

Moulding a Villain in *Billion Dollar Whale*: A Post-Humanist Approach

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ABSTRACT

*The advancement of the human race and the emergence of new ideologies/movements often come hand in hand. Post-humanism is a concept whose origin can be traced to the 1980s when people began to challenge the long-established views of humanism. Humanism emphasises that the world be evaluated through a fixed moral hierarchy where the human species must be placed on top of it. On the contrary, post-humanism challenges this view by highlighting the importance of redefining what it means to be human. It urges people to embrace different identities and see the world beyond its basic dualistic nature. This paper examines how post-humanistic ideas can be employed as tools to mould the villain, Jho Low, in Tom Wright's and Bradley Hope's *Billion Dollar Whale*. This article draws on ideas from Donna Haraway (1985) in relation to the concept of 'cyborg' and Francesca Ferrando's (2019) discussion on post-dualism that breaks the categorical differences between humans and other non-human objects. It argues that the book's villain, Jho Low, has been transformed so significantly that he is no longer bound by his origins, physical presence, and abilities attributed to humans, eventually rendering him invincible. It also highlights the idea that, just as with any other human, villains evolve, too, offering a different perspective through the post-humanistic lens.*

Keywords: Billion Dollar Whale; cyborg; Jho Low; post-humanism; villain

INTRODUCTION

When post-humanism was first brought into the domain of scholarly discussion a few decades ago, it raised a few eyebrows among scholars. It was not hard to justify why post-humanism did not sit well with some scholars, as it boldly challenged the long-established status quo of what it means to be human. Fast forward to the present, there is a strong indication showing how post-humanism has found its place, particularly in the groves of academia. In a time when cyborgs, mutated superhumans, and hybridised creatures are a common sight on the silver screen and social media feeds, it is safe to claim that the perfect climate for post-humanism to bloom has finally arrived. Nevertheless, it is still crucial to explain post-humanism as it can be understood and interpreted broadly. In the simplest terms, Cecchetto (2013) explains that post-humanism may be understood as a form of recognition to refer to the human condition that has reached a phase where it should be re-evaluated according to different contexts and situations.

Meanwhile, Mahon (2017) asserts that post-humanism acknowledges that humans and humanity are continuously evolving through interaction with technology and gadgets. These simple explanations may potentially serve as major wake-up calls to stop being complacent with what our species has accomplished and instead start re-evaluating other alternatives that may contribute to acquiring newfound meanings of being human. Undoubtedly, the human race would not have flourished without the presence of technology as its reinforcement. McQuillen and Vaingurt (2018) argue for the centrality of post-humanism to assess how to present technological advancement characterises cultural changes that help form a future post-humanist society. They further explain that a prospective post-humanist society is more impartial and democratic, made possible by eliminating fear and anxiety. This means that in order to examine the notion of post-humanism, it is crucial to acknowledge that the world is imperfect; to further investigate these imperfections, Landgraf et al. (2020) suggest that the position of humans might be better re-appraised. Elements such as machines, animals, geological time, and power structures have encouraged us to re-examine our position in this world. However, it should be pointed out that although post-humanism has been widely debated and examined by modern scholars today, it remains predominantly a field focused on the Western tradition.

Post-humanism and trans-humanism are often confused as the same because they are generally perceived as interchangeable terms, but there are some important differences that should be noted. In simple terms, post-humanism is a broad philosophical and cultural movement that explores the meaning and implications of human existence beyond its traditional understanding. Transhumanism, instead, is a more specific movement aimed at improving human abilities and surpassing human limitations through technology. Post-humanism is a multidisciplinary field that originated from philosophy, science, literature, and art. It challenges the traditional humanist idea of human beings as the pinnacle of creation and calls for a more comprehensive understanding of what human beings mean. Transhumanists, on the other hand, believe that technology can transcend the limitations of human existence.

