



# WHITE NOISE

English Department Magazine

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Kamala Nehru College, University of Delhi

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## Editorial

As a writer, I find nothing more daunting than the phrase “write anything”. What on earth is “anything”? Who decides if my “anything” is good enough? How am *I* supposed to decide what to write? Previous editions of *White Noise* have offered writers particular themes to keep them from this kind of floundering. This year, however, the Editorial Team has decided to throw the magazine open to just about “anything”. Not because we are sadists who deliberately want to make other people’s lives difficult – neither is it because we are sluggards who couldn’t be bothered to think of a theme. It is because “anything” is a wonderfully ambiguous place which gives one’s consciousness space to explore. There are no crutches to prevent one from stumbling or wandering, and that’s where the beauty of the endeavour lies. There is no such thing as a “mistake” because there were no rules (apart from those of grammar) to begin with. So really, if I were to delineate a theme for this edition of *White Noise*, it would be self-expression: be it through poetry, prose or research. And nothing better sums up the purpose of a student magazine than this. It is a platform for all of our voices (no matter how measly we consider them) to be brought to the fore. It is a space for dialogue, an instrument for building our confidence. What better validation can there be than seeing one’s own words in glossy print, all enveloped in an air of importance? To be taken seriously not only by peers but even professors?

In spite of the brilliant pieces we received, the response to the experiment was not as overwhelming as we had originally hoped. Dear reader, as I invite you to tumble down our rabbit hole of “anything”, I do so with hopes that you will make the journey again. Only this time, you will be armed with a pen and paper instead of a magazine.

*Sandhra Sur*

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## Nature's Soot-ing Reply

As we are stepping in a hyper-modern and technologically advanced world, we are also stepping in a world where a breath of fresh air is as rarely available as a trip to the Moon. One might see this as a hyperbole but Raj would beg to differ. "For an asthma patient, the world, the atmosphere and environment, is different from the others", he says casually having accepted his fate with the respiratory disorder that he has been struggling with for the past twelve years. "We identify places by the amount of air that enters our lungs" he manages to crack a dry joke between sharp breaths. Saying that the increase in the particulate matter has made lives difficult for asthma patients would be an understatement. Seeing Raj struggle for breath like a toddler struggles to walk, one can see the devastating effects of the polluted air. When we were younger we, quite religiously, mugged up in science that air is a mixture of Nitrogen, Oxygen, Carbon Dioxide, Water Vapour and few other gases. It would be fit to say that *that* one lecture on air seems quite redundant now. Air as we knew it, exists no more. "My job requires me to move from place to place. I have been shunting like this for the past ten years now and I have seen quite a difference in the air we breathe in these ten years itself." Raj says, taking a puff from his inhaler. "It's not just Delhi; the air quality has gone down terribly everywhere. I take frequent trips to New York and London. They are nearly as bad as Delhi. They have been infamous for their soot blanket even earlier; however, the situation has worsened now." Delhi, neck-and-neck with Beijing in the game of "where the air turns visibly black first", has been under quite a lot of scrutiny when it comes to air pollution, these days. The citizens of Delhi are doing everything, from buying masks to buying new cars with odd-even numbers, to trying to combat the situation. However, should this awareness and pro-activity be limited to Delhi and few other cities of the world? One might want to pose this question to every person, as a citizen of the Earth and not their own countries only. "Even a place like Leh which has been untouched all these years is taking a blow now. It just takes one trip by Aamir Khan to make a place magnetic for humanity, and humanity is all it takes to destroy the purity. If it wasn't already difficult to breathe there due to high altitude, it has been made worse now. I pack half my suitcase with inhalers and medicines if I am forced to make a trip there." Raj says light-heartedly. As human species evolve, we make nature 'evolve' with us. "Nature is not fond of being meddled with. Even though, I am facing harder consequences being an asthma patient, I feel it's only fitting that I reap what I sowed. This situation that we are in right now, I call it 'nature's soot-ing reply' to us for all the meddling." Raj chuckles at his own pun; however, makes a strong point. 'This situation' that Raj says we are in is indeed a sad one. The increase in respiratory disorders, children as young as a four-year-old facing the wrath of bronchitis and asthma, and many other such issues are coming into light every day. Nature has been here and will be here even in future. However, at this pace of destruction, would we?

**Manjistha Datta**  
*BA Programme 2<sup>nd</sup> Year*

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## Just Another Villanelle

Hoping to return to that forgotten place,  
Before everything turned downhill  
Reminding, what I cannot replace.  
Heartbreaking memories and fleeting trace,  
If only I can make the time stand still  
Hoping to return to that forgotten place.  
The woman I love but can never face,  
Those flames hurt but words did kill  
Reminding, what I cannot replace.  
In the photographs, it is you I embrace,  
Those unfinished hopes my dreams fulfill  
Hoping to return to that forgotten place.  
Dear, forever keep me in your grace,  
Here, autumn falls on my windowsill  
Reminding, what I cannot replace.  
So much to recall, repent, retrace,  
If I can turn it all back, I will  
Returning to that forgotten place  
Cherishing, what I cannot replace.

**Ayushi Sinha**

*BA Honours English 2<sup>nd</sup> Year*

## My Dad

My Dad  
If I had you,  
I would not cry  
If I had you,  
There were no reasons to lie  
If I had you,  
These times could happily fly  
If I had you,  
Give life another chance, at least I could try.  
If you were here,  
I had someone to care.  
If you were here,  
How I am treated, no one could dare  
If you were here,  
I would be care-free I guess  
Now that I don't have you  
I fear  
Every hurting word  
A tear  
Wish you were here  
I would not beg  
Relations with conditions  
I would never regret

You were my support, my lifeline  
You would laugh and make my world shine  
In your embrace, I grew to touch the sky  
Watching you smile I wish I could die  
World seemed so small but I was so glad  
That was a time when I had my dad.  
Now the world is so big but you are not around  
To watch your li'l girl wearing a frown.  
I twist and turn my heart to mend  
Wish you could come back and this misery  
would end.  
I stumble I fall and I hear people say  
"Look at her" and they block my way  
They curse and laugh with evil in their eyes  
With pain in my heart I look up in the sky  
I then remember when times were bad,  
You were always there to hold my hand  
Joys were small but I was so glad  
Once upon a time when I had my dad.  
When rumours spread like fire  
And the world stands against me  
I'll still rise for I know from somewhere far  
above you would see  
Your daughter standing tall maybe with  
bruised knees  
You'll be a proud father then and for a moment  
our worlds will freeze  
With faith in my heart for a great winner I  
shall be  
God will give me a chance and reward me with  
your glance  
I will cling to you, kiss your head and our  
hearts will bleed  
With a sight so blissful there's nothing I wish I  
had  
I know time will be short but I will be glad  
That will be the time when I'll have my dad.  
"Thank you god" with gratitude I will say  
For giving me a chance to see my father today  
I am back in reality and the world is staged  
Where I fight for right and never let my heart  
be caged  
Time has passed only memories remain  
I learnt to cherish life and never let any  
moment go vain.  
Meeting was brief but I was so glad  
Once again when I had my dad.

**Surabhi Yadav**

*MA English (Final)*

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## Abuse – An Exclamation Mark!

I remember a time, not too long ago, Exclamation marks (!) were used to exclaim. Emotions were expressed through heartfelt intonations, and vocabulary carved a picture for deep thoughts. It was not too long ago (trust me, I am young enough to say so!) before all of this was reduced to one word: ‘f\*\*k’.

I marvel at this word, though it literally gives no scope for marvelling at. I marvel nonetheless at how multi-faceted it is in its being, how versatile. It is like that old pair of worn off shoes that are there for you in every season, the ones with half torn sole and numerous holes. You can make them shine bright, but do they help? Do they save you from frostbite in winters or the puddles in the monsoon? *That* is a different question altogether. At least they are there for you to maintain your morale. One who doesn’t look close enough won’t even see the holes in them. You remain perceivably ‘competent’ with minimum effort that’s the general idea.

Sometimes, though I wonder if my awe is misplaced. Maybe it is just the ‘poor’ who have the exceedingly ordinary, extraordinary capability to stretch the shoes more than their stretch-ability. Taking a step away from my sarcastic analogy, one can sure do view them as ‘mediocre’ and the brilliantly multifaceted abuses a sign of ‘mediocrity’ that the world has settled for.

Maybe we misinterpreted Robin Williams. He asked us to forego our laziness and *stop* using the word ‘very’, in *The Dead Poets Society*. He never asked us to use a substitute word for it. Yet here we are...

‘F\*\*k it’ when you are unable to do something.

‘F\*\*k off’ when you can’t stand a person.

‘F\*\*k man (or dude)’ when you are disappointed.

‘Oh f\*\*k’ when you make a mistake.

Two words.

That’s it. Our emotions can narrow down to two words. It is a rather amusingly easy way of life. Use ‘f\*\*k’ in a permutation and combination of ‘oh’, ‘man’, ‘it’, or any other of the many syllabically impoverished words. A genius plan I must say - ingeniously unintelligible, genius nevertheless.

‘F\*\*king \_\_\_\_\_’ when you have to put an emphasis.

‘As f\*\*k’ when you want to use some simile.

It is convenient to a fault how this word is an all-rounder in adjectives too. Even though logically it might cause confusion when one says – ‘you are f\*\*king gorgeous’ as to whether they imply that you are breathtakingly, unimaginably beautiful, or that you have a sexual relationship with someone they find gorgeous. However, logic is certainly not what we believe in applying these days, or else, any sane person would have taken offence on being called “loyal as f\*\*k” because ‘f\*\*k’ *literally* has no loyal standing.

Saying that language has lost its charm would be a gross understatement. It has, in fact, even become dependent on abuses for ‘appropriate’ reflection of thought, and there is no one to reflect on this disappointing aspect. ‘Language is simply made to put a point across’ is the wieldy reason people give for putting grammar and vocabulary in the backseat, conveniently forgetting that there is a huge difference between putting a point across and putting a point across *effectively*. Having said that, I would not waste time emphasising the charisma of the brilliantly spoken and written word. Many people, much more proficient than me have already done that. I do not expect everyone to share my

love for language. However, it baffles me to see that the decrease in vocabulary is now directly proportional to the increase in swear words. Abuses that were made to offend are used as a punctuation mark in every sentence these days. It is a miracle to hear a person speak and not add one of these punctuations ever so lightly. 'Freedom of Speech' they say, I say it is 'Free-dumb of Speech'. I agree that it is irrational to expect the use of flowery language, however, is it irrational to save abuses for the sake of abusing only? Or, are we too dependent on something as vulgar and distasteful as the swear words? Are we being the advocate of free speech or the advocate for the uncouth? I will leave that analysis to you...

**Manjistha Datta**

*BA Programme 2<sup>nd</sup> Year*

## Muse

The shroud of winter engulfs  
The lazy sun of these languid days,  
The silent roads where voices get lost  
Between the thick fog that hangs in the air,  
Like a lazy child on a school morning.  
I puffed up some air, curled my toes inside my  
boots  
As I walked the stretch.  
Breathing in the dank smell of  
Mother's vintage shawl.  
The musky smell of wood smoke  
Burning at a distance, fused  
With the crisp cold air.  
The tip of my nose is probably red, I thought.  
My fingers felt like icicles as they held  
The half-lit cigarette.  
Mindlessly, I strolled until I reached  
Someone's wood fire like a guest.  
Without a word, the crowd of five shifted to  
Accommodate my silent intrusion.  
My hesitance faded away as my skin  
Soaked the tingling warmth. I felt I fitted in  
When the whispering hisses  
Of the withered stumps befriended my ears.  
Glad I didn't listen when they said, "Stay in!"  
This is my muse—*wandering*.  
"What's a vacation for?" I laughed and left.

**Aisha Wahab**

*BA Honours English 2<sup>nd</sup> Year*

## Plagued by Future

There is one thing certain about the future:  
It's uncertainty.

