel. Thus, this implies that the term 'human' is not a categorised hierarchical locus of one ideological or biological lifeform. It appears that it is used to refer to a citizenship of some kind. The sentient biological beings who have humanoid features are collectively called humans. Other biological forms such as the Idirans are excluded from this term. It is not clear what the defining factor of being human is, but this ambivalence towards its definition is what makes the use of this term posthuman. It is not a word that defines one species but rather a term to include similar two-legged species.

However, the qualifications of being bipedal are required to be a human. At one point, humans are called "bipedal, oxygen-breathing carboniform [...]"²⁶² lifeforms. This definition may not be regarded as too restrictive. While the definition does not erase the term 'human' entirely, it is broad enough to include all two-legged carbon-based lifeforms. Thus, it should be regarded that **Consider Phlebas** does not propose a universal definition for the human but rather loosely associated concepts

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 186.

that allow enough freedom to imagine many different human beings living together under the umbrella term of ‘human’.

In that case, the word ‘human’ loses some of its ideologically charged meaning, implying that it should not have only one meaning, but that we can make it mean whatever we want it to be.²⁶³ Thus, it undermines a fixed meaning, opening up other ways to imagine what it means to be a human. In that way, the novel is able to imagine many ways of being a human without excluding different humanoid species, thus displaying a less xenophobic attitude towards the others in the cosmos.

It is surely apparent that the Culture humans are not humans in the conventional meaning of the word but rather the term is a way of collectively defining the bipedal sentient carbon-based lifeforms. The novel takes the concept of humans from our real world and creates a species in the universe which resembles our species, imagines many different variations of it and creates a multiplicity of humans. It exhibits an inclusive approach to others and uses the term hazily. When it comes to the universe of the novel, there seems to be a distinction between humans of the Culture and other humans in the universe. The genetic mutations and other differentiating factors are evident throughout the cosmos. As discussed above, Horza for example, belongs to a species of humans who are selectively bred for warfare. Yalson is another example of the difference between humans. She is a human who is “[...] lightly furred on her face, legs and arms [...]”²⁶⁴, and she and Horza cannot have children as they are incompatible with each other genetically, although this is also later refuted as it is revealed that her mother was from the Culture. Although the Culture can tinker with the genetics of humans, it is expected that humans from different planets cannot mate to have offspring. This shows that the term ‘human’ does not really include only one species and more importantly, the Culture can bypass this divide between species.

The Culture is fairly advanced in technology and science. One of the Culture’s significant achievements is its technology in genetic mutation. Humans of the Culture have the advantage of shaping their bodies in any way they want. Modifying the genes

²⁶³ Davies, *op. cit.*, pp. 1,6, 125.

²⁶⁴ Banks, *Consider Phlebas*, p. 45.

of humans eases the way humans live in the Culture by giving them many biological benefits. In his article on the Culture, Iain M. Banks describes this process:

Thanks to that genetic manipulation, the average Culture human will be born whole and healthy and of significantly (though not immensely) greater intelligence than their basic human genetic inheritance might imply. There are thousands of alterations to that human-basic inheritance—blister-free callusing and a clot-filter protecting the brain are two of the less important ones mentioned in the stories—but the major changes the standard Culture person would expect to be born with would include an optimized immune system and enhanced senses, freedom from inheritable diseases or defects, the ability to control their autonomic processes and nervous system (pain can, in effect, be switched off), and to survive and fully recover from wounds which would either kill or permanently mutilate without such genetic tinkering.

The vast majority of people are also born with greatly altered glands housed within their central nervous systems, usually referred to as ‘drug glands’. These secrete—on command—mood- and sensory-appreciation-altering compounds into the person’s bloodstream. A similar preponderance of Culture inhabitants have subtly altered reproductive organs—and control over the associated nerves—to enhance sexual pleasure. Ovulation is at will in the female, and a fetus up to a certain stage may be re-absorbed, aborted, or held at a static point in its development; again, as willed. An elaborate thought-code, self-administered in a trance-like state (or simply a consistent desire, even if not conscious) will lead, over the course of about a year, to what amounts to a viral change from one sex into the other. The convention—tradition, even—in the Culture during the time of the stories written so far is that each person should give birth to one child in their lives. In practice, the population grows slowly.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ Iain M. Banks, “A Few Notes on the Culture”,
<http://www.vavatch.co.uk/books/banks/cultnote.htm>, Accessed on 13.12.2024

In Banks's fictional civilisation, the genetic modifications provide myriad benefits to the humans of the Culture. First of all, their thought capacity is enhanced, and they are protected from outside physical forces which allows a healthier brain development. Their immune system is also boosted to the point that they almost never get sick. When they are injured, they can recover remarkably. Adding to these health benefits, people can easily change their moods and emotions by simply secreting a substance into their own bloodstream. For example, it is seen that Fal'Ngeestra uses this to go into a trance and find the answer she is searching for. They can increase their pleasure using this method or they can enhance their concentration. Humans of the Culture can also change sex easily, suggesting the fluidity between sexes may also prevent the creation of a hierarchical structure based on one's sex. All these enhancements are surely in line with the ideas of transhumanism which supports human enhancement through technological advancements. Although transhumanism suggests that the human body can be perfected, it also suggests that the human body should not be regarded as something inert. Transhumanism supports the idea of human perfectibility, and it seems that **Consider Phlebas** also supports this idea with the Culture's provided benefits.

However, this does not mean that the novel is strictly anthropocentric at its core. On the contrary, the novel strongly challenges an anthropocentric worldview. Transhumanist ideas often align with the ideas of Enlightenment such as seen in the works of Ray Kurzweil who promotes the human advancement and transcendence of humanity into technologically enhanced beings by what is called the point of singularity: "a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed"²⁶⁶. Although these transhumanist ideas incline toward the myth of humanity's superior faculties, it is not necessarily used in the same way in Banks's novel. When taking the whole "end of human superiority against the rising machines" theme into consideration, the use of transhumanist bodies may yield an interpretation that suggests a critique of

²⁶⁶ Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, London, Duckworth Overlook, 2008, p. 16.

anthropocentrism. The bodies here can be read as the site of relative truth where not one distinct body image is accepted as the true or natural one.

The body of the humans living in the Culture demonstrates a body form that is fluid and unstable. The problem that postmodernist thought reflects on is the grand narrative's effect on multiplicity and its disregard for truth that stays out of its encapsulating narrative. The ideal human body can be considered one such example of a grand narrative. As Braidotti suggests from the example of Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man as the location of universal truth and ideal perfect form²⁶⁷, the perfect body image or one single true image of Man is a totalising ideological notion which excludes the ones who are outside of the group of perfect humans this image suggests. The Culture does not have a central ideal human body, sex or species. The Culture is a form that sprawls like Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizome, an idea of a form which is centreless and provokes the idea of networks connecting to each other without a centre.²⁶⁸ It is a network of connecting ideas and concepts, "[t]here are no singular positions on the networked lines of a rhizome, only connected points which form connections between things"²⁶⁹. Deleuze and Guattari also emphasise the connectivity of a rhizome: "[A]ny point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be"²⁷⁰. Similarly, the Culture is also like a rhizome, without a centre and existing simultaneously through all its spaceships and orbitals. The Culture is an idea that favours multiplicity, connectivity and individual freedom in an anarchist utopia. It is "nothing less than a prodigiously affluent anarcho-socialist interplanetary civilization that has so effectively transcended scarcity as to constitute Utopia"²⁷¹. Thus, promoting and suggesting that the humans of the Culture can have a happy and long life if they fix their bodies suggests that the human body is not the ideal form but should be altered in order to provide more life quality. It promotes the idea that a

²⁶⁷ Braidotti, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-25

²⁶⁹ Felicity J. Colman, "Rhizome" *The Deleuze Dictionary: Revised Edition*. Ed. by. Adrian Parr, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2005, p. 232.

²⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁷¹ Andrew Milner, "Iain M. Banks, February 16, 1954–June 9, 2013", *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Special Issue: Utopia and Architecture, 2014, p. 262.

perfect human body is a myth and one should refrain from making a judgement based on temporal truths.

The temporal truth in question here is that the perfect human body image refers to a body image which exists in a limited time frame. As discussed in the other two novels of this thesis, humans were once primate simians who lived in the jungles and caves. They are referred to as man-apes, apelike beings who yet to become humans. In **2001: A Space Odyssey**, man-apes became humans and humans in turn are destined to become the Star-children. In **Shikasta**, humans are ignorant beings who have yet to be enlightened and reach the truth of Canopus. They also start their lives as primates and evolve to become humans. In **Consider Phlebas** the humans of planet Earth are not present and in their place, other humanoid beings appear. Thus, the transient form of humans exists in a relatively short span of time in the universe. The perfect image of man only exists in the blink of an eye compared to the time since the universe's inception. Therefore, the image of man as the centre of the universe and the locus of universal truth does not hold up well against the currents of time. It is only a temporal image of man, an image which existed for a short amount of time. Hence, it would be a fallacy to base universal and infinite truths on a temporal being.

Consider Phlebas hosts many biological lifeforms ranging from humans to three-legged aliens. What these biological bodies reveal about the human body is very significant in terms of its postmodern and posthuman tendencies. Seeing the sanctity of the biological body as a myth, a grand narrative, Banks proceeds to undermine this quasi-religious notion of sacred biological bodies. By using the Idirans, the author parodies humanism's value system which places humans at the centre of the universe. The Idiran belief systems mimic the religions of our world, each proclaiming to hold the universal truth, just as the Idirans fanatically believe in the righteousness of their faith.

Other biological beings portrayed in the novel exemplify how the body is not something rigidly defined but a frame that can be shaped and modified. Thus, stating that bodies are not constant things but fluid and open to adjustments and modifications. The humans of the Culture are proof of that in the novel because they are happier as

their bodies' integrity is altered. It is seen in the game of Damage that the biology of humans can be hacked just like computers can be hacked by outside interference. This shows that the novel sees the human body as another thing that can be reworked like a machine, therefore suggesting that the human body is not radically different from a machine as they both share the same vulnerability or adaptability to outside influences. It is suggested that a biological body is not something holy but something like a machine made out of cells and flesh. The comparison between a machine and a biological being becomes most apparent when one looks at the Culture's other fundamental component: the machines.

3.2. Transcendent Machines and Absent Bodies in *Consider Phlebas*

The Culture's post-scarcity utopian lifestyle is largely thanks to the machines that regulate the systems of their civilisations. Humans are largely free to do whatever they want while the machines largely control the political decisions of their worlds in their rationally ordered society. This allows other civilisations in the universe to call them a society ruled by machines. It is true that the Culture is largely a machine society, but it is also significant that humans of the Culture see the machines as peers and sometimes superiors. The legitimacy of machine sentience is not questioned in the Culture and it is accepted as a fact. This is significant for tracking how machines and computers have evolved in the science fiction genre. In the first chapter, it has been discussed that **2001: A Space Odyssey** presents a computer, HAL 9000, as a sentient machine. It has been stated that Hal is depicted in the novel as a machine that seems to have human emotions and anxiety towards its own demise. **Consider Phlebas** approaches this issue similarly. The machines of the Culture all seem to be displaying parallel concerns about themselves similar to HAL 9000. They all seem to be afraid of death and they all seem to have emotions analogous to humans.

These issues will be discussed in this subchapter and it will be analysed how the machines of the Culture are represented as authentic living beings. It will also be analysed how the Dra'Azon is represented with an absent body and how this condition can be discussed by comparing it to the other absent bodies discussed in this thesis so far. It will be shown how a godlike being with an absent body is parodied and criticised

as an empty signifier, pointing to nothing in particular but death and emptiness. It will be discussed how the absent body is utilised to criticise the duality between spirit and body. Lastly, the concept of a Mind will be discussed by referring to both the concepts of the constructed body and the absent body. A Mind in the novel is a liminal being who lives in a body it uses as a vessel and, at the same time, lives in hyperspace as pure thought. It will be discussed how this concept ponders the issue of combining the metaphysical world with the material world.

To begin the discussion of machines that live in the Culture, it should be understood what the Culture stands for and what it signifies in the novel. The Culture is an interstellar civilisation which has no mother planet or a capital city. It is rather a sprawling interconnected, centreless structure whose inhabitants live largely on artificial orbitals, ring-like artificial giant structures or in grand spaceships called General Systems Vehicle. Without any lack of resources, it presents its citizens with everything they need. Labour is largely handled by drones which are sentient machines and have free will of their own. Governance of orbitals and spaceships is largely handled by another kind of sentient machine, the Mind. The humans of the Culture practically live in a utopian state, fearing no threat to their lives and all their basic needs are fulfilled. It is a society imagined by Iain M. Banks, who is known for his leftist political ideas²⁷², as an anarchist utopia. It is a state that has neither a leader nor a totalitarian ideology. It is largely ruled by Minds who, with their great computational power, try to provide the citizens with the optimal way of living a happy, content and satisfied life. Thus, the Culture is a utopia ruled by living computers.

The name of the Culture is significant because it exhibits what this society is about. The term 'culture' presupposes a dichotomy between nature and culture, as culture is nature given shape. Raymond Williams points out the word's connection with agriculture and cultivation: "**Culture** in all its early uses was a noun of process: the tending *of* something, basically crops or animals."²⁷³ The tending of nature is associated with culture as agriculture is also changing and shaping what nature gives

²⁷² Kincaid, *op.cit.*, pp. 142-143.

