



**THE WRITERS' BLOC**

**EDITION 1**

**2017-2018**

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Writers' Bloc! This newsletter is the result of a collaborative effort of the Literature students of Mount Carmel College. The production process was long but engaging. We debated what the goals of our newsletter would be. Did we want to share a collection of serious, academic think pieces in Times New Roman? Or perhaps a colorful, entertaining edition with puzzles and games?

Our first issue of The Writers' Bloc avoids both these extremes, and instead explores a variety of themes that piqued the interest of our student writers. Each contributor was free to write about anything she wanted to write about.

This issue features a cover story about archetypes in literature, an interview with Varun Gwalani, a photographic trip to some of the best bookstores in Bangalore, and much more.

We appreciate the assistance of the entire English department in bringing this project to completion.

Now, we extend an invitation to you to join our circle of writers and lose yourself in a brave new world of ideas and perspectives.

**PREETHI SAGAR, III PyEJ**

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# EXPLORING ARCHETYPES: THE BYRONIC HERO

The novel-reading experience doesn't feel complete until you develop a sense of attachment to one of the characters. Characters form the backbone of all good stories, and are often more memorable than the plot itself.

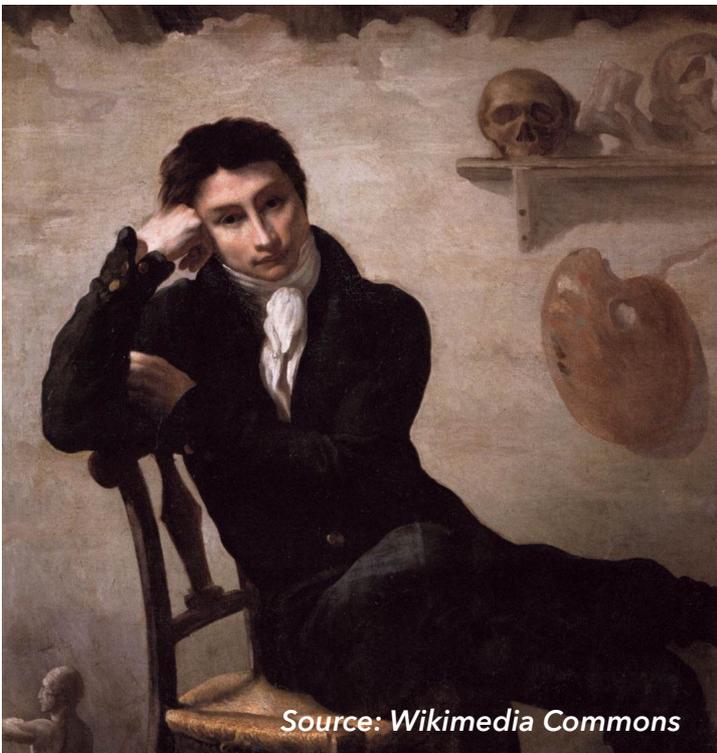
While we tend to believe that everything we read is original, many of our favourite characters are archetypes. An archetype can be defined as a "typical character, action or situation that seems to represent universal patterns of human nature." Psychologist Carl Jung believed that the collective unconscious of mankind formed the root of archetypes. The shared experience of human circumstances and emotions which are common across race, class, and culture unites readers and allows them to relate to the characters and the plot on a more personal level. Essentially, the struggles faced by the characters such as love, death, and survival are relatable for readers. They create acceptance and appreciation for archetypes by diverse audiences.

Literary archetypes have not disappeared with the passage of time. They have grown with us and adapted to fit the contexts of our daily lives. Many characters from popular novels are echoes of archetypes from the past. They have been altered to make them socially acceptable in the current milieu as the original traits of these archetypes often clash with modern thought. This is seen in the modern treatment of the Byronic Hero archetype.

The Byronic Hero is an archetype created by the "mad, bad and dangerous to know" Lord Byron himself. It has first been observed in his poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* where the eponymous character plays this role. These characters have a dark and magnetic quality to them and their

signature traits include charisma, rebellion, and arrogance. They often indulge in wild, unforgettable romances. Heathcliff from Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Edward Rochester from Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, and Prince Vlad from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* are classic examples of the Byronic Hero. In twenty-first-century literature, characters such as Severus Snape from the Harry Potter series by JK Rowling and Edward Cullen from the Twilight series by Stephenie Meyer fall under the same archetype.

Slightly deviating from their predecessors, modern Byronic Heroes are predominantly sympathetic.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

**Portrait Of An Artist in His Studio by  
Thomas Gericault**

They are plagued by internal conflicts and react in destructive ways which result in regret and melancholy. Edward Cullen from the *Twilight* saga is sometimes seen as a revamped version of Dracula. Their vampirism brands them as forbidden creatures, and they brood about until they start interacting with human beings. Their passion keeps them conscious of their need to control their savage nature and protect their loved ones.

The difference between the two is evidenced by Dracula, a conventional Byronic Hero. He is dangerous and his inner turmoil surfaces as malevolence. Edward Cullen, in contrast, adopts an aloof and indifferent attitude, and this transformation pushes his feral nature to the background. In the case of Dracula, Heathcliff and Rochester these characteristics are boldly portrayed but for the modern Byronic Hero Edward Cullen, they are drawn out by challenging circumstances.

The Byronic Hero has become a central figure in films and television shows, such as Anakin Skywalker and Han Solo from *Star Wars*, Bruce Wayne from *Batman*, Magneto from *X-Men*, Dean Winchester from *Supernatural*, and Don Draper from *Mad Men*.

The archetype of the Byronic Hero has occupied centre space in mainstream fiction and culture due to universal appeal, which can perhaps be attributed to the reluctance of these characters to conform to societal norms. They can be understood as the reflection of our inner desire; to be unencumbered by moral codes. The popularity of these characters indicates that the Byronic Hero will continue to haunt and transform the spheres of literature and cinema for years to come.

**–DEEPITHA P MENON, III PyEJ**

# IS IT FANTASY OR REALITY?

Dead mothers, orphaned daughters, wicked stepmothers and witches, and charming princes who rescue damsels in distress have been a staple of fairy tales like 'Cinderella', 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Snow White'. Deceased mothers take the shape of cows to help their daughters, boys transform into ravens and dwell in crystal mountains, and girls prick themselves into eternal slumber in the woods. Modern retellings have nevertheless shifted towards contrasting perspectives which embody unconventional twists and endings.

The 2014 movie *Maleficent* is a striking adaptation of 'Sleeping Beauty'. It explores the perspective of the "evil" witch and recasts her from a human point of view. The witch moves beyond wickedness and becomes capable of loving. Similarly, the acclaimed Broadway musical *Wicked* centres around the "Wicked Witch of the West" and portrays her as a sympathetic character. The 2014 film *Into The Woods* revises multiple fairytales and presents unanticipated transitions among the characters and storylines.



