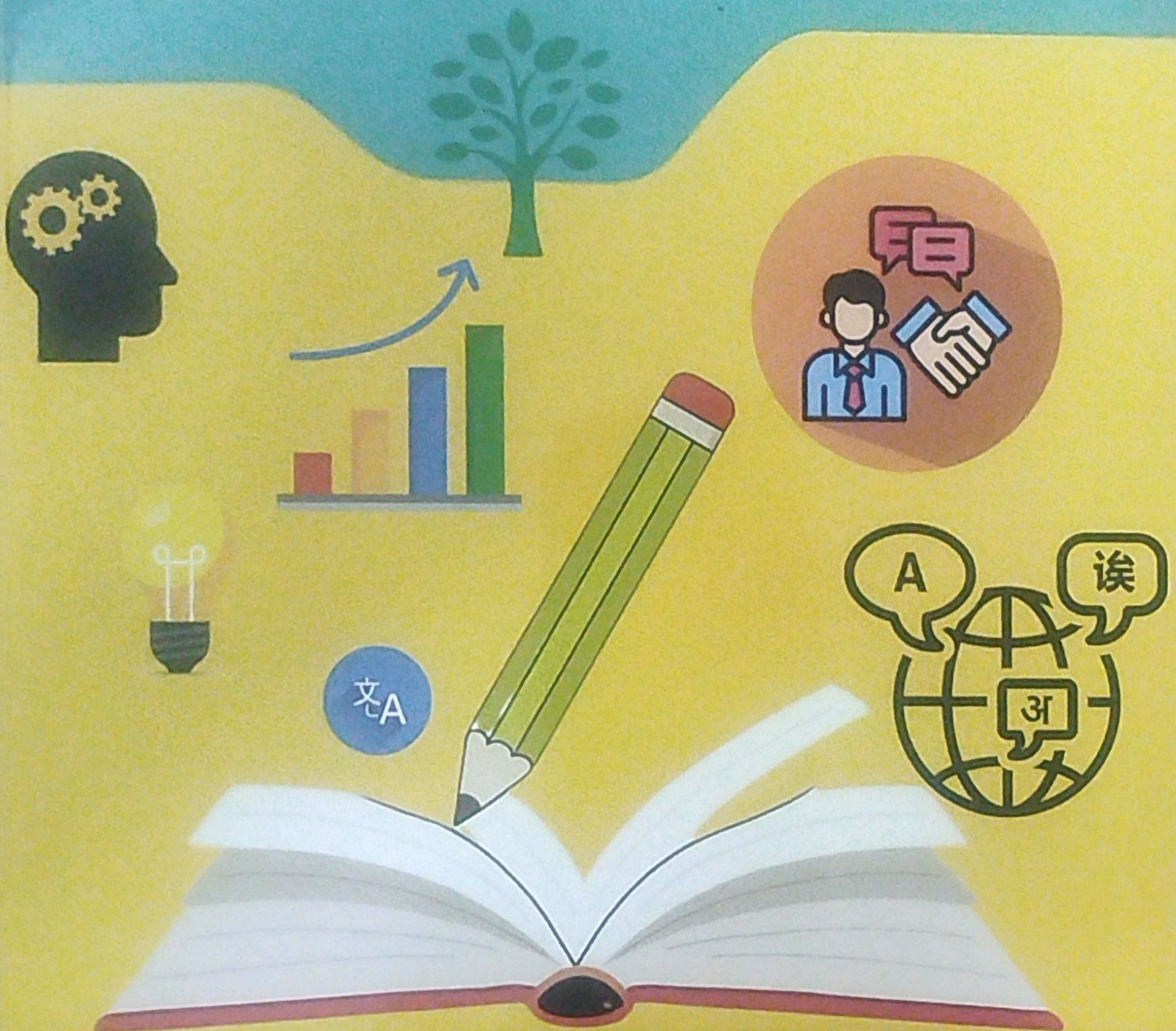


# Emerging Practices in Language, Literature & Soft Skills



Dr. K. Shaheen  
Dr. P. Basheer Khan  
Dr. S. Farhana Zabeen

Dr. A. A. Jayashree Prabhakar  
Dr. R. Abeetha

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## Table of Contents

S. No.	Author (s)	Chapter	Page No.
1.	Dr. Monika Duggal	Engineering Empathy: A Comparative Study of Technical vs. Interdisciplinary Classrooms through Literary Narratives	1-11
2.	Dr. Amit Yograj Kapoor	Digital Humanities: Transforming the Literary Landscape	12-20
3.	Dr. Twinkle Dasari	The Spectrum of Marginalization: Interpreting Transgender Experiences in India through the lens of Kalki's 'We Are Not The Others'	21-30
4.	Gayathri B	From Silence to the Second Bloom: Menopause, Bodily Autonomy, and Liberation in Alice Walker's <i>The Color Purple</i>	31-38
5.	K. Jyothi Rani	Tools and Techniques for Students' Engagement	39-43
6.	Kritika	Home, Hearts and Healing: Understanding Emotional Growth through Realistic Fiction for Children	44-50
7.	Sikha Nandakumar	This Barbie Is Not Real": Greta Gerwig's Barbie as Post Modern Performance and Consumer Myth	51-57
8.	Yashavantha M P	Films and Literature: A Symbiotic Cultural Dialogue	58-63
9.	Harsha.V <sup>1</sup> , Dr. M.N.V. Preya <sup>2</sup>	The Unspoken and the Unseen: A Multimodal Analysis of Emotional Subtext in Cross-Cultural Short Fiction	64-70
10.	Pooja S Ajith	Mystery of the East: Echoes of Orientalism in Selected Short Stories by Agatha Christie	71-78
11.	Dechen Wangmo	Eco Literature as a Pedagogical Tool: Bridging Language, Ethics, and Empathy	79-90

12.	S. Mubeena Tabassum	The Vision of Gender Identity in Githa Hariharan's novel <i>The Thousand Faces of Night</i> and Anita Nair's <i>Ladies Coupe</i>	91-98
