

## The Unbearable Lightness of Being: A Posthumanist Reading to Scott Westerfeld's *Specials*

الوجود الضوئي الغير محتمل: دراسة ما بعد انسانية لكتاب "العروض الخاصة" لسكوت وسترفيلد

1 Hakima Moumna\*

Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef, Algeria  
ha.moumna@univ-chlef.dz

2 Faiza Boukhelef

Hassiba Benbouali University of Chlef, Algeria  
f.Boukhelef@univ-chlef.dz

Received 21/11/2022 Accepted 03/12/2022 Published. 28/12/2022

### Abstract:

In a biotechnological age marked with the excessive use of biomedical advances and a state of immense will for transcendence, one's imagination is stimulated toward envisioning the possibility of attaining the full abilities of the human mind and otherworldliness. Such augmentation may rather rob the human individual identity, affecting his stability likewise his self-recognition vis a vis his perception of the hegemonically standard world. Scott Westerfeld's *Specials* disseminates the culture of the technological posthuman entanglement and the coming of inexorable future for the human, built around the popularity of the contemporary infliction of cosmetic surgery. Therefore, this article is interested mainly in exploring the intervene of the biotechnological advancement in the vehement formation of cyborg identity, and the implications of body modifications on altering the venue of human cognition leading eventually to his disorientation.

**Key Words:** Cyborg- Disorientation- Individuality - Mis-recognition -Posthumanism.

المخلص:

في عصر التكنولوجيا الحيوية الذي يميزه الاستخدام الواسع للتطورات الطبية الحيوية و الرغبة الجامحة للتفوق، يتم تحفيز خيال المرء نحو تصور امكانية بلوغ القدرات الكاملة للعقل البشري و العالم الآخر. غير أن مثل هذا التعزيز قد يؤدي الى سلب الهوية الفردية للانسان، مما يؤثر على استقراره بالمحاذاة مع ادراكه لذاته اتجاه تصوره للعالم المعياري المهيمن. تروج "العروض الخاصة" لسكوت وسترفيلد ثقافة التشابك التكنولوجي لما بعد الانسان و ظهور المستقبل الذي لا يرحم الانسان كما هو عليه الحال اليوم، و الذي تم انشاؤه حول شعبية الايقاع المعاصر لجراحة التجميل. و عليه فان هذه الدراسة تهدف بشكل أساسي الى استكشاف تدخل التقدم التكنولوجي الحيوي في التكوين القوي للهوية السايبروجية، و الآثار المترتبة عن تعديلات الجسم على تغيير مكان الادراك البشري الذي يؤدي في النهاية الى ضياعه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ما بعد الانسانية، سايبورغ، سوء الادراك، الازتيك، الفردية.

\* Corresponding Author

# The Unbearable Lightness of Being: A Posthumanist Reading to Scott Westerfeld's *Specials*

Hakima Moumna/Faiza Boukhelef

---

## 1- Introduction

Arriving at the verge of what critics came to term the third millennium or the quick pace of the posthuman juncture, and the old defining characteristics of our humanness have been could into question. The allurements of the hybrid naturalities of the posthuman subject has seized to be a mere fictional and scientific visualization to a palpable new construction of a bio-social creation. Soon the "outmoded human" seemed to feature the early humanist determination, embracing, instead, its bio-technological hybrid constituent marking the catalyst of the posthuman condition. A condition characterized by recurrent breaching of boundaries, highlighting the inevitability of the human entanglement with non-human forces, in particular, the technological which allows him to obtain his full potentials. Hence, this article discusses how continual fashionable molding in Scott Westerfeld's *Specials* (2006) is deconstructive to individuals' identity formation in a way that disrupts humanist autonomy. The paper reflects on how the implementation of science and technology could be entrapping and disorienting instead of being a liberating force, endangering human individuality and imposing a hegemonic conformity which inflicts the collective and the personal recognition in a way that denounces the apparently unbearable lightness of such being. It sketches chiefly on the fatal consequences of penetrating the boundaries designating the human nature under the umbrella of scientific hubris.