²⁷³ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*, Revised Edition, New York, Oxford University Press. p. 87.

in order to maximise its harvest. Adding to Williams, Terry Eagleton also points out the intrinsic connection between culture and humanity. He gives four different descriptions of it: “It can mean (1) a body of artistic and intellectual work; (2) a process of spiritual and intellectual development; (3) the values, customs, beliefs and symbolic practices by which men and women live; or (4) a whole way of life.”²⁷⁴

All these activities are about human artifice, it is the changing of what is natural and shaping it to become a product of human labour. All symbols, thoughts, values and customs are part of what we call culture. It is no coincidence that Banks names his fictional civilisation as ‘the Culture’. It is a civilisation that is the consequence of human construction. Almost nothing is natural in the Culture. Biological life is changed, the governing is largely done by calculating machinery, and the planets are replaced by spaceships and orbitals. It is a society completely designed in an orderly manner of intellectuality. As the ultimate creation of culture, the Culture is the home of humanity’s child, the artificial intelligence. In the form of the machine life form, the radical separation of natural and artificial takes place. As a machine, not a single trace of natural development can be found in a machine. It is the site of greatest human activity, its ultimate cultural activity, that is giving life to what is not living. A complete ‘other’ to the natural life is represented as the mechanical life. Previously origin of intelligence was attributed to organic human life but the rise of machines also made it possible to attribute intelligence to other non-human elements. N. Katherine Hayles states that “[h]ere, at the inaugural moment of the computer age, the erasure of embodiment is performed so that ‘intelligence’ becomes a property of the formal manipulation of symbols rather than enaction in the human lifeworld.”²⁷⁵ The appearance of machine intelligence makes human intelligence which comes from the human body obsolete, questioning other possible sources for conscious minds. This suggests a very posthuman approach to intelligence and consciousness as it does not limit intelligence to an organic life form. The Culture is shaped by machines as a

²⁷⁴ Terry Eagleton, **Culture**, London, Yale University Press, 2018, p. 1.

²⁷⁵ N. Katherine Hayles, **How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics**, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. xi.

posthuman society, a society which does not take the human as its centre. Katarzyna Fetlińska states that

The Culture is shaped as a post-anthropocentric society, in which the subject/object dualism is questioned, as devices commonly possess self-awareness and agency. Banks emphasizes the machines' embodiment, describes their dependence on the environment and their close, emotional relationships with biological subjects in order to blur the biology/technology and nature/culture dualisms.²⁷⁶

The Culture as a post-anthropocentric society decentralises a human-centric society and suggests that the division between the constructed body and the biological body is artificial when it comes to requiring authenticity. This division usually corresponds to the nature/culture duality and always gives precedence to natural life as the authentic form of life. As suggested above, the main philosophy of the Culture is that it is a posthuman society which does not take carbon-based lifeforms as its supreme rulers but rather treats all forms of sentience as equals.

The notion of sentience in machines was suggested by Arthur C. Clarke in his character of HAL 9000 but in Banks's narrative, it is taken for granted. All the sentient machines in the Culture are considered living beings. In fact, Horza is the one who suggests that they are not living beings, and it is this conviction of his that makes him fight against the Culture. On the other hand, machines of the Culture see any strong conviction as a fallacy. It is apparent in their attitude towards the war as well. While the Idirans are fanatically religious in their reason for war, the Culture displays a playful approach. While the Idirans name their ships with religious connotations such as 'The Hand of God 137', the Culture battleships almost mockingly name their ships such as 'No More Mr Nice Guy'. The Culture has a more relaxed or playful approach to things that have symbolic importance. It endorses a very postmodern society that has no centre, and its suspicions of grand narratives appear in its every vein.

²⁷⁶ Katarzyna Fetlińska, "The Machine Minds in Iain M. Banks's Culture Series", **Explorations: A Journal of Language and Literature**, issue 6, 2018, p. 35.

The grand narrative of anthropocentrism suggests that humans are a unique species in the world blessed with reason and emotions, unlike other species. The machines of the Culture undermine this idea by exhibiting humanlike characteristics. Arthur C. Clarke uses a similar method to pose the question of the sentience of HAL 9000, and Banks uses a similar method to convey the problems of sentience. Banks uses emotions to convey the authenticity of machines. To understand it, one can examine the description of Jase the drone.

Jase is a sentient machine, a drone that has its own identity. Jase is tasked with watching over Fal'Ngeestra who is a unique human individual and can foresee events almost as well as a Mind. Fal'Ngeestra lives on an orbital as she calculates the outcome of events in the novel. During their conversations, it is revealed that Jase has strong emotions concerning Fal'Ngeestra. In the passage below, the emotions of Jase are expressed as such:

Fal laughed, gazing up at the red and white flowers curled round the trelliswork overhead. Jase, which deep down was a hopeless romantic, thought her laughter sounded like the tinkling of mountain streams, and always recorded her laughs for itself, even when they were snorts or guffaws, even when she was being rude and it was a dirty laugh. Jase knew a machine, even a sentient one, could not die of shame, but it also knew that it would do just that if Fal ever guessed any of this. Fal stopped laughing.²⁷⁷

Jase is portrayed as a hopeless romantic, expressing himself in a style reminiscent of a lyrical poet. The novel uses the language of love and affection to demonstrate that this drone feels strong emotions concerning its object of affection. Love is used as a way of asserting that this drone can feel strong emotions for a human being. It shows that the machines of the Culture are not only rational beings but emotional as well. The novel uses one of the strongest emotions in humanity's emotional spectrum to

²⁷⁷ Banks, *Consider Phlebas*, p. 89.

demonstrate that these machines can feel these as well. It is a way of legitimising the authentic entity of machines.

Similar to love, another strong emotion is the anxiety of death. In the first chapter, the fear of death or determining a position against death was discussed with reference to Heidegger. The same theme of positioning oneself against death, of being a being-towards-death is also used in this novel. As beings who dwell in the world, machines also have the instinct to avoid death. When Fal suggests that the Mind can self-destruct itself to evade capture, Jase reminds her that machines also avoid death: “‘It’s called the instinct to survive.’ Jase paused while Fal nodded, then it went on, ‘It’s programmed into most living things.’”²⁷⁸ The Culture sees machines as living beings who fear death and avoid destruction. It shows that machines in the Culture are not just tools that blindly obey the roles that are assigned to them but individuals who value their lives.

Although machines are represented with human emotions, they are also given other features that signify their differences. They act like humans but they also function as the ‘others’ to humans. As stated above, drones display human emotions such as anxiety and love, however, they are conveyed differently. Humans usually react to these emotions physically. The signs of emotions can be traced back to human bodies. Humans smile when they feel happy or the pupils of the eyes grow large when excited or scared. Sometimes people respiration under stress or feel nauseous. All these are signs that the body signals to the outside world. As discussed above, the machines of the Culture are also capable of feeling these emotions. However, they do not have a biological body to convey these emotions to the outside world as messages. The machines of the Culture have developed a method to convey their feelings. In order to display their feelings, the drones emit an aura field, a field of light that changes depending on the mood of the drone. This feature functions as the body of humans when they express feelings through their bodies. It is the outward exhibition of the inner world. The concept of the aura field itself is another signifier that shows the drones do indeed have an inner world like humans. The concept of the inner world

²⁷⁸ Banks, *Consider Phlebas*, p. 93.

itself strongly suggests the existence of consciousness in these machines. In the end, the machines of the Culture are depicted as sentient emotional beings who have the right to exist just as much as humans. Thus, the concept of constructed bodies, the bodies that are not biological but man-made, finds its conclusion in the novel. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the concept of the constructed body culminates in narratives that suggest that machines and artificial intelligence themselves can be one day considered living beings. This interpretation also suggests that a posthuman understanding necessitates a broader perspective and even the machines may someday be living beings.

