# FANTASY AND THE SELF: A STUDY OF SELECT NOVELS BY NEIL GAIMAN

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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# Fantasy and the Self: A Study of Select Novels by Neil Gaiman

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Submitted

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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Fantasy and the Self: A Study of Select Novels by Neil Gaiman**" is the bonafide research conducted by Z.D. Lalhmangaihi under my supervision. Z.D. Lalhmangaihi worked methodically for her thesis being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English, Mizoram University.

This is to further certify that she has fulfilled all the required norms laid down under the Ph.D. regulations of Mizoram University. Neither the thesis as a whole or any part of it was ever submitted to any other University.

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## DECLARATION

I, Z.D. Lalhmangaihi, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/ Institute.

This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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This chapter introduces the introductory components that are related to the framework of Gaiman's worldview. It focuses on the diverse meanings that have been associated with fantasy literature. It attempts to situate the manner in which the varieties of folk tradition feed fantasy literature and the implication that it bears. The chapter will also address the manner in which Neil Gaiman alters the act of traditional storytelling through visual literacy and pictures. The unique patterning of the secondary world in Gaiman's works examines and demonstrates the diversity of fantasy literature, and it explores the manner in which Neil Gaiman transforms the conventional approach of understanding fantasy. The four novels which have been selected for the study namely *Coraline* (2002), *The Graveyard Book* (2008), *Odd and the Frost Giants* (2008), *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (2013) shall validate and interrelate Neil Gaiman's works and fantasy literature.

"The Muse in Black Leather Jacket" is an epithet that has been used to describe Neil Richard Gaiman (Smith 12). He has created a body of works which has ranked him amongst the most popular writers of the twentieth century. He was born on 10th November 1960 at Portchester, Hampshire in England. He is a British author, screenwriter, comic book writer, poet, and occasional songwriter, who makes public appearances with his "black leather jacket, black jeans, and black t-shirt" (12). The very fact of his popularity is described when "his fans present him with dolls and sculptures inspired by his stories, or paintings they've done of characters from his books, and speak of how being exposed to his works changed their lives" (12). A majority of his works have been adapted into films and has received serious attention. In the year 2001, Neil Gaiman wished for his troop of readers "magic and dreams and good madness" and in the year 2012, he wished his readers to "make mistakes…Make glorious amazing mistakes" because this would generate a new experience. His body of works is never limited to "one culture, time period, franchise, story world, or medium" (Porter 15). He opines that through the medium of both "dreams and mistakes" (15) it is possible to widen our range of experience. Due to his life affirming approach to writing, he has won numerous awards (15). In his works he creates:

> Realistic modern characters: thinking, feeling beings who are called to respond in marvelous ways that they could never have predicted. They touch us because they are lively and force us to interact with them,

> whether they reside in worlds far way in an interplanetary future or a fictionalized Terran past, whether they are human, hybrid, or immortal (15).

Instead of portraying escapist themes in his works, he encourages his readers to envisage upon lives and their society and he creates a mirror for his readers to discover themselves (15).

Fantasy occupies the heart of Gaiman's works which possesses a multifarious genre. It blends seemingly irreconcilable genres such as science fiction, fairytales, the gothic novel, the picaresque, the novel of chivalry including mythology within one and the same narrative (Nikolajeva 139). The term fantasy derives from the Latin word *Phantasticus* which in turn is derived from the Greek word *phantastikos*. It is a word that denotes "what is presented to the mind, made visible, visionary, unreal" (Lance 14). Early usage of the term within the terrain of Western culture can be seen in the folklores, mythical stories, and legends which are closely associated with the ritual of the carnival. Throughout history, fantasy has been considered somehow inferior to the mimetic mode. *In Defense of Fantasy* (1984), Ann Swinfen has denoted at the outset of her study that one of the most challenging tasks of engaging in a serious critical study of fantasy fiction is the problematics of the mindset of the majority of contemporary critics who propagate the idea that "the so-called 'realist' mode of writing is somehow more profound, more morally committed, more involved with 'real' human concerns than the mode of writing which employs the marvelous" (14). Fantasy has been regarded as an inferior genre ever since Aristotle's proclamation that the fundamental aspect of art is an imitation. Offensive remarks on it have always been rampant and "have thus always been associated with "high-brow" aesthetic" (15). David Hume, who is a prominent eighteenth-century philosopher, disdains literary fantasy "as a threat to sanity" and professes that romances deal with nothing but "winged horses, fiery dragons and monstrous giants" (Hume 6). Likewise, Marie de France claims that fantastic adventures camouflage substantial ethical note. Several earnest Christians consider that literary fantasy inherits lie (7). Moreover, several sophisticated Christians throughout the ages have rejected fantasy as inconsequential that does not deserve serious attention. Kathryn Hume stresses:

> Moreover, despite hostility to the fantastic, Christianity did not quickly give rise to a realistic literary tradition, partly because it was too hostile to our fallen world and therefore could not consider realistic representations desirable or enlightening; partly, too, because it fostered allegory and other forms of fantasy deemed compatible with Christian morality…Christian fantasy encouraged the non-real, but did not sharpen critical awareness of the phenomenon because fantasy, if it served the cause of morality, became "true" and therefore ethically distinct from the lies of fable (7).

