

**Dan Wells' *Partials*: A Critique on Biopolitics****Dr. Shubhangi Nitin Jarandikar**Associate Professor in English  
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(Affiliated to Shivaji University, Kolhapur)**Abstract**

In his conceptual framework Foucault introduces the term 'biopolitics' which refers to a form of political power that regulates and administers human life. According to Foucault biopolitics is a new technology of power that differs from the sovereign, monarchical forms of authority and operates in its decentralized form. In this power it is expected to regulate human population and safeguard its biological existence. However, in the contemporary world the streams of knowledge like science, technology or medical institutions have surreptitiously been intertwined with the biological power and have functioned as the instruments of exploitation, victimization and politicization of biological existence of human life. Humans are transformed into objects to be examined, analyzed, controlled and managed in order to sustain political governance. Human life then turns into controllable human species. With the advent of technology the biological existence of humans has been threatened and the biopolitics in its deeply coercive and ethically problematic agenda has begun to challenge the human identity itself. Dan Wells' speculative science fiction *Partial* illustrates how the biological power with its dynamics exerts and controls the biological identity and existence of human beings and interrogates man's unchecked and unethical agenda of governance under the guise of survival. The present research article is a modest attempt to study and interpret how Dan Wells' narrative exposes and critiques the dynamics of biopolitics with the help of Foucauldian reading of the novel within the framework of science fiction.

**Keywords:** biopolitics, Foucault, management of human bodies, partials and human species, Dan Wells, science fiction

**Introduction:** Science fiction has traditionally been considered as a form of popular literature, often associated with themes of mystery, adventure, technological innovation, or heroic triumph. While these elements contribute to widespread appeal of the form of science fiction, critics have long observed that science fiction also articulates deeper cultural anxieties and collective psychological fears. Beneath its imaginative worlds and speculative technologies lies a sustained engagement with the fate of human civilization and the ethical dilemmas posed by scientific progress. In this sense, the genre functions as a cultural mirror—bringing to the surface what might otherwise remain unspoken in the collective unconscious of modern society. Dan Wells' *Partials* exemplifies this dual tradition of the science fiction. Although the novel portrays suspense, conflict and speculative locale and intrigues, it simultaneously reveal the attempts of political management of human lives. By juxtaposing the human species with the genetically engineered species called partials, Dan Wells interrogates ethical boundaries between natural and artificial life, biological

vulnerability and engineered resilience. Through the depiction of the central character, Kira Walker and a captured partial Sann the narrative framework forms a ground to make a conceptual reading of the biopolitics with the help of Foucault's perspective. The bodies of both the characters, their actions in the given circumstances, and their choices throw light on the broader structures of governance that shape the dystopian world. As the story unfolds, Wells puts forth these two figures at the intersection of medical authority, reproductive politics, and state surveillance. His narrative thus provides an insight into how biopower operates—how institutions administer life, regulate reproduction, and classify bodies in ways that reflect the political anxieties of the society. In the following section of this article the interplay of biopolitical power has been discussed through a close textual analysis of the novel and attempt is made to interpret and analyze Dan well's exposition and interrogation of the unethical and unchecked dynamics of biopolitics.

### Discussion:

In its speculative and futuristic temporal setting of the year 2076 the novel *Partials* opens up a site where the world of humanity is on the verge of extinction. The narrative opens in a hospital where newborn infants die within three days of birth, a recurring event that immediately establishes the crisis faced by the remaining human population. Humans have been largely wiped out by the RM virus, which is associated with the Partials—genetically engineered beings originally created by humans. Only a small group of humans survives in a forested region of Ireland.

To ensure the continuation of the human race, governance on the island is controlled by a senate of twenty members. The administration enforces a strict reproductive policy under a law called *Hope*, which mandates that all women capable of conception must give birth. The minimum age for pregnancy is set at eighteen, despite the known fact that no infant survives beyond a few days. The hospital functions as a site where births, deaths, and records of infants are systematically maintained. The protagonist, Kira Walker, is deeply disturbed by these conditions. She questions the effectiveness of the existing medical practices and believes that understanding the immunity of the Partials may provide a solution to the infant mortality crisis. When official authorities refuse to support this approach, Kira secretly plans an expedition to capture a Partial for study. Along with her companions, she travels to the Partials' territory, captures one named Sam, and brings him back to the island, though they are later arrested for violating the law. The senate allows Kira limited time to conduct her research under strict supervision. During this period, Kira discovers significant differences in the biology of the Partials. Sam, despite being treated harshly, saves Kira's life during an attack, leading her to question official narratives about the Partials. Sam reveals that his community is not responsible for human extinction and seeks cooperation rather than conflict. Kira eventually returns with Sam to the Partials' territory, where she is captured and examined. She then learns that she herself is a Partial. Despite this revelation, Kira succeeds in finding a cure for the RM virus. The novel concludes with the birth of a surviving child and Kira embarking on a new journey to understand her identity and purpose in a world divided between humans and Partials.

Apparently the novel presents the futuristic, dystopian world but at one level it portrays he biopolitical governance exercised over human bodies; at another, it reveals the regulation and control of the Partials; and at a more complex level, it exposes how the Partials themselves emerge as governing agents over humans. In a world marked by existential threat, biopolitics functions as a dominant technology of power. As Foucault has illustrated,

Biopolitics implies regularization of population according to the perceived insistence of norms . . . Unlike the diffuse, microscopic, governmental mechanisms of surveillance that identify the need for disciplinary interventions, biopolitics concern itself with the regularization of societies in a large scale, notably through demography.

