



# Liquid Gold and Broken Futures: Environmental Politics in Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*

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## Abstract

Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* pictures a dystopian vision of the American Southwest devastated by prolonged drought, environmental collapse and ruthless political practice over water resources. In the near future, water functions not only as a life-sustaining component but as a stock of huge political and economic value "liquid gold." This paper analyses how Bacigalupi focus on environmental politics by revealing the intersections of climate change, state power, corporate greed and social inequality. Through the collapse of legal water-sharing systems, the rise of water tycoons has been increased characters like Catherine Case have been pictured in the novel. The violent enforcement of resource control is portrayed by Bacigalupi. The novel shows contemporary environmental governance and privatization exploitation of nature. This paper further explores how environmental scarcity breaks social structures and produces broken futures particularly for downtrodden people. The life of common men is displaced because of the ecological disaster. *The Water Knife* gives readers the framework of climate fiction and environmental political discourse in the upcoming future. This paper argues that Bacigalupi's narrative serves as both a warning and a political intervention for the readers. Earlier men face lot of challenges. But right now, basics needs like air and water itself people are not able to get. People don't have basic needs. It has become a rare commodity. The problem starts with the basic needs of survival. Bacigalupi pictures that the readers have to reconsider current approaches to environmental management before scarcity becomes irreversible.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, AI in Education, technology, teaching, personalized learning

In the twenty-first century, climate change has transformed from a casual concern to an urgent global reality. Rising temperatures, prolonged droughts and decreasing natural resources has increased. All environment issues shape political decisions and social relations. We could notice that there is a change in the literature. Literature has responded to this crisis by producing narratives. The settings

of the novel have changed. Many writers focus on environmental issues. Bacigalupi sets platform for environmental neglect. The long-term consequences of environmental neglect are effectively portrayed by Paolo Bacigalupi in *The Water Knife*. Failure of the government and governmental institutions to protect the society leads to ecological damage. When a society ignores environmental concern then it is a



warning for environmental neglect. This neglect does not affect everybody in the society. The poor people and weaker in the society affect most. Because they can't afford the price for the basic needs.

Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* is a warning for the irresponsible governance. If the deciding authority is not going to take proper measures, then the future generation will be in danger.

His portrayal of a near-future America where water scarcity dictates power. The novel is set in a parched Southwest. *The Water Knife* depicts a society in which rivers run dry due to that the cities collapse. Human life is valued only in relation to access to water as a result the crime rate has increased. Lives of the people were complicated due to scarcity of water. Even the water is sold in the black market. Whoever is selling water they become rich. Survival is the only instinct which makes them to move further. People they don't have the access for water. So here starts the power control. Rich they were able enjoy all the basic necessities. They have the money to pay for it. But then the downtrodden lead their lives in refugee camps. Who were not able to afford they die.

This paper explores how *The Water Knife* represents environmental politics through the metaphor of water as liquid gold. The basic needs have become a prized commodity. Bacigalupi does not merely depict a world suffering from climate change but he shows the political system that misuse environmental crises for profit and control. Bacigalupi highlights conflict over water rights, legal plotting and violence. The entire is under power control. *The Water Knife* reflects real-world tensions surrounding resource management and environmental injustice. Moreover, the narrative pictures how ecological collapse diversely affects the poor and displaced in the novel. The novel leads the reader to the future which can be described as broken futures. Many lose their dignity and hope for stabilised life.

Through a careful reading of the novel, this paper examines the relationship between environmental degradation and political power in *The Water Knife*. It argues that Bacigalupi's dystopia is not a removed fantasy but a projection of existing systems taken to their logical extreme in *The Water Knife*. The

resources are scarce it was not equally distributed. Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* gives a warning to the society. It is high time actions should be taken in a serious way. Every individual must have moral responsibility. Proper actions will avoid destruction to happen in near future. The novel function as a cautionary tale. It shows the failed systems in the society. It gives idea to the readers that unchecked technological advancements will pave way to environmental destruction. Bacigalupi portrays that natural resources should be shared by all human. But it has become a profit driven commodity. When society uses natural resources as commodity it shows their ignorance for ecological importance. This practise intensifies environmental degradation.

In *The Water Knife*, water is no longer a basic need available to every individual in the society. It has become the most valuable commodity in the economy. It has become a profit driven business. Bacigalupi repeatedly stress that control over water determines wealth, security and political dominance of the entire nation. Water has become a liquid gold. Natural resources should be used by the society for collective survival. But in the novel, it is under the control of Catherine Case, Queen of the Colorado. Government sectors have all become privatized. Entire harmony of community is shattered. Water has become unequal access. The transformation of water into liquid gold is depicted in the novel. It has become a rare commodity. The characters in the novel were not able to drink, bath in a regular basis. Washing their clothes is a dream. It reflects the broader commodification of nature under late capitalism. Even life-sustaining resources have become a market value. Maria used sell water in the black market and save money to move from the city.