We time travel in our thoughts,  
Weighing our success on the scale of doubt,  
Living in the moment is something we flout.

Nobody knows what future holds  
Which is why we are obsessed with it all the  
more.

Predicting Horoscopes, reading tarot cards,  
Encashing on our anxiety are these feigning  
bards.

Willingly we pay  
To know what might happen next May.

Complicit in our own duping.  
Is this the level to which 'supposedly' the  
most superior creature on earth's stooping?

Consumerism has turned the 'future' into a  
potential market,  
And the one's possessing cultural capital are  
its target.

Still there is only one thing certain about the  
future:  
It's uncertainty.

**Aishwarya Gosain**

*MA English (Final Year)*

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## Skins

It's brown. No, it is coloured  
I see it and scream 'discolour'  
They call it savage, they find it primitive  
I say it is brutally limitive

They call it white, they call it fair  
It is beautiful. No, it is just an affair  
Of the tight corsets and the watchful mannerisms  
Of self-styled identities and English delirium

If it is red, it is native  
If it is black, it is a terrorist.  
But what about vermillion, yellow, pink and maroon  
What is worshipped, what is doomed?

Sometimes ugly, sometimes pretty  
It is never the same, it is all so witty  
But who decides, who is the judge  
Of what is blessed and what is drudge?

**Anjali Singh**  
*BA Honours English 2<sup>nd</sup> Year*

## Litost

We poets  
Are slowly dying  
Due to someone else's innate indifference.

They sleep soundly while you starve,  
They disconnect your hopes with the touch of a button.  
I am sure you must've tried so hard to put up with such parasites,  
Who crawl under your skin in places you had guarded, for so long,  
And there they thrive till you are left with nothing.  
Your body is a half-conquered city beyond recognition;  
Your soul is a nameless luggage tossed in crowded airports.

There is no catharsis.  
Your throat gets grabbed by memories which drown you every night,  
And burn you every time you visit that lane where you first  
Met, or kissed, or cried, or simply walked side by side.

You cannot stand listening to Steven Wilson anymore;  
It's beauty marred with the ugliness of your own becoming.  
It's a curse, an excess, a terrible hara-kiri  
To love another,  
At the expense of your own haunted soul.

**Debopriyaa Dutta**  
*MA English (Final)*



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## Charade

The mountains close in upon me  
As I drip with an unspeakable sense  
Of unease.  
Our valley of camellias have turned into wilted remains  
Of an endless void.  
You choose to trample on them till they bleed to oblivion,  
Willfully.  
You chase shifting forms in vain;  
You settle for  
Flickering gaslights,  
Which illuminate the wires in your head:  
I cannot connect to them any longer.  
The art is forgotten  
Somewhere between trusting and questioning,  
Between convenient conversations and  
Truthful confessions.  
But now the swallows have left the nest, never to return.  
Do not subject me to the fate of echoes,  
I ricochet.  
The impact shattering our set dimensions  
Which we had built, so carefully,  
In a phoney, careless trance.  
All these locked towers around you are aching to be  
smashed open.  
I claw at them aimlessly,  
Missing the mark every now & then.  
You, an impregnable fortress  
Welcome the world's flattering treachery with open arms:  
  
I can still see faces in the wind.

**Debopriyaa Dutta**  
*MA English (Final)*

## Invincible

Night shrouds are the thickest at 2:30  
Impregnable  
Descending like carefully thought out  
bouts of madness  
  
I guess it's a sin  
To be so oblivious to your wonders  
And so sensitive to your flaws,  
Dying and undying endlessly, each day.  
  
I laugh  
At the untranslatable dilemma  
Of making you realise what weapons  
you wield.  
Achilles would battle Troy 9 times over  
To be like you; just like you  
  
I turn away to string together your  
carelessly strewn spoils,  
Your unknown treasures,  
Your mounting directionlessness,  
Which robs me of my sleep.  
  
Thou art invincible  
Like poor poets on a humid July  
afternoon  
Who slave at jobs they never wanted  
and weep over once used antique  
typewriters.  
Rise up with a jolt in the midst of chaos  
And  
Create such artistic havoc  
That it smears you with colours you can  
never wash off.  
You're a felt tip marker etched beneath  
dusty windows  
To form endless odes of beauty, forever  
lost,  
Drowned in oblivion.  
Bereft of duplicity  
But like a timeless obelisk, they will all  
stare at you many light years after:  
star-struck.

**Debopriyaa Dutta**  
*MA English (Final)*

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# Stains

**Abeen Bilal Shayiq**

*BA Honours English 3<sup>rd</sup> Year*

And there was blood on the road....*blood!*

*"Wash it away," they shouted.*

*"Bring more water," they demanded.*

Baba has come after three long months. With my favourite Swiss chocolates and the books that will adorn my personal library. It's been a while since he and I have had our usual evening tea together. And also, I have to show him my latest write-ups. But I have seen the blood on the street....*blood!*

*Red.*

*Shining.*

*Spreading.*

Maa is preparing the most delicious cuisines ever - chicken and kebabs. Baba and I love her cooking, but shhh...we can't tell her that. We usually gang up on her and criticise her dishes with suppressed grins, winking to each other. Despite knowing our true intentions, she still gets all worked up and it's so much fun to see her that way.

Yes, that is my crazy eccentric family. Just the way I like it. But the roads were filled with blood...*blood! Innocent. Faultless.*

The house is crowded with guests. Relatives and friends and neighbours. They come in all shapes and sizes, bringing their own levels of craziness to our already eccentric family. It's just an excuse to get together and to sit and talk and discuss and explain and analyse. So many conversations going on simultaneously.

But I have seen the blood... *Blood! Haunting.*

*Unforgettable.*

The noise crosses all acceptable decibels, but it is not a bad noise. It's a good noise. A warm noise. The kind that does not hurt your ears but fills your heart with warmth: the safe warmth of belonging to a family. Personally, I don't do much talking. . I like to spend my time in scrutinising their expressions and marvelling at how they change, as they jump from discussing politics to family matters to something 'secretive'.

But, nothing feels normal today. There is no sweetness in the chocolates, no mystery in the books, no bickering around the table, no warm noise to fill up the hole in my heart. My trivial treasures, my parents, my family and my friends, everything around me feels distant – disconnected somehow. Because I saw it.

It was merely a picture .

But it was there.

Stark.

Bold.

Scarlet.

A photograph.

A photograph of locals washing a road, stained red with blood.

This image of just a few pixels crashed through my safe existence and brought me face to face with the reality. The reality of my people. The reality of violence and murder and war and death and...blood. All around me. All around us.

We try to detach ourselves from the horrifying truth that is surrounding us. We feel that everything going around is far away from our own lives. "Ohh well, okay... violence happens, but I haven't encountered it".

I myself have just been on the hearing side of the stories and incidents that take place, here, in my city, but have still felt so far off. Not related to *my* life!

We distance ourselves from the pain and suffering, and the depressing existence.

Now when I see my family members, I realise that it is not that they don't know about the condition of the state. They do. They discuss it. They share their own bits of experience or information. They invoke pity and sympathy. They do all this.

However, by the end of the day, they have mastered the art of moving on and living their daily lives, running away from the siege that continues. All the discussions that I hear, usually conclude with " but what can be done?", and then, silence. Pause. Slow breathing and a change of topic to some lighter event. Could I take it?

After all...*blood leaves stains.*



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# Research Papers

## Querying Reality: Metafiction and Authorship in Cornelia Funke's *Inkworld Trilogy*

Sandhra Sur

BA Honours English 2<sup>nd</sup> Year

“Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean it is not real?”

- J.K. Rowling

### Introductory Overview

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “fantasy” refers to the “faculty or activity of imagining impossible or improbable things.” In general parlance, fantasy fiction is understood to be a genre that gives primacy to magical and supernatural elements in its plot and/or setting. The word “fantasy” itself, however, is open to a much broader meaning encompassing all that is far removed from what is considered “real” and “normal.” The genre of fantasy fiction can hence be imagined as a gargantuan space including anything from ancient myths and epics to contemporary dystopic imaginations.

In both definitions, the “real” appears to be diametrically opposed to the “fantastic.” The quote by J.K. Rowling used in the epigraph queries the apparent dichotomy between the real and fantastic. Cornelia Funke, too, in her *Inkworld Trilogy* questions this distinction. Her story is about making stories come physically alive; in the narrative, the Inkworld created by the author Fenoglio comes to life when the book *Inkheart* (which is also the name of the first book in the series) is read aloud. The main characters, Meggie and her father Mo, constantly shift between the fantastic and the real finally choosing to settle in the Inkworld. Funke, using metafiction, blurs the borders between fantasy and reality – the constructed nature of both is starkly represented in the ‘Epilogue’ when Meggie’s brother, who is born in the Inkworld, regards what the reader would consider the “real world” as a fantasy he wishes to explore. Is fantasy, then, to be regarded as an escape from reality? If so one must question why there needs to be an escape: what is the nature of reality one is escaping from and how far removed is the fantasy from verifiable reality. Fantasies are often built from reality hence enabling a critique of society. Does the value of fantasy only lie in its function of understanding and commenting on the real? If so, is not any piece of fiction writing a product of its socio-political and economic context? Why, then, should fantasy in particular be studied?

This essay seeks to answer the questions posed above. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part comprises of a close reading of the *Inkworld Trilogy* along with writings on authorship and reader-response by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. The second part investigates the definition and scope of the genre of fantasy fiction, primarily through writings of Rosemary Jackson and Erik S. Rabkin. By portraying both reality and fantasy as a construct through the usage of metafiction and intertextuality – which in turn raise questions about authorship and reader response – Funke demonstrates the constructed nature of order and the inherent sense of disorder both in the real and fantastic worlds. Could it, hence, be argued that fantasy should be studied because rather than organising the real world to fit a certain ordered ideal, it enables coming to terms with the anxious and uncertain nature of reality by transgressing the norms that define it?

### Authorship and Questioning of “Reality”

Funke uses metafiction and intertextuality to facilitate enquiry into authorship and reader-response in order to question the distinction between fantasy and reality. According to Patricia Waugh, metafiction is “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (qtd. Bhadury 301).

The series employs metafiction both in terms of reader and writer awareness. The story is full of bookworms. The protagonist, Meggie is an avid reader – a trait which she inherits from her father Mo. Even her aunt, Elinor, fondly refers to her books as “my inky children” (Funke *Inkheart* 41). Meggie notes a marked difference in her aunt’s and her own readership patterns: “There were no haphazard piles lying around as they did at home. Every book obviously had its place” (Funke *Inkheart* 33). By describing different reading habits, the author breaks the metaphorical fourth wall between the reader and the characters, making the reader associate closely with the characters by forming a bond on the basis of love for books. This bond formulated through this rhetorical technique makes it easier for the reader to suspend her disbelief while reading what is astonishing and accept the “ground rules” (Rabkin 15) of the fictional space created. It is through reading aloud that the fantastic comes to life physically in *Inkheart*, just as reading a book makes it come to life in the reader’s imagination. However, as Orpheus states in *Inkspell*, the second book of the series, “the reader has to stay behind, that’s the iron rule. I’ve tried every way I could to read myself into a book, but it just won’t work” (Funke 6). Soon after the proclamation is made, Meggie is able to transport herself and Farid into the Inkworld. This is possible because she does not read herself into the text – she writes herself into it.

