

# The Genre of Science Fiction

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**Abstract---** Since more than two decades, literature is interlaced with social traditions, religious belief and scientific inventions. The Sci-Fi genre reflects and prolifically contribute to such connections and inventions. Science Fiction and Fantasy works as a genre maintains a continuous stronghold on its readers' mind and offers them to escape into the world of imagination. Works of J.K. Rowling, H.G. Wells, Franz Kafka are one such example. Such genre provides the possibility of discovering and rethinking existing questions and situations with new answers, giving its readers scope to find new ways of seeing old things. Jules Verne's stories of journeying in the submarine to fight sea monsters and landing on the surface of the moon through a space cannon, or Rowling's mythical stories of witches and wizards and magic, imaginary plots and a school of magic; all have contributed significantly to the imagination of their time. At this juncture though science fiction was yet to take a more definite step and mould itself. In the 20th Century science fiction was taken to newer heights by Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein through their writing style the history of the future. C.S. Lewis combined imagination with scientific and religious imagery in his fantasy novels. This Research Paper endeavours to examine the detail about the popular Sci-Fi Genre in contemporary times and its impact on literature and society. Studying in detail the works of H.G. Wells and building a link and understanding of the difference between Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia, and Myth to understand Sci-Fi Fiction's popular genre is my primary focus in the paper.

**Keywords---** Sci-Fi, Myth, Utopia, Dystopia

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Since more than two decades, literature is interlaced with social traditions, religious belief and scientific inventions. The Sci-Fi genre reflects and prolifically contribute to such connections and inventions. Science Fiction and Fantasy works as a genre maintains a continuous stronghold on its readers' mind and offers them to escape into the world of imagination. Works of J.K. Rowling, H.G. Wells, Franz Kafka are one such example. Such genre provides the possibility of discovering and rethinking existing questions and situations with new answers, giving its readers scope to find new ways of seeing old things. Jules Verne's stories of journeying in the submarine to fight sea monsters and landing on the surface of the moon through a space cannon, or Rowling's mythical stories of witches and wizards and magic, imaginary plots and a school of magic; all have contributed significantly to the imagination of their time. At this juncture though science fiction was yet to take a more definite step and mould itself. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century science fiction was taken to newer heights by Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein through their writing style the history of the future. C.S. Lewis combined imagination with scientific and religious imagery in his fantasy novels. This Research Paper endeavours to examine the detail about the popular Sci-Fi Genre in contemporary times and its impact on literature and

society. Studying in detail the works of H.G. Wells and building a link and understanding of the difference between Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia, and Myth to understand Sci-Fi Fiction's popular genre is my primary focus in the paper.

## II. SCIENCE AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Along with the progress of the twentieth century, Literature and Society were enriched by tangible scientific developments. Things that at some point were a part of the author's imagination gradually became scientific facts. However, the societal ways to function remained the same and the old vices from his days shaping up to be different and challenging in the first half of the twentieth century. As an aftermath to all this, human conflicts had led the world to two massive World Wars and a Cold War. Such chaos and turmoil shook the entire humanity. Around that time, George Orwell and William Goldings came into existence as writers of that time and genre. Many other Science fiction writers like Arthur C Clarke, Issac Asimov, Frank Herbert have made an attempt to find answers to those social and human limitations in the outer space through their fictional works. Talking about the then-popular novelists of the twentieth century and the father of Science fiction and Jules Verne, H.G. Wells (1886-1946) started his literary works towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He had been a keen observer of social vices in

Victorian England with a scientific bent of mind. He put his imagination, ideas and literary skills at work. One of his most famous novel, *The Time Machine* (1895) depicts the inquisitiveness of the time travelling in distant futures to seek answers to the questions that were boggling in his mind. It threw light on the conflicts of his own time in the process. His initial novel began as a story instalments in magazines. Later on, it became a runaway success and later in 1896 *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Both talk in depths about the degeneration of the human race. After success on the same theme in his first novel, *Time Machine* has plotted on a remote island instead of a distant future from his previous novels. The portrayal of the protagonist Prendick reaching a mysterious island and the character of Dr. Moreau, who performs experimental research on humans and ape had much criticism. It is believed that this work of Wells lacked style and content, the logic and precision of *The Time Machine*. Besides that, initial reaction, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is now considered a part of Wells' collection of celebrated scientific romances written the outset of his career.

*The Invisible Man* (1897) also contains Wells' scientific exuberance. In this work of his he uses the theme of the potential of the power of science leading a man into wrong direction. After years of experiment on human reflexive index, a man called Griffin manages to become invisible. As a consequence, he is intoxicated with his own abilities and gradually slips into insanity. When the *Sleeper Awakens* (1899) Wells uses the old technique of mysterious sleep, it makes the protagonist Graham unconscious for two centuries. This technique Wells uses to present an imaginary London, its scientific advancements and political state after two centuries. There are elements like political turmoil, hostile alien races, scientific inventions gone wrong, and the consequences of out of control human ambitions in all these works. Irrespective Wells kept the human core intact in many of his novels of various lengths and genres.

