

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SPECULATIVE FICTION FEATURES
IN SOME SHORT STORIES OF RAY BRADBURY AND HOJIAKBAR
SHAYKHOV**

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Abstract

This piece comparatively analyzes speculative fiction features in some short stories of an American author Ray Bradbury and an Uzbek writer Hojiakbar Shaykhov. It touches upon common aspects of their works, identifying humanism as a major theme of their respective short stories. The article also points out some original features of their works. Based on the analysis the author puts forward some conclusions for consideration.

Key words

Speculative fiction, Short story, theory, Principle of reality, Fantastic, Literary studies, Comparative literary analysis

In this article we intend to look into genre features of speculative fiction in Ray Bradbury's and Hojiakbar Shaykhov's short stories.

Tzvetan Todorov, who is credited as a creator of the theoretical genre of the fantastic, points out: "In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral

part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous.... The fantastic . . . implies an integration of the reader into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the reader's own ambiguous perception of the events narrated. It must be noted that we have in mind no actual reader, but the role of the reader implicit in the text (just as the narrator's function is implicit in the text) [1].

A Turkish researcher Şeyma Karaca points out that “Bradbury uses conventions of fantasy and science fiction in his stories.”[2] She tries to “define fantasy and science fiction in the context of the reality principle because the relationship between these two genres and the real and unreal determines their position in literature”. [3] An Uzbek researcher Rano Ibrohimova in some way echoes that definition, stating “fantasy as a genre takes its roots from fairy tales”. [4] She references to Hojiakbar Shaykhov's work “*Telba dunyo*” (Crazy world) citing that “Uzbek science fiction arose from fairy tales.” As Ray Bradbury himself stated, “all science fiction is an attempt to solve problems by pretending to look the other way”. [5]

Agreeing that principle of reality serves as a borderline for both fantasy and science fiction, we believe it is worth differentiating these two genres. Science fiction and fantasy both fall under speculative fiction genre where many elements, characters, and settings are created out of imagination and speculation rather than reality and everyday life. However, there is a distinct difference between science fiction and fantasy. Science fiction is based on science and technology and therefore, depicts scenarios that could be true one day. Science fiction can be basically categorized into hard science fiction and soft science fiction. Hard science fiction often involves accurate details, especially physics, astrophysics, and chemistry, and accurately portrays and predicts advanced technology that is yet to be invented. Soft science fiction is based on social sciences such as psychology,

political science, sociology, economics, and anthropology and are not as scientific as the hard genre.[6] Fantasy, on the other hand, involves many supernatural elements and takes place in a world that does not and cannot ever exist. Therefore, the main difference between science fiction and fantasy is that science fiction has its base in science and consists of possibilities whereas fantasy has no base on reality and consists of impossibilities.

Looking for answers to our questions within our comparative analysis we intend to look at personalities, and some works of the two authors. Because, as Ray Bradbury pointed out, “I have always tried to write my own story. Give it a label if you wish, call it science fiction or fantasy or the mystery or the western. But, at heart, all good stories are the one kind of story, the story written by an individual man from his individual truth”. [7]

Ray Douglas Bradbury was a US writer of fantasy, horror, science fiction and mystery. He is widely considered to be one of the 20th century’s greatest and most popular writers of science fiction, however, Bradbury famously, and consistently, resisted the title of “science fiction writer” [8] claiming that his work was based on the fantastical and unreal. Nevertheless, he is defined as “one of the masters of science fiction and fantasy”. [9] His fascination with magic and future technology in his early childhood helped him to shape his fantastic and science fictional stories. Aside from his most well-known work, 1953's Fahrenheit 451, the prolific author and screenwriter claimed to have penned mostly fantasies—stories filled with impossible events. His works have been translated into more than 40 languages and have sold tens of millions of copies in different countries. His popularity continues in the 21st century. During his long writing career, Bradbury wrote almost 600 short stories, eleven novels, as well as various poems and plays. [10] Ray Bradbury’s principal literary form has been the short story, and he has published several important collections, including *Dark Carnival* (1947), *The Illustrated Man* (1951), *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (1953), and *I Sing the Body Electric!* (1969). Two important extensive collections of his short stories are *The*

Stories of Ray Bradbury (1980) and Bradbury Stories: One Hundred of His Most Celebrated Tales (2003).