**Angelina Jolie as Maleficent in the 2014 film *Maleficent***

If fairytales were mere figments of our imagination, they would not have left lasting impressions on our minds. One explanation widely accepted during the nineteenth century was that readers

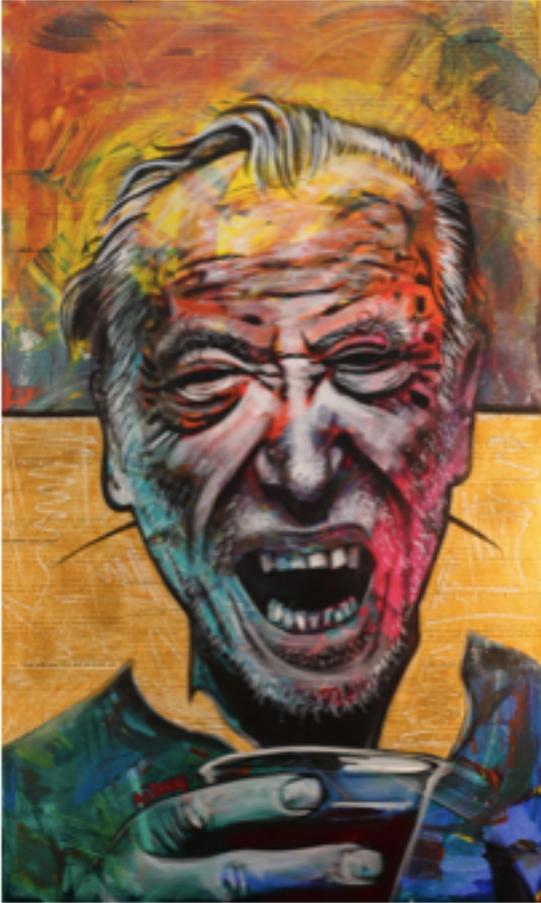
identify with fairytales because they are stories of the past. The widely accepted explanation in the current scenario is that, as per the premise of symbolism, the bizarre elements in fairytales are often relevant to storytellers and their audiences. Fairytale imagery is a fusion of the supernatural and the magical, and its lack of distinction between animals and humans suggests "an age of savage fancy." These stories have captivated readers and audiences for decades, which suggests that fairytales—as Friedrich Max Müller put it—are the "epidemic" of "incredible and impossible" matter.

The notion that fairytales were invented only once, traversed through regions, and retained the cultural imprints of their places of origin, had a strong impression on the French folklorist Emmanuel Cosquin who proposed that fairy tales originated in India. Although these retellings upset and contradict our age-old perceptions, the character conflicts they depict are grounded in the human experience. As such, these revisions broaden our perspectives and their connection to our ordinary reality raises the question of whether fairytales are really fantasy or reality.



**–DEIKSHA BURMAN, III PyEJ**

# BUKOWSKI & CENSORSHIP



**Portrait of Charles Bukowski by Aidan Smith**

**Source: *Bluethumb Art Australia***

Like many Literature students, my love for reading drove me to write. I don't remember ever wanting to write, yet it always seemed the right thing for me to do. I would use my favourite books as reference, noting the styles that ruled the stories, the decoration of the words, and the subtle wordplay that made me believe that writing was brilliant. Ever since I first picked up my pen, I always focused more on "how to write" than on "what to write." While eagerly exploring a variety of genres, my writing style was altered. It became an explosion of experiments that went wrong and I found myself unable to connect with my own writing. I took a break from writing that lasted years.

It was when I discovered Charles Bukowski through his book "Women" that I finally began to understand the nuances of writing. My previous experience of literature was limited to Wordsworth and Keats, and their writing, while revolutionary in its time, always seemed distanced from my reality. In contrast, Bukowski's straightforward approach to writing flabbergasted me. His brutal portrayal of the mundane aspects of reality displaced the utopian world I was fed for years.

Bukowski's book "On Writing," which is a collection of letters that he wrote to various people including many publishers reveals the scathing criticism he received for his work. He primarily concentrated on societally inappropriate and offensive subjects. Excluding English Majors, most people are unaware of Bukowski and this indicates how censorship has rendered mainstream culture incapable of addressing sensitive issues.

K.M Munshi in his essay 'Despotism: Old and New' writes about how a modern despot decides everything for us—from what to wear and what to learn, to when to marry and whom to marry. This raises the question of who gets to decide what we should study. The Indian government and society are in conflict with Western culture. In their attempt to retain a singular Indian identity, they have failed to realise that literature cannot be classified as black and white, or right and wrong. India, which has given the world "Kamasutra," today brands it taboo and inappropriate. The Indian education system has become so non-secular, prudish and censored that in 2017, a High Court judge claimed that peacocks mate asexually.

Writers like Bukowski have transgressed these barriers and created art that escapes the confines of ideology. His tombstone reads "Don't try," which is perhaps the most beautiful way to describe art. The question of what constitutes writing has been addressed by great writers but at its core, writing is an act of creation. We work too hard and exhaust ourselves over words that do not come naturally; over stories that are not ours, and over writing that is mere wordplay in sync with the latest trends, purely because we want to play "safe." We need to accept the ambiguity of literature and let people choose the literature they wish to explore.

**–RASHI KOHLI, III PyEJ**



Greenwood to understand where things went wrong in her own life. There are certainly several similarities between Esther's destructive spiral and Sylvia Plath's depression and eventual suicide.

**FB:** Esther thinks she knows herself all along, but when the time comes, she realises that her whole life, her goals- everything has been a lie, a sham. There's nothing to direct her anymore and she feels exposed.

**DK:** People say that comedians are usually extremely depressed despite their humour. I think that many writers function similarly, when they create something beautiful out of their most personal hardships.

**"I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory"**

**-Alexander Hamilton**

***Hamilton: An American Musical***

**FB:** Death is also interesting, in relation to identity. Hamilton initially dreams of dying in glory because it is the only way he knows to rise from his low position in the social hierarchy. Both Hamilton and Esther are dissatisfied with their lives. The difference is that Esther feels like the other girls are attempting to "save her", which is quite possibly a premonition of what befalls. They are perhaps saving her from herself.

**"I'm a girl in a world in which**

**My only job is to marry rich"**

**-Angelica Schuyler**

***Hamilton: An American Musical***

**DK:** Esther is right about one thing. She feels that after marriage, men treat women no better than doormats, that men curb women's identities after marriage. Angelica from Hamilton is well aware of this fact too, and despite her keen interest and skill in political matters, she cannot be a permanent participant of that sphere. Obviously not all men are oppressors like the ones in Esther's life, or in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. However, our society is naturally structured to give men power and preference through their relationships with women.

**FB:** Athena in Paulo Coelho's *The Witch of Portobello* is fascinating like that. Born out of wedlock to parents of different races, she was abandoned by her birth mother out of shame. She grows into an independent and free-spirited woman, yet remains confined by societal norms. She doesn't adhere to them, and she is judged for not doing so. Women have been classified into Saints and Witches since the dawn of time. Any woman overstepping the boundaries drawn for her by the patriarchal society was automatically deemed a witch.

**"Oh, let me be a part of the narrative**

**In the story they will write someday"**

**-Eliza Hamilton**

***Hamilton: An American Musical***

**DK:** Athena is always blamed for the circumstances of her life as well. Her marriage fails because her husband believes that she manipulated him into having a child to satisfy her motherly



**Artist: Renee Nault**

**Source: Kotaku Australia**

instincts rather than out of desire for him. It's a great insight into the lives of Romani people too. They have systematically been ostracized for being different. The term 'gypsies' by which they are known actually originates from the word for theft. Their collective name was a slur.

**FB:** It's intriguing how Athena claims her own identity by taking a name different from her birth name. It is a conscious effort to distance herself from the facts of her existence and be known as the person she created. An identity forged for herself, with no care for the presumptions of others.

**DK:** But in stark contrast, the same names which lent identity to Athena have been taken away from the handmaids in *A Handmaid's Tale*. They are women kept for breeding, whose identities are defined by the Commanders they belong to. Offred, the protagonist, belongs to the house of Fred. Ofwarren, from the house of Warren. These "two-legged wombs" and "sacred vessels", are simply "containers" who must give as many births as their Commanders require. Offred's failure to reproduce determines her identity- "I have failed once again to fulfil the expectations of others, which have become my own."