Meanwhile, villains are characters who incessantly generate controversial viewpoints in both non-scholarly and scholarly fields. From critically acclaimed canons to age-old folk tales, the presence of a villain is considered vitally important. As postulated by Genc and Lenhardt (2020), villains are essential in all environments, as they adapt well to all of them, but at the same time, they are the outstanding ones who should be controlled and fought against in order to have normality in life. Recently, through the works of some notable authors and filmmakers, several quintessential villains have been given a new lease of life by being portrayed through more positive and unconventional perspectives. This has allowed us to see these inherently evil and wicked villains from other novel standpoints. As the discussion around villains expands, more possibilities have come to light regarding how villains could be studied. However, it is essential to note that the study of villainy is not merely about an excavation that appeals to literary scholars who are enamoured with critically exploring the various facades of a particular character. Instead, the study of villainy enables us to engage readers with a more profound understanding of how our mental faculties operate, primarily through fiction. Fahraeus and Çamoğlu (2011) assert that in all narratives, villainy is an indispensable part as it mirrors the innermost fears etched into the human psyche. It is also a significant element in the construction of loss, for example, loss of one's identity, loved ones, authority, or innocence. This undoubtedly suggests that the study of villainy should be taken more seriously because it allows us to examine the human psyche beyond its readily available conventional perspectives. However, it should be noted that studies that combine the study of villains with post-humanism remain relatively scarce in the scholarly field.

The book *Billion Dollar Whale* (Wright & Hope, 2018), written by investigative journalists Tom Wright and Bradley Hope, was published in 2018. The book was promptly met with critical and commercial success upon its release. Kolhatkar (2018) asserts that anyone with a penchant for global intrigue, financial crime, wealth porn, and absurdity would find the book compelling. Meanwhile, Hassan (2018) describes the book as "a brilliant piece of journalism," and in a 2019 review by *The Economist*, the book was praised as an "impeccably researched book on the 1MDB scandal." Commercially, the book was a sensational success. Kong (2018) reports that eager readers grabbed all the copies of the book when they hit the shelves of bookshops across the world.

The nonfiction book recounts the story of Jho Low, a young Malaysian social climber who managed to execute one of the world's greatest heists, 1MDB. The book tells how Low, who started as an ordinary middle-class chap, was fueled by impassioned ambition to rise to the top. Through his ability to expand his impressive network with the high and mighty, he and Najib Razak, Malaysia's former prime minister, finally crossed the path. Their encounter would soon mark the beginning of one of the biggest financial heists to date and, consequently, the fall of Najib Razak. Ramesh (2019) points out that although Low did not hold any formal position in the then Malaysian cabinet, he became a trusted associate of the former Malaysian Prime Minister. Low was no stranger to the world of glitz and glamour; Ramesh (2019) further adds that thanks to Low's staggering net worth, he was always seen surrounded by people ranging from multibillionaires to A-list celebrities at some of the most premium locations around the globe. Despite Low's abilities to rise to the top, there is no doubt that Low is portrayed as a major villain in the book. He was found guilty of embezzling a huge sum of money from 1MDB by courts in Singapore, the United States and Malaysia. However, Low was absent during all court proceedings in which he and his counterparts were found guilty. His ability to evade the authorities for so many years is nothing less than astounding because such an ability is unequivocally beyond what ordinary people can pull off.

This paper examines how the notion of post-humanism can be applied in analysing Low, a villain of Asian descent, as portrayed in the book *Billion Dollar Whale* (Wright & Hope, 2018). This paper will specifically examine ideas about the concept of the cyborg as posited by Haraway (1994) in her seminal work entitled *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985-1991). It will focus specifically on the breakdown of boundaries between man and machine and physical and non-physical forms. Special attention will be paid to tracing Low's transition from an ordinary individual into one that embodies different forms of existence by transcending physical and social boundaries. This paper

brings new insights into the present discussion by investigating how post-humanism can also be utilised in analysing a character, more specifically a villain, in a nonfiction work. This will demonstrate how post-humanism is pertinent to examining fiction and nonfiction works. It further shows that even a character of Asian descent can be read through the lens of post-humanism by engaging in the character's life journey of maturity and progress. While the post-humanist theory is more commonly applied in examining characters that embody obvious characteristics dealing with machines, technology, and futuristic physical appearances, this paper shows that even an ordinary-looking person like Low can be studied from the post-humanist point of view. It also demonstrates how the concept of the cyborg, which is more often regarded as non-human-like, might better be investigated covertly through a humanistic approach by studying a real-life character.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the past, numerous scholarly studies have been dedicated to examining the notions of post-humanism and villainy. Fischhoff (1995) posits that villains can be studied through psychological theory as they are psychologically complex. Because of this, villains are generally more human, allowing audiences and readers to identify with them more closely. In another study closely related to post-humanism and villainy, Bergstrand and Jasper (2018) maintained that studying villains, victims, and heroes collectively is imperative. A study of such a nature will shed light on how these three groups of characters can work concurrently to define social roles, particularly in politics. Combining Character Theory with Affect Control Theory, they posit that understanding how individuals identify themselves with a particular group of characters makes it more evident how these individuals' goals and dynamics can be more accurately speculated. This will allow for the identification of new traits among these individuals. As far as post-humanism is concerned, Gayozzo (2021), in discussing the idea of transhumanism, postulates that transhumanism champions the use of advanced technology to improve human functionality. While discussing cyborgism, an idea firmly associated with post-humanism, he adds that cyborgism makes human enhancement possible as it allows humans to adapt well to different scenarios.