Hojiakbar Shaykhov (1945-2002) was one of the founders of Uzbek science fiction. Hojiakbar Shaykhov is the author of more than 30 science fiction stories, short stories and novels. "Renee's Riddle" (1977), "Glorious Steps" (1977), "Operation Seventh" (1979), "Strange Shadow" (1980), "Diamond Shine" (1983), "The Destruction of the Last Dragon" (1985), "Living Dreams" (1985), "Memory of Ancestors" (1986), "Burning River" (1986), "School Stage" (1988), "Magic Girl" (1989), "Crazy World" (1990), "Connected Worlds" (1996), "The Witch's Husband" (1999), "Two Worlds of Troubles" (2001), etc. there are fantastic stories and novels. In his works, the struggle between good and evil, right and wrong, tolerance and selfishness is reflected in a unique way in science fiction forms. No matter how supernatural the series of events is, no matter how strange the heroes are, no matter what happens not only on Earth, but in the whole universe, on the neighboring planets, they are ultimately connected in some way to the lives and concerns of people today. His works, such as "Strange Shadow", "Renee's Puzzle", "Diamond Gloss", became popular among readers and were translated into several languages. Hojiakbar Shaykhov is recognized in Uzbek literature as the founder of the science fiction genre. This is evidenced by the fact that the encyclopedia of the world's most advanced science fiction writers, published in the United States, includes the name of Hojiakbar Shaykhov as a representative of Uzbek literature.

[11]

Analyzing short stories of the both authors, we believe that main characteristic feature that unites them is their humanism.

There is a consensus that, as Erik Sofge puts it, Ray Bradbury was science fiction's first great humanist.[12] Some have criticized his science-fiction stories for their scientific and technological inaccuracies, a criticism that Bradbury did accept, stating that was a "people" writer. [13] His dominating concerns are social, cultural, and intellectual issues, not scientific accuracies. Bradbury is also known

for his distrust for technological advancement.

"What if one day our race for development gets out of control?" The author raises this question in his short story "The Smile". The narrator describes to the reader a story that takes place in 2061. He paints ruined, broken, charred cityscapes; creates vivid portraits of the poor, accurately conveys their remarks and reasoning - and behind such a calm intonation of the narrative, a desperate cry breaks out. "Think about it!" - the writer inspires, - "What will this run lead to?" The reader sees people who have lost themselves in the race for civilization. "Who needs it? .. It's all in vain anyway," says one of the main characters - Grigsby. Tom, who saves Gioconda's smile in his fist, and smiles back at her, gives us hope that brainy people, whose soul lies to the beautiful will eventually prevail.

Several critics have accused him of sentimentality and simplicity because of his critical acceptance of technical progress, his emphasis mainly on human values, his opposition to modern materialism against the human spirit, and his belief in the basic virtues of small village life against the weak indifference of big cities. Bradbury responded by saying, "Critics write with their heads, and I write from the heart." His most chilling stories comment on the human consequences of progress. "Science ran too far ahead of us too quickly," he once said, "and the people got lost in a mechanical wilderness." Bradbury believed that one purpose of science fiction "is to warn about negative things that might happen in the future if care is not taken in the present".

Bradbury's idea is vividly portrayed in "The Pedestrian". [14] Mankind has taken great strides toward progress with inventions such as television. However, when children refuse to read and play outdoors to turn on the TV, the question may arise as to whether this is progress or decline. In "The Pedestrian", Ray Bradbury chose to make a statement about the impact of these changes. Through the images of the protagonists of the story, it shows that if society rises to the point where it loses its humanity, then humanity can also perish.

Mr Leonard Mead, who loved walking in silence, in ten years of walking by

night or day, for thousands of miles, had never met another person walking, not one in all that time. We could say he is the last man, who has become a stranger for a society in 2053. His interaction with the police car demonstrates that very clearly, as the police car seems surprised by his answers to its questions:

'Your name?' said the police car in a metallic whisper. He couldn't see the men in it because of the bright light in his eyes. 'Leonard Mead,' he said. ... 'Business or profession?' 'I think you'd call me a writer.' 'No profession,' said the police car, as if talking to itself.... 'What are you doing out?' 'Walking,' said Leonard Mead. 'Walking!' 'Just walking,' he said simply, but his face felt cold. 'Walking, just walking, walking?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Walking where? For what?'

The progress portrayed by the police car with a metallic voice takes Mr Mead to the psychiatric centre in the end of the short story. Bradbury reminds us that progress without a soul may eventually destroy us as human beings. The impact of development on humanity as a result of the loss of humanity's spirit is evident in the conversation between Mr Mead and the police car. The car does not understand the need for humanity. It doesn't understand Mr. Mead's desire to return to nature - "just walking to see" is incomprehensible to him. It can't understand why Mr Mead isn't inclined to sit in front of a "watch screen" or "breathe air conditioning air". Development does not feel the need for humanity. It simply locks him in the back seat and takes away from his house. Bradbury thus warns that humanity can only end sadly if becomes a captive of technical progress.