**"Legacy. What is a legacy?**

**It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see."**

**-Alexander Hamilton**

***Hamilton: An American Musical***

**FB:** The female identity is also mistreated with regard to children. It is always the "barrenness" in women that must be treated. This echoes profoundly in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin. Bolanle, the fourth and youngest wife of Baba Segi, is persistently taken to local physicians to absolve her of her deficiency. Her fruitlessness tarnishes Baba Segi's virility.

**DK:** *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* grants a unique perspective of polygamous marriages, a part of the pitiful 'Third World'. An English educated, modern woman makes a choice to marry an aged thrice-married man, defying her family. The book unfolds a milieu seething with rifts and strange alliances between women married to the same man. Western feminists will likely refuse to indulge Bolanle's poor decision-making, arguing that no woman would consciously take such a decision.

**FB:** They fail to account for the basis of feminism: agency. Women do not have to make the right choices by the standards of Western society. They need to have the autonomy to make choices and the freedom to stand by them without repercussions. Interestingly, Chimamanda Ngizi Adichie's *Danger of a Single Story* ties up with Shoneyin's narrative. As a child, Adichie's world was dichotomised between the Western world which literature brought to her, and the African reality which she grew up in.



**Identity Painting by Emmanuel Turner**  
**Source: Fine Art America**

**DK:** So the books she read ploughed through her African identity. Her white imagination could not accommodate the world around her as the stories she wrote belonged to a *white* space. Her perspective became *white*. Then she began to read non-white works, and that made all the difference.

**"You, you, you...  
I'm erasing myself from the narrative"**  
-Eliza Hamilton  
**Hamilton: An American Musical**

**FB:** It's similar to the issue that young Indians face when building communities around popular culture. In an article contributed to BuzzFeed India earlier this year, Abhishek Madan discusses the struggles of identifying with a culture that does not belong to you. "And so, the generation that grew up reading poems about flowers we hadn't seen and watching shows about problems we didn't have graduated to referencing a childhood that we did not live." He says, "I felt like I was cheating on my childhood, disrespecting the great, but different, things I had the privilege of

experiencing." The Internet has broken a lot of barriers to communication, but we cannot ignore how it has also created a duality within those of us that participate in it.

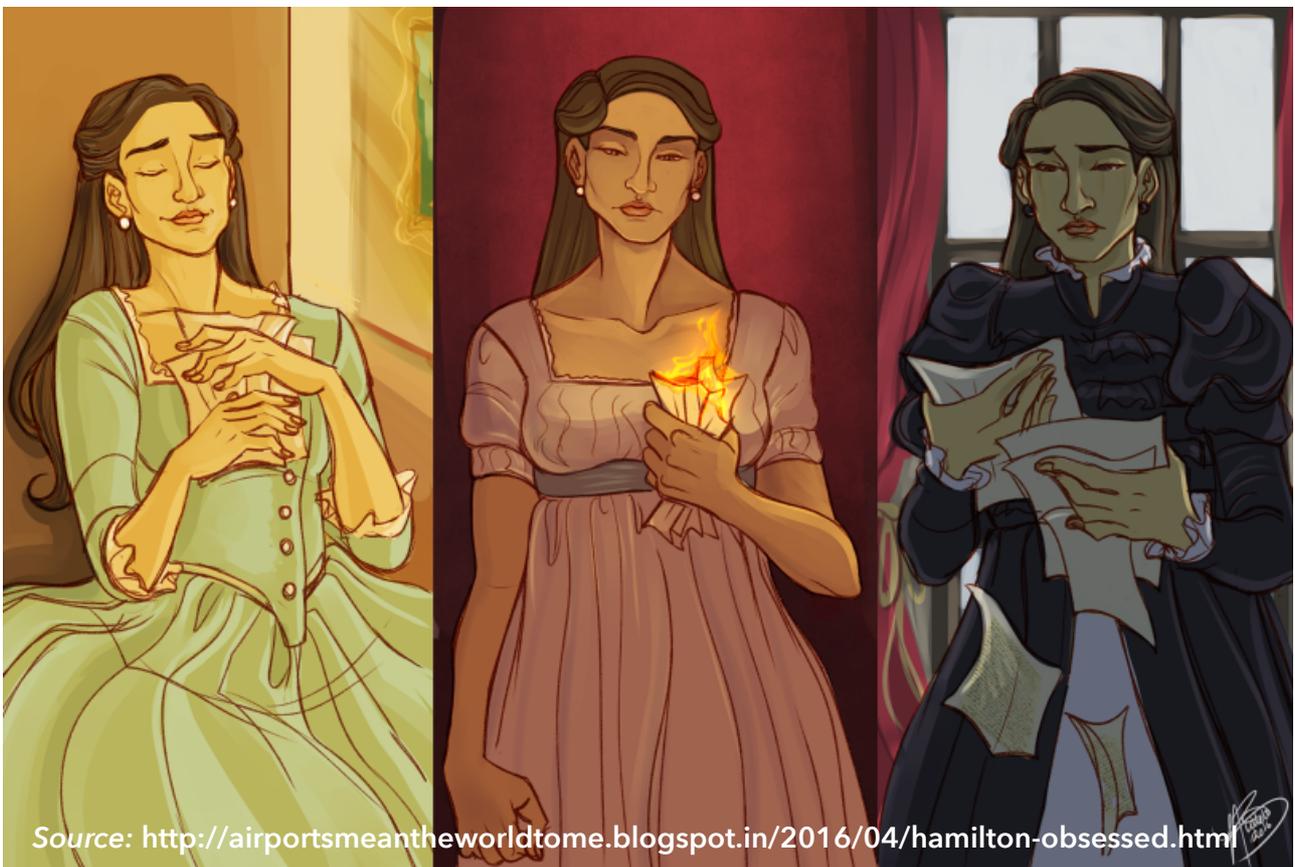
**DK:** In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai explores the same duality by questioning the expectations that define Indian immigrants and parents. Biju's father's expectations cannot become his own. Desai portrays the constant crisis of being too English or the shame of being too Indian and finding what lies in between.

**"You let me make a difference  
A place where even orphan immigrants  
Can leave their fingerprints and rise up"  
-Alexander Hamilton  
*Hamilton: An American Musical***

**FB:** The young Sai yearns for familial love- "Why couldn't she be part of that family? rent a room in someone else's life." She has inherited a loss of love, and the love she finds is drowned in a tumult of insurgencies that overtake the state. Gyan, the mathematics tutor, "felt the stir of purity" and a "feeling of martyrdom crept over him." Considering himself "hero to homeland", he gauges his manliness by his participation in the "masculine atmosphere" of the creation of history.

**DK:** Like Sai, Hamilton's wife is initially a helpless, naive and passive woman, content with sharing a "fraction" of her husband's time. Hamilton's self-publicized infidelity extinguishes Eliza's certainty in her reality and transforms her contentment. By refusing to undervalue herself, she finally rejects her passivity and reclaims her identity as an individual. She is no longer just a wife.

**"I knew you were mine  
You said you were mine  
I thought you were mine"  
-Eliza Hamilton  
*Hamilton: An American Musical***



Source: <http://airportsmeantheworldtome.blogspot.in/2016/04/hamilton-obsessed.html>

**FB:** The judge in *The Inheritance of Loss* is a complex character, so detached from others that he has separated himself from himself. He “himself couldn’t tell which one of his selves was the authentic, if any” despite being aware that he is living a lie. He reigned over his wife Nimi, burning the life out of her, shouting, swearing, hitting her- “His hatred was its own creature; it rose and burned out, reappeared of its own accord, and in her he sought only its justification, its perfection. In its purest moments he could imagine himself killing her.” As he robs himself of an identity, he takes Nimi’s away from her.