Furthermore, Chakraborty (2020) presents an interesting idea of challenging post-humanism as merely a Western construct. In his research, he investigates how post-humanism can be examined alongside postcolonialism. This was done by studying the names of public buses in India that, he argues, gravitate toward syncretism. The names of the buses bear the names of Hindu gods while resonating with Islamic appeals rendering them into spaces beyond humanism. Meanwhile, Czerniakowski (2021) observes that in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), post-humanism transgression plays a crucial role in reconstructing and later dismantling binary oppositions instrumental in defending the oppressive system. When all the characters in the novel become 'one race,' the boundaries between human and non-human, white and black, are all transgressed. Through the transgression, all of them are then able to deconstruct the oppressive system. Finally, Al Ammouri and Salman (2021) point out how post-humanism can be examined from the perspective of capitalism. Analysing Mohsin Hamid's (2014) *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, they argue that the rise of the economy has decentralised humans from the centre of the planetary scale. They posit that in the post-human neoliberal world, human mortality, disposability, and hyper-individuality are emphasised rather than the protagonists' lives and progression. This has resulted in the way that the meaning of the word human has been given a new definition.

Although the concepts of cyborgs and post-dualism first gained popularity in the late 20th century, they are still widely studied in various fields today. In some recent developments related to the two concepts, Cahyo and Suryaningtyas (2020) explore how the film *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) constructs sexist narratives around technology and reveals exactly how technology can be used to strengthen gender norms and stereotypes as well as how the movie can be understood as a form of female emancipation by associating women with technology. As mentioned by Kundu and Sarkar (2021) in their work dealing with post-dualism, a new perspective is presented in evaluating the different manifestations of human existence. Rigid dichotomies often lead to disastrous consequences, but the acceptance of post-dualism allows us to see beyond the limitation placed upon human existence. New ideas pertaining to post-dualism are also examined by McMillan (2021), embracing post-dualism, the boundaries of games, science fiction movies, and realities which can all be intertwined and blurring the lines that separate the real and imaginative in a more nuanced way.

These studies examined the concepts of post-humanity, post-dualism, and villainy separately, but it is important to note that they share a clear commonality. Post-humanism, post-dualism, and villainy are instrumental to the discovery of hidden possibilities in the human domain. The study of villainy raises our consciousness and intimate familiarity with our psychological complexity. This same idea is supported by Effron and Johnson (2017), who argue that villainy is crucial as it makes visible the measuring points which let us gain a more profound understanding of the functions of societal moral structure. As they further explain, universally acknowledged concepts like hope, suffering, redemption, and morality may be deemphasised upon our knowing concepts of evil. Simultaneously, post-humanism and post-dualism urge us to explore new areas of possibilities and meanings. Thus, by combining concepts of post-humanity and post-dualism in re-evaluating villainy, the study may certainly expand knowledge related to these fields. Determining the points of convergence between post-humanism and villainy through the idea of cyborgism is precisely the gap that this study aims to fill because it demonstrates how these three concepts, together, are closely intertwined and correlated.

METHODOLOGY

The world-renowned feminist philosopher, Donna Haraway, introduced the concept of cyborg in her influential 1985 paper, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*. In this study, Haraway points out that we are all Cyborgs in some sense because we are already a combination of biology and technology, and this hybridity is not to be fearful but accepted. As posited by Haraway, Cyborg is seen as a form of metaphor for our present existence, in which the boundaries between humans and machines, nature and culture, and men and women are blurred. She argues that the cyborg is a hybrid and ambiguous figure that disrupts the boundaries between different categories.