## 2- Theoretical Background

### 2.1- The Posthumanist venture

The underlined theory of Posthumanism came to prominence and became paradigmatic to our current epoch since Ihab Hassan's injection in his essay "Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture". Since then, the posthumanist critical stance designates the 21<sup>st</sup> century evolutionary discourse to mark "the ongoing deconstruction of humanism" (Badmington 2000). A discourse that subverts mainly the earlier anthropocentric account of the human as the superior entity and the ultimate existence in the universe. Considering mostly, the contemporary cultural and technological transformations that are projecting new realities shaping what critics refer to as the cyborg identity. David Bolter argues that it mainly "seeks to undermine the traditional boundaries between the human, animal, and the technological" (p. 1), through perceiving the birth of the technoscience subject as the current ultimate creation to excavate human capacities. Rosi Braidotti defines it as "...a working hypothesis, it serves as a conceptual framework to flesh out "the kind of subjects we are becoming"(p. 1). Luca Valera elaborates that posthumanism encapsulates the "total contamination and hybridization of human beings with other living beings and machines" (2014, p. 481).

The notion of the cyborg is very referential to posthuman identity constructivism. Originally, the term stems from the biological field fusion with artificial intelligence and cybernetics, it was introduced by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline (1960) in their article *Cyborgs and Space*. However, it is understood in contemporary culture as a "metaphor

for most human-machine interactions ranging from physical organic-machine couplings...that consider how technology shapes or alter human experiences" (Ursula 05). Eventhough, many believe that to merit the name of a cyborg there has to be an incorporation of any form of technology to the organic body or must be "moebius interaction... a continual interacting surface of interior and exterior, internal and external" (Gosz 183). Yet, the cyborg is acknowledged in the present time as even the simple interaction between human and any instrument including interfacing with communication technologies such as computers (Branwyn 3).

In point fact, it's the ground breaking re-vision of the notion by Donna Haraway that gave the term its real substance in her famous 1985 essay "The Cyborg Manifesto". Haraway avers on presenting the cyborg as a social blasphemy that disrupts old dichotomies and builds new allegiances with its antithetical other (animal-machine). The cyborg, as Haraway reflects, negotiates hybridity in a constant representation, hovering between its fictional and real social process: "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. A social reality is lived social relations, our most important political constructions..." (Richter 1967). This subversive figure was introduced at the beginning within the anti-patriarchal discourse as a deviating figure from "male rigid norms" (Ursula, P. 23), where She sought, from a feminist standpoint, a liberating possibility through ensuing science and technology in an instable patriarchal culture that forces the masculine trope even over the technological spheres. Nevertheless, this mythical creation of our epochal conundrum became an embodiment of agency through its adaptive nature capturing human experiences in general and their assimilating journey that presupposes techno-social transformation.

## 2.2- Posthuman Narratives

Posthuman narratives; thus, emerged in its critical sense to drag on the costs of this frantic extensions through enacting different considerations of the posthuman subject. It embodies literary works enacting different images or dealing with heroes in the unnatural status, such as; zombies, avatars, cyborgs, AI systems, even vampires and werewolves, Aliens, human being injected or being exposed to experiments to alter their functionality. These narratives tend to open debates and imaginations concerning the human species evolutionary state and to scrutinize meanwhile presential biological breakthroughs. Stefen Herbechter soberly asserts that posthumanist literature is: "somehow literary engagement with all figural of human becoming or unbecoming, demise, renewal or transformations" (2020, P. 7). He fosters his claim by articulating that such reflections are usually nurtures in popular culture, mainly, in texts that fall under the so-called speculative fiction and science fiction.

Scott Westerfeld is one of the twentieth Century finest American novelists of science fiction for Young Adult, growing up in a scientific atmosphere as his father was a programmer in profession, provided him with material for his fiction. He is mostly known for the *Uglies* trilogy, which was written as a "subversive political image"(Scott and Drago, 2015, P. 1) for the contemporary mad obsession with plastic surgeries in the worldwide, in general, and the American landscape, in particular. As studies have registered that, in 2002, nearly 6.6 million people of the population were exposed to aesthetic surgeries including (liposuction, facelift, breast augmentation, nose reshaping, eyelid) as Top five make ups.

