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Department of English

University of Delhi

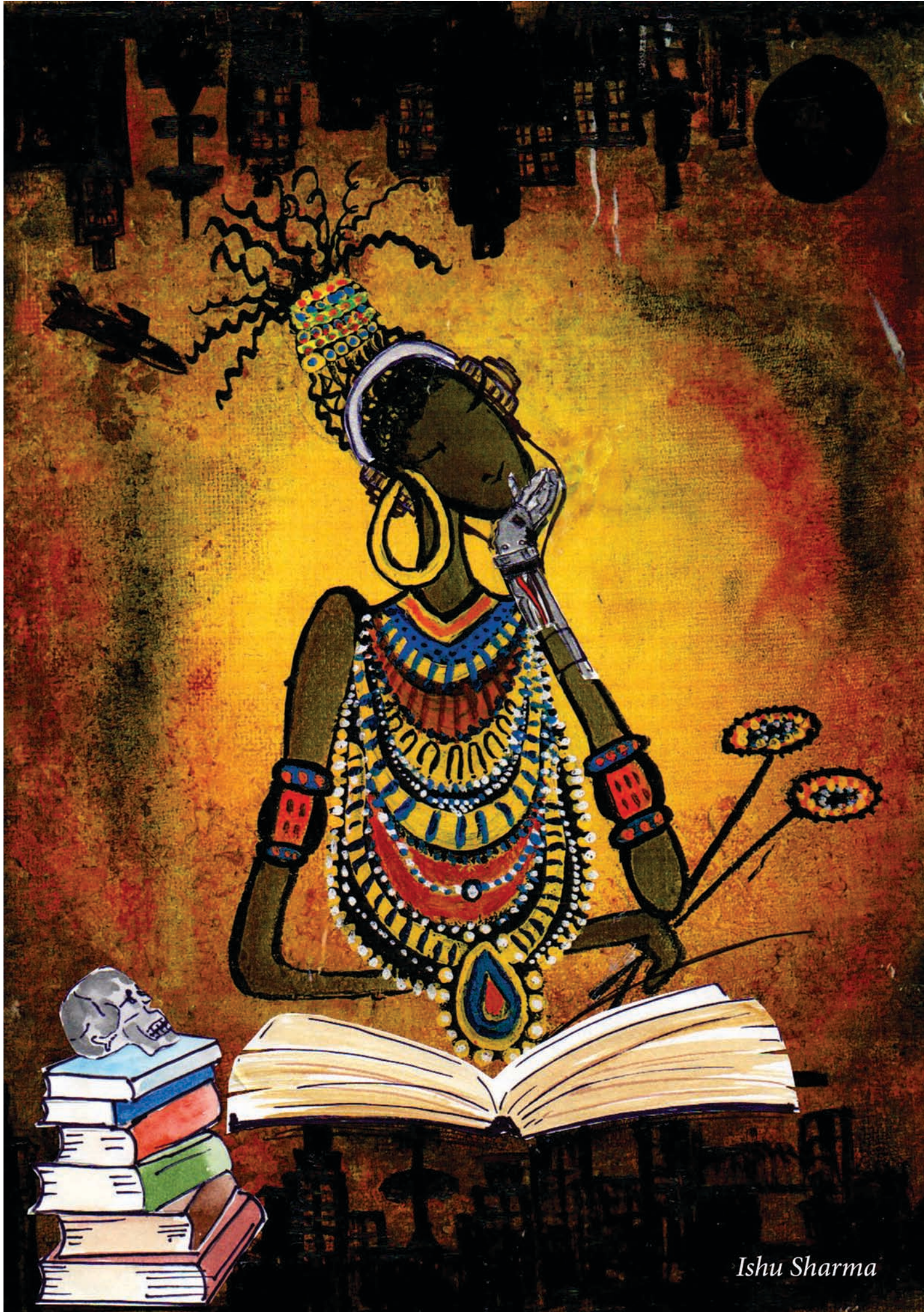
BITACORA

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Volume 1.1

April 2016

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Alternate Realities

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Editorial

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

A Captain’s log or journal: **Bitacora** appears an appropriate name for the debut issue of this literary magazine. The first issue of the Department’s own magazine meant beginning from scratch. We have had great fun creating the title and the logo, and with working out the theme and cover design for this issue, but even more with breaking down the teacher–student barrier. We hope Bitacora will inspire more students to explore the world of letters.

Why are we going against the idea of one real, one reality, with the theme “alternate realities”? The world of the imagination has always spoken to different imaginings of reality, and guarding this world against destruction is the first responsibility of the humanities student. As any undergraduate worth her weight in the readings of Derrida or Foucault will tell you, there is no one real or reality. It is a not-so-well-disguised truth that we wander around in our own personal reals, but most of us are compliant enough to not always be fighting with the consensus realities set down and policed by society. These consensus reals include things that often give great pleasure and demand much exercise of duty, such as membership of the family, or work, or community. Other consensus reals are only irritating chores that we accept because they are as easy to do as not do, such as the baths we take daily or that we brush our teeth every day. Still others can break the spirit: consensus reality can brutalize those with bodies deemed less than able because of disabilities or impediments. Consensus realities such as the continuing existence of the caste system that makes possible a world where a man can be killed in the street while shopping for a shirt because he had married above his station are indeed a reality we must readily un- and re-imagine. Still other consensus realities such as the expectation that we maintain at least the appearances of heterosexuality, or the compulsory motherhood that is expected of women, or the demand that we not fight religious and/or fundamentalisms, can break spirits, bodies and societies alike.

Alternate realities as a concept is thus important because while we maintain the appearance of membership via an (unwritten) social contract, to not be cast out by our communities of belonging, it is a basic human aspiration to expand the spaces in which we can be ourselves, explore ourselves and create the spaces to transform ourselves as we desire. The students writing in this issue are young women at the end of adolescence, already adults, but whose entry into that world is disputed also by those who term students “children”, or by those who do not necessarily want to see the next generation of women speak up for themselves, still less that they imagine a world where genders become irrelevant. We are proud that the theme for the first issue of their magazine should be something as poignant and spunky as alternative realities.

Numerous interesting and relevant themes surface in a number of pieces. “Escapist’s Reality” sets the tone: “we become true to ourselves when we are unashamed of our desires and unafraid of being judged by people,” says its author, emphasizing the need to imagine ourselves unimpeded by barriers of class, caste, race, sexualities and genders. “In our Alternate Reality” on the other hand is a sardonic critique and a wish to overturn the plutocratic Neo-Imperialist global village one feels trapped by. “A Name in Imagery” problematizes language and its role in creating identity markers and a longing to break linguistic boundaries.

Madness, schizophrenia and the idea of the doppelganger, themes that betray the bitter core at the heart of fantastical writing show up in “She was Me,” “If Mirrors could Speak,” “Are you God?” all of which suggest that individuals are fractured beyond repair by oppressive social realities, while short stories like “Beyond the Horizon,” working within the genre of science fiction and using strategies

from meta-fiction, imagine transformed societies instead, so this brave new inter-planetary adventure is free of caste, class, race and their resultant violence. Meanwhile, another short story set on this planet, “Beyond Patriarchy” overturns this world’s reality by imagining a male person vulnerable not only to sexual violation, but shows him also to be subject to social control via clothing norms, even as “Sexing the Cherry,” a reading of a memorable course-book, argues for creative writing’s powerful destabilizing impact on our own prejudices of gender, biology and sexuality. Other literary take-offs in this themed volume, apart from an overview of the different realities of “Art and Life in Nineteenth Century” riff on powerful popular cultural texts. “Same Reality, Different Dimensions” finds an alter ego for Samuel Johnson’s eighteenth century malcontent Thales in Christopher Nolan’s Batman series, while “Alternate Reality of a Deranged Mind” finds parallels in Porphyria’s Lover and Jean-Baptiste Grenouille in Tom Tykwer’s film, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (2006). Both articles reflect the other, while the voices of rebellion against authority and corrupt degradation from Johnson and the Batman series they refer to also echo a different revolution blowing through our very own capital, even as “Just a Game of Thrones” examines how the popular series reimagines state and family.

The sedate eighteenth century seems to offer a fresh mirror for contemplating our own: “Realism in Fantasy: Alternate Reality in the Land of Houyhnhnms” explores how Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, a book often gifted to small children who have newly begun reading, is steeped in prejudices of race, class and gender despite the overt mode of fantasy. This is a sobering reminder that just the mode of the fantastic does not guarantee subversion or a politically more tenable world. Desire, preoccupations with time, life and death, even karma and reincarnation emerge from “Mirror of eriseD”, “Time is a Lover”, “Death’s Gift” and “I Have Lived Before”.

That our world is also a very exclusionary one for all the other species homo sapiens have brutalized and dominated can be seen in “The Tiger Man”, “A translation of a Sema-Naga folktale”. A touching tale where a gifted hunter’s spirit leaves this world at the same time as the tiger he fiercely hunted and sought to dominate dies. The connection between the lived reality of the human being and that of the tiger suggests that the tiger, though four-legged and a forest-dweller, is no less human and sentient than the man who kills him. The man’s own people implicitly recognizes this connection when they clothe him in the dead tiger’s skin and then lay him to rest; they realize, despite being forest people and villagers without much formal education, that it was the successful hunt, the too-successful domination of another creature’s spirit beyond human need that breaks man, makes humanity inhuman. *Bitacora* is proud to be the space where this translation is published, for stories like this, emerging from worlds not immediately around us, are urgent reminders of the need to be more ecologically responsible and responsive.

The space of the classroom while being one of contest, learning and debate, is also a world where the teacher is also rendered opaque. This issue features interviews with the three senior-most faculty members of our Department; hopefully, interaction of this nature will help students develop a more intimate understanding of the worlds that their teachers inhabit.

The **Bitacora** team would like to extend its gratitude to members of the Department - students and teachers alike for their enthusiasm and cooperation. The student editorial board has done its best to learn from this experience in a hands-on fashion and without Mansee Dhapola, Tuba Firoz, Shruti Sharma, Yashi Marwaha, Saumya Gairola, Aarushi Mathur, Ishu Sharma, Arushi Gupta, and Simran Mittal, **Bitacora** would have remained a distant dream in an alternate world. Although a Students’ Journal, the faculty members of the editorial team have contributed greatly to this debut initiative. Thanks are due to Dr. Shatarupa Sinha, Mr. Maisnam Arnopal, Mr. Sameer Chopra, Mr. Shashanka Das, Mr. AdityaBahl and Ms. Jeyakirthana J.

Special thanks are due to Dr. Anjana N. Dev and Ms. Pragya Gupta who as Teachers-in-charge guided, encouraged and backed the publication of this first issue; Ms. Vidya Das Arora and Ms. Mudita Mohile (who was a part of Bitacora Editorial Board but is currently on leave) for their inputs on historically valuable data which might have otherwise been lost to us, and so much more. **Bitacora** is deeply indebted to Dr. Aneeta Rajendran for her invaluable suggestions, guidance and support through this whole endeavour. We are proud of sponsorships for the magazine that have come in from businesses and organizations that work in diverse areas. We are grateful to ONGC, MESH and Quirky Byte in addition to the Departmental Literary Association, and to Dr. Shashi Tyagi, The Principal, Gargi College for arrangement of funds to publish this issue. Bitacora's biggest thanks however, are due to Ms. Nzanmongi Jasmine Patton, Convenor of the Magazine Committee for constantly and tirelessly working to get this project off the ground. We are grateful to her for making **Bitacora** a reality.

The great trepidation and doubt we started out with have long been replaced with happiness at the eclectic and large corpus of contributions that have far exceeded our expectations. Perhaps it was chance that we decided on *Alternate Realities* for a theme a little before the country's students began demanding a different reality for themselves. Given the turn of events in the wake of fighting for one's right to go against the grain, we believe we could not have hoped for a more relevant subject. Bitacora has anticipated and caught the spirit of the times and hopefully, will serve as an archive, a space where the thoughts of young people can be recorded, and which will serve not only as a therapeutic journal, but also as a praxis for change.

Escapist's Reality

When I was little, every year the walls in my room would be white washed before Diwali but would be covered with doodles once again by the time Christmas came round. There would be forests growing atop buildings, a cute version of Roald Dahl's BFG running through an open field, people surfing on tsunamis, and me with Harry Potter's lightning shaped scar. I spent a significant amount of my childhood reading, watching television, and playing games. Almost everything that I read or watched comprised of an imaginary world and I, alone, played a vital role in all of them. When I couldn't perform well in a class test, the meaningless scribbles on my walls were blamed. I was told daydreaming about illusory worlds was futile and would not bear any fruit later in my life. People who created alternate versions of reality deluded themselves as they were living fallaciously. So, I tried to control my wandering mind and felt guilty when I was unsuccessful. It took me a while to realize that fantasizing was not only natural but also beneficial.

Daydreaming provides an escape for our mind when life becomes too big a burden to carry. It doesn't mean that we want to elude our responsibilities or that we are incapable of facing reality. It's proved that taking a break from stressful situations helps us to reevaluate and come up with better solutions. My board exams are an example of this. There were times when my brain was saturated and refused to process any more information. The more I tried to concentrate on the problem in front of me, the less I understood. Going on a walk, taking a shower, listening to music or even staring at the ceiling helped cope with such times. While the problem didn't disappear, my mind relaxed and therefore it was better equipped to handle the situation.

It is generally believed that daydreaming is harmful because it may mislead us into pedestaling ourselves. I disagree with this. It is the very opposite, in so far as it allows us to imagine ourselves without barriers that are set up by our hairsplitting society. There are no impediments in the form of class, caste, race, sexuality, gender, etc. A lot of people from the LGBT community hide their identities in the real world out of the fear of not fitting in. However, they are free to dream of a world where they won't be seen as anomalies because of their sexuality. In that world, they can be themselves, marry the person they love or not marry at all. We become true to ourselves when we are unashamed of our desires and unafraid of being judged by people.

Escapism in and to pop culture has influenced me greatly. If there wasn't a heroic Katniss, a valiant Harry and a curious Sherlock, I'd have no one to draw inspiration from. I fail to understand why escapist fiction is considered in a negative light. Neil Gaiman has also commented on the sully of escapist fiction, "I hear the term bandied about as if it's a bad thing. As if 'escapist' fiction is a cheap opiate used by the muddled and the foolish and the deluded, and the only fiction that is worthy, for adults or for children, is mimetic fiction, mirroring the worst of the world the reader finds herself in." The assertion that escapist fiction offers nothing more than mere pleasure is devious and dumbfounded. I feel escapist fiction portrays reality in a better, more compassionate manner with the additional perk of getting away from the harsh realities of life.

Our inner and outer worlds need to coexist in a balanced manner. Sometimes escaping to the inner world may take us a step closer to finding solutions to the problems of the outer world. The world of fantasy can't be deemed worthless because the emotions and experiences that escaping emanates exist even in the outer world.

Mansee Dhapola
I Year

My Daily Chai

Roaming about Nescafe, sipping on my daily chai in peaceful solitude, a disturbingly passionate conversation finds my ears: “Would Pakistan ever root for India? No. All they do is breed Afzal to terrorize our nation. I don’t understand these anti-nationalists. Does cricket mean nothing to them?”

I held back my furor, and quietly walked away before my chained debater started howling at them. ‘It’s how they were raised’ I tell myself. It’s real to them. This is the righteous, earnest way of life to them. This is their reality. They live in a nation bound by one language. On the other hand, I don’t. I take an auto to the studio that awaits me and try to focus at my task at hand. I plan, “backlight to highlight her edges, oh and I can use my scarf, maybe I’ll play around with shutter speed”, my mind wanders. Is it really the only thing I can do, walk away? Would my speech have made a difference?

Later I channel my fear and frustration into words thrown at my boyfriend. Calm and composed, he listens and replies, “It doesn’t matter, calm down, the food we eat is going to kill us much before politics will. Everything is propaganda, a revolution means nothing anymore. Soon, we will all belong to an age gone by.” I instantly know he’s talking about our entire race. All the public outrage meant nothing to him. He sat at home, afraid to step out because he might catch an allergy again.

Vidisha

II Year

A Name in Imagery

I need no name to be myself.

I am the cosmic flame.

I taste like the essence of a thousand apples gone sour, but only a little.

My bones both surround the world and nestle in it.

My eyes (I have been told) shine like the light of gold ore in the darkness of a newly quarried mine's night.

My blood carved the furrows of all the rivers on the earth, and my wounds were named volcanoes.

My tears became the vast and mighty oceans and my laughter brought forth their life.

My love (I have been told) is a deep dragging weight, like pockets full of stones and a telegram of death, which pulls you into the quick sands of time.

I am fire and ice.

I am the wildfires of hot summer days and the ice age of earth's past (and future).

The skin of the earth was created from my sloughed off skin

left in a certain divine garden.

Was the serpent really evil?

My screams were swallowed by the void as it kissed away my soul, and failed to contain it.

I ate the void.

I am the void.

And the void has no name.

Please do not resist

Shefali Juneja

II Year

Realism in Fantasy: Alternate Reality in the Land of Houyhnhnms

“Suppose now, O most courageous of all dialecticians, that some and wise understanding creature such as a crane were in imitation of you to make a similar division and set up cranes against all the other living beings to their own special glorification at the same time jumbling together all the others including man under the appellation of brutes...” So the Stranger tells the Young Socrates in Plato’s *Statesman* to evince the error in dividing mankind into Hellenes as one species and all the other species under the common name of Barbarians.

Alternate Realities have long been consulted by writers in reflecting upon the practices and conditions of contemporary society. Peter Hunt writes: “...fantasy allows us to speculate, to explore possibilities to indulge over private selves – to consider imaginatively things that cannot be (as opposed to speculation on things that might be, which produces science fiction) - it would seem to offer worlds of infinite possibility, of expansiveness, of liberation.”

Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) is a popular fantasy fiction where the narrator Gulliver recounts his experiences of four voyages to four separate corners of the world. All the four kingdoms are unreal and figments of the author’s imagination (even though Swift’s narrator tries hard to make the reader believe that the places indeed exist on the face of the Earth). In Lilliput, Gulliver stays among people who are one-twelfth his size whereas in Brobdingnag, the situation is reversed. The people are as huge as twelve times his size. Laputa is, of course, a flying island and in the land of Houyhnhnms the horses are the rulers. For these obvious impossibilities, *Gulliver’s Travels* has often been dismissed as a children’s bedtime story. Peter Hunt further notes – “It is not surprising that fantasy and children’s literature have been associated with each other, because both are essentially democratic forms – democratized by seeing outside the solipsistic system of high culture.”

However, fantasy literature is not merely a form of illusion; in fact, it almost always employs an intricate play of politics. *Gulliver’s Travels*, for instance, is a satirical allegory of eighteenth century England where Swift uses the fantastical space to force his readers to reconsider and rethink the flaws in the English socio-political scenario. In her essay, ‘“Curiouser and curiouser”: Law in the Alice Books’, Catherine Siemann contends – “The chessboard world of the Looking-Glass country, on the other hand, is a totally rule-bound reflection of bourgeois society, where, as J.S. Mill has famously contended, laws and social strictures have combined together to eliminate individuality.”

In *Gulliver’s Travels*, the parallel universe is best imagined in the fourth voyage to the land of Houyhnhnms where the horses take up the role of The Stranger’s cranes in questioning the rationality of the human beings. Following fatal misfortunes in a voyage, Gulliver lands up in a country where the Houyhnhnms are the masters and Yahoos are the servants. This world is sketched upon an inverse of the ‘normal’ human world where the Yahoos, standing in for the human beings therein, are the brutes - the “abominable creatures”, and the horses or the Houyhnhnms are “so orderly and rational, so acute and judicious”. As a major trope of the Alternate Reality fiction, Swift cleverly works upon its impossibility by making the ‘normal’ world ‘impossible’ within the space of his story. Gulliver says how his Houyhnhnm master had a difficult time imagining “how it was possible that the Houyhnhnms of my country would leave it to the management of brutes?”

Again, the domain of Alternate Reality, which is developed in order to question, often operates through the suspension of the narrator-protagonist’s identity. In the wonderland that gets “curiouser and curiouser” Alice asks “Who in the world am I? Ah, that’s the great puzzle.” (Carroll L., *Alice’s*

Adventures in the Wonderland, 1865). Likewise in the land of Houyhnhnms the identity of Gulliver as a human being is suspended, for there is no category called ‘humans’ at all. Due to his possession of both brutal and rational qualities, he’s now “a wonderful Yahoo, that could speak like a Houyhnhnm”, which is decidedly not a set identity. It is worsened when, as Gulliver narrates:

“He [Gulliver’s Houyhnhnm master] then began to find fault with other parts of my body, the flatness of my face, the prominence of my nose, mine eyes placed directly in front, so that I could not look on either side without turning my head: that I was not able to feed myself, without lifting one of my fore-feet to my mouth.”

The very qualities that proffered him identity are now questioned, and he, in turn, begins to question his long familiar world. Absorbed into the world of the Alternate Reality, not only is he able to conclude that the “frequent use of salt among us [in England] is an effect of luxury” but also consider dressing for shame as strange and futile. The Houyhnhnm master, rendering a stranger’s perspective on the human world, interjects “why Nature should teach us to conceal what Nature had given”? As Gulliver and his Houyhnhnm master engage in a human and no-human world interface, the issue in the forefront seems to be the hypocrisy of the assumed rationality of human beings. The alternate Houyhnhnm world evinces that the institutions of Law and Government are superfluous if society is not driven by Reason, that the activities of warfare that England engages in proceed not from Reason but from its corruption. In this Utopian space of the Houyhnhnms, Swift unleashes his imagination of a disease-free population that only decays with age.

Having said that, what is important to notice is that the spaces of Alternate Realities are mere projections of the author’s desires. As Peter comments on Lewis Carroll’s Alice books – “Fantasy locked on to the real world, each book is a satire-allegory on politics, a child’s position on Victorian society and a sublimation of Carroll’s own desires.” In *The Voyage to Houyhnhnms*, Swift fictionalizes his own convenient dreams of a disease free society, money-free trade, an economy that precludes export or import, and even a system of speech that “doth not abound in variety of words, because their wants and passions are fewer than among us.” The author criticizes the usual division of time into weeks as unnecessary by delineating that the Houyhnhnms don’t do so, but fails to go the distance to argue the logic of having years at all. Likewise, while almost all the rudimentary practices of the English, or broadly the human society come into question when juxtaposed with those of the Houyhnhnms, some are left unasked. The most important among them would be the concept of slavery. At one juncture Gulliver notes –

“..among the Houyhnhnms, the white, the sorrel, and the iron-grey were not so exactly shaped as the bay, the dapple-grey, and the black; nor born with equal talents of mind, or a capacity to improve them; and therefore continued always in the condition of servants, without ever aspiring to match out of their own race, which in that country would be reckoned monstrous and unnatural.”

True, the usual hierarchy of race in the human-inhabited world is inverted in this space of Alternate Reality but hierarchy persists nonetheless. One may ask, why the seemingly perfect race of Houyhnhnms, the company of which helped the author ameliorate himself to a perfect being and also bring suggestions to purge the flaws of his country, couldn’t do away with the perpetual slavery of a particular part and make efforts to improve its “talents of minds” without believing that they are necessarily deprived by birth?

The portrayal of the Houyhnhnm world also prefigures the author’s bias against women and his belief in the male-female binary or hierarchy. Gulliver while painting the picture of England to his Houyhnhnm master scornfully remarks – “my country was governed by a female man, whom we called a Queen.” And then again while describing how resourceful is the Houyhnhnm education system,

Swift writes - “Strength is chiefly valued in the male, and comeliness in the female, not upon the account of love, but to preserve the race from degenerating; for where a female happens to excel in strength, a consort is chosen with regard to comeliness.”