**DK:** Nimi was not given the opportunity to escape the fetters of patriarchal society. On the other hand, the loss of the security that Hamilton provided solidifies Eliza’s resolve so she can assert her identity and reclaim her space. Eliza is a powerful character, since she does not need to diminish the stories of others to insert herself into the narrative.

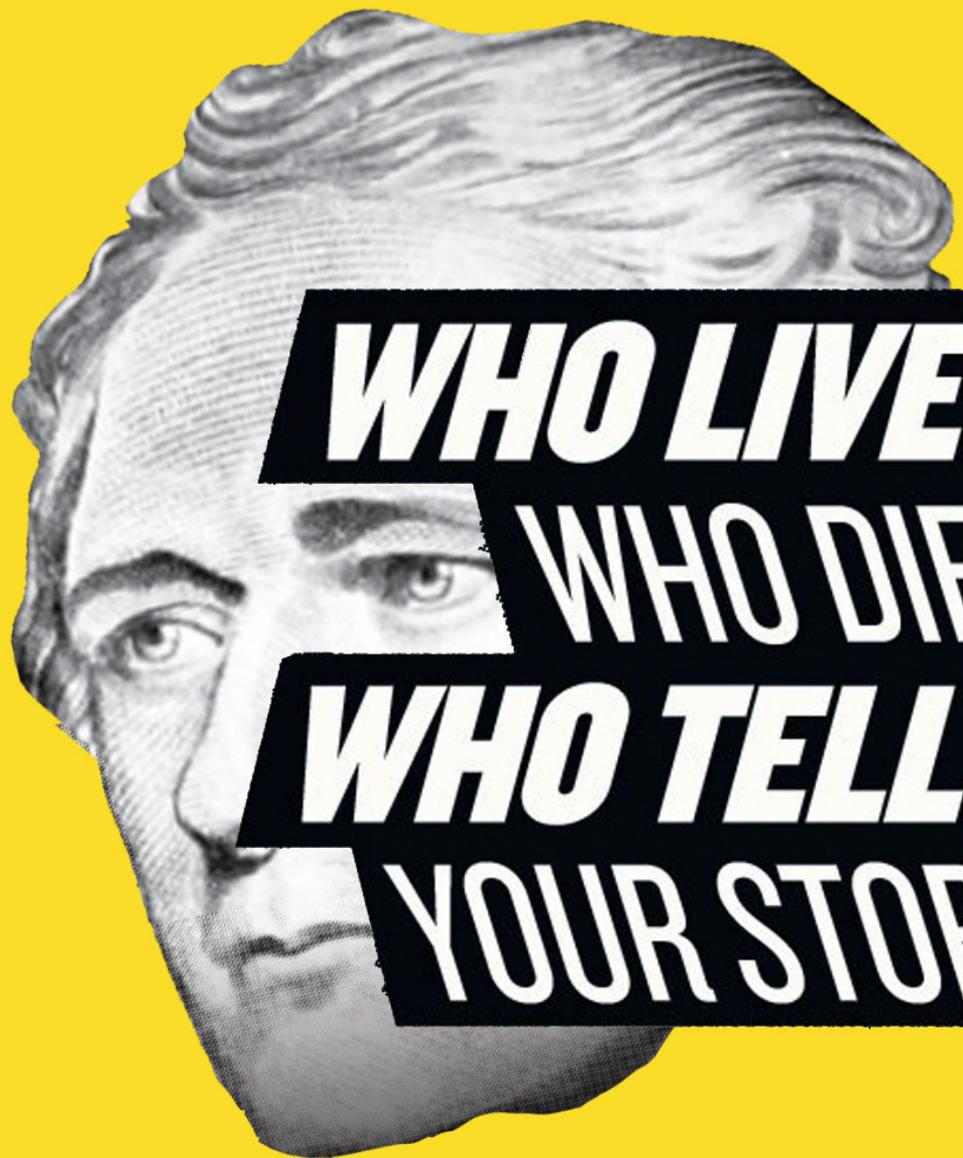
**“I put myself back in the narrative  
I stop wasting time on tears”  
-Eliza Hamilton  
*Hamilton: An American Musical***

At their core, identities should allow us to feel a sense of belonging, but they are being exploited to do the exact opposite. To the outside world, our identities suggest distinctions that we do not even know exist. Whether we want to or not, we are forced to identify ourselves by our caste, ethnicity and citizenship. The gatekeepers do not care whether we fit into the boxes they create, and this leaves us in the lurch. If we do not belong where they say we belong and we cannot belong where we want to belong, where does that leave us?

**“Who remembers your name?  
Who keeps your flame?  
Who tells your story?”  
-George Washington and Company  
*Hamilton: An American Musical***

It is time to rediscover ourselves.

**–DEEPALI KARKAL & FATIMA BANAN, II PyEE**



**WHO LIVES**  
**WHO DIES**  
**WHO TELLS**  
**YOUR STORY**

# MONDAY BLUES OF AN EVERYDAY KIND

During the day –  
there are families, and  
nobody is lonely.  
It begins on the stairwell at the metro station;  
a girl is holding her parents' hands,  
two men are almost brushing against each other  
smiling,  
and a young woman is selling sheaves of corn with her  
daughter sitting close.  
There is less life in a life led with hurry, you think,  
as you push to get past the turnstiles.  
But in this hurry, you kiss / you hold hands / and  
you cry.  
Later, the night is slower and seasons are changing.  
Every night –  
families are unspectacular, brave, and alone.  
The girl sleeps with her head under  
the pillow because she is tired of the screaming.  
The two men sleep in different rooms because this  
is how it is - a sad summer might last the whole year,  
and  
the young woman doesn't sleep at all.

–M JYOTHSNA, II PyEE

# RESTING SELF

The silence stirred  
A wake of restfulness  
An awareness so sharp  
Everything was magnified ten folds  
The magnificence  
Of it all  
Brought back the power of being with self  
A playful whisper of a wind  
Slapping wings.  
Of the creatures of the night  
The 12 o' clock bell  
That boomed thrice  
The roar of the thunder  
That ripped open the sky  
The quake that shook the grounds to rubble  
The screaming gigantic waves that wiped out the land raw  
Screeching of the storm that tore and bled the ears  
But loudest of all  
Was the beating heart  
And the feisty spirit  
That endured itself in its own presence  
Its own resting self.

**–PRERNA MALHOTRA, III PyEC**

# A SLICE OF LIFE

The Slice of Life genre occupies a unique place in the realm of anime and manga. Known as *Nichijou* in Japanese, the genre aims to capture everyday life, but by highlighting the radiance of every ordinary moment. The lives of the characters have their own ups and downs, and the beauty lies in overcoming them, learning from them, and growing as people. The Slice of Life genre celebrates the act of living, sometimes mixing several other genres – friendship, romance, school life, humour, family, mystery, etc. It may even contain supernatural or sci-fi elements.

Slice of Life stories generally revolve around characters going about their daily lives and being themselves. These stories don't usually feature any driving conflict, and instead serve as peaceful escapism. Coming of age is often a major aspect of the story; we see characters, each with their own distinct personalities and quirks, developing and growing. The setting is usually ordinary as well, like a school, but sometimes it isn't set in the world as we know it. Mundane events form the structure of the anime or manga, with punchlines, jokes and conflict between characters to spice things up. It is a light and refreshing genre that many can identify with. The best way to enjoy it is to let the story take its course without searching for a specific direction or conclusion.

Some anime and manga that belong to the Slice of Life genre are:

**Daily Lives of High School Boys** - The anime revolves around the daily lives of three students of an all-boys academy. Every episode shows ordinary instances like having random arguments while hanging out with friends, or with siblings, meeting a weird co-worker at a part time job, interacting with classmates, having scary storytelling sessions at a friend's place, making up an imaginary radio show and acting out a role playing game. It's a truly enjoyable show because of its light humour.

