

The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction in *Brave New World*

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Abstract

Science fiction, a perfect blend of science and literature, relates something which is uncommon, something more than the ordinary experience of a common man. The touch of scientific understanding makes this genre of literature possess some specific characteristics. Istvan Csicsery – Ronay, Jr. has contributed one of the most significant works of science fiction criticism entitled *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, in which, he has given a pragmatic list of seven characteristics of science fiction to enhance the understanding of a text. So, the present paper attempts to trace the above mentioned seven beauties in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

Keywords: Science and literature, science fiction, dystopia, *Brave New World*, *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*

The two completely different streams, Science and Literature, are not in opposition to each other. In fact, most of the times proving complementary and interdependent, they substantially influence each other. Literature would not have attained its present relevance without being affected by the various scientific developments. At the same time, science has also not been able to stay away from the imagination and expression of literary writers.

Science is responsible for multiple significant changes in the behavior and pattern of our life by increasing our knowledge of the natural phenomena. But man, using his imaginative power, could penetrate into the future much before than these investigations began taking place, which led to a change in the style, tone and language of literature. Science fiction, thus, uses science in order to gauge the future seen through imagination. In this attempt, it acquires features which are specific to the genre declaring it different from other fantasies because of the touch of scientific understanding and the amalgamation of the characteristics of science (intellect, reason, experiment, objectivity, logic, reliability, facts, data, exactness, practicality etc.) and literature (aesthetics, emotions, feelings, affections, sensibilities, imagination, subjectivity, conscience, etc.).

Aldous Leonard Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) is a well-known anti-utopian or dystopian novel of the twentieth century which talks about a 'World State' which accepts and worships 'Ford' as its God and has the motto of 'Community, Identity, Stability'. Other than this world, there is a Savage Reservation in New Mexico, where all those people are held captive who cannot abide by the laws of the World State and are primitive and abnormal according to the new definitions of civilization and normalcy in this 'Utopia'. John, the illegitimate son of Linda and the Director of the Centre, comes to the World State from the Savage

Reservation but feels uneasy and disturbed by the lifestyle at his current abode. Finally, he is bound to surrender before the World State society and being unable to adjust, he commits suicide at the end of the story.

Istvan Csicsery Ronay, Jr. has authored one of the most significant works about science fiction entitled *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*. In this work he talks about seven beauties found in a science fiction which help in understanding the text better. This paper shall analyze *Brave New World* in the light of Istvan's concept of the seven beauties of science fiction.

1. *Neologism* – By this term, Istvan means to say that a science fiction possesses the beauty of having newly “invented words, intended to refer to imaginary ‘new realities’ “. (Csicsery – Ronay, www.depauw.edu). A science fiction talks about something which is new and uncommon. So, the authors, in order to create this effect of uncommonness or novelty in the world being portrayed, accordingly select vocabulary and syntax from the register of scientific disciplines. Hence, Istvan talks of the presence of fictional newly coined terms so that the readers' expectations come true.

The novel *Brave New World* employs many unconventional terms as required by the context, environment, story line and situation. Many a times the author has used terms, which already exist in the English vocabulary, but for an entirely new meaning/ context/ or reference. For instance –

- i. “As soon as they got back to the rest house, she swallowed six half-gramme tablets of soma, lay down on her bed, and within ten minutes had embarked for lunar eternity”. (Huxley 122)
- ii. ‘Podsnap’s technique’ (5), Neo-Pavlovian Conditioning Rooms (15), ‘morocco-surrogate cartridge belt’, ‘brachycephalic’, ‘coyote-man’, ‘hypnopædia’ (Huxley 23)
- iii. “And then, in all but silence, in all but darkness, there followed a gradual deturgescence, a diminuendo sliding gradually, through quarter tones, down, down to a faintly whispered dominant chord that lingered on...charging the darkened seconds with an intense expectancy”. (Huxley 66)
- iv. “One egg, one embryo, one adult – normality. But a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds...Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress.” (Huxley 3-4)
- v. “...the fertilized ova went back to the incubators; where the Alphas and Betas remained until definitely bottled; while the Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons were brought out again, after only thirty-six hours, to undergo Bokanovsky’s process.” (Huxley 3)