# The Unbearable Lightness of Being: A Posthumanist Reading to Scott Westerfeld's *Specials*

## Hakima Moumna/Faiza Boukhelef

---

(Nicolopoulou, P. 19) following the year after, the female community filled up 87 percent of the population who underwent cosmetic surgeries like Botox injections or chemical peels in U.S.A (ibid).

Westerfeld sought this as an alarming cultural implication of beauty discourse bringing to the fore the reality of chasing the delusion of perfection corresponding to the hegemonically set out standards. As he explains in the trilogy's guide *Bogus To Bubbly: An Insider's Guide to the World of Uglies* (2008), "A question I'm often asked is: "Are we the Rusties?" The short answer is: "Yes!" But, of course, what I really mean is that we *could* be the Rusties. We don't have to wind up with a future like Tally's. We have a choice. (*Bogus to Bubbly* 27; original emphasis). He believes that with technology at our disposal, the human breakthroughs are quit stepping out of control. Westerfeld's fictional writings allure insightfully for a disdained human future at this rate, marking him as a writer who projects our current reality into a possible posthuman future par excellence. Many of his works were nominated for films adaptation such as *So Yesterday* (2004) and the *Uglies* series, other novels include; *Leviathan* series (2009-2011), *The Spill Zone* (2017), in which he explores many of the twentieth century worldly phenomena by dealing with themes related to Globalization, totalitarianism, and uniformization, characterizing post-capitalist culture.

### 3- The Turbulent Transformation of the human to the posthuman in Scott Westerfeld's *Specials*

*Specials* is the third book in Westerfeld's series of the *Uglies*, a socio-eugenic dystopian novel, a subgenre in science fiction being "an amalgam of social ones (like Orwell's 1984) and eugenic ones like (Huxley's *Brave New World*)"(Claeys 107). Its posthuman narrative revolves around the central figure of Tally, who throughout her journey discovers the reality laying behind her aesthetic metamorphosis. From previous books we learn that the characters live in an urban community, conceivably utopian, with technology at hand to ensure their luxury which resembles the Foucauldian panoptical division as people are spatially divided into different cities having beauty degree as a point of divergent between. Children before the age of 16 are referred to as *uglies* and inhabit *Uglyville*, where they are socially persuaded by a transformational operation whom they await enthusiastically. When time arrives, they are exposed to extreme aesthetical surgery to eliminate physical deficiencies. These transformations are subject to what the international committee for morphological standards sets out as the norm. After "the pretty making" operation The *Pretties* move to *New Pretty Town* where they are permitted to considerably continuous rather than radical cosmetic amendments to avoid the extreme that may result in disharmony. *Specials*, on the other hand, constitute the last and most significant phase of beauty and are said to possess "cruel beauty" and supernatural power and speed. They are called "Cutters" as well and work as disciplinary organization to undermine any rebellion against the system and are under the command of Dr. Cable herself. As the story centers around Tally's quest to save her lover Zane from the damages left on his brain, she learns distracting facts in each phase constituting each time different perception and version of Tally.

The novel avers on presenting the potential impacts of technology on the construction of the cyborg identity. It shows how the cyborg identity can be turbulent matter, controversial and dangerous on the self-recognition, as Tally moves from being content about her special reconfiguration toward retaining a deep ambivalence directed to the real intent of the operation and the cost of its transgression of boundaries. Westerfeld undermines the liberalist humanist assumption of the self-autonomy and stability by exposing the dark fact of interplaying the associative bound between body and identity.