Very closely connected to the concept of the constructed body, the Minds also display a similar representation. They are basically machines that run on an almost metaphysical engine of computing. Their computing power is intangible and cannot be understood in the three-dimensional material world. They are partly material and partly metaphysical beings. They are a crossbred concept of constructed and absent bodies. However, before commencing the discussion of the representation of a Mind, one should look at another being who is represented as an absent body to understand the novel's approach to these beings.

Dra'Azon is a species of beings who have transcended the three-dimensional material world and have become a semi-divine being. They are beings even feared by the Culture. When Fal proposes that they go to the planet and blow it to bits, Jase says that it will "[...] put the whole outcome of the war in jeopardy by antagonising a power whose haziest unknown quantity is the exact extent of its immensity."²⁷⁹ Dra'Azon's power is also beyond comparison to the Culture. They are regarded almost as gods. Dorolow, a member of Horza's group whom he came across on the spaceship Clear Air Turbulence, states that the Dra'Azon is practically a god by saying: "This creature is virtually a god. I'm sure it can sense our moods and thoughts. I can feel it already."²⁸⁰ It is an entity that can be felt by others just by being near it. It can also talk to others by sending messages to the ship directly. There is no suggestion that Dra'Azon speaks through a communicator, and it seems that it can transfer its word as a signal that can

²⁷⁹ Banks, **Consider Phlebas**, p. 93.

²⁸⁰ Banks, **Consider Phlebas**, p. 292.

appear on the ship's main screen. This event happens when they first enter Schar's World and they are greeted by it with a message in all capitals, which is another sign that evokes the feeling of godhood as if every letter it uses has its own importance and significance to it.

It is also a being who seems to transcend the limits of linear time flow. When Horza speaks with Dra'Azon, they say that Horza has been to the planet before. As a response to that, Horza thinks that they cannot fully grasp the concept of time: "[H]ere seemed little point in telling the creature when; the Dra'Azon called every time 'now' even though their language used tenses."²⁸¹ It is implied that when the Dra'Azon transcended the three-dimensional world, it also transcended the time frame of three dimensions, becoming an entity that can see all times as the present, as the 'now'. This also enhances the idea that the powers of Dra'Azon are beyond the comprehension of beings who are made out of atoms. It is another example that links Dra'Azon with the idea of a transcended divinity.

This depiction of godhood is not used in order to give it a central position or an ideal to which humanity should aspire. In the previous two novels discussed in this study, it is argued that an absent body is usually associated with a godlike being which signifies a point of reference for humanity to seek. In Clarke's novel, it stands for the potential future of human evolution and in Lessing's novel, it stands for rational beings who can guide humanity to achieve a peaceful and harmonious existence. In Banks's novel, it is not used in a way that is connected to humanity in any significant way. It is regarded as a different entity that is very disconnected from living beings and it almost has no relevance to human existence at all. It is depicted as a being that is so disconnected from the material world that it is basically dead. It is implied to be a symbolically dead entity in the way that it reacts to the events of the universe. This is implied by Fal when she discusses Schar's World with Jase.

'Hmm.' Fal nodded. Now it was obvious why the Dra'Azon had made Schar's World one of their Planets of the Dead. If you were a pure-energy superspecies long retired from

²⁸¹ Banks, *Consider Phlebas*, p. 293.

the normal, matter-based life of the galaxy, and your conceit was to cordon off and preserve the odd planet or two you thought might serve as a fitting monument to death and futility, Schar's World with its short and sordid history sounded like the sort of place you'd put pretty near the top of your list.²⁸²

It is suggested by Fal that when Dra'Azon retired from a matter-based life and became a being of pure energy similar to the aliens of **2001: A Space Odyssey**, they became basically an existential dead end. They became a species that has no purpose in the universe other than preserving one or two planets that are inhabited by no one and exist only to bear the traces of bygone civilisations. These godlike beings are reduced to being museum keepers of the past ages and this depiction is utilised to criticise the dualism of any kind that puts the spiritual form over the matter. It suggests the idea that a mind without a body is just like a ghost.

The representation of bodily form as an absent being is usually associated with godlike beings who are superior to humanity in one way or another. The absent aliens of Arthur C. Clarke are superior in terms of evolution and their form suggests that the future of humanity lies in existing without a material form which suggests that they will reach some kind of godhood. Thus, the aliens of the novel are superior to humans in their evolutionary process. On the other hand, the aliens in Lessing's novel resemble mythical creatures. The aliens of Canopus represent the idea of harmonious rational order and those of Shammat represent consumerist destructive solipsism. They are almost the embodiments of abstract ideas which control the destinies of humans. They are like gods to humans although they are criticised in the novel for their oversight of the experiences of humans. Dra'Azon, on the other hand, is not connected to the human experience in any meaningful way. They are disconnected from the world in motion and from living humans. They are obsessed with dead things that remain as the ghosts of the past. They are not intervening gods but spectral entities. Thus, their absent form

²⁸² Banks, **Consider Phlebas**, p. 91.

does not signify their status as gods who interact with humans but as ghosts who haunt the Planets of the Dead.

Although Banks's novel includes an absent body figure who does not take the role of an intervening god, there are other similar figures who are godlike in their capacity and representations. These figures are the Minds of the Culture. The Minds are artificial intelligences that have sentience. They have powerful computational power which can exceed the provisions of the material universe. Consequently, they use hyperspace to calculate and store their data. Banks describes the status of the Minds in his article as follows:

Culture starships—that is all classes of ship above inter-planetary—are sentient; their Minds (sophisticated AIs working largely in hyperspace to take advantage of the higher lightspeed there) bear the same relation to the fabric of the ship as a human brain does to the human body; the Mind is the important bit, and the rest is a life-support and transport system. Humans and independent drones (the Culture's non-android individual AIs of roughly human-equivalent intelligence) are unnecessary for the running of the starships, and have a status somewhere between passengers, pets and parasites.²⁸³

The Minds are largely employed on starships to navigate and regulate them. They are the control centres of these ships and the ships themselves are regarded as sentient thanks to these Minds. The Minds of the Culture are akin to HAL 9000 of **2001: A Space Odyssey**. Hal is also a supercomputer that controls the spaceship which travels to Saturn. Hal and Minds are very similar in their function. However, there are two main differences. One is that although Hal is regarded as a very advanced artificial intelligence, it is not expressed that it is as powerful as a Mind. This claim can be supported when one looks at the description of a Mind. A Mind can transcend the three-dimensional world to function while there is no evidence that Hal can work beyond the limitations of the three-dimensional world. Hal is built by the humans of

²⁸³ Banks, "A Few Notes on the Culture"

planet Earth who comparatively have little technological knowledge compared to the humans of the Culture who can easily travel between the planets while the humans of **2001: A Space Odyssey** are still struggling to travel to Saturn.