Meanwhile, Francesco Ferrando, a philosopher, further developed the concept of post-dualism that first appeared in the late twentieth century by challenging traditional binary oppositions that structure our understanding of the world, such as the mind/body, human/non-human, and nature/culture. In this respect, post-dualism advocated a more complex and nuanced understanding of reality that recognised the interconnection and interdependence of all things. Furthermore, this philosophy also encourages us to go beyond differences and appreciate the complexity and richness of the world around us.

This article aims to conduct a textual analysis of Tom Wright's and Bradley Hope's *Billion Dollar Whale* in line with Donna Haraway's ideas concerning post-humanism and Ferrando's post-dualism. The textual analysis was carried out in close relation to the concept of a cyborg that breaks categorical differences between humans and other non-human objects, as posited by Haraway. By drawing ideas from Haraway's seminal work, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), the analysis will trace the transformation of the villain of the book, Low, concerning his origins, physical presence, and abilities. Haraway says: "The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (Haraway, 1994. p.6). This means that societal limitations do not bind the cyborg as it is a standalone creature that embraces his/her fractured form of existence. By embracing the hybridity and transgression of the cyborgs, we can challenge the assumptions that underlie our consciousness concerning the hero and villain's identity. As portrayed in the book, it is evident that Jho Low's origins, physical presence, and abilities are more human-like in the book's first few chapters. Starting as merely an ordinary individual who hailed from the working class, he is trapped in an environment where he finds it hard to break away from the many restrictions placed upon him. However, as he begins to work his way up through establishing solid connections with the high and mighty, all the characteristics and traits that associate him with humans begin to blur. Like a cyborg, his origins, physical presence, and abilities begin to regenerate into a state that evinces his beyond-human existence. Thus, he is no longer defined by his race, nationality, or class, and his physical whereabouts have become progressively more mystifying. Above all this, his human-like abilities have also been significantly transformed, eventually putting him in a state of invincibility. His abilities to evade authorities and navigate through different spaces seamlessly render him a creature synonymous with a cyborg that possesses the power to break categorical boundaries and limitations. To demonstrate Low's transformations more accurately, the textual analysis will focus on analysing Low at different stages of his life as expressed in various chapters of the book. From being an ordinary Asian student in London to becoming one of the most wanted fugitives in the world, the textual analysis will show how Low transforms in terms of his abilities, identities, and physical presence gradually. This will then be discussed closely in relation to the notion of post-dualism that emphasises the inadequacy of understanding the world through a strictly binary

approach. By recognising the interconnectedness of all things, we can see that the villain is not completely separated from the rest of the world but the same forces that shape all of us. This can encourage us to take a more balanced and sensitive view of evil, recognising its total complexity and its role in the same system in which we all live. The methodology aims to bring to light how Low's post-humanistic transformations render him cyborg-like, eventually making him an indiscernible villain. Villains are often described as characters of transgression, challenging the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and representing qualities that destabilise the social order. Hybridity and transgression of Cyborgs are considered in this context to be evil, challenging the traditional notion of identity and embodiment. The analysis will demonstrate how Low fits well into the post-humanist framework.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

THE MAKING OF A CYBORG IDENTITY

Cote and Levine (2002) note that the process of forming adult identity started out in a rather straightforward manner in premodern societies. As observed by them, the scenario is now significantly different because the postmodern world has provided us with more diverse models of adult identities as alternatives with which we are able to identify. However, these ever-changing models often lead to more confusion among individuals. Because of this, it is normal to see how many individuals are being more influenced and manipulated easily because they are uncertain of their own future actions and beliefs. Concerning this, Fatić (2016) states that the modern democratic world is one in which individuals are frequently subject to self-blame due to unfulfilled goals since it is a very demanding one to live in. The increasingly perplexing process of identity formation does resonate well with many notions closely attached to post-humanism. If we are to introduce a post-humanistic view on identity formation, Francesca Ferrando's notion of post-dualism is the most fitting. As Ferrando (2019) rightly observed, post-dualism leaves no room for a strict separation between life and death and between biological and artificial. This is because strict binary dualism is deemed inadequate to address the complexity of human existence. As such, this study analyses Low in relation to how he embodies different forms of identity throughout his metamorphosis. This will then demonstrate how his identities gravitate towards the post-human persona.

Readers are first introduced to Low, who is a foreign student in England and who is born to a middle-class family. The identity-forming process takes place while he is enrolled in two educational institutions, boarding schools and a university. He was described as someone who struggled to fit into the new environment. *Recently, Low had begun attending Harrow, the elite boarding school in England, where some of his classmates counted their families' wealth in billions, not mere millions (19).* Throughout his formative years at Harrow, Low struggled to find his bearings among his uber-rich schoolmates, but this was short-lived as he quickly found his way into connecting with those above him.