What transpires succinctly is that the precincts of the parallel universe are defined by the inconveniences that the author logically or personally perceives in the real world. From an elaborate description of the Houyhnhnm society, one can guess that Swift’s Alternate Reality is in fact based on the primitive, austere Spartan model where indeed the complexities of trade, speech and government weren’t there but also the scope for love was really less. Following the Spartan framework, in Houyhnhnms, “The young couple meet and are joined, merely because it is the determination of their parents and friends”, parents don’t have any special affection for their own issue and all children are same in their eyes. Thus, again this fantastical Utopia is strongly built on the Spartan notion of emotionless utility which fails the author in his critique of the Utilitarian England in a whole new way.

Clearly, the fantastical space of the Alternate Reality is the author’s own. One finds questions galore. To look for solutions and prescriptions in it would posit an impediment to the author’s predilections. This goes, however, without discounting the potency of the genre!

Sayantani Chowdhury

II Year

Mirror of eriseD

Standing before the mirror
staring into familiar unfamiliar eyes
the reflection, I see is me
but mirrors not I.
The life in those eyes
miss the contemplation of death
What I seem to think is true
Is scarred by trivial battles.
Pretentious reflection becomes truth
—an unattainable reality
the missing dark in my reflection
questions, what is real?
And standing before the mirror I realize
I, simultaneously live two lies.

Asawari Tripathi

II Year

Are You God?

I cannot bear the loneliness any longer. What am I supposed to do all day with myself? My parents do what they can, but I still have to face the world every day. My professors pretend to neglect me but their uncomfortable gazes are self-explanatory. I have no friends to talk to, to share my despair with. People say solitude is peaceful, even healthy, but the solitude of those who say that is voluntary. Mine is forced. I am Celie, by the way, and I am an only child, turning twenty today.

My parents have made me a big cake, given me twenty presents, expressing their love for me. They have helped me survive my loneliness all these years, and to them I am the most beautiful person alive. But that's what they think, and they can't force anyone else to think their way. They too have to carry the burden of my ugliness. I can't see them struggling anymore, and I can't look at people anymore, repelled by my face. Why should it matter how I look? Am I any less of a human being? You may call me a coward for doing this, but you don't get the right to judge me until you have felt what I have felt, seen the shock on people's faces as I have.

I stare at the bottle of pills for a long moment. Then I down all of them with a big glass of water. And the effect is immediate. I fall on the floor, and darkness covers me.

I don't know where I am. It looks like Mother Nature itself, only one that is untouched by man – wild, free, abandoned. To my amazement, I see an escalator, and I find myself climbing on it, full of the spirit of adventure. Looks like I'm in a tree house now. I go in, expecting someone to be there telling me, "This is where your afterlife begins. Be happy now." But my hopes are dashed as bewilderment fills me. There, on the floor, I see life itself. An infant at first, then a baby, a child, a teenager, an adult, an old person, and back to an infant, before my very eyes. I couldn't believe what I was seeing! But I couldn't recognize whether it's male or female.

So when the child became an adult again, I ask, "Who are you?" To which I'm answered, "Don't you recognize me? I am the one you used to pray to daily, the one you then abandoned angrily as all your prayers went unanswered every time. The one who now apologizes to you." I just stand there, shell-shocked and hushed.

"Are you God?"

"I don't know, but I don't like everyone calling me that. The word presumes just too much."

"Am I dead? Is this real?"

"Well, that depends on what you choose to believe. But I think we can both agree that it's definitely real, at least for the two of us."

"Did you create this world?"

"I believe I did create a world, however not one as reprobated and self-destructive as the one you come from."

And I begin to cry in earnest. S/he tries to calm me down, but it feels good to cry. All my anger and resentment come pouring out of my eyes. We sit in silence for some time while I try to comprehend what is happening.

"If you are God, how come I can't determine whether you are male or female? God is a man, everyone knows that."

“Like I said, presumptions. I am neither male nor female. I am not either, and I am both.”

“Then why does everyone think you are a man?”

“I don’t know. Maybe it suits some, and the rest are too powerless to argue. I made man and woman believing that they will fit together like the pieces of a puzzle, and two halves uniting into a whole is the most satisfying process. But nothing happened as I planned. Since then, I have tried every day to fix things. But now I am tired, and unlike you, I don’t have the option of ending myself.”

“But if you’re both male and female, then Christ...?”

“Is the son of Adam and Eve. You must believe I did not create any hierarchies. Eve was not, as you believe, born out of Adam’s rib. I created her alongside Adam, his companion, his other half. I can see that you find this hard to believe. But religion, caste, class - all these are human creations.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing, and stared incredulously at the person sitting before me.

“Why did you make me so ugly?”

“Because humans need to realize that outward appearances are not a manifestation of their personality. You took the overdose of sleeping pills because everyone thinks you’re too ugly to even look at. But beauty is just another human construct, something born out of humans’ desire to classify and categorize. Who gives this world the right to judge your beauty?”

“I hate this world. You are clearly very powerful, so why don’t you do something?”

“My dear Celie, that’s exactly what I try to do, and miserably fail at. I have given up. You tell me what you think will make this world right, and I’ll do it.”

And we both sit there thinking about how to make this world a better place.

Simran Mittal

III Year

Live

There's an alternate dimension beneath my left eye lid!

And a parallel universe under the right.

They stick and cling as they swing

From lash to lash like twisted vines.

I see them behind my lids each time I blink

And enter their world for a moment.

My eyes hold them back, in sheltered agony,

So that my worlds of pain and joy

Don't break the world we have.

Sandhita Chandra

II Year

Art and Life in Nineteenth Century Literature

Art and life can be seen as two ends of a double-edged sword that both imitate and enhance each other. They are far apart enough to act as alternate universes to each other and yet are closely linked; art attempts to imitate and reflect life and thus augments our experience of it, while also being exalted by it. At the same time, individuals inspired by art replicate and apply it to life (thus imitating art) and here again life is made better for allowing the development of art. This relationship between the contrasting ideals can be seen reflected in nineteenth century English literature, and has been examined in this paper.

These dynamics between the opposing contrasts is expressed in the philosophical position of anti-mimesis, that is, life imitating art. It is the direct opposite of the Aristotle-inspired ‘mimesis,’ a critical and philosophical term dealing with “imitation, representation, resemblance and presentation of self.” (Gerbauer and Wulf, 1992.) It comes from the Greek word for “to imitate” or “emulate.” Mimesis is, in its contemporary interpretation, the process by which art reflects and reinterprets the world around it. Originally, in ancient Greece, mimesis was an idea that governed the creation of works of art with correspondence to life (or the physical world) as a model for beauty and truth. After Plato, use of the term mimesis shifted gradually towards literary function (and was subsequently re-interpreted multiple times) until it arrived at the nineteenth century exposition with Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Theory of Imagination* (1798). He argued in the book that imitation reveals the sameness of process in nature, saying, “(T)he composition of a poem is among the imitative arts; and that imitation, as opposed to copying, consists either in the interfusion of the same through the radically different, or the different through a base radically the same.” Coleridge here opposes imitation to copying, referring in “copying to Wordsworth’s (his contemporary and friend) notion that poetry should replicate nature by capturing actual speech (calling it a “spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility). He proposes instead that the unity of essence is revealed precisely through different materialities of media.

Oscar Wilde was a notable proponent of the anti-mimesis position, who wrote that “Life imitates Art more often than Art imitates Life,” in his essay *The Decay of Lying* (1889). He wrote under a Platonic school of thought, claiming that anti-mimesis “results not merely from life’s imitative instinct, but from the fact that the self-conscious aim of life is to find expression, and that art offers it certain beautiful forms through which it may realise that energy.” What is found in life and nature is thus not really there but is what artists have taught people to find there. The effects of beauty and wonder did not exist in life until art invented them, according to Wilde. His anti-mimetic idealism was part of the nineteenth century debate between Romanticism and Realism. (McGrath, 1999.) George Bernard Shaw wrote in his preface to *Three Plays for Puritans* (1897, 1898, 1900), “I have noticed that when a certain type of feather appears in painting and is admired as beautiful, it presently becomes common in nature so that the Beatrices and Francescas in the picture galleries of one generation come to life as the parlour maids and waitresses of the next” and commented that men and women are created by their own fancies in the image of imaginary creatures in his youthful fiction, and that the real world does not therefore exist. He did, however, disagree with some of Wilde’s points, considering most attempts by life to imitate art to be reprehensible, in part because the art people choose to imitate was idealistic and romanticised.

In *The Mill and the Floss* (1860), written by Mary Anne Evans under the pseudonym George Eliot, the theme of art and life co-existing as binary contrasts and yet acting as supplements to each other can be seen. The protagonist of the novel, Maggie, has the book *The Imitation of Christ* (1418-1427, Latin) by Thomas à Kempis gifted to her and is inspired on reading it to renounce all art and pleasurable

activity from her life. This is ironic as a book, which is itself a work of literature and therefore art, is what compelled Maggie to remove all art and enjoyment from her life. Her relationship in the novel with her brother Tom can be compared to this balance of art against life. Maggie is creative, imaginative and passionate while Tom is dull, business-like and deeply rooted in reality; Maggie is spirited and has a flair for histrionics while Tom is pragmatic and placid. This is much like the relationship shared in George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (1847) between the protagonist Dorothea Brooke and her husband Edward Casaubon. Dorothea was an idealistic, buoyant and intelligent woman with great aspirations. Edward, however, was a pedantic, elderly man who resented her youthful energy and regarded her ambitions with cold-hearted detachment (as Tom tended to do with Maggie). Brooke represents art in their relationship, undertaking inventive, artistic projects such as redesigning cottages for her uncle's tenants; Casaubon, though, is representative of life, holding her back in her endeavours. In this way, Eliot portrays the dynamics between art and life in her novels through various inter-character relationships.

At the same time, Tom considers Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* to be 'inconsistent' while Tom is himself rigid and stubborn (though this arises more from his egotism and personal pride than a constant moral value system to inspire his false sense of righteousness). Neither of the two extremes are, however, ideal and a balance must be struck between the two (unpredictable spontaneity and rigidity in one's personality), in the same way that an accord between artistic expression and realistic life is essential. The juxtaposition of art against life can be seen in the dynamics of Maggie and Tom's relationship. When Maggie vows in 'Book Fourth' of the novel to give up art and pleasure, her friend and later lover Philip helps her embrace them again and persuades her to bring art and culture back into her life. He makes her realise that art, literature, et cetera are important life experiences, and attempts to show her beauty, love, poetry and art are as sacred and significant as renunciation. He views Maggie as self-important and feels she wants to portray a false image of herself as saintly.

Maggie, who craves praise and appreciation and has sought them her whole life, denounces art as a pretence. It is an artifice, as she does it merely in order to receive approval, doing subconsciously all she can to gain acceptance and a sense of belonging. Thus, her determination to be unselfish and give up all activities of self-gain stems from her inner selfishness and motive of self-interest. It is, in this way, a paradoxical act, as it is through her 'selfless' actions that she is able to feel satisfaction and fulfilment. Critics Gilbert and Gubar refer to her as the "angel of renunciation." (2000) The novel also employs the device of portraying art as a remedy for suffering. With Philip, for instance, his various cultural talents and interests offer him an outlet or refuge from his struggles and allow him to better cope with hardships.

Additionally, the forest (the Red Deeps) acts as an area where art can thrive, since it is a fantasy-reminiscent land that contains untold wonders and keeps them hidden from society, thus protecting them from reality and life. This area is seen thus as a cross between Shakespeare's Edenic forest of Arden (*As You Like It*, published 1623), a space where individuals are able to exercise true freedom, and Edward Thomas's path from his appropriately titled poem '*The Path*' (1917) that represents endless remarkableness visible only to the attuned eye (like that of an artist). It is thus the area where art can truly and completely thrive. This forest is ironically first seen at a time when Maggie has just proclaimed she will renounce and reject all pleasurable activity. However, it is here that, with Philip's persuasion, she is motivated to take it back up. He lets her know he feels she is deluding herself, saying she is "shutting [herself] up in a narrow, self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dullness."

Eliot's views can thus be seen reflected in this section. Philip's urging illuminates her thoughts and views to the reader and we can tell the writer believes it alright to enjoy, and that indulging oneself

is not a practice to be denounced as negative or sinful. She also feels that it is not right to suppress natural human wishes and urges to indulge in art and pleasure; it is better than a life of control and dullness. This is particularly relevant to her protagonist Maggie who, by nature, craves excess and is passionate and vibrant. For her, craving art is almost like a necessity and this brilliance and vibrancy of hers flashes in her face still, until she draws, in Philip's opinion, "that veil of dull quiescence over it." (Eliot, G. Part V, Chapter 3) In addition, art and literature are important as they help individuals in a society relate to others and understand reality (another correlation between art and reality). Art also helps one connect with humanity. It was, at the time, written off as flippant and feminine (which is why Philip was considered feminine, due to his link with the artistic sphere), and Eliot's disdain over this is evidenced in her work.

The idea of the binary contrasts of art and life is also explored extensively in poetry of the nineteenth century, when the Romantic Movement was at its peak- particularly in the genre of poetry. One such poem that examines this theme is poet laureate Lord Alfred Tennyson's celebrated ballad *The Lady of Shalott* (1832). Tennyson, in his poem, represents an artist's life as being detached from life and reality- separated from the rest of the world- who is still able to portray and comment on life through art. The eponymous Lady of Shalott is depicted by the poet in a sense as an artist, although no one sees her work, in solitary confinement, dying upon exposure to reality. The poem may therefore be read as an allegory (extended metaphor) for the isolation-bound life of an artist. The art of the Lady is what keeps her content (as Philip is kept, in *The Mill on the Floss*), and in depicting reflections of real life in her work, she struggles to balance herself (as all artists do) between the living world and a private dream (the world of art). The Lady of Shalott becomes, in her death, a work of art herself, viewed by and on display for the people of Camelot. Her death at the end as well as Maggie's in *The Mill on the Floss* proves to the reader that, in that time, in order to break the norms of society (such as isolation for the woman and for the artist), one is forced to die. Death is the only way to achieve salvation. The lady's artistic ventures are brought to light in the lines, "There she weaves by night and day/A magic web with colours gay." (*The Lady Part II*, Lines 37-38)

The theme was also a favourite of poet John Keats, who referenced it in numerous poems- it being a predominant subject of thought amongst his peers. One of Keats's poems which juxtaposes art and life is of course the famous *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1820). He deals, in the poem, with transience represented by life as opposed to the permanence that comes with art and its 'preservative' properties, so to speak. The poet expresses in the poem his belief that immortality can be attained through art (and representation in art) alone. He writes, addressing the urn he writes of, "When old age shall this generation waste,/Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe." (Keats, J. 1820. Lines 46-47)

Keats muses, while looking upon the urn that he believes has captured for eternity a moment in the lives of ordinary people, and will now last forever due to having been encapsulated on the Grecian vase. Another poem of Keats's, *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819), is a meditation on art and life, inspired by a nightingale nesting in the poet's garden, singing. The bird's song and the poet's happiness in it is contrasted with the transient nature of youth, beauty and other elements of human life. (The song of the nightingale is seen as a symbol of art and thus outlasts human life.) The narrator ponders on death and old age, complaining about the approach of old age that is certain for all humans but which art remains unaffected by and thus, which the nightingale need never worry about. Keats therefore treats the binaries of art and life with an unpleasant disposition- holding art on a pedestal that life and reality can never aspire to. He considers art to be equated with eternity and permanence, while life is equated with mortality and transience. Keats also touches upon these themes in his other poems, *To Autumn* (1819) and *Bright Star (or Last Sonnet)*, published posthumously in 1838.

However, it can be said that life cannot exist without art, as in its absence people lead limited, unimaginative, sad lives. One is unable to 'live' fully, since a life lacking art is not a life at all. This idea is also propounded by Eliot in her novel. She believes that art makes every day existence better and is an emotional outlet or refuge from daily worries and concerns, and from the monotony of life. Simultaneously, though art must be kept detached and distanced from reality, it must always be a reflection of it (and thus of life). Art is thus dependant on society and cannot exist without it, just as life cannot exist in the absence of art. Neither can one prevail if the other does not. In the words of John Keats, "Beauty is truth, and truth beauty'- that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

(Keats, J. 1820. Lines 49-50.)

Sandhita Chandra

II Year

Same Reality, Different Dimensions Samuel Johnson's London and Christopher Nolan's Gotham

Samuel Johnson's poem *London* (1738) is written in the form of an imitation of Juvenal's Third Satire, and critiques the corruption and moral perversion that has arisen after leaving the glorious days of the Renaissance far behind. The speaker of the poem, Thales, aligns himself with left wing politics and propounds the need for a revolution in the near future which would bring about a complete change in London's current state of affairs. A similar view of corruption and the need for revolutionary action is depicted in Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight trilogy. The city of London and Gotham are comparable in terms of their moral decadence. In both cities, one witnesses corruption, and at the same time, realises the need for mass rebellion and vigilante justice.

Johnson describes London as a place where "Malice, Rapine, Accident conspire". Thales is most critical about foreign elements influencing British society and believes that the French and Spanish people who come and reside in London are responsible for shifting the boundaries of ethics and morality. Johnson is also against the Walpole government, and attacks it with allegations of favouritism, nepotism and a callous attitude towards the citizens. As Harriet Raghunathan states in her introduction to Johnson in the Worldview Critical Edition of the poem, "everyday life is a battle, in which the individual strives to maintain his integrity in the face of an insidious moral invasion, as a country tries to avoid military or political capitulation. England is now a mercantile capitalist country and this is reflected in Johnson's picture of pervasive mercenary values and the competition and struggle everywhere apparent in the poem."

Christopher Nolan's Gotham is also a city exposed to chaos and anarchy, where criminals like the Joker and Bane are able to suppress the masses and create an atmosphere of apocalyptic frenzy. In Matthew Arnold's terms, the Joker and Bane symbolize the populace "doing as they like." It is a populace as the "sterner self," which "likes bawling, hustling and smashing". In *The Dark Knight* (2008), the villainous Joker posits a Nietzschean allusion. Early in the film, he states, "I believe whatever doesn't kill you simply makes you . . . stranger". This line is a punning adaptation of the familiar Nietzschean aphorism, "What does not kill me makes me stronger." This allusion invites the viewer to consider the different aspects of the human struggle to maintain order against nihilism and chaos. It may suggest that while the city's corruption and amorality may not kill the citizens, it will ignite in them the strength and fervour to bring about a revolution.

Thales, as the speaker of *London*, assumes a vanguard position by remarking on the shortcomings of political institutions and encouraging citizens to unite in protest. His vision of an ideal place is the countryside, which is still untarnished by moral corruption and is free of the foreign influences of the French. Thales is able to inspire because he is a citizen of London himself and thus harbours a sense of belonging and goodwill towards the city. In a way, he illustrates the link between the personal and the political. Because he is poor and unrewarded, with all his wealth dissipated, he is able to feel strongly for the Londoners. Since the whole land is in need of rejuvenation, the degenerate creatures must be replaced by such men who will prefer a virtuous simplicity to corrupting luxury, cultivate sturdy independence instead of a sycophantic dependence and bring to moral ugliness and decay, a new vitality and beauty. In Gotham, this role is taken up by Batman. However, he, as a vigilante, operates outside of the law.

Batman seeks law, order, and justice for Gotham and its citizens; such is his justification for acting outside the law. In the first movie (*Batman Begins*, 2005) itself, the fact that it is necessary to sometimes step outside the rules of society in order to save it is established clearly. During his training Ducard tells Bruce, "Crime cannot be tolerated. Criminals thrive on the indulgence of society's understanding." Like Thales, Batman is also accepted as a defender of justice because of his own personal experiences. Having seen his own parents being shot and murdered and being orphaned at a young age forces

him to feel ardently for other innocent citizens. Batman is the double for Bruce Wayne, who clearly represents an Arnoldian liberal manifesting his best self in a barbarian “with its characteristics of high spirit, choice manners, and distinguished bearing” searching for a best self in an attempt to express a “general humane spirit.”

In *London*, Johnson attacks the Walpole government for suppressing independent thinking and lays emphasis on the difficulties faced by outspoken writers in getting rewards and recognition. The lines “Since unrewarded Science toils in Vain” and “Slow rises Worth by Poverty Deprest” convey that meritorious individuals and people with a genuine thirst for knowledge aren’t able to make a name for themselves in society. In order to be successful, one must be corrupt and more importantly, obsequious. In order to fit in, one must either ape the fawning Frenchman or be plunged into hated poverty. He implies that awkward flattery has become the status quo in London. This idea is also illustrated in Jonathan Swift’s novel *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726). Swift contrasts the unfair way people were elected to the parliament in England with the absurd way people in Lilliput win their political positions, that is through rope dancing and leaping over sticks. The candidates for the ministerial positions are trained to dance on straight ropes from an early age and only those who are able to dance on ropes with dexterity become ministers. The ones who manage to flatter and impress the Emperor with their dancing are the ones who are successful.

The idea that individuals lose their sense of selves in order to fit in is criticised by the Joker in *The Dark Knight* (2012). The Joker’s trademark phrase, “Why so serious?” is repeated several times throughout the film, emphasizing his perpetual curiosity as to why people keep trying to stick to the system, follow the rules, do as others tell them to do, when nothing ever turns out the way they plan. The Joker simply aims to upset the status quo and introduce principles of anarchy to the people of Gotham (foreshadowing Bane’s campaign against Gotham’s elite in *The Dark Knight Rises*). Anarchy, the Joker argues, is far fairer than a judicial code because it is based on chaos, one of the universal constants; one can never expect the unexpected. Perhaps the anarchy that the Joker proposes is the same revolution and rebellion that Thales and Johnson want, the only difference being that while Thales offers it as a peaceful idea, the Joker tries to execute it in a psychopathic frenzy. In any case, both Thales and the Joker wish to disturb the current state of affairs. However, where such a revolution leads to is not addressed.

London also suggests that the corrupt surroundings consume every individual, forcing a loss of virtue in every heart. In the poem, the righteous are in fact singled out as victims, and villains and fools are favoured as beneficiaries of an unjust government. The good come to a bad end, and the bad go scot free. Essentially, begging becomes the mark of virtue. Johnson’s claims anticipate the idea of “mind forged manacles” suggested later by William Blake in his poem *London* (1794). The idea proposes that human beings were born free but are now trapped by ideological patterns. Johnson laments that Londoners are so naïve as to become entrenched in the ideology of Frenchmen.

Similarly, corrupt circumstances also drive Harvey Dent to a point of mental perversion in *The Dark Knight*. After the Joker kills Rachel, Dent undergoes a profound transformation into the villain Two Face, and seeks revenge on those responsible for her death. Dent, encouraged by the Joker, goes on a murderous rampage and eventually falls to his death. Nolan here warns us about how even the most upright of people are liable to corruption and radical transformation.

Finally, as Thales retires from London at the end of the poem and leaves behind his agitated friend to lead the revolution, Batman too retires, entrusting police detective Blake with his responsibilities of protecting Gotham. In both cases, there is an unspoken promise of returning when the city is at the peak of revolution. Both Thales and Batman believe in the idea of Kairos, that at an opportune moment, a revolution will arise that will change the city forever.

Aarushi Mathur

II Year

Beyond the Horizon

Homo sapiens live in a spoon-fed world of pre-existing facts, ideologies, theories, concepts, beliefs, rights and wrongs. We study histories of this universe and carve our thoughts according to the observations, experiences and experiments of great men and women.

But, have we ever given second thoughts to their origin or considered why we are limited to them? Or have we ever deeply explored and discovered the horizons of our imaginary mind? We see dreams night and day, reveries of every kind, and fantasise a world of our own - a world not necessarily restricted to logic or reason. In some way or the other, we unconsciously construct a world, or for that matter, multiple worlds of our own, existing parallel to the 'real' world. These worlds or 'alternative realities' are pieces of fiction of our own making, which may go to any lengths. It is interesting to discover the extent to which our mind can travel, often leading to utopic, 'out-of-the-box' thoughts and imaginations. Such cognizance occurred to me post a dream I envisaged on a tranquil October night.