In letting Meggie write herself into the Inkworld, Funke uses metafiction at the level of writer’s awareness and also alludes to the concepts of reader-ly and writer-ly texts. The difference between the two, as described by Roland Barthes, lies not in the text itself but in the way one approaches it: “the writerly text is not a thing” (5). While the reader-ly text renders the reader a mere consumer of the text, the writerly text makes her a co-producer (Barthes 4). The writerly text is “asserting the very existence of plurality” (6). Through this assertion of plurality, the Inkworld is described as a dynamic space where the authority of authorship lies not only with the writer but with the reader as well, provided she takes the initiative to influence the narrative and approaches the text from a writerly angle. Therefore, the “text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one” (Barthes 5). The passage into the Inkworld created by the author is treated as an option which does not outweigh any other point of the entrance the reader may choose to create. Meggie and Farid enter the meta-narrative of the Inkworld *in media res*, and it is regarded as a legitimate place for the plot of *Inkspell* to begin to unfold. By allowing Meggie to influence the writerly narrative of Inkworld, Funke raises questions about the concept of authorship.

Michel Foucault defines the author as constituting “the privileged moment of individualisation in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences” (205). There is a constant awareness of other texts in existence and the Inkworld is replete with intertextual elements alluding to the fact that every text is preceded by a literary context and tradition. Farid, Dustfinger’s protégé fire-eater-in-training, hails from the *Arabian Nights*. Dustfinger describes him as someone who “switches from story to story like a snake changing its skin” (Funke *Inkspell* 7). The world also includes characters from Fenoglio’s other unpublished works, such as Doria and Bluejay. Meggie, in *Inkheart*, has a “Treasure Chest” in which she carries books during journeys. She chooses Roald Dahl’s *The Witches* and Homer’s *Odyssey* (Funke 17) as her travelling companions for her excursion to Aunt Elinor’s mansion. At the beginning of each chapter, there is an epigraph making intertextual connections and making the reader constantly aware of the status of the novel as something constructed and the author as someone preceded by a long tradition of literature and influence. According to Poushali Bhadury, the “ever-present intertextual ‘library lists’ (Nelson 228) are essentially prescriptive” (303).

At this point, one must deviate from the subject of authorship in order to call attention to certain questions that Bhadury’s reading of the text yields. Unlike the author of this essay, Bhadury categorises Meggie choosing to write herself into the Inkworld as an example of “bad readership” where the protagonist “provides an example of the child reader so seduced by words that she foregoes

all her other ties and obligations—clearly an example to be avoided” (304). The fact that the characters choose to remain in the Inkworld at the end of the series, then, highlights the sheer strength of the enticing capabilities of fictional spaces. This reading is, of course, based on the premise that fantasy and reality are two separate categories which the remainder of the essay will serve to disprove. Even so, it is necessary to raise the broader question of whether series as a whole carries an educative tenor and whether all writing for children must contain at least a semblance of didacticism. If one understands children’s fantasy lying at the intersection between children and adult fiction, towards whom are issues of authorship and reader-response directed? The child reader? The adult reading aloud the book to the child? Does the fact that the novel is most likely read during leisure hours for pleasure hinder its academic value? While these concerns are beyond the scope of this paper, they are worth pondering over.

Barthes, in his essay “Death of the Author” famously concludes, “the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author” (6). Both Mo and Meggie are given the power to influence the narrative, making them the co-authors of the text. The metafictional *Inkheart* is rendered a writerly text, made so by the (metaphorical) death of the author. As the Inkworld spins out of authorial control resulting in the death of many characters in *Inkspell*, Fenoglio (the author of *Inkheart*) exclaims “‘I’m not its author anymore. No, the author is Death” (Funke 492). There is a clear play on the title of Barthes’s essay. The essay states, “contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author” (Barthes “Death of the Author” 2). The despair expressed by Fenoglio may be read as being caused by the subversion of authorial authority. It is also an outcry triggered by the lack of order in the realm.

### **Theoretical Debates on Fantasy**

Rabkin describes the fantastic as having “internal ground rules” (5) that form a sense of order. According to him, “the fantastic is reality turned precisely 180° around, but this is reality nonetheless, a fantastic narrative reality that speaks the truth of the human heart” (28). Two things emerge out of Rabkin’s theorisation: a desire for order and the notion of universalism. If one assumes that reality consists of chaos and disaster, a 180° “diametrical reconfiguration” (Rabkin 8) would construct an ordered universe to provide “psychological consolation” (Rabkin 73) through escape. Therefore, to Rabkin, “(t)he universe around us is chaos; art is ordered. To that extent, all art is fantastic” (33).

The fantastic Inkworld, though, is not an ordered place – there is a pattern of setting down ground rules to create a sense of order followed by an almost immediate breakdown of the same. Orpheus says the “iron rule” (Funke *Inkspell* 6) is that readers cannot enter the world of the book, and almost immediately after the statement, Meggie breaks the rule by writing herself into the narrative. Fenoglio declares that those who die cannot come back to life, but Dustfinger ends up coming back to life not once, but twice. Fenoglio fails when he tries to impose a systematised structure upon Inkworld by bringing to life Cosimo the Fair to defeat the evil Adderhead, reflecting both the loss of authorial control as well an inherent sense of chaos in the setting. The fantastic world, thus, “creates ‘alterity’, this world re-placed and dis-located” rather than an “alternative order” (Jackson 19).

The questioning of whether fantasy fiction should have a place in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom is indicative of the marginal status of the genre in academia – one doesn’t, for instance, have seminars on whether Shakespeare or Milton should be included in the syllabus. According to Rosemary Jackson, “the dismissal of the fantastic to the margins of literary culture is in itself an ideologically significant gesture, one which is not dissimilar to culture’s silencing of unreason” (173). She further states that creation of fantastic words is “legalised” when it is based on religion or science as it is used to “fill up a certain lack, making up for an apprehension of actuality as disordered and insufficient” (173). From this, one can conclude that writing is a means of organising the world to make it comprehensible to human imagination, re-evoking Rabkin’s idea of all fiction fulfilling the fantasy of order.

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The genre of fantastic fiction (as characterised by Jackson), therefore, holds subversive potential in its deconstruction of order, as seen in the *Inkworld Trilogy*.

The *Inkworld Trilogy* does not provide “psychological consolation” (Rabkin 73) through escape but links fantasy and reality through an inherent sense of chaos and the anxiety related to this chaos. This correlation between fantasy and reality is most starkly apparent in the ‘Epilogue’ of *Inkdeath* the final book in the trilogy. Meggie’s brother, born in the Inkworld, is fascinated by tales from the “real” world and wants to travel to that world because “it must be exciting in that world, much more exciting than in his own” (Funke 572). There is an inversion of the gaze of “reality” with the descriptions of aeroplanes as “flying coaches” (Funke 571) and the association of disbelief with them. The “real” and “fantastic” are hence rendered to be a matter of perspective. When Funke points to the constructed nature of the fantasy and reality, she also speaks of the constructed nature of order and the inherent sense of disorder in the real world. As summed up by C.S Lewis,

The distinction between the natural and supernatural, in fact, broken down; and when it had done so, one realised how great a comfort it had been – how it had eased the burden of intolerable strangeness which the universe imposes on us. (qtd. Jackson 26)

Rather than organising the real world to fit a certain ideal, fantasy enables coming to terms with the anxious and uncertain nature of the reality by transgressing the norms that define it.

### **Conclusive Comments**

Cornelia Funke’s *Inkworld Trilogy* serves as an exemplar for why fantasy fiction ought to be studied. Through its usage of metafiction and intertextuality, it serves to question the distinction between fantasy and reality. While realism creates the effect of reality – serving the purpose of organising the real to make it comprehensible – fantasy fiction is embedded with the inherent chaos of reality. Fantasy fiction holds the potential of enabling readers and writers to understand the anxious and uncertain nature of reality. However, this potential is often not realised because the genre is read lightly. This makes it imperative that fantasy fiction is studied in the twenty-first-century classroom. Education institutes hold great significance in terms of canon formation; therefore, the incorporation of fantasy fiction into the syllabus would greatly aid the realisation and expansion of the genre’s potential.

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# Impact of Social Media and Technology on the Performance of Employees at Workplace

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Since the introduction of internet services and social media in the 1950s, there has been an increased dependence on social media in all fields of work. There is an increased reliance of users on social media “for their entertainment, for their web searches, for their news or simply for spending their time” (qtd. in Leftheriotis and Giannakos 1). As Borders states, social media began with the discovery of telephone network and “phone phreaking”, or uncovering new ways of using the telephone system, and achieved impetus in the 1950s (2). Presently, it is being used for both internal communication, i.e. between colleagues within an institution and external communication, i.e. between different levels in the same organisation or between different organisations. Continuous presence in the cyber social space has led to the fear of “presenteeism”, or the fear of a decline in the performance of employees in the workplace, due to the divided attention span between job work and social networking (Moqbel, Nevo and Kock 240). Recent trends suggest that social media has become a major source of distraction for employees from organisational work, thus lowering their productivity and job performance, and increasing the risk of mental and physical health issues among workers in the future.

Among other problematic sources of distraction, the internet has been a major source of distraction for workers, preventing them from providing full attention to the work in their offices. Understanding the gravity of the situation, Carr observes, “the net is designed to be an interruption system, a machine geared to dividing attention” (3). Websites offering online video streaming such as YouTube, chatting and video calling such as WhatsApp and Facebook, and holiday planning such as Trivago, have encouraged employees to spend a fairly good amount of their time participating in activities unrelated to their job requirements. *Psychology Today* reports that in the U.S. workers spend more than one and a half hours on the internet, aside from the work assigned to them (qtd. in Bukszpan 5). This is because employees are provided with free Wi-Fi facilities in their work settings and often follow the policy of BYOD (or Bring Your Own Device), under which they have to bring their own personal devices to their workplaces, giving them the benefit of a constant presence in the cyber-social world. According to Miller, “Employees may be more likely to use the devices for personal items during the workday” (11) such as browsing the Internet or engaging in conversations over social media, thus leading to divided attention.

Devices such as Smartphones are one of the major causes of distraction in workplaces. Loaded with multiple interactive features, Smartphones act as one of the prime catalysts in hindering employees from achieving their work targets. Inappropriate behaviour, stressful influence from issues other than work, decreased productivity and less awareness of the reality are some negative impacts of Smartphones over workers (Pitichat). A multiplicity of interactive social media applications for instant texting and video callings, such as WeChat and WhatsApp, and applications providing information from all over the globe, such as Bing, have become an indispensable part of our lives, and have acted as addictive sources of distraction. They invite distractions in all workplaces, such as offices, schools, hospitals “and classrooms, as they provide individuals with access to texting, games, social media and the Internet” (Beland and Murphy 1). Smartphones affect the efficiency of work in health-care work settings. As stated by Preetinder S. Gill *et al*, smartphones could be threats to one’s personal space and security, and could also lead to diverted attention in health care organisations (2).

Excessive use of social media in workplaces might also lead to social disconnections, within and outside the work-settings. Drago observes, “Technology has a negative effect on both



the quality and quantity of face-to-face communication”. Highlighting the same problem, Green and Clark argue, “Online communication tends to lack much of the sensory information we use to understand our communication” (155-156). Sensory information refers to the information we send and receive through our sensory organs – ears, eyes, nose, tongue and skin. Communication through social media needs to be precise and clear, since there is no place for clues or hints through facial expressions or body gestures and movements, because of which many hesitate to communicate their ideas upfront and find themselves disadvantaged by this shortcoming.

Social media also facilitates and enhances the efficiency of work in such workplaces. It may lead to extraction of greater productivity from the workforce and stronger connections with those both within and outside the organisation. Social networking sites establish a work-life balance, leading to employees being more committed to their organisation, resulting in job satisfaction and increased performance of the employees (Moqbel, Nevo and Kock 242). Social networking sites, such as Facebook, are often seen as major sources of distraction, but they might also be instrumental in building and strengthening business relationships. They might also help in maintaining the work-life balance. As pointed out by Moqbel, Nevo and Kock, employees “can be socially connected with family, friends, and other coworkers in the workplace, leading to a better work-life balance” (241).

