

CHAPTER - I

FANTASY IN LITERATURE

A) FANTASY : A brief discussion of its Nature :

Fantasy has had a broad appeal to people of all ages, and consequently fantasy has always been an integral part of literature. The term 'fantasy' was derived from the Greek word 'phantasia' meaning 'making visible, capacity for imaging.' Fancy was supposed to be an abbreviation of fantasy. The two terms were supposed to be synonyms especially in medieval times. According to The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, both the terms - fancy and fantasy - are 'closely related to imagination'¹. Longman Modern English Dictionary defines fantasy as 'playful imagination.'² The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English also regards fantasy as the 'fantastic product of imagination.'³ In A Dictionary of Literary Terms Harry Shaw defines fantasy as 'extravagant and unrestricted imagination; the forming of weird or grotesque mental images.'^{4(a)} Fantasy, he says, is applied to a literary work, 'the action of which occurs in a

non-existent and unreal world (such as fairyland) and to a selection that involves incredible characters science fiction and utopian stories are famous forms of fantasy.^{4(b)} Thus, fantasy is, in the first place, generally associated with imagination and, secondly, with the unreal and the incredible. But the question is : is fantasy 'unrestricted imagination'? J. Shipley in his A Dictionary of World Literary Terms emphasizes the factor of 'consistency'. He says : 'Only purely imaginary phenomena, accepted such by the author and his intelligent adult readers, constitute the characteristic matter of fantasy. Once the author has aimed his fantasy's flight, however, its farthest range must be in the same imagined world, must seem consistent.....'⁵ In a PMLA article on Aldous Huxley, Rudolf B. Schmelzer defines fantasy 'as the deliberate presentation of improbabilities through any one of the four methods - the use of unverifiable time, place, character or devicesto a typical reader within a culture whose level of sophistication will enable that reader to recognize the improbabilities.'⁶ Schmelzer puts his finger on one of the most important aspects of fantasy-unverifiability. He further says that unverifiability may be in respect of time or place

or characters or all together. Improbability is another related characteristic of fantasy, since as [Burchfield] says in A Supplement To The Oxford English Dictionary that 'fantasy deals with things that are not and cannot be'.⁷

We may now, on the basis of the foregoing discussion, summarize the various characteristics of fantasy in literature :

(a) Fantasy is a deliberate presentation of something 'imagined'.

(b) Improbability and unverifiability are the basic aspects of the imagined 'stuff'.

(c) But in a work of art fantasy is not unrestricted imagination, but imagination controlled by the principle of consistency.

C.N. Manlove, in his highly perceptive book, Modern Fantasy, speaks of the irreducible supernatural element in fantasy fiction and of the sense of wonder that it generally evokes. He defines fantasy as 'fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural with which the moral characters in the story or the readers become

on at least partly familiar terms.'⁸ According to Manlove, wonder is, of course generated by fantasy purely from the presence of ^{the}supernatural or ^{the}impossible, and from the element of mystery and the lack of explanation that goes with it. This can be well illustrated through an example from Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures In Wonderland which Rabkin quotes and comments upon :

'Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do. Once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading but it had no pictures or conversations in it, "and what is the use of a book", thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?'

So she was considering, in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a white rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her when the Rabbit actually took a watch out of its waist-coat pocket, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waist-coat pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.'⁹

Now it is impossible for us to believe that a rabbit wears a waistcoat, takes out a watch from its pocket and looks at it. Since there is no explanation for this phenomenon, it sounds extremely mysterious to us and evokes a sense of wonder. This effect of mystery and wonder is achieved through the use of the supernatural element. Manlove defines the supernatural as an element 'of another order of reality from that in which we exist and form our notions of possibility.'¹⁰

The most sophisticated discussion of fantasy is to be found in Eric Rabkin's remarkable book, The Fantastic In Literature. If Manlove has spoken of 'the element (not) belonging to our world', Rabkin speaks of 'the ground rules (not) of our narrative world'. According to Rabkin we have our own ground rules of our narrative world, which give us a particular perspective. For instance, according to our ground rules, plants are mute, flowers never talk, the dead don't speak etc. When this perspective of ours is contradicted, we face fantasy. Rabkin explains this by analyzing the following passage from Through The Looking Glass :

"On Tiger-Lily!" said Alice, addressing herself to one that was waving gracefully about in the wind, "I wish you could talk!"

"We can talk", said the Tiger-lily,
"when there's anybody worth talking to."