The novel portrays water rights as weapons controlled by powerful states and private corporations. Arcane water laws are outdated. These laws are based on the historical agreements which becomes outdated in the current scenario. Corporate sectors manipulate for their own benefits. As an outcome common men face lot of challenges and commotion in the day today life. It is not easy to the present realities. Water laws become tools of domination and often enforced through violence. Bacigalupi has presented presented Angel with



complex motivations shaped by social and political forces. The Water Knife reveals that power and control are only means of survival through Angel's character.

Angel Velasquez is known as water knife. He works for Catherine Case. His role as water knife is to eliminate water threats and destroy water supplies in Arizona. He is a key agent and ruthless in his profession. Angel is a combination of political authority and corporate brutality. It is a dangerous alliance. This combo is a collaboration of public responsibility and private exploitation.

Bacigalupi pictures the contemporary realities, where privatization of water resources has already sparked global conflicts. Bacigalupi highlights these drifts to expose their ethical implications. Water has become a tradable asset. The novel *The Water Knife* reveals how environmental politics can degrade entire populations. The chase of profit overrules reflections of justice environment sustainability. Human lives are deeply connected with ecosystem. The damage done to the ecosystem will become a threat to the collective survival. Each and everybody should be responsible to build a happy environment with all the needs for the future society.

Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* is a clear sign of political failure. Traditional systems of government have collapsed in the corporate environmental catastrophe. Government bodies have become weak, international borders were under the surveillance. The states try to act as independent but really, they were not so. Cities were under the control by people like Catherine Case. "The Queen of the Colorado had slaughtered the hell out of these neighbourhoods: her first graveyards, created in seconds when she shut off water in their pipes" (Bacigalupi,11). The Colorado River Compact, is powerful symbol used by Bacigalupi in *The Water Knife*. Resource sharing, becomes irrelevant in a world where legal agreements cannot withstand ecological reality.

Bacigalupi's narrative suggests environmental crises and reveals the fragility of politics. Laws designed in a way were corporate sectors become powerful and common men are totally devastated. Water scarcity is the predominating theme. Laws no longer protect the marginalised. There is no safety for common men. Laws were no more supporting ecology and human needs. Political leaders depend

on the corporate sectors for funds. Many public welfare measures are decided by the corporate sector. There is no transparency. Ethical responsibility is reducing in the government sectors. There is no equality in resource distribution. The access of resourced were shaped by government bodies. Environmental decisions were taken by corporate sectors. Environmental politics thus becomes a field of ruthless competition. Environmental issues were not addressed properly.

In Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* laws are enforced and manipulated. Cities in *The Water Knife* face lot of water shortage. The novel is set in climate ravaged society. Survival becomes a daily struggle for common men. They are life has filled with threat and challenges.

*The Water Knife* focuses heavily on political and economic systems. Portrayal of ordinary people struggling to survive is pictured clearly. Refugees, labourers and poor suffer a lot because of environmental collapse. Their lives are characterized by constant movement, insecurity and fear. Many they try move out of the city. Threat and danger were in the minds of the people. Political decisions made in distant boardrooms and conference rooms reflecting the human cost which they were able to overcome.

Characters like Lucy Monroe were not able to accept the reality. Lucy Monroe, a journalist in the novel, serves as a witness to these broken futures. She thinks law can change things in the society. Readers encounter refugee camps and the life style of the people. Displaced families and cities reduced to dust is shown clearly in the novel. These scenes pictures that environmental crises are not abstract phenomena. The realities of common men life that shape individual destinies of the future society. Children grow up without stability, education, or hope. The innocence of the childhood is gone. Only hunger and thirst are the prime factors. They were not able to lead a healthy life. Their future is unpredictable. They don't get proper education and healthcare. Future was beyond their control.

Violence in *The Water Knife* is systematically and politically motivated. Water cutoffs, assassinations and armed enforcement are considered as normal methods of maintaining control in corporate sector. The novel suggests that when essential resources



become scarce, violence becomes an accepted instrument of governance. And nobody can raise question against the power and governing body. This reveals the broken future of the society. Scarcity of resources leads to violence.

Bacigalupi's representation of broken futures highlights the uneven distribution of environmental suffering. People only suffer. Happiness is a rare scene in the novel. Everybody was under the pressure. Happy living with basic needs is beyond their dream. Because of the climate change entire society suffer a lot. Basic needs have become a prime source. This imbalance reflects real-world patterns of environmental injustice in Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*. Marginalized communities face lot of difficulties. Novel challenges readers regarding the environmental policies of human race and the future of the planet. Men thinks that in the ecologically hierarchy human race is in the centre. But we often forget that planet is shared by other species also.

Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* presents environmental politics. Crisis and scarcity are the predominantly shown. Water is the main symbol transformed as liquid gold. This portrayal reinforces the novel's central warning for human race. Survival is not only for human race. This planet is equally shared by other species. We human make other species life also in threat and danger.

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