

Ecological Frontiers: Assessing the Environmental Themes in the Works of Paolo Bacigalupi

Suriya Prabha. A¹, Dr. A. Vadivukarasi²

¹Research Scholar, Sri GVG Visalakshi College for Women.

²Assistant Professor of English, Sri GVG Visalakshi College for Women

Abstract: The research paper entitled, “Ecological Frontiers: Assessing the Environmental Themes in the works of Paolo Bacigalupi” focuses on tracing the major themes in the works of American writer Paolo Bacigalupi. The themes related to the ecosystem has its focal point in drafting the major ecological challenges that are pertinent in the present world, that needs prior attention among the humans. The loss of biodiversity, resource depletion and environmental degradation are left unnoticed by the human community. The paper also highlights the environmental negligence of humans, who pay very little attention to the dreadful representation of the disastrous future in the fictional world. Such representations should be taken as a metaphor for the upcoming worse future. The paper aims to put forth the major environmental concerns expressed by the writer through his works, as a representation of the real world, thereby categorizing Paolo Bacigalupi as a futurist writer.

Keywords: Climate Change, Ecological balance, Environmental degradation and Technological advancement.

INTRODUCTION

The American writer, Paolo Bacigalupi is renowned for his dystopian and speculative fiction, often interwoven with strong environmental themes. Paolo Tadini Bacigalupi is an American science fiction and fantasy writer, who was born on August 6, 1972. Along with being nominated for the National Book Award, he has also been awarded with the Hugo, Nebula, Compton Crook, Theodore Sturgeon, John W. Campbell Memorial, and Michael L. Printz prizes. Paulo Baccigaluppi's artistic focus is mostly on the following subjects, which includes: Environmental Degradation, Climate Change, Human and Nature Relationships and Environmental degradation. His work stresses on the adverse effects of environmental damage, deforestation and the loss of habitat. His works also focuses on dealing with the consequences of climate change due to the unpredictable weather. The works

selected for the study are: *The Windup Girl* (2009), *Ship Breaker* (2010) and *Water Knife* (2015).

ECHOES OF A FRAGILE WORLD: THE INERWOVEN REALITIES

Literature that expresses its views on environmental sustainability and management of resources aims in advocating these principles to the readers. The readers are expected to take these fictional happenings as realities, in order to create ecological awareness among the human community, to promote a better sustainable future, by replacing the present world that is highly affected by the Climate changes. “Environmental crises, such as global warming, climate change, resource depletion, desertification, and species extinction, are increasing in intensity, leading to a global growth by destruction of the environment” (Shiva, *Ecological Balance* 55). The fictional characters of the works: *The Windup Girl* (2009), *Ship Breaker* (2010) and *Water Knife* (2015) experience a dreadful attack of environmental changes, that has affected them

physically, economically and psychologically. The works also revolves around the societal collapse that happens in the fictional narrative. “Environmental crisis appears not just as a . . . theme but much more complexly and actively as part of writers' construction of their characters' psyches, thoughts and actions . . . and writers' crafting of narrative structure” (Buell 285).

Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009) has its setting in the distant future. The world is at the verge of the depletion of the fossil fuels. Humans had to rely on the other alternative sources for supplementing the use of fossil fuels. Set in a future Thailand, *The Windup Girl* explores the themes such as climate change, genetic engineering, and bio-terrorism. The characters in the novel strive hard to retain themselves in this livelihood struggle. Due to the irreversible effects of global warming, the fictional world was affected drastically by the

changes in climate patterns. In his analysis of the ethical and ecological consequences of genetic engineering, Bacigalupi depicts an illustration of a society in which genetically engineered plants and animals are in responsibility, resulting in both prosperity and catastrophe. The reliance on alternative energy sources like kink-springs and calories underscores the issues of fossil fuel depletion and the search for sustainable energy solutions begin. *The Windup Girl* is a multilayered story set against a backdrop of social and environmental breakdown, weaving together the destinies of its protagonists. It is a potent criticism of current affairs, that highlights the necessity of ethical concerns in the development of technology and environmental management. The novel asks readers to consider the possible future that has to be created out of the novel's intricately drawn setting and ethically less concerned individuals.