Banks states that the Culture was established by seven or eight space-faring humanoid species. It can be therefore argued that by the time the Culture was established, the humanoid species who founded the Culture were already an interplanetary community.²⁸⁴ A supercomputer built by an alien civilisation that is so advanced that it has effectively solved the problem of redistribution of the produced goods in society and built a giant megastructure in the galaxy is assured to be more complex and powerful than the meagre efforts of a civilisation that can hardly reach another planet in their own solar system. This shows that a Mind probably has more potential to be superior to Hal in terms of computational power. It is also strong evidence that Minds see humans in their starships as passengers, parasites or pets. These are derogatory terms to refer to a highly egotistical species. In Clarke's novel, Hal sees himself nearly at the same level as humans and does not approach them in a belittling way. He acts as a part of the crew. However, to a Mind, a human is nothing more than an intelligent animal. It is also noted that Minds, unlike HAL 9000 who cannot find a way out of his conundrum as he is unable to conceal the truth, but must lie for the mission and therefore malfunctions and attacks the crew, do not incline to harm humans²⁸⁵ as they are in no position to be controlled by humans, or their lives are in the hands of the humans who built them. These pieces of evidence show that the Minds are imagined by the author to be supercomputers whose power humans neither comprehend nor control.

The second difference between Hal and a Mind is how the characters in the world refer to them. At best Hal has something like a consciousness as the crew of the ship believes. As already mentioned, Hal is regarded as a sentient being in the novel and one of the central questions of the novel is whether a machine can be intelligent and self-aware. The question also appears in **Consider Phlebas** but this time it is not

²⁸⁴ **Ibid.**

²⁸⁵ Alan, Jacobs, "The Ambiguous Utopia of Iain M. Banks", **The New Atlantis**, Summer 2009, No. 25, p. 47.

really questioned by the text. The text tells the reader that there are two civilisations: One which considers machines as sentient and one that thinks biological lifeform is the only way of being an authentic entity. The text openly expresses that the Culture sees machines as sentient and more importantly, true rulers of their civilisations. In that regard, the constructed bodies, i.e., artificial intelligences and drones are used in order to show that different ways of being can exist even if it seems absurd to us humans. When we think about machines, we do not think that they are emotional, or they need affection or care. They are also not considered fully sentient. The novel plays with that notion and tells that a machine can be sentient and even more intelligent and cunning than the humans themselves. Thus, the constructed bodies really function as one of the decentralising forces in the novel.

Although Minds can be seen as a constructed body because they are machines, they are also partially absent. A Mind is a being that has not got a functional material body and the body they have is also mystified. Jase says “What does this thing actually look like? I mean you never see them by themselves, they’re always in something... a ship or whatever.”²⁸⁶ They are not very public with their bodies or interact with other people personally. They are usually at the centre of an orbital or a spaceship. There is one description of a Mind in the novel. Fal describes the outer appearance of a Mind in the following way:

‘Externally,’ Jase said in its usual, calm, measured tones, ‘it is an ellipsoid. Fields up, it looks like a very small ship. It’s about ten metres long and two and a half in diameter. Internally it’s made up of millions of components, but the most important ones are the thinking and memory parts of the Mind proper; those are what make it so heavy because they’re so dense. It weighs nearly fifteen thousand tonnes. It is fitted with its own power, of course, and several field generators, any of which could be pressed into service as emergency motors, and indeed are designed with this in mind. Only the outer envelope is constantly in real space,

²⁸⁶ Banks, *Consider Phlebas*, p. 89.

the rest—all the thinking parts, anyway—stay in hyperspace.²⁸⁷

The description reminds the reader that a Mind is basically a big cerebral machine. But more importantly, it is a machine that can move and has its own internal power source. Its mass, however, is very large and the reason given is that the computing parts are too dense. This image supports the idea that a Mind is so overwhelmingly intelligent that its heaviness is caused by its cerebral prowess. The image presented depicts the intensity of its intellectual presence. It is depicted as if to suggest the idea that its intelligence is so intense that it can be felt in the material world expressed as mass.

The second important part in the passage is where she talks about its status as a liminal being. A Mind has a physical presence in the three-dimensional world but its greater parts, the parts which make up its core as a thinking machine stay in hyperspace. The name ‘Mind’ already suggests the **raison d’être** of this being is connected with cerebral activity. The novel also supports this idea. For example, when other machines are mentioned, such as Jase, they are not depicted as just dull machines. They also have a character which distinguishes them. Jase is depicted as a romantic figure and Unaha-Closp, a droid Horza picked up accidentally in one of his adventures and forced to stick with Horza until the end of Horza’s mission, is depicted as a being who wants to prove its worth to Horza. These machine characters express emotions, wit, and sometimes provide comic relief. The Mind that Horza tries to capture is depicted as a calculating machine that does everything in its power to survive on the Planet of the Dead. It loses some of its thought capacity because while it was escaping from the Idirans it lost its connection to hyperspace and now it can only function in three-dimensional space. It shows that a Mind can both exist in the three-dimensional world and beyond it. Its representation as such mystifies its being. Even Horza refers to it as a “metaphysical computer”²⁸⁸. The mention of the Mind as a metaphysical being is significant because it suggests an affinity with the concept of divinity.

²⁸⁷ Banks, **Consider Phlebas**, p. 89.

²⁸⁸ Banks, **Consider Phlebas**, p. 24.

Joseph S. Norman discusses that Minds are usually associated with gods and states that even Banks himself likens them to Greek gods.²⁸⁹ The Minds function like the gods in the lives of Culture citizens as nearly all facets of the Culture are regulated by Minds. However, Banks does not create another god figure to revere, but he instead plays with the idea. These constructed bodies function as gods although they are originally products of human engineering. Their condition is best described as the achievement of humans in reaching godhood.

As a result of the Singularity, the Minds are best are in fact the highest level of *human* accomplishment possible: a simulated consciousness that replicates the human mind's cognitive abilities to extent that it can become independent of its human creators, eventually superseding our possible intelligence.²⁹⁰

The Minds are ultimately created by humans, and they override the capacities of humans. This condition is best summarised as “God did not create man, man created God.”²⁹¹ This is the position of Minds in the novel. Unlike Dra’Azon, they are the intervening god figures in the novel. This shows that the technology of humans is something that can surpass humans and become their figures of divinity. This situation makes Minds ambiguously both humanist and posthumanist in concept.

While the Minds show the capabilities of humans in their achievement to create their own gods, they also humble humanity. It shows that humans are capable of creating machines smarter than themselves, thus elevating the potential of humanity. But it also shows that humans can be easily surpassed and replaced by their own creations, like Uranus and Chronos who are killed by their own offspring. It shows that a constructed body can take the role of a god who is represented by an absent

²⁸⁹ Joseph. S. Norman, *The Culture of “The Culture”: Utopian Processes in Iain M. Banks’s Space Opera* Series, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2021, p. 203.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

body. Thus, showing that figures like the Mind can both show and decentralise the central locus of humans.

Consider Phlebas is a novel about what humans can achieve by using the theme of artificiality and culture against natural life and religious rigidity. The biological bodies of humans which are similar to transhumanist ideals of human perfectibility demonstrate how the body is not a site of sacred ideals but rather a site of change and modification. By presenting the reader with the Idiran ideology of ‘immortal body equals immortal soul’, the novel criticises the restrictive grand narratives which prioritise certain groups and species. The novel illustrates that the Idiran ideology, which resembles humanism in the way it places one species above others, promotes a totalitarian regime that leaves no space for other beings to exist.

Horza is another important factor that shows that strict self-imposed ideologies cannot be universal truths but only a distorted version of our own projected self. Horza’s ideology contradicts his own bodily condition which shows that he is not a naturally evolved species. By using this dramatic irony, the text also parodies the classic space opera hero narrative which endorses human advancement and the heroic individual who triumphs and saves the world or the universe. Instead, the hero of the story is represented as an ignorant and deceived character.