Alice was so astounded that she couldn't
speak for a minute : it quite seemed to take
her breath away."11

Incidents like talking of plants and dragons
for that matter are not inherently fantastic; they
become so when seen from a certain perspective. In the
above-mentioned incident, we are taught that one of the
ground rules of the narrative world in which the mind
is adventuring is that flowers do not talk. And when
this perspective is contradicted, turned directly around,
we face fantasy.

One of the key distinguishing marks of the
fantastic is that the perspectives enforced by the
ground rules of the narrative world must be diametrically
contradicted. By virtue of this notion of diametric
reconfiguration or direct contradiction of perspectives,
we can distinguish the fantastic from other non-formal
occurrences : the unexpected and the irrelevant. The
unexpected, literally means, the 'not-expected'. The
'not-expected' occurrence may be quite ordinary for us
as far as one of the aspects of fantasy 'wonder' is
concerned. The entry of character in a novel, for

example, may be unexpected, and it may not produce any wonder in us. In this sense the unexpected has nothing to do with fantasy. Dis-expected, on the other hand, is more nearly allied to fantasy. It occurs frequently in the fantastic. The dis-expected presents an ironic conflict between the overt ground rules and the covert ground rules. The dis-expected presents those elements which the text had diverted one from thinking about but which, it later turns out, are in perfect keeping with the ground rules of the narrative.

More closely related to fantasy is the 'anti-expected'. In our world the dead do not speak. Their speaking is unexpected in the sense of anti-expected. In the anti-expected, our perspectives are directly contradicted. When the anti-expected happens, we are in the presence of fantasy. 'The Rabbit with waistcoat' incident becomes a fantasy in this sense. ^{The} 'irrelevant' reverses the basic ground rules of art. If a person does not have a set of perspectives which the author has, the person apprehends nothing. He must know something about the perspective, otherwise it becomes irrelevant. Rabkin takes the following passage from Edmund Carpenter's report on the Canadian Eskimos for his analysis :

"I once naively thought my Eskimos hosts would be fascinated to hear about the remarkable world from which I came. In fact, they showed only irritation when I talked about it. If a tubercular Eskimo is taken from his igaloo and put in a sanitorium in Brandon, Manitoba, or Ontario, and treated there for four years, gradually being given freedom to wander about the hospital and town, when he returns home, it is unlikely he will ever mention a single thing he witnessed or learned. The outside world is uncertain, dangerous, hostile—above all, alien, untranslatable."¹²

The outside world remains 'untranslatable' for the Eskimos. They can't perceive it as they possess different perspectives. Hence the description of the outside world is irrelevant for them. But the truly fantastic occurs when the ground rules of a narrative world are forced to make a 180° reversal, when prevailing perspectives are directly contradicted as in ^{the} case of Alice watching flowers talk. Thus fantasy mainly deals with the 'anti-expected'. And the elements of the 'dis-expected' and 'irrelevant' may occur occasionally in it.

B) FANTASY IN LITERATURE :

As it has been already stated, fantasy is an integral constituent of literature and it has appeared in

literature in various forms like myth, fairy-tales, satire, allegory, gothic fiction, science fiction etc. Sometimes fantasy comes as a mocking parody of the present world. Thus fantasy sometimes is closely associated with reality. Many times fantasy is called 'Escape Literature'. It is supposed to offer a vision of escape. Especially in modern times, fantasy is believed to provide an escape from the monotonous, boring routine, and it gives the mind welcome relief from the matter-of-factness of a prosaic industrial world. Fantasy releases some of the mental tensions caused by the sense of individual frustration in a regimented society. According to Holman, 'Escape Literature' includes 'adventure stories, detective stories, tales of fantasy, pornography, westerns, scientific fiction and..... fairy tales'.¹³

According to Holman's description of escape literature, myth as a form of fantasy may also be included under escape literature. In fact, fantasy began to appear first in literature through myth and allegory. A Dictionary of Literary Terms describes myth as a 'legendary or traditional story, usually one concerning a superhuman being and dealing with events

that have no natural explanation'.¹⁴ It is an unproved belief accepted uncritically. It usually attempts to explain a phenomenon or strange occurrence without regard to scientific fact or so-called common sense. It mainly appeals to emotion as it is used for communicating religious beliefs. Myth dates from ancient times when rational explanations of natural phenomenon were neither available nor apparently wanted. Myth is a fictitious story which fascinates the reader by its remoteness, mystery and heroism. A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms defines myth as a fantasy dealing with imagination "used in contexts opposing to 'truth' or 'reality'".¹⁵ Since in myth ground rules are not contradicted directly, it does not evoke much wonder in the reader.