**The Garden of Words** - This is an anime film centred on Takao, a hardworking high school boy aspiring to become a shoemaker. Because of his love for rain, he skips school and sketches shoes in a garden on rainy days. There, he meets a mysterious woman who shares his love for rain, and slowly starts unwinding himself to her. Even though they don't know each other, they form a strange connection.

**Love So Life** - This manga is about the life of Shiharu, an orphaned high school girl who loves kids, lives in an orphanage, and works at a daycare. She is appointed as the baby sitter of 2-year-old twins by their uncle, their guardian. She goes about her daily life as a student and a babysitter, and slowly falls in love with her new family. The story's warmth and innocence tugs at one's heartstrings.

**Horimiya** - This is an on-going manga about the eponymous characters, Hori and Miyamura. Hori may seem like a normal, popular high-school girl, but she's a completely different person after school. At home, she takes care of her little brother and all the household chores in the absence of their workaholic parents. Her classmate, Miyamura is a quiet, bespectacled boy. He may seem like a studious loner, but outside of school, he's a friendly, timid boy with many

piercings and tattoos. The story is about them discovering each other's true selves, making friends, going about their daily lives, and falling in love.



**Clockwise: Garden of Words, Lovely Complex and Hyouka**  
**Sources: wall.alphacoders.com (Garden of Words, Hyouka),**  
**zerochan.net (Lovely Complex)**

Other examples are *His and Her Circumstances*, *Tamako Market*, *Rainbow Days*, *Blue Spring Ride*, *Free!*, *Anohana*, *Azumanga Daioh*, *Itazura na Kiss*, *Kokoro Connect*, *Hyouka*, *K-On!*, *Lovely Complex* and *360 Degrees Material*, to name a few.

**–SHRADDHA SUMAN, III PyEC**

# FAIRY TALES

“Once upon a time” and “they lived happily ever after” are phrases that we’ve all grown up with. Fairytales have pervaded our childhoods, and we have subconsciously internalised the values they propagate. These seemingly innocuous bedtime stories have unfortunately suffused with social norms; boys often believe that girls need to be saved rather than being able to save themselves, and that roughness and violence are the ways to validation. Meanwhile, girls think that beauty is the path to acceptance, and that being a “damsel in distress” is the only option available to them.

Fairy tales intended as bedtime stories have made little girls grow up believing they can’t fight their own battles and that attractiveness is the most important asset one can possess. Boys grow up to dominate their wives, believing that their masculinity can only be asserted through violence. For example, Sleeping Beauty is a fair young woman who wins the prince’s heart through her beauty and graceful dance. The wicked witch is portrayed as haggard and unattractive, which makes her hate the beautiful woman. These characters promulgate the misconception that beauty is the only means for girls to be accepted by society. Unaware that they mirror traditional, patriarchal societies, children create identities for themselves through these stories. They begin to accept and conform to the gender identities and roles imposed by the heteronormative society.

Parents, teachers, and society play a crucial role in shaping a child’s self image and the world around them. Fairytale values have fostered gender stereotypes universally. However, instead of conventional narratives of helpless and pitiful women, parents should tell stories of women who have fought their own battles and rose to glory. In my opinion, Jhansi ki Rani is indeed a better role model than Cinderella. Young boys should be told stories that connect masculinity with kindness and teach them to respect both sexes.

The concept of the self, identity and role in society has been greatly transformed in the last few decades. From a collective decision of how men and women ought to be, we’ve become more individualistic in our character and identity. Despite our attempts to adapt them to the modern context, fairy tales still carry the conventional concepts of gender identities. It is time to stop these fairytales from creating a distorted reality for children.



*Source: Anomaly Podcast*

**–BHAGYALAKSHMI MAKAM, III PyEJ**

# THE FIRST STORYTELLER

**Varun Gwalani is a 23 year old published author of two widely acclaimed books, Believe and The First Storyteller. Believe was hailed as a “masterpiece” by Shyam Benegal and The First Storyteller was launched at an event hosted by Nandita Das. The author can be visited on his blog at the following address: [ohmynatis.wordpress.com](http://ohmynatis.wordpress.com).**

## **Please tell us about your writing journey.**

“My writing journey is a microcosm of the journey of my life. I started writing as a means of self-expression, because I was good at it and it allowed me to talk about things that I couldn’t otherwise. As I grew as a person, my writing grew as well. My themes and ideas became more mature, more nuanced. I got the sense of who I wanted to be as a writer and as a person. I began incorporating empathy and



Source: [celebritypix.us](http://celebritypix.us)

**Varun Gwalani**

activism into my writing, which is why my first novel examined the impact of sexual assault and the nature of religious beliefs. I was diagnosed with OCD soon after I had finished writing my second book, and I found that the nature of my struggle with OCD became a major part of that book. I think it’s interesting to note that even though my writing has become much more polished, my ideas of positivity, of hope and resilience have continued from my very first story.”

## **Can you tell us about your most recent book, and any upcoming projects you may have planned?**

“My latest book, The First Storyteller, follows a nameless, faceless, genderless protagonist who goes through a “magical” forest. This book is different from anything else in Indian literature, because it defies conventional definition. It spans multiple genres and styles, and is a pure, unvarnished expression of my struggle with mental illness, and as such, has become a sort of allegory for all struggles. While I have several non-literary projects planned, my main long-term literary project is to create a series of novels that is set in an indigenous fantasy world, one not based in any current mythology. It would will be one of India’s first undertakings of this size.”

## **What are your thoughts on revisionist literature/ looking at literature from a new perspective?**

“I think revisionist literature, as it comes to rewriting old stories like fairy tales to reflect more current values, can be a really good practice, and can be the best way to unlearn biases.

Revisionist literature as it concerns fan-fiction is something that I am unsure whether I should even comment about (but I will anyway). I do subscribe to Barthes' idea of an author losing true "ownership" in terms of interpretation of his work after it is published. I think that the entire purpose of art is to take, absorb, co-create and make new. That is the foundation of "memes" today, that is the foundation of the postmodern world we live in. There is no controlling the beast that is cultural interpretation, so I honestly think that the best thing to do is engage with it, because if people are reinterpreting your work, it means that they are paying attention to your work, they are examining it."

### **What are your literary influences?**

"As I mentioned earlier, I believe that we live in an age where, now more than ever, ideas are fluid and can be incorporated from a variety of sources. As such, I don't have any main literary influences, but rather a range of influences from different mediums that have impacted my storytelling. So I could be influenced by the world-building of Rowling and Martin's novels; the lyricism and depth of Leonard Cohen's music; the genre-defying humour and observational skill of Dan Harmon's TV shows. All of these and more, are actually incorporated into *The First Storyteller*."

### **What advice would you give to young, aspiring writers?**

"I would say to anybody who wants to write or wants to create, that you will be faced with many obstacles. You will be discouraged, you will be beaten down, it will seem unattainable. But that's exactly when you must walk on. That's exactly the best thing you can do, you must walk. You must keep walking, not give up, realise that if you are authentic, if you are honest, and if you keep evolving as a writer, you will find an audience, however long it takes."

### **Do you believe in writer's block? If you do, what ways would you suggest to overcome it?**

"I don't particularly believe in the idea of "writer's block" in the sense that there is this mystical terrible force that will prevent you from writing a word for no reason. Writer's block is a very tangible problem that is caused by reasons that you know but are probably unable to confront. Maybe you're unsure of your work, or believe that you won't be able to write. The best thing to do, whenever you're faced with that, is to write. Write and confront what you're conflicted about, write about the cause of not being able to write, even if you think it's not good, even if it's hard. That's the only way to get out of it. I've actually recently finished a short story series titled 'The Reckoning' on my blog on writer's block, and it's the perfect example of what I mean."