It was as if a whole new world lay in front of my eyes, watching extra-terrestrial life existing in all the other planets. I found myself to be the omniscient observer of the mesmerising events happening around me. With people settling in the neighbouring planets, it was soothing to witness our earth getting liberated of the population explosion it had been witnessing since decades. Wouldn't it be a major omission if I talk about this encroachment without mentioning about the natives? Well, they were far from us in appearance; an entirely different set of species. Round-heads, fubby and turquoise skin being some of their distinct characteristics. However, they appeared to be diligent and humble in demeanour. And I felt much like Gulliver coming across strange creatures in his travels.

I happened to witness non-living things react, which left me flabbergasted yet in some ways, it was a treat to watch them. The usually placid forests were able to "bough-wough" with the arrival of danger. Flowers were able to roam around the world like gypsies, planting themselves wherever they pleased. Lands on the other hand could shake themselves to their contentment, dissuading man from building his concrete nest in the process. And I felt like the curious Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, loitering and experiencing a topsy-turvy world.

The amount of space thrust upon man- to settle, work and make merry seemed infinite, for there were planets aplenty! The moon, which had often been considered an auspicious celestial body in determining festivals, holy rites and rituals for many communities across the world, had now turned into a favourable destination for honeymooners, adventure enthusiasts, explorers, religious and superstitious people. So, applications for visa to the moon had already started pouring in! In fact, the happiest lot was the corpulence who eagerly wanted to pay a visit and delight himself by feeling lighter! All thanks to the moon's weaker gravitational pull (one-sixth of the earth). Mars, being nearest to the earth became children's attraction (and parents' headache) for excursions.

Moving further, I realised how often we have come across people boasting about their 'foreign-returned' tag after an overseas trip. Considering the access to seven other colossal celestial objects, Neptune being the farthest of all, became every man's dream destination. However, it was the determination of high-spirited Punjabi women which led them to accomplish their desire of an expedition to the cold planet – only to brag about being 'Neptune-returned' on their Twitter and Facebook accounts. So poor Mt. Everest lost all its value!

Talking about women, one of their biggest obsessions of all times has been beauty, and beauty pageants have been held to encourage them to recognise their external and internal splendour. On a universal

level, the competition however was an inter-planetary one, with Miss Mercury, Miss Venus, Miss Uranus, Miss Saturn and so on, competing hard for the Miss Cosmos title. And the stage was none other than Jupiter, possessing the capacity of a billion people (considering its massive structure).

All along I have mentioned travelling and settling, and the almost immediate question of accessing different planets would have risen in your mind. So, the catch is, people had rockets to commute for short as well as long distances. Fly anywhere anytime to your heart's content. So instead of bus conductors screaming to call people in, there were rocket conductors selling tickets for Mars and Saturn.

Another thing I observed was, with the universe becoming one and for all, the beliefs and superstitions created by astrologers and soothsayers regarding planetary shifts vanished, for people were able to access them on their own. In addition, equality among people was beginning to attain rightful restoration with the marginalised sections like Dalits, for instance being summoned for commencing holy pujas, and given respect and dignity. On the other hand, the poor migrating to alternate planets for space and opportunities boosted their standard of living.

Thus, the gap between the rich and the poor reduced subsequently. The theory of Karma was the strong influencing force behind the eradication of treachery, rapes, acid attacks, murders, robbery and all sorts of crimes. Law operated differently among the planets, with Mercury and Venus sending criminals towards the sun to burn and die.

The theory of time is one of the things that caught my attention. All our lives we have been taught about the value of time and that "time and tide wait for no one". But this abstract thing called time could be paused and rewound by the inhabitants once a year. So the people had the opportunity to dive and delve into the depths of epochs and see their past. This somehow reminded me of the stream of consciousness technique which Virginia Woolf used in her characters (particularly Clarissa) in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Trying to gather further information from a native of the ringed-planet, I suddenly found myself quivering. It kind of disrupted my stream of thoughts. I was amidst my glorious observations when some strange sounds appeared. They grew louder along with a few jerks, and finally my eyes opened. I saw my mum, her vexed expression, holding up my snoozing alarm and showing me the time. Alas! I had missed my morning lectures once again.

Saumya Kalra

III Year

Love, Conjoined

(I)

He lies

Beside me

"I love you" he says

I lie beside him

"I love you too" I say

We love each other

We "lie" together.

He knows I am not there

Never will be

I died the day he left me.

I know he's not here

Never will be

His death made me this numb.

I know he's not with me

Yet I feel him.

I feel him like the air around me

I feel him when I feel myself

I believe he talks to me

I believe he wants me

I want him too.

I believe he's here

even after he's gone

and taken my life away with him.

(II)

We were two souls

Conjoined by birth

At hearts!

His sneeze tickled my nose

When I moved, I gave him shivers

We were made never to fall apart

For my body gave blood to his heart.

Bodies united

But heart?

One heart united the two

We were happy.

But the world would not bear it

One syringe.

One syringe

Killed him

And I, was born still.

(III)

Nine months together

We knew not if we were lovers or siblings or spouses

We were two lives

Two lives supporting each other

Reveling in one's joys

Grieving other's pains.

Two happy lives

But the world would not bear the happiness

One syringe

Took his blood away

My heart away.

(IV)

"The world outside is utopia, we'll go there someday",

He said, as we

lay in the dark round world,

with water everywhere.

He wanted to go out in the light

Explore the bigger world

(with shallow hearts)

We could do that together

Walking around with one heart.

But, the world,

This bright, enlightened world

Could not bear us together

One syringe

Just one syringe

Made us all alike,

Made us two, heartless too.

(V)

Those living in the dark

are not always dark on the inside;

(those with hearts are not always benevolent)

We were happy in the dark circle.

One push towards the light,

And we lost each other.

Heart detached

Bodies separated

Veins blocked.

Living "together", was "utopic"

Promises turned lies

In this altered world

Where lives kill lives to gain flesh.

We were happy in our dark world

The malicious hearts taught us the other lying.

"I'd always stay with you", he once said,

He lied to me.

"I'd always be with you", I'd replied,

I lied to him.

Now, we lie together in the dark world again,

This time, surrounded by earth,

We love each other

We lie together

As people from the light,

Send us back in the dark.

Kajal Bhatia

III Year

Beyond Patriarchy

It was the usual college day, when Alwin found himself being followed by Myreah on his way to home. So, he stopped for seconds and checked whether his hair was parted correctly or not so that it doesn't give a wrong signal to the girls. Then, he pulled his shirt downwards thinking that it could be the reason for the ill-behavior of Myreah. Satisfied by his appearance, he rushed towards his home. He had seen that girl stalking him for a week. The next day, Myreah stopped and threatened him by saying, "Don't wear such dresses and move around. Jeans-shirt and such dresses are made only for us, not for the male folk. I don't want to see you tomorrow in such a dress." Alwin didn't speak anything, but on the whole way back, he kept thinking, "Why am I born a boy? And when will the day come when I'll put on any dress and move freely on the road anytime?"

Again on the next day, he couldn't save himself from the lusty gaze of Myreah. She caught him by his hand and said, "You didn't follow my instructions. So, now you will have to pay for it." As he said these words, she started molesting him. Alwin saw a policewoman Kaity, expecting her to be a ray of hope and asked for help. She came and bribed him in exchange of giving help. Alwin rejected as he didn't have any money left with him.

Kaity then gave a helping hand to Myreah and insulted Alwin. Alwin tried to protect himself and he also cried for help. No one came to help him because it was late evening and the road was very quiet. Kaity gave a demonic laughter at the pitiful Alwin and said, "No one is here to save you. You can't do anything, you are a boy. Nothing will harm us. Rather, your honour is at stake. So, don't shout." Alwin was thinking woefully, "If I had been a girl, I wouldn't have faced so much."

When Alwin was trying to save himself, his head accidentally struck a tree trunk and his head started bleeding so heavily that he lost his life. Both, Myreah and Kaity ran away from that place. Luckily, two friends who were passing by found Alwin's body and reported it to the police station. The police arrived soon and tracked the CCTV camera footage, which was the only way to find the culprit. It was evident who the culprits were, but the government didn't pay any heed to nab them. Instead, the government advised the boys and men to wear decent clothes and not step out after evening.

The tragedy sent Alwin's parents in deep shock and they regretted bringing up a male child in a female-dominated society. At least, the child would have been alive!

Nitisha

I Year

In our Alternate Reality

The US will drive like the rest of the world,
And declare peace on the world for all times ahead;
Good films and books will be successful;
And punk's not dead.
Justin Bieber will bottom all the charts;
Bond will like his martinis stirred, not shaken;
Race, gender, class and orientation are nonsense words;
And there'll be no sequels to Taken.
Teenagers will fawn reading Tolstoy and not Meyer;
Old, black men will order the "extra whip, non-fat, caramel latte, venti;"
Poets will feature in the Top 20;
Art galleries will be closed to people over 21;
There will be equal jobs and opportunities for everyone;
Humans will give up on colonising mars and the moon;
We will bring down the capitalistic, racist, misogynistic hetero-patriarchy,
Tonight at noon.

Sandhita Chandra

II year

She was Me

I blinked my eyes slowly, then rapidly, trying to make sense of my changed surroundings. *Where am I?* The branches slightly hid the scene unfolding in front of my eyes. The yells and the howls of men filled my ears. Thousands of glimmering flames flooded my vision as I slowly moved closer to the edge of the woods. But I couldn't dare to move out from behind the shield the branches provided me with. Engulfed by the darkness of the woods, I peered through the branches.

An area had been cleared right in the middle of the woods. A wooden pillar had been erected in the middle of that clearing. As I saw the rusted chains dangling from it, a shiver ran down my spine. Hordes of men had formed a circle around the pillar. Their bearded faces were distorted with anger and vengeance. Spit flew out from their mouths as they yelled and shouted, brandishing their flamed torches. *How did I come here? Where was I?* I turned to search for a way out or to at least find the way I came in. The woods behind me were dark. I found the dark woods a lot more comforting than the glimmering angry flames behind me. I needed to go back home. *How far away from home was I?* I looked down at my clothes. My black skinny jeans and my shirt were exactly the way they were when I had headed to the mall in the morning with my sister. I searched my pockets to find my phone. A wave of relief washed over me as I felt the plastic case with my fingers and pulled it out. Thanking God, I frantically pressed the power button to turn it on. As my screen lit up, the missing network bars on my phone destroyed every hope I had of returning home. I angrily shoved the phone back into my pocket and I suddenly realized that the woods were quiet. The men had stopped shouting. Cursing my curiosity I moved closer to the edge again.

The men at the farther side had parted to let someone in. I could see three figures walking towards the circle. The men were facing these approaching figures. Two burly men were dragging a frail woman by her arms. A nagging feeling of dread started bubbling in the pit of my gut as the three figures entered the circle and stood right in front of the pillar. The young woman wore a simple, white, long dress which had been soiled with mud. The hem of her dress had torn away and was forming a trail behind her. One of her sleeves had been ripped open. The two men were dressed in black tunics and turncoats with breeches and boots. Their death-grip on her thin arms was the only thing that was enabling her to keep standing on her own feet. Her head hung low and she was breathing heavily due to exhaustion. Her inky-black hair; the same colour as mine; had come undone from her bun and had formed a curtain obscuring her face from the thousands of glares.

"Kill her!" a man yelled among the crowd. "Kill that damning woman." "Burn that witch!" Shouts of anger filled the quiet woods again. The mass of people all dressed in black robes and turncoats wielded their flamed torches in agreement while proclaiming their own verdict. With their growing anger, the fear in me intensified. The jeers became louder and louder until it was just a cacophony of voices disturbing the silent night. I couldn't look at the men anymore; they disgusted me. My eyes fell on the dejected figure standing in the middle of the crowd. She hadn't said a word. *Who was she?* As if realizing my questioning stare she looked up at me.

I lost my footing as soon she looked at me and I staggered backwards. I caught the closest branch to stop myself from falling. The prickly-branch scraped my right palm but I didn't take notice of it. Her cerulean-blue eyes looked right at me. I had seen those eyes before; seen them for the last eighteen years; seen them smiling and sad. They were *my* eyes...*my* face.

I was her or may be, she was me.

She looked at me with a knowing look as if she knew I would be there. Her or *my* eyes bored into me. Her face was devoid of any expression. She implored me through her blue eyes and I was transfixed

by her stare. Suddenly, one of the men yanked her by her arm to straighten her up. She turned her eyes from me and stared at the man. "Please, let me go." she said, "I have never hurt anyone." Her voice; *my voice* washed over the crowd silencing them. I could hear her plea; *my plea*, amidst all the howls of the men. Her voice was tired and yet it never wavered. She had pleaded and shouted in self defence for a long time that turned her voice hoarse. The older man who had yanked her dropped her arm. He moved back a step and slapped her across her face. I yelped from the pain as I saw her; *myself*, crumple on the ground.

"How dare you speak to me, you vile creature?"the man spat at her. Pulling her by her hair they dragged her to the pillar and bounded her to it by the chains above her head. The men reveled at their justice. Panic rose in me as I shook myself out of my stupor. I had to save her; *save me* or else they would kill her. I looked at her and found her looking at me. A red-bruise was rapidly being formed on her left cheek. The corner of her lip had split open. My heart squeezed in my chest at her numb expression. I took quick steps to reach her and was almost out in the clearing, when she shook her head to stop me. My feet halted on their own accord as she shook her head ever-so-slightly again. I moved back into the woods but didn't turn my eyes away from her. She straightened herself up and her numb expression changed. A look of calmness shone in her face as she looked up at the sky and prayed. But I started trembling knowing the outcome. Like a coward I stood there looking at her.

The crowd cheered with glee as one of the men came forward with a lightened torch. My vision blurred with tears as I saw *myself* about to be lit on fire. She, however, looked calm and serene. Tears streamed down my cheeks. Suddenly, the quiet night shook with the loud rumbling of the sky. A flash of lightening lit up the woods and for a moment blinded me. An angry wind threatened to blow out all the flamed torches. The men became frantic as they tried to fight against the wind. The eerie howl of the wind silenced the shouts of the men. My hair aggressively flapped against my cheek and I looked at her. She wasn't fazed by the sudden change in the weather, as if she had already anticipated it. She just looked at me and smiled as if to reassure me that she will be fine...*I will be fine*. As the wind grew relentless, my eyes shut involuntarily.

"Ava", someone was shaking my shoulder. I opened my eyes and found myself staring at my own image in the mirror. A bundle of new clothes was lying near my feet. I was back in the trial-room of the Mall. I turned and came face-to-face with my sister. "Hey! What is wrong with you? What is taking you so long?" my sister's voice was laced with irritation. I couldn't focus on her face or her voice. *How did I come back here?* I turned again and faced the mirror. My sister droned on with her questions but I didn't know what to tell her. The howls of the angry wind still ringed in my ears. My cerulean-blue eyes were red from crying and my right cheek in the mirror had the exact red bruise being formed. My inky-black hair was in unruly curls and was disheveled. Blood had clotted at the corner of my lips. There was a dull-throbbing pain in my head. I looked at my hands and saw that my right palm had turned red from the scraped skin. There were faint markings of the rusted chains on my wrists. "Give me five minutes", I managed to say in a small voice to my sister. She looked at me with a strained expression and left the trial-room. The dark woods, the flames, the wind and *her* smiling face, all came back to me. I wanted to know what had happened to her. I closed my eyes shut and hoped that I would go back to the woods again. I opened my eyes only to be greeted by my own reflection in the trial-room mirror. Questions after questions pummelled into my thoughts but the ones that I desperately needed answer to were- *What happened to her? Who was she?* And most importantly *who am I?*

Kathakali Dutta
II Year

If Mirrors Could Speak

“Do you have an identity beyond the mirror?”

“I am you. I am your reflection.”

“That’s called avoiding the question, Mirror-Me. “You have read Alice: Through the Looking glass, haven’t you? I know the consequences of avoiding questions. Like she destroyed her mirror and thus the world beyond it, I fear you would do the same. And yet, I cannot lie to you. You were never good at lying to yourself, after all.”

Mirror-Me looks scared. I won’t ask any more distressing questions, I think to myself. I lean as close to the mirror as the dresser will allow, and press my cheek against Mirror-Me’s.

“If your world is anything like mine, you probably need some intelligent conversation once in a while, right? You can talk to me, if you like?” I tentatively whisper. She begins to smile. I realize that she has her own identity beyond my reflection. Like left to right, light and shadow, her world is just a little flipped. I now have a friend!

At least my reflection can never leave me.

We talk once or twice a day. There are no others whom I can dare to be open with in my reality. Over the years Mirror-Me has acquired several cosmetic and personality changes. Her hair is shorter. She looks older. She has more scars than ever before. I try, and fail, to ask about them. She is an expert in evading the topic. One day I look into the mirror, and I have no reflection. The room beyond is empty. Mirror-Me has gone.

She has left me too.

I crumple to the floor before the dresser, sobbing. Pain hits hardest in the soft places where certainty once nestled. The room begins to rumble around me. If it’s an earthquake, let it bury me. I do not wish to care. Then –the mirror explodes! Shards landing in my hair and on my clothes, slicing open a million little cuts all over my face. Mirror-Me leans *out* of it, shouting,

“...come here, Aevon! Please, hurry! Someone’s reflection tried to take revenge for the legend of Alice. Your world is destroying itself!”

She leans out and grabs me by the shoulders, pulling me upwards strongly from my crouch on glass-shard-floor, and I go headfirst through the ruined mirror. She holds me tight to her, immeasurably scared for me. I begin to smile.

“What’s your name then?” I ask her, as black-suited people begin to seal up the ruins of the dresser.

“Call me Yasha, darling. You’re safe now. You will be very happy here.”

“Correction,” I grin, snuggling closer to my ex-reflection, “we will be very happy here. Together?”

And we kiss.

Yasha

II Year

Alternate Reality of a Deranged Mind

In his book *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961), Foucault unravels the notion of madness in three phases. His suggestions can be perceived in the light of an alternate reality that separates those we term ‘mad’ from the normative categories of political citizens. In this paper, I shall attempt to posit the views of three scholars from different centuries to elaborate on the concept.

Foucault creates the space for society to recognize madness as a social construct and a subjective category. He suggests that madness is a social dictate of the majority in society. The striking minority or individual who lives a different reality of moral/social conduct is simply cast out and declared deranged. John Webster’s eponymous protagonist in *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613-14) is a bold and rational woman, who is punished by her brothers for her unsanctioned sexual relationship with a steward of the royal court, Antonio. Ferdinand, her brother, attempts to drive her to madness by surrounding her with madmen in Act IV, Scene II. In this scene, Webster brilliantly reveals the facets of ‘madness’ along with the real intent of his Revenge Tragedy. He employs the comic tool of ‘Masques’ to bring out the serious problem of corruption in society, resonating with Shakespeare’s use of jesters in his Tragedies such as *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*. Foucault’s ideas of the 20th century are represented in the madmen created by Webster in the 17th century. The confinement that the Duchess is subjected to is another concept explored by Foucault as a way of getting rid of the “undesirables”. There is a priest driven mad by rigid religious dictates and emerges in stark contrast to the Duchess’ brother and Machiavellian Cardinal. The Cardinal is the pinnacle of corruption in his sexual and moral conduct. He plots and murders, that too using a poisoned copy of the Holy Bible. A gentleman can’t keep up with society’s demands of proper conduct and is a madman because of his refusal to comply. However, his decision can be understood as a step towards different norms rather than madness. He wishes to live an alternate reality where one could have space for individuality instead of constantly being moulded into existing social dogmas.

The tailor is another interesting ‘madman’. He is unable to keep up with changing fashions during the height of fashion in the Renaissance. Frequent change in fashion is symbolic of the fluctuations in human nature itself. It is also resonant of Niccolo Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1513), in which the author advocates the need to adapt oneself to one’s changing environment. Furthermore, fashion was class exclusive; it demanded people to dress according to their class. Women of the age were expected to dress themselves in clothing that was appealing yet protective of their virginity, to uphold the Madonna-Whore complex, first identified by Sigmund Freud under the rubric of *psychic impotence*. The tailor’s mind perhaps constructed a simpler world without such unalterable precepts. He was unfit and powerless in his society and thus driven insane. Antonio and the Duchess themselves were misfits because of their virtue and uncharacteristic courage. They had no space in society and hence died painful deaths within the realm of the play. Webster’s intent seems to be to point out the malice and madness of the corrupt society that he creates. In his play, the madmen seem sane, and the functional authorities and citizens seem insane in their conduct. In the very first scene of the first act, Antonio illuminates the sycophancy and corruption of the Italian court (representing the English court) by contrasting it with the “Judicious King” of the French court. It was perhaps this very corruption along with guilt that drove Ferdinand mad, which is ironic because he wanted to drive the Duchess mad. The Duchess on the other hand proclaims, “nothing but noise, and folly / Can keep me in my right wits, whereas reason / And silence make me stark mad.” (4.2.5). One would think that it’s easy to drive a person mad by surrounding them with madmen, but in the Duchess’ reality, these madmen kept her in her right wits. She is the only character who maintains her dignity until her death as she states, “I am Duchess of Malfi still.” (4.2.142). Each character in the play seems to be living in a personal perception of reality until the inconsistencies begin to culminate in Act IV.

In the 18th century, Samuel Johnson produced an imitation of Juvenal's 'Third Satire', 'London', written in 1738 and published anonymously in multiple editions. Like Webster, Johnson's focus also centres on the problem of corruption. He presents a state of affairs which centuries later manifests onto screen, through Christopher Nolan's depiction of Gotham City in the Batman Trilogy. Nolan's Gotham City is depicted in murk as criminals roam free and crime flourishes with little hope for justice. Good people face constant danger as evil exploits them. Johnson depicts a similar situation in 'London' where "Crimes are Safe" but people never are. While a "true Briton" living in London was traditionally defined as virtuous, masculine, superior, and perfect in every sense, Johnson relocates this Briton in the countryside which is the only place where virtue can now exist according to him. Johnson thus creates two polarities: the morally decadent city and the morally upright pastoral. These two polarities seem to offer two extreme alternate realities, where on the one hand, city life is nothing but malevolent, and on the other, country life is the epitome of tranquility. This moral decadence was the reason he wishes to leave the city and live in the country like a hermit, reminiscent of *The Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. He describes the country as a place free of inhibitions and crime, though it was not so. His idealistic description of the country hints toward his extreme passion for justice.

Through his narrator Thales, Johnson is trying to incite the people of England to revolt against such circumstances, such malice and corruption which is maddening. People are turning to crime because of the madness of extreme corruption, driving them mad too. Johnson is advancing a revolution and declaring himself leader. He is driven by extreme passion and love for his nation into a stream of thought which the government would deem deranged. He is instigating his audience to take immediate action without concern for the consequences that might follow. Foucault says, "The possibility of madness is therefore implicit in the very phenomenon of passion." This statement is directly relatable to Johnson's views wherein his passion for justice and disgust for corruption is leading him towards ideas which are 'deranged' within a certain sense of order. In the Batman Trilogy, the main plight of the antagonists is to relieve Gotham City of its own evil by destroying it. The antagonists condemn the city due to its corruption and madness. Meanwhile, driven by passion, they themselves go to extreme lengths for the city's destruction which in itself is madness. Thus madness exists on many different planes where each group may perceive the other as mad. For Johnson the English court is mad, occupied by sycophants, while for the government, people like Johnson are trying to disrupt order in the name of revolution which too is madness. Great revolutions are fuelled by intense passion, often to the extent of madness.