According to A Dictionary of Literary Terms fairy-tales too deal with 'supernatural spirits represented having mischievous temperaments, unusual wisdom, and power to regulate the affairs of man in whatever fashion they choose'.¹⁶ Fairy-tales use the World of Enchantment as their location. They have a set of perspectives belonging to an altogether different world. They appear fantastic because they are concerned with diametric opposition to the ground rules of our world. Thus the readers have to accept 'escape from logic'

offered by the fairy tales. The readers have to accept the perspectives offered by the fairy-tales - i.e. - talking of flowers, flying of animals etc.

During the ancient and medieval eras fantasy appeared in the forms of allegory. The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry And Poetics describes it as 'a method of representation in which a person, abstract idea, or event stands for itself and for something else. It is a work of fiction in which the author intends characters and their actions to be understood in terms other than their surface appearances and meanings.'¹⁷ Thus allegory in which an object stands for a person or an idea is a form of fantasy.

Satire is one of the forms of literature which use fantasy as a device. Satire often blends humour and wit with a critical attitude towards human activities and institutions. Satire, according to Shaw, is a genre 'ridiculingfolly, stupidity, or vice; the use of irony, sarcasm, or ridicule for exposing or denouncing the frailties and faults of mankind.'¹⁸ Satire attempts, therefore, to juxtapose the actual with the ideal. To project a double vision of the world, satire employs its chief tool-irony-which exploits the

relationship between appearance and reality. Satirists hold up to ridicule contemporary situations that fall short of their ideals. Hence, Highet says, "all satirists are at heart idealists."¹⁹ Satire is inherently fantastic because it attempts, through irony, to state 'the reverse of the truth as though it were clear truth.'²⁰ Satirists make use of different technical devices like distortion, caricature, exaggeration, parallelism, parody etc.

Fantasy has appeared in 'Gothic Fiction, too. It deals mainly with the visions of a medieval world of dark passions enacted against the massive and sinister architecture of the gothic castle. It also implies the whole paraphernalia of evil forces and ghostly apparitions. In its creation of supernatural or other-worldly terrors, it contradicts possibility quite often. In such kind of fiction the terrors are often left irrational and unexplained. The supernatural element is left entirely alien to give the readers a shock. It demands an additional adjustment because of the oddness of its method or subject matter. Detective fiction also can be considered a soothing, rejuvenating fantasy which offers an escape into the world of justice.

Science fiction is a narrative which draws imaginatively on scientific knowledge, theory and speculation in its plot, theme and setting. Shaw says, 'Science fiction is a form of fantasy in which hypotheses form the basis, by logical extrapolation.....',²¹ Science fiction is that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesized on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology. A work will belong to the genre of science fiction if its narrative world is at least somewhat different from our own, and if that difference is apparent against the background of an organized body of knowledge. In science fiction, fantasy is based on a solid base of knowledge of science. The perspectives in science fiction, though they belong to a different world like that of the moon, or a planet, or a remote island, are deeply rooted in scientific facts. Therefore, Manlove says, 'science fiction is supposed to describe those events and civilizations that conceivably could exist, whether now or in the future.'²²

✓ C) FANTASY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE :

In order to get a proper perspective for the study of fantasy in Aldous Huxley's novels, now I am going to

make a brief historical survey of fantasy in English literature. Allegory and fairy - tales are the first forms of literature in which fantasy makes its appearance. The Owl And The Nightingale (1250) is an allegorical poem by Nicholas of Guildford presenting a moral lesson - the nightingale representing the lighter joys of life, and the owl representing wisdom and sobriety. Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales (1380-1400), written in the tradition of Boccaccio, are tales of fantasy, though The Prologue comes very near to reality. It describes contemporary people, manners and society. William Langland's Piers The Plowman gives the poet's vision of the Malvern Hills which describes a series of dissolving scenes dealing with the adventures of allegorical beings. The allegory exposes the sloth and vice of the Church.

The seeds of fantasy can be seen also in Beowulf dealing with an episode of mere monster 'Grendel'. Widsith (The Far Traveller) has been regarded as the oldest poem of English language. It describes ^{the} places and persons, real as well as imaginary, ^{that} the traveller visits. The first prose work dealing with fantasy is Sir Thomas Malory's Morte d'Arthur (1469-70). Sir Thomas More's Utopia also deals with an imaginary state.

