

CHAPTER - II

FANTASY IN HUXLEY'S FICTION :

Though Huxley's novels can be broadly divided as 'House-Party Novels' and 'Futuristic Novels', all his novels are essentially 'Novels of Ideas'. His novels are interrelated by one common set of ideas which he discusses in his works other than fiction also. His last work, Island (1962), a utopia, gives a final expression to his ideas and ideals expressed hitherto in his earlier works. A survey of Huxley's novels reveals ^{the} fact that one of the major aspects of Huxleyan novels is fantasy. Though Brave New World, Ape and Essence, Island are regarded as great fantasies of Huxley, fantasy has been a persistent element in his works right from the beginning. Hence, I propose to make a brief survey of Huxley's fiction and try to trace how fantasy functions in his works.

CROME YELLOW :

Crome Yellow (1929), Antic Hay (1923), and Those Barren Leaves (1925) form a trilogy representing post-war disillusionment, cynicism and hedonism. These novels are called 'House - Party Novels' written in the

Peacockian tradition. In Peacockian novels, real and artificial characters gather at a house-party and get engaged in characteristic pursuits and conversations. They embark on learned and philosophical discussions in which many common opinions of the day are critically discussed. Crome Yellow is an amusing satire on the ill-fated love affair of a sensitive young poet, Denis Stone. He comes to Crome to declare his love for Anne, niece of Sir Henry Wimbush, the owner of Crome. The novel's thirty chapters actually record his failure to deliver the message. Hence the theme of Crome Yellow is ineffectual communication.

Irony is the chief tool that Huxley uses here to mock at certain ills. Mr. Wimbush takes his guest to his Home Farm. He tells his guests about a pig and says that he would kill her if she doesn't deliver a greater number of pigs next time. Mr. Scogan remarks:

'But how practical, how eminently realistic!.....
...In this farm we have a model of sound paternal government. Make them breed, make them work, and when they are past working or breeding or begetting, slaughter them.'¹

The criticism of Mr. Scogan is very harsh. He criticizes the political system and ironically points out the follies in it. But Crome Yellow is known more for the prophetic ideas given by Huxley through Mr. Scogan than for its political criticism. While speaking about the future of mankind, Mr. Scogan describes the 'Rational State'. Before establishing the 'Rational State', he says,

'An impersonal generation will take place of Nature's hideous system. In vast state incubators, rows upon rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires. The family system will disappear; society, sapped at its very base, will have to find new foundations.....' (p. 42).

These are the fantastic ideas which Huxley later elaborates in Barve New World (1926). Through this fantasy of Mr. Scogan's Huxley gives a picture of a hideous society controlled completely by science :

'Systematically from earliest infancy, its members will be assured that there is no happiness to be found except in work and obedience; they will be made to believe that they are happy, that they are tremendously important human beings, and everything they do is noble and significant.....' (pp. 193-194)

How marvellously Huxley satirizes the loss of individuality in the world to come! Huxley sees the bitter reality that human beings will be turned into machines.

In Crome Yellow fantasy operates in terms of irony, satire, and interesting ideas etc. Except in the utopian ideas about the 'Rational State', fantasy in this novel functions on a lower level, very close to reality.

ANTIC HAY :

Gumbril, the hero of Antic Hay, like Denis Stone of Crome Yellow, suffers from the sense of 'inadequacy'. Gumbril believes that an artificial beard would transform him into a complete Man - strong, over-bearing and successful.

'The effect, he decided immediately was stunning, was grandiose. From melancholy and all too mild he saw himself transformed on the instant into a sort of jovial Henry the Eighth, into a massive Rabelaisian man, broad and powerful and exuberant with vitality and hair.'²

Here fantasy operates in terms of exaggeration. Gumbril with his artificial beard, imagines himself as Henry the Eighth. He being a man of extravagant

imagination, Most of his plans are more imaginative than realistic. His idea of pneumatic pants is really fantastic. He wants to make money by exploiting a brain wave. He plans to introduce pneumatic trousers which would prevent contact with hard surfaces and thus ensure a comfortable seat.

"Scientifically, then," said Gumbril Junior, "my Patent Small-Clothes may be described as trousers with a pneumatic seat, inflateable by means of a tube fitted with a valve; the whole constructed of stout seamless red rubber, enclosed between two layers of cloth." (pp. 28-29).