Words like diminuendo, deturgescence, bokanovskified etc. have been coined by Huxley to add to the whole environment the novel discusses. On the other hand, words like Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon are scientific terms according to our present vocabulary store which, either, refer to the types of radiation or rays or mathematical symbols or some computer software. But, in this novel, these terms have been reproduced as different categories of people

residing in the World State. Similarly, the word soma is well known to mean an intoxicating drink in reality as well as in the novel, but the reason for it to be used by the residents of the World State and the frequency with which they use it suggests it to be as important as water is for us or as a life saving agent. They use it whenever they feel uncomfortable or uneasy because of the experience of some kind of emotion or sentiment or need which is obvious in the case of a normal human being. These new terms, ideas, connotations and concepts were used by the author to suit the purpose and make the fictional storyline seem all the more real.

2. *Novum* – This word originated from the Latin word ‘nova’ which means ‘new things’. Istvan says that this beauty refers to the presence of all those imaginary concepts, discoveries, applications and inventions which are an inseparable part of the world portrayed in a science fiction and which at the same time add novelty to the storyline and theme of the fiction. For e.g., time machine, life on all planets, cloning, travelling faster-than-light, etc. According to him, these new concepts or ideas are so unprecedented but convincing that they seem to be capable of changing the course of history.

We find many novum or new concepts in *Brave New World* from the point-of-view of the age in which it was written and with respect to the age it talks about (A.F. 632). For instance -

- i. The Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre produces human beings, i.e., human beings do not take birth, they are manufactured. Those who take birth through the procedure of normal delivery, those who are prone to diseases, those who feel and experience the presence of sentiments in them, are kept separately at the Savage Reservation Centre.
- ii. What to produce, how to produce, how many to produce, all such decisions are taken by the State, and this enables the stability of the rule of the Controllers as well as of the controlled identical population. “Bokanovsky’s process is one of the major instruments of social stability!” (Huxley 5)
- iii. Ova are stored in incubators at the World State and are fertilized and boganovskified in order to divide or proliferate a bud into ninety-six buds.
- iv. The human beings being produced are bottled and labeled according to the rules of Social Predestination as ‘Alpha’, ‘Beta’, ‘Gamma’, ‘Delta’ or ‘Epsilon’. They are programmed to exist and work according to the jobs to be done by the category to which they belong to.
- v. In chapter XIII, when Henry Foster invites Lenina to come over for a feely one evening, and tries to build up a conversation with her, she just shakes her head for every answer. To this dull reaction, he says that:

You’re not feeling ill, are you?... you ought to go and see the doctor... A doctor a day keeps the jim-jams away... Perhaps you need a Pregnancy Substitute... Or else an extra-strong V. P. S. treatment. Sometimes, you know, the standard passion-surrogate isn’t quite... (Huxley 163-164)

So we see that even after regular intake of ‘soma’, if any mechanically-produced inhabitant of the World State feels any kind of emotion or sentiment (and they

obviously do not realize the same), they call it the state of being ill; the first aid required in such case is 'soma' and if it does not help then it is sure to be some infectious disease which needs proper treatment. In Lenina's case, she is unable to understand or realize that whatever she is going through is not any kind of illness but her falling for John and the resultant emotions. But she is suggested to take a pregnancy substitute or a 'V.P.S.' treatment, a cure which is impossible to be recommended for the kind of ailment Lenina is suffering.

3. *Historical extrapolation/historical futurism* – According to Istvan, historical futurism or extrapolation means those direct as well as indirect explanations which are 'historically logical'. These explanations pertain to how well the writer of a science fiction transcends the readers from the real state in the present time period to the imaginary world in the future depicted in the novel.