In this way upto the fifteenth century, fantasy remains totally dissociated from reality except in Chaucer and Langland. Fantasy during this period functions mainly through allegory only. Allegory played a major role in the field of drama too during this period. It appeared in Mystery, Miracle, and Morality plays.

Spenser's Faerie Queene (1589-96) is a major literary work of the sixteenth century. The work has been divided into twelve books, each dealing with the adventures of a particular knight representing a certain Elizabethan virtue. John Lily's Euphues (1578-80) is a travel-romance describing the adventures of a young Athenian, Euphues. Milton's L'Allegro and Il Penseroso (1632) are also allegories full of scholarly fancy. John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress (1678), The Holy War (1682), The Life and Death of Mr. Badman (1680) are the famous works of allegory dealing with allegorical personages like Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Giant Despair etc. In this age, too, fantasy and reality run parallel. Fantasy and reality come close to one another in Dryden's famous satirical allegory, Absalom and Achitophel (1681-82). Fantasy, though dissociated from reality, was delightful and creative as Manlove says, "fantasy

lacking in the full character of reality can have compensatory strengths. It can give us an order of experience we are normally without.²³

The gap between fantasy and reality was minimized in the eighteenth century. Hitherto, fantasy appeared mainly through allegory functioning in terms of the personification of Virtues and vices. In the eighteenth century, fantasy is often associated with satire. Jonathan Swift's The Battle of Books (1704) presents an allegorical satire on the dispute between the ancient and modern authors. His A Tale of a Tub (1704) is a religious allegory. Gulliver's Travels (1726) is a powerful satire on ^{the} politics of Swift's time. In his satires, Swift makes use of irony to ridicule the foibles of mankind. His satire is always powerful but never mean. Pope's poems like ^{The} Rape of the Lock (1712) Dunciad (1743), Epistle to Arbuthnot (1735) are famous satires. The last poem presents a satirical caricature of Joseph Addison with whom Pope had quarrelled. Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (1719) is a mingling of realism and fantasy. It is based on a factual story of Alexander Selkirk. During this century, fantasy and reality go hand in hand.

During the nineteenth century, since realism starts dominating English fiction, fantasy had to find

special genres to dwell in, i.e. Gothic fiction, detective fiction, science fiction etc. Horace Walpole's Castle of Otranto (1764) is a remarkable example of Gothic fiction which has in it the whole paraphernalia of evil forces. Webster's Duchess of Malfi (1613), The Coming Race (1871) by Bulwer-Lytton, Collins's The Dead Secret (1857), Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll And Mr. Hyde (1886) are some of the famous works of horror fiction. During the same period, science fiction also begins to gain some ground. H.G. Wells's The Time Machine (1895), The Invisible Man (1897), The Food of the Gods (1904) are scientific romances mingling fact with fiction. Butler's Erewhon (1872), William Morris's News from 'Nowhere' and A Crystal Age, Clarke's Childhood's End are the novels dealing with science and technology. In these novels, fantasy is rooted deeply in scientific facts. These works present those perspectives which are different from those of our own world.

Thus, fantasy, upto the seventeenth century, appears in literature dissociated from reality. It is the eighteenth century onwards that fantasy comes close to reality. Fantasy gets closely associated with reality especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

D) FANTASY IN UTOPIAN FICTION :

Since I am focusing my attention on the role of fantasy in Aldous Huxley's two novels, Brave New World and Island, I think it is good to discuss in general the role of fantasy in Utopian fiction.

Utopian fiction is an old form of literature. Utopias are skilful descriptions of ideal societies. The word 'Utopia' literally means 'no place'. Thomas More in 1516 wanted to have pun^a on 'eu-topia' meaning^o 'good place'. If 'Utopia' means a good place, it is possible to think of its opposite, a bad place, a dystopia. Eric Rabkin says, 'By analogy, we often call a work that projects a future bad society a 'dystopia' meaning 'bad place'.²⁴

The genre of utopias contains both utopias and dystopias. Utopias seem to carry the author's approval while dystopias seem to carry the author's disapproval. In other words, utopian fiction represents the ideal political state and way of life, while dystopia represents, as Abrams says, 'a very unpleasant imaginary world in which certain ominous tendencies of our present social, political and technological order are projected in some future culmination.'²⁵

Utopia denotes a non-existent country on the one hand and a perfect commonwealth on the other. It recalls the old dreams of a perfect world, of a golden age, of a time and place where things are better and misery has no existence. The Golden Age, The Millennium, Utopia are the different aspects of the Earthly Paradise.