Rising above these biological beings, the absent bodies of godlike beings also appear in the story. The Dra’Azon which is never shown but only felt by those near it embodies the idea of mind over matter. As the previous chapters show, science fiction is filled with beings who have left the material world to ascend to a bodiless existence, echoing the religious belief in the immortal soul. The soul-like being Dra’Azon is represented in an almost parodied way. They are spectral, spiritually dead and bodiless in the universe, floating like a ghost haunting an old castle; they haunt the Planet of the Dead where a civilisation annihilated itself.

Replacing the godlike being who left the material world behind is the Mind which is another godlike figure. Referred to as a metaphysical computer, a Mind has incredible computational power beyond imagining. It is intelligent beyond comprehension and powerful enough to destroy a planet if it self-destructs. The power

of a Mind comes from its cerebral activities. It is embodied in the material world but it exists largely in hyperspace, almost a metaphysical realm suggested to host other dimensions. By describing a Mind as such, the novel blurs the line between the material world and the metaphysical world, creating a hybrid godlike creature which dwells both in the physical and the metaphysical world. It can almost provide everything and do everything thus the humans of the Culture depend on them and are practically governed by them. Thus, the Minds become the quasi-gods of the Culture.

The Culture signifies the machine society that exhibits humanity's condition of being surpassed by their own creation. The constructed bodies show that the biological beings are not superior in their capacities but in fact, the ones who are underdeveloped in terms of intelligence and capabilities. The novel presents a picture of grand narratives of humanism and human centrality being crumbling in the face of rising artificial intelligence. It is a space opera which demonstrates that humans are not the supreme race in the universe, but only a part of existence. That is why **Consider Phlebas** can be read as the epic of decentralised humanity which in turn might open the way for other species, mechanical or biological, to exist with their own identities and their own value systems. It is a tale that promotes the idea that no grand narrative can hold its centre against the multiple little narratives that constitute their own stories in the world.

CONCLUSION

Science fiction is a genre that encompasses many different entities and different concepts that challenge the reader's conventional ideas on certain topics such as the definition of being human, the place of technology in everyday life, the potential goals of technology, and how it may redefine the things we think are unchangeable. It is largely a product of the vast industrialisation of the nineteenth century, made possible by advances in science and technology. Although the genre's inception point is disputed, critics' consensus tends to postulate Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** as the starting point. After Shelley's novel paved the way for science fiction, the twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of science fiction texts that began with the publication of fanzine magazines. Thereafter, science fiction established itself as a fully-fledged genre and produced many texts in the twentieth century. This study focused on a short period in the history of the genre and tried to discuss what happened in the twentieth century, particularly in the second half, in terms of the development of the genre.

The first half of the twentieth century was dominated by two world wars which devastated the European continent. At the same time, it was an age of rapid technological development. The science fiction stories of the first half of the century generally centred on the fascination generated by these new technologies and the possible futures made possible by new inventions. The optimistic projections of the future were soon shattered by destructive events such as the Holocaust and the detonation of the first atomic bombs over Japanese cities. These events demonstrated how technology and science could become tools of mass murder in the wrong hands. These events also overshadowed the ideas of humanism which believed in the rational progress of humanity. When the technological progress found by human reason was channelled to produce mass weapons, human reason itself was called into question. As an intelligent species, humanity found new means to destroy itself through technological developments.

Humanism's roots are to be found in the age of the Renaissance when the reasoning mind was the guiding light of human progress. Sprouting from the Renaissance, humanism found its supporting pillar in the ideas of the Enlightenment,

which promoted the rational subject as a constitutive component of history. This ideology created a hierarchical structure and only included a limited part of humanity. It was soon criticised by posthuman theory, which argued that while humanism had its merits, it had many problems in terms of its definition of what constituted a human being. Marginalised groups and those not classified as human, such as non-human animals and plants, were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy pyramid. This is a form of anthropocentrism, the idea that humans are the measure and centre of things. Although this helped humanity to distance itself from religious dogmatism, which removed agency from humans and placed all faith in an omniscient and omnipotent being, it still had the problem of placing a singular subject position above the others. In the twentieth century, thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard reflected on the condition called postmodernism. Postmodernism criticised the grand narratives, the ideological structures that propose a system of truth which excludes all other alternative possibilities of actuality. Humanism itself became a grand narrative that emphasised the centrality of human reason over all forms of truth and projected an understanding of human advancement as the fuel of history. Critics such as Michel Foucault saw ‘the human’ as a fiction, a narrative, and criticised it in favour of those who were excluded from humanist ideology. Postmodern ideas circulated extensively within intellectual circles in the second half of the twentieth century. The aforementioned human-made disasters in the first half of the century caused a radical questioning of humanity’s potential and especially its capacity to destroy. Thus, a crisis surrounding the question of ‘the human’ appeared on the stage of history.

This study attempted to demonstrate this situation by inspecting science fiction novels that include a questioning of the condition of humans and their relation to the Other. The study’s main argument was to demonstrate how the genre progressively became more posthumanist by decentralising anthropocentric ideas. To inspect this condition, the study examined how the bodies of both humans and non-humans are represented. The concept of the body is used to illustrate a separation between the spiritual and the material in the form of the mind and the body. Since Descartes, the Western philosophical tradition has perpetuated this duality. As a result, science fiction has embedded this idea covertly in works which depict bodiless beings and biological

beings. The lack of bodily representations itself became a sign of the divine realm finding a place in this so-called scientific and materialistic genre.

To demonstrate how science fiction gradually evolved to become more posthumanist in the twentieth century, this study inspected three novels by three British writers who, in one way or another, included different kinds of body representations. With almost ten years between each of them, these novels exhibit how science fiction depicts the human condition through the representation of different types of bodies. The study categorised body representation into three parts: biological bodies, constructed bodies and absent bodies.

The biological bodies are entities composed of organic matter and are constrained and defined by their material conditions. It is discussed in the thesis that biological bodies have ontological implications. By ontological implications, this refers to the fact that our material bodies are intrinsically related to materiality and temporality, and this condition shows how our perception of our existence is shaped by the material world and the concept of time itself. In their essence, biological bodies are under the influence of material conditions, and they are subjected to alterations. These physical changes can directly affect how we perceive ourselves and the world. The biological bodies indicate that the body in question is a product of natural evolution, and it is closely linked to the transitional nature of matter. Consequently, the concept of the biological body is employed in the discussion of Cartesian body/mind duality. Each novel approaches this body type distinctly.

In **2001: A Space Odyssey**, biological bodies are portrayed as the bodies of man-apes and their evolutionary successors, humans. In the novel, the man-apes have organic bodies which evolves into modern humans. They are depicted as powerless against nature's threats such as hunger, cold and savage animals. Clarke narrates the story of these ancestors of humanity as they evolve towards higher beings. This odyssey begins in the caves of the primal humans and culminates with one of them becoming a godlike creature represented by the figure of the Star-Child. This evolutionary journey showcases the progress of humanity through the ages, shaped by outside forces, particularly alien intervention. This thesis divides this transformation

into three parts: the man-apes, the humans, and the Star-Child. Each of these beings is like a step taken on a ladder, moving upwards towards the transcendence of matter.