Huxley imagined of a future where there is a 'World State' in which human beings are manufactured through mass production methods. But this has not remained an imagination anymore because today we have successfully produced test-tube babies. This means that the author's imaginative present at the time of writing the novel has turned into the real-time present. This futurism seems to be historically logical because seeing the development of the technology of producing test-tube babies we can imagine the horrible future where everybody would be manufactured and not given birth.

Another instance for the same is when the Director told the students some 'incredible' historical facts that:

For a very long period before the time of Our Ford, and even for some generations afterwards, erotic play between children had been regarded as abnormal (there was a roar of laughter); and not only abnormal, actually immoral (no!)... A look of astonished incredulity appeared on the faces of his listeners. Poor little kids not allowed to amuse themselves? They could not believe it...even adolescents...Not possible!...*Nothing?*... (Huxley 27)

This instance clearly hints that the author is talking about the practices which we have been following since centuries regarding the appropriate age for children to get married and indulge in physical union. And as the world seems to be moving towards the norms of legalized prostitution, free sex, sex tourism etc., the statements cited above actually make a reader believe in the future world being portrayed wherein children are made to practice sex since their childhood as a routine activity.

4. *Oxymoron* – The fourth beauty that Istvan talks of is oxymoron. He believes that in a science fiction's storyline lies a contradiction which seems to be absurd and illogical from the point of view of common sense. This contradiction may be very interesting but many a times seems to be unacceptable. These strange scientific and technological concepts of the strange future world depicted in the story are so paradoxical at times that they seem to be impossible in spite of their possibility/ credibility.

The novel involves the imagination of a 'nightmarish' future where "2000 million standardized citizens sharing only 10000 surnames" (Bradshaw, v), which are not born but hatched to fill their predestined roles in the society of the World

State. Approximately 3% births of today's population are twins i.e. a single fertilization resulting in zygotic twins. So, this can be rational in future times, but as per the current understanding of the technological advancements, it seems to be 'absurd' that a single egg can be 'bokanovskified' to proliferate into as many as 96 buds, each of which grows into a full sized adult. Today, when we take so much care that our children do not stray towards indulgence in sexual activities at an early age, while today we love to see children play childish games, it seems entirely impossible to believe that the 'Brave New World' teaches them to play sexual and erotic games. It is too outlandish to imagine a world where everybody belongs to everybody and sex is free; though, today we have many tribal cultures or urban societies which promote and practice free sex.

5. *Scientific Impertinence* – Istvan says that in order to create a picture of an imaginary future world, the science fiction stories sometimes violate certain laws formulated by science. But this is done with the intention of creating a suitable environment for the imaginary future being described in the novel.

The novel seems to violate the currently known scientific processes and technologies but Huxley uses them to create little strange and difficult-to-explain situations which at times are comically interesting. For ex. the various techniques of manufacturing and upbringing human beings in the World State through the fertilization process, freezing and storage of sperms, sleep teaching, bokanovskification etc. have been used to create the appropriate atmosphere of the future dystopian world he is indicating at. It also presents a world where people are not only allowed but forcefully encouraged to be intoxicated until they stop feeling their sentiments. It paints the picture of complete absence of humanity as the people of World State are horrified and irritated at the sight of any man following any rituals or suffering from a disease or a woman breast-feeding a baby. It talks about a future where getting married or living with one person the entire life is bizarre. "Listen, Lenina; in Malpais people get married...what?...For always. They make a promise to live together for always. What a horrible idea!" (Huxley 167-168):

Mr. Forster explains to the students the conveyor travelling at the rate of thirty-three and a third centimeters an hour which takes the half – processed embryos from the 'Social Predestination Room' to the 'Decantation Room'. He says, "...growing embryo on is bed of peritoneum. Made them taste the rich blood – surrogate on which it fed.....Showed them the jets through which at every twelfth meter from zero to 2040 it was automatically injected.....described the artificial maternal circulation installed on every bottle at meters 112...". (Huxley 9)

These descriptions at times seem to be absurd and strange to believe upon and the work is full of such details but Huxley has used them to add a little dramatic as well as comic element to the text.