At Harrow, Low thrived as a member of Newlands, one of the school's twelve houses of seventy or so pupils. Newlands pupils, which had included members of the Rothschild family, the Anglo-French banking dynasty, lived in a four-story redbrick detached building from the 1800s, much like the townhouse of a well-to-do Victorian-era businessman. Although Low was relatively wealthy himself, he quickly fell in with a new group of friends from Middle Eastern and Asian royal families and was struck by the cash at their disposal. These were people, including the son of the Sultan of Brunei, a small oil-rich country abutting Malaysia, who was picked up by drivers in Rolls-Royce cars at the end of term.
(p. 22)

Low's character's development can be seen further as he enters an Ivy League university. He is described as someone who is more comfortable with socialising with the rich and elite students from the prestigious university. The transition is evident in Chapter 2, where he started to organise big and opulent parties as his social circle began to expand. No longer a bystander, he even gained the confidence to invite Ivanka Trump, the daughter of one of the most influential men in the world.

Low began to invite sorority members and his Asian and Middle Eastern friends to gamble, hiring stretch limos for the one-hour drive to Atlantic City. The group often gambled at the Trump Plaza Hotel and Casino, wagering a few hundred dollars a hand. Low even wrote Ivanka Trump, then a student at Wharton, inviting her to attend.
(p. 25)

Low's education path is paved with opportunities that enable him to learn the knowledge of business and the tricks to connect with the right people. With a robust foundation built while studying at these two educational institutions, Low was ready for the next phase of his life, where his identity was set for further transformations. It is worth noting that Low's previous transformation as a well-established identity as a person has proven to be helpful as he transitions into a business opportunist. By the time he finishes his studies, Low has already mastered the art of building a business network very well. He understands the importance of creating a well-connected persona in order to gain the trust of the right people, even if it means having to resort to trickery. This is when Low starts to transform into another persona, a trickster.

He was creating the impression that prominent individuals were behind the company. With such illustrious backing now in place, Low had no trouble persuading Malaysian banks to lend tens of millions of dollars. He used some of the debt to fund the investment group's acquisition of the construction companies. (p. 36)

He then set about creating a fiction that major Middle Eastern sovereign wealth funds also were involved in the purchase of the construction companies. If Low could make it appear as if his personal ventures were backed by powerful Middle Eastern funds, he could attract even more money. To create the illusion, he turned to the opaque world of offshore finance. (p. 36)

Years of being in the business have eventually catapulted Low into the same league as some of the wealthiest and most powerful individuals in the world. As his own net worth continues to grow, he no longer needs to put up razzle-dazzles unnecessarily to attract money into his life. However, what he needs instead is to build a reputation that can distract others from questioning the source of his wealth. To do this, again, Low needs to transform himself this time into a philanthropist.

From the outside, Low appeared to be accumulating prestige, and he no longer had to situate himself between formidable people—the ones who knew the secrets of how the world really works. He had become one of them in his own right. Dating a supermodel, he was pursuing deals and drawing the Malaysian prime minister and his wife ever closer. Those who hung around him, at the Super Bowl or over dinner, still gossiped about his money. (p. 157)

The Malaysian needed some good publicity, and like many disreputable businessmen, he looked to philanthropy for a quick fix boost to his image. It was a sign of growing desperation. (p. 169)

Although Low's desperate attempt to build his new identity as a philanthropist fails dismally, the fall of the Najib Razak regime does not appear to have affected him very profoundly. With Low retreating from the spotlight, he still wallows in living large in a reclusive way. This is when Low starts to embrace the identity of a reclusive billionaire.

By August, with the prime minister's crackdown in full swing, Low felt reassured enough to fly by private jet and helicopter to join the *Equanimity* in the seas off Greenland. For over a week, he went completely dark, visiting the National Geographic scientific camp and stunning people who were seeking regular updates on developments. (p. 186)

Low's transformation throughout the years is nothing short of extraordinary. His multifaceted and ever-evolving identities are proof that he cannot be placed within the strict binary dualism lens, as mentioned by Ferrando (2019). When an individual is examined through the strict binary dualistic lens, his/her characteristics should be able to fit comfortably into readily available classifications and standards. He/she does not aim to challenge the existing status quo by conforming to societal standards. However, Low's characteristics push him far away from being one of those aforementioned individuals who opt to conform. Most importantly, Low's undefinable identity places him closer to what Haraway terms the cyborg. In Haraway's own words, "A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek a unitary identity and thus generates antagonistic dualisms without end" (Haraway, 1994, p. 65).