Thus Huxley uses fantasy to generate the comic idea of pneumatic trousers.

Gumbril, looking at the wretched conditions of people, remarks,

"It's appalling that human beings should have to live like that worse than dogs."

"Dogs have nothing to complain of," Shearwater went off at a tangent. "Nor guinea-pigs, nor rats. It's these blasted anti-vivisection maniacs who make all the fuss." (p. 83). Here fantasy is used for ironically

emphasizing the meaninglessness of life. Human beings live a more wretched life than animals do. Thus in Antic Hay Huxley's fantasy functions through irony, satire, exaggeration and playful imagination.

THOSE BARREN LEAVES :

In Those Barren Leaves (1925) there are two intellectuals occupying the centre of the stage - Mr. Calamy and Mr. Chelifier - through whose speeches Huxley expresses the meaninglessness of the modern pursuit of material pleasures and the monotonous routine of industrial civilization. Calamy, for instance, says :

"After having been away, as I have, for a year or so, to come back to civilization and find the same old people doing the same idiotic things - it's astonishing. One expects everything to be quite different.... But everything is exactly the same..... There's not the slightest change. Oh, it's more than astonishing - it's positively terrifying."³

In this novel, too, Huxley speaks about the future. Huxley's fascination with the future is revealed through Irene's thinking :

'At some distant future date, when society is organized in a rational manner, so that every individual occupies the position and does the work for which his capacities really fit himwhen.. diseases have been suppressed, all our literature of conflict and unhappiness will seem strangely incomprehensible..... ... Joy will take the place of suffering as the principal theme of art; in the process, it may be art will cease to exist when there is no misery, he will have nothing to write about. Perhaps it will be all for the best.' (p. 53).

Here Huxley imagines the distant future, his fantasy functioning parallel to reality.

One of the striking ways in which fantasy operates in Huxley's novels is in terms of language. For instance,

'He had a melodious voice, ripe, round, fruity and powdered.....' (p.28). Here Huxley uses a metaphor to describe the voice. The linguistic fantasy appears in a number of descriptions, which bristle with his encyclopedic knowledge about history, art, architecture, religion, literature etc.

Thus, in Those Barren Leaves, too, Huxley's fantasy operates on the level of irony, satire, exaggeration, and language.

POINT COUNTER POINT :

Huxley presents complex situations and multiplicity of approaches in Point Counter Point (1928). He shows here dissimilar people trying to solve the conflict between natural sexual desire and the social bondage of marriage. Mark Rampion is openly critical of modern civilization :

'Blake was civilized,' he insisted,
'Civilized, Civilization is harmony and completeness. Reason, feeling, instinct, the life of the body - Blake managed to include and harmonize everything. Barbarism is being lopsided. You can be a barbarian of the intellect as well as of sensuality. A barbarian of the soul and the feelings as well as of sensuality. Christianity made us barbarians of the soul, and now science is making us barbarians of the intellect.'⁴

Huxley introduces some fantastic ideas in Point Counter Point with the purpose of making fun of modern civilization. For instance, Lord Edward and his assistant Illidge are engaged in some curious experiments like breeding guinea-pigs with serpents.

The novel bristles with linguistic fantasy at every stage. Huxley, at one place, describes a band of musicians :

'A dozen anonymous fiddlers and cellists scraped at his bidding. And the great Pongileoni glueily kissed his flute. He blew across the mouth whole and a cylindrical air column vibrated.' (p.29). What exuberance of fantasy working through language!

Generally speaking, fantasy in Point Counter Point, does not rise above the usual level of irony, satire and language. It is in the next novel that fantasy really takes wings.

BRAVE NEW WORLD :

Brave New World (1932) is supposed to be one of the best-known fantasies about the future of mankind. If this novel is compared to the earlier works of Huxley, it can be seen that this novel deviates entirely from the Huxleyan tradition established in the earlier novels. And as far as fantasy is considered, Brave New World is the product of the greatest flight of Huxley's fantasy. Here he creates entirely a new world with different values and concepts. Here the past is discarded. 'Mother' is supposed to be an obscene word; marriage is meaningless. Moreover, death is controlled. It is a world entirely based on the advancement of science and technology. Science is so much advanced that identical children can be produced in bottles. Huxley's fantasy

operates at its highest level in this novel.