The use of social media through Smartphones in the workplace may also lead to positive outcomes, in addition to negative consequences. Through extensive research, Pitichat finds that Smartphones encourage sharing of information, connections with friends and superiors and self-governance, resulting in greater efficiency at work and job satisfaction (4). Applications such as WhatsApp help in an instant and continuous contact, in addition to being increasingly helpful in sharing urgent pieces of information, such as last minute presentations or change in the daily schedule. Moreover, Smartphones are contributing to the welfare of the public, for example, in health-care settings, professionals have access to a variety of applications dealing with medical concerns, such as the application “PalliApp”, containing information provided by eight cancer networks regarding their guidelines (Nwosu and Mason abstract).

Social media often strengthens workplace interactions and social connections. It helps accomplish goals and profitable ties through better connections over both internal and external communications. According to Westwood, social media encourages knowledge sharing and exchange of feedback and opinions on topics of similar interests, over a global working population (4). Social media aids in the maintenance and stability of personal as well as public relationships of a professional working in an office-setting by providing easy and instant communication channels such as social networking websites. In their research, Yuan, Zhao, Liao and Chi discovered that “using social media helped people develop better awareness of both their colleagues’ expertise and their personal lives” (1664) by spending time in interactions with their colleagues and being socially connected with their loved ones.

Social media has also played a vital role in helping those workers who lack face-to-face communication skills. It has provided them with a platform over which they can communicate in a clear, concise and formal manner without being socially awkward, thus protecting their career from being jeopardised. This has also helped in integrating world economies, through common interests and universally accepted languages and modes of communication. “The growing globalisation of media and communication seem like the immaterial process that goes parallel with the economic integration of the world” (Hafez 1).

A critical view of the overall situation shows that social media has acted as both a negative as well as a positive influence for the workforce across the globe. However, the general view still focuses mainly on the negative outcomes of continued usage of social media space. With better utilisation of the available technology and connectivity,

it can be exploited to its full potential, especially for sharing knowledge and information.

Yuan, Zhao, Liao and Chi confirm that “the full potential of social media for supporting knowledge sharing [is] yet to be achieved” (1659). However, there is also the risk of too much usage of social media, which might lead to depression, anxiety and decreased productivity. Through a new research, Goodier finds that both the usage and addiction to social media are connected to feelings of dejection (1). Smartphones, which provide easy access to social media, may also lead to addictive behaviour.

Thus, while social media might be both a bane and a boon for the working men and women, its usage trends suggest negative implications, both on the physical health in the form of lethargy in the workplace, and on mental health in the form of extra burden and anxiety disorders. Due to its negative repercussions, such as over-usage, social disconnections and harm to health and education, social media is a hindrance to workforce productivity. It is one of the major causes of divided attention in workplaces and might lead to increased mental issues such as stress, anxiety and depression among the present generation, thus, increasing the risk of mental hazards for the future generations. Social media forms an integral part of the economy and hence, its usage cannot be suspended. However, strict measures need to be taken to regularise and control its use, so that it does not harm job satisfaction and productivity.

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## **Analysis of The Wife of Bath as an Advocate of Feminism**

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Alisoun Looms, popularly referred to as The Wife of Bath, is one of the most developed characters in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* authored towards the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Through the Wife's extensive prologue, Chaucer reviews the status of women in the Middle Ages. He provides a seemingly misogynistic reading of Alisoun by portraying her as a conceited, deceitful and violent woman who defies societal norms. Thus, her take on the issue of anti-feminism almost fails to serve the purpose of being proto-feminist due to her self-contradictory nature and her views which conform to patriarchal stereotypes of women.

Through the Wife's prologue, Chaucer conveys his sympathies to the fairer sex and provides a glimpse of the effects of anti-feminism on them, but at the same time weakens his protagonist's position by making her comply with misogynist and to a great extent misogynist views. According to Peggy Knapp, Alisoun is more of a "commentator", who brings to light the need for liberation, rather than a "liberated woman" herself (188). The Wife still employs her sexuality as a means to dominate men. She understands the politics behind society's ill view of womanhood and tries to use this anti-feminist perspective to her advantage. In doing so, she is often seen as contradicting herself. When she describes the manner in which she treated her first three husbands – whom she considered "gode" (good) as they were rich, old and submissive – she begins to resonate with the image of the "wicked woman" that had been created by misogynists within the society.

I governed hem so wel after my lawe  
That ech of hem fulblisful was and fawe  
To bring me gaye things fro the fayre.  
They were ful glad whan I spak to hem fayre,

For God it woot, I chidde hem spituosly (The Wife of Bath's Prologue 220-223)

Through the above lines, the reader is introduced to Alisoun's manipulative ways and materialistic mind-set. She further goes on to advise other women to lie and gain leverage against their husbands just as she does. She also boasts about being able to extort wealth from her husbands in exchange for sexual pleasures. Hence, she is portrayed in a negative light through the exhibition of a combination of the stereotypes of being sexually voracious as well as indulging in sexual behaviour for monetary gain. The commodification of marriage by the Wife seems to resonate with the concept of marriage as a form of "legal prostitution" as proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft in her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. All these ideas represented in this allegorical confession, were often used by men to support the "hierarchy" of the patriarchal society which allowed for the domination of women.

Although some critics may want to label Alisoun as the first-ever female feminist critic, Chaucer's depiction of her as a deceitful and violent woman undermines any such possibility.

The readers do see her take a stand against the clergy, who are often out to slander women, by putting on a scholarly act, where, as an exegete, she preaches her own interpretations of various scriptures to support her cause. Often she proves herself wrong with her admission to being “false” which questions her credibility as a narrator. Her violent tendencies further add to her instability and have also earned her the label of a “sociopath” by critics such as Donald Sands as quoted by Knapp (190). In the latter half of the prologue, while she talks about her fourth and fifth husbands, Chaucer introduces this “homicidal” angle to her character.

And eek I seyde I mette of him al night:  
He wolde han slayn me as I lay up-right,  
And al my bed was ful of verray blood; (Chaucer, Prologue, 577-579)

These lines can be interpreted as the Wife confessing to having conspired with Jankyn the murder of her fourth husband. She deceives Jankyn into believing that he has “enchanted” her and that the dream is a signifier of wealth. Through her supposed “dream”, she conveys to Jankyn that she is both rich and sexually available. In this manner, Alisoun once again fits the misogynistic stereotype of women being deceptive and sexually overbearing.

The Wife also puts women in an agency-less position, when despite being subject to physical as well as psychological abuse by Jankyn, who becomes her fifth husband, she continues to love him and is won over by his physical beauty and sexuality. However, in a final attempt to re-establish her power over her husband, she rips out three pages from the *Book on Wicked Wives* from which he frequently read to her to torment her. Her gesture of protest is answered by a blow from Jankyn, which she returns in equal measure after she tricks him into kissing her. This episode ends with them agreeing to a truce where she makes him bequeath whatever little wealth he owns to her and she, in turn, agrees to love him. Hence, The Wife regains her former “maisterie” (mastery) over her husband.

The occurrence of all these events ultimately results in the weakening of The Wife’s, Alisoun’s, position as a feminist. As put by Susan Crane, The Wife’s “vaunted abilities as a ‘wyswyf’ (D 231) are, precisely, those the satirists condemn” which deem her happy-endings as “patently illusory” (166). By the end of her prologue, one may wonder if her “experience” can be believed or if it is simply a bitter creation of Chaucer to depict the “fickleness of women”. Thus, it is implied that The Wife of Bath’s devious, cunning and aggressive attitude shakes the very foundations of her proto-feminist arguments.

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# Critical Commentary on Durga Puja and its Capitalist Aspects

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Durga Puja is one of the many festivals celebrated in India. It is the most widely celebrated festival in West Bengal and in other parts of the country and the world. According to Hindu Mythology, the festival is celebrated in Autumn due to Lord Ram's untimely invocation of Goddess Durga. This led to the shift of the festival from the spring season, which was called "Basanti Puja", to autumn and is now called "Sharadotsav". This essay will try to establish the festival as a part of "popular culture" and show the shift in the way in which the celebration of this festival have changed since its origin. The focus of this shift will be on the capitalist aspect of the celebration and will try to establish this as a social festival more than a religious one.

Considering the definition of "popular", as mentioned in Longman's New Universal Dictionary, published in 1982, we can say that anything "of the general public, or suited to the needs, means, tastes and understanding of the general public, or having general currency or commonly liked or approved" can be deemed as popular. Going by the definitions, we can say that the festival of Durga Puja is a part of the "popular". It is celebrated by the public in not only one region but also in many other parts outside of Bengal. Hence, we can say that the festival of Durga Puja is a part of popular culture.

Morag Shiach, in her essay, "A History of Changing Definitions of 'The Popular'", argues that in the definition mentioned above, the idea of "people", available in the earlier definitions is replaced by "general public". This, according to her lets go of the social hierarchy and "differential power of the lowly or plebian". However, even though we can say that the definition challenges hierarchies, the practical implementation of the same seems problematic. Though people from all sections of the society celebrate this festival, the scale at which it is celebrated varies. By discussing the construction of the "pandals", the labour force involved in the same and the kind of extravaganza involved in the festival, the social inequity in the celebration will be analysed in this paper.

To talk about the change in the mode of celebration over the years, this essay shall talk about the origin of the festival. Celebrated by the Tribal community of the pre-historic times, the "Mother Goddess" was born of the earth, out of a respect for nature's bounty on one hand and the fear of destruction of all that supported life, on the other. The festival used to be celebrated in the spring season and was, therefore, seasonal. It becomes more prevalent as we see the significance of "Nabapatrika" in the celebration even today. The "Nabapatrika", or the leaves of nine plants - banana, colocasia, turmeric, jayanti, wood apple, pomegranate, ashoka, arum and paddy are the ones that are harvested in Autumn and them being part of the worship signify an ode to nature as they represent nine folk deities. However, the present day form of Durga was first invoked in the *Ramayana* as a part of "Akaalbodhon". The term was used in Krittibas's *Ramayana* signifying untimely invocation. The festival, which was first a part of the Tribal society celebrating new agricultural cycles, has now become a more urban and social celebration. The celebrations have now taken the form of establishing the social status of an area, also called the "paara". Such celebrations started in the form of "Baaroyaari Pujo" which means the "twelve pal puja" which was conducted in Guptipara, Hooghly in 1790. The "Sarbanjanin Durga Puja" celebration, which means the celebration that involves the entire population of an area, first started in 1910 when the Sanatan Dharmotsahini Sabha organised the first community puja in Baghbazar in Kolkata with a full public contribution, public control and public participation.

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This is the dominant form of celebration in the present day scenario. Other than Bengal, this festival is celebrated in almost all parts of the country. One of the first celebrations of Durga Puja outside Bengal was in Delhi in 1911.

Even though “Sarbjanan Durgotsav” may seem inclusive of everyone, there are many inequalities in it. Generally, the entire community raises the funds, and the members of the Puja pay a fixed amount. Though the members can pay anything they want to, they are expected to pay a certain amount. The remaining funds are raised through sponsorships brought in by the members. This might create a problem, as some of the members might not be able to pay a certain amount, however, mostly, they end up paying in order to maintain their social stature. Similarly, the budget or the fund amount decided by a community might vary from the other, depending on the scale of income of the community. This tendency overlooks the marginal classes of the community and becomes more exclusive a practice than inclusive. The more “famous pandals”, or the ones that are set up on a larger scale might get better sponsorships than the ones which are of a lower scale. This leads to a difference in the budgets within a community or within different communities. Hence, we see that some of the communities end up celebrating the festival on a huge scale as compared to the others. Such economic inequalities are then further propagated by the media as television channels conduct competitions for best “pandals”, best idols and so on. This brings out the inequalities in the forefront as we can see that certain “pandals” and idols are a part of the competition every year and only some among those chosen few become winners.

