

Between the Space and the Earth : A Study of 'Orbital' as Creative Non-Fiction

Dr. Kiran Sitole*

*Asst. Prof. (English) Govt. Holkar Science College, Indore (M.P.) INDIA

Abstract : Creative non-fiction is a genre of literature that blends factual accuracy with narrative storytelling for an immersive and informative experience. "Orbital," by Samantha Harvey a beautiful scientific novel fits within this category which takes readers on a journey of space exploration. Samantha Harvey weaved scientific reality by literary techniques to convey real scientific principles with human experience and human emotion in her novel. This paper examines the structure, themes, characters and all over impact of "Orbital" as a creative non-fiction novel. My paper highlights how it bridges the gap between empirical knowledge and artistic expression of author.

Introduction - Difference between fiction and non-fiction have often been blurred in literature, particularly in the genre of creative non-fiction. "Orbital" is an example of informative and engaging storytelling. This novel allows readers to experience the mysterious marvels of space while maintaining a connection with human experience. The Booker Prize-winning novel by Samantha Harvey, offers a contemplative exploration of human existence with experience of six astronauts aboard the International Space Station Set over a single day. Author writes experience of these individuals as they complete sixteen orbits around Earth, each chapter corresponding to one orbit. This structure of writing allows readers to drown in joy into the astronauts' reflections on life, death, identity, and the interconnection of humanity. *Writing style is not one to be rushed either.* Harvey wrote clearly and articulately, with poetry and lyricism about science and beauty, geopolitics and personal stories. The whole package of Space Voyage is wrapped up in the grandeur of history and the humbleness of human insignificance within the immensity of the universe. This is a small novel but it has a BIG message.

*"How are we writing the future of humanity? We're not writing anything, it's writing us. We're windblown leaves. We think we're the wind, but we're just the leaf.....
.....Some metal separates us from the void; death is so close. Life is everywhere, everywhere."*

Space, by comparison, or at least the nearest region of space – "Earth's back garden" – seems more knowable and less lonely. With this extreme slender and stretchy her fifth novel, Harvey makes an ecstatic travel with an imagined crew on the International Space Station, and looks back to Earth with a lover's eye. Orbital goes into flight for a single day, though a day is a different kind of thing up here, where "the whipcrack of morning arrives every ninety minutes" and the sun is "up-down-up-down like a mechanical toy".

It's a nicely giddy structural ploy to align each and every chapter with an orbit of the Earth: 16 orbits all together. The mobile narrative sends out probes into past and future, but all is held in the looping motion of elliptical travel.

Samantha used amazing vocabulary in Orbital to illustrate things that might be missing at home like anticipated things, O nigiri, Skiing etc. It begins with stunning display of literary brilliance, its first half alive with breathtaking imagery and profound ideas of life and space. But as it progresses, its demand high reading skills. However, Orbital Offers a Fascinating thought provoking journey of space, not just once but sixteen times. Samantha Harvey never been visited to space but how beautifully she painted the practical aspects of life in space station in her words. She represented the eating, sleeping, work out and toileting habits in widely praised language. For its beautiful presentation Guardian Describes Orbital as an uplifting book in its blurb.

The story is set over the course of one 24-hour period on board the International Space Station. There are four astronauts and two cosmonauts who are following the journey of the first manned space craft to land on the moon since 1972 as well as a terrifying typhoon developing over the Pacific Ocean. During this day on board the ISS, they will orbit the earth sixteen times,

"they'll see sixteen sunrises and sixteen sunsets, sixteen days and sixteen Nights"

To assist the reader, Harvey has provided a map of their orbits across the globe so when they talk about what they can see from the window, we can track it for ourselves. It is the artistic beauty of characterisation that connect us with characters Characterization in orbital is subtle and focused on the astronauts' inner lives and perspectives, rather than elaborate backstories or dramatic conflicts, with each character representing a different facet of humanity's

relationship with space and Earth. The characters are not necessarily developed as individuals with complex personal dramas, but rather as representations of different aspects of humanity, such as faith, grief, and the search for meaning. **Anton (Russian)**: Described as sentimental and reflective. **Chie (Japanese)** is portrayed as methodical and wise. **Shaun (American)** Leans on his faith and sees the universe as a testament to design. **Pietro (Italian)** Considered the mind of the spacecraft. **Nell (British)** works for commitments. **Roman (Russian)** The commander, described as dextrous and capable.