### 3.1-Tally as a Morphological Violation

Ramification and outcomes of morphological freedom that advocates body modifications have been morally and technically largely scrutinized and prophesied. It is one of the most perturbing and sensitive field in this study because of its devastating agenda and the ultimate complexities resulting from the dangerous intersection between the personal and the social perception of the modified self which affects vigorously the human identity. Sandberg simply defines Morphological Freedom as: "the fundamental right to freely modify (or not modify) one's body according to one's desires (Sandberg, 2013, P. 56). This freedom entails that the individual is free to be whoever he/ she wants and are able to adjust their physical traits the way they perceive right and appropriate. In Transhumanists Bill of Rights, it is alleged with self-ownership and self-autonomy as long as the right to own's body, liberty, and what account from, does not interfere with anyone else's right to act similarly (Fuller, 2016, P.2). In *Specials*, it is not only legitimated but understood as a trope of personal agency and practice of individuality based on humans' adherence to living via the choices they make. Individuals after the radical plastic surgery they undergo, they continue having various cosmetic decorations as much as they wish, such as facial Tattooing and exotic surgeries. Eventhough, the community was able to eliminate racial differences, skin color problems, but it was based on a "culture that valued physical appearance to the extent that most were generally dissatisfied, pleasing aesthetic garnered popularity and prosperity while the alternative elicited discrimination" (Scott and Drago, 2015, P.3) emphasizing, thus, human subjugation to techno-scientific consumerist culture persuaded by ideal beauty leading to the flourishing of the cosmetic market (ibid).

In a pejorative sense, Westerfeld exposes through his narratives the myth of the humanist autonomy associated with the advanced figure because the characters in *Specials* do not choose deliberately their morphological transition as it may seem. On the contrary, their consent is ideologically steered toward assuming this change in which they are made to believe that this transformation prevents past blemishes which brought about wars due to racial intolerance. They were told that they are born "ugly" and people suffered eating disorder to avoid filling the rank of the derogated other, accommodating as a convenient solution the operational beauty "as the evolutionary ideal" (ibid). By the same token, Shay as a rebellious character was brought back after her escape to the Smoke and renovated, in the *Uglies* she mentioned that "We don't have to look like everyone else, Tally, and act like everyone else. We've got a choice, we can grow up any way we want"(Westerfeld, 2005, P. 89), which echoes Neil Bostrom contention about Morphological Freedom which singles out: "individuals get to consult their own consciences as to what is right for themselves"

# The Unbearable Lightness of Being: A Posthumanist Reading to Scott Westerfeld's *Specials*

Hakima Moumna/Faiza Boukhelef

---

(Bostrom, 2005, P.206). Shay nonetheless pins down to Tally the imposition laid on her autonomous self "That's not me? It's some committee's idea of me" (Westerfeld,2005, P. 44), to be the first one to oppose the bitter trope of entrapment enfolding them that deflected the previous proclamation of self-ownership.

After turning *Special*, Tally, as well, is immersed with egocentrism as a remnant to the alteration which prompted a sense of superiority, urging her to compel Zane to change to what she accounts as the ideal. Despite his endless efforts in convincing her to retreat her decision which notoriously resulted in the loss of his life "This was all her fault. She Coaxed him here to become what she wanted... This was the final price of her massive ego" (2006, p. 306). The text captures this as Tally's first morphological violation within the story, being a member of *Special Circumstances* was never an ideal state, but bears the hallmark of the nightmarish being they are becoming to, to be a cog in the hegemonic machine, circulating the process.