The difference in the budget of the celebrations leads to many kinds of inequalities during the festival. The idols that are made vary from “pandal” to “pandal” depending on the budget as well the theme. We can see many idols now which do not have similarities with the kind of idol that were first worshipped. It is made keeping in mind the theme of the “pandal” which might vary from eco-friendly to “daaker shaaj” (a certain kind of idol that is dressed up in anything innovative). Not only do the idols and “pandals” show class differences of a community but also such attitude is manifest in the people celebrating the festival. The upper class or the upper middle-class families deck up in costly clothes during the festival and show a certain kind of class-consciousness. The food that they eat or the places that they roam in are very different from the lower middle class or the lower class. It is a very common phenomenon during the festive season to exchange gifts among themselves. This, even though can be seen as a way of expressing love and solidarity, the kind of gifts exchanged and the number of gifts given and received vary among different classes. For example, on one hand, an upper class or an upper-middle-class person might buy expensive clothes and other extravagant things, on the other hand, a lower middle class or a lower class person will wear clothes that they would wear daily or some worn clothes given to them by the upper classes.

The festival can be termed as an industry in the present scenario. To construct the “pandals” and to prepare the idols, the labour force is required. Thousands of labourers work day and night to construct the pandals. Not only the workers from the local area are hired but also workers from outside the area also do different kinds of work. For example, the workers of Tripura are hired to work with bamboo; the famous workers of Chandannagar do the lighting outside the pandal. Special workers in Kumortuli in West Bengal make the idols and they travel to different places in the world or within India before the festival to render their services. Such exploitation of labour forces can be deemed as “alienation” as Marx described in the concept of Alienation. The workers can be seen as alienated from their product as the “pandal” or the idol which is made is themed and designed by the members of the community and the workers just work in a mechanised way.

During the celebration, the “Dhaaki”, the ones who play the instrument “dhaak”, which is a significant factor of the celebration, come from rural areas to urban West Bengal and even to other parts of the country and world. Most of the communities organise events for the entertainment of the people. The costs of the artists depend on how famous they are. There are celebrities such as Bollywood actors, singers to dancers, sports person etc. who visit the “pandals”. Other than these, there are also the “purohits” who perform the rituals. This also gives rise to caste inequality as only the Brahmins can perform the rituals or prepare the “bhog” for the Goddess. We can see cultural appropriation in this case as the festival had started as a celebration by the Tribal community, who are now almost equivalent to the lower castes in their social status. Hence, the Indo-Aryans took over the celebrations and appropriated it in a certain way. The way in which the labour forces work also shows the alienation of the worker from the act of the production. The workers work at different places without any demand for self-identity. This then leads to the commodification of the labour power.

Hence, we can say that the celebration of the festival of Durga Puja goes way beyond being just a religious festival. It is also a social gathering where the celebrations of the communities or “paara” are judged on the basis of their economic “grandeur”. It can be termed as an industry where the upper classes or the bourgeoisie invest their capital in the process of the celebration and exploit the labour force for the successful execution of it. The labour class, who work so hard before and during the festival, has to struggle the most during the celebration. Therefore, we can see that the festival that denoted the celebration of the beginnings of new agricultural cycles for the pre-historic, tribal community has now become representative of the social and economic status of a certain class. It has now become, what Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer would say, the “culture industry”.

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# Fantasy for the Child: The Appeal of Harry Potter

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“Broaden your minds, my dears, and allow your eyes to see past the mundane!”

- Professor Trewlaney in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*.

To see past the mundane is to explore the world of numerous possibilities and imaginary creatures: the realm of fantasy. Fantasy, derived from the latin *phantasia* (imagination), exercises our sense of awe. It is a gate to the realm of fantasy, alluring uncanniness, and wonders that the real world lacks. The best way to describe fantasy is to quote Rosemary Jackson, “fantasy, both in literature and out of it, is an enormous and seductive subject. Its association with imagination and with the desire has made it an area difficult to articulate or define, and indeed the value of fantasy has seemed to reside in precisely this resistance to definition, in its free-floating and escapist qualities. Literary fantasies have appeared to be ‘free’ from many conventions and restraints of more realistic texts; they have refused to observe unities of time, space and character, doing away with chronology, three-dimensionality and with rigid distinctions between animate and inanimate objects, self and others, life and death.” (1). The term fantasy has been applied to any literature that introduces realms and elements other than the human such as fairytales, myths and legends. In fact, fantasy literature mainly draws its inspiration by either borrowing or referring to elements from ancient myths and legends to create new imaginary worlds and has been influenced by different cultures like Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and works of Edgar Allen Poe and Lord Dunsday. Even before the advent of written literature, stories characterised by supernatural elements existed in spoken word. The oral tradition, which enabled many ancient myths and stories to be maintained, remembered and conveyed from one generation to the next, altered or not, hence dating back the origins of the genre to times when Homer wrote the Epic fantasy, *The Iliad*, that dealt with mythological elements influencing contemporary fantasy literature. The same motifs and patterns have been used, repeatedly, to create fairytales and folktales.

When talking about fantasy it is necessary to include what is called Children’s literature or Children’s fantasy literature. Keeping this in mind, Felicity Hughes makes an important observation regarding children’s literature that it is mostly based on fantasy and is therefore “non-serious” and is hence considered as “low culture” and as well as popular literature, so it doesn’t qualify for the academic world. Contrary to the above notion, Fantasy is a very successful genre (hence, the usage of the term popular literature), mainly because of its therapeutic effect on its readers and the escape it provides. It is also pedagogical in many ways not only for children but also adults, appealing to us because of the relationship between magic and morality. Therefore it should be included in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century curriculum along with other fantastical canon works. Using the works of Rosemary Jackson, Eric Rabkin and Bruno Bettelheim, an attempt will be made to challenge the belief that fantasy is “non-serious” and affirm the belief that fantasy should be a part of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom. As Children’s Literature is majorly based on fantasy, the contemporary adult fantasy series, *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling will be analysed to understand why fantasy should be studied.

## **Harry Potter as a Bildungsroman**

The *Harry Potter* series encompasses a number of genres, the *Bildungsroman*, the school story genre, the heroic narrative, various gothic elements, and children’s literature. As



Joan Accolla claims, “part of the secret of Rowling’s success is her utter traditionalism. The Potter story is a fairytale, plus bildungsroman, plus a murder mystery, plus a cosmic war of good and evil, and there’s almost no classic in any of those genre’s that does not reverberate between the lines of Harry’s saga” (74). Although the form of *Bildungsroman* is mostly associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rowling gives us a remarkable update of the genre for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The series confronts our uncertain present by charting a young person’s development through a complex world of magic and reality. Magic adds greater wonder to the stories and provides a strategy for making sense of the world. The entire *Harry Potter* series is about Harry’s development from a boy into a man, and “from a slightly awkward muggle into great wizard” as noted by Robert T. Tally Jr (39), and fulfilling his prophecy of killing Lord Voldemort and ending his reign of discrimination and prejudice. He also points out, “much of the enjoyment lies in the reader’s joint-educational mission. Whether the scene is actually Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry or elsewhere, the reader reads alongside Harry the ways or the wizarding world, as Harry learns so does the reader”, suggesting that the reader too is in a way escaping reality, learning about the “fantastical world” that appeals to the reader as much as it appeals to the protagonist. Harry discovers he is a wizard in the first book of the series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, and he does so in a very fascinating and dramatic way. Hagrid, the Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts, barges into the shack they are hiding in and reveals the supposed secret to him.

... when Hagrid spoke his every syllable trembled with rage. ‘You never told him? Never told him what was in the letter Dumbledore left for him? I was there! I saw Dumbledore leave it, Dursley! An’ you kept it from him all these years?’ ‘Kept what from me?’ said Harry eagerly. ‘STOP! I FORBID YOU!’ yelled Uncle Vernon in panic. Aunt Petunia gave a gasp of horror. ‘Ah, go boil yer heads, both of yeh,’ said Hagrid. ‘Harry – yer a wizard.’(55)

It opens up a whole new world for him, a whole new realm of possibilities, Hogwarts, where he escapes the abuse and the prejudice of “normal” and “not-normal” he is subjected to at the Dursleys’, embodying the hope of a better life, a different life. As Rosemary Jackson condemns, “When we accept a world in which the make believe is real, we participate in the fantastic. The participation is a form of escape.” Fantasy diverts the readers from the real issues, concealing them by the issues in the fantastical world, taking time off from reality, enjoying a moment of calm estrangement and appreciating the extraordinary in the ordinary. Diversion from reality helps by distancing the reader from rationality, escaping it but eventually returning back to reality with a clearer sense of purpose, direction and perspective. Looking at the issues from a psychological perspective, the reader (irrespective of age) may relate somewhat to Harry’s circumstances here: fantasy gives “hope” for a better future, just like Harry, who escapes to the world of magic at Hogwarts. As mentioned earlier, magic is a means of making sense of, or giving form to the world, we live in, which is the purpose of the paper.

### **Harry Potter as a School-Story narrative**

J. K. Rowling also provides the idea of escape through the school story genre, introducing Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, a realistic description of a boarding school, engulfed with magic. The curriculum is also based on the subjects of an ordinary school: for example, the Potions class is based on chemistry, History of Magic as the name suggests is History and other subjects included are Astronomy, Divination, Ancient Runes and Care of Magical Creatures. The idea of a boarding school fascinates millions of children as it not only offers companionship but also escape from parental authority. Karen Manners Smith quotes J. K. Rowling’s comment, “the

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idea of being removed from the expectations of parents is alluring.” This stands true not only for children but also for adults. It provides an escape from the expectations and responsibilities of daily life. This is one of the factors which appeal to the readers. When one reads a fantasy novel, it offers psychological escape: a mental door the reader opens to escape reality. This time proves to be therapeutic. As mentioned earlier, fantasy offers a brief period where the tale provides an altogether new perspective of reality to the reader. Rabkin points out that “we make believe because we want to believe, to accept belief, to suspend belief” (43). The world of *Harry Potter* provides this belief to its readers by putting in front of them the world full of magic and supernatural elements while homogenising it within a boarding school.

Further, Eric Rabkin argues, “the fantastic does more than extend experience, the fantastic contradicts perspectives”. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, Harry is astonished when the snake talks to Harry:

The snake suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry’s. *It winked.* Harry stared. Then he looked quickly around to see if anyone was watching. They weren’t. He looked back at the snake and winked, too (25).

The snake and Harry, then have a small conversation through signalling and speaking, respectively. As Rabkin suggests, dragons and other supernatural elements are not “inherently fantastic” when you look at them with a certain perspective. “The fantastic does more than extend experience, the fantastic contradicts perspectives” (4). Therefore, one can suggest that Harry’s astonishment signals the fantastic. Perhaps this is when the fantastic starts playing in the series. This goes on until the very end of the series, as Harry explores his new world: A world full of fascinating creatures like elves, goblins, unicorns, giants, centaurs, etcetera.

Bruno Bettelheim, a child psychologist, has argued that one of the many purposes of fairytales is to give children hope. Rowling’s magical world does exactly that. Just like the world of Tolkien and Carroll, Rowling’s magic can be understood as a narrative device that articulates hope. Ursula K. Le Guin also supports the notion of hope being articulated, she suggests that “the literature of imagination, even when tragic, is reassuring, not necessarily in the sense of offering nostalgic comfort, but because it offers a world large enough to contain alternatives, and therefore offers hope.”(3)

Children’s fantasy literature allows to “protest in the face of given, to refuse to accept its limitations and lacks and unacceptable features, to reject the inevitability of the intolerable” (86), suggest Baukham and Hart. They further argue that it also stimulates imagination, develops intellect, and provides emotional clarity and solutions to the problems which perturb the reader. This genre of fiction helps children as well as adults to deal therapeutically with the psychological problems of growing up and adapting to the real world. According to the *International Companion Encyclopaedia of Children’s Literature*, “it consists of texts that consciously or unconsciously address particular constructions of the child, or metaphorical equivalents in terms of character or situation (for example, animals, puppets, undersized or underprivileged grown-ups), the commonality being that such texts display an awareness of children’s disempowered status (whether containing or controlling it, questioning or overturning it). Adults are as caught up in this discourse as children, engaging dialogically with it (writing/reading it), just as children themselves engage with many ‘adult’ discourses.” It also helps children to build up their imaginative and creative spaces as well as learn concepts like friendship, bravery and various cultural norms. Jack Zipes argues, “the fantastic is embroidery and embroidered in our daily lives so that perversity and excess appear to be norms.” Again, it is providing an escape, which is therapeutic and pedagogical.