Utopian fiction can be divided into three categories. First, Evolutionary utopias discuss the sort of life human beings will live in future. Here the writer does not merely indulge in speculations, but he has to convert them into an imaginative reality. This kind of utopia is the only effective way of imaginatively dealing with the far future. Scientific utopias deal with the happiness and prosperity achieved through mechanization, science, technology. In Arcadian utopias rigid mechanization is discarded, and in its place a beautiful rural Arcadian World is established. Thus, in all these forms of utopia, fantasy functions as a chief tool to create the utopian world.

The utopian literature is said to have begun from Plato's Republic which describes the concept of an ideal state. Sir Thomas More's Utopia (1516), too describes an



imaginary state in which social life is governed by reason. Here an extreme length of life is not aimed at, but death is calmly faced. It offers an irresistible promise for the improvement of the human condition. Sir Francis Bacon's New Atlantis (1626) gives more stress on the natural history than on the evolution and development of a new society. In this scientific utopia as conceived by Bacon, the most important building is not a church, but a research institute. For the first time in utopian fiction, the idea of progress, the idea of infinite perfectability, the idea of man's power over other forms of life are given a concrete expression through the use of fantasy. Swift's Gulliver's Travels (1726) can be regarded a utopia. But it is more a satire than^a utopia. Samuel Butler's Erewhon (1872) criticizes science. It turns Darwinism on its head. It records a reaction against industrial development. Bulwer Lytton's The Coming Race (1871) is an example of evolutionary utopia. It describes the race of super human Vril-ya, who are more or less like ordinary human beings, but taller, more powerful, gifted with the mysterious force, Vril. Using this strange natural force they can kill anybody at almost any distance. Hudson's A Crystal Age (1887) is a satire on mechanization. It describes machines being

abolished because of their ugliness and the crudity of their products. Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward 2000-1887 is supposed to be America's most influential utopia. Bellamy looks for social perfection in the industrial age. Bellamy fully approves of his imagined society, Man's World (1926) by Charolette Haldane describes a chemical war destroying philosophers and politicians. Scientists and geneticists work as controllers in this world. H. G. Wells A Modern Utopia presents a utopian ideal man. It describes machines heading towards perfection. It also deals with the problems of social reconstruction and planning. His Men like Gods (1923) is a wonderful fantasy, presenting a world where all problems are solved. It describes a society full of people gifted with direct thought-transmission without the use of language. Time Machine (1895) can be considered the best fantasy of the future. In this dystopia, Wells uses the fantastic idea of time travel to present a vivid social warning based on orthodox extra polation of biology and political science. More Than Human (1953) by Theodore Sturgeon discusses man's superior future. Sturgeon stresses man's psychic evolution rather than physical. Clarke's Childhood's End (1953) concerns itself with the emergence of the next

step in man's evolution, a step taken by children into a new species of telepathic communion. Tolkien's The Lord of The Rings is a deliberate attempt to write a large-scale adult fairy-story. It describes the warfare of the natural against the unnatural. Orwell's 1984 shows the evolution wheel running its full circle. Orwell introduces certain fantastic ideas like death control, reality control. E.M. Forster's The Machine Stops describes a world fully controlled by machines. After the final breakdown of machines, a natural life begins again. Huxley's Brave New World is a dystopia which describes the crucial stage to which the technology will lead us. Island, a utopia, presents a saner society which tries to combine cleverly ^{the} mysticism of the East with the technological advancements of the West. These novels will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Thus utopian fiction presents a fantasy world. Sometimes it is a speaking comment on the contemporary ills, or sometimes utopian fantasy presents a rosy picture of the future. Fantasy remains a major aspect of utopian literature. Utopian fiction is sometimes charged as merely fantastic. Finally an objection is raised against a utopia that it is primarily a work of ideas.

Richard Gerber in his book Utopian Fantasy answers to these objections raised against utopian fiction. He says, "a limited amount of fantasy and the prevalence of social ideas in a utopian novel can't be avoided and should be accepted as a distinctive feature of the utopian genre; in fact, they form some of the main attractions of this type of story."²⁶

According to Gerber, a utopia must be a novel of ideas in which the writer may present his fantastic ideas of the future.

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