The next century was witness to Robert Browning's poem, 'Porphyria's Lover' (w. 1834, p. 1836) which is an objective study in morbid psychology. Browning creates a lover, also driven by extreme passion who strangles his object of desire. The narrative reads:

"In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her."

The strictly linear narrative and aesthetic perfection in the title and the structure suggest the insane orderliness of a paranoid mind. This perfection of the dramatic monologue cracks along with the speaker. Phrases such as "murmuring how she loved me", "put my arm about her waist" and "when no voice replied" suggest that her strangulation is seen by the lover as a tender act of love which silences her forever. His desire to freeze this exquisite moment, to bind her loveliness, tenderness and sexual warmth to him shows his extreme passion, progressing toward perversion. This perversion of

desire is what led to his obsession which is why it is possible that he derived sadistic pleasure in her strangulation. Jacques Lacan introduces unconscious desire which in this context implies that the speaker was impulsive in his actions as he “found a thing to do”. The lover seems to be experiencing an alternate reality where his actions were merely an expression of love. His built up frustration over her being “Too weak” or her unattainable regal figure, in a moment of hatred, perhaps resulted in his Instinct of Thanatos (death instinct as defined by Sigmund Freud’s in his book, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). Lacan also makes it possible to view the anonymity of the lover as a ‘Lack’. The lover seems to be so afraid of loss or abandonment (or Lack), that he actually kills the woman in order to possess her forever. This also highlights the Victorian ideology of commodifying women. The lover’s fear can be compared to King Lear’s “vulnerability as a human masked by his rash behaviour and unjust decisions”, in the words of Jessica Dunckel in *The Necessity of Reasonable Madness in King Lear*. Another reading of the poem is in relation to identity politics. Since the lover’s identity is supplemented by his beloved, his erotic, sadistic fantasy is fulfilled at the point of her death. So he remains anonymous in the beginning of the poem and becomes her lover by killing her because he tries to attain the unattainable.

A master-slave relationship emerges when the speaker says, “Porphyria worshipped me”, implying a complete authority over her essence and existence. He justifies the murder by suggesting that he’s fulfilling her desires by fulfilling his own, as she loves him. This idea can be compared to the idea that the Lady of Shalott was redeemed in her death, from Alfred Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’. His impulse leads to a defence mechanism in which he tries to rationalise his actions, “No pain felt she”. He refuses to acknowledge her death as an end of her emotional and physical life, “Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss”, and depicts the greatest of denials. He suggests that she is happy in her death and united in their cause and wanted to stay with him forever. He believes that since he led her to her death, death cannot take her from him, which is why he sees her smiling in her death. Thus we witness the lover rationalising and reasoning his madness. Friedrich Nietzsche said, “There is always some madness in love. But there is also always some reason in madness.” These words explain the extremity of love. Perhaps, the madness in love is only madness to those who cannot love intensely. Similarly, that which is unacceptable to society is perhaps perceived as deranged thought. Comparably, the Holocaust was madness but seen as rational because the state infused reason into it. These interpretations seem possible in Nietzsche’s concept of Perspectivism. The phrase “reason in madness” is reminiscent of Edgar from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, “O, matter and impertinency mix’d! Reason in madness!” (4.6)

We see a psychological parallel to the lover’s in Jean-Baptiste Grenouille from Tom Tykwer’s film, *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (2006). The movie is a postmodernist saga which uses Nietzsche’s concept of *Übermensch* as defined in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), to create a protagonist who is a ‘Superman’. Grenouille’s extraordinary sense of smell segregates him from the common man. Grenouille finds that virgins have the purest essence as there is no intermingling of smell. He kills a girl, not fully aware of his actions, much like the speaker in ‘Porphyria’s Lover’. With her dead body, he tries to capture her scent. For his purpose, he willingly kills 13 virgins. Such extreme devotion to his cause is perfectly reasonable to him but to others it is a grotesque, almost deranged thought. There is madness in his reason. At a psychological level he is driven by obsession, therefore his desire has also undergone perversion like the lover’s. The perfect scent that he successfully creates gives the impression of an Edenic space in a prelapsarian world. This is evidenced in the reaction of the people who had gathered to witness his hanging. On smelling the perfume, they entered a paradisiacal mental frame and indulged in an orgy because they were free from societal boundaries in that state. This can also be perceived as madness but on the other hand, it can be simply argued as the effect of a perfume. The effect was so powerful that the father of Grenouille’s final victim called him his son. The

poem and the movie both allow multiple readings and interpretations. Their actions can be argued in the terms of psychoanalysis or passion, reality or fantasy. There is hence 'reason in madness' and 'madness in reason'. But as Derrida and Nietzsche suggest, it is all subject to perception.

We can attempt to define the boundaries of sanity as much as we like, yet they are easily blurred. In different centuries, writers have dealt with the concept and perception of madness. When Foucault finally published his extensive works on the parameters of these ideas, it became clear that men are more easily termed mad than driven insane. It becomes essential to understand and accept that madness exists and operates in alternate realities.

Vidisha Khaitan

II Year

The Virtual World

Alternate reality has become part and parcel in every individual's life. This subject has found a new space in the field of research. Digital ethnography is one such research revolving around the theme of alternate reality. Digital ethnography is the process of studying people and their culture in the virtual world. It looks at the ways of representing real life situations through storytelling within the digital world. Through this, it allows the audiences to engage and experience a different culture through a digital based community. Here, it is worth looking at the impact of video games on our life – virtual and real.

Games, for a while now have served as a means to release stress, get rid of boredom and to pass time leisurely. One's memories of childhood, is filled with playing around various games with friends. The best days of childhood were the recreational activities. Games like *kho-kho*, *kabaddi*, *gilli danda*, have been replaced by video games that provide us with a world full of fantasies, impossibilities, adventures, excitement and entertainment. They not only provide a means to pass our time but also open doors to a whole new world. *Games like Tom Raider, God of War, Last of us, Prince of Persia, Grand theft Auto series* etc. create a new concept of alternate reality where we become part of a new world without laws, or limits to our actions, where we are our own masters, where magic exists, and exploring the impossibilities of the veritable world is a possibility. Video gaming has brought in a new era in the field of gaming: an alternate world where we are not alone but with a spectrum of personalities.

The popularity of electronic gaming is ever increasing but it has both positive and negative outcomes. To begin with video games require smartness, intelligence and experience. It increases the IQ of the player through the ability to solve various problems in the course of the game. The mind processing and analytical abilities become very active and quick. On the other hand, it restricts our mobility, creating health related problems and reducing the individual to a 'couch potato', much like television. Our social interaction is limited to people of the phantasmagoria. One is isolated from the world around him/her. These games are extremely addictive as they provide an escape from the eternal verities of our daily life. The gamers are in a state of virtual hangover which they find it difficult to get rid of.

Tuba Firoz

I Year

Time is a Lover

I do not know where I go when I'm not with you
Maybe I don't really exist
I do not remember the times in between our togethers
Do I slip through time to meet you
Or does your presence call me out of time to your side?
Time affects us in the linear
I've never seen it as anything but a vapour
That curls around me and I walk above it
For I am a ghost walking on the waters of time
A miracle or an apocalyptic event,
Catalyst to disasters you prevent with a smile at me
–in a life where smiles are premonitions of betrayal
You are Time for me.
Who are you –Who am I?

Shefali Juneja

II Year

Death's Gift

In the coldest, darkest phase of night while the moon itself withered and pale faced hung in the desolate sky struggling with malevolent armies of dark bellied clouds, in a room decorated with absolute silence lay a body shrunk in size with the preying disease, deep in sleep, dead to the eyes of the onlooker but herself lost in the world of rainbow dreams with fairy lights while outside the window of that doomed window shrieked an owl, loud and unstoppable for a fear gripped its heart, a fear of a presence around the house, of a guest who is never welcome, never waited upon but visits stealthily like a thief and leaves with something precious to its unfortunate host, a guest who comes wearing the cloak of night itself and is invisible to mortal eyes and with that knowledge of night's this daughter the shrieking owl looked on from its own hideout, terrified as in her all-consuming gown made of the darkest hours of night she walked with steps lighter than air, swooping on others silently and her long trail that covered the entire city inched forward with a life of its own but effortlessly nonetheless as she moved forth, the bloodless, absolute whiteness of her cold skin glowing breathtakingly against the infinite blackness of the gown that shrouded her, the hazels of her eyes burned like rubies surrounded by kohl against the moonless sky as she seemed to tower over the entire house itself, much brighter than the burning eyes of the hounds that walked on either side lolling their heads from side to side with fuming saliva dripping down their merciless jaws and burning holes in the earth but silently they walked, subjugated to the wishes of their mistress who held their leash wrapped around her knuckles and together they came noiselessly crushing the earth beneath their feet.

"There you are. Morbid and overbearing as ever" out the window came a man with a face more radiant than the sun itself and flushing with the warmth of blood, wrapped in a robe made of brightness of the galaxy of stars "Are you not late?" he asked.

"I'm death. I never miss my moment" she smiled with an air of superiority all around her "you here to welcome me?" she asked with a smirk

"I'm life. I welcome all" he replied, mocking her.

"Don't try to be like me, that would do nothing for you" she chuckled and walked past him, to the room

"Shall I hold them for you?" he eyed the leash around her knuckles with faint disdain

"Not everyone can carry this burden" she cocked her head back and replied before moving to the thin, pale body lying broken on the silk sheets.

"Poor girl. She doesn't deserve to die you know" he said with the slightest of uneasiness on seeing her eyes glow brighter

"Nobody does" she whispered and letting go of the hounds sat beside the ailing girl, as a fresh gust of cold wind rushed in through the window

"She'll be 21 next week"

"She would have been" she corrected, placing an icy cold hand on the girl's forehead burning with fever and ran her fingers through her oiled hair, smiling to herself slowly

"It's a pity you will kill her" he spoke with growing anxiousness as his white robe flapped around him in the cold wind, touching the hem of her robe

"I'm ridding her of her sickness" she replied with a high pitched whistle following it, a whistle so melodious and pure in its sound that only he could bear to listen to it

“She loves life” he replied, holding on to the foot of the bed

“All of them love their life at some point or other” she replied bemused and closed her eyes to murmur something out of his earshot

“You are a thief. A cruel thief” he grew melancholy

“When they die, they go to sleep, a sweet sleep which you ‘life’ don’t let them have ever. I give them sleep, I give them freedom, I let them have everything they desire when they were in your possession” she looked up at him with eyes brighter than rubies and spoke with an unsettling calm

“By taking away from them all they once loved? You only give pain, pain to everyone around your weakling victims”

“love!” she guffawed “this is what you do to people, this is why they embrace me, this is what makes me beautiful, you bind them with love, commitments, relationships and I, I cut them free” she continued with passion

“I give them choices” he stood upright

“And I give them chances. You give them limitations and defined paths to follow. You kill their ambitions, you are unfair to them and tired of your lessons they come to me and I give them all they wish and want, I lift the limitations, blur the boundaries, my world is full of their fantasies”

“So you can enslave them” he spoke with disgust and continued “so they never try getting back, you can only give them illusions, a reality which is nothing but a mirage because you want them running around aimlessly in your caves in a trance, you suck out their conscious...”

“The mirage of my world is only seen when they are exhausted by the dreary realities of life”

“I’m real. I exist” he stood tall and spoke in a pitch closest to anger, in a raised voice

“Don’t shout” she put her slender finger to her lips and commanded in a cold, emotionless voice while stroking her forehead “I can exist only when you exist, obviously you do exist. You are real but I’m the reality they seek. You are the one they originate from but I am the one who finally holds them all. You are an overprotective guardian and I am the valley of freedom they run into”

“You are what you are only because I choose to be what I am” he said with unmatched arrogance

“Why do we have to do this every time?” she breathed the words out, while studying the contours of her victim’s face

“You don’t give birth to anything new, you will not know the pain of letting it shrivel up with only the touch of death”

“And you don’t have to take away from people what is theirs, you don’t have to see the face of hope dying, the last twinkle of life which is strongest near death, you don’t know the pain of killing everything you touch” she said but mostly to herself in a half-gaze

“why...”

“I have to keep the balance and give them their other realities, I have to make them live their fantasies and now....it’s her turn” her gaze once again turned to the girl on the bed and a slow smile crept upon her lips, stolen from the beauty of roses themselves

Silently he turned away as his white robes entangled with the expansive blackness of her gown and the clouds finally swallowed the moon, for now was the time life was to be taken over by death, behind him he could hear her breathe away all the light around the girl and then as the flailing owl shrieked and hounds began to cry, lovingly like a mother she leaned over the innocent face and kissed her forehead and with a gasp out of the chapped lips of the girl her life escaped, now guarded by the hounds so it could not get back into the lifeless body and something in the room snapped suddenly... a connection

“Done!” she stood up and whispered in a heavy, labored tone, disentangling her gown from the searing brightness of his robes

“Go away!” he said feeling her coming up to him

“What do you want?” he turned around tired as she came closer and stood transfixed by the sudden jolt of her mystical beauty that assaulted his eyes

“One day you will have accept it too” she whispered and put her frozen lips to his, full of warmth and sensations, of emotions and feelings, of hopes and dreams. There was a swarm of colors and a shock of warmth in his touch as the infinity of her darkest corners colluded with the spotless serenity of his aura and suddenly despite his resistance, with cold resolution and will she slipped out of his touch and walked away followed by the hounds, with a certain ache in her heart which she always shares with him but with her head held high and eyes burning bright for he had given her their parting gift, the essence of life enough to keep her, death, alive

Vaishnavi Chaudhary

I Year

Sexing the Cherry and Alternate Reality

“Every journey conceals another journey within its lines : the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are journeys I wish to record . Not the ones I made , but the ones I might have made , or perhaps did make in some other place or time.” – Jordan (2)

“It’s one life or countless lives depending on what you want.” – The Dog-Woman (in the 20th century)

These lines, spoken by Jordan and the Dog-Woman, the two protagonists of *Sexing the Cherry*, by Jeanette Winterson, encapsulate the motif of alternate realities that spans the whole book. *Sexing the Cherry* challenges the “solid world of objects” (Winterson x), questioning instead the reality of the world. The ideas of reality, time, and alternate reality are contemplated throughout the book. The criterion that makes anything real is: anything is considered real, when most of us believe in it and when the thing is made of matter which can be seen and touched. But, solid objects and matter become empty space in the book: “Empty space and points of light” (Jordan 169) he also keeps reiterating this point throughout the book).

The two protagonists of the book and the action we go through with them make us question the concept of reality, and bring to the forefront the idea of alternate realities, as it is often not possible to tell whether these things really happened or whether they are only imaginings, however real, of lives that might have been. The questioning of the conventional distinction between reality and the imaginary enables readers to inhabit multiple possibilities, be these of Puritan England, ecological warfare, or travel and exploration.

The last section of the book – “Some Years Later” – features Nicolas Jordan and an unnamed female environmentalist (who is the Dog-Woman contemporized) in the current, ostensibly real world, for greater immediacy. In this section, Nicolas Jordan is fascinated with the idea of making journeys, as a member of the Navy, “of bringing something home for the first time” and becoming a hero. At the beginning of the section, he sees a painting in which Mr Rose, the Royal Gardener, after coming back from his journey to Barbados , presents a pineapple to king Charles II (which is itself a curious edit of Jordan’s own history of having pioneered the arrival of the pineapple in England). In his boyhood world, he cannot make journeys and go on voyages . He can only make boats and sell them on weekends. His parents cannot afford a telescope, Winterson tells us, the better to emphasize how looking at new worlds and other realities is also a function of money and class. To pursue his desires of sailing and seeing this world, all he can do is join the very regimented world of the British Navy.

The nameless female environmentalist, who can clearly be recognized as the Dog-Woman in the contemporary world, is described as “pretty” and a girl whom men adore, quite contrary to how she is physically presented in the seventeenth century. But she is upset due to the increasing pollution and consequent dangerous levels of mercury in the rivers, lakes and streams of the world, and the government’s indifference frustrates her. So, she starts a one-woman campaign, camping at a riverbank to make the rulers take some steps for the betterment of London. But she feels helpless as an ordinary “small” person who cannot do much to bring a change – a great contrast to her gargantuan seventeenth-century avatar who slays scores with impunity. She thinks she is hallucinating when she imagines herself becoming a giant who grabs and puts all the world leaders and important persons from various places in her bag and goes to “butter mountains , wine lakes and deserts” . There, she trains men in feminism and ecology, and also redistributes food surpluses to the needy; hence, she is able to change the world.

Only a small part of the narrative describes this “real”, puny condition of the protagonists. In this so-called real world , both Jordan and the Dog-Woman are not able to do what they want to, but these

conditions give sharpness to our desire to inhabit other realities where both the characters have an existence which seems unreal because impossible in our world .

Jordan and the Dog-Woman are able to become who they want to be in that world, though it has its own forms of unhappiness. In the alternate reality the book constructs, Jordan is a foundling, he is parentless. In that world, Charles I still reigns though his head is brutally chopped off; there are many undiscovered places and things; John Tradescant who has travelled the whole world becomes Jordan's companion in another alternate world. Due to all this, it is possible for Jordan to explore the world and embark on voyages and fulfil desires that he cannot do in his own immediate real world. The time period, the chronological realities of their alternate worlds are in keeping with the desires of Jordan and the Dog-Woman. Industrialisation is yet to happen in England in the seventeenth century, so the place is not yet polluted by the effluents of mass production, though the Thames is already dirty with human waste and words have already fantastically caused deaths through pollution. However after the king is beheaded, London itself starts to rot and becomes a place full of pestilence. When it happens, the Dog-Woman seeks to move away from that time and space. The Dog-Woman in that world is described as an extreme Royalist. One reason for this could be that in the contemporary world, rulers do not do anything about the issues she considers important for the improvement of the condition of society, so she prefers a king to the rule of the Commonwealth and government which is also not rule of commoners but of elite figures. Another reason could be the Puritans, who discard all pleasures and associate only female body with excesses. Doing so limits and controls the freedom of women.

The Dog-Woman and Jordan of seventeenth century seem fantastic in their outside reality. The Dog-Woman is a giant in that world, a grotesque figure much more powerful than males, her weight more than that of an elephant in the circus, as she describes in the early sections of the book. Besides, she has to turn sideways through doors, she has not taken a bath for many years and is presented as an ugly woman; all this portrays her to be completely the opposite of conventional, traditional representations of weak and beautiful female figures. Winterson's scripting of an alternate reality turns conventionally soft woman ugly, strong and masculine: she is: “. . . uncontrollable , flowing , enormous ,ugly , violent, tender , loving , energetic , smelly , noisy , rough , dirty. The Dog-Woman's body is everything that the female body is not supposed to be. It is an absolute escape from the proper feminine body” (Haslett, quoted by Gocken).

The reasons for the Dog-Woman's existence in this alternate world can clearly be perceived through the narrative of the Dog-Woman of the contemporary world, bereft of dogs too in her struggle. In the contemporary world, she feels ordinary and helpless and imagines herself as very fat (as she was until adolescence) and states: “I was fat because I wanted to be bigger than all the things that were bigger than me. All the things that had power over me” (143). In a real world this is not possible – after all the stereotype of feminine anxiety is anorexia, not Gargantua – but in her alternate reality, she becomes so huge and that she has to be noticed even if by creating fear.

In the contemporary world however want and inadequacy prevail, she also sees her imagining of herself as an alter ego that gives her power. She thinks it a fantasy and hallucination but the text shows us its existence. The Dog-Woman's resistance to everyday reality via these empowering hallucinations could also be perceived as an interaction between reality and alternate reality. She gets glimpses of her version of self in the other world when the text, without warning, cuts away to the seventeenth century Dog-Woman. This also happens when the text enables us to see what the Dog-Woman would do to change the world if she were indeed to exist as a giant in the contemporary world. The Dog-Woman of the seventeenth century does have a morality of her own. She kills all those who she thinks of as scoundrels (including her own father when he tries to sell her when she was a child) and also justifies

her actions in terms of how much more violence she is able to prevent by doing this. She states, in the last section – “my actions are not motivated by thought of gain, only by thought of justice..... there is no person dead at my hand who would be better off alive.” When she is loyal to anyone, she fulfils that loyalty to the extreme. She was loyal to the king: when he was beheaded, she avenged him by killing the Puritans Preacher Scroggs and Neighbour Firebrace; she also takes the eyeballs and teeth of many Puritans when supporters of the dead King decided to seek revenge. A person like her does not exist in our “real” world and seems unreal. Such a thing is possible in alternate reality, and there bodily largeness also signifies her sense of power.

Similar to the Dog Woman, a person like Jordan also seems unreal: he who, as an infant, is able to survive the extreme cold which even freezes the animals, and who travels to different cities which can be called fantastical. But, their existence in Winterson’s alternate world is as real as ours. Jordan is also very tall (here too, bodily largeness can be associated with power and adds to the fantastic element in Jordan’s existence) which we get to know from the Dog-Woman’s description of him. At the age of nineteen, he is as tall as her chest. He has the agency to travel to places that he wants to visit, journeying to impossible realms he embarks on with Tradescent. The journeys he undertakes are with the motive of finding himself, which is to find and live his inner life and desires. This is similar to Jeanette, the protagonist in *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*, another book written by Jeanette Winterson, where she is also told by her mentor Elsie to take notice of both the inner and outer world: “If you want to make sense of either [the inner or the outer world] you have to take notice of both” (*Oranges*, 32). Afterwards, she tries to balance between both the worlds, but chooses the inner life as most important, like Jordan, who follows his dreams and wants to live his inner life. In both the alternate seventeenth century world and the “real” twentieth century world, when Jordan talks about his desires, two aspects of these are made visible – one is to travel the world and become a hero, and the other is his fascination with the freedom that dancers and acrobats feel when in the air. One of his inner desires is fulfilled in the parallel world. To fulfil another aspect of his desire, he goes to various fantastical cities – cities where people walk on ropes, cities where love is an epidemic which sweeps off the whole population except a monk and a whore who unite to give birth to another whole city, a city where people knock down and rebuild their houses in some other place to avoid their creditors – all of which can be interpreted as existing in different alternate realities of that world.

During those journeys in search of the self, he finds Fortunata who could be another version of his self (the parallel universe theory states that there are different versions of selves who exist in universes parallel to our own) and embodies his desire to become a dancer. She also introduces herself in the same way that Jordan does in the beginning: “My name is Fortunata. This the first thing I saw” (106). She also seems unreal for the world of Jordan. She balances perfectly on ropes, and is one of the twelve dancing princesses. During her descent from a house where Jordan sees her for the first time, she cuts and re-knots a rope while climbing down a sheer surface, which appears to be impossible but which she does anyway. After that she disappears and Jordan seeks to find her. As a dancer, she also teaches students to become points of light (which is what Jordan is fascinated by). In his search to find her, he dresses himself as a woman, visits various feminine spaces, and meets twelve dancing princesses who exist as real persons in yet another alternate world. In that world created by Winterson for these princesses, their story begins where the original tale ends – after the happily ever after of every tale, after their marriage with the twelve princes. All of them, in one way or another, have separated from their husbands; some have also killed their husbands and some have run away. But no one comes after them, which seems possible in that alternate reality only. So, they live together happily in a well.