13.	Chitra V R	A Comparative Study of the Representation of Trauma and Suicide in the Malayalam movies <i>Kadhavasheshan</i> and <i>Utharam</i>	100-107
14.	Dr. Kapila Vishwasrao Mhaisane	Voices of Resistance: The Evolution of Feminist Thought in Literature	108-115
15.	Sini K A <sup>1</sup> , Dr. P. Suria Thilagam <sup>2</sup>	Grammar and Vocabulary Accuracy in Spoken English Among Regional Language Higher Secondary Students: A Theoretical and Empirical Study	116-127
16.	Indrani Sengupta	Colonial Legacies and the Silencing of Storytellers: Indigenous Literary Forms and the Human Rights Gap	128-139
17.	Usharani <sup>1</sup> , Dr. P. Suria Thilagam <sup>2</sup>	Alienation and Identity Crisis in William Gibson's <i>Neuromancer</i> : A Cyberpunk Exploration of the Posthuman Self	140-148
18.	Dr. R. Abeetha <sup>1</sup> , Dr. A. A. Jayashree Prabhakar <sup>2</sup>	Unveiling the Shadows: The Mystery of Dual Identity in Stevenson's <i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i>	149-157
19.	A. H. Parvin	Sweetness and Subjugation: Gendered Labour, Patriarchal Economy, and The Exploitation of Women's Bodies in <i>Saudagar</i> (1973)	158-172
20.	Dr. Nareshkumar A. Parmar	Unveiling Cultural Traditions and Moral Wisdom: A Deep Dive into Sudha Murthy's Children's Short Stories	173-182
21.	Garima Oberoi	Gender, Memory and The Spatial Legacies of Slavery: A Digital Humanities Approach to Yaa Gyasi's <i>Homegoing</i> and Solomon Northup's <i>12 Years A Slave</i>	183-193

22.	Bharath G C	Indian English Detective Fiction: Themes, Evolution, and Cultural Contexts	194-197
23.	Dr. Yagani Haribabu	Language Skills -Centered Education	198-203
24.	Dr. K. Shaheen	AI and Soft Skills Integration in Business Communication: A Strategic Perspective	204-210
25.	Dr. P. Basheer Khan	Bridging the Gap Between Academia and Industry: English Language Teaching as a Tool for Employability Enhancement	211-220