BOUNDARY-TRANSCENDING ABILITIES

Gods, goddesses, and celestial beings are often depicted to be bristling with limitless powers and abilities. This is a far cry from humans who are inherently constrained by limited powers and abilities. According to new research, the limitations that humans are constrained by include those that are inherent and acquired. These limitations can emanate from different factors ranging from the ageing processes, disabilities and accidents (Paul van Schaik & Barker, 2016). In relation to the discussion of human abilities, Cooper (1999) asserts that abilities can generally be taken to

mean behaviours that can be logically evaluated where their effectiveness can be possibly accessed. The question is: What if there is a new way to examine human abilities from a perspective that surpasses all these preconceived notions? With respect to this, the analysis will continue to assess Low's abilities, which surpass most limitations and the evaluation parameter. When examined closely, his abilities do undoubtedly exceed what ordinary humans are capable of.

As portrayed in the book, Low's ability to navigate seamlessly through the world of business and politics is concomitant with his long-standing experience dealing with powerful individuals. As shown in the previous part of the analysis, Low spent years in prestigious education and financial institutions to build his unshakeable rapport with these individuals before he himself became one of them. His portfolio and reputation are small potatoes when compared to the massive empires of his other business counterparts.

Low might have hailed from Malaysia, but he was a twenty-first-century global scheme. His conspirators came from the world's wealthiest 0.1 per cent, the richest of the rich, or people who aspired to enter its ranks: young Americans, Europeans, and Asians who studied for MBAs together, took jobs in finance, and partied in New York, Las Vegas, London, Cannes, and Hong Kong. (p. 16)

Low knows exactly what type of partnerships he would need to form in order to help him ascend the social ladder. Associating himself with 0.1 per cent of the world's powerful individuals, rare opportunities soon came to his door. Although his business ventures are not always picture-perfect, Low always knows how to tilt to balance in his favour through his connections. Low's impressive ability can be seen once again in how he is able to connect with the most powerful family in Malaysia.

Low's ability to bring Mubadala to the table marked a revival after the mess of the failed condominium deal. He latched onto the opportunity it presented to build his political contacts in Malaysia. He already knew Deputy Prime Minister Najib's brother and his stepson, and he set about getting close to Najib and Rosmah themselves. In 2007, Low formed an offshore company for Rosmah and Najib to help pay for their daughter's expenses while studying at Georgetown. (p. 33)

Without producing anything, Low had shown an unusual ability to navigate the chambers of power and persuade investors by holding out the promise of large returns. He had made money for Otaiba and his other influential sponsors, strengthening his web of contacts. Not all the cash was really his—he'd have to figure out a way to get some money back to Taib—but Low was starting to develop a deal-making reputation. (p. 38)

It is nearly impossible to convince anyone without showing the colour of one's money, but that is exactly what Low is able to achieve. What Low is able to pull off seems to be a mission that could only be achieved with the help of a troop of invincible Illuminati, but Low does it all as a one-man show. Armed with his superhuman sophistry, he fooled the world into letting him into the lucrative game without having to pay for an exorbitant entry pass. However, earning the sought-after entry pass was just the first step for Low. Before long, Low would prove to the world that his abilities are certainly beyond what ordinary humans are capable of.

In addition to his binge spending, people noticed another trait of Low's: a seemingly photographic memory. Some friends noticed that he had the ability to remember very specific details of what money was moving where down to a decimal point. "He was always a bit extreme," said one person who knew him. (p. 61)

It was as if the same compulsive nature that made his scheme take off—Low's ability to procure the biggest and best of anything, be it a yacht or a Hollywood star—was also his Achilles' heel. By 2010, Otaiba, the UAE ambassador to Washington, was becoming unnerved by Low's public antics. (p. 85)

When closely examined, Low's abilities are akin to those of a cyborg. As noted by Haraway, the cyborg debate is intrinsic to the notions of "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (461). Low's business adventures often put him in a state of uncertainty. His ability to always emerge as the ultimate winner from the labyrinthine of dangerous ground proves that he is no ordinary chap. This argument once again resonates closely with Ferrando's idea of post-dualistic identity, where humans are not to be understood by the strict binary view of ability versus disability. In Low himself, we can trace a myriad of abilities that associate him with both humans and non-humans. It is not an overstatement to say that he is a human, machine, magician, negotiator, and an opportunist put together, but above all, he embodies the traits of a true cyborg as far as his mysterious abilities are concerned.