### **III. UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA AND SCI-FI: THE SUPER GENRES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

As a genre, Utopia, Dystopia and Science Fiction form a super-genre and some satire in its tendencies to overlap. Though they form a super –genre yet they have their distinctive characteristics which are rightly summed by Dieter Petzold in his article where he says:

*... the secondary worlds created by utopian fiction are characterized by a combination in the alternative and the desiderative mode because they are rationally constructed and at the same time*

*expressive of human wishes such as justice, order and social stability. If the desiderative element dominates strongly in the same combination, we may get the daydream world of the 'space opera'. Dystopias and tales of world catastrophe are both the result of a combination of the alternative and the anxiety-producing subversive mode. In contrast, serious science fiction, which comments on man's position in the universe, is informed by a substantial admixture of the applicative to the primary alternative mode.<sup>1</sup>*

Science Fiction owes its name to Hugo Gernsback who invented *scientifiction* in 1926 to characterize the contents of *Amazing Stories* and three years hence he coined the mellifluous *science fiction*.<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis believes science fiction is just the modern version of yester times' morality play or myth. Although Science Fiction is a super genre along with the utopian and the satiric, it can still be distinguished from utopias. John Griffith has cited a lucid quote by Philip O'Corner from his letter *The Guardian* which appeared in 1966, which says: *Utopias are concerned with individuals and science fiction with amenities...What we truly need is utopian science fiction which includes the fascinating changes from competitive to cooperative individualism and depicts them materially equipped for the civilization of which they constitute the basis.*<sup>3</sup> A common form adopted by the global view of science fiction is that many critics regard it as an inevitable expression of the contemporary human condition. Robert Scholes, believe it as *the literature of the Darwinian and Einsteinian revolution which has replaced the Historical Man with Structural Man.*<sup>4</sup> Alvin Tofler in his novel *Future Shock*<sup>5</sup> suggests that its function is to help its readers to adjust for an unforeseen and unheard future which is constantly accelerating the pace of social and technological change. As per Scott Sanders, science fiction presents a de-individualized world of robots, featureless human beings resulting from its grasp of the phenomena of twentieth century alienation.<sup>6</sup> In these cases critics seek to reduce the complexity of modern life to a single existential formula. These are not strictly sociological, but attempts to alter the ways in which science fiction is comprehended. The multiplicity of available sociological and socio-psychological descriptions of the contemporary world is itself a cultural phenomenon of recent times. If one looks for the underlying political and economic processes which have given rise to the contemporary sense of malaise and victimization. Science fiction must be seen as one among the many products of the later stages of capitalism, or of western imperialism or of industrialization.

#### IV. SCIENCE FICTION AS A ROMANCE

Keeping in account the components of science fiction, it has been qualified as a romance, specially from the realistic novels. Richard Chase describes this romance as a sort of a 'non-word' and further says: *It tends to prefer action to character, and action will be freer in a romance than in a novel, encountering as it were, less resistance from reality... Being less committed to the immediate reedition of reality than the novel, the romance will more freely veer towards mystic, allegorical and symbolistic forms.*<sup>6</sup> Northrop Frye believes that *all literature may be seen as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture.*<sup>7</sup> Further, in the course of his exposition of the formulas in his Anatomy of Criticism, Frye describes science fiction as *a mode of romance with a strong inherent to myth.*<sup>8</sup>

The historical novels and plain love-stories come under the broad category of 'romance' which then gets disrupted of its real meaning. Just like the realistic novels that have within them a great deal of formulas and archetypes which fall I favor of the mystic critic, the science fiction in its speculations profess an ultimate loyalty to logic, probability and cognitive intelligence. The difference between the romance-writer and science fiction writer could be stated as: *if the romance-writer often takes pride in the sheer arbitrariness of his fiction, science fiction does its best to hide that arbitrariness with the mask of necessity.*<sup>9</sup> Science fiction has been called a form of romance because its subject matter is romantic but its concern is not with ordinary relations of existing events as shelly would have put it. Zamiatin had discussed Wells in detail and hailed him as a creator of 'urban fairy tales' and went on to state emphatically that the concept of modern fairy tale is realities of science. He argued: *this sounds very paradoxical at first: exact science and fairy tale, exactitude and fantasy. It is so, and it has to be so. After all, myth is always, whether explicitly or implicitly, connected with religion, and the religion of the present-day ideological fantasy.*<sup>10</sup>

#### V. CONCLUSION

Thus, it is quite evident that the science fiction novels in early years have accomplished a creative synthesis of the universal and timeless element represented in the ancient myths and the equal and opposite necessity of *future shock* that has been studied by science fiction as its proper object.<sup>11</sup> Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979) employ some rules which become subtly prescriptive defining realms of ideology and for Suvin, *true science fiction is that fiction which an estranging*

*socio-historical novum is then validated for the reader by the exercise of scientific logic.*<sup>12</sup> Evaluating and analyzing the methods of characterization adopted in sci-fi novels, Perrinder says that it tends to be formulaic as the literary incompetence of the novelists and also because of the acute consciousness of the authors with regard to the particular idea that the sci-fi genre reflects the dehumanization of modern society. The question to ponder upon is are we mechanized humans or the humanized machines?

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