### **Do you read your book reviews?**

"Haha, yes, I do, actually. I would give some spiel about constructive criticism and feedback, and while that is true, mostly I just want to know what people think about this work that I have invested so much of my life in. It's not ideal...but it is something I have tried to overcome. However, I am exceedingly happy with *The First Storyteller* Goodreads reviews, with readers from around the world talking about how my book has impacted their lives and it's just incredible to me, reading that."

### **How has being published changed your life?**

“Well, it’s a great conversation starter! But generally speaking, it’s amazing that I have my work out there. I have words that I typed in a dingy room at the break of dawn in the hands of someone on the other side of the world, and they connect with it, and suddenly they are transported to the room and reading over my shoulder as I write. If I actually sit and think about it, it’s incredible to think of the ways my life intersects with others’.”

### **What is the main idea you were trying to get across with your book?**

“To say there was one main idea kind of undercuts the nature of the work, which is in itself so inter-lapping and touches on so many different ideas and themes. At its purest, however, the book is an impassioned plea to understand that the differences between human beings exist mainly on a surface level, and that we are all connected by the bonds of something deeper, a shared emotionalism, a shared story or journey that we can all relate to. The First Storyteller is the story of that journey.”

### **How did the writing community influence you?**

“I think young artists and writers nowadays are incredible in the way they are carving out a space for themselves and the work they do. They constantly amaze and inspire me. I am encouraged to do better, to try harder, to work more so that I can contribute to creating an environment in which their works can be discovered, grow and blossom.”

**–Interviewed by SAHITI GAVARIKAR, III PyEJ**

# REVISITING THE MYTH – PERSPECTIVES OF THE EAST AND THE WEST



Discussions on myth and religion throughout history have seen diverse responses. Religion incorporates morality, belief in one Supreme, and faith in prayer and justice. Mythology which consists of folk tales and legends retold through the ages can be a literary narrative and a representation of religion. Most mythological stories have been passed down as oral traditions, and provide multiple perspectives on the idea of a 'supreme universal force' or God. Religious communities have often denounced these oral traditions and stories adapted from scriptures as deviant and untrue.

In his TED talk, *East vs West – the myths that mystify*, Devdutt Pattanaik remarks, "Every culture tries to understand itself. Every culture comes up with its own understanding of life, its own customised version of mythology." There exist several disparities in the ways that mythology addresses the notion of the Supreme or universal power, both in the East and the West. The mythology of the East is mostly Indian and Sino-Japanese legends, while in the West it is predominantly Greco-Roman fables and lore.

Chinese mythology dates back more than five thousand years. The myths vary constantly as the names of Chinese celestial beings and deities are interlinked with rulers from different regions and eras. Japanese mythology celebrates the two integral ideas of 'nature' and 'the nation'. Izanagi or 'the Male who invites' and Izanami or 'the Female who invites' are idolised as the creators of the nation and its consecrated hierarchy of emperors. Conversely, Indian myths

revolve around Hinduism, one of the world's most ancient religions. The concepts of creation and destruction shape these myths, which maintain that everything in the universe is subject to the eternal cycle of 'janmam' (birth), 'maranam' (death), and 'punarjanmam' (reincarnation).



**Japanese deities Izanagi and Izanami on the Floating Bridge of Heaven**

Ancient Greek mythology consists of narratives of mighty Godlike kings whose reigns were unquestioned. It commemorates the extraordinary efforts and achievements of mortal heroes and demigods (half-mortal and half-divine beings). Greek mythology often overlaps with Roman mythology as the Romans revised these myths by renaming Greek deities. Mythology in Rome served as an excellent medium to describe the city and its customs.

The different perspectives of mythology in the East and the West have helped to widen the parameters of history, literature and religion. Mythology thus plays a crucial role in shaping and perceiving culture and anthropology.

**-M JYOTHSNA, II PyEE**

# MURDER IN THE OPEN

I sat outside the house as the detective continued to scratch the floorboard for evidence.

A scarlet blanket was wrapped around my shoulders;  
Music of sirens playing in the background,

The police stretched out the yellow tape on the door.  
Herds of people gathered around the bushes trying to get an exclusive look.  
'Estimated time of death, 3:00 am,' said the forensic expert.

'Ma'am, do you know what might have happened? Did your son have any conflict with the wrong sort of people?' the detective asked quietly.

'Uhhh...no, not as far as I know,' I replied as the tears quietly slipped down my face. The detective sympathetically apologised and walked away as he closed the case.

'Ronald's death seems to be the work of a crime syndicate, we found the trademark weapons of one and there was a message near the body.' The closed file said.

'Death is my cruel gift to you,' it said, the message on the floorboard near the body carved beautifully by the scalpel.

Edward should have known better than to start an affair with my son.

Risky business to cross me.

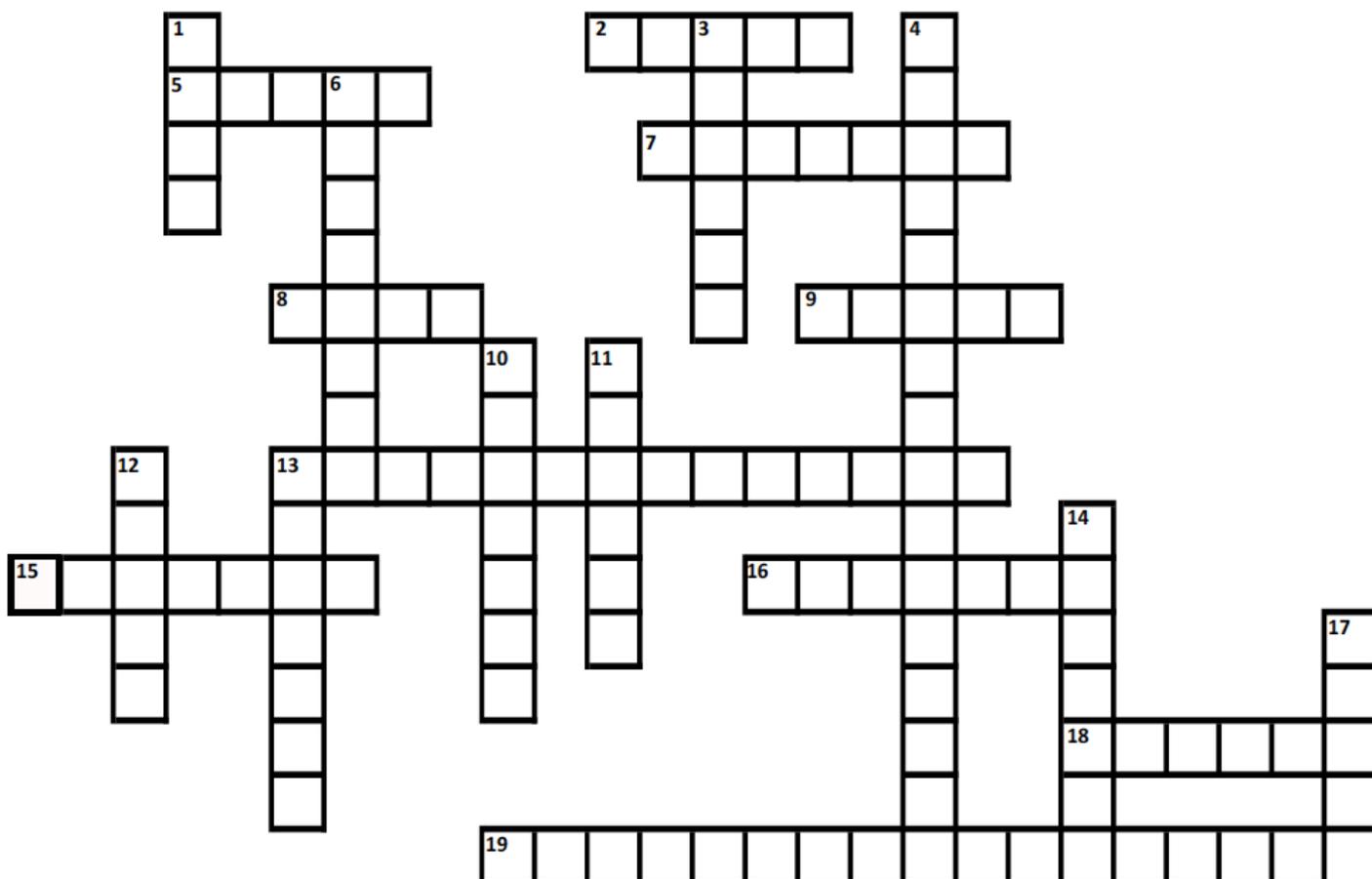
Eerie, isn't it ?