Central to this form of power is an inherent paradox; life becomes both the object and the subject of politics. Biological life is studied, measured, examined, and analyzed in order to establish norms through which populations may be governed and optimized. Yet this same process reduces human life to an object of political intervention. Under biopolitical governance, political power no longer confines itself to territorial control but extends into the management of life itself. Birth, death, health, illness, reproduction, sexuality, and population growth are systematically regulated through administrative mechanisms. Institutions such as public health systems, medical establishments, family structures, and statistical departments play a crucial role in decentralized governance, transforming the population into a collective entity that can be measured, controlled, and regulated. However, when such objectification reaches extreme levels and produces destructive outcomes, biopolitics simultaneously reveals life as a subject that resists control. Populations begin to assert their right to life, health, and dignity, thereby challenging compulsory regulatory frameworks.

We can find several instances of such governance and exertion of biological power objectifying the communities and also their resistance as subjects in the narrative of *Partials*. The novel depicts how science and technology are used to develop a complete branch of genetic engineering that actually works to create and control the bodies of their products labeled as partials. The existence of the partials reveals a form of biopolitics where the bodies of human species are used to experiment, examine and analyze the biological processes and human transformation. Science, technology and the medical institutions hand in hand are exploited to reframe the sovereign power into a form of biopolitics. Sam refers in his dialogue with Kira that how the bodies thus transformed are turned into objects for maintaining the power structure. Transformed into partly human and partly machines their population, their reproduction system and their right to life have been all administered and regulated by the government. They think that partials are nothing but the objects in the hands of the government. The actual population of the partials is regulated through sensors that help them stay connected with each other but at the same time can be controlled by the sovereign power of human rule through the branch called Para-genetics. The partials are given life and their death is also controlled. Being partly machines they have the expiry date but being partly humans they desire to survive as a community and the novel portrays their struggle to survive. Their urge to survive and their hatred to be governed by the humans bring out catastrophic consequences. The event of 'Break' which is at the backdrop of the complete narration of the *Partials*, is an attempt of the *Partials* to annihilate the human race. But they also need to know how like human beings they can develop reproduction system so that they can grow their population. The survived humans have bifurcated the world of the partials and that of the humans by the advance nuclear artillery. Hence they cannot enter into the world of the human beings. But when they succeed in captivating Kira Walker they examine her body. Kira's body is utilized as an instrument to examine, analyze and evaluate the human reproductive system. Kira for the partials is not an individual entity but the sample of the human species. But in a twisting episode at the end of the novel the readers identify that body of Kira has already been used as a controlling and regulating instrument in the human

world by the transformative agencies most probably, Paragen, a company formed by US that creates genetically altered race of humans. So for the controlling and regularizing the population of the world, the governing body in the form of bio power transforms many human bodies into partials. However these attempts of controlling and exercising the sovereign power are threatened when the genetically transformed soldiers resist to remain as the objects and rebel against the humans in the act of 'Break'. A virus RM works like a plague and destroys the large part of human race. Thus it reveals at one level that though biopolitics has its positive purpose in governance, the actual implementation of the power creates the war, hatred and acts of annihilation.

The novel further explores biopolitics through the governance of the surviving human population. In a climate of panic and scarcity, the senate assumes authority to formulate policies aimed at human survival. Once population preservation becomes a political concern, biopolitics enters fully into operation. Institutions such as the army, hospitals, agricultural systems, and medical authorities are mobilised to regulate human life. As Foucault observes, biopolitical power functions through control over marriage, sexuality, and reproduction, transforming sex into an administrable and utilitarian resource.

In *Partials*, this control is evident in the enforcement of the Hope Act, which mandates reproduction and lowers the permissible age of pregnancy. Every birth and death is meticulously recorded, and hospitals function less as spaces of care and more as sites of surveillance and experimentation. Public gatherings at the coliseum serve as instruments of population management, while women's bodies are transformed into tools of state policy. Through these representations, the novel demonstrates how governance shifts from the public sphere to the intimate administration of life itself.

**Conclusion:** In the contemporary scenario, advancements in science and technology are occurring at an exponential pace. The knowledge systems emerging from these developments have increasingly transformed into new technologies of power. Embedded within sovereign political authority, these technologies have begun to encroach upon human life at the level of individual existence, gradually reducing it to manageable and reproducible prototypes of the human species. If such powers are not exercised through ethical and conscious frameworks, biopolitical structures are likely to produce devastating consequences for humanity. In *Partials*, these transformations are not merely discussed but are narratively enacted through a speculative world where biological existence itself becomes the primary site of political intervention. By regulating birth, survival, and bodily autonomy, the novel represents how human life is reduced to a functional and reproducible entity within a larger biopolitical order. Dan Wells employs the conventions of dystopian and speculative fiction to translate abstract technologies of power into concrete human experiences, thereby exposing their ethical implications. He points out how human life is reduced to a functional and reproducible entity within a larger biopolitical order. Dan Wells employs the conventions of speculative and dystopian fiction to translate technologies of power into lived human experiences, allowing the reader to witness the ethical consequences of such control. The narrative thus functions as a cautionary reflection on a future where scientific progress, severed from moral responsibility, may turn as an instrument of biopolitics.

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