The same could be said about Hojiakbar Shaykhov's works. As prominent Uzbek literary critic Ozod Sharafiddinov stated, Shaykhov's works contain all the necessary features of "*fantastika*", meaning that their events take place not only on Earth, but throughout the Universe, in neighboring galaxies. Shaykhov's protagonists are various robots, aliens, human-like or non-human-like creatures. However, no matter how supernatural the series of events may be, no matter how strange the heroes may be, they will ultimately be linked in some way to the lives of the people on Earth. The writer thinks of weaving interesting, fascinating

adventures from each other, not to occupy the reader's imagination, but to raise man's eternal problems, to appeal to the human conscience, to awaken him from his slumber, and to make him more perfect. Therefore, at the heart of Shaykhov's works are the issues of meaning, belief, honesty and purity of human life. The writer depicts the struggle between good and evil, right and wrong, tolerance and selfishness in science fiction forms. [15]

We can find tones regarding technological progress and humane values paradigm in Hojiakbar Shaykov's short story "Sirli Nur" (*Mysterious Light*). [16] The author warns that even most advanced technologies can lead humanity to destruction, if people do not use them in a proper way. A planet "Ziyo" discovered by astronauts has achieved significant technological progress, and people there were able to live up to thousand years. A protagonist of the short story Davron Sharipov lands on the planet, but finds no-one, as all inhabitants of the planet had perished due to their selfishness. The Medical Academy of the planet discovers "anti-genes" to vaccinate the population, which would allow them to live a thousand years. However, that invention did not satisfy all, as sociologists of the planet warn that without natural deaths demographic growth would mean that the planet would not be able to feed all. Hojiakbar Shaykhov points out that, social thought and technological progress should develop in a harmonious way. "Due to some peculiarities of the developing social societies on the planet, sciences such as biology, medicine, and genetics developed rapidly and were far ahead of their time". The Council of the planet decides to temporarily sterile the population, to allow scientists to find ways for the solution of the problem. A few years later, the high spirits and joys were replaced by other emotions. It was as if something had happened to the human psyche. People became cautious, slow, and vigilant. Everyone has developed a habit of carefully monitoring their health, which can cause panic if they get a little sick. The number of cases of mutual neglect has increased. Suddenly it became a habit to get nervous for something trivial, to be stupidly upset. The number of people willing to participate in scientific

experiments has sharply decreased, and university audiences have become empty. No one wanted to risk their lives. Astronauts, sailors, pilots, and underwater divers gave up their jobs en masse and began to engage in peaceful activities near their homes. Mankind, which was once a whole, has been divided into separate individuals who are confined to a narrow and limited world. When there was such a wonderful opportunity to live a thousand years, no one would want to die of an illness or an accident. But the worst was yet to come. The effect of the temporary sterilization had already expired, but for some reason the birth still did not recur. Previously, it was suggested that sterilization would likely affect more than the estimated time. But as the years passed, the decades were replaced by new decades, and centuries passed — people began to forget even what a baby's cry sounded like. Thus, it was recalled that the sterilization experiments were carried out in a hurry, and that the interaction of the sterilizer with the anti-genes was not investigated at all. Apparently, the same - the interaction of the anti-genes and the sterilizer - gave rise to a new feature of the organism - infertility. This eventually leads to the extinction of people on the planet. Hojiakbar Shaykhov makes a conclusion that even the most advanced technology cannot solve problems of humankind, if people do not care enough for humane values.

Comparative analysis of Ray Bradbury's and Hojiakbar Shaykhov's short stories discloses original tendencies in their works. First of all, we should mention the length of their compared short stories. Ray Bradbury's "The Pedestrian" is based on minimalism, but manages to give us clear understanding of the plot and what is behind it – that is technological progress embodies in one police car. Bradbury's strength is that he can describe Mr Mead's loneliness, desertedness, strangeness in one sentence. Answering the police car's question about marriage, he replies "Nobody wanted me". Whereas, it takes pages for Hojiakbar Shaykhov to describe what caused decline of the planet "Ziyo". Shaykhov has to go into details, creating new words ("anti-genes"), to explain us his intention from the story. He even adds the text of a last will of the people of the planet, which seems

unnecessary, as its message could probably be incorporated into information that Davron Sharipov gets from the planet's Cyber Centre.

However, despite these obvious dissimilarities, which probably speak about the level of poetics and talent of the both writers, their common feature in using speculative fiction in their short stories is a call for humanity to stay humane. That message is definitely common for both of them.

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