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## Dystopian Writing as a Part of Science Fiction

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“Where in the world am I? What in the world is going on? What am I going to do? These are questions common to science fiction (sf) whenever and wherever one locates it historically or geographically.”(Moylan 1)

According to the Oxford dictionary, “Fiction is a type of literature describing imaginary events and people, not real ones.” (431) Fiction is actually any literary narrative, whether in prose or verse, which is invented instead of being an account of events that actually happened. Further if we see, the fiction has various sub-genres and science fiction is one of the well-known and popular genres of fiction. One of the science fiction critic Darko Suvin defines science fiction as: “a literary genre or verbal construct whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment.” (Roberts 8). Here cognition refers to the rational and logical aspect of science fiction while the term estrangement implies alienation that is it refers to that element of science fiction which makes it different from other familiar fiction. More than any other literary mode, science fiction is closely associated with the future. It is above all a literature of change where change implies that the present is perceived in relation to perceptions of the past and expectations of the future which shape that present.

To find the point of origin for science fiction is as difficult as defining the form in itself. Modern historians of science fiction often locate the origins of British science fiction in the works of Mary Shelley’s, *Frankenstein* (1818) and *The Last Man* (1826), a fatalistic disaster story, while both of these works are antithetical to the philosophy of progress though neither of the works made its influence felt immediately, but both became formative prototypes thus heading powerful tradition of imaginative fiction. Science fiction as a genre can be categorised into hard science fiction and soft science fiction.

Soft science fiction as opposed to hard science fiction is a subgenre which gives more importance to characters and social and psychological aspects rather than technology. It studies the effect of technology on the social, personal and psychological life of the individuals. The writers of soft science fiction lay much stress on the social aspects of science fiction including themes related to environment, technological hazards, biotechnology etc. The subgenres utopia and dystopia which are related to the social structure of a society can also be included under the subgenres of soft science fiction.

Dystopian literature is actually an offshoot of Utopian literature where utopia both as a form and term came into existence with the publication of *Utopia* in 1516 by Thomas More. More depicted utopia as an imaginary island with a perfect social, legal and political system. The term ‘utopia’ comes from the Greek word eu-topos which means a good place. However Chris Ferns gives the definition of utopia as “...Utopia may be defined as both a good place,

and ideal (or at any rate, more perfect) society, yet at the same time one that does not exist - desirable, perhaps, but at the same time unattainable.” (Ferns 2)

Taking the theme from More’s *Utopia* the framework of ideal societies developed over the years. In the later nineteenth century most utopias written by various authors offered innovative ways to promote happiness and contentment by offering great freedom for the individual. The writer Alfred D. Cridge exemplifies the best of the Earth in his *Utopia* (1884), another book which represented an agrarian utopian world of simplicity, beauty and isolated labour was *News From Nowhere* (1890), *Looking Backward* (1888) by Samuel Bellamy was another influential book which revolutionized industry based literary utopia. The book even gave rise to a political movement named Nationalism; this movement was however short lived but it gave voice to various other reforms of public utility. In the early years of twentieth century a diverse group of literary utopias were produced. In fact, the most noteworthy writer who played a prominent role in the establishment of utopia as a subgenre was H.G Wells. His work *A Modern Utopia* (1905) presents a vision of a clean, orderly and efficient society.

In the twentieth century, the utopian visions were attacked by the critics who argued that in reality many such utopias would turn out to be ‘dystopias’, that is, oppressive societies, may be due to the tyranny of the ‘perfect’ system over the will of the individual. Therefore in the twentieth century utopias have tended to be replaced by ‘dystopias’, a term suggesting the malfunctioning of utopia. According to Chris Ferns since the nature of utopia is ambiguous it requires the phrase ‘anti-utopian’ or ‘dystopian’ for registering and describing the negative existence. In the year 1952 J. Max Patrick suggested the difference between the good place as ‘eutopia’ and its opposite, the bad place, as ‘dystopia’. In the opinion of M. Keith Booker:

Dystopian literature generally constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the critical examination of the Utopian premises upon which these conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions. (Booker 3-4)

According to Booker dystopian writings provide fresh perceptions on the problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and unavoidable. The period of 1930s which was the flowering time for the dystopian fiction also justifies Booker’s statement as during this period a series of dystopias were published in which the working of states was imagined which oppressed the demand for conventional beliefs to wipe out individuality. Literature, specifically dystopian and utopian, helps readers to define what humanity is.

The dystopian literature shows certain prominent characteristics such as it portrays a society where people worship either a concept or a figurehead. A dystopian piece of work highlights the despondent condition of the society around which its story revolves. The story depicts that independent thought and freedom in such a society is restricted. An individual in a dystopian fiction lacks individuality and he/she have no right to dissent with the propaganda that controls the society.

The control or propaganda can be a corporate control where big corporations control the society either through their products or policies. The control can even be a technological, bureaucratic and philosophical control. Believing that something is awfully wrong with the society in which he/she lives, the protagonist in a dystopian literature questions the existing

social and political systems. It is only through the protagonist that the readers come to know about the adverse aspects of the dystopian world.