This is a subversion of a well-known tale, which also appears in *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*. The title can be perceived as a critique of only one particular idea of any reality and truth, and accepting it as the only possibility and denying the other. In that book, which is the fictionalized auto-biography

of Jeanette Winterson, the protagonist Jeanette (a lesbian who is cast out when found to be one by her mother) creates different stories to cope with reality and understand her relationship with her mother. In one story, a prince searches for a perfect woman. After a long time search he finds her, but the woman refuses to marry the prince and says she is not flawless. The prince gets angry and kills her. This story is a subversion of an ordinary fairy tale where the girl would have married the prince and lived happily ever after. But here, the girl herself refuses the prince's proposal and is happy to live alone, which makes him angry. This story and that of the twelve dancing princesses presents heroines who are completely different, strong, and feminist, as opposed to the conventional fairy tale heroines. The perfect woman is killed when she tries to word her thoughts, whereas the twelve dancing princesses live happily together in a kind of utopian world, as suggested by Luce Irigaray in her essay "When The Goods Get Together." When Jordan visits them, he enters the well where all of them live together. Here, the well can be seen as symbolising female body parts and he could be seen as entering a feminine space. His journeys to the fantastical cities and search for Fortunata (who is an alternate reality for Jordan of seventeenth century, who himself is an alternate reality existence for Nicolas Jordan) presents an alternate meta-reality.

Finally, he finds Fortunata in Barbados where she teaches dancing to girls. It is the same place where he finds the pineapple to present to King Charles II. Barbados (a place he thinks about in the contemporary world when he sees the painting of Mr Rose) is the place where both his desires get fulfilled and alternate reality becomes reality for him. There is an interaction between reality and alternate reality throughout the book. Ultimately, only the Dog-Woman and Jordan are able to escape their time and space. When London is burned down (in historical reality), Jordan sees his own face in the smoke, which can be interpreted as him escaping his real world and entering an alternate one, where he will become a dancer. Other instances include the Dog-Woman getting a glimpse of her existence in the contemporary world, John Tradescant's appearance in both the worlds, and Nicolas Jordan's sense of déjà vu when he first meets the Dog-Woman. Through this interaction, different narrators demonstrate the multiplicity of worlds and reality is questioned. In the list made by Jordan of the different lies of the world, lie 6 is "Reality as something which can be agreed upon" and lie 7 is "reality as truth" (93).

To conclude, *Sexing the Cherry* directly refers to the concept of alternate reality while presenting worlds that are described in completely realistic terms. Thus, being in one place does "not deny the existence of the other," as Jordan says. It does not simply assert that other worlds exist, but proves their existence. Jeanette Winterson, in her introduction to the book, remarks: "Be where you want to be in time. Be who you want to be in time"(Winterson X). This is what Winterson makes her characters do – they become who they want to be, where, in their alternate realities.

Ambika Tanwar

III Year

Demerara

You reach for your fifth sugar cube
to drop into your third cup of liquid gold.
that holds more sugar and ice cubes
than real tea.

Tumbling cube after cube — of sugar or ice,
I've lost track — you pause mid-tumble in contemplation
fidget with one,
Turning it over
in dry palms.

Neither of us hears the cacophony
below our bubbled balcony.
My blue-white, brown-streaked saucer
is hopeful, and holds your gaze,
its dripping brown stains braver than I.

My every clink-a-clink-a-clink
of spoon on cup edge
breaks your concentration
you have to start over
(With what, I'm not certain)
and we both know I'm clinking on purpose,
counting beats with the cuckoo clock,
with a heart as full of hope
as your cup is with hexagonal once cubes.

When you look up again,
I can feel inside me
the number of worlds in the universe
double instantly, and I wonder
which one we're in—
Will you say what you want?
Or what (you think) you should?

Sandhita Chandra

II year

Just a Game of Thrones?

Almost everyone is familiar with *Game of Thrones* today, and that in itself speaks of its commercial success. The question, however, is whether it is also an aesthetic and literary success. That's what I have tried to examine here.

George R.R. Martin's novels, and consequently the show based on it, are inspired from the English War of Roses (1455-85) between the houses of Lancaster and York, which are echoed in Martin's houses of Lannister and Stark. Some more historical inspirations for the series are the Icelandic sagas of the Viking Age (the Ironborn), the Mongol hordes (the Dothraki), Byzantine Greek Fire (Wildfire), the legend of Atlantis (ancient Valyria), Hadrian's Wall (the Great Wall), the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), and the Italian Renaissance. It is a mystical, but still credible, re-imagination of the history.

It is undoubtedly an epic story, covering everything from wars between royal dynasties, battles between good and evil, romances, using modes like the quest narrative, the bildungsroman and melodrama. Martin has depicted a "morally grey-scale world" where no character is uni-dimensional. This is because the reader is given a story from multiple perspectives. Martin himself says, "Having multiple viewpoints is crucial to the grayness of the characters. You have to be able to see the struggle from both sides, because real human beings in a war have all these processes of self-justification, telling ourselves why what we're doing is the right thing." This is what makes his characters and plot so plausible in the reader's mind. The number of characters itself brings a whole new level of complexity to the plot, and the plot has multiple storylines.

The question of loyalty is examined with great detail in both the novel and the television series. The concepts of family, duty and honor are of great importance in the story. LyannaMormont is extremely loyal to the Stark house even when StannisBaratheon claims that the Iron Throne is his by hereditary right as his brother's sons are all bastards, which can be seen in the following dialogue:

StannisBaratheon: "*Do you know this wretched girl? LyannaMormont.*"

Jon Snow: "*The Lord Commander's niece.*"

StannisBaratheon: "*The Lady of Bear Island and a child of ten. I asked her to commit her House to my cause. That's her response.*"

Jon Snow: "[reading aloud] *'Bear Island knows no king but the King in the North, whose name is Stark.'*"

Lord PetyrBaelish is a true politician, to the very core of his heart. He is loyal to no one but himself in his thirst for power. He betrays Ned Stark thus causing his death at the hands of a child-ruler, i.e. JoffreyBaratheon, then his wife Lady Catelyn, their daughter Sansa Stark, and he kills LysaArryn himself. He is also known as Littlefinger, which is a little ironic since he is the one around whose finger everyone dances. In contrast to him is Lord Varys, the Spymaster, who is an eunuch, and also the only one thinking about the good of the seven realms. As he's literally castrated, he gathers as much knowledge as possible in order to appropriate some power for himself.

Speaking of power, one must examine the portrayal of female characters in this series as, their mutual antagonisms aside, there are strong female roles here. Cersei, although an adversary, is one of the strongest characters in the entire series, with her courage, ambition, willful desire, politics being really quite commendable. She even manages to garner some sympathy from the readers in her 'Walk of Shame'. Ygritte, a wildling, is unembarrassed of her desires, fights like a warrior for her home, love and honor.

Arya Stark from a small age shows distinct traits of a headstrong individuality, and a desire to fight for herself quite literally, using her 'Needle'. She has completely subverted the idea of a needle, which is otherwise culturally a feminine stereotype as women are supposed to sew and stitch as that is what is expected of a woman. Stitching in itself is a metaphor for the woman being the homemaker. Arya breaks both of these by using her 'Needle' to escape certain imprisonment, potential death, and for revenge, which is why she is one of the most popular characters. Princess Daenerys Targaryen, Stormborn, the Princess of Dragonstone and heiress to the Targaryen throne after her older brother Viserys Targaryen, is also a well-liked character. She is a victim of patriarchy through and through – sold by her brother to the leader of a barbarian community, the Dothraki, in exchange for an army; molested by her husband in the beginning of her marriage; alienated from that community also after her husband's death. However, she comes out on the other side a survivor, and her story is truly inspirational. She gives birth to dragons, forms her own army, frees countless slaves, beginning with the 'Unsullied', as she knows what it means to be bought and sold. It is interesting to notice that she is the only one fighting against slavery.

Sexuality has been explored in great depth in the series. Whether positive or negative, there is an unashamed portrayal of human sexuality throughout the novel, and even more so on screen. Although it is almost the single greatest factor for its popularity with the young generations, it has also brought to the forefront that which was previously restricted to the private realm and a taboo to even talk about, especially for females. It has not confined itself to only the accepted forms of desire either, but has dealt with it from a grassroots level - from the family itself. Cersei and Jamie Lannister, siblings, indulge in an incestuous relationship, thus giving birth to three children. The Targaryen dynasty is built and brought down due to their incestuous relations. Craster, a wildling, sexually abuses his daughters so that his entire family is both his daughter as well as his wife. Only the female children are allowed to live in his household, and the male ones are sacrificed to the white walkers. The extent of the victimisation of these women is truly pitiable. They are first abused by their own father, forced to bear his children, and later molested by the betrayers of the Night's Watch after the Mutiny. This is one of the many flaws in Martin's series and the show - Craster's Keep is never revisited and the reader/viewer has no idea of what happens to them. It is also one of the various subplots that undercut the figure of the powerful and strong female figure.

But there is also Danaerys Stormborn - she cleverly uses her sexuality to win her husband's affection and after his death, climbs onto his funeral pyre. She comes out of it unharmed, gloriously naked and the mother of three dragons. Sexuality has therefore been depicted as both oppressive and powerful in this story. It has been used as a punishment for adultery, when Cersei is tried by the High Sparrow – she must perform a 'Walk of Atonement' in order to see her son, i.e. walk naked through the streets of King's Landing. Hence, it cannot be said conclusively that sexuality in this story and show is either completely positive or completely negative.

These are just a few of the issues considered in the series, and there are a lot more such as religion, discrimination, society and class, coming of age, the interweaving of past and present and so on. They add layers of meaning and intricacy and thereby completely and absolutely engage the reader as well as the viewer.

Simran Mittal

III Year

Limiting Alternate Realities

When we hear the term “alternate realities,” we tend to think of the stories offered to us by pop culture: science fiction, thrillers and other such genres, partners in crime in tempting us to dream of more exciting scenarios for the human being to exist in. But these ideas and theories are the brainchild of others. What of the ones we cook up in the private confines of our own minds on a daily basis? These exist closer to home, revolving around our personal aspirations. These are the comfortable alternatives we tend to often slip into or aspire for. These are the love child of the frequent affairs of reality and expectations. These are daydreams.

We see ourselves being more and achieving more. They cushion and comfort us, assuring us of better approaching times. But is it possible that somewhere this comfort has become an addiction? Do they attune us to think bigger and beyond possible limits in such a way that impacts us negatively? Do they compromise our happiness? Do they perhaps widen the gap of disappointment and guilt that exists between our ‘ordinary’ human lives and the “Great Perhaps” we strive to reach for?

Nat Ware, a Rhodes Scholar based at Oxford University talks about an “expectation gap” because of which we “make decisions based on actual outcomes...but our happiness depends on relative outcomes.” One could counter this idea with the argument, “If people don’t dream big, then they won’t achieve big.” Fair enough. But we need become alert to the possibility, that in the process of ‘dreaming big’, our expectations have the power to wrench away the reins from logic and gallop amok. That, sometimes, we may end up setting ourselves with more than we can handle and collapse under the pressure of living up to that ‘perfect version’ of our lives. Nat Ware adds, “having unrealistically high expectations means that we’re less satisfied with the most likely outcome. So it’s a trade off between increasing the probability of success and increasing the likelihood that we’ll be unhappy.”

It is time that we pay attention to the power of expectations, which can become dominant, if allowed. The alternate reality in our heads should be encouraged to stay reasonably ahead of the one we live in. But not so far ahead that it sprints off, leaving the actual one coughing and spluttering behind, unable to ever come close, forget catching up.

Arushi Chadha

I Year

I Have Lived Before

Know, therefore, that from the greater silence I shall return . . . Forget not that I shall come back to you . . . A little while, a moment of rest upon the wind, and another woman shall bear me

–Kahlil Gibran

I was introduced to reincarnation and related phenomena (near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, past life regression therapy, etc.) in my psychology class in Grade 11. We would often have long discussions about eminent psychiatrist and psychotherapist Carl Gustav Jung and his theory of multiple lives, the collective unconscious and the archetypes that are used to classify behaviour and thus understand personality. As someone already interested in the paranormal, his work fascinated me and he soon became someone I admired.

Jung's work has led to an area of study, in both the natural sciences and humanities, that is small but steadily gaining strength. There are scientific journals and research papers, TED talks by scientists and personal accounts of people corroborated by psychiatrists and physicists, all pertaining to past lives, reincarnation, near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences and the like.

“There are thousands of cases recorded in the scientific literature of children speaking foreign languages to which they had never been exposed, of having birth marks at the site of previous mortal wounds, and of these same children knowing where treasured objects were hidden thousands of miles away and decades or centuries earlier,” says Dr. Brian Weiss, a pioneer of reincarnation research. Reincarnation supplements the present knowledge derived from genetics and study of environmental influences to explain hitherto unexplained phenomena.

It is not, however, a new concept. References to it occur in the Vedas and it forms an essential part of the central doctrines of Brahminism and Buddhism to this day. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Empedocles and Pythagoras spoke about reincarnation and it was an important part of Plato's work. Modern philosophers such as Goethe, Hume, Lessing and Schopenhauer have expressed a sympathetic interest in the idea of reincarnation. However, they have merely written of it as a philosophical concept, not as a naturally occurring phenomenon with empirical evidence to support its existence.

As a naturally occurring phenomenon, Dr. Ian Stevenson explains reincarnation as a series of events that occur due to the transfer of energy. Each human being comprises a physical body and psi-component. After the death of the physical body, the psi-component may continue an disembodied existence for some time, after which it associates itself with another body, usually during its embryonic development. The psi-component thus influences the personality of the new human being.

As a result, most of the evidence of reincarnation and related phenomena comes from children for they are they are temporally closer to their previous births than adults and have almost no behavioural training (such as the process of socialisation). Such evidence can be uncovered either through hypnosis (the process of inducing a state of consciousness in which a person loses the power of voluntary action and is highly responsive suggestion or direction. Contrary to popular belief, the subject is conscious during the process and can choose to “wake up” when he/she wishes) or a close examination of accounts of children who spontaneously recall past lives. The latter is a more reliable method as these memories can be examined through strict scientific protocols. The easiest way of verifying past life memories of children is to compare the details of their memories with the lives of the people they claim to be. While a significant number of cases turn out to be false, a large number have been verified through this process.

But while there is a fairly concrete set of evidence that reincarnation and past lives could exist, there are relatively few scientific theories explaining the role of consciousness in formation and transformation of matter. However, answers might be found in the field of quantum physics. Scientists have long known that matter (electrons and protons) give rise to certain phenomena only when observed. For example, when one shines light through two slits cut on a screen on a photographic plate placed behind the screen, the unobserved ray of light appears to have travelled through both the slits. But on closer observation it becomes clear that the particles travel through only one of the two slits. The behaviour of light does not change from one situation to the next, the only difference is that in the second situation, the ray of light is being “observed”. Max Planck, the father of quantum physics believes this provides strong proof that the physical world is influenced, even derived from the non-physical or consciousness. Consciousness, then, does not need the brain to exist. It goes beyond matter. In fact, it is an all-encompassing concept.

That brings me to why we need to understand reincarnation and past lives when we are trying to understand the rather wide concept of alternate reality. Does this really serve a purpose? An awareness of the mere possibility of multiple lives, the immortal soul and multiple chances at life does not only have great explanatory value, but also makes way for a better world. When the fear of death is gone, people are free to expand themselves to look at the bigger picture. The simple knowledge that one exists beyond this plane allows people to love. It allows for love to exist in its purest form – without an object.

Reincarnation has immense explanatory value. It adds a third dimension (other than genetics and environment) to our understanding of human personality and development and explains everything that science does not. It explains why babies, barely hours old, begin to display characteristics unique to them. In fact, each baby moves in a distinct way even inside the womb. It explains phenomena such as déjà vu (the feeling that the event being witnessed has already been experienced before), filling a lot of gaps in modern scientific knowledge.

The realm of reincarnation and past lives lies beyond what is tangible. What one experiences through past life memories and visions experienced under hypnosis are a form of alternate reality. But more importantly, knowledge of multiple lives presents the possibility of a better world . . . an alternate reality to the one we know today.

Prachi Hota

I Year

Indian Horror Culture as an Alternative Space

The earliest history of the very beginning of what is today known as or called the horror culture in Indian context, begins somewhere during the latter part of the Vedic period, during the existence of Rig-Veda where the distinction between Asura or Demons and Suras or god came into being and the term Asura came to be associated closely with the enemies of god, this view of Asura personifying evil and deva personifying good, was further propagated in the Atharva Veda and the epic tradition however the same did not exist in the early Vedic period, during this period there was no clear distinction between the ideas of Asura and Deva in fact, Asura as a term was used to refer to deities specifically Varun and Mitra in the early Vedic period. The idea of Asura being symbolized as demons is not only the one that crops up during rigveda without any prior signs but also the one that find its critic in the old Persian languages (where 'h' is placed before 's' as in Greek), in these languages the words Ahura signifies god which is evident from the fact that the Zoroastrian chief god is called Ahura Mazda, similar to the way in which Varuna is addressed as Asura in early rigvedic hymns again showing how the change in the ideas came suddenly with no documentation available to account the shift in perceptions of 'Asura' and 'Deva', another critic of the same idea of 'Asura' being evil is presented in the Iranian ideology where 'Deva' came to be known as synonymous to 'Demon' therefore leaving to us a fragmented picture of unclear transformation of hindu 'devas' as demons in Iranian and Persian Ahuras or gods as 'demons' in Hindu mythology what we know with certainty is that after Atharvaveda and in subsequent epics asura came to be completely associated with the symbols of "evil, darkness and drought" and were depicted as deceitful, selfish and uncultured in comparison to the higher stature of gods. Other descriptions provided for Asuras are more inclined towards using the idea of asuras as a tool for moral conditioning, whereby Asuras are described as hovering around sacrificial rites and if these rites are not performed properly they shall devour those defaulters. With the firm placing of Asuras as the headstone for creation of more such creature and thus a beginning for horror culture in earliest sense, came the subtypes of asuras, all of which find their reflections in various other mythologies across different cultures.

Further there were Daityas who were the asuras of oceans and the decedents of the chaos hags Diti and Danu and were supposed to have a lifestyle matching to the stature of gods, these were the demons who fought against the devas much like the Titans in Greek mythology and the Irish fomorians and were then confined to the Patala by Indra with a prophecy of being let loose to take part in the "last battle" like the Norse giants and in their abode in the patala these demons nurse an "asurafire" which is to burn constantly, fed by water and is never to be extinguished and according to the folklore when the end will come this fire will burst forth and devour all three worlds which is again similar to the idea of fire at rangnarok which must end the world by engulfing it all at "the dusk of the gods".

Another dweller of the underworld are Nagas who symbolize shifting narratives among the Aryan civilizations and Vedic ideologies, initially nagas were to be defined as demoniac cobras who were human to waist and rest of the body was that of the serpent, ruled by the king who was called Shesha or vasuki or Karkotaka and had thousand heads, an idea which is much in sync with the idea of the typhon who fought Zeus. This king ruled with his three host dragons, vritra "the encompasser", ahi "the confiner" and fierce kushva "the scorcher" who spits fire and burns up the day however as stated earlier nagas shows the shift in ideologies manifested in the form of the later narratives where nagas were considered 'demigods' due to an immense increase in serpent worship. This changed the perspective on nagas providing to us the contradictory perspective of naga females as beautiful nymphs who were wooed by mortals as opposed to the earlier view of demonic appearance. Also there came another contra view that they provided drought of nectar for the ones they favoured, the nectar which provided strength. The view of nagas thus changed unlike other creatures or asuras they were not in direct contest with gods.

Just as asuras were considered the enemies of gods, rakshasas, pisachas, darbas and panis were considered the enemies of man however were equally detested by gods. Rakshasa and pisacha were owners of fear striking and in some narratives as the rakshasas of mahabharata even grotesque in appearance and were both associated with eating the flesh however pisacha were fearsome and malignant devourers of dead bodies which were also responsible for deadly diseases while rakshasa were considered man eaters and shape shifters whose powers increased manifolds in the “first forty seconds of grey twilight preceding nightfall”. Panis(aerial demons), dasyus and darbas on the other hand were in the correct sense more of notorious demons who would encourage men to neglect homage to deities, were repulsive of men with zeal and aspects, stealers of cloud cows or fiends of evil omens.

For all the evil asuras against gods and humans, there were, as if to counterbalance narratives and show the evil and good binary, good or useful spirits which were nevertheless fierce and fearsome but much of service these included yakshas which were called punyajanas or “the good people”, guarding spirits of kuvera and gandharvas. Yakshas and guarding spirits are both put forth as the guards of kuvera’s (the god of wealth) treasure and are not allowed to visit the world of men and are equipped with wind speeds and weapons to protect the treasure while yakshas were either humans with big, benevolent eyes or fierce fighters as rakshasa, spirits are either dwarfish or of fierce visage and of blood red eyes and feed upon fat and flesh. Gandharvas on the other hand are mystical beings which haunt air, forest and mountains much like the idea of fairies but gandharvas are all male nonetheless they have power to work illusions in the grey twilight and are associated with mesmerizing performers of music however they are sometimes described as having fights and warriors who overcome them might get instructions in religions but those who loose are carried away envisaging the parallel context of Teutonic elves and bards. This system of binary opposition is a way of understanding two exclusive terms as a complement to each other, in a sense that one can only understand one term due to the presence of the other. It is an integral part of structuralism where distinction is considered fundamental to all language and thought. One such binary is between good and evil. The good vs. evil binary has been used by human civilizations since a long time to explain a number of undesirable results. It is in a way a human tendency to simplify things as talking about the good vs. evil binary is easier than talking about the complex influences that can lead to undesirable results. In cultures, which support the concept of all-good-God, where God is the epitome of all goodness, it is easier to believe in an entity that represents all evil.

Over time, there have been various elements of horror that have been associated with evil. It has had a huge implication on the social and cultural lives of people. Groups of people have been ostracized, discriminated against and even made to suffer because of their so called evil associations. In this essay, we discuss the dynamics of this good vs. evil binary, the manifestations, the various elements that have led to its exaggerated nature and its implications on the human civilizations over time.

Let us look at some instances.

Singing Birds. They are manifested as singing spirits in India as well as in Europe and thus are supposed to have certain kind of mystic wisdom and superior knowledge as can be shown through the tale of Siegfried who after eating dragon’s heart understood the language of birds and the birds warned him of the enemies, in India too the seafarers whistle to invoke the spirit of the sea. However another idea that is endlessly believed worldwide as in India is that the language of birds is the language of spirits and is explored by sir Walter Scott in his book ‘Minstrely of Scottish Border’ where he draws attention to the belief that speech of spirit is kind of a whistling as that of birds. The idea of birds as spirits or evil omens are found in abundance in folktales and mythological stories of all regions, western and Indian alike as can be seen through the examples of manifestation of danavis having voices like cranes or croaking raven believed to be an evil omen, these views on certain birds

and their connection to evil or spirits finds its parallel in other western perspectives too like Homer's ghosts which were bat-like, Egyptian ghosts which were hooting owls and in Scottish highlands where the spirit of dead continues to appear as birds so do fairies. However as stated earlier there always exists a binary so certain birds are associated with the spirit world while some also have celestial connections as shown in the view of Indian celestial rishis as well as Irish gods taking the form of swans also the manifestation of various birds as associated with gods.

Vampirism: India indeed plays a very significant role in the vampire history. Some scholars believe that it was through India that idea of vampirism spread to Greece and Eastern Europe and back through the silk and spice trails. However this view remains uncertain but what is certain is that as the cultures began interacting, their stories got shared and began to influence each other. In India there are various creatures which could be viewed as vampiric in relation to the modern theory of vampirism; Betals (vaitals) which are essentially evil spirits which inhabit bodies of dead and feed on the living, in some folktales these are depicted as half-bat and half-man thus with respect to the association of bats with vampires these are really close to that depiction, however they don't entirely match the depiction of modern vampires. Other creature that can be associated with the idea of vampire is pisacha which though resembles zombies or wendigos more than vampires, are still considered Indian parallel of the cult because of their specific thirst for blood. Chediope also comes close to this western idea of vampire but she is a spirit which feeds on blood of men not to kill them but to weaken them or to take away the charm, in that sense more than vampire she is a parallel of western idea of succubus. Rakshasa which differs with different regional folktales, mostly in the realm of folktales rakshasa were demons in humanoid flesh who had long fangs and drank the bloods of vulnerable, especially pregnant women and infants which is a reflection of the the early ideas about vampires in western culture, who were attributed with same behavior according to the folklore, these creatures live in cemeteries and in Indian context rakshasa disrupt rites and rituals and again as parallel to the idea of western vampire history rakshasa in the folktales are supposed to die when come in contact with sunlight or by fire this view however differs through varied regional folktales. In Christianity a vampire lives forever until killed and then it ceases to exist because the soul is already gone but in Hindu mythology though there is an immortal life, if and when a vampire is killed it does not just disappear but gods might give a chance to soul to be reincarnated and potentially into human form.