NOW YOU SEE ME; NOW YOU DON'T

As observed by Kümbet (2020), the cyborg body is one where the differentiations of real and virtual, self and other, and all gender boundaries are opaque. In addition, it is also one that extends the potential of how technologically enhanced bodies are able to dissolve the limitations set within a natural body. Ideas about blurring boundaries in one's physicality are also discussed in the research by Thweatt-Bates (2016), who notes that living as a cyborg means acknowledging that all predetermined boundaries of humans can and will be breached. Since this analysis focuses on examining Low through the lens of a post-human cyborg, it will further investigate how his physical appearance has also changed from something concrete to just an idea or illusion, making it difficult for people to track him. Just as his abilities and identity undergo multiple stages of metamorphosis, the same can be seen in Low's physicality. As seen in the first few chapters of the book, Low starts out as a lone wolf who needs to get most tasks done by himself. That being the case, Low has to present himself physically in order to execute his plans. Although he is described as socially awkward and does not know how to handle conversations, Low starts expanding his network by being a wire puller that brings all parties together to the business melting pot. Low is a Jack of all trades who understands that in order to achieve what he wants, he has to be willing to be at the beck and call of his important business associates or the people that he wants to impress. This includes but is not limited to, handling bookings and payments, making it appear as though he is the one footing the bills. His willingness to do the dirty work and be physically present in his business endeavours can be clearly seen in the following lines:

It was a lesson that power and prestige—or at least the appearance of it—opened all kinds of doors. Low positioned himself in the group as someone who could get things done. He'd make the bookings and collect money when it came time for the bill, making it appear like he was the one paying. He became the fixer, trading off his proximity to the truly powerful, and it had the effect of making him a focus of attention. (p. 23)

The Malaysian worked in other ways to build his brand. He wrote articles on stocks for the Wharton Journal, the business school's student newspaper. He wrote many more such pieces, copying most of them from analyst reports on Wall Street. Somehow this got past editors at the paper, and Low began to develop a reputation as a stock picker, despite being only a freshman with zero experience analysing companies. (p. 25)

Low understands that while working his way to being somebody, he has to rely on nobody to execute his tasks. While dealing with his sharp practice, Low has no choice but to make himself available physically, even if it means putting himself at high risk of being caught. However, he begins to recruit more people into his league after marking his presence in the business world. By having the right individuals on his team, Low begins to slowly take a back seat in his business dealings. This also marks the first evolution in his physical presence, where he attempts to present himself in a more subdued state.

As Low's group forged ahead, they worked hard to ensure the pillars of capitalism—lawyers, investment bankers, auditors, and valuation experts—were involved at every turn. The effect was to give the deal between Petro Saudi and IMDB a patina of respectability. For a fee, most were happy to oblige. (p. 50)

Low informed his new legal team that he would be making a sequence of major investments, but he was very concerned about privacy. He opted to use the firm's Interest On Lawyer Trust Accounts, or IOLTAs, to help distribute the money. (p. 58)

As seen in the lines above, Low no longer has to pull one-man shows riskily when it comes to expanding his network. With the help of his capable team members, he continues to tip the scales in his favour but more passively and effortlessly than before. However, Low is far from being complacent with his then achievements. As he metamorphoses further, Low begins to transform himself into the éminences grise behind some of the most powerful political leaders and lucrative industries.

As with IMDB, Low never took a formal position at Red Granite and stayed out of day-to-day operations, but he was a behind-the-scenes force. He organised the first batch of funding for the film company in April 2011, a wire transfer of \$1.17 million from Good Star, the Seychelles company he controlled, to Red Granite's account at City National Bank in Los Angeles. (p. 91)

Although he kept his name out of the press and avoided the set, Low continued to deepen his relationship with DiCaprio as filming progressed. At one point during production, the Malaysian spent more than a week at the Venetian in Las Vegas, accompanied at times by DiCaprio, Riza, and McFarland. He told friends he liked the quietness of the gambling floor, where cell phones are prohibited, as it allowed him to escape. The paid-for gambling excursions also helped reel in the actor. (p. 120)

Low is even compared to the wildly mysterious and fatally idealistic literary character Jay Gatsby a couple of times in the book. Not only is his origin a mystery, but Low also has his own invisible cloak where he makes his presence known without actually being known, both socially and when conducting business. As noted by Rajandran and Lee (2023), the comparison used is a form of powerful metaphor to associate Low as a swindler who obtains a large sum of money for himself and for those with whom he works. Perhaps it is also because he looks like any ordinary Asian-looking man with nothing remarkable, making it easy for people to overlook it. This also makes him a perfect puppet master.