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Fantasy gives us hope, for a better future, that, indeed, there will be a future, by fulfilling our deepest and most heartfelt of human needs, says Karen Filmer. Not only does it provide its reader a trapdoor from reality but also charts the unconscious hope and aspirations of our modern society through symbolism and allegory. In the *Harry Potter* series, all of this is present, making it a charmer, casting a “narrative spell” on its readers. Being a bildungsroman, it charts the eponymous protagonist Harry’s growth and shows his journey in the fantastic world of Hogwarts. Although there are various instances that can be considered as dark, the *Harry Potter* series still provides the reader a sense of hope and wonder. Even though Fantasy is labelled “non serious” because it is popular, its positive connotations should be kept in mind: the escape it provides, allowing readers to let go and enter a magical state. Although we are aware it is not possible, one can only hope and fulfil this wish through reading. Perhaps, we are all waiting for something magical to happen to us, just like Harry, and the consumption of fantasy fiction provides us with it. It is therefore important for Fantasy to be given high regard in academia taking into consideration what all it provides the readers. Works like the *Harry Potter* series, *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *Hunger Games* trilogy, have revealed how Fantasy is an important genre that needs its own serious place in the curriculum.

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# Ideal Beauty Standards in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fashion Magazines

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Culture is best described as a way of life, constantly evolving, accepting and rejecting changes as a part of the process of development. It is difficult to assign a particular definition to culture, but we can refer to Raymond Williams's *Keywords – A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, in which he describes culture as “a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development” (Williams 90). Thus, culture evolves through the entirety of social, economic and political changes in the society. Popular culture refers to the ideas and thoughts prevalent among the masses. As Tim Delaney in his article in *Philosophy Now* says, “Popular culture may be defined as the products and forms of expression and identity that are frequently encountered or widely accepted, commonly liked or approved, and characteristic of a particular society at a given time” (Delaney 3). Fashion magazines, as a part of print media, have had a major influence on popular culture. As mentioned in the book *Culture and Media*, “many publishers instead embraced the potential of magazines to simply tell people what they want or need, thus solidifying the role of the magazine as a driver of popular culture” (Lule). This paper seeks to understand how fashion magazines typify beauty standards (such as the thin ideal, light skin and more than average height) and how they affect women of the twenty-first century. Fashion magazines, through idealising certain beauty standards, have altered the physical and mental health of women for the worse, thus negatively affecting their lives.

Fashion magazines have set unrealistic beauty standards for women, one of them being the thin body type. Fashion magazines, both men's and women's, present the ideal of the skinny body as desirable for every woman. “The message being sent to women is that they are not pretty or skinny enough” (Chojnacki *et al.* 1). Bodies of models featured on the cover of many leading magazines are often photo-shopped to look unrealistically thin. For example, in 2009, a controversy emerged based on the unrealistic presentation of a woman on a leading magazine's cover. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, “A model featured in a fashion photograph for Polo Ralph Lauren, which was doctored to make her look abnormally thin, has been fired by the label, she says, for being too fat” (“Polo Ralph Lauren” 1). The society imposes such ideals onto the consciousness of women. “[Because of] Body types that are not considered “ideal” by society [women believe] body types that are more desirable than their own are the “ideal” body types which women should strive to resemble”(Sheehan Abstract). Such instances of morphing women's images into the idealistic thin body-type find a way into the conscience of women who use harmful ways to achieve it.

The thin-ideal inspires women to follow unhealthy diets and hectic exercise routines. Girls, at a very young age, come face to face with the idea of looking a certain way, which “can inhibit eating disorders and compulsive exercising in the future”(Sheehan 8). Fashion magazines play a key role in perpetuating such ideas among impressionable minds. According to Mary Sheehan, in fashion magazines and ads, models represent a body-type that differs from the real average body-type of an American woman, an undernourished body type that is unrealistic and harmful to health (7). Women may resort to starving or choosing extreme diet plans, such as the Maple Syrup diet, “a diet that Cheryl Cole's been known to use when she's worried about putting on weight. The diet became famous when Beyoncé used it to shed 20 pounds for her role in *Dreamgirls*” (Chandler 10), or the raw food diet which includes “unprocessed and uncooked food” (Chandler 13).

Extreme measures to achieve the thin body-type may lead to health hazards, such as eating disorders. “Exposure to thin-ideal media images may contribute to the development of eating disorders by causing body dissatisfaction, negative moods, low self-esteem, and eating disorders symptoms among women” (Hawkins *et al.* abstract).

The body-type of models as presented in fashion magazine may make women insecure about their own body types. This leads to as dangerous a consequence as Anorexia: “a serious physical and emotional illness in which an abnormal fear of being fat leads to very poor eating habits and dangerous weight loss” (Webster). It is a psychological disorder, which is caused by many factors, including the influence of images in fashion magazines. “People with anorexia come to believe that their lives would be better if only they were thinner” (“Understanding Anorexia” 5). Anorexia is a life-threatening disease, which may lead to “fatigue, weakness, syncope, and amenorrhea” (Sidiroupolos 8). Hence, there is a need to spread awareness on the causes and hazards of eating disorders. A recent article in *The Huffington Post* featured the news of a Danish fashion magazine having apologised “for featuring a very thin model in its pages” (Tejada 1). The ban on models “who appear to have an eating disorder” (CBC 1) by the famous *Vogue* magazine highlights the seriousness of the problem. However, the thin body-type continues to be the ideal choice for many fashion magazines.

Fashion magazines have set light skin as another beauty standard for women. The fashion industry is obsessed by skin-lightening or whitewashing women’s complexion on magazine covers. In a recent case of 2010, *The Telegraph* reported criticism against the *Elle* magazine “after internet rumours suggested Gabourey Sidibe’s skin had been lightened on its front cover” (Leach 1). This is especially true for black women, as even highly proclaimed celebrities such as Beyonce and Lupita Nyong’o’s have been involved in skin-lightening controversies. According to *The Huffington Post*, “Beyonce and India Arie are just a few of the black stars who have also found themselves in skin-lightening scandals” (Wilson 6). Such a favoured representation given to light skin makes bleaching and lightening creams popular among women, especially Asian women, who desire to have a “milky, snow white skin tone — it’s what’s considered elegant and fashionable”(Kramer 3), which can be harmful for their skin, being prone to side effects. This “serious underrepresentation of women of colour” (Kite 2) adds to the racism prevalent in the society, and creates insecurities among coloured women, besides having an impinging impact on their lives, excluding them from the mainstream. “The mainstream beauty ideal is almost exclusively white, making it all the more unattainable for women of colour” (Kite 5).

Most fashion magazines exhibit tall and young models. The fashion industry seems to be obsessed with tall and thin women, and “insist on putting clothes on models that are stick thin and six feet tall” (Amed 6). There have been some efforts to include women of different shape and colour; however, the fashion industry continues to exclude older women, especially those who are in 40s. According to *Vogue*, “This season, the push toward inclusiveness resulted in several shows that featured women of colour and varying body shapes, but models of a certain age (namely, past their early 20s) were largely excluded from the discussion—and the catwalks”(Okwodu 1). This shows a certain bias for young women or girls, which plants undesirability for signs and changes in the body associated with older age. “Ageist social practices in popular fashion magazines and the reluctance of the fashion industry to recognise the sartorial needs of female baby boomer cohorts feed into an internalisation of naturally ageing women’s bodies as socially undesirable” (Lewis *et al.* abstract), which again results in eating disorders and depression. The perpetuation of such negativity, therefore, is not good for either mental or physical health of women. Many cases point out the continued promotion of business through the typifying beauty standards of fashion magazines. For example, the *Vogue* magazine’s online blog reported Sofia Mechter to be the opener for the Dior Haute Couture Fall 2015, which “made for some scandalized headlines for being only 14 years old at the time of her debut”(Okwodu 2). As Lindsay Kite reported, on the cover of the *Self* magazine in September 2009, celebrity Kelly Clarkson’s body was thinned by digital methods, and looked almost unidentifiable (6). Although these practices have given a booming business to the fashion magazines, they have also succeeded in the continued

internalisation of the desirability of beauty standards.

Though there have been steps towards progress, women continue to live in self-doubt and even self-hatred, being crippled by the beauty standards portrayed in fashion magazines which are a major source of information and influence in their lives. These beauty standards have become an essential part of the popular culture, existing in every field and not just fashion. A video posted recently on YouTube highlights all the issues mentioned in this paper, and stresses on the very important understanding that “attractiveness is a choice” and that women should decide the standards not have these imposed on them. Being unsatisfied with your own body is toxic and we must take conscious efforts to get rid of the sources of such toxicity.

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# How Time Spent on Social Media Causes Disputes and Infidelity in Relationships of Married Couples

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As technology is developing, it has become an inevitable part of almost every man's life. 'Social media' is a part of technology. It is a mobile and web-based technological platform where users can freely interact, share, discuss, co-create and modify user-developed content. Mobile social media is when one accesses social-media sites through mobile phones and tablets. Some of the popular social media sites are Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Twitter and Pinterest. The popularity of these sites has drastically increased over the years. People often create accounts on these sites even if they do not access them because they want to be part of this 'social trend'. Even though it has many advantages and is significant in individuals' lives, it is also one of the reasons that have led to dispute and infidelity between married couples as they use it extensively. "Facebookcheating.com", is a website that assists people who are struggling because of their unfaithful partner who uses Facebook. This website claims that Facebook is responsible for 1 divorce out of 3 (Halfens 4). Excessive use of social media by married couples influences their time, trust, communication and emotional build. They spend less time together as they are generally busy with the virtual life. They lack trust and faith in each other, as they are unaware of their partner's online activities. They also secretly spy on their spouse's social accounts, which generally lead to frequent conflicts. Married couples also suffer a communication gap and an emotional distance as they barely spend time with each other to express their feelings, thus almost destroying their marriage.

Overuse of social media by couples have led to uncommitted relationships because they give more time to social networking sites than their spouse. They generally have conflicts in their married life, which depreciate their quality of marriage. It is also found that a 20% yearly increment in Facebook conscription is linked to 2.18% to 4.32% growth of divorce cases (Rosenfeld 5). Married couples even devote their time on social media websites talking to one another. They could also spend that time socialising personally or by spending time together, but they are not keen on interacting face to face rather, generally, find it exciting to talk on social media. They oftentimes like interacting with their own social group, sharing pictures with them and knowing about their lives. It is ironic that couples are more interested in knowing about their friends' married life rather than building a strong relationship of their own. Many people have a habit of logging into a site just to check recent updates, statuses, posts and pictures of people who are virtually around them, ignoring reality. Addiction to social networking sites not only affects their married life but also their health (Nowinski 2). In many cases, they commonly suffer from depression, anxiety, loneliness, insomnia and stress. By devoting too much time on Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp, people plant suspicion and distrust in a relationship.

Social media severely affects the trust and loyalty in a relationship. Social media makes an individual prone to jealousy and suspicion, as the significant other desires to know about the activities they perform online. Stannard claims that couples often feel uncomfortable and insecure about their relationship, post discovery of some misconduct in their partner's social account. This often increases circumspection, spite, and discord in a relationship (4). Research workers have discovered that as more and more spouses investigate their partner's online activities, more jealousy and incertitude is accounted. One in 10 adults have admitted hiding their texts and online activities from their partners (Stannard 5). Eight percent of the couples in a relationship acknowledge that they have secret accounts (Stannard 5). While 58% of the polled British population admitted knowing about their spouses' password, even though their partners were not aware of the fact (Wong 4).

