Prediction of cyberpunk in the Utopian vision of Isaacasimov

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Abstract

This paper concentrates on cyberpunk and its intense impacts on society. It also considers the suppressing supremacy and overpowering of technology in the future generations which can be seen obviously in the works of Isaac Asimov. Undoubtedly, Asimov was an eminent figure in the field of robotics and the science fiction genre who was considered to be one of the 'Big Three' science fiction writers. He was not only a writer but also a professor of biochemistry at Boston University. His predictions regarding the future in his book *Earth is Room Enough* (1957) will indeed come true as we are facing situations where there is a rapid increase in dependency on technology and artificial intelligence. The short story *The Fun They Had* (1951) was periodically set in the year 2157 wherein he presented the lives of two young children Margie and Tommy, and their strained relationship with the mechanical teacher.

Keywords

Cyberpunk, Technology, Supremacy, Future and Mechanical teacher

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The world of American literature is always unique. The arrival of English-speaking Europeans led to the rise of American literature in their land United States which was set in the seventeenth century. The literary works contributed by Americans are of different genres. Some of the literary genres in which America specializes its literature are fiction, naturalism, modernism, postmodernism, and romanticism. Ray Bradbury, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Frank Herbert, Robert Anson Heinlein, and Isaac Asimov are some eminent American writers in the science fiction genre.

Science fiction is fully immersed in the world of imagination and the future in which the advancements of science and technology have a prominent part. Science fiction is also referred to as "literature of ideas". Isaac Asimov (1920-1992) defined Science fiction as a branch of literature dealing with the reaction of human beings to the changes in science and technology. He felt proud when he was recognized as a science fiction writer.

Undoubtedly, Asimov is a remarkable figure in the field of robotics and the science fiction genre who was considered to be one of the 'Big Three' science fiction writers. He began to write at the age of eleven which he started to sell at the age of nineteen itself. He was not only a writer but also a professor of biochemistry at Boston University. He authored more than 380 short stories and also wrote 90,000 letters approximately. In addition, he was the president of the American Humanist Association. He is counted as an expert in the branch of science and technology. He was renowned for his *Foundation Trilogy: Foundation* (1951), *Foundation and Empire* (1952), and *Second Foundation* (1953).

Asimov's *Earth Is Room Enough* is a compilation of fifteen science fiction short stories, accompanied by two works in comic verse which was published in 1957. Some of the remarkable short stories in this collection are *Satisfaction Guaranteed* (1951), *The Fun They Had* (1951), *Franchise* (1955), *The Message* (1955), *Jokester (1956)*, and *The Dead Past* (1956). He had created a fictional supercomputer named 'Multivac' that has been featured in more than a dozen science fiction stories. This supercomputer was featured in many works like *Question* (1955), *All the Troubles of the World* (1958), *Anniversary* (1959)*, True Love* (1977), etc.... In his work *Someday* (1956), he ends it by saying that the little computers would grow clever and more powerful someday.

The title itself is self-explanatory. It concentrates on cyberpunk and its intense impacts on society. It also considers the suppression by the supremacy and overpowering of technology in the future generations. Cyberpunk is a science fiction subgenre that takes place in a dystopian, futuristic setting. This subgenre often features scenes that highlight

technological and scientific advancements and their enormous impact on society. It was Bruce Bethke, a writer who coined the term 'cyberpunk' by mixing the words 'cybernetics' and 'punk' in 1980.

It was William Gibson, an American Canadian writer who played the most significant role in bringing out cyberpunk as a specific genre. It can also be seen in his debut novel *Neuromancer* which was published in the year 1984. Some other prominent writers of the cyberpunk genre are Frank Miller, Bruce Sterling, and Rudy Rucker. A video game namely 'Cyberpunk 2077' was also designed and is being played by many.

This can be seen obviously in the works of Isaac Asimov. From his works, both positive and negative connotations concerning the concept of cyberpunk can be derived. In the short

story *The Fun They Had* (1951), he presented the lives of two young children Margie and Tommy, and their strained relationship with the mechanical teacher.

At the outset, the story narrates about the school life of Margie and Tommy from the world and time potentially far beyond from now. That's an era where the dominance of artificial intelligence and technology overpowers the human mind. The learnings of the students, teaching methodologies, and overall school life are unimaginably contradictory to the present life.

The author walks the reader through the year 2157, wherein Margie and Tommy go to their school in the comfort of their bedroom. It's an electronically caged school where they learn everything from a big screen. On May 17th, Margie writes in her diary about the book Tommy had found. It's an old-time book. Seeing it, Margie is reminded of how her grandfather's grandfather used to study from printed pages that are motionless whereas they are studying from telebooks with abundant storage space. With astonishment, she questions Tommy about how a man could be a teacher and also bets him that a human teacher cannot be smart enough.

Margie is reluctant about her school life for many reasons and so the school life back then fascinates and amuses her. They had human teachers, they gathered under one roof to study, they had friends who studied the same, and they helped each other in learning whereas now learning is within lonesome four walls. In the end, she can't help but wonder about the fun and joy they might have had going to school. This short story clearly demonstrates how technology completely changes the lives of students and also society in totality.

In another short story called *Franchise* (1955), Asimov illustrates the use of technology in building one's nation. In a future transformed by technology, the U.S. has adopted an "electronic democracy" model. The computer system, Multivac, would ask a series of questions to each person that will determine the result of an election. This eliminates the need to hold an actual election with the manual voting system.

The protagonist of the story is Norman Muller who was selected as the "Voter of the Year" for the 2008 presidential election. Despite being legally bound to accept the title, he is unsure if he needs to play this role that identifies the whole electorate. He fears that the outcome might be unpropitious. He also worries that everyone may accuse him.

After "voting", Norman felt glad that he was able to help the citizens of the United States by rendering them an untrammeled franchise. This sentence seems to be sarcastic

because not even a single person had a chance to vote manually. In this way, the consequences of getting biased voting results can be avoided.

The concept of a computer system predicting the outcome of an election instead of holding an actual election was likely inspired by UNIVAC I's accurate prediction of the winner of the 1952 U.S. presidential election. This story presents the readers with an alternative way of voting system with the help of the same technology.

To conclude, this paper suggests that Asimov's predictions regarding the future in his book *Earth is Room Enough* (1957) will indeed come true as we are marching ahead where there is a rapid increase in dependency on technology and artificial intelligence. Like the coin having two sides, the overpowering technology would surely bring both positive and negative impacts in the future undoubtedly.

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