

Shashank- Hey where were you??

Amit- Hi..I was busy watching the movie Quantum of Solace..an awesome movie..a good spy story..a nice sci-fi work!

Shashank-Excuse me please...did you mean that Quantum of Solace is somehow a work of science fiction...lol!!

Amit-Yes..why..whats the problem??

Anshul-Okay..tell me what makes you think that its a work of Science fiction??

Amit-The cool gadgets, the hi tech vehicles, etc used in the movie..aren't they enough to call it a science fiction movie???

Anshul-Well thats not enough to make something a work of science fiction..dude..you are using the term science fiction the wrong way!!Had you taken up the introduction to literature course this semester you would not have been saying so!..Laughs..

Ashish-Hey whats going on guys??

Amit-Well we were just discussing about science fiction..I would like to know what do you people have got to say about science fiction..? What does it mean exactly?

Ashish-See basically..let me google first to give you better insight..here we go..lets begin with the wikipedia definition of science fiction..(The person reads out loud)"Science Fiction is the medium in which our miserable certainty that tomorrow will be different from today in ways we cant predict, can be transmuted to a sense of excitement and anticipation, occasionally evolving into awe. Poised between intransigent scepticism and uncritical credulity, it is par excellence the literature of the open mind.

Amit-Hey 'A' can you explain me rather than reading out something from internet!!

Kunwar-Well according to me..Science Fiction is a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.

Amit-Hey folks are you trying to explain me or confuse me!! Cant you people explain me properly and be more specific??

Vinit-Well that's a bit complicated but let us try to make things a bit clearer...

To begin with...let me tell you some questions you may ask yourself to know whether something is a work of science fiction or not..

Does the story tell me something worth knowing, that I had not known before, about the relationship between man and technology? Does it enlighten me on some area of science where I had been in the dark? Does it open a new horizon for my thinking? Does it lead me to think new kinds of thoughts, that I would not otherwise perhaps have thought at all? Does it suggest possibilities about the alternative possible future courses my world can take? Does it illuminate events and trends of today, by showing me where they may lead tomorrow? Does it give me a fresh and objective point of view on my own world and culture, perhaps by letting

me see it through the eyes of a different kind of creature entirely, from a planet light-years away?...and others..

What I mean to say is..if a text has some of these aspects it may be considered a work of science fiction..well the range of science fiction is not strictly limited to these aspects but still they give you a rough idea..

Amit- Thats a whole lot of things...can you be more specific and clearer??

Tanmay-See..most of the works of science fiction can be divided into three basic motifs:

Space Travel

Time travel

Extra-terrestrial life/Alien or alien culture

Amit-So what you are trying to say is: any text which has an alien in it or has a space ship can be considered a work of science fiction??

Tanmay-Well not exactly..To be considered as a work of science fiction a text must not just have such elements as a part of its plot but these must also be a part of the central theme of the text in consideration.

Amit-Its still not very clear to me...

Tanmay-Let me give you some examples so that you develop a better understanding: Lets start with the movie 2001: A space odyssey...have you ever watched it??

Amit-NO!

Tanmay-Go and watch it first!!!

Amit-Hey what was the movie about?!! I couldn't understand anything!

Tanmay-Let me explain..

First tell me the literal meaning of the term Odyssey..

Amit-The dictionary meaning says that it is a voyage or an intellectual quest for something.

Prakhar- Precisely, that is what the movie deals with...basically it is a voyage of humans into outer space where they try to explore the universe and its various entities. What else did you see in the movie??

Amit-There were various kinds of space stations and spacecrafts shaped differently and used for space exploration. There were two space missions one was to the moon and the other one to Jupiter. Also I noticed that some people were kept dormant under a computer's supervision.

Tanmay-These are many of the science fiction elements that relate to space travel. Actually the movie tries to portray space travel and explore the futuristic technologies involved and the effect it would have on the men involved.You see that the men involved are highly dependent on technology to survive.The computer Hal coordinates all the machinery involved in the spacecraft.It even stores vital information unknown to the crew.

