

**ST JOSEPH’S UNIVERSITY, BENGALURU -27**

**IV SEMESTER OPEN ELECTIVE**

**END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION: APRIL 2024**

**(Examination conducted in May / June 2024)**

**OEOE4 - UNDERSTANDING SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY**

**(For current batch students only)**

**Time: 2 Hours Max Marks: 60**

**This paper contains THREE printed pages and THREE parts**

**1. You are required to stay within the word limit indicated.**

**2. You are allowed to use a dictionary**

**3. Marks will be deducted if you copy from the passage.**

**PART-A**

**Read the following article titled ‘3D glasses on reality’ by Kim Stanley Robinson.**

We are now living in a science-fiction novel that we are all writing together. The present feels dangerous and volatile, and which future will actually happen is radically uncertain. It could be a good life for future humans in a shared and interdependent biosphere. It could be extreme climate change, a mass-extinction event, agricultural collapse and intense deadly conflicts among desperate human groups, including nuclear war.

To grapple with this bizarre breadth of possible futures, I tend to take it one story at a time. And I deploy a set of organizing ideas.

Science fiction is the realism of our time. It describes the present in the way a skeet shooter targets a clay pigeon, aiming a bit ahead of the moment to reveal what is not yet present but is already having an impact. This gives us metaphors and meaning-systems to help conceptualize our moment. So, as with any other realist art, you pluck just one strand out of the fabric of the total situation, and follow where it leads.

Because a novel is not a world. Even if it is about a world. It’s just one story among millions that could be told, so it doesn’t have to describe everything.

We read fiction to have two science-fictional experiences: time travel and telepathy. Fiction takes us to other times and places (Regency England, the Ice Age, the moons of Jupiter), and it takes us inside people’s heads, where we hear their thoughts and feel their feelings.

And science fiction can describe any time, from tomorrow to billions of years hence. That’s a big spread, and it creates a number of subgenres, each with its own qualities. Space operas set in the distant future use the whole Universe as a story space, sometimes to spectacular effect. Near-future science fiction is the proleptic realism I describe above. In between these, say from about one to three centuries from now, there exists a less-populated story zone that I find interesting. You could call it future history. Stories set in this zone resemble nineteenth-century social novels: the characters interact not just with each other, but with their societies and even their planets. Possibly, confronted with the mind-boggling complexity of our present, describing events a century from now allows us to de-strand chosen elements for closer examination.

Here’s how I think science fiction works aesthetically. It’s not prediction. It has, rather, a double action, like the lenses of 3D glasses. Through one lens, we make a serious attempt to portray a possible future. Through the other, we see our present metaphorically, in a kind of heroic simile that says, “It is as if our world is like this.” When these two visions merge, the artificial third dimension that pops into being is simply history. We see ourselves and our society and our planet “like giants plunged into the years”, as Marcel Proust put it. So really it’s the fourth dimension that leaps into view: deep time, and our place in it. Some readers can’t make that merger happen, so they don’t like science fiction; it shimmers irreally, it gives them a headache. But relax your eyes, and the results can be startling in their clarity.

**Answer ANY THREE of the following questions in about 5-8 sentences each. (3x5=15)**

1. What do you think motivates the author to say, *We are now living in a science-fiction novel that we are all writing together*? Comment.
2. Do you agree with the author’s statement that *science fiction is the realism of our time?* Why?
3. How does the author illustrate the dual function of science fiction, likening it to the dual lenses of 3D glasses?
4. Do you think projecting events a century into the future allows us to closely examine the present? Comment.

**PART B**

**Answer the following questions in about 150 words each. (3x10 = 30)**

1. Science fiction often depicts humanity's relationship with the unknown, including extraterrestrial life and other dimensions. Comment.
2. How does science fiction incorporate scientific concepts and principles into its storytelling, and what role does science play in shaping the narratives of the genre?
3. Would you rather read a SF novel or watch a SF film? Is the influx of science fiction content in film and TV series contributing to the genre's popularity? Comment based on your experience.

**PART-C**

**Answer the following question in about 200 words. (1x15 = 15)**

1. What is a *novum* in science fiction? How does the introduction of novum contribute to science fiction narratives? Elaborate with examples.

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