With easy access to social media applications through smartphones, it has become much easier for an unhappy partner to find a new affair or get in touch with their ex. A booming 30% of the population on Tinder is married. "AshleyMadison.com" helps married couples find a new affair, and more than 130 million folks worldwide visit this website every month (Stannard 6). Lootah reports that earlier most citizens of the United Arab Emirates did not have many communication channels, but now since they have various mediums to connect with the world, they misuse them (5). In the meantime, in the United States, divorce counsellors admit that social networking applications have played a great role in marriage crack up. They say Facebook is the foremost source that helped 66% of unhappy couples gather evidence against their partner's solecism (Wong 5). Social networking provides a medium to individuals who are already in a delicate and fragile state or are in an unstable relationship so that they can escape from their problems and arrive at a pleasant alternative situation online. Social sites may promote extramarital relations by permitting troubled couples to interact with others (including ex-lovers or with the person having similar interests) causing emotional distancing, cheating, and consequently, divorce (Almazroui 13).

Social networking websites can also develop emotional distance and communication gaps between husbands and wives (Almazroui 10). For a family to function harmoniously and smoothly, communication is very important. However, it is seen that technology creates communication gaps not only between couples but also between their children (Lootah 1213). It is a common belief that good communication results in a blooming relationship while the lack of communication leads to its breakdown (Williams 1). Direct interaction allows individuals to reciprocate in a conversation verbally and nonverbally through expressions which build a trust and bond between couples. However, due to social networking sites, direct communication among the masses has decreased (Farrugia 5). Messaging applications can lead to misinterpretation of messages between couples creating barriers in understanding each other's feelings and thoughts because it lacks body language and expression. Interacting through social networking sites do not convey individuals' feeling, sentiments and emotions, which severely affects married life because a relationship is mostly built on love, emotions and understanding (Hertlein and Ancheta 1,8). Women, in particular, need emotional support at the time of distress; they connect more with their female friends through networking sites via chatrooms and video conferencing. This creates a bridge in the married relationship of couples because instead of sharing their problems with their husbands, they share it with their friends (Thelwall 2).

Due to increasing 'social media trend', married couples hardly spend their hours together, which result in relatively unhappier and troubled married life (Nowinski 4). They lack trust and faith in each other because of their infatuation with social networking sites. Unaware of their partner's movements online, they often feel neglected and cheated. Out of suspicion and jealousy, they start snooping and spying on their spouses' social accounts, thus questioning their loyalty (Stannard 4). They also suffer from stress, anxiety and depression because of lack of communication and emotional support from their partner (Nowinski 2). By sharing their emotions through status updates and posts, they limit their personal interaction with each other, negatively affecting their relationship (Stannard 2). Love and understanding for each other gradually fade away, making their marriage monotonous. In many cases, this leads to divorce, consequently disintegration of their lives. Excessive use of social media, by married couples, influence their time, trust, communication and emotional build. They spend less time together as they are generally busy with the virtual social lives. They lack trust and faith in each other, as they are unaware of their partner's online activities. They frequently quarrel regarding each other's infidelity and secretly spy on each other's social media accounts. Married couples also suffer from gap in communication, emotional pain and relationship rift as they barely spend time with each other to express their feelings.



In many cases, the thought of divorce troubles the minds of married couples as their lives start becoming monotonous and disintegrated. Since the addiction of present generation to social media is very intense, in the future we may find more unhappy and troubled marriages. There may also be increased rates of divorce cases. While social networking sites will continue to thrive in the future, they will affect our lives in irreparable ways.

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# Transgressive Fantasy: Gothic and Children's Literature in Victorian England

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The eponymous virginal maiden of *Jane Eyre* (1847) is troubled by tyrants, ranging from her cruel aunt and her family to the head of the pseudo-convent, Lowood school, Mr Brockelhurst. Through the course of the story, she meets her brooding and mysterious hero, Rochester. Fleeing from his Gothic mansion where his secrets lurked in its dark passages and floors, she ends up in a dry and barren moor. By the end of the novel, Jane discovers her family, inherits a fortune from her dead uncle, and reunites with Rochester, after having mystically heard an echo of her name called out by him. Charlotte Bronte deliberately uses these traditional elements of Gothic writing, to present a coded narrative of a rebellious woman expressing her desires and following her heart. By revealing the mind of a young woman in this way, Bronte challenges Victorian England's prudishness and the constraints put on women. The Gothic, developed in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century England, had subversively infiltrated other forms of writing including poetry and the realist Victorian novel. While some writers such as Charlotte and Emily Bronte remained true to the spirit of Gothic in their texts, later writers employed its transformed form and fantasy to do the same question and transgress the limits. This paper shows that the Gothic became the precursor to the subversive literature produced under the thin veil of the fantastical children's fiction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, through a reading of *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Goblin Market* (1862), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1866) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1871).

Felicity A. Hughes in her essay, "Children's Literature: Theory and Practice" notes that Children's literature developed as a separate genre in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. She further states that exclusion of fantasy from 'serious' literature by the Victorian critics, became the reason for the writers of that time to write 'childish' and 'immature' literature in order to escape the prying eyes of those critics. Hence, following the example of writers like Bronte, even Christina Rossetti and Lewis Carroll are able to present a social critique and discuss the 'improper' topics in *The Goblin Market* and in the *Alice* books (1866 and 1871), only under the garb of fantasy. David Putner in *The Literature of Terror* (1980) notes that one of the key terms in the Gothic is that of ambivalence because the Gothic so often appears to delight in transgression (quoted in Smith 3). Through this ambivalence, Bronte in *Jane Eyre* lays bare the deep-rooted class structures of the Victorian society. For instance, she has shown Jane refusing to be treated as a servant by the Reeds. However, Eagleton shows that such egalitarian tendencies of Jane have a double-edged perspective. Despite Jane's severe dislike of Reed's snobbery, she shared their class assumptions about the poor. Jane in a reverie has said that she would not like to belong to poor people. However, she finds the poor children of Morton school unmannerly but still believes that these "coarsely clad peasants" can be as good as the children of nobility as they possess "germs of native excellence" (quoted in Kapadia Xxvii-Xxviii). Rossetti, too, uses mutated Gothic ambivalence and is able to transgress the moral codes of Victorian society. *The Goblin Market* in Christian terms voices the issue of salvation. Laura after having sinned (because like Eve she ate the forbidden fruit) goes through a process of redemption and Lizzie, the Christ-like figure offers herself to save Laura, "Eat me, drink me, love me; / Laura make much of me" (468-469). The poem notes that Laura, "Shaking with anguish, fear, and pain, / She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth" (488-489). This scene is clearly homoerotic in nature. It presents glimpses of tabooed sexuality ambivalently intermingled with apparent Christian teachings.

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Gothic literature majorly dealt with horror, death and romance. Gothic plots were set in the gloomy and morbid ambience of an ancient castle or a monastery. They presented images of insanity, forms of monstrosity, the role of nature (propelling Romantic ideas), the sublime and the supernatural. Reflecting the horror of Gothic writings, Bronte and Rossetti have used supernatural vocabulary to mark out the demonic 'other' in their texts too. By borrowing concepts of evil from the Gothic tradition, they label the gender and race 'other' as threatening and extra-terrestrial. The goblins that pose danger to the twin sisters are half-animal, half-human monsters. Each merchant possesses an animal attribute – cat's face, rat's pace, snail's foot. Terrence Holt notes that in differing so strangely from their essential, human form, they seem to possess no integrity of body or of character. Bertha Mason, as the representative of rebellion and sexual freedom, scars the Victorian propriety code. She is a racial other (a Creole), a possible other to Jane who represents a fearful female sexuality that is repulsive and dangerous. Hence, she is described as the 'vampire', a 'demon' and a 'witch'.

Referring to Gothic writings by women, Andrew Smith argues that the term Female Gothic was first used by Ellen Moers in *Literary Women* (1976):

For Moers, the Female Gothic represented fears about women's entrapment within domestic spaces and anxieties about birth. The term has been subject to further critical discussion which has explored its development of a subtle, or understated, mode of feminism in which its heroines strive for some version of a better, more emancipated, life. The Female Gothic's focus on the opportunities for social advancement suggests an optimism about possibilities for change, although one that is frequently conditional upon discovering a long-lost mother that facilitates a mother and daughter relationship which can withstand patriarchal authority (Smith 31).

Written by women, *Jane Eyre* and *The Goblin Market*, too, offer their heroines the love and comfort of another motherly female figure to successfully endure their troubles. Although temporarily, Ms Temple and Helen Burns offer Jane respite and strength to bear the harsh environment of Lowood school. Jane's troubles end only after she discovers her family and inherits property from her dead uncle. Laura in a similar way gets out of her misery with the love and support of her sister Lizzie. Lizzie like a female-Christ sacrifices herself as she endures the assaults of the goblin men to get the fruit for her troubled and decaying sister. Sisterhood is glorified by Rossetti and the poem's end shows a happy domestic setting devoid of husbands or male children. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Donald Rackin points out that Alice ends her adventures secure in her sister's nurturing care, unharmed and safe from the erratic dreams, the terrifying Queen of Hearts and her sentence "Off with her head!". Hence, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* too, as a fantasy, shows similarity to Gothic Literature.

Novy Kapadia has noted, "When society is as reticent as in Victorian England, then art must be indirect". Works of both Rossetti and Bronte, deal with the forbidden but, indirectly. Gothic atmosphere of the Red room in *Jane Eyre* has been used to hint at the female sexuality and its repression while the Gothic feeding into fantasy has been used by Rossetti to talk about the tabooed sexuality. The overriding presence of the colour red and the rich, layered decor in dead Mr. Reed's room, where Jane is sentenced for her display of passion and anger, is a paradigm of female inner space. The scene of the red room and Jane's incarceration not only marks the coming of age of Jane and the suppression of her sexuality respectively, but also as Elaine Showalter notes, it echoes "the flagellation ceremonies of Victorian pornography".

As in whipping scenes in *The Pearl* and other under-ground Victorian Erotica, the mis-en-scene is a remote chamber with a voluptuous décor, and the struggling victim is carried by female servants. Jane is threatened with a bondage made more titillating because the bonds are to be a maid's garters...

Whipping girls to subdue the unruly flesh and rebellious spirit was a routine punishment for the Victorians, as well as a potent sexual fantasy ...It is interesting here to note that sexual discipline is administered to women by other women, as agents for men (Showalter 427- 428).

The market of the goblins can very well be read as representative of the male-controlled trade in women. Elizabeth K. Helsinger has argued that the poem refers to prostitution, with the goblin men representing the clients who attempt to seduce innocents such as Laura and Lizzie (quoted in Smith 58-59). The physical and psychological assault on Lizzie by the Goblins for refusing to eat the fruit, described in explicit terms, amounts to molestation.

They trod and hustled her, Elbowed and jostled her, Clawed with their nails, Barking, mewling, hissing, mocking, Tore her gown and soiled her stockings, Twitched her hair out by the roots, Stamped upon her tender feet, Held her hands and squeezed their fruits. Against her mouth to make her eat (Rossetti 399- 407).

Andrew Smith while stressing on the overt word play describes Lizzie as surrounded by “a hoary (whorey) roaring sea” (413) of men which she endures by standing “Like a royal virgin town” (418) and returns to Laura. She offers the juice of the fruits smeared on her body to Laura and says:

Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices  
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,  
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.  
Eat me, drink me, love me;  
Laura, make much of me (Rossetti 468-472).