Indian Folktales: Indian folktales have very interesting retellings. A chudail or daayan is considered the Indian counterpart of a witch, although there are different opinions about the origin of these words. A chudail is believed to have arisen from the death of a woman during child birth. Indian witch stories have many variations across the different states of India. For e.g. the north Indian states often believe that the Chudail can change its physical form and lure young men. Once she lures them into a lonely place, she pounces on them to either kill or have physical contact with them. In both the cases, the victim is supposedly drained off his life. The Chudail is supposed to live near graveyards or deep inside the forests. To prevent the birth of a Chudail from the death of a woman (during her child birth or menstruation or suicide due to social harassment), the villagers used to spread mustard seeds at their doors. In rare cases, tantriks were called to conduct exorcisms to bid the dead a peaceful goodbye. In the western & eastern parts of India, the Chudail is believed to look like a hag who lures small children away from their families and then kills them. Some even believe that she eats little children so as to keep herself younger through centuries. In the western regions of India, the Chudail is sometimes referred to as Haadal. However, unlike the beliefs of the north Indian people, the people living in Western regions believe that the Haadal haunts a Tamarind Tree or an old Banyan Tree. When people prone to ghostly attacks come in the vicinity of this tree, she haunts them to fulfill her unfinished businesses. Indian witch stories have many variations across states. Within the state of

Maharashtra it is believed that one who dares to strike a nail through the bark of the tree supposedly haunted by a Chudail (or a Haadal) will not only free his village from the witch's torment but will also gain good luck for his family for the next seven generations. This act needs to be done at the stroke of midnight on a no moon day (amaavas).

All of these folktales have the basic element of a supernatural being living near the common people and affecting their lives in ways that are sometimes incomprehensible. These folktales have been derived from the earlier notions of witchcraft as mentioned in the Vedas. However, it is to be noticed that from being a ghostly character alone, the concept of horror characters and other creature evolved to define the bifurcates of right and wrong. Where earlier these demons were considered as something beyond human understanding, the concept of ghosts became more grounded with time, and through these folktales it was easier for the common people to believe in the existence of the good and bad, although not limited to that. With time, the concepts of witches, and witch cults has started affecting the common people. Any undesirable activity in the society is deemed as a result of an evil spirit and to remove this evil, the society could go up to any lengths. So many people get caught in the middle of false beliefs, blind faith and superstitious practices. But the fact is that somewhere in the popularity of horror culture lies the greater evil of the politics of social sanction and acceptances. It is a construct that came into being to be used by people in various time frames to validate their viewpoints or to suppress opposite ideas, be it the idea of outcastes being presented as Asuras by Aryan civilizations to keep them out of the social realm or the most modern example of people branding a certain family or mostly women as witches and thus eliminating them from the social structure. Horror as a part of the culture thus seems to work on the fear psyche and has always been used to segregate, subjugate and control others, mostly the ideas condemned by the 'powerful' psyche like the idea of single women who are often killed or sexually violated in the name of punishment for being witches but isn't this punishment a hidden punishment for having been dared to be independent and free? And a woman is not supposed to be free or not to belong to someone male also these folktales pertaining to horror aim at reinforcing the same biases over and over again like that of a prèt or an atma or tend to be presented as a moral lesson as in case of folktales which give particular reason for the becoming of a being like a certain kind of spirit turning into a spirit because of never having married thus pushing the idea of importance of marriage etc. the folklore is full of them. Thus there is no clear idea of horror it is a part of the culture that keeps constructing and deconstructing itself to put forth the dominant ideas or to be used as tool to inculcate a way of living or a teaching or to reinstate the myths and is mostly a weapon to thrust upon people certain ideology and those who fall out of the confines of these ideologies end up being victims of horror culture in one form or other thus to some extent it is a big bad idea which needs to be studied and suppressed instead of letting it be the suppressor.

Aqsa Khan

Vaishnavi Chaudhary

I Year

Cultural Transmission, Morality and Didacticism in Alternate Realities

What is Tradition? 'It is an inherited, established or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior. It is the cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs and institutions.'" The most common way a tradition is carried over from one generation to another is by handing down the information, beliefs, and customs by word of mouth or through examples of oral narrations. So, when a group of children gather around their grandparents or sit around a campfire listening to stories from an elder with rapt attention, it not only results in the creation of one of their fondest childhood memories but also in the conditioning of the younger generation's social selves in the garb of entertainment.

Folktales, fairy tales, cartoons, fables or parables - all make use of the form of Alternate Reality. Impossible becomes possible in these tales, while animals speak and emote in parables, and cartoons make use of a composite of all these. In India, fairy tales and cartoons take the form of *Panchatantra* tales, *Hitopadesas* (Gujarat) and *Thhakumar Jhuli* stories (Bengal). However one thing common in all these forms is their service to the end of moral didacticism. They help to cut across the generational barriers and thereby maintain a cultural cohesion in a region, big or small. Be it the race of tortoise or the sharing of cake between two cakes or the clever fox who fooled many other animals, children's stories – a popular form of folk culture - always abound in lessons of morality. Even cartoons, for that matter, like Noddy or Chhota Bheem are fraught with teachings of courage. In fact, studies have unanimously agreed how these cartoon cultures – Western and Indian alike – have been trying to prepare children to manage difficulties from their early days and be honest amidst the hardest of situations.

Formal education is received through institutions while informal education of what is valued and preserved in a cultural society is transmitted through the generations in the form of these Alternate Realities. Folklore or Folktales teach or explain to the new generation, how something came to be known as the 'creation of myths'. They always have a didactic lesson or a moral to teach and thus they become a tool of traditional education. In other words, tradition is 'veiled' in the various forms of Alternate Reality. But why are these morals taught? Fafunwa through the observation of African folktales says that- "The aim of traditional African education is multilateral and the end objective is to produce an individual who is honest, respectful, skilled, co-operative and conforms to the social order of the day." Tradition is based on Ideology. When a tradition transmission takes place through these various forms of Alternate Realities; it is basically the conscious as well as unconscious conditioning of one's beliefs, goals and behavior. As Louis Althusser, says that 'ideology' "interpellates" human individuals as subjects, thus grounding their sense of personal identity in their "imaginary relation to the real conditions" of their existence. The folk-tales always are formed by a hegemonic thought or ideology. Their ideologically charged narratives naturalize the dominant social positions and relations. For example: the Idoma Folktales teach the younger generation of that culture about moral-uprightness, courage and to teach the child to stand against vices such as theft and dishonestly as observed by Halima L. Amali.

Maria Tatar says that Didactic patterns in folktales have become more prominent in the recent centuries. According to her, even the most basic works of children literature under Folk-Tales have an 'unusually cruel streak, one that especially affects women and children and are known as 'moral correctives'. The Folk-tales becomes the tool to teach the children the specific code of conduct of a particular gender. Simone de Beauvoir suggests that- "one is not born a woman but, rather, becomes one" through the construction and formulation of gender and the Folktales makes the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity more pronounced to the point of it being rigid. The male protagonists are usually characterized through virtues such as heroism, leadership and physical prowess whereas the female characters immersed in mandatory preconditions for marriage which was usually their only chance to

move up the social ladder like for Cinderella. The only way she could escape her impoverished condition and poverty was by marrying Prince Charming. The 'ideal' female character was characterized by her obedience towards her father or husband, diligence, modesty, humility and endurance and if the woman failed in these criteria they were chastised and punished like in *Catskin* and *Allerleirauh*, and the female protagonist was reduced to a servile position. Tatar writes that a similar pattern of punishments associated with female disobedience can be seen in European Folktales as well. To illustrate her point, she describes the death penalty for adulterous females. The first is from the collection of the Grimm Brothers' "*The Three Snake Leaves*" where the unfaithful woman is sent out on the sea with her accomplice in a boat filled with holes and the second is from an Italian folktale "*The Lion's Grass*" where the woman condemned is hung first, then burnt and then her ashes are thrown to the wind. According to her, no folktale ever depicts such a cruel punishment for an adulterous man. This teaches young girls to behave in the way prescribed by the society so as to save themselves from the cruel judgment. Another example is our most basic Fairy-Tales and *Roopkathas* that teach the young to be the perfect patriarchal archetype of woman delineated in the examples of Cinderella or Ariel or any Princess from the *Roopkathas*. The Evil Queen from *Snow White* or Ursula from *The Little Mermaid*, are known for their hunger for power and a woman wielding power and basking in freedom is always seen as a figure of contempt by the Patriarchal society, so young children are conditioned to abhor these figures for their radicalism. A pure ploy created so that the prevalent patriarchal norms are never questioned. Red riding hood's mother warns her to stick to the path as the woods are dark and scary. She also asks her not to talk to strangers but Hood naively talks to the wolf and tells him where she is going. The consequences later on teaches generations of kids to listen to their parents but especially the females against the possible threats from the space of forests and strangers. In a way, these folktales intensify the already existing gender-bias.

An alternate reality story also often presents us with a different reality to our current situation or past. Kathleen Ann Goonan in her book *In War Times* presents an utopian alternative to our reality; she gives us a place where the Cold War did not happen. A reality where peace overcomes conflict and mutual technological advances were shared between Russia and America through the protagonist Sam Dance's alternative reality. It tells what the present would have been if a different course of action was taken. As mentioned in the book *Trauma in Contemporary Literature: Narrative and Representation*, "Goonan's novel is driven by an aching sense of the losses not just of the second world war, but of the trajectory American politics took after 1945." Time-travel, often a trope for Alternate Reality becomes a tool for a visionary experience which teaches us a moral. In H.G Wells' *Men like Gods* we see, several Englishmen are transferred through an accidental encounter with a cross-time machine into an alternate universe featuring a utopian Britain. When the Englishmen, led by a satiric figure based on Winston Churchill, try to seize power, the utopians of that world, point a ray gun at them and send them to a different dimension.

On one hand where some morals and norms are upheld and passed on so that the prevalent society may continue, some other ideals of our ancient world are gradually dissipated with such a change representing a change in the era. In the book, *A Cultural Sociology On Middle East, Asia and Africa : An Encyclopedia*, it is maintained how the ancient folklore of Africa that talked about the long tradition of slavery was later replaced by folk culture like jazz music that had therapeutic effect against the culture of slavery and the dehumanization attached with it. Similarly, until the growth of modern urban Bengal, the folktales and *Patachitra* paintings used to delineate the importance of river as a means of migration, sustenance, geographical relocations and trade through the tales of Krishna and Behula-Lakhindar. In fact, the folk culture of India for long maintained the image of women as the 'Mother India'. The idea of nation was personified in the woman and hence the suitable qualities of being sacrificing, nurturing and docile were expected of her. This remained an unquestioned belief

beginning from the early twentieth century till the modern shout out for feminism began in the country and sought to crumble such veiled subjugation.

Thus, by providing an alternate to the current reality it not only helps show us our traditions or remind us our morals or the follies of the past but also sometimes the repercussions it could lead to if we continue in our set pattern. Going by the cliché of literature - Alternate Reality reflects and responds.

Kathakali Dutta

Sayantani Chowdhury

II Year

Story of the Tiger Man (A Sema-Naga Folk Tale)

To most people the word “Tiger Man” would seem strange but to the people in Nagaland whenever the word would be mentioned, especially around old people the reply you would hear would be a simple and extended “ahh” with an expression that would seem as though they were reminiscing something from the past. The story about the Tiger Man has been passed down from generation to generation. And before any elder would start the story they would always say, “This is not fiction, nor imagination, nor a source of entertainment. This is a true story which is as real as your mobile phones and your computers”.

Zunheboto, a district in Nagaland that is inhabited mostly by the Sema tribe, one among the major tribes of Nagaland, has many small villages. Within it was a small village hidden in between the mountains. There lived a farmer named Hutovi Ayemi who was an ordinary man but with an extraordinary soul, a soul that could transform into a tiger once he was asleep.

As his sleep takes over, his tiger soul would travel to faraway lands exploring places that an ordinary farmer wouldn't even dream of. And as his soul gets accustomed to the transformation, his body that is asleep would get up to eat, work on the farm, interact with friends and do whatever that is necessary needed for a man to do. His tiger soul could teleport himself to any place that he wished to go. He would often tell his friends about the places he's explored and has been to as his friends were the only ones who knew about his transformation. Whenever he felt hungry in his tiger form, he would hunt animals like cows or goats from the village during night time and eat them just like a predator hunts and eats its prey. When his soul returned to his body and he woke up, there'd be a few strands of fur and dried blood smeared around his mouth and chin.

One unlucky day the villagers decided to stay up to wait for the creature that was killing their cows. Unaware of their plans, Hutovi decided to go on about his usual hunting routine. As soon as he approached the cows, all the villagers came from their hiding places and they threw stones at him and chased him away with fire torches. Since he was badly injured, he couldn't return to his body and had to stay in the forest for two days, and during that time his body at home was also bed ridden and sick. As he was resting in the forest, a hunter was passing by the forest and before Hutovi could even figure out what to do he was shot in the stomach and he lost his life. Now, even though his tiger form had passed away his human body was still alive but was unwell. As he was resting on his bed, he heard lots of commotion outside so he asked one of his friends to see what was happening. His friends came back with the news that the village was celebrating because one of the men from village had come back from his hunting trip and bought along with him a tiger that he had killed. As Hutovi heard the news, he knew immediately that the tiger was his soul. When he got to know that his tiger-soul had left the world, he told his friends that he was going to go to sleep- little did his friends knew that Hutovi meant to sleep eternally.

On that particular evening as the villagers prepared for Hutovi's funeral they decided to cut out the skin of the tiger and lay it on top of his coffin as a sign of respect and love. But the irony about the whole act was that they were sending off the same man in the dead Hutovi and the slain Tiger. Other than Hutovi's friends none of the villagers knew about his alter-ego, so in their hearts, they were glad as they knew that their dearest friend who was now on the other side was content and happy because even though he had passed away and was being buried, his body was one with his soul, a special soul that could transform into a tiger and run about in freedom.

It is believed that back in those days, such supernatural powers were passed on from one family member to another; if one wanted to end it, they would take the egg that did not hatch even after the incubation period and eat it raw. Eventually as the British took over India and Christianity was spread across the country and in Nagaland too, tradition changed hands with modernity. The Naga people became strong believers of the Christian God and what was left behind was these folktales and beliefs. Nonetheless, these tales of the folk are still circulated among the new generation and they transport them back to the glories of those past replete with wonderful stories.

- Translated by
Amghali Achumi
I Year

Tweet a Tale

A Twitter-sized Tale, 140 characters long (including spaces) where one is encouraged to think about what you want to say and get at the heart of the matter, perhaps has Robert Lowell turning in his grave and the Haiku feeling a tad abandoned. *Terribly Tiny Tales*, a veritable new genre has taken the social media by storm with their succinct yet momentous tales. A passionate team of vivacious young creative writers in the summer of 2013, launched this offbeat concept on Facebook, in response to the contemporary “unintelligent content” as Mariya Gabajiwala from *TTT* calls it. Since then, the venture has come a long way and has over 500,000 likes on Facebook alone, besides other popular social media. Its ‘*less is more*’ concept has unquestionably managed to strike a chord with the right audience and the *TTT* has indeed carved a niche for itself in the current literary domain. So we decided on a tiny tête-à-tête with Mariya.

Q: How did you chance upon this concept of Terribly Tiny Tales?

A: The idea behind Terribly Tiny Tales wasn’t really ‘chanced upon’. Back when the Facebook page went live - the summer of 2013 - collective attention spans were at an ever-steady decline and online timelines were cluttered with spammy, unintelligent content (including bathroom selfies, cat memes, and the likes). Creative expression took a backseat in the grand scheme of things - making it a particularly frustrating and difficult time for creative individuals. Terribly Tiny Tales was a natural response to this. And like any good product, it borrowed the best from the worse - creating something that was truly unique and filled a need-gap.

Q: What is your idea of an ‘alternate reality’?

A: Coincidentally, this is something we actually talk about at our micro-fiction workshops. We believe that an ‘alternate reality’ exists right here, parallel to our own - hiding in plain sight: a world of wonderment, magic, insights and stories. To experience it or to visit it, all one has to do is look. In more ways than one, observation is a writer’s (either aspiring or established) greatest asset - to see an alternate reality that others simply don’t.

Q: Writing always addresses a social cause but by doing your stories online only, does it not limit the target audience? Or was it deliberate to cater to a particular kind of readership?

A: There are very few ‘always’ with writing. And today, wouldn’t not doing stories online drastically limit the target audience? These days, the world is so entwined - stories are where the readers are, and the readers are where the stories are. The conversations, collaborations, and agility that the online medium allows is unsurpassed - as long as the medium is respected yet pushed to its limits and turned to its head.

Q: Since writing has become such a competitive space, how and where do you see yourselves 5 years from now? Would you continue writing in a soft medium like blogging or enter the publishing arena? What is your long term plan?

A: There’s over-saturation in almost every field. But good content always, always survives. Great writing is its own biggest advertiser. And good stories automatically allure and attract audiences. And that’s our aim - to ever-strive to tell great human stories, continue to explore insights and truths, and become a platform to countless eager, hungry voices. Future-proofing ourselves against the many challenges, we’re building technologies, too - with our audiences and stellar content at its heart.

Q: Anything in the current social, political, environmental (or any other scenario) you wish to change? What kind of alternative would you deem ideal?

A: Questions, today, are discouraged. And to grow, we must accept to ask, understand, and answer them - we must encourage them. At the end of the day, questions are often at the centre of so many stories. The simplest alternative to fix this myopia would be to be more accepting, and not take ourselves too serious. And maybe, at times, question ourselves.

Nano Movie Reviews

Alice in Wonderland: Disney(1951)and Tim Burton(2010)

“We’re all mad here.”

Whimsical and enchanting, Alice in wonderland must be a part of every childhood, in some form or another. We’d prescribe it before vitamins! Follow her down the rabbit hole and lose yourself in the delights and fancy of a surreal world.

The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind by Michel Gondry (2004)

“I apply my personality in a paste.”

This film is part-sci fi, part-drama, part-romance, part-comedy, and all fantastic! Gondry gently depicts a world where you can erase your memories. Follow Jim Carey’s sombreness and Kate Winslet’s hair as they lead us through the bizarre plot.

The Matrix by Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski (1999)

“I imagine that right now, you’re feeling a bit like Alice. Hmm? Tumbling down the rabbit hole?”

Awaken to reality with this classic film that raised the bar of sci-fi. Just be ready to question everything.

Back to the Future by Robert Zemeckis (1985)

*“The way I see it, if you’re gonna build a time machine into a car, why not do it with some *style?**”

Strange as a funny sci-fi may seem, this film executes it brilliantly and has been a favourite for generations. Inventive and exciting, director Robert Zemeckis lets his audience fly through time with Marty McFly.

The Butterfly Effect by Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber (2004)

“You can’t play God, son.”

This invigorating whirlwind of a film both makes you think hard about choices and entertains at the same time. The film is haunting, dark and brilliant- everything we like in a movie to be honest!

Minority Report by Steven Spielberg (2002)

“Dig up the past, all you get is dirty.”

Spielberg deals cleverly in this film with the way the future connects to present life. Engrossing, stirring and scary, the 2002 film is a prototype of stellar directing and thoughtful ideas. Also watch

Cloud Atlas for more journeys of connecting the past, present and future- in an extended history that goes beyond mere recorded facts and subjective notions.

Groundhog Day by Harold Ramis (1993)

“Do you ever have déjà vu?”

Celebrate the weather-forecasting tradition (where a groundhog determines whether locals will see spring or more winter) in this twisted tale where a reporter sent to cover the event lives the same day over and over again. Feel your cynicism and irritability melt away, watching Bill Murray being loveable as ever could be.

A Place Called Here by Cecelia Ahern (2006)

“There’s only one thing worse than not being able to find someone, and that’s not being found.”

No, don’t judge the book by the writer. Trust us and lose yourself in one of the many make-believe worlds of Cecilia Ahern. A brilliant concept, of a world that holds everything you lose (think of the socks!), and an even better execution makes this a fascinating read.

Sandhita Chandra

Yashi Marwaha

II Year

Aligarh A Review

Director Hansal Mehta's *Aligarh* is an intense movie powered by sincere performances and an amazing screenplay. The movie is a must watch for all cine-lovers who appreciate atypical movies more than mainstream movies with unnecessary item numbers and exaggerated action sequences. It is based on the true story of Professor Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras who was suspended from his university because of his sexual orientation.

Manoj Bajpayee brilliantly plays the character of Professor Siras, a Marathi teacher at Aligarh University, whose wife left him not long after their marriage because she found him 'boring' and his relation with his family was not so healthy. Though Bajpayee has given some amazing performances in the past, this could easily be called one of his best. He portrays the character of a homosexual man who is uncomfortable with people describing his feelings in three letters-- g-a-y. He is also a poet who believes poetry can never be understood in words but in the pauses, the gaps and the silences. The most memorable scene of the movie is the one in which he, isolated - physically and mentally- hums a LataMangeshkar tune with his eyes closed; it is his changing expressions that convey his deep felt anguish, anguish that he cannot express in mere words. Rajkumar Rao yet again proves his acting prowess and does full justice to his character of Deepu, a journalist who is not interested in *masala* news but is eager to dig out the truth. His relationship with Professor Siras is heart warming. The friendship between the heterosexual man and the homosexual man is shown as normal as the friendship between any two individuals regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

The movie begins with Professor Siras being driven to his home on a rickshaw, and the rickshaw puller follows him to his room. Then we see two men with a camera following them, shrieks are heard and four university officials arrive on the scene. Hereafter, Professor Siras is 'exposed' as a homosexual, and is consequently suspended from the university, just three months before his retirement. He struggles as he is secluded after his "*kaand*" goes viral on media with the university officials (who promised him not to disclose the incident) giving interviews in the media one after the other. He is denied even a meeting with a doctor despite making an appointment and has to keep shifting his residence as the landlord makes stupid excuses to make him leave. In the midst of the dirty politics of the university, activist groups from Delhi, journalist Deepu and one of Siras's colleagues, Professor Tahir Islam (played by Sukhesh Arora) who is a graduate from Oxford, try to help him file and fight a case against the journalists who invaded the privacy of Siras and his 'friend'- two consenting adults but homosexuals 'unfortunately'! Even after winning the case, Siras believes India is not a country where people like him can lead a respectable life. May be he foresaw things; homosexuality which was decriminalised in 2009 was again criminalised in 2013.

The scene in which Deepu, who had never made love to any woman before, makes love to his colleague Namita (played by Dilnaz Irani) is followed by the scene in which Professor Siras makes love to his lover. The two are not depicted only as sexual partners but also those who share warmth in their relationship, who bond over their same taste for music. The fact that Siras's 'friend' is found missing shows the plight of the person who is not just oppressed due to his lower class and caste but also because his sexuality is not accepted by the society.

The movie doesn't follow a strict linear progression which adds to the drama. There are no songs in the movie; it didn't need any (with old melodies playing on Siras's tape, and his poetic words). The cinematography is good. Even the minor characters play their part well: Deepu's fellow journalist Tashi (Sumit Gulati), the corrupt and jealous university officials, and Siras's lawyer played by Asish Vidyarthi.