Really, it was painful, the betrayal.

**—KANGAN AGARWAL, III PyEC**

# CROSSWORD

Think yourself a literature buff? Try out this crossword to test your knowledge in the world of books!



## ACROSS

2. And miles to go before I -----
5. Eve's bane (OR) Snow White's bane
7. A Shakespearean word; come to life after ages.
8. Greek Earth Goddess.
9. Jean Louise's nickname.
13. Protagonist of 'The Book Thief'.
15. Will's daemon.
16. A famous poem by Homer.
18. The world in the wardrobe.
19. Author of 'Gone With the Wind'.

## DOWN

1. A gust of wind to blow Katniss away.
3. He is not supposed to sparkle, yet he does
4. Who are the most widely accepted writers of the first fairytales?
6. Last words of Albus Dumbledore.
10. We do not sow.
11. Typically Hufflepuff.
12. In the original version of Cinderella, she had ----- slippers.
13. It's not -----, it's -----.
14. Heathcliff is a ----- hero.
17. What is Hermione Granger's middle name?

## ANSWERS

ACROSS: 2. Sleep 5. Apple 7. Swagger 8. Gaia 9. Scout 13. Leisel Memminger 15. Kirjaya 16. Odyssey  
18. Narnia 19. Margaret Mitchell  
DOWN: 1. Gale 3. Edward 4. The Brothers Grimm 6. Look at me 10. Greyjoy 11. Humble 12. Furry  
13. Leviosa 14. Byronic 17. Jean

# TABOO LITERATURE

***“When people have tried everything and have discovered that nothing works, they will tend to revert to what they know best– which will often be the tribe, the totem, or the taboo.”***

**— Christopher Hitchens**

Taboos are the restrictions and prohibitions put forward by society or religion that prevent an individual from engaging in certain associations or practices. The usage of this word in the English language dates back to 1777 when the British explorer James Cook visited Tonga. The Tongan speakers used this word for “anything that is forbidden to be eaten, or made use of.”

Sigmund Freud proposed that incest and patricide were the only two taboos in the world. However, many societies had long established their own versions of what the word meant to them. Taboos related to sex and sexual relationships like incest, necrophilia, miscegenation, adultery, fornication, paedophilia, homosexuality and voyeurism are acknowledged across the world. Abortion, infanticide and cannibalism are also considered to be taboos in many societies.

Though large parts of the world have left some of these practices in the past, communities in certain parts of the world continue to follow them. The Aghori Babas who live in the city of Varanasi in India are known to eat the dead, as they believe this to be the means to overcome the fear of death. The Buddhists of Tibet perform another taboo ritual called ‘Jhator’ as they believe that in the cycle of life, dead bodies do not need to be preserved. They dispose of them by leaving them in areas of high altitudes as alms for scavengers like vultures.

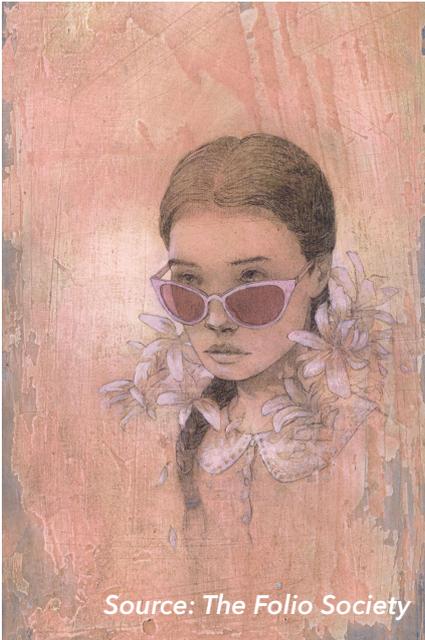
Despite criticism, taboos occupy a significant portion of literature. They have been adopted as central themes in books, plays and poetry. Taboo Literature is a genre that depicts customs and practices that are proscribed by society. Although early literary works avoided taboos, writing has progressed with time and this is no longer an established boundary. This article provides insight into the different taboos featured in literature.

## **INCEST:**

Incest is a sexual relationship between blood relatives, particularly siblings. One famous incestuous relationship was between Charles Darwin and his wife Emma Wedgwood Darwin, who was his first cousin. Incest is a major theme in many literary texts such as *The Cenci: A Tragedy in Five Acts* by Percy Bysshe Shelley written in 1819. The verse drama explores the theme of incest through a forced relationship between the Italian Count Francesco Cenci and his daughter Beatrice, and his subsequent assassination by the latter.

## **NECROPHILIA:**

Necrophilia is the act of engaging in a sexual activity with a corpse. It has been portrayed in literature by renowned writers like Oscar Wilde, Algernon Swinburne and Edgar Allan Poe through subtle references to necrophiliac tendencies and instances. Stephen King’s *Under the Dome* presents a necrophilic act between a character and two female corpses.



**Artwork from the illustrated version of *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov published by *The Folio Society***

### **PAEDOPHILIA:**

Paedophilia is the tendency to experience sexual attraction towards children. A.M Homes' *The End of Alice* highlights paedophilic attractions as a central theme. The story features a regular correspondence between two paedophiles who share the details of each other's paedophilic affairs. The book generated much controversy for including intimate details about sex with children, with many critics viewing it as a sympathetic presentation of the theme of paedophilia. Another book that instigated much controversy over this taboo was Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* in which the main character engages in a sexual relationship with a twelve year old girl.

### **ADULTERY:**

Adultery refers to voluntary sexual intercourse between a married individual and someone who is not their lawfully wedded spouse. While adultery has become a popular theme in modern and contemporary literature, its origins date as far back as Chaucer. Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* explores the theme of adultery through a married socialite named Anna, and her affair with Count Vronsky. Rabindranath Tagore in his book *The Home and the World* navigates the concept of

infidelity with the female lead character straying away from her marriage to Nikhil and developing emotions for another man.

### **CANNIBALISM:**

Cannibalism is the act or ritualistic practice of a human eating the flesh of another human being. A person who engages in such an act is called a cannibal. Though cannibalism is discussed as frequently as other taboos, it has a strong presence in various works of fiction such as the famous *Hannibal Lecter* series created by Thomas Harris. The taboo is also a recurring theme in Terry Goodkind's *The Sword of Truth*. Even Willy Wonka in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* welcomes the golden ticket winners into his factory with the greeting; "Everything in this room is eatable. Even I am eatable. But that, my dear children is called cannibalism, and is frowned upon in most societies."