One name was missing from the list of positions, however: Jho Low. Low decided to take no official role, but in truth, he was behind every decision. Najib had given Low a free hand to run the fund, and Low had stuffed it with his associates. Tang and Loo were among the Malaysians Low had gotten to know while doing deals after returning from Wharton. Plucked from relative obscurity, Shahrol would soon show he could be relied on to blindly follow orders. With staff in place, things began to move quickly. (p. 49)

With the unexpected fall of Najib's regime, Low's bulletproof business plans finally hit a snag. With that, 1MDB is exposed as one of the biggest financial heists in history and authorities around the world begin to hunt for the people involved in it. Multiple powerful individuals have been brought to justice, and Low remains at large despite being the biggest conspirator of 1MDB. All the pressure from the media and governments around the world has further pushed Low into becoming more covert in his existence. At first, he assumes the identity of another man, in this case, his associate, Eric Tan, when conducting business dealings to avoid being tracked by the authorities before completely disappearing off the grid.

Low disappeared again, leaving his family behind. In the years since the scandal first broke, he had given up Las Vegas, London, and New York. Now, his only choice was to descend further into anonymity, presumably somewhere in China. Someone so gregarious seemed unsuited to an underground life. (p. 216)

As seen in the analysis, Low's physical transformations are nothing short of extraordinary. Starting out as someone who had to get his hands dirty to execute his own plans, he transforms into a powerful individual who controls multi-billion-dollar industries and then, eventually, the power behind the throne. Even when all odds are now against him, he manages to vanish into thin air and lives an existence unknown to the world. When Low is examined through the lens of post-humanism, his multifaceted physical appearance does render him cyborg-like. Low is not one but an embodiment of multiple physical forms, and this lends credence to the claim that Low can be associated with a post-humanist persona.

CONCLUSION

Examining characters in works of fiction through the perspective of post-humanism has been largely explored by many literary scholars. However, this paper presents a fresher angle at how post-humanism can also be employed as a theory in analysing nonfiction characters. Besides, Haraway's notion of a cyborg is more commonly studied in relation to female personas, as evidenced by the literature review. Nevertheless, in this paper, Haraway's notion of the cyborg has been adopted into studying an Asian male character, which is a far cry from the conventional practice. Hence, this paper does expand the sphere of post-humanism, particularly in the discussion of the cyborg and post-dualism.

For many ardent followers and readers of the world news, Low is a man with many wicked ideas planted within his head. He exemplifies avarice and insidiousness in the extreme because his actions are deemed unscrupulous. Some may glorify him as a hero, but as evinced in Tom Wright's and Bradley Hope's (2018) *Billion Dollar Whale*, Low is a villain who steals a large sum of money to feather his own nest. As reported by Gould (2023), Low has been sentenced by a Kuwaiti court to ten years' jail in absentia. It has been years since Low disappeared from the radar, and although an all-out manhunt was launched by the Malaysian government with the help of other powerful nations to trace his whereabouts, all efforts hitherto have not been fruitful. Low remains at large to date, despite being one of the most wanted fugitives in Malaysia and other parts of the world.

When examined closely through the post-humanist lens, it is not hard to figure out why he has been able to avoid the authorities all these years. Low is a villain whose abilities, identities, and physical presence will continue to metamorphose. His abilities to reinvent himself with post-humanistic approaches render him the will-o'-the-wisp that is always beyond the law-enforcers net. Perhaps, this is what happens when the authorities depend too heavily on using humanistic methods to catch a criminal who has transformed himself into a “cyborg”. Although it remains to be seen if Low will eventually be captured, the fact that he remains scot-free to this day is a testament strong enough to justify his idiosyncratic and paradoxical existence that exceeds all human limitations, an outcome of a post-humanistic analytical lens.

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