Amit-But that is not all.What about the prehistoric times depicted in the early phase of the movie.Also what about the bizarre set of events portrayed at the end?

Yavvan-As a matter of fact, science fiction is not just about the technology and

plot elements involved. Science fiction also involves various other elements. The two elements here being Time setting in a historical time that contradicts known facts of history or the archaeological record and Paranormal events. The appearance of the monolith and the subsequent discovery of the tool by the ape is contradictory to our knowledge and hence is categorized as science fiction. The scene where the astronaut seems to be teleported through vast distance when he looks at many lights is a paranormal event with no precise explanation.

Amit- Could that not be regarded as fantasy??

Prakhar- No. Science fiction is not fantasy. The difference between the two is very basic. Science Fiction is a genre of literature that deals with concepts which are rooted in the here and now. That is in scientific theories, even though advancement may not have reached that stage. Fantasy on the other hand is rooted in the then and there. It has no roots in existing theorems and lemmas. For eg. consider the paranormal events at the end of the movie. Just before the scene begins, there is an indication of an unknown radio signal having been transmitted from the monolith on moon towards Jupiter. Thus we get an indication of technology being used in the events that happen thereafter, thus differentiating it from fantasy. Fantasy on the other hand is something like Harry Potter which gives no explanation or indication of science being used.

Akshay- Now that we have a vague idea about what science fiction is, let's explore it in a little more detail. What else is it that constitutes Science Fiction??

Anshul- Texts which explore a society alien to ours or creatures with whom we are not familiar with also come under science fiction. Humanoid robots, extraterrestrial creatures and other imaginary beings fall into this group. Texts like Avatar, War of the Worlds fall into this category. The text When it changes deals with a similar society of women who have been living on another planet and have developed ways to reproduce without men.

Ashish- Time travel is another motif that forms a major part of Science Fiction. There have been innumerable references to time machines and travel in various texts from H.G. Wells' The Time Machine to movies like Back to the Future that deal with time travel and its possibility. The chronic Argonauts by H.G. Wells is another such text which tries to justify science travel by backing it with established laws of physics and mathematics. It also deals with the consequences of time travel. The Doctor accidentally ends up killing a man in the past which results in a false notion of the sons having murdered him. Thus we notice that if space travel was actually possible, the repercussions would be not entirely positive.

Amit- Okay! I think I have a fair idea of what Science Fiction is all about. It can basically be divided into 3 main motifs Space travel, Time travel and Alien culture. But what about texts like Neutron star, which show describe events in great details. I can't fit it into either of these definitions. And what about the text When it changed, I still can't fit it into either of these sets.

Shashank- Science fiction can also be categorized into two Sub-genres - soft science fiction and hard science fiction based on the ideas that the texts deal with. Neutron star by Larry Niven falls in the class of hard science fiction. The intricate details with which he describes the events, justifying everything through a rigorous scientific proof thus making us think about its possibility. When it changed, on the other hand falls into the category of soft science fiction. Character, society, or other speculative ideas and themes that are not centrally tied to scientific or engineering speculations is what constitutes soft science fiction.

Kunwar-It basically explores the idea of a society with only females who have no need of men and are content with the level of advancement they have.It emphasizes on the characters emotions and reactions to people who invade their lives.

Amit-oh!!I thought when it changed and neutron star involved an alien society .

Tanmay-The thing about science fiction is that its sub genres are not mutually exclusive.They may overlap and a single text might be kept under multiple subgenres.Thus both the texts fall into the alien category becuae of the plot elements they use and the ideology behind these puts them into the sub-categories of hard or soft science fiction.

-----FINAL DEFINITION TO BE SAID BY AMIT-----

WIKI DEFINITION:C-Hey..I have another definition.. Science fiction is a genre of fiction dealing with imaginary but more or less plausible content such as future settings, futuristic science and technology, space travel and aliens. Exploring the consequences of scientific innovations is one purpose of science fiction, making it a "literature of ideas".