Eroticism and lesbian desire are easily traceable in such lines of Rossetti’s poem. Just like *Jane Eyre*, *The Goblin Market* and *Through the Looking Glass* too, offer a social critique of their times encoded within the fairytale settings. Dorothy Mermin has noted that the representation of the brotherhood of Goblins is actually a critique of the male-oriented art-world (quoted in Smith 57). Carroll in *Through the Looking Glass* criticises the mechanisation, commodification and acceleration that were transforming Victorian life. Alice’s fast-paced and discontinuous dreams reflect the dizzying pace of life then. In the words of Donald Rackin:

The anxious dream-satire of Looking-Glass railway scene is directed, in part, at the improbable regimentation and commercialization of what was until then considered beyond such strict mechanical control and quantitative measurement. In Alice’s dreams of the railroad carriage, time and space are measurable by new mechanised, monetary standard. Money, not inherent worth, now determines value; now ‘time is money’ (the insubstantial ‘smoke alone’, according to the awe-inspired consumers in Alice’s carriage, ‘is worth a thousand pounds a puff!’) (Rackin 103).

Texts like *The Goblin Market* and *Jane Eyre* labelled and dismissed as Children’s literature and Gothic romance are actually attempts by female writers to voice out their concerns and become a part of the literary tradition. Only by being fantastical could *The Goblin Market* offer the concept of a female hero through Lizzie, and *Jane Eyre* could capture the monstrous form a suppressed female sexuality could take through Bertha. Carroll’s *Alice* books though “literary fairy tales”, have no didactic purpose. If there is any lesson at all, it is the wonder of childish imagination. Brinda Bose notes, “Carroll’s invitation to her [the Victorian child] is to do, and think, and feel and say - as well as to remember with tenderness the halcyon days that are passing her by even as she does so”.

Children’s literature can be considered as an offshoot of Gothic, sometimes borrowing directly and at other times presenting a mutated form of it. Its layers of fantasy hold within it voices of the rebellion of the repressed sex. The ‘frivolous’ writing harbours substitute worlds of toppled gender-roles. Though meant for children, these magical worlds have the potential to hint at the forbidden topics that the adults of the real world refuse to talk about. Like a curtain of mist, fantasy in

literature separates its reader from the critique of the time. It only takes a willing mind to lay bare the veiled criticisms and transgressions. Fantasy then does not any longer remain for children only. In subtle ways, it has raised questions, transgressed suffocating boundaries and upheld a mirror to the Victorian society and it continues to do so even today. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* series, uphold the legacy of their 19<sup>th</sup>-century predecessors to amuse, delight, and simultaneously analyse the contemporary society by either parodying it or by offering an alternate reality.

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## Fantasy through a Contemporary Lens: A Discussion of *Game of Thrones* through Its Gender Discourse and the Impact of Visual Adaptation

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Fiction is understood as "any literary narrative, whether in prose or verse, which is invented instead of being an account of events that actually happened" (Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*). Fantasy happens to be one of fiction's "largest and fastest growing genres" (Burcher *et al.*, 101) and includes those works that imbibe the elements of magic and alternate worlds where the power of imagination accomplishes even the most absurd and impossible of spectacles. What appeals to several ardent readers of fantasy fiction is that these works draw on real-life situations and characters to be placed in unrealistic worlds where inexplicable events occur. This allows an escape for readers from their own dreary and mundane realities. Despite this resonance with readers, most contemporary fantasy fiction fails to be included in the academic canon. With the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, innovative variations of fantasies such as J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* series and J.K Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, have taken the literary world by storm. Yet, the academic world seems to require either a Carroll or a Grimm to produce works which may be deemed "canonical".

This paper shall attempt to provide reasons for why contemporary fantasy fiction ought to be made part of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century English literature classroom by alluding to the televisual adaptation of George R. R. Martin's *Game of Thrones*. This television series has been lauded as a "marvel" of multimedia and is replete with a complex plot and the perfect amalgamation of action and strong characters. Set in an imagined variation of the medieval era, *Game of Thrones* also provides a critical comment on this period through its exceptional depiction of women in power. Its chronotype allows issues embedded in our reality to be focalised in an objective manner which is easy for the audience to assimilate without being overly perturbed or overwhelmed by them.

Erik S. Rabkin sees boredom as a "prison of the mind" from which the fantastic offers escape (42). When the extra-textual ground rules of reality seem to restraint the individual, the diametrical reversal of these rules in a fantastic narrative provide a much needed psychological escape (42). Martin's works are also especially relevant to the subgenre of history in fantasy since "imaginary histories have been created to make political points or to explore social and gender roles" (Buchanan 4, 5). *Game of Thrones* being located in a fantastic reworking of the Medieval era not only re-establishes the fact that the historical and literary legacy of this period is extremely popular but also provides a critical distance to analyse certain social constructs rooted in our reality. George R.R. Martin skillfully fuses fantastical and medieval elements to fashion a literary landscape where conventional forms of storytelling are both adhered to as well as subverted. Familiar images, such as those of the "valiant knight", the "revered lady" and the "morally upright lord", belonging to the Middle ages have been used as prototypes and have often been destabilised by Martin throughout the narrative to create a sense of dramatic unpredictability.

One of the central aspects of the television series that is under popular debate is the seemingly subversive and empowering representation of women which adds to its "dramatic effectiveness and massive fan appeal" (Smith). It is a critique of not only this bygone age but also of the treatment of women in current times. Certain fantasy writers are often faced with the challenge of creating an enthralling and flexible language for the portrayal of "female heroism" (Tolmie 153). Martin tries to explicitly destabilise patriarchal conventions by depicting strong female characters who function from within the system to forge their own destinies. Several of these women protagonists "have staying power and high market value within particular systems of power, systems familiar to the medievalist even when decontextualized, displaced and relocated elsewhere in the space – time continuum of the imagination." (148). For Tolmie, it is noteworthy that these women battle against a system, which is strongly opposed to them on the basis of gender, and emerge triumphant ultimately. They draw attention by breaking away from societal norms to shape their new existences that are "magical, sexual, marital, religious and political in nature" (153).

Prominent among these figures are the characters of Cersei Lannister, Daenerys Targeryen and Arya Stark of the *Game of Thrones* series who shall become the prime focus of this argument as products of "female exceptionalism". Cersei is one of the major antagonists in Martin's work, who subverts the patriarchal system from within and uses it to her advantage. Although it has been argued that she possesses no true agency (Buchanan 14), one can beg to differ on the account that she does admirably use tact and guile which act as a kind of "political prosthesis" (Patel) for her femininity and aid her in acquiring the kingdom. It is true that she is dependent on men in stations of power, such as her husband King Robert Baratheon and then her sons Joffrey followed by Tommen, yet, it is her incessant scheming and strategising that makes her the remarkable, manipulative, ruthless and headstrong Queen Regent of the Seven Kingdoms. Her portrayal although unpleasantly bitter and somewhat misogynistic, is nonetheless fiercely powerful. Cersei too, just like any other character in *Game of Thrones*, has had her share of hardships and ultimately finds herself motivated by her love for her children and self-preservation in the struggle for survival in a world run amok by immorality, chaos and violence.

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Besides this, her ambition is fuelled by the pleasure she derives from the sense of control she has over men, thus making her quite the “femme fatale” of the series.

Daenerys Targaryen, the other queen in the narrative, acts as a foil to Cersei. She happens to be the female protagonist and heroic figure who is juxtaposed with several male heroes in the series, the last and most fascinating one being Jon Snow in season 6. She starts out as the “damsel in distress”, who is endlessly subjugated by an atrocious brother followed by the leader of a barbaric tribe, Khal Drogo, whom she ultimately falls in love with. It is with the death of her husband that she too ascends to power but on her own terms. Unlike Cersei, Daenerys feels no need to manipulate her subjects to have them pledge their loyalty to her; they do so of their own free will. She commands the respect of her husband’s tribe, the “khalasar”, not just after the fantastic moment of the birth of her dragons and her unscathed emergence from her husband’s funeral pyre (thus earning her the name “the Mother of Dragons” and “the Unburnt”) as pointed out by Steinweg, but also through her own actions. She uses, not her sexuality, but her values instead and creates a new society by working against the conservative and patriarchal traditions of the Dothraki. She remains unaffected by the opinions of others who slander her for assuming power. Daenerys, through her compassion, morality and rigid sense of justice is successful in amassing followers wherever she goes. In the land of Mereen, people refer to her as “Mysa”, which literally means mother. Thus, her matriarchal persona is what endears her to her people and enables her to invade Westeros and literally take back what is hers with “fire and blood”.

Martin’s characterisation of Arya Stark is quite intriguing. She is the one to truly understand that her identity is not actually rooted in her gender. Tired of being trained to be “lady-like”, Arya takes to swordsmanship at which she is natural. It is after the trauma of witnessing her father’s execution that her journey of subverting patriarchal conventions, by casting off her femininity and fluidly navigating the realm of gender to achieve her goals, begins. It is this art that she masters at Braavos, where “the gods grant a common girl uncommon gifts” (Micklem quoted by Tolmie), that has the audience hooked. There is no dearth of heroic or empowered females – Brienne of Tarth, Obara and her warrior daughters and Olenna Tyrell, to name a few – in Martin’s epic saga. Thus, the emphasis remains on the individual woman rising above a system that keeps her down, triumphing over it, reversing expectations, while oppressive structures continue to provide the basis for representation (Tolmie 147).

Rebecca Jones, on comparing the characterisation of these figures in the books with their television adaptations, notes that they are portrayed as more “sympathetic, empowered and realistic” in the latter which is in tandem with contemporary ethics thus revealing the “changing pressures and expectations for women”. Why the television adaptation seems to be more effective can be answered by one’s interpretation of the process of adaptation and the impact of the television as a broadcasting device. Raymond Williams theorises that as a media device, the television possessed an unprecedented power which “altered our basic perceptions of reality” and was a means of providing “centralised entertainment” and centralising the “formation of opinions and styles of behaviour” (3, 4). Despite making technological advancements, television is still seen as inferior to cinema. Yet, in today’s world, people have exhibited an “unusual kind of preference” for this inferior technology. This preference is attributed to the variety of entertainment offered by this “home machine”, unlike cinema that pertains to a special kind of theatre, and also its imbibition of both auditory and visual elements which made it widely popular thus compensating for its deficits (Williams 21). Adaptations have been understood as “palimpsestuous” works by Michael Alexander, to which Linda Hutcheon further adds that they are accepted substitutions of familiar other works which involve an artistic and re-interpretative undertaking of “appropriation/salvaging” to “extend the intertextual engagement

with the adapted work” (8). Several debates persist regarding how the adaption process can be defined based on an adaptation’s similarity to the original source (Hutcheon 7). The drawing on themes discussed in the source work is central to the process of adaptation and emphasis is laid on the development of characters that are identifiable with those depicted originally. The mode of adaptation that deals with transcribing the text from its narrative to its performative form (like theatre, film and television) is most radical as it brings to life what requires to be visualised by the reader. Through the materialisation of fiction found in books, adapters become creators of new texts based on their own interpretation and visualisation of the source. In the *Game of Thrones* series the transposition of a “heterocosm” (meaning another world) occurs which is complete with the translation of the characters, setting, events and situations that readers are acquainted with in the books into tangible elements, thus making it easier to consume such works.

Thus, it seems that G.B Weiss and David Benioff chose wisely when deciding on adapting George R.R. Martin’s novels as a television production. The privatised domestic accessibility of the show, its cost effectiveness and flair for “spectacular theatricality” without compromising on the narrative and visual appeal has effectively catalysed the expansion of the *Game of Thrones* fandom. By addressing contemporary and relatable issues, displaying intriguing characterisation and with the power of a visual medium, this work highlights the fact that fantasy fiction is, in reality, a nuanced genre of literature, which needs to be studied in detail. It is obvious that the example of a single work cannot stand in for the vast genre, but it definitely provides enough reason to explore this category of literature beyond the printed form by extending it to visual adaptations as well.

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