**– SAI AMRITHA and SAI KEERTHI, II PyEE**

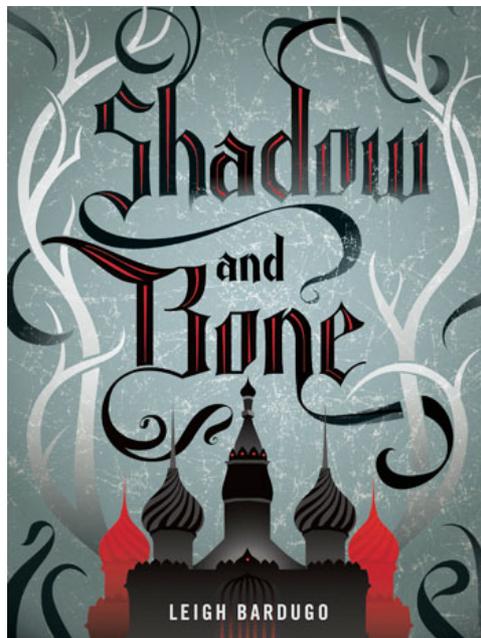


Artwork by Kurokawa Inuko

Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/505669864392694491/>

# WHERE THE SUN DOES NOT SHINE : A BOOK REVIEW

Leigh Bardugo's *Shadow and Bone* is set in the fictional nation of 'Ravka', a region protected by the kingdom's magical elite called the 'Grisha' (people with powers to manipulate matter in its basic form). The once-great nation has been torn in half by the 'Shadow Fold', a swath of impenetrable darkness filled with horrifying creatures that feed on human flesh. Alina Starkov, a pale, lonely, orphan discovers the rare ability to summon light while trying to save her best friend, Malyen, from those creatures. When her dormant powers are awoken, she becomes the symbol of hope for the nation. She catches the eye of the Darkling, the mysterious and powerful leader of the Grisha army with the ability to summon darkness, who takes her to the royal court to be trained as a member of the Grisha.



**Source: Goodreads**

The characters are very distinct from each other. Although quirky and witty, Alina has always lacked confidence in herself, but upon discovering her power and facing difficulties, she evolves into a stronger person. The Darkling is a 'being' shrouded in mystery, a creature of seductive charm and terrifying power with ink black hair, quartz grey eyes, and sharp features, Baghra is a bitter and ancient Grisha who pushes Alina to her limits and is the only one who can unnerve the Darkling; Genya is a beautiful Grisha who Alina unexpectedly finds a friend in. The chemistry between the main characters, Alina and the Darkling, is undeniable but interwoven with a sense of exciting danger and wariness.

Shadow and Bone introduces a unique race of magical beings who don't just create magic, but bend natural elements to their will and live longer the more they use their powers. The story plays with the concept of light and darkness, figuratively and literally, even materializing them as tangible elements of nature. The setting of 'Ravka' is modelled after nineteenth century Russia which can be seen in the weather, the places, and the use of Russian terms. The book is written

in a simple language that is both visual and descriptive. Leigh Bardugo's writing paints a very lucid picture of this fantastical world, transporting her readers into it. The plot focuses on everything in a balanced manner with just the right amount of explanation. Shadow and Bone would appeal to teenagers and adults.

The build-up to the story allows the plot to unwind into a harsh tale of betrayal, power, lust, love, and friendship. It also features spine-tingling revelations and the conflict of deciding who is friend and who is foe. The mystery surrounding the 'Grisha' rises in a crescendo as secrets unfold and truths unveil, all leading to a conclusion that will leave readers both shocked and satisfied.

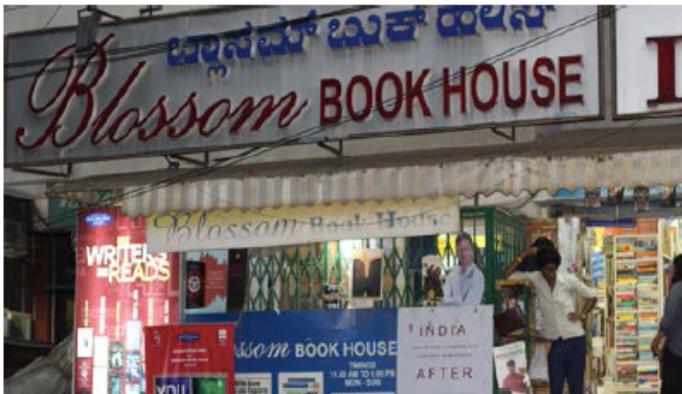
**–SHRADDHA SUMAN, III PyEC**

# BOOK STORES OF BENGALURU

Bengaluru's array of numerous bookstores has been a joyful retreat to many bibliophiles for years. Most of them sell second-hand as well as new copies at reasonable prices that kindle every book lover's urge to splurge! Here are some of the many bookstores that cater to your love for reading:

## BOOKWORN

Having set up its first store in 2002 at Srinagar Complex, MG road, Bookworn is a valuable hub for several key literary and historical texts, especially for students pursuing the Humanities stream. Apart from this, it practices a unique system of store credit, where one book can be exchanged for another for just half the price of the book, which it considers as 'reading fees'. Bookworn inaugurated a new branch at Church Street, MG Road, in 2015.



## BLOSSOM BOOK HOUSE (OLD)

A popular favourite amongst both adults and youngsters, this place entralls its customers with the multitude of books it showcases. Mayi Gowda, the founder and owner of Blossom estimates that the store encases nearly 200,000-300,000 titles, sourced from around India and many imported as well. One can endlessly browse through the hard bound biographies, comic books, graphic novels, science fiction and multiple editions of the same books with different prices.

## BLOSSOM BOOK STORE (NEW)

Blossom has expanded its business by launching a larger book house just off Brigade Road, at Church Street last year. The store stocks recent releases, children's books, magazines, fiction and a larger collection of graphic novels than its' older counterpart. It further offers the comforts of a restroom and drinking fountain for a comfortable book shopping experience.





### **GOOBE'S BOOK REPUBLIC**

Blink and you will miss it. Located on Church Street, Goobe's is a hole-in-the-wall kind of bookstore. Goobe's Book Republic came into existence about 8 years ago. Packed with a variety of books ranging from John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* to Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend*, its warm and amicable atmosphere tempts readers of all ages. The best thing about Goobe's is that they sell sets of old books in bulk, at just Rs. 25

in order to make room for new additions, upcoming writers, and graphic novels.

### **HIGGINBOTHAMS BOOKSTORE**

Higginbothams' reign over South India started way back in the then-Madras, in 1844, making it India's oldest bookstore. Opening its first branch in Bangalore in the year 1905, Higginbothams sends out vintage vibes that appeal to both the older and younger generations. Accompanied by an aesthetic interior, the bookstore is truly a never-ending treat to book lovers.



### **SAPNA BOOKSTORES**

A colossal storehouse of books, Sapna Bookstores not only sells different genres of books, but also stationery, toys, electronics and even multimedia accessories. The owners of the store opened their first branch with just a hundred books in 1967. Sapna is now a proud home to over a thousand books, and its wide range of genres make you keep coming back for more.

## **SELECT BOOKSTORE**

Over 70 years old, Select Bookstore is one of the most popular book hubs in Bangalore, particularly for vintage book lovers. From Mario Puzo to Ruskin Bond to Enid Blyton with almost all the books priced below Rs. 500, this small store is your go to even if you are a casual reader. Mr KKS Murthy's meticulous efforts have transformed the store into a minuscule paradise for bibliophiles of all ages.



**–AHALYA NAIR, II PyEE**

**–Photography: SUKANYA BORBARUAH, III PyEJ**

