

Science Fiction: An Overview

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Abstract- As with myth, the forms of fantasy are closely allied and intertwined with the forms of science fiction. The mark of the fantastic is the thrill of seeing the believed unreal become real. This is so regardless of what, in the world outside the fiction, might be real. A direct reversal of the ground rules of the narrative world is the structure that marks the fantastic. All science fiction is to some extent fantastic, because all science fiction makes at least one assumption that reverses the ground rules of the world outside the text in order to create the world inside the text.

Science fiction has successfully faced several destructive forces and established itself as a serious form of literature. Now, any serious reader will agree that science fiction has its own vision like other forms of literature. The vision of science fiction is partly a matter of the forms in which this vision takes its shape. Like all fiction, science fiction makes frequent use of myths, those archetypal stories which provide the symbols that help us shape our world. Clarke's "Total Breakthrough" in *Childhood's End* recalls the Descent of Grace. Mike's return in Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* recalls the Second Coming of Christ.

The most pervasive myth, perhaps, is the myth of the killing of the king, often a fisher king, at times of infertility, social turmoil, or world crisis. The sacrifice of the king appeases Mother Earth or allows the creation of a new social order, we see versions of this myth in science fiction whenever a socially representative character dies for the wider society, as when Estraven sacrifices himself in Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Science fiction has also used the myths of the reincarnation of the dead man to mortality and reincarnation from death to immortality. Science literally means knowledge. Death in genesis, was the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. From times immemorial, man has sought to use his knowledge to regain his lost immortality. The stories of Elijah and Elisha in the *Old Testament*, of Lixerus and pre-eminently of Jesus in the *New Testament* centre on reincarnation. In Clarke's *The City and the Stars*, we find the most common science fictional device for a kind of reincarnation to immortality, namely, personality tapes. This fictional device presumes that one can exhaustively specify a human being and record information sufficient to reconstruct him, body and 'soul'. There are not only reincarnation and prolongation of life but also the absolute creation of life from unliving materials. But in the use of artificial life in science fiction, we set a clear moral conservatism. Ever since man ate the fruit, and caused himself to know death, he has felt guilty in his inevitable struggle for life and this is seen in many myths, when science fiction uses the devices of artificial life, its mythic heritage emerges to lend a guilty colour to man's struggle against death.

The vision of science fiction has been partly a matter of its adaptation of certain traditional forms and archetypes. But it is also a function of certain recurring themes which it has made its own. A persistent aspect of the vision of science fiction is the desire to transcend normal experience. The population of imaginary universes with forms of unhuman intelligence is the primary biological manifestation of this urge. Its primary physical realisation is through the presentation of characters and events that transgress the conditions of space and time as we know them. "Teleportation" breaks the laws of material movement through space as they are currently understood. The term refers to the instantaneous or gradual moving of matter through space by parapsychological or fantastic mechanical means. Like teleportation, the motif of time travel represents a human wish fulfilment.

At this point, one is faced with the questions- Why does man always strive to transgress? Adam was the first to transgress and the strain has continued in the human race ever since. Man has questioned all philosophy, metaphysics, religion, ethical axioms, social values, political systems and even science. Man has always tried to go beyond his own experience, the known. Does the known tire man? Is man working out an innate purpose or moving towards an unknown goal in his endless striving for the new!

Man is never content with mere existence. The vertical growth of life and knowledge soon tires him and his restless spirit urges him for a horizontal expansion. The best of science fiction writers embodies this very spirit of horizontal exploration in his works. His speculations are no longer hindered by the Ptolemaian man-centred universe with its perfectly symmetrical scheme. Science has revolutionised this orientation and shown that the human beings are inhabitants of one planet circling a minor star in an uninteresting suburb of a medium sized galaxy in one among many island-universes. Also, science has freed man to face the inevitable probability of other existences, other lives not necessarily related to or derived from him. In a sense, science has brought man to the threshold of actual participation in the unknown. How, the science fiction writer takes an active help from science and also often provocatively reverses one of its bases in his endless and exciting search for the new and the marvellous.

One of the most challenging issues for the writer of science fiction to tackle is the moral imbecility of science. Also, he will have to deal with the questions can a scientific society be stable? Broadly speaking, we are in the middle of a race between human skill as to means and human folly as to ends. Given sufficient folly as to ends, every increase in the skill required to achieve them is to the bad. The human race has survived hitherto owing to ignorance mid incompetence. But, given knowledge and competence

combined with folly, there can be no certainty of survival. Knowledge is power, but it is power for evil just as much as for good. It follows that, unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow. All serious science fiction of coming years will presumably be dealing with these core issues.

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