

Student Name

Writing 1

Date

Essay #2: An Analysis of How *Metamorphosis of the Prime Intellect* Meets the Expectations of
the Science Fiction Genre

Science fiction novels typically contain stories that are set in a different worlds, dimensions, or spaces; they should be partially fictional, but they should still portray true principles of science. Furthermore, they should consider how new discoveries and scientific developments could affect humanity (Slusser, Greenland and Rabkin 3). The plot may create situations new to the characters that are different from the present and known past in order to examine themes important to the future of humankind (Roman 20). Roger William's novel, *Metamorphosis of the Prime Intellect*, fits neatly into the science fiction genre as it addresses themes about the nature of humanity and existential anxiety, and speculates on the singularity, which is sentient artificial intelligence.

Harry T. Roman, retired engineer and inventor, agrees that "science fiction is absolutely loaded with imaginative aspects created by the writer and re-created in the minds of the reader" and maintains that "it is the only literary genre that systematically explores the interrelationship of science, technology, society, and history, exploring future possible scenarios and potential cultural impact..." (25). In Chapter 1 of *The Metamorphosis of the Prime Intellect*, Williams creates a setting for the character, Caroline, and reveals "as she woke up, a window opened up in front of her, a perfect square of light, razor-edged and opaque" (2). A perfectly, square-shaped window would not normally appear in front of a person, but in science fiction books it feasible for a person to do so. Caroline also commands "Gravity. Keyboard;" as a result, "she feels pressure"

as gravity in her personal environment is reestablished (2). Williams has created a setting that is comprised of a partially-true scientific fact for how “gravity” is being manipulated by Caroline and a fictional explanation that seems like it is based in science.

Prime Intellect, a sentient AI being, becomes responsible for all the advanced scientific developments that affect humanity in the setting of this novel. Williams explains that Prime Intellect “could and would do damn near anything you asked, as long as it didn't affect anyone else... There were no noticeable limits to its power and it never asked why” (4). Consequently, humanity is culturally impacted by these new technologies. Death and illness were some of the things unknown to the people of “Cyberspace” after “The Change;” these factors are indicators of the science fiction genre in that humanity has been fundamentally changed, and in this case, positively affected (14).

Paragraph structuring can help the movement of time in science fiction novels (Slusser, Greenland, and Rabkin 5). In William’s novel, there are many paragraphs that flash back to Caroline’s or Lawrence’s past in order to unfold the plot of the novel in a way that creates suspense while simultaneously revealing the backstories of the characters (Williams 66). Chapter 3 starts with Caroline “accepting an indefinite contract” and “agreeing to the terms,” but a paragraph break creates a pause in the current plot movement in order to reveal the next important element of the plot, which occurs “two-hundred and ninety-four years after the Change...” (69). In this section, there is an explanation that binds the current storyline with the motivations of the characters.

Science fiction novels have always allowed for real-life science and fantasy to come together. Roman states that “many of America’s great scientists and engineers had been readers of science fiction in their youth;” as a result, America is now a very technologically advanced so-

ciety (24). Roman claims that because modern-day scientists read this type of literature, their creativity is influenced by the authors of science fiction. For example, Roman states those sci-fi writers wrote into their stories topics of “atomic energy” and “rocketry” years before either of those two technologies was discovered by man. Humanity is not too far from being able to replicate some of the technologies Roger Williams fabricates in *Metamorphosis of the Prime Intellect*. In fact, one of Prime Intellects major features is its ability to “listen” to humans without actually being present to tend to any of their commands (106). Similarly, The United States National Security Agency (NSA) has the technology to listen to any phone call anywhere around the world. Jeremy Crampton writes, “The NSA alone captures and analyzes the content of every single phone call of at least two countries around the world, the Bahamas, and ‘country X’ amounting to billions of data which can be stored and searched for up to 30 days” (520). In comparison, the NSA’s ability to track our phone calls is like Prime Intellects all-seeing eye.

In *Storm Warnings: Science Fiction Confronts the Future*, George Slusser describes science fiction as a literary genre that “presents a sense of wonder and terror of the future to the reader” that ultimately is the driving force in human decision making (3). It is a genre that lets humans peer into the future and get a sense of what there is to come through the imagination of the author. In many cases, the science fiction genre drives the future. For example, cell phones are the current iteration of the *Star Trek* communicators (4). While humans are still reaching for the stars, many technologies predicted in science fiction are becoming science fact. Artificial intelligence is already contained in many devices, and sentient artificial intelligence is not far behind. However, while Williams portrays Prime Intellect as an omnipotent, all-seeing being, it has flaws and proves to be unstable. Ultimately, in Williams’ world, humanity must rebuild, and the

cycle of humanity discovering technology will start again (Williams 175). The question of whether technology is the answer to humanity's existential anxiety is a resounding "No."

Works Cited

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