Indeed, the traumatizing incident of Zane' death captured Tally's moment of epiphany to re-consider her choices, so far, decisions were taken on her behalf, she was ideologically and biologically manipulated. Before, when Tally and her Boss Shay transformed into Cutters (Excessive beauty), they believed that they are able to do what they want, they called this ecstatic state "being Icy" and were satisfied with their altered body. However, this sense of gratification soon faded away when Tally realized that the transformation was not designed for the satisfaction of the masses and it's not based on their autonomous choice nor for the sake of augmentation. The operation is followed by complications that affect individuals' cognition to induce conformity and cause "Bubbleheadness" that alter behavior and it was not what they exactly wanted. In this context, the notion of "cruel beauty" becomes meaningless though highly referential to the idea of morphological violation as it portrays the horrible picture of insane beauty where "Cutters" cut themselves in order to feel. This act of cutting is perceived in the story as a liberating performance which collides with Harm principle established in the transhuman dictum that entails the ensuing of science and technology should not be precedent with harm and pain (Ranish, 2014. P.07). For this reason, Tally once arrived at Diago city is considered a "Morphological Violation"(2006, P.252) and a "Dangerous Weapon"(ibid, P. 255) that need to be corrected. she constitutes a threat for both herself and for the others, Diago's Hospital doctors explain in the passage: "your fingernails and teeth have been weaponized, your muscles and reflexes centers significantly augmented...there are certain structures in your higher cortex, apparently artificial, which seemed designed to change our behavior...suffer from sudden flashes of anger or euphoria, counter social impulses, or feeling of superiority"(ibid, P. 253). This hits harshly Tally and she is able to make sense of her irrational outrageous conducts and why most of the time she could barely act defenseless. She also realizes deep inside that she was not like herself, the wild changed Tally and so her experience at Diago city, compelling her to construct new identity.

### 3.2- Disorientation and Struggle for Self-Recognition

Tally forms her cyborg identification through a constant negotiation between the personal and the collective account of the self. In the quest of her identity formation, she is caught in a

web of disorientation and struggle for self-recognition. In *the Politics of Recognition and Misrecognition* Martineau et al contend that the human is characterized by a significant demand for recognition "as a vital human need" to become full human agents. (2012, P.1) drawing on Hegel and Rousseau, Charles Taylor fosters the claim that the individual is only capable of understanding and defining the self through indulging in "webs of interlocution" and thus being able to make coherent choices (Taylor, 1989, P. 28,32). Tally's recognition is interwoven and loses sense of self couple of times due to various variables, she identifies herself as special Cutter who is tricky and strong once among her group, but disoriented and less familiar once not "somehow the wild made her feel less special" (184). Taylor agrees with Hegel and soberly asserts that "the struggle for recognition can find only one satisfactory solution, and that is a regime of reciprocal recognition among equals" (1994, p. 50). A point of fact that Tally realizes throughout the story " being special wasn't just about strength and speed; it was about being part of a group, a clique. Back at the camp Tally had felt connected to others-always reminded of the powers and privileges they share" (Westerfeld, 2015, P. 185). Tally liked being special but is soon disoriented once entangled with her asymmetrical relations, for instance, she was unpleasant wearing the mask of an ugly and "one look in the mirror had shaken her confidence" causing her to feel 'unspecial'. She felt also "out of place, uncomfortable in her own skin" (ibid, P. 59), knowing that Zane was back from the hospital and not been with her, since he is the person, she really identifies with throughout the whole story, then, she wishes not being '*Special*' to relocate herself with him.

Moreover, Tally suffers again disorientation and misrecognition with Pretties and normal at Diago, she fails to capture her belonging to these "others" because she fails to see them equal. According to Richard Rorty, failure of recognition or misrecognition of a person among a cultural group "can be characterized by an absence of moral imagination in seeing others as like ourselves.... fail to see them being like us" (1993, P. 129) and to feel sympathy likewise for them. Tally is torn between her memories of being once among them and her current sense of superiority and absence of sympathy for them: "she remembered a lot of times when she'd been contented-as a bubblehead, even as Smokey. But somehow her satisfaction never lasted very long. She always found herself changing, pushing against the limits"(Westerfeld, 2006, p. 65). According to Renante Pilapil, misrecognition is the failure to appropriately acknowledge one's moral status as a person, and this personhood focuses on three features the person possess: social beings, rationality and are capable of autonomous actions (qtd in Martineau, p.6). Ugliers and Pretties were contaminated of bubbleheadness and treason tricks which deprived them of rationality and substantial autonomous actions, which warranted tally to disfavor this social group. In a controversial stance, Tally also hold in contempt for her morphological violation bearing on the smokies outlook of her manipulative cognitive by the operation. Tally was incapable of reasoning and having coherent actions in respect of the lesions left on her brain to conduct her behavior and therefore is conceived as less than human by the smokies. Having realized the situation, Tally wasn't happy and significantly disoriented "I'm not sure what I am anymore, Zane. Sometimes I think I'm nothing but what other people have done to me-a big collection of brain washing, surgeries, and cures" (Westerfeld, 2006, P. 190).