The profound weirdness of experience makes Harvey's imaginative act all the more impressive. The account certainly doesn't lack verisimilitude. But the parts of the novel that stuck with me most were not the disorientating lack of gravity but the moments of reflection about what could be seen of the Earth spinning below. "Orbital" employs a unique narrative structure that intertwines factual exposition with character-driven storytelling. By using a first-person perspective, the novel places readers in the body of astronauts, scientists, and engineers, offering an intimate glimpse into the psychological and physical realities of space travel. The book's stylistic choices, including detailed descriptions and introspective monologues, enhance the reader's immersion in the subject matter.

"We matter greatly and not at all. To reach some pinnacle of human achievement only to discover that your achievements are next to nothing and that to understand this is the greatest achievement of any life, which itself is nothing, and also much more than everything. Some metal separates us from the void; death is so close. Life is everywhere, everywhere.sm"

One of the key strengths of "Orbital" is its ability to present scientifically accurate information within a compelling narrative. Isolation in space, the fragility of human existence, bonds they form with each other and emotions for Earth. Real scientific phenomena, such as microgravity effects on the human body and the physics of orbital mechanics, are seamlessly integrated into the storytelling, making complex concepts accessible to a general audience. It beautifully presents the earth from space. It is so beautiful, that globe.

"Because who can look at man's neurotic assault on the planet and find it beautiful? Man's hubris. A hubris so almighty it's matched only by his stupidity."

Over the sixteen orbits tracked by the novel, dazzling descriptions of the planet rhythmically recur. There is Africa, "chiming with light" that is almost audible. Gran Canaria's gorges pile the island up "like a sandcastle hastily built". There is the "soft brushed nickel" of the Mediterranean; Uzbekistan, an "expanse of ochre and brown"; the "clean and brilliant Indian Ocean of blues untold", Man-made border of light is visible on Earth: a long trail of lights between Pakistan and India – and even that disappears in the daytime. The light which strikes and stabs, sparkles and shimmers is able to make boundaries otherwise there is "no wall or barrier: no tribes, no war or corruption or

particular cause for fear"; instead "a rolling indivisible globe which knows no possibility of separation".

"The earth, from here, is like heaven. It flows with colour. A burst of hopeful colour. When we're on that planet we look up and think heaven is elsewhere, but here is what the astronauts and cosmonauts sometimes think: maybe all of us born to it have already died and are in an afterlife. If we must go to an improbable, hard-to-believe-in place when we die, that glassy, distant orb with its beautiful lonely light shows could well be it."

This is the Earth as experienced in the universe. The Earth majesty coexisting with, and increasingly shaped by, its temporarily dominant species. Individually as a human we are powerless in the face of nature. Collectively as a team we've utterly transformed every part of it in a plethora of deeply unknowable ways.

Creative non-fiction novel "Orbital" plays an essential role in bridging the gap between scientific understanding and public engagement. By employing a narrative approach, the book makes space exploration more relatable and emotionally resonant. Its reception among readers and critics highlights the growing appreciation for works that combine factual rigor with compelling storytelling, fostering greater interest in space sciences.

It exemplifies the power of creative non-fiction in transforming educational content into an engaging literary experience. By maintaining scientific authenticity while exploring human emotions and challenges, the novel serves as a model for how literature can contribute to scientific literacy and appreciation. As the genre "Orbital" will remain inspiring curiosity and understanding about the universe we inhabit.

However, some readers may find the novel's lack of a conventional plot challenging. "Orbital" prioritizes introspection and philosophical inquiry over traditional narrative structure, which may not appeal to those seeking a plot-driven story. Nonetheless, for readers open to a meditative and poetic exploration of existence, the novel offers a rewarding experience.

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