Since Brave New World is going to be discussed in detail in the following chapter, it is enough to make only some introductory remarks about it.

EYELESS IN GAZA :

Eyeless in Gaza (1936) is a story about Anathony Beavis. The novel records a conflict between violence and pacifism. Huxley himself is an advocate of pacifism.

Compared to Huxley's earlier novels, it is clear that this novel has very little fantasy in it. The usual channel for his fantasy is the linguistic one :

'As though it were drinking a new life from the sun. And that strange, violent, flamy life from outer space seemed to strike through the skin, to premeate and transmute the flesh beneath, till the whole body was a thing of alien sun-stuff....'⁵

Here Huxley uses 'fantastic' metaphors like 'flamy life' and 'drinking a new life' etc. In addition to linguistic fantasy, Huxley uses the device of satire. Anthony's notes read as 'The primal slavery is the slavery to the empty belly, and the unpropitious season. Slavery to



nature, in a word. The escape from nature is through social organization and technical invention. In a modern city it is possible to forget that such a thing as nature exists.' (p.107)

Anthony rightly states that man is a slave to hunger. He also says that escape from this is an impossibility.

Anthony points out the meaninglessness of human life :

'Life is so ordinary that literature has to deal with the exceptional.' (p.205)

According to Anthony, literature cannot deal with life now as nothing sensational is left there.

In addition to linguistic fantasy and satire, Huxley presents some examples of playful imagination also:

'When Helen kept her eyes closed, the red darkness behind the lids came wildly and chaotically to life. Like a railway station, it seemed full of hurrying people, loud with voices; and the colours glowed, the forms stood sharply out, jewelled, with the more than real definition of forms and colours under limelight.' (p.311)

In the above sentences, Huxley imagines darkness coming to life behind her lids like a railway station. Gradually one after another every figure begins to become clear.

AFTER MANY A SUMMER :

It has been rightly described by Jocelyn Brooke that After Many A Summer (1939) is 'a comedy of longevity.'⁶ Generally men seek to prolong life by every possible means. But Huxley regards the short term of temporal life as a blessing in disguise. Like Brave New World, After Many a Summer is a fantastic parable. Within the sphere of fantasy, the novel deals with the ultimate topics of all philosophy - bondage and liberation, reality and illusion, the problem of good, the nature of evil etc..

The novel begins with an ironic remark on democratic activities :

'Suddenly a new idea came into his head. Anxiously he began to wonder whether, in this democratic for west of theirs, one shook hands with the chauffer- particularly if he happened to be a black moor....'⁷ Through this ironic comment, Huxley points out that class-consciousness and racialism always dominate our consciousness however cultured we are!

Huxley, as usual, makes ample use of satire in After Many A Summer. While thinking about the exploitation of the poor, Mr. Propter reflects:

"All of them had come to California as to a promised land; and California had already reduced them to a condition of wondering peonage and was fast transforming them into Untouchables." (p.79)

As in Brave New World, there is a bitter attack on science and technology in After Many A Summer, too,

'What about Science, for instance? Is that good?'

'Good, bad and different, according to how it's pursued and what it's used for.' (p.91)

Huxley here wants to suggest that it depends on us how to use science. If science is properly handled, it will be a great boon for us.

The novel is full of examples of linguistic fantasy:

'..... it was a small, fluty voice, suggestive of even song in an English Cathedral.' (p.9)

'At the bottom of the hill the car turned to the left along a wide road that ran, a ribbon of concrete and suburban buildings, through the plain.' (p.18).

The most striking feature of After Many A Summer is that certain fantastic ideas govern the entire plot of the novel. One such fantastic idea is the idea of longevity:

'For example, Dr. Obispo went on, why should some animals live much longer than human beings and yet show so few signs of old age? Somehow, somewhere we had made a biological $\frac{1}{2}$ mistake.' (p.55)

Dr. Obispo has been working on longevity for some years in accordance with the instructions of Mr. Stoyte, a multi-millionaire. It has been revealed in the papers of Hauberks that a similar successful investigation has been carried out by the Fifth Earl of Gonnister. Finally it is discovered that the Earl and his housekeeper have been turned out into gibberish monkeys and that they have been living in that condition for the last two hundred years. As in Brave New World, fantasy is the mainspring of the plot of the novel.