# The Unbearable Lightness of Being: A Posthumanist Reading to Scott Westerfeld's *Specials*

## Hakima Moumna/Faiza Boukhelef

---

The cultural implication of the collective conscious that perpetuates the permeability of recognition of a dominant social group is termed by Franziska Dubgen as "epistemic injustice". In her article, she explains that this injustice takes on three forms; "testimonial injustice" occurs when some knowledge producers are regarded as more authoritative than others in virtue of their higher social status (qtd in Martineau et al, 2012, P.7). In *Specials*, the scientist Dr. Cable and her specials are authoritative because of their knowledge and strength including their coercive force that Dr. Cable's operation rendered. By virtue of their excessive beauty and abilities are considered, in a social stratified environment based on beauty, of a more value which is correlated with the second cognitional injustice. Third, as argues Dubgen, 'cultural imperialism' which is present when the representation of reality of powerful social groups achieves hegemonic status (ibid). Special Circumstances and Dr. Cable reconfigurations are presented as the ideal and ultimate posthuman condition enrolling individuals in the work. Dr. Cable authority is not only feasible due to its bio-manipulative mechanism but with the ability to alter the conceptional cognition of individuals through brain damage and ideological persuasion.

### 3.3- Divine Scientific Hubris

The posthuman narrative of the story also singles out Dr. Cable resemblance of the contemporary "Mad scientist" archetype. A medieval trope that was rejuvenated by the nineteenth century writers, who draw on the tradition of its precedent image of the literary figure "Mad Alchemist", stemming mainly from the classical German legend of Dr. Faust (Schummer, 2021, P. 1). The ascribed image with the mad scientist is a brilliant scientist who "is obsessed with some chemical project, secludes himself in the laboratory, works day and night, and becomes socially isolated... and his laboratory is largely equipped with the stuff of the "mad alchemist"(ibid, P. 3). However, this literary figure pleases through unsuccessful experiment to overcome human defective nature by technological means and is often characterized by a scientific hubris. Dr. Cable is the scientist who developed the plastic surgeries in the story and she is in charge of supervising and monitoring the process. She represents a modern descendant to the prototype of the Greek hero whose hubris and eccentric leads to his downfall. Instead of an achievement that goes to goof for human being, to having totally the wrong path as a result of tinkering with our nature and thus destroying the world's balance.

Nevertheless, the trope in *Specials* is approached in a different more subversive sense. Dr. Cable is a female scientist and to epitomize her madness, she is enrolled in the transformation, Tally ponders: "she had the sharpest features..." At the story close, Tally realizes that Dr. Cable waged war at Diago's New System despite knowing that they are not the one responsible for the destruction of the Armory field, but actually it was Tally, she confesses: "Tally, I couldn't very well tell them that you had almost dismantled the city's defenses. The Cutters were my pride and joy, my special Specials" (Westerfeld, 2006, P. 336). Taking in runaways and spreading the cure at Diago meant the demise of her experiment. Hitherto, Dr. Cable falsified facts and lied to the council, seizing the opportunity to halt this from



happening: "you'd given me splendid opportunity to get rid of an old opponent"(ibid, 336). Marcus Rockoff explains this as a divine grace will of the human's egocentric nature to became his own creator, an attempt to achieve perfection and thus being able to monitor. He marks that at this stage, it must be read as: "a literary reflection on human's intellectual abilities to understand the functionality of (human) nature and on his craftsmanship to create the man-made human beings"(2014, p.6).