Saumya Gairola

II Year

Tributes
Harper Lee
The Legacy She's Left Us

“Real courage is when you know you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what.” *Atticus Finch, To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)

Harper Lee – a legend, an inspiration, a childhood icon – has passed away. Having lived out her whole life post-*To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) in anonymity, Lee had been a recluse for the last few decades and her readers only imagined her through her protagonist Scout's voice. Last year, however, she found and released *Go Set a Watchman* (2015), the parent and sequel to the novel that the world knew her by. Had Harper Lee's death be announced this time last year, it would have been met with silent acceptance and musings of it being her time, or with surprise that she had not already passed.

Now, however, we have been given a taste of more. We had been jolted out of our resignation in July 2015 and have not stopped talking about Lee since. We cannot silently accept Lee's passing; her two beautiful novels are not enough. My memories of spending hours in the cool dungeon that was the English room of my school and being taken on a riveting, moving journey through Harper Lee's novel flood me now: my teacher inviting the small group of five that had elected for higher English into the teachers lounge so we would be appropriately comfortable to delve into and appreciate fully the beauty that is *To Kill a Mockingbird*; falling in love with literature all over again every single time we cracked the volume open; going on a wild ride through a child's eyes to seeing her grow up and deal with testing points in life; tackling societal problems together like gender norms, race and class, until we felt like we could take on the world. The serene, soft focused novel with lilted wit and narrative sophistication changed my life, like many others.

The novel that gave everyone bundles of cherished memories has been left as just that, a memory. It had been a waking dream that was gently slipping out of our minds as we went about our life. And then, Harper Lee's lawyer discovered her original manuscript, that her editor had said needed work. Chronologically set after *To Kill a Mockingbird* but written much earlier as the first version of it, *Go Set a Watchman* is raw, complex and as far from tame as it can get. It makes you rethink everything you accepted in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and urges the reader to scratch under the surface, instead of recording life and its injustices through the eyes of a child. The angry, anxious book with a racist Atticus Finch has been everything that *To Kill a Mockingbird* was not. As *The Telegraph* puts it, had *To Kill a Mockingbird* been a little more complex, “it wouldn't have been so much of a fairy tale; it wouldn't have been taught in schools everywhere, and it probably wouldn't even have been considered a classic. But it would have been a masterpiece.” This is what makes it so hard to accept the news that has been unceremoniously thrust upon us. We have been jolted awake from our reverie; we have had a taste of more, and now cannot settle for less.

Making this dismal situation even worse is the surge of conspiracy theories that have come up after Lee's two successive years under the spotlight. Conjecture that Truman Capote (her close friend and the inspiration for the character Dill) wrote the book, speculations on her state of mind (and thus ability to decide to publish *Go Set a Watchman*), questions on her talent (that she was an accidental writer with only one book in her) are thoughts that make ardent fans wince. At the same time, most of her readers are glad that she only ever published one book (albeit twice), because it would have almost been the same, revisiting similar settings and circumstances. As she poignantly predicted in 1961 (the year she won the Pulitzer prize), “I have a horrible feeling that this will be the making of me.”

With a heart fit to burst, we pray that Harper Lee's voice reaches us posthumously. As she always said, she wrote for herself, and it's unlikely that she would have stopped just because she didn't want to publish any of it. We can't help but wonder what other work of hers is out there. We hear of her letters and her unpublished crime story called *The Reverend*, hoping against hope that she didn't burn her papers. "Her death," as The Telegraph writes, "sets a scene for literary vultures."

Lee is remembered by celebrities and readers alike. Reese Witherspoon tweets, "She revealed it all... the glory and the fear and the hate and the beauty." Barack Obama's family issued a statement on the impact Lee had on the world, "When Harper Lee sat down to write *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she wasn't seeking awards or fame. She was a country girl who just wanted to tell an honest story about life as she saw it. [...] But what that one story did, more powerfully than one hundred speeches possibly could, was change the way we saw each other, and then the way we saw ourselves, through the uncorrupted eyes of a child, she showed us the beautiful complexity of our common humanity, and the importance of striving for justice in our own lives, our communities, and our country. Others like Aaron Sorkin, Erin Brockovich, Oprah Winfrey and Stephen King also paid tribute to her through their tweets.

But if there's anything you take away from this article, let it be to stop trying to 'expose' Harper Lee, and listen to her work. People's apparent disappointment with and offence at *Go Set a Watchman* must not translate to petty revenge and attempts to tarnish Lee's reputation. Instead, it is time to come to terms with the reality Lee offers. As The Washington Post reports, "If *To Kill a Mockingbird* simultaneously condemned Southern racism and allowed the reader to feel morally superior for rejecting it, *Go Set a Watchman* banishes the illusion [of a belief in your own goodness being the same thing as a real commitment to equality] that made *To Kill a Mockingbird* so popular."

She highlighted issues of racial discrimination and the judicial system, was an inspiration to many, and remains one of the most influential writers – nay, people – to have ever lived. So mourn Harper Lee, not as a writer but as a rare voice and a tear-stained laugh that makes you reflect on yourself and society, not merely loathe it. Mourn the death of Atticus Finch. Mourn all her characters, but thank her for what she left behind. Remember her with fondness, and not regret. Let her novels stay with you; let them simmer in your heart for you to call on when you need- be it for a growing-up lesson, one of acceptance, or an issue of prejudice. Treasure them; give them to your children; read them so often their pages start to come apart in your hands; let them get you through hard times. Whatever you do though, never forget them. Never forget Harper Lee, for she has given us something great. Let her change your life.

We leave you with Truman Capote's quote on her determination to live on her own terms,

"Her cussing was unconscious; the clothes she wore appealed to her because they were practical; she laughed when one of her teasing remarks drew a comeback delivered with equal zest. But she would not stoop to seek others' approval. The notion that she should never seemed to enter her head."

Sandhita Chandra

II Year

Umberto Eco A Legend Passed Us By

Umberto Eco speculated that his last name was given by officials who recorded the birth of his grandfather, who had been abandoned, as an acronym for the phrase “*ex caelisoblatus*” which is Latin for “A gift from the Gods” or “donated by the heavens.” He was certainly a gift to humanity from God. The Italian writer, philosopher, intellectual and literary critic, however, succumbed to pancreatic cancer at the age of 84 on 19th February this year.

Eco was one of the rare individuals who stepped over boundaries with ease, donning a variety of hats over the course of his career as an academician as well as a writer; he was intellectual, spiritual and philosophical, and yet realistic about the world. As he said, very similarly to philosopher and theorist Roland Barthes’s thoughts, “The author should die once he has finished writing, so as not to trouble the path of the text.” He himself strove to always stay out of the way of his texts, as a silent, withdrawn figure, letting his work speak for itself. These words however, seem haunting now that he has died in fact, and it is hard to grip that he is truly finished writing.

This is why, when news of his death broke, many could not believe this was true. Praying that it was a hoax but eventually grasping that the news, indeed, was real, the world was devastated at the loss of an ingenious soul, an individual with a mind the likes of which this physical realm has not seen in a long time. The Internet was flooded with obituaries and tributes, with people the world over expressing their sorrow. Eco pursued the study of medieval philosophy and literature from the University of Turin, choosing it over a career in law. Eco at the time of his death was Professor Emeritus at the University of Bologna. His contribution to literature has been immense. One of his most famous works is the novel *Ilnomedella Rosa (The Name of the Rose)*, published in 1983. It is a historical mystery novel set in the fourteenth century. This debut novel by Eco combines the use of semiotics in fiction, biblical analysis, medieval studies and literary theory to make it an intellectual murder mystery. In an interview for the Paris Review Eco states, “Number one: when I wrote *The Name of the Rose* I didn’t know, of course, since no one knows, what was written in the lost volume of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the famous volume on comedy. But somehow, in the process of writing my novel, I discovered it. Number two: the detective novel asks the central question of philosophy—who dunnit?” This shows that Eco was not only a great intellectual but also a person with witty humour and a jolly personality.

Annalisa Merelli, who enrolled at the University of Bologna solely due to the professor’s reputation and association with it, says, “Whenever [I saw Eco], I was bewildered by his joyous, playfully big personality, and overwhelmed by the vastness of his knowledge and of his insatiable thirst for it. As a colleague once described him, he was excessive—for culture and generosity. He knew everything, about everything. He was exceptional in making very complex things clear and approachable, which is why, his essays are such a gift to the curious mind. He embodied the definition of a bright mind.”

Apart from *The Name of the Rose*, Eco has also written other novels and literary criticisms. His other novels include, *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1989), *The Island of the Day Before* (1994), *The Prague Cemetery* (2010). One of Eco’s literary criticism on “open” texts has been written in series of essays in the book *The Open Work* published in 1962. He even published a book for his students named, *How to Write a Thesis*. In that book with a sort of a bluntness, he tells what a writer (not just of a thesis paper, but in general too) should or shouldn’t do. Eco in a very brash, yet kind way conveys his message to the readers. For instance, he tells his students: “*You are not Proust*. Do not write long sentences. If they come into your head, write them, but then break them down. Do not be afraid to repeat the subject twice, and stay away from too many pronouns and subordinate clauses.” Or in another instance from the same book: “*You are not e. e. cummings*. Cummings was an American avant-garde poet who is known for having signed his name with lower-case initials. Naturally he used commas and periods

with great thriftiness, he broke his lines into small pieces, and in short he did all the things that an avant-garde poet can and should do. But you are not an avant-garde poet. Not even if your thesis is on avant-garde poetry.” This kind of guidance from him definitely helps students or amateur writers to improve their skills even if in a tongue in cheek manner. In another interview, when asked what advice he had for young writers, he answers that they should always go step by step rather than trying to directly aim for the Nobel Prize.

Eco in many of his lectures not only drew examples from medieval culture but also from television, movies, and other things on the internet. This of course made his lectures more relatable and also allowed him to explain him a difficult concept in very simple terms. In an interview with the *Paris Review*, Eco admits to watching a lot of television, “I suspect that there is no serious scholar who doesn’t like to watch television. I’m just the only one who confesses. And then I try to use it as material for my work. But I am not a glutton who swallows everything. I don’t enjoy watching any kind of television. I like the dramatic series and I dislike the trash shows.” Natalya Avetisyan, editor-in-chief of Slovo, which published four of his books, finds that, “He was really light in conversation, always full of ideas, and had a rare trait – he appreciated people he worked with ... I think this is a big loss for the whole intellectual and cultural world.”

Eco had a lot of appreciation for other writers, especially for Ian Fleming. He was much kinder with his criticism towards Fleming as compared to other critics. This was because he could identify with the Manichean ideology in Fleming’s novels. He also found sexism and racism to be an intentional reflection of society. He also wrote an essay on Fleming’s writings, *Narrative Structures in Fleming*. In the interview with Paris Review, Eco also talks about Dan Brown, “The author, Dan Brown, is a character from *Foucault’s Pendulum*! I invented him. He shares my characters’ fascinations—the world conspiracy of Rosicrucians, Masons, and Jesuits. The role of the Knights Templar. The hermetic secret. The principle that everything is connected. I suspect Dan Brown might not even exist.” This statement reflects the way his mind worked and the pure genius of his thoughts.

People who have had the good fortune to meet him in his apartment have also marveled at his huge book collection. Eco’s apartment in Milan has 30,000 books. There are books lined from the ceiling to the floor. His other manor, near Urbino, has another 20,000 books. People who were visiting always questioned him, whether he had read all these books. But the point of having such a huge library, as Eco and other critics have pointed out, is not what knowledge you have but rather what you don’t have. Eco said that the huge library that he had was more for research and helped him look at a concept or an idea in a very different way. With him gone, many question the fate of these books.

With the news of his death, Twitter was filled with messages that ranged from disbelief to disappointment and grief. It was not just celebrities and writers who expressed sorrow and unhappiness, but the entire Twitter community that voiced its shock and paid their respects. Kristina Georgieva, Bulgarian economist and vice-president of the European Commission, tweeted Eco “People are tired of simple things. They want to be challenged.” Most of all, his native country, Italy was in mourning. “[He was] an extraordinary example of a European intellectual, combining unique intelligence of the past with a limitless capacity to anticipate the future,” Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi said about Eco. “It’s an enormous loss for culture, which will miss his writing and voice, his sharp and lively thought, and his humanity.”

In reality, it is not just Italy, but the whole world that has lost a celebrated author, an extraordinary intellectual, an inspiring man with many talents. Hundreds flocked to his funeral in Milan in collective mourning, where guests enjoyed whiskey and wordplay, remembering the gentle spirit, and speakers choked back tears. Yet it was Eco himself who said it best: “We have a limit, a very discouraging, humiliating limit: death.”

Asawari Tripathi

II Year

Bitacora

Co-curricular life at the Department of English (2015-2016)

The Departmental Literary Society organizes activities through the year so that students' co-curricular exposure enhances their curricular development and faculty hearts and minds are enriched in the process too.

September 2015

Lit.Soc.'s participation in KATHA's brainstorming session on the "Translating India Project" introduced students to the formal mechanics of translation as academic activity. Student inspiration from the activity is visible in our first year student's realization of a translation into English (perhaps for the first ever time) of the Naga folktale published in this issue. Our attempt at celebrating the enriching, alternate, multilingual realities of our nation. One small step.

October 2015

- In collaboration with Upstage, the Dramatics Society of Gargi College, Lit.Soc. organized a staging of Ismat Chughtai's "*Bichoo Phupi*" an Urdu play produced by Vikram Singh Thakur.
- Lit.Soc. also organized a Poetry Reading and Interactive session with acclaimed poet Sudeep Sen.

February 2016

Faculty member Aditya Mohan Bahl conducted a creative writing workshop for students of the Department of English and for students enrolled with Quilluminati, the creative writing society of the college.

March 2016

Lit.Soc. organized *Literati*, its Annual Literary Festival with this year's theme being '(Re) Imagining the Literary: The Aesthetics and Politics of Folktales' inviting explorations of the various lives of the folktale, including its cultural histories across the pan-Indian canvas and how one might benefit from a more direct consideration of the folk tale form when combined with the permanence of the modern media of writing, film or television. Folk artists who were invited showcased and sold their craft work.

Dr. Shashi Tyagi, Principal, Gargi College declared the fest open This was followed by a panel discussion chaired by, Assistant Professor, Gargi College. The panelists included Dr. Gitanjali Chawla, Dr. Sangeeta Dutta, Mr. Shonkhajeet De and Ms. Arunima Das. Convenor of Bitacora, Nzanmongi Jasmine Patton chaired the session and also announced the publication of the first edition of the literary magazine of the Department of English. Hope you all enjoy reading Bitacora as much as we've enjoyed working on its first edition. That's a bitacora entry on Bitacora in Bitacora. Is that right?

April 2016 Lit Soc organized a lecture by Craig Brandist (Director, Bakhtin Centre, University of Sheffield, UK) on how to develop theoretical paradigms for the study of the novel using the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Oswal Sena Library

The Oswal Sena Library was set up over two years (2000-2002) with books donated by Mr. Sushil Oswal through the late Professor Vinod Sena (retired from Delhi University), both of whom were visually challenged and committed to creating voice recordings, braille libraries and digitised versions of books. This diverse collection of books has been catalogued in-house. Over time, Prof. Sena added to the collection, and even after his death, his daughter donated cartons of books. These books are a significant donation since the Department did not then have the resources to set up its own library. The library is one of our prized possessions, and the room includes paintings by leading contemporary artists like Anjolie Ela Menon among others. These paintings that now deck the library walls were painted on the lawns in front of the then Principal's office over 18 years ago for Confluence, an Arts, Crafts and Cultural Fest that invited established artists from Delhi who presented their work to the College. We are very proud indeed of these now priceless works of art that complement the treasure trove of the Oswal Sena Library.

I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library - Jorge Luis Borges

The Oswal library, of the Department of English not only helped me with my curriculum, but also satiated the bibliophile in me, with its immense lineup of books even from outside our curriculum (although it doubles as the Council Room near the administrative office). These books range from poets to critics to authors, from fan fiction to romance, from novels to critical essays, and contain books of every era, cutting through boundaries, and hence help to satisfy the need of every student. The diverse assortment of books ensures that it caters to the needs of students and teachers alike. The collection ranges from now-out-of-print anthologies of Jacobean drama to Deleuze on Foucault.

Not only does this library have a great assortment of books, the Oswal Library committee has taken up the magnanimous responsibility of running it efficiently as well, and they do a great job of it. They not only maintain the library in a good condition, they ensure efficient working of the library by allocating certain days of the week for the students of each year, and during these allocated days, the interested students visit the library under supervision of the teacher and either have the books issued for a week or sit and read them as they please.

Personally, as a student I feel a higher sense of belonging to the college, because of the department library, and in a sense it gives me more confidence we can always depend on it for our assignments and material pertaining to our prescribed texts (even in the last minute). Many books that may not be available to us in the general library are made available to us in the Oswal Library.

Shyama

II Year

Interviews

Ms. Vidya Das Arora

Vidya Das Arora the senior most faculty member in the Department of English at Gargi College wears several hats beautifully. Very few people might know that she was once a reporter for the Swaziland Times, that she has shortlisted films for Doordarshan, and has been an active peer-reviewer for important academic texts for Penguin. She has been a pillar of the Gargi institution in very labour-intensive but crucial administrative roles, such as serving as advisor to the college students union, besides leading the Women's Development Centre here as its founder convenor in the troubled and activist 1980s, besides putting in place several institutional structures for a dignified collegial environment. Her own deep knowledge and appreciation of the arts-- drama and theatre, film, music and all literature has benefited long decades of students involved in co-curricular work in the college's Western Music, Theatre, Literary and Creative Writing and Film Societies, many of which she helped found. On the more conventional academic plane, Vidya is a name to reckon with in contemporary drama, critical theory and translation (especially Odia). Despite her many accomplishments, this pioneer is characteristically shrouded in Sphinx-like mystery and keeps us wondering. Here is our interview with her for **Bitacora's** first issue.

Qn: Considering your long teaching experience, what are the most striking changes in this University over the last four decades you have observed? More specifically, what are the changes in classroom realities you have perceived over the decades?

35 years of teaching is a very long time. I've seen huge changes in student profile, in higher education policy and in the conception of what constitutes an appropriate syllabus for our discipline. Some of these changes have been very heartening, some, due to piecemeal legislation and faulty or hurried implementation, have made teaching less satisfying than it once was. In terms of the classroom, the short semester and the large class size makes the teaching experience too impersonal for me. The older system allowed more space and time for individual attention and interactions.

Qn: How does your students' identity as young women, in your view, express itself in your time with them in college? How have these realities changed since your own days as a student in DU?

I was a student in the seventies. We were a rebellious generation and deeply affected, both intellectually and politically, by events happening around us in India and across the world. Students today seem more driven by their personal goals. But I appreciate their self-confidence and ability to just be themselves.

Qn: How does your identity as a woman and/or a feminist affect your work as a teacher and a scholar?

My identity as a woman and as a feminist (and I'm not afraid to take on that label) certainly affects my work as a teacher and scholar. It guides my choices, my principles and carries with it an awareness of the huge responsibility we have of shaping the minds of young people at the thresholds of their lives.

Qn: What are the differences you perceive in translation to and from English and Oriya?

I have only dealt with one-way translations, with Odia as the source language and English as the target language. I was part of a project for the creation of a translations bank. My purpose was to make Odia writing accessible to the English language reader. Most educated Odias read English. But others have done excellent English to Odia translations.

Qn: How important are theatre and the performance arts (and movies) to literature? Do you think they are important to our syllabus?

They are allied fields, aren't they? All modes of cultural expression. As teachers, we have always tried to give our students some exposure to the other arts even when they have not been part of the syllabus. That creates a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural negotiations of an age.

Qn: What drives you in your work a scholar and teacher in this institution? What 'alternate reality' would do you wish for here?

The only thing that drives me is the hope that I can maybe make some impact on the intellectual growth of our students. If even just a few students of a class feel changed by our teaching, our co-curricular activities, our interactions outside the curriculum, it is enough. We are educators, first and foremost, and I hope we shape our students just as we were once shaped.

Qn: What are the most important attributes a young humanities scholar in Indian academia today needs to retain her/his ethical framework?

Given the recent devaluation of the Humanities in Universities across the world and the struggle to retain the values and directions of the stream, written about at length by Chomsky, Eagleton, Nussbaum, Delbanco and many others, I would like to remind my students that it is only the Humanities that teaches us the legitimacy of multiple truths, differing perspectives, alternate realities, within a basic framework of a just and democratic system. It teaches us how to live, not how to make a living. I am appalled at the upsurge of intolerance I see in spaces around me. We are able to talk about alternate realities in imaginative spaces but find it increasingly difficult to respect alternate realities in our own social spaces. We can maintain our differences, our dissents, without turning into adversaries over whom coercive power, in one form or the other has to be exercised.

Dr. Radha Chakravarty

Dr. Radha Chakravarty is a writer, a critic and a translator who is currently Professor of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies at Ambedkar University, Delhi. Her other teaching assignments have included JNU and Delhi University, where she taught at Gargi College for almost three decades. *The Essential Tagore*, which she co-edited, is veritably the final word in Tagore studies, and its importance in the world of letters is recognized by its nomination as Book of the Year 2011 by world-renowned feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum. Radha's other works include *Feminism and Contemporary Women Writers* (2008) and *Novelist Tagore* (2013), in addition to scores of scholarly journal papers and review articles for wide audiences.

Dr. Chakravarty's journey into the field of translation had a beginning that will confirm for young students that there is no substitute for passionate love for one's field of study: having signed up for a doctoral project on Mahashweta Devi, Radha soon realized that most of these works were not available in English. Immediately, Radha set about translating Mahashweta Devi, and the result is --- translations! Her journey then led to translations of Rabindranath Tagore's texts, like *Gora*, *Boyhood Days*, *Chokher Bali*; and of *Bankim Chandra Chatterji*, into English. These giants of Bengali literature wrote almost a century ago. That Radha's translations are so highly commended by the academic community are a measure of her truly masterly scholarship. So how could Bitacora not interview with her?

Q. How do you imagine a world without patriarchy?

A. A world without patriarchy would be an altered world indeed. Old habits of thought, speech and action would be gone. Relationships would need to be reinvented. So would mainstream literature.

Q. What alternate reality do you envision for the present scenario? What is your opinion on the future of the alternate reality in literature?

A. I long to see a planet where humans are in harmony with their environment. A world where freedom goes hand in hand with sensitivity and responsibility. Where imagination has a place.

Literature has always offered a parallel space where we can move beyond the world we know to imagine new realities into being. It's a risky enterprise, as dangerous as it is exciting. The worlds we imagine today have an uncanny way of turning into reality tomorrow. The writer should know her power and use it with care. But use it she must.

Q. Do you think fiction helps explore the female identity?

A. Writing explores, but also shapes, identities. Fiction has proved a fertile ground for narrativising female identities. But there are so many other kinds of writing too. Emergent genres like slam poetry can be empowering.

Q. What inspired you to further explore the writings of Rabindranath Tagore?

A. I was struck by Tagore's extraordinary ability to get out of his own skin and think about lives and realities not his own. And by his refusal to accept limits to his quest for freedom, understanding and creativity. From him we learn that in the realm of the imagination there are no boundaries.

Q. How do you think books take one to an alternative world? How important is it to escape to the world of fantasy?

A. Words are magic. They have the power to build new worlds. Fantasy is seldom an escape. More often, it's a way of deepening our engagement with reality. That is the paradox of fantasy literature.