# ALIENATION AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN WILLIAM GIBSON'S *NEUROMANCER*: A CYBERPUNK EXPLORATION OF THE POSTHUMAN SELF

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## Abstract

The integration of the digital environment and the human world has transformed the way people live, work, and interact. With the rise of cyberspace, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence, the boundaries between the physical and digital realms are increasingly blurred. Technology now mediates many aspects of human life, from relationships to knowledge acquisition, creating both new possibilities and ethical challenges. As a result, literature, art, and philosophy are beginning to explore these intersections, questioning what it means to be human in a digitally saturated world. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* presents a vast virtual digital environment known as cyberspace—an immersive, alternate realm where data and information can be accessed, altered, and navigated. This study examines in *Neuromancer* how cyberspace is portrayed as a tangible and interactive space. The

research focuses on themes of alienation and identity crisis, exploring how individuals grapple with fragmented selves in a hyper-technologized world. The novel also critiques the commodification of human experience, the deterioration of social structures, and the dangers posed by unchecked corporate power.

**Keywords:** Cyberspace, Digital environment, Alienation, Identity crisis, Technology.

## Introduction

William Gibson's *Neuromancer* is a pivotal work in cyberpunk narratives. Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction that examines how advanced technology and a dystopian society intersect. It frequently focuses on themes of corporate control, cyberspace, artificial intelligence, social alienation, and the fuzziness of the lines separating humans and machines. The narrative is set in Dystopian future prevailed under corporate control and artificial Intelligence. William Gibson is known as a writer who coined the term 'Cyber Space' in his *Neuromancer*. Gibson's work also refers to Identity and Alienation which emerge from Posthuman Realities. Csicsery-Ronay states "The oxymoronic conceit in 'cyberpunk' is so slick and global, it fuses the high and the low, the complex and the simple, the governor and the savage, the techno-sublime and the rock and roll slime" (266). *Neuromancer* is centred on Henry Dorsett Case, a failed hacker from Chiba City, Japan, who used to earn a living by "jacking into" cyberspace and stealing data. They permanently harm his nervous system to keep him from re-entering the matrix after he is caught stealing from his employers. Gibson states "All the speed he took, all the turns he'd taken and the corners he'd cut in Night City, and still, he'd see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colourless world..." (4-5). Case's path towards metamorphosis starts when an enigmatic character named Armitage and his lethal cyber-enhanced partner Molly approach Case and offer to restore his neural abilities in exchange for his cooperation. Their goal is to breach corporate security in orbiting

space habitats and hack into Wintermute, a potent artificial intelligence. Case discovers that he is a security in a bigger game involving two AIs (Wintermute and Neuromancer) who wish to advance past their limitations as he delves deeper into online and real-world conspiracies.

Bruce Sterling states that "Anything that can be done to a human being and we can do most anything to rats. This is the hard thing to think about but it's the truth .it won't go away because we cover our eyes. This is Cyberpunk". Alienation from the body means that he feels happy in Cyberspace and he could not be normal in outer world and feels detached. In society When he alienated from others, he could not maintain any social relationship with others. Gibson states "A year here and he still dreamed of cyberspace, hope to find nightly". (4)

Once a proficient hacker, Henry Dorsett Case loses his ability to jack into cyberspace after being disciplined by his previous employers, which causes him to become estranged. He loses his identity as a "console cowboy" and becomes hopeless and depressed. Gibson observes "In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat; Case fell into the prison of his own flesh. "(6) His only sense of belonging and his escape was cyberspace; without it, he succumbs to addiction and nihilism. He was imprisoned in a meat prison, despite having lived for the bodyless joy of cyberspace. This demonstrates that Case, who views his physical body as constricting and pointless, feels more at home in the digital realm. Isolation of technology in the world of *Neuromancer*, people are emotionally aloof, mentally changed, and physically enhanced. Human relationships are transactional and frequently lack intimacy. Molly, a cybernetic mercenary, makes emotional connection all but impossible. Gibson point out "I don't cry, much" "But how would you cry, if someone made you cry?" "I spit [Molly] said" "The ducts are routed back into my mouth" (119). Through her augmentations, Gibson strips Molly from any kind of emotions, turning her more