In his *Posthuman Dimension*, Roberto Marchesini bounds this with the human autarkic vision that summons human resume to technology "in order to dominate the world and separate himself from otherness...to emancipate the mankind from his animalistic condition" (2017, p.142-143). This scientific psychosis is dedicated to "resolve non-equilibrium status by seeking stability in technical support" (ibid, p. 143), to feel special and this justifies the allusive connotation of the name *Specials*. Dr. Cable's obsession illustrates the anthropocentric positioning of Renaissance humanism. In doing so, the story plot highlights the dominating idea that science itself has a moral defect, there is always a creation of something on the expanse of something else, and a creation turns on its creator which parallels the same trajectory traced within Mary W. Shelly's novel *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) and H.G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896). In *Specials*, Dr, cable is cured by her best creation, but for the surprise saves tally to fulfill her autarkic vision: "you're the only real Cutter left...The last of my Specials designed to live in the wild, to exist out-side the cities. You can escape this, can disappear forever. I don't want my work to become extinct, Tally. Please...For my sake, keep yourself special"(Westerfeld, 2015, P. 357-58). Blinded by her aspiration to transcend, Dr. Cable failed to conceive that she is already defeated by her own creation, and that nature always revenge. She assumes saving humanity from damnation uttering "you call this cure, Tally? It's letting a cancer on the world", "it won't be long before they start chewing up the wild, you know...Freedom has a way of destroying things"(ibid, 356-57) Where she actually created dangerous beings, super-amped fighting machines who are ready always to destroy.

### 3.4- Subversion and Determination

Rene Descartes in his philosophy believes that the human is distinguishable from animals because of his free will and ability to determine actions, humans have the ability to choose imperfection and make mistakes (Miah, 2007, p. 15), concepts of choice and perfection, as Miah avers "are both central points of contestation within the literature on posthumanism (Ibid). As previously mentioned, Tally took the initial step of rebelling through making her own choices,

"It didn't seem fair. When had she even had a chance to be selfish? Ever since Dr. Cable had recruited her, other people made most of Tally's choices for her. Someone was always forcing her to join their side in the conflict between the Smokies and the city. Her only real decisions so far been staying ugly...escaping ...with Zane.... Everything else had happened because of threats, accidents, lesions in her brain, and surgery changing her mind for her. (Westerfeld, 2015, P.184)

Her experience in the wild and at Diago shaped a lot of Tally's subversive character. Tally's virtues of liberation were set in motion as soon as she started to object to her

# The Unbearable Lightness of Being: A Posthumanist Reading to Scott Westerfeld's Specials

Hakima Moumna/Faiza Boukhelef

---

confinements. Stimulated by her love for Zane, Tally refrained from following shay's orders, risking herself at Diago: "that's what's amazing about you, Tally-even Dr. cable and her surgeons don't stand a chance against your ego" (ibid, p. 170). Clarity was available and she could think out of the box and become conscious of her autonomous self, when she came to terminate her cycle of conformity by basically rejecting others' projection of a certain knowledge at her, "pockets of rebellion do occur but it occurs within the same environment that fosters conformity"(Hogan, 2001, P.74), by separating herself from the assemblage and be on her own "Traveling alone gave her a lot of time to think...being special wasn't just about strength and speed...connected to others-always reminded of the powers and privileges they share" (Westerfeld, 2015, P. 185). Tally "broke from her paralysis"(ibid, P. 280), and she manages to stop the war, cure Dr. Cable and learn to tolerate the individual averageness and vulnerability in spite of the superior vain within her. In a sense of individuality, she remained the only cutter in the story and decided not to adhere again.

Tally could eventually assimilate her hybridization and learn to control her behavior without the cutting. Writing the Manifesto at the end of the story established her as a new powerful lunatic cyborg who is able to recognize her both supernatural and malfunctioning. In fact, the book's enthralling close, with its foreshadowing the third book in the series, foregrounds the ongoing cyberization battle. After all, Tally didn't cure herself and stood morphologically speaking a "Dangerous Weapon" (ibid, P. 255). Furthermore, she disseminates the human ultimate urge to reach the boundaries and press on the limits. The ending is read, from a posthumanist angle, as a plea for continuation of the experiment and strong belief in the human excessive will in alteration and change. Reenacting the cogito of "stay special" (ibid, p. 257-258) works as a reminder to the demise of humanity on the verge of its perpetual starve for unreasonable technological encroachment.