6. *Sublime Chronotopes* – Since science fiction depicts their own imaginary worlds in the future, Istvan says that these worlds have their own laws of space and time according to the literary space and time being described in the story. These chronotopes seem to be magnificently strange and powerful.

Huxley's *Brave New World* presents a spatio-temporal environment of the future world in which there are Ten Controllers each for the ten zones of the World State. In the Western-European zone, headed by Mustapha Mond, human beings are produced in a factory-like concern "with a mass of Epsilon-Minus Semi-Morons bred for menial labour at the base and with castes of increasing ability ranked above them" (Bradshaw, vi). The other human beings who still get married, make love, give birth and die as of old are called savages and are kept at 'Savage Reservations'. Since it talks about the age A.F. 632, the inhabitants of the developed World State are also shown to use various technologies and gadgets like the 'mesa' (a plane), 'Blue Pacific rocket' (Huxley 86), Violent Passion Surrogate (V.P.S.) treatment, synthetic music machine etc.

7. *Parable* – Istvan says that in the works of science fiction, somewhere beneath the discussions about the various aspects of science and technology is a literary parable or story which most of the times acts as a moral tale giving us a message about the adverse effects of science and technology.

Since most science fictions involve science and technology as a medium for a moral message, the same is the case with *Brave New World*. It talks of the concepts of chemistry, biology, physics, mathematics, science, technology etc but inwardly it gives the message that these are just for the enhancement and advancement of life and when used beyond limits, life becomes more and more dependent on them. Haphazard application of science and technology shall make our lives more pitiable and negatively affected by it. The major theme of the novel is to throw light on the advancement of science and its effect on human life and nature when used limitlessly. Huxley criticizes the extreme dependence on science like the dependence of the people of the World State on the use of soma, hypnopaedic conditioning, feelies etc. He has successfully given us a glimpse of the nightmarish future but he has also given the message that science and technology are necessary but only up to a limit.

So, we see that *Brave New World* bravely exemplifies the commingling of science and literature, to give birth to an outstanding specimen of science fiction. It not only acts as a worthy medium of entertainment but also presents a story which is uncommon and talks about something which is an extraordinary experience of an ordinary man. The readers are exposed to the duality ingrained in scientific evolution, which, beyond a point, may prove catastrophic. People are able to realize the power of science and technology through this novel but they are also warned at the same time that how hazardous scientific advancements can be. It indicates that science is a discipline to be used to find the truth behind the natural processes taking place as per the directions of God. But technological manipulation and scientific experimentation with this truth leads to the corruption of man's instincts with power struggle. Man tries to get hold of the powers of God. And this leads him to be trapped in chaos because if human beings try to go off the track which God has created for them, they are bound to fall in an endless pit of destruction and darkness. In the World State, people believe in Ford as a God, because he was the first one to introduce mass production and they look up to him in order to produce human beings in mass quantities and maintain the 'Stability, Identity, Community'. John is a symbol for the

essence of humanity still present in man but which is diminishing as a result of the scientific progress. It tells us that every human being needs a blend of practicality and sentimentality in his or her life. This makes him feel content and complete. But the World State has advanced so much that, the human beings produced, are not capable of thinking or realizing anything beyond the capacities conferred upon them. They think, act, react, feel, express or understand whatever is supposed to be done by the citizens of 'Brave New World'. And human being has surrendered himself to the complications of techno-science and hunger for advancements on the cost of the essence of being human in the real sense. This science fiction (*Brave New World*) possesses all the seven beauties of Science Fiction as described by Istvan Csicsery Ronay Jr., viz., neologism, novum, historical extrapolation, scientific impertinence, sublime chronotopes, oxymoron and parable. All these seven beauties have been woven implicately with the plot of the novel to create the effect of the future world being described seem real to the readers. These elements are appropriately wrapped with the theme of appreciation of scientific progress and the accompanied side-effects. To conclude, we can say that *Brave New World*, being the only science fiction written by Huxley, deserves to be included in the list of most appreciated science fiction.

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