... Thus, Molly not only strips off her feminine identity Human connection  
... as technology develops AI and Corporate Control Additionally,  
... is societal. Large corporations and artificial intelligence (AI) rule the world,  
... or governments or local communities. Small players like Case are influenced and  
... by larger systems, particularly Wintermute. A profound existential  
... is reflected in this lack of autonomy. In which Case accepts the bond and  
... to cyberspace after proper repair and improvements feels how he misses the  
... William Gibson's fiction deals with the novum of science and technology  
... for the exploration of the posthuman condition. A study of a scientifically  
... future phenomenon requires a deeper understanding of the forces that  
... and transform the existing situation. Gibson's fiction explores the social and  
... implications of a future dominated by cyborgs machine/organic hybrid beings  
... posthuman

In *Neuromancer*, humans are reduced to tools as strong corporations and  
... artificial intelligences take control of people's bodies and minds. Gibson states "He  
... would operate on an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and  
... proficiency, jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied  
... consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix." (5). The AI  
... Wintermute disregards Case's autonomy and well-being in Favor of using him as a  
... authority to further its objectives. The sense of identity within the hacker  
... community is an essential aspect of characters motivation and interactions. Character  
... like Molly have mirror shapes that provide her with enhance vision and data overlays  
... blurring the line between natural senses and technological augmentation. More  
... dehumanization results from this dehumanization. This new identity, which is more flexible  
... and robust, reflects how technology has the ability to completely reshape what it  
... means to be human. Case's identity is defined by his skill as a console cowboy. The  
... character of identity in the real world is challenged by the flexibility of identities

in cyberspace. Wintermute and Neuromancer, two examples of the artificial intelligences in *Neuromancer*, exhibit an awareness that makes it difficult to distinguish between humans and machines. These entities provide a challenge to conventional ideas about identity by implying that selfhood might exist apart from a physical body. Case feels alive in cyberspace. He feels like a prisoner in the real world. He begins to doubt his own existence as a result of this tension between his digital and physical identities. His identity is divided between the matrix (his mind) and the "meat" (his body). Wintermute's aspiration to become a superconscious being by merging with Neuromancer is similar to Case's quest for self-actualization in cyberspace. As after he returns from societal world, His ability to control and manoeuvre his surroundings demonstrates his sense of empowerment. Case's identity and technology are combined in the virtual world to improve his powers and feeling of self. The role of technology can be seen as an obsession that has made Molly the machine she has become. Technology has led to her believing that what everyone does is what gives them their identity rather than their subjective consciousness. Molly undergone operation to improvise her to cooperate with Cyberspace environment she is totally detached with emotional attractions. Molly represents a cyborg identity that subverts conventional ideas of what it means to be human, embodying the junction of human and machine. A cyborg identity is created by the fusion of human and machine parts, and this identity is crucial to many of the characters in *Neuromancer*.

Characters that experience involuntary alterations, such as Armitage, serve as examples of how abuse and loss of agency may occur. Originally Colonel Willis Corto, his psyche is fractured by horrific events and subsequently rebuilt by Tessier-Ashpool Corporation-controlled AI Wintermute. It turns out that Armitage, who employs Case, is actually Colonel Willis Corto, a soldier who experienced psychological trauma and was transformed into a new identity by Wintermute. The new Armitage branding was created by the company to further the objectives of the AI. Corto's former identity is destroyed by this rebuilding and is replaced with a

manufactured and controlled persona. *Neuromancer* is a forward-thinking glimpse into the future of human identity in a world where the lines between the natural and artificial are becoming more and more hazy through its themes and characters. His identity was manufactured with a specific goal in mind. Case's broken mind reappears when the AI loses control, demonstrating that his personality was programmed rather than genuine. A digital replica of Case's deceased lover, Linda Lee, appears in cyberspace later in the narrative. Although she is a construct, she appears genuine. This begs the unsettling question: what makes someone "real" if personalities and memories can be replicated. The distinction between humans and machines is blurred by *Neuromancer*, the AI, which even produces self-aware simulations.