Dr. Anjana Neira Dev

Dr. Anjana Neira Dev did her MPhil from the University of Cambridge and her PhD in Indian English Poetry from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi. Her PhD dissertation titled *Nations within and without: a Study of Seven Post Independence Indian English Poets* has since been published (2012). Considering her work on the idea of ‘nation’ and the current turn of events that nationalism has taken, she is pretty vocal about this dystopia and believes that this climate of intolerance has “fractured the world we are living in”.

Having taught at Gargi College as an Associate Professor of English for numerous years, Dr. Anjana Neira Dev is adept at grasping the diversity within the student body. In addition to teaching literature and language to English majors, she also teaches courses on Academic Writing, Business Communication, Technical Writing and Creative Writing to students majoring in other disciplines. Her published books include four textbooks commissioned by the University of Delhi: an edited bilingual anthology on *Indian Literature: An Introduction* (2005), *Business English* (2008), *Creative Writing: A Beginner’s Manual* (2009), and an edited *Anthology of Indian English Poetry and Short Stories* (2014). She even has a book on *Bridge Gyan!* We could not do a first issue of the department’s literary magazine without an interview with one of its senior most, flamboyant members.

Qn: Do you agree that academic excellence is not the only criterion for becoming a teacher?

For me a teacher is someone who has the following qualities and talents: a deep engagement with the subject and a love for it; the ability to communicate the nuts and bolts of the subject to the learner and give him/her an unshakable foundation on which to build his/her understanding of it. This has to go along with an awareness of the diversity among the students that comes from a variety of factors – socio-cultural and economic experiences, self perception, intellectual abilities, interest, relevance of the subject for the fulfilment of personal and professional goals, affective responses to the experience of being in the classroom and confidence in the teacher, to name a few. After these elaborate prefatory remarks, my answer to the question is that *these* are the unwritten but ‘essential qualifications’ for being a teacher. So with academic excellence, you have only climbed the first step on the qualification ladder towards being a teacher.

Qn: In a place like Delhi University, where a teacher has to interact with students from diverse backgrounds, what are the challenges and considerations that s/he has to keep in mind?

First of all, the challenge is to understand that the world in which the students are growing up and their experience of it is very different from the world in which I grew up and my experience of it. This difference is not restricted to the individual differences in the linguistic, socio-economic and cultural domains. If my engagement with the students has to be mutually empowering I have to build bridges across these gaps and find a ‘common ground’ to communicate with them. The second important challenge is to enthuse the students to think independently in an environment that traditionally rewards conformity and give them the confidence to be as different as they please. One of the most important challenges, according to me, is to help the students engage in critical self-assessment and become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, a personal SWOT analysis if you like; one that will help them to map, in a more realistic fashion, the ‘road that they wish to travel and the destination that they desire to reach.

Qn: You have worked extensively on Indian Writings in English/Translation. In recent years, there has been a major change in the syllabus of English Studies with more authors from India and of Indian origin included. How important is the role of English Studies for Indian Literatures while we already have Department of Modern Indian Literature across various universities including D.U.?

As far as English Studies goes, the shift that you are asking about is a shift in the very notion of what constitutes 'English'. For a very long time, due to political, social and economic reasons, English was synonymous with that which was born/produced in England. Even within that framework the 'canon' was like an exclusive gentleman's club that had clear rules of who is allowed in and who is prohibited entry, even if the aspirant happened to be a true blue Englishman/woman. As any student of Linguistics will tell you, languages change over time as do notions of 'correctness'. It is in this light that we have been fortunate to see English studies changing to include, not just accommodate, literature written in English from all parts of the world, including India. So the shift is one that prioritises the exposure to intellectual and social traditions across time and space and it is this understanding that has enriched and empowered English Studies today.

Qn: Your Ph.D. thesis is on the idea of the 'nation' in the works of seven post-independence Indian poets. At the moment, Nationalism has become a hot topic and there are clashes (sometimes violent) amongst different imaginations of nation. Do you believe that the politicians and ideologues across the spectrum are responsible for this mess while the real concerns of the 1.2 billion Indians are not being heard?

My modest efforts in my thesis were to interrogate the very idea that there is single and universally 'true' definition of nationalism. What I learned in the course of the reading I did is that every age and every group of people interpret the nation in different ways, ways that come from their experience and understanding of being and belonging, as well as feelings of alienation and exclusion. In this context I would hesitate to identify victims and aggressors in the neat binary suggested in your question. I do hold on to some fundamental beliefs in the unity, sovereignty and integrity of the 'nation' to which I belong but at the same time I am convinced that individual expressions of such beliefs will and should vary. While it may sound clichéd, I think replacing 'intolerance' with 'tolerance' for the beliefs of 'others' and negotiating a common ground for dialogue and interaction is the need of the hour. I can agree to disagree with you, as long as both of us agree on some rules of this communication. One of the rules is I think, that we dialogue in a spirit of impersonal and rational enquiry with a genuine effort to understand where each of us is coming from – what has made me believe what I do, and what makes up the fountainhead of your beliefs.

Qn: The recent political past has seen the rise of many female leaders from Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar to Hillary Clinton in the US to Nepal's president, Bidhya Devi Bhandari. What do you feel are the new roles and responsibilities of an academic toward gender equality in today's age?

I enjoyed the editorial by Melinda Gates in the Times of India on March 8th where she talks of some best practices like the GEMS (Gender Equality Movement in Schools) initiative as also the new definition of a MARD – Men Against Rape and Discrimination. I would perhaps carry these notes to myself even further and introspect about all the labelling I am often guilty of, whether towards other women or towards men as well. I would carry this argument forward and include among these best practices a recently launched initiative by The Times of India, called 'Note to self'. This is an initiative that asks women to look in the mirror and introspect. It states, "While women direct all their angst towards men for putting labels on them, do they realize that they themselves tend to be harshly

judgemental of other women and their life choices? Take a minute and think.” As a teacher, especially in a women’s college, my greatest challenge is to aspire towards a paradigm shift from gender equality being restricted to equality for women, in comparison to men; to the idea of equality for all genders and a resistance to the stereotyping of any one gender to fit an artificial notion of it.

Qn: What are some of the significant changes that you see in classroom teaching over the course of your career?

As Heraclitus famously said, ‘The only thing that is constant is change’. To answer this question I will mention one of the greatest challenges of adapting to the dynamic and continuously evolving classroom. The present day students have access to knowledge in all its complex avatars at the touch of a button. If they can get all the information they need, independently of me, why should what I say and do in the classroom be of any consequence to them? I have had to redefine my transaction of knowledge in the classroom in the light of this challenge and constantly reinvent my pedagogical strategies to complement the access the students have, via technology to the rich reservoirs of world knowledge.

Qn: What is your take on ‘Alternate Realities’, the theme of our first edition of Bitacora?

I love the theme you have chosen to highlight in the first edition of **Bitacora** for two main reasons. The first of course is related to our profession – after all one of the most valuable rewards of the study of literature is the insight that there are (at least) “thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird”. The second reason for believing that your choice of theme is very apposite is related to the current debate raging about the ‘alternative realities’ of ‘nationalism’ and ‘sedition’. I am reminded of what Mahatma Gandhi said on March 18, 1922, when he was facing a trial for sedition against the British Empire. In his speech Gandhi makes a reference to ‘alternate realities’ when he says that his non-cooperation with the British Empire can be seen in two ways: “what in law is a deliberate crime, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen.” Just like he remains a touchstone for many values Gandhi continues to inspire us for his understanding of how reality is neither one dimensional nor is its definition the prerogative of a single individual or group of individuals. Reality, like love, is “a many splendored thing” and the theme reminds us of that.

The Department of English

We Are All Mad Here (Then Again, Who's Sane?)



Ms. Vidya Das Arora joined the Department of English, Gargi College in 1980 and is Associate Professor of English. Her areas of specialization include Elizabethan & Jacobean Drama, Modern Theatre & Performance, Critical Theory, 1960s and 1970s Pop Culture, and World Cinema. She has published many research papers and articles in reputed journals. Over the years, she has been actively involved in hosting and organizing seminars and conferences in the college on subjects like Religion and Politics, Media and Politics, the Renaissance, The Novel Form, The Idea of the Medieval, Women and Legal Rights, Sexual Harassment, Marxism, and New Wave Cinema/Theatre and Western Music. She

has also organized International Conferences on “The Imaging of Women in Myth and History” and “Nationalism”, “Literature After World War II”, and “Integrating Knowledge” to name a few. When you get to spend time with her though, she makes you think of Buster Keaton-guess why.

Dr. Radharani Chakravarty, writer, academic, translator, literary critic, and a veritable Tagore scholar has worked at Gargi since 1991 and is an Associate Professor of English and is currently on lien. Her areas of specialization are Translation, Comparative Literature, Gender Studies, Contemporary Literature, Postcolonial Literature, and Tagore. Any student who has had the pleasure of studying under her can vouch for her adoration of Rabindranath Tagore, which she subtly weaves into all her lectures. We would love to put in everything she’s written and published so we can make ourselves look good but we’ll have to allot our funds to doing just that!



Dr. Anjana Neira Dev is Associate Professor of English at Gargi. In addition to teaching literature and language to English majors, she also teaches courses on Academic Writing, Business Communication, Technical Writing and Creative Writing, to students majoring in other disciplines. Her research interests include Indian Writing in English, Popular Literature (Detective Fiction), Women’s Writing, Creative Writing, Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages and, English for Special Purposes. Her “ten-minute rule” strikes fear into the hearts of the students who scramble as fast as their little feet can carry them in order to reach class on time. Her inspiring and engaging lectures are, however, completely worth the lightning-fast sprints to class! There is no party without her here!

Ms. Pragya Gupta is Assistant Professor of English. Students consider her the “Wonder Woman of Medieval Texts” because of her wonderful classroom lectures and open-ended discussions. Her fun-loving nature and cheerful attitude are what make students eagerly look forward to her classes. She has been actively involved in many cultural activities in college. She has been the Convener of *Quilluminati*, the English Creative Writing Society since its inception in 2013, and convened QED-the English Debating Society before that from 2006 to 2008. She has been a part of the Department Association for the last four years and was also on the editorial board of the college magazine, Logos, in 2014. Her areas of interest include Post-Colonial Literatures, Women’s Self Fashioning, and Popular Fiction. If you haven’t already guessed from the photo, she is the Absent Minded Professor of our Department and the current TIC.





Ms. Mudita Mohile is Assistant Professor at Gargi College and is a Proctor, Humanities. Her academic interests lie in Women's Studies, Gender Studies, Pre-Modern Indian Literature, Colonial Modernity in Western India. She is an active volunteer, trained for Feminist Intervention and Counseling in cases of gender-based violence and works with *Jagori*. To say she loves animals would be an understatement. While she believes teaching is her true calling, she has now discovered an alternate reality outside Gargi thanks to her beautiful daughter.

Dr. Shatarupa Sinha is Assistant Professor at Gargi College. Her interest in Indian English literature is not hidden from her students when they see the interest and enthusiasm she shows whilst teaching authors like Kalidas and Amitav Ghosh. A good reason for that could be her PhD thesis on "*Indian English Literature: A Critical Inquiry into Reading Strategies and Pedagogy*". She confesses that spending time with her son after a hectic day at college is what helps her relax. She is amongst the few who aspired to take up the profession of teaching since her youth. She believes that she learned to respect the knowledge of her students, through her own phase as a student. Her sweet voice belies her flustered outbursts of panic (especially during Lit Soc meetings).



Dr. Sutapa Dutta is Assistant Professor of English at Gargi College. All her students know that although she'll always struggle to remember their names, she'll go to great lengths to encourage and motivate them in all their academic and extra-curricular endeavours. Her superhuman talent lies in breezing through the text at break-neck speed and still managing to cover the text thoroughly in an engaging manner! Her areas of specialisation include 18th and 19th century English and European novels, poetry and drama. Her research interests include a comparative study of Eighteenth Century Novels and issues interrelated to identity, nationality and representation; Indian educational philosophy, present problems and challenges in the Indian education system; Nationalist ideologies in

South Asian culture and identity; Missionary writing and Empire; Language, Literature and Culture particularly in colonial Bengal. Yes that's a lot and she has published loads too.

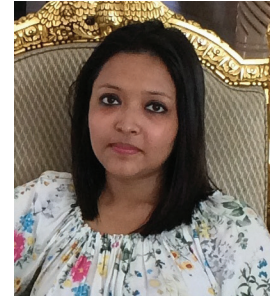
Ms. Nzanmongi Patton, popularly known as Jasmine ma'am, is Assistant Professor at Gargi College. Ms. Patton is interested in gender studies, autobiographies and oral traditions and folklore but the latter is where she finds the first of her passion. She has also translated some very rare traditional Lotha-Naga folktales/lores into English. Her understanding nature and quirky mood, keeps up the spirit of her students. She has the power to become one of us and yet teach like a professor. She is also the first Convenor of **Bitacora!** Her love for antiquity can be sensed in her lectures on Classical Literature, where she also informs her students of the awesome past of her native land, Nagaland. She even lets her students try on her family heirloom (the necklace seen on her in the picture) which has been passed down for generations and was handcrafted by her forefathers.





Ms. Rajkumari Smejita Devi, is Assistant Professor at Gargi College. Her areas of interest include Popular Literature, Modern Indian Literature, 19th and 20th Century British Literature. She is also interested in children’s fiction, oral narratives and translations and short stories. She has been an active member of the Women Development Cell. Apart from her academic excellence and interests, she is a sweet and charming personality, who teaches with an immense passion and understanding of the text. Still waters run deep. Don’t be taken in by her deceptive quiet attitude.

Ms. Arunima Das is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, with a teaching experience of nearly twelve years. Her research interest lies in contemporary oral narratives from India especially contemporary legends. Her collection of Contemporary Legends has been credited as the first collection from India by Indian and foreign scholars, and has also been included in the Encyclopaedia of Urban Legends (2013, USA). Her research strategies involve linguistic concepts like Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and she analyses legends from various angles such as actual reason of recounting and telling, and significance of narration of traditional narratives as a social medium of exchange. Her present research focuses on the urban legends of Assam. She’s something of an urban legend herself (we hardly see her since she’s away on study leave, working on her thesis.)



Dr. Aneeta Rajendran has been teaching at Gargi College as Assistant Professor since 2010. Her areas of research and specialisation include Gender and Sexuality, Queer Studies, Popular Cultural Texts and Cultural Studies (including comics and graphic novels), moving image and sound studies, Indian Literature with a primary focus on writing from the Twentieth Century, and Contemporary Literature and Postcolonial Literatures including African and West-Indian Literatures. With numerous publications to her credit she is currently working on a UGC Major Research Project on Indian Comic Strips and Graphic Novels. She is well known in college as Convenor of the Women’s Development Centre, and

has been involved in the creation and implementation of gender-sensitive programmes including self-defense training workshops, talks, panel discussions and documentary film screenings for discussion on a wide range of gender-based issues, creation of a protocol for institutional intervention in case of domestic violence and organization of support/networks. She is also Presiding Officer of the ICC. You don’t want to mess with her, but she’s great fun too!

Mr. Ashwin Bajaj is Assistant Professor at Gargi College. His teaching methods are adored by all students. His lectures inspire students to read more. His various teaching interests include: Literary Theory (Marxism, Feminism, Post-structuralism), European/Indian Realism (Austen, Eliot, Balzac, Dostoevsky, Conrad, Flaubert, Premchand etc.), Modernism, amongst others. Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, is amongst his favorite reads. Apart from all the heavyweight readings he takes pleasure in, he likes to play badminton and football. Who would have guessed!





Ms. Neha Khurana joined Gargi College as Assistant Professor in 2013. She often plays the Devil’s Advocate in class and holds interactive discussions. Her extraordinary debating skills find expression off the podium as well in the lively banter that she and her students engage in during class. With a keen interest in the broad area of culture studies, she is particularly invested in researching the visual representations of virtual and spatial manifestations of surveillance and censorship that characterise ‘modernities’ in urban spaces. Over the years, she has participated in multiple academic conferences and paper presentation competitions along with competitive debates in English. She has also been actively involved with a number of cultural societies within the college.

She has co-convoked QED-the English Debating Society, Quilluminati - the English Creative Writing Society, Iris-the Photography Society and Upstage-the Dramatics Society, and has been an active faculty member of the Literary Society.

Mr. Maisnam Arnabal is Assistant Professor at Gargi College. His research interests are fresh and all encompassing: Gender and Feminist studies, Postcolonial Literature, Literatures from North-East India, Cultural studies, and Conflict studies. Amongst all his reads, *The Colour Purple*, by Alice Walker has had a profound effect on him, and left him with a new perspective. One advice from his early days, “academia is a utopic world”, has stuck with him till date, and he is of the opinion that one learns both as a student and a teacher. He’s the in-house practical joker.



Mr. Mohit Abrol is Assistant Professor at the Department of English. His M.Phil dissertation titled “Realms of Memory, History, Forgetting: Personal and Collective Memory in Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow* and *Istanbul: Memories and the City*” epitomizes his love for historical fiction. He wishes to make an effective contribution to the field of pedagogy by prompting students to think and to question, encouraging them to change their long-held views. He is popular among the students for his “*satsang* classes” and “*shayari*” sessions, and “mind games”. He claims to be particularly inspired by the works of Umberto Eco and names *The Prague Cemetery* as the book that changed his life. He ardently believes

that the aim of life is not merely to survive, but to thrive and to live with passion.

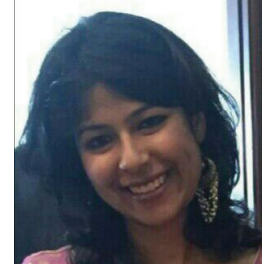
Ms. Jeyakirthana J. joined the Department of English as Assistant Professor in 2015. Her areas of interest are Modernism, Post Modernism, Utopian & Dystopian Studies, and Mythology. She is currently working on the final lap of her doctoral thesis titled *Dreaming Utopias through a Dystopic Imaginarium: A Study of Ayn Rand & José Saramago* at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She has also been actively involved in theatre and other literary activities which include writing poems and editing Bitacora. You’ll find students referring to her as “that cool teacher in a *kurta*, Crocs and (sometimes) a bandana!” With discussions in class ranging from the text to Young Johnny Depp and *Alice in Wonderland* merchandise, she has become one of the students’ favourite teachers.





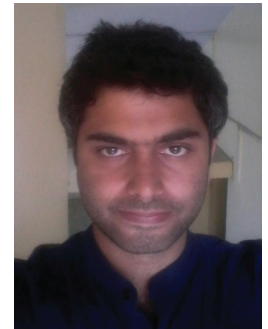
Mr. Sashanka Shekhar Das is Assistant Professor at Gargi College. He would've been an archaeologist if not a professor, as his love for the past outweighs his fancy for the present. But as a professor, he feels he can learn more and practice pedagogical learning techniques which he enjoys thoroughly. He has been a part of various activities in college such as the Creative Writing Society, the Dramatics Society, the Literary Society and the Department's Magazine Committee. A hot cup of coffee seems to cool his nerves on a stressful day. He is the Department's Dreamer.

Ms. Gayatri Mehra is Assistant Professor at Gargi College who is also a beloved alumna. Her academic interests lie in Indian Writing In English and Theories of Mass Culture. She has been actively present in all college activities, she has been the member of The Literary Society, Oswal Library Committee, Upstage, Manaswini, Glass-Eye, and The English Debating Society. She is also an avid dog lover who takes feeding and caring for her neighborhood dogs very seriously. And she'll believe almost anything you tell her.



Mr. Sameer Chopra, Assistant Professor at Gargi College, is the newest addition to the department. His teaching and research interests lie in: Gender and Sexuality Studies, Popular Culture and Film Studies, Modernist Literary and Visual Cultures, Literary Theory, and Academic Writing. On a lone day, he would prefer introversion, time away from technology and "zoning-out" to a more peaceful state. Ask him what would he rather be if not a teacher, "a journalist or a diplomat" he says. And one advice he sticks with from his days as a student: literature is not a subject, it is a way of life.

Mr. Aditya Mohan Bahl is Assistant Professor at Gargi College. His M.Phil dissertation: "*Excelling the Discrete: Study of the labour of recursion in George Oppen's Discrete Series,*" is a study of George Oppen's first book of poetry published during the onset of the Great Depression. His classes are interactive and engaging, with frequent rebuttals which keep the students hooked. He has held a workshop on writing, and the semantics of *Haiku*. He is also the co-editor of *Bones*, a journal of contemporary Haiku, all issues of which have been archived by *The Haiku Foundation* based in America. He has several published poems to his and is also the in-house graphics and art designer for Bitacora. One can almost hear him say "Ofcourse, right?"



Ms. Jharana Rani Majhi is an Assistant Professor of English. Her primary interest lies in Feminist Translation Theory, and has presented the many papers on the subject including "Translating the Untranslatable: The politics of Language in the English Translation of *Yajnaseni*"; "(Re)Mapping the Translation Matrix through the lens of feminism"; "Role of Translation in Dissemination of Knowledge." To tune out on a stressful day, she listens to music and also enjoys activities like jogging and cooking. She is a voracious reader and cites Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to be her favourite book.



QuirkyByte was founded by AdityaGoel on 4th May 2015. QB started as an online magazine that brought in trend, the utility based articles on Entertainment, Sports, Health and Lifestyle, Technology, etc. and in no time did it reach a global rank of 47,883 out of a 30 million websites across the globe, as per Alexa rankings. It is valued at INR 1.8 crores as of now. A team of 87 employees with 7 being the core team members, having 2 editors, 1 graphic designer, 1 website manager, 1 social media manager and 2 resource managers, we feel proud, but also, strengthened, at the same time, to provide with an innovative and new way to fulfill the hunger of reading amongst those who live for it as a utility based online magazine. As we try to provide with as many jobs as possible to the youth, WorthofWeb identifies us as a current revenue potential of \$295 a day. With a dedicated social media audience, with a wide reach of 3 million people a week, we look forward for it to raise to \$1500. The cost that we incur as of now is that of advertising on social media, Facebook primarily and the payment made to our writers and fellow employees. QuirkyByte has proved as a platform for many writers across the globe who were looking for one to portray their words to avid readers. We believe that no human is ever born without a talent, all that is required is to have the correct place for playing their magic tricks. This is what we have always tried to establish and what we'll try to develop together. QB is a family to most of us, that encourages the greatest resource of all times, people and their minds. We function with our brains and work with our hearts at QB. None-the-less, the writers here feel glad to have the reader audience, they had once dreamt of. The graphic designers, our managers and all of them set together, the members of our family, feel all that they have always wanted to feel.

We are all, the proud members of our family we call QuirkyByte.



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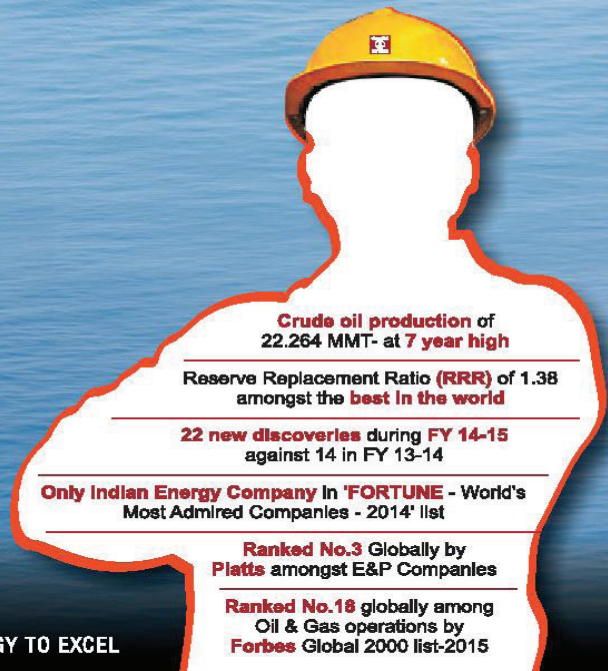
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