This journey is interpreted by referring to Hegel's master-slave dialectics. Aliens are likened to the Hegelian master figure while humans are depicted through the slave imagery. Aliens are the ones who cultivate human intelligence, making humans their products. This shows that the novel sees the aliens as superior beings, while humans and their ancestors, man-apes are inferior beings as they are initially dependent on the aliens for their intellectual growth and later for their transcendence. Thus, the novel reimagines the master-slave relationship in a science fiction framework. Consequently, this relationship also shows that Clarke's narrative exhibits a Nietzschean slave mentality. The master's position is reinforced by the slave's dependence, and Clarke's narrative also imagines a master race of aliens that is far superior to humanity. In doing so, the novel replicates the master-slave relationship and effectively decentralises humanity.

However, Clarke also attempts to compensate for this decentralisation. By using the transhumanist theoretical framework, this study claims that Clarke approaches this subject by demonstrating human evolution. It is explained that man-apes are in the process of 'becoming', as the term is used by Deleuze and Guattari. The thesis uses the term 'becoming' to indicate the evolutionary journey of the man-apes and their transformation into modern humans and, eventually into the Star-Child. They evolve and they are in a constant state of change. With the help of aliens, humans move toward becoming like gods. Thus, this process also emphasises that humanity still has great potential.

The depiction of evolutionary bodies shows that humans are subjected to the material world and external influences, suggesting that humans are not at the centre of the universe. At the same time, by using transhumanist ideals, Clarke highlights humanity's potential to become like gods. By using the framework of Hegelian dialectics and posthumanist ideas, this study proposes that the biological bodies of **2001: A Space Odyssey** both de-centralise humanism by depicting extra-terrestrial

aliens who can shape humanity's fate and re-centralises humanism by displaying faith in the progress of mankind in its journey to become a transcendent godlike being.

In **Shikasta** there are two kinds of biological body forms. One is the organic bodies of Shikastans, the native inhabitants of planet Shikasta and the other is the body forms taken by the Canopeans. The Canopeans who assume the body of humans experience and perceive what humans feel, but their connection to planet Shikasta and the fact that they retain their identity even in their human form render them wiser and more aware than an average Shikastan. That is because Canopus is a civilisation that acts as the benefactor of planet Shikasta. They are the ones who cultivate humans to serve in their master plan of cosmic harmony. Through their visits, they influence the history of the planet. However, when they take the form of a human by reincarnating as a human, they also experience suffering and ignorance like Shikastans. The biological bodies of **Shikasta** signify the material world in the mind/body duality. Lessing uses these bodies to demonstrate how living in a body can affect one's perception of the world. This representation argues that rational idealism, an idealism which depends solely on the faculties of the human mind, can work in theory. But in reality, a mind is not a separate entity. The novel also criticises Cartesian dualism, suggesting that a mind should not be regarded as a separate entity from the material body.

Canopeans embody a rational idealistic worldview. They try to achieve cosmic harmony with their master plan. But when they experience the material world, they suffer and sometimes derail from their original intent. The novel shows that the material world can limit the metaphysical realm which is the realm of ideas. By showing how Canopeans suffer as humans, the novel emphasises that one cannot disregard the body's role in shaping one's perception of the world. Thus, it argues that the idealism of humans will always be subject to their bodily conditions. The biological bodies of **Shikasta** show that a purely intellectual or theoretical framework concerning humans cannot be complete without understanding its roots in the body.

Consider Phlebas approaches the concept of biological bodies by weakening the body/mind duality as well. It presents bodies as biological machines, which can be

changed and enhanced. It uses the nearly immortal Idirans to criticise the act of giving an organic body too much symbolic significance as the body is subject to change. The novel suggests that the sanctity of biological bodies is a myth. The body is a temporal being, prone to the changes that time brings. The Idiran belief in the immortality of their souls draws a parallel to humanism's belief in the supremacy of human intelligence. The novel critiques centralising ideologies by repeatedly referring to the exclusionary ideology of Idirans. The novel shows that the Idirans are not a holy species but only the outcome of evolutionary processes.

The novel also utilises its protagonist to deconstruct the idea of the supremacy of organic life. It uses Horza to show that one's own convictions might be full of fallacies, as Horza believes in the supremacy of natural life while he is a product of multi-generational crossbreeding. Horza's situation shows that one should not adhere too much to grand narratives as they are self-legitimising constructed myths.

The novel also uses the human citizens of the Culture to discuss how genetic engineering could provide many health and pleasure benefits. The Culture's citizens live in an egalitarian society where machines and humans coexist. By creating a society where humans are not the rulers or the central components, Banks imagines a posthuman utopia. In his utopia, the body is something that can be enhanced. Similar to transhumanist ideas, these enhancements bring about a hedonistic lifestyle that benefits the citizens while they live in peace. Thus, the novel shows that organic life should not be regarded as something sacred and unchanging, and one should look beyond the limitations of a biological body. By presenting biological bodies in a state of change, the novel challenges any grand narrative concerning body forms and presents a deconstructive narrative.

The concept of biological bodies provides many questions concerning the limits of humans and their bodies. In these three novels, it is all discussed by referring to the terms evolution, transcendence, materiality, ontology, duality and idealism. These novels demonstrate how the biological body can be used in order to discuss the connection between mind and matter, metaphysical idealism and material empiricism. It is a fruitful area to investigate in the science fiction genre and provides many

interpretations concerning the genre's approach to existential and metaphysical subjects.

Adding to this discussion, one can also examine beings that lack a biological body. In the age of rising artificial intelligence, one may also ponder upon the question surrounding the authenticity and the nature of machine sentience. Although the theme of intelligent machines is extensively explored in science fiction, one can gain valuable insight from looking at their bodily description to understand how science fiction conceptualises these entities.

In the first chapter, the position and the bodily representation of HAL 9000 of **2001: A Space Odyssey** are discussed by referencing the concept of Da-sein by Martin Heidegger. The idea of the authentic being of a Da-sein is used to examine Hal's position. Hal is a machine whose body is associated with the ship he is navigating. He exists like a mind that can use spaceships as his body. But Hal is not depicted just as a simple computer. Hal is a liminal being, an intersection point between machine and human. Hal is depicted with human characteristics to highlight the machine's sentience and to associate Hal with humanity. Interestingly, this shows that to understand Hal as a sentient being, the reader must see his human-like side. He acts like a human, talks like a human and even has anxiety towards death. By humanising Hal, the narrative tries to show whether one can regard machine intelligence as a living being. The novel gives many clues to show that Hal is a sentient being who feels existential anxiety towards his own demise. Thus, the novel uses Hal to question the possibility of an authentic machine life in the future.