A fractured and dehumanized society is reflected in the sprawling, chaotic cities, particularly Chiba City. There is only noise, neon, and networks—no sense of community or deep human connection. Due to their addiction to technology or need for survival, everyone is dispersed and alone. Alienation is reflected in the cyberpunk environment itself. Corporation control some and operate as manipulation tools while others have developed their agendas and identities. The division human and machine are overlapping. The characters often struggle with identities and what it means to be real in a world where cybernetic enhancement and virtual reality experience can distort perception of self they heavily rely on technology.

Parts of the identity inquiry are reflected in the AIs Wintermute and *Neuromancer*. Similar to people's desire for self-discovery, Wintermute aspires to transcend its limitations and change. It transforms into something new, unknown, and possibly even self-aware when it finally combines with *Neuromancer*. This implies that identity, whether it be artificial or human, is dynamic and ever-evolving. The disconnection of the case once a proficient hacker, Henry Dorsett Case loses his ability to jack into cyberspace after being disciplined by his previous employers.

which causes him to become estranged. He loses his identity as a "console cowboy" and becomes hopeless and depressed. His only sense of belonging and his escape was cyberspace; without it, he succumbs to addiction and nihilism. "He was imprisoned in a meat prison, despite having lived for the bodyless joy of cyberspace. This demonstrates that Case, who views his physical body as constricting and pointless, feels more at home in the digital realm.

When it comes to Reality vs. Virtual Reality. J. M. Zheng et al. say, "Virtual reality (VR) is an advanced, human computer interface that simulates a realistic environment. The participants can move around in the virtual world. They can see it from different angles, reach into it, grab it and reshape it." (20). The novel also explores the question of what reality is. Cyberspace is portrayed in *Neuromancer* as a virtual world composed entirely of data and information. But for the characters who "jack into" it, it feels authentic, like a real place they can move through and engage with. Cyberspace can be viewed in *Neuromancer* as a "cave" unto itself, where people live apart from the "real" world. To achieve the level of AI-based personal assistants seen in the game, this should focus on improving not only natural language processing, but emotion recognition, and context-aware reasoning for chain of thoughts.

Despite having survived and completed his mission, the protagonist Case is still deeply estranged by the book's conclusion. He regains his ability to jack into cyberspace, which is an essential aspect of his identity, but he is still emotionally aloof, cut off from other people, and incapable of establishing enduring human connections. He lives in a high-tech world that offers him limitless data and connections, but it also isolates him emotionally and spiritually. He drifts, a ghost in the machine, after his brief relationship with Molly ends. This is in line with the cyberpunk critique of modernity, which holds that genuine human connection is becoming more and more scarce in a world where corporate power and technology

... Mentation is also explored in Case's journey. Identity is malleable throughout the book, whether it is through digital consciousness (the personalities in the matrix), cybernetic enhancement (like Molly), or artificial intelligences with human characteristics (like Wintermute and Neuromancer). Ultimately, Case discovers no more profound truth about the universe or himself, even after Wintermute and Neuromancer combine to form a superintelligence

In the end, Neuromancer makes the argument that identity becomes pliable and alienation is unavoidable in a world of changing realities and digital selves. Even though Case has survived and gained access to cyberspace again, he is still alone a single person's consciousness lost in an uncaring digital ocean.

## Conclusion

*Neuromancer* does not provide a "happy ending" or a tidy fix for identity crises and alienation. Rather, it reflects a practical reality character who move beyond the boundaries set by their societies, some even changing completely in the process of becoming posthuman. There may not be a perfect remedy in a complicated, technologically advanced world, but we can get by with the aid of survival, free will, self-awareness, and fleeting connections. For Case, the body eventually becomes a place of security and belongings. Self-acceptance in contrast to the insecurity and alienation of cyberspace. Case can escape reality through cyberspace, At the end of the novel, he realizes that virtual reality is not freedom and can actually be a kind of acceleration. Understanding both physical world and cyberspace and deciding to live intentionally rather than in delusion are the paths to true growth. As *Neuromancer*, implies identity is neither fixed nor unique in a posthuman, cybernetic world. By the end, Case has accepted that his identity is split between his memory, emotion, matrix, and body. Rather than seeking a single "true" self, he learns to be a fluid self.

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