APE AND ESSENCE :

It is a brief futuristic novel describing the atomic annihilation as a result of the Third World War. New Zealand is the only country to be saved from atomic devastation.

The introductory scenes show human apes parading under national flags and whipping their scientists for securing more and more destructive weapons. Scientists like Louis Pasteur, Faraday, Einstein are captivated by haboons.

'The apes open their haversacks, throw some bread, a few carrots and two or three lumps of sugar to the Einsteins, then fall to themselves on rum and Bologna sausage.'⁸

This description shows that scientists like Einstein have become slaves to the baboons.

The whole novel is full of fantastic ideas. The semi-savage inhabitants of this place live in a ruined city, burning old books for fuel and digging graves to recover jewels and clothes. Most of the children born in the area suffer from physical deformities resulting from atomic radiation. Such deformed children are offered as a sacrifice to Belial on a particular day.

In this place, woman is supposed to be a hateful object :

'What is the nature of woman? Answer. Woman is the vessel of the Unholy Spirit, the source of all deformity, the enemy of the race'(p.54)

Huxley points out that woman in this place doesn't enjoy any prestigious position as she does in our present civilization.

Huxley introduces another fantastic idea in Ape and Essence - seasonal sex. Here the sexual habits of the people also have changed as a result of the mutation produced by the effects of gamma rays. Women's sexual response has now become seasonal like that of animals, and the two weeks following Belial Day are devoted to unrestrained sexual indulgence:

'.....And don't they.....well, I mean, don't they feel like doing this sort of thing at any other season?'

'Just for five weeks, that is all. And we only permit two weeks of actual mating.' (p.102).

People here are not permitted to enjoy sex in any other season.

The novel has been presented in the form of a scenario. The narrator sees human beings as baboons and apes, and regards their life of comfort and civilization as the 'fantastic tricks' played by angry apes. Huxley argues that the results of political and scientific utopias would be the ultimate extinction of Man. Ape and Essence presents the picture of human life resulting

from the pursuit of the present political and scientific ideals in terms of dystopian fantasy.

ISLAND :

Huxley's final novel Island (1963) is a utopia, giving a promise of better future. Pala is an imaginary island where every kind of perfection has been achieved by the mingling of ^{the} mysticism of the East with the technological advancement of the West. In fact, whatever ills of science and technology are presented in Brave New World, ^{they} are mended in Island. The things like literature, arts, religion, which are discarded in Brave New World, are considered essential for life in Island. If Brave New World is considered as a technocratic hell, Island presents an ideal society of saner inhabitants.

Island is full of rich fantasy. After Brave New World, Huxley's fantasy takes wings again in Island. A detailed study of Island will be made in the following chapters.

A survey of all these novels of Huxley brings out convincingly that fantasy is one of the chief novelistic devices used by him. In his earlier works like Crome Yellow, Antic Hay, Those Barren Leaves, fantasy operates

at a lower level very near the level of reality. Fantasy generally manifests itself in these works in the forms of irony, satire, mockery, reflections, linguistic fantasy, and playful imagination. Brave New World is one of the finest products of Huxley's fantasy. The novel presents a totally alien world, discarding the values of the present life. But one notices that fantasy does not appear merely for the sake of fantasy. On the contrary, through the fantasy of Brave New World Huxley launches a bitter attack on our present civilization and its pursuit of science and technology. Here fantasy and reality go hand in hand in an oblique manner. Huxley begins with reality, takes a jump into the world of fantasy and creates an unbelievable world. His later novels like Eye less in Gaza, Time Must Have A Stop, The Genius and the Goddess do not give much scope for the play of fantasy. In After Many A Summer Huxley once again takes recourse to fantasy. He continues his experiments with fantasy in Ape and Essence and, finally, produces Island, a product of highly controlled, delicately subtilized fantasy.

Since Brave New World and Island present two highly interesting and successful modes of fantastic imagination, it would be worth while focusing our critical attention on these two novels and analyse their nature, function and value.

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