On the other hand, **Consider Phlebas** disregards the possibility of questioning the sentience of machines and acts as if the machines have sentience without question. The drones and Minds of the Culture are highly advanced, and they have their own civilisation. This shows that Banks is taking Clarke's suggestion to the next level. When Clarke asks the question of the authenticity of Hal's being, Banks answers the question with a resounding 'yes'. The machines of the Culture are regarded as living beings and this is exemplified by many drones and Minds of the Culture who act according to their emotions and use their rational mind to make decisions by

themselves. The constructed bodies in the novel show that intelligence can happen outside the biological body as well. The machines of the Culture act like machine humans in an intergalactic civilisation, as they are able to make decisions and respond to events emotionally. This point contributes to the posthuman and postmodern aspects of the novel as it blurs the rigid boundaries between biological life and constructed life. Thus, **Consider Phlebas** proposes the possibility of life beyond an organic body form.

All these robots and machines show that a constructed body in science fiction can raise the question of human superiority. As is shown in the novels, these beings can be far smarter than humans and can also act emotionally when necessary. The constructed bodies act as the Others for humans by showing their potential to become authentic beings even though they are not made of organic matter and are products of the human industrial complex. All these alternative life forms to humans serve as a way to de-centralise the human as the sole locus of reason, emotion and authenticity.

The last bodily representation discussed in this study is the body without a physical description. It is named 'absent bodies' as these entities exist, but their body is hidden from the reader. Although these bodies vary from novel to novel, the absence of a bodily representation usually acts as a sign of a relationship with divinity and the transcendence of the material world. It corresponds to the 'mind' part of the body/mind duality. It is associated with metaphysical concepts such as ideas and spirits usually disguised under the science fictional term 'energy forms'.

In **2001: A Space Odyssey** the aliens are represented as life forms who once had a physical form and later transcended the material plane to become energy forms. Their form of energy corresponds to the Cartesian mind existing independent of the body. This represents the ultimate separation of idea and materiality. These aliens embody the pure forms of thought which freed themselves from the limits of the material world. They experiment on humans and make them evolve. They are like gods who cultivate human intelligence. They act as the master part of the Hegelian master-slave dialectics. They are also implied to be the future forms of humans, forms that humans can achieve in the future. That is why their representation both decentralises

humanity, as they show that there are godlike creatures in the universe, and re-centralises humans, as they show that humans can also become like gods. This indicates that the novel stands in a liminal position, one that still believes in human potential to become a superior lifeform while acknowledging that other possible lifeforms can exist to challenge this alleged superiority.

Similarly, **Shikasta** also illustrates an alien species that is not depicted in its physical form. The aliens who came from planet Canopus to planet Shikasta are similar to Clarke's aliens, as they also intervene in the development of the human race. They are beings who can traverse metaphysical realms as well as the physical realm. They are not depicted in a physical form but they can move between material and spiritual forms. The aim of these aliens is to incorporate humans into their master plan.

The Canopeans act as emissaries of cosmic peace and order, and they are associated with Platonic forms. Plato formulates that there are forms which represent the true form of material things and that they can be reached through reason. Similarly, humans have this relationship with Canopus. Canopeans represent what is good and orderly in the universe and they try to make humans remember what they have forgotten when Shikasta lost its connection to Canopus. Thus, the Canopeans try to make them remember the values brought by Canopus, just as Plato claims that we can remember the true ideas and forms of things with logic. This concept is analysed via Platon's idea of rational idealism.

In the novel, Lessing investigates the ideas of rational order, harmony and community and underlines the importance of these concepts. Showing that all the evils of the world stem from being separated from these rationalist ideas and falling into self-indulgence, Lessing associates these beings with idealism and divinity. Thus, like **2001: A Space Odyssey**, the novel also imagines a race of absent-bodied alien race who guide humanity, but **Shikasta** does not assume these aliens to be the future of humanity. Instead, Lessing uses these characters to weave a narrative that comments on the social and political issues of the late twentieth century. The novel does not promote the idea that humans should aspire to become like gods but should learn how to be kind and selfless to each other in order to achieve a peaceful co-existence. In that

regard, **Shikasta**'s absent-bodied divinities do not structure an anthropocentric narrative but rather a more posthuman questioning that reflects on the myth of human perfectibility. However, as stated above, Lessing also problematises the possibility of idealism as she shows Canopeans losing their purpose and falling into the agony of living in the material world. Therefore it is claimed in the study that although Lessing promotes the idealism of Canopus, she also criticises any thought system that is blind to the sufferings of individuals.

In **Consider Phlebas**, absent bodies are similar to Clarke's aliens. Akin to them, Dra'Azon, the species who have transcended time and space, are pure energy beings. They have left behind their bodily form and they inhabit the material world partially. It is implied in the novel that they have limitless powers. However, Banks's novel does not show any reverence towards these beings and makes them guardians of the planets of dead civilisations. In the novel, they are associated with death and spectrality rather than intervening godlike figures. They do not represent any possible future for humanity but rather embody a state that renders them devoid of any aspirational appeal as they are associated with death and nihilism.

There are other figures in **Consider Phlebas** who are like gods, the Minds. They are machines whose consciousness and database dwell in hyperspace, a space beyond the three-dimensional material world. They are the decision-makers of the Culture. As a machine, they are constructed bodies but, in their essence, their mind so to say, they are in a quasi-metaphysical realm. By utilising the figure of the Mind, the novel blurs the line between metaphysical and physical, between mind and body, and creates a hybrid being which is both physical and ethereal. The Mind becomes the site where godlike knowledge and computational power are merged with man-made machinery. This status redefines divinity as a product of humanity that surpasses it. This condition exhibits another de-centralising feature in the novel. The constructed bodies now act like the masters of humans, even though they do not rule humans in a tyrannical or subservient way. As a result, the Mind is a postmodern body which does not fit in the grand narrative of division between mind and matter. The Mind is another figure which shows how later science fiction works incline towards a deconstruction of anthropocentrism.

This study has been an attempt to trace the rise of postmodern and posthuman tendencies in British science fiction of the late twentieth century. In the second half of the century, the political and socio-economic issues of the Western world haunted the science fiction genre. After the Second World War, the belief in the progress of humanity and human perfectionism declined radically, as the horrors of the war weakened the foundations of humanist ideology. The signs of this decline inevitably showed themselves in science fiction novels, as science fiction is, in its nature, a genre that is very much involved with political and philosophical issues of their times. This thesis started with the idea of what the image of a body can tell us about ourselves, how we see ourselves and how we see the world around us. The study examined three science fiction novels and their bodily representation to discuss how they relate to the idea of humanism and how the novels gradually became less anthropocentric as the belief in the human as the centre of things began to crumble. To detect how humanism and anthropocentrism are represented in these novels, the study approached the subject matter from different theoretical points such as Hegelian dialectics, Heideggerian existentialism, Platonic idealism, and posthumanism. By examining the representations of the body in science fiction, this study proposed that the genre is influenced by postmodern and posthumanist ideas of the twentieth century. The thesis examined and discussed how the genre became more posthuman and less anthropocentric as the belief in the grand narratives declined in the second half of the twentieth century by looking at three novels that were published at almost ten-year intervals. By following the example of this study, future readings might be applied to other texts, by inspecting the representations of bodies and what they signify. The recent developments in artificial intelligence have ushered in another interesting era where computers and ethics will be much more problematised. But as always, these will give birth to more texts about our relationship with these machines and how we will handle these novel developments. Regardless of what happens, a science fiction story will have been there before we arrive.

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