## 4- Conclusion

In the final run, this article has shown that technological and biomedical advancements can be confining and turbulent to the human identification. From a posthumanist perspective, the study highlighted the implication of body modification on obliterating the individual conscious of his autonomous self, inflicting damages to his self-recognition leading to his disorientation. Undermining the hegemonic social construction of individuals' identities to foreground under the guise of the scientific hubris that nonetheless communicate the verge of human eccentric will to go beyond and tinker with boundaries. The paper also provided an innovative analysis to Tally's subversive agenda depicted in her subliminal negotiation of the two forces constructing her hybrid cyborg identity, between her supernatural and her human substance. Tally's liberation is epitomized in her break of the conformity cycle by being able to determine her own individual choices.

### List of References:

Badmington, N., ed. *Posthumanism*: Palgrave, 2000.

- Bostrom, N. (2005). Transhumanist Values. *Journal of Philosophical Research* 30 (Issue Supplement - Ethical Issues for the Twenty-First Century), 3-14.
- Fuller, Steve. Morphological Freedom and the Question of Responsibility and Representation in Transhumanism, Research Gate. *Confero Essays on Education Philosophy and Politics: Conferno*, Vol. 4 , no. 2, 2016, pp. 33-45 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311750911>
- Hassan, Ihab. "Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture." In *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, edited by Michel. Beramou and Charles. Caramello. Madison: Coda Books, 1977.
- Herbrechter, Stefan. *Posthumanis Literature*, ed. Academia: Geneva, 2015. P
- Pepperell, R. *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain*, 3rd Edition. Bristol: Intellect Books, 1995/2003
- Hogan, P. C. *The Culture of Conformism. Understanding Social Consent*. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2001
- Marchesini, R. (2017). The Posthuman Dimension, Over the Human. *Numanities-Arts and Humanities in Progress*, vol 4. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62581-2\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62581-2_7)
- Martineau, Wendy et al. Theory and Practice in the Politics of Recognition and Misrecognition. *Springer Science+Business Media, Res Publica*, V18, DOI 10.1007/s11158-012-9181-7. 2012, P1-9
- Miah, Andy. Posthumanism: A Critical History. Chapter in Gordijn, B. & Chadwick, R. (2007) *Medical Enhancements & Posthumanity*. New York: Routledge.
- Ranisch, R. (2014). *Morality, Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*, Edition: Beyond Humanism, 01, 149–172.
- Richter, D.H. (1989). *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary trends*, St. Martin's Press
- Rockoff, M. (2014). *Literature, Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*, Edition: Beyond Humanism, 01, 251–314.
- Rorty, Richard. 1993. Human rights, rationality and sentimentality. In *On human rights: The Oxford amnesty lectures*, eds. Stephen Shute, and Susan Hurley, 111–134. New York: Basic Books.
- Schummer, Joachim. 2021. "Art and Representation: The Rise of the "Mad Scientist" Peter Ramberg (ed.), *A Cultural History of Chemistry in the Long Nineteenth Century*,
- Sandberg, A. (2013). Morphological Freedom: Why We Not Just Want It, but Need It. Dans M. More, & N. Vita-More (Éds.), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future* (pp. 56-64). Chichester: WileyBlackwell.
- Scott, N. Kristi, Dragoo, M. Heather, *The Baroque Body: A Social Commentary on the Roles of Body Modification in Scott Westerfeld's Uglies Trilogy*. Daneilriha: inter-disciplinar.net
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Westerfeld, S, *Uglies*. Simon Pulse, New York, 2005.
- Westerfeld, S, *Specials*. Simon Pulse, New York, 2006
- Westerfeld, S, *Bogus To Bubbly: An Insider's Guide to the World of Uglies* Simon Pulse, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009