The technological control makes dystopian writing a part of science fiction. Technological control implies that the society is controlled by computers, robots and other scientific resources that means through technology. Such a control is seen in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, H.G Wells' *The Time Machine*, *War of the Worlds*, *When the Sleeper Wakes*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Zamyatin's *We*, Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* to name a few. This paper highlights dystopian writing as a part of science fiction taking into account George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

George Orwell is one of the great writers of the 20th century, famous for his direct and powerful style as well as for his fictional condemnations of totalitarianism. The political consciousness pervading his writing makes him a touchstone for a wide range of readers and "one of the major literary protagonists in the Cold War era". (Newsinger ix) In the novel *Nineteen Eighty Four* Orwell portrays a restriction in the political thought of a dystopic society using scientific means and technology.

Orwell depicts in *Nineteen Eighty Four*, fantasy elements such as the Thought Police and Vaporization. The thoughts of the citizens of Oceania are constantly scrutinized by the Thought Police and even if a citizen had a thought of betray he is vaporized. No one knows where a particular citizen has gone who was found guilty of the thought crime as his record is erased from the memory and the databases. Thus the government applies its restriction on its citizens utilizing Thought Police and the process of Vaporization as its powerful instruments. Terror of the scientific instruments prevents the citizens from generating their own political thoughts which might be hazardous for the political reputation of the government.

Usages of scientific inventions such as the telescreens and the machines which can record even the minute emotions have been portrayed by Orwell magnificently. Use of cameras to capture the actions of the people who were under the government of Big Brother was unimaginable during those days yet Orwell managed to depict such brilliant technology in his novel. The plot of the novel revolves around Oceania which is a province ruled by the Big Brother, who is the leader of the totalitarian government. The various ministries such as the Ministry of Truth, the Ministry of Peace, the Ministry of Love and the Ministry of Plenty work under this totalitarian government called the Party. The slogans on which the Party works are "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, and Ignorance is Strength."(Orwell 6)

The effect of technology in controlling the political thought of the society by the government is so evident in the novel that at the end even the protagonist of the novel deviates from his path of betraying the government and instead becomes one of the staunch believers in the philosophy of the government. Thus the novel is a fine example of the incorporation of dystopian writing in a science fiction.

Another novel using dystopian writing as the means to bring out the ill-effects of technology is Aldous Leonard Huxley's the *Brave New World*. In the midst of a global economic crisis, two great wars, and new ideologies and technologies, Aldous Huxley, in despair for the world of 1932 and beyond, wrote his famous dystopian, social satire, *Brave New World*. In the novel *Brave New World* Huxley has displayed very artistically the perfect world that is utopia turning into a dystopia. *Brave New World* is essentially a satire that utilizes science fiction

and contemporary issues to demonstrate the destruction of humanity. The novel is set in futuristic London-AD2540- called the World State and deals with a world with revolutionized reproduction methods where children are 'created' and raised in hatcheries in a single eternally peaceful World State. The motto of the World State is "Community, Identity, Stability".(Huxley 1)

This motto of the World State is maintained through a combination of biological engineering and exhaustive conditioning. Its 2,000 million standardised citizens, sharing only 10,000 surnames, have not been born, but 'hatched' to fill their predestined social roles. A conditioned system through consumption of a happy drug 'soma' keeps everyone content. Relationships and individuality are considered horrifying and people simply do the jobs they are bred to do, devoting themselves to pleasure and consumerism. Unlike popular optimistic utopian novels, Huxley's vision of the future is not a hopeful one- it is frightening.

Huxley was criticized for being so threateningly dark. The novel reveals the misuse of technology as biotechnology and drugs are used to produce emotionally and socially conditioned children in laboratories. As an adult these children become a part of a social class already predetermined for them before birth. Christopher Hitchens notes that while George Orwell, in 1984, "was writing about the forbidding, part-alien experience of Nazism and Stalinism... Huxley was locating disgust and menace in the very things – the new toys of materialism from cars to contraceptives – that were becoming everyday pursuits" (Hitchens ix). The novel considers the obvious political and social fears of its time; however, the novel also thoroughly confronts a more menacing and pervasive problem, quite real and familiar to today's reader. Thus *Brave New World* is stylistically unique novel as apart from a science fiction it is a social satire and a dystopian novel as well.

As virtues and vices are the two sides of the same coin, in the same way dystopian and utopian writing are interconnected to science fiction. Every technology and scientific invention has its pros and cons and it is the tendency of human beings to get attracted to the brighter part of it while neglecting the darker side. Dystopian writing in science fiction warns the human race about the menacing effects of scientific inventions and discoveries. This paper tries to highlight the dystopian writing as part of science fiction taking Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four and Huxley's *Brave New World* as exemplary science fictions. Both of these novels serve as best examples to portray dystopian writing as a part of science fiction.

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