Paolo Bacigalupi's next work, *Ship Breaker* is set on a dystopian future Gulf Coast, which is devastated by resource depletion and climate change. Nailer, the main character, is a teenage boy who loots abandoned oil tankers in search of precious resources. When he finds a damaged clipper ship with Nita, an affluent girl, on board, his hard existence transforms. Nailer must decide whether to risk everything to save Nita or to sell the ship for spare parts. When he decides to assist her, they set out on a perilous quest to get away from Nita's adversaries and into safety. "Wherever the huge ships lay, scavenge groups like Nailer's swarmed like flies...dragging the old world's flesh . . . to . . . the recycling smelters that burned 24-7 for the profit of Lawson & Carlson, the company that made all the cash from the blood . . . of the shipbreakers" (Bacigalupi, *Ship Breaker: Number 1 in series* 6-7). The issues related to the themes of survival are brought into limelight in this novel. The writer also highlights the conspicuous disparities between the affluent and the poor. The novel has its setting in the Gulf Coast region. The Gulf Coast region was highly affected by the societal collapse caused by the scarcity of the resources due to the harsh climate realities. The protagonist of the novel *Shipbreaker*, Nailer, scratch around the shipwrecks for his survival.

The novel illustrates future, where humans fight among themselves to own the last remains of the resources of the earth, to live on the earth. Bacigalupi connects the disparities between environmental degradation and socioeconomic

challenges by showing how the poor bear the brunt of ecological collapse while the wealthy are sheltered. The story reflects on human resilience and adaptation in the face of environmental disasters, emphasizing the need for sustainable living practices. Paolo Bacigalupi ends *Ship Breaker* with Nailer and Nita making it through the dangers of their planet. After choosing to save Nita, Nailer's perspective changes from one of only surviving to one of pursuing a brighter future. In spite of all the dreadful events of the future, the novel ends on a positive note. The novelist ends the novel by proposing his trust over the loyalty and moral decision-making minds of the humans.

Paolo Bacigalupi's fascinating dystopian thriller *The Water Knife* examines the ramifications of a civilization experiencing water shortage. In the future depicted in the novel, the American Southwest has been devastated by drought and climate change, leaving Las Vegas as one of the final bastions of civilization. *The Water Knife* is fundamentally a story about power conflicts and survival in a society where having access to potable water has replaced money as the most valuable resource. The protagonists of the book are Maria Rivera, a young lady with a knack for mending things, and Angel Velasquez, a former soldier who is now a smuggler. As they traverse the perilous terrain of Las Vegas, where dishonest public servants and cunning businesspeople compete, their paths cross.

The novel *The Water Knife* is set in a near-future Southwest of the United States. Drought has made the nation dreadful. The major themes discussed in this work includes the necessity of survival, resource scarcity, and the dilemmas faced by the fictional characters, who are fighting to survive in a society where water is more valuable than any other precious resources. The effect of man-made actions has resulted in an unpredictable weather pattern, due to which draught has occurred. The novel also deals with the catastrophic after effects created by the prolonged draught. The novel ends with a realistic resolution. The conclusion urges the readers to act meticulously to retain the sustainability of the earth's resources. Bacigalupi frequently blames the human actions that has led to the rigorous environmental degradation. He also warns the readers against the unnoticed exploitation of natural resources. Baccigaluppi's stories often link environmental issues with social and ethical concerns. This particular work demonstrates how societal disintegration and inequality are made

worse due to the environmental issues. This piece also functions as a warning to promote sustainable living. “Just can’t figure out how rich people always come out good, and poor people always get nothing” (Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife* 92)

CONCLUSION

Paolo Bacigalupi’s speculative fiction serves as a powerful commentary on contemporary environmental issues, urging readers to reflect on the consequences of their actions and the importance of protecting our planet for future generations. Through his diverse themes, the writer aims to highlight the unnoticed symbiotic relationship that exists between the humans and the surrounding world. As Schneider and Mayerson rightly points out the importance of environmental narratives in the contemporary world: “At this point, we do not only need more narratives that include and centre climate change, but narratives that are more likely to inspire, guide, and support a just response to climate change in the years and decades to come.” (357)

REFERENCE

- [1] Bacigalupi, Paolo. *Pump Six and Other Stories*. Start Publishing LLC, 2008.
- [2] ---. *Ship Breaker: Number 1 in series*. Hachette UK, 2011.
- [3] ---. *The Water Knife*. Hachette UK, 2015.
- [4] ---. *The Windup Girl*. Hachette UK, 2010.
- [5] “Global Ethics and Environment.” *Routledge eBooks*, 2002, doi:10.4324/9780203015254.
- [6] Mount, Dana, and Susie O’Brien. “Postcolonialism and the Environment.” *Oxford University Press eBooks*, 2013, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588251.013.0021.
- [7] Philippon, D. J. “From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century.” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 11, no. 2, July 2004, pp. 295–96, doi:10.1093/isle/11.2.295.
- [8] Schneider-Mayerson, Matthew. “‘Just as in the Book’? The Influence of Literature on Readers’ Awareness of Climate Injustice and Perception of Climate Migrants.” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 27, no. 2, Jan. 2020, pp. 337–64, doi:10.1093/isle/isaa020.