She again professes that Christianity does not play a significant role to amend the symbiosis between fantasy and mimesis, although Christian poets employ fantasy in allegory, romance, and religious tales. So, fantasy was regarded as a form of entertainment but did not establish a positive status and as a result, fantasy continued to occupy a peripheral status (7). Although there are genres and works that eschew fantasy, the history of Western literature departs from consensus reality in the works of authors such as Homer, Vigil, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pynchon, Cretien de Troyes and Rabelais, Gottfried of Strassburg, Thomas Mann, Kafka, Dante, and Calvino. Then, during the nineteenth-century fantasy occupied a peripheral status on account of the champions of the realistic novel. However, with the passage of time, fantasy evolved and has been favored. It has generally been a "well-established part of mainstream narrative, and is today re-established as a prominent narrative in contemporary fiction." Hence, what becomes crucial is that we must abandon the belief that mimesis is "the only real part of literature" (21) and that fantasy as a peripheral phenomenon. Instead, we have to accept that "literature is the product of both mimesis and fantasy" (21). As a mode of narrative that runs contrary to fact, late in the nineteenth century, various authors have employed it as an alternative to counter the novel that focuses on social realism. However, in spite of the increasing accomplishment as a genre, what becomes problematic is the interpretation and the inability to comprehend the term. There are definitions that claim that fantasy is merely another version or imitation of science that embodies the supernatural, the past and the future. Apart from this, fantasy is attributed as a term that is synonymous with the fictional, the bizarre, the improbable that eventually connotes escapism (Irwin 4, 5). Although fantasy is glorified by writers like Sidney, Tolkien, and

E.M. Foster, Plato dismisses it. Plato's *The Republic* of Book 10 opines that fantasy is a hindrance to knowledge which is an impediment that must be banished. Likewise, Pope contends that an excessive amount of fantasy is disagreeable (Olsen 15). Plato claims that fantasy writers dwell on the supernatural, which he considers is important but perceives it as a subject which fantasy authors are not aware of. According to him, the universe is structured accordingly with rational principles that can be discovered through reason. He accuses the fantasy writers as distorters of truth in their attempt to invent the rules by which the universe operates in order to create an astounding story (Littmann 29). On the other hand, Aristotle's belief is that the inclusion of fantastic elements within the story does not necessarily disrupt the creation of sense because according to him a good serious story must make sense (33). The opposing views between Plato and Aristotle become crucial as it reflects multiple viewpoints on fantastic literature. There are a number of people like Plato who underestimates the power of fantasy literature on the grounds that it is devoid of reality. Plato's view is synonymous with the modern Christian view which discards fantasy literature, condemning it as a genre that conceals the role of God in the universe. On the other hand, there are a number of people whose view on fantasy literature remains parallel with that of Aristotle. Fantasy fiction is no doubt a sensible art, from which one can derive pleasure and legitimately exercise his or her thinking and imagination to make sense (35). Lance Olsen claims:

> Fantasy is a metagenre that touches upon romance, fairytales, pornography, myth, legend, the *nouveau roman*, pulp fiction, science fiction, satire, utopia, dystopia, detective stories, allegory, dream visions, surrealist fiction, gothic novels, expressionist texts, tales of horror and so on. In its pure form, it is opposed to the dominant culture of dates, times, places and certainty. It is a mode of discourse that hovers between two other modes: the marvelous (where narrative believes in a coherent ideology of the *over there*, where narrative is shaped by underlying meaning which is independent of the story it expresses, and where it believes in the metaphysics of presence and so is redemptive and compensatory) and the mimetic (where narrative believes in politics, psychology, community, character that is fully rounded, chronology, the

> specific over the general, and the *here and now*; and where narrative also believes in a compensatory metaphysics of presence---that the world mirrors the world). Because of its hesitation between two universes of discourse, the fantastic confounds and confuses reader response, generates a dialectic that refuses synthesis, explores the unsaid and unseen, and rejects the definitive version of "truth," "reality," and "meaning". Its function as a mode of discourse is to surprise, question, put into doubt, produce anxiety, make active, disgust, repel, rebel, subvert, pervert, make ambiguous, make discontinuous, deform, dislocate, destabilize (117).

Brian Attebery stresses that "fantasy invokes wonder by making the impossible seem familiar and the familiar seem new and strange…by generating suspense, by presenting characters whose fates we are interested in, by appealing to our senses, by calling forth human longings and fears" (3). Apart from this, fantasy functions by taking advantage of our curiosity, explores the unknown and exhibits the capacity to "engage us intellectually and morally by presenting the clash of ideas and issues in simple and concrete form" (3). It clarifies philosophical and moral conflicts, "that may not be directly applicable to our own complex and muddled lives but which can please or inspire because of their open and evident design" (4). Attebery further claims that fantasy imparts a "comprehensible form of life, death, good, and evil" (4). Jim Casey asserts that Postmodern fantasy epitomizes more than just a shift from a White, Western, patriarchal culture. He stresses that postmodernism deviates from epistemology (theories of knowledge) to ontology (theories of being). Besides, he claims that "Postmodernism's central system of knowing affirms the impossibility of knowing everything for certain" (118). He demonstrates the nature of Fantasy thus:

> Modernist literature has been described as elitist; modern novels often reject intelligible plots and modern poetry can be surreal and incomprehensible. Fantasy (even recent fantasy) often bears an affinity to the symbolic, hierarchical and formally conjunctive bases of modernism, but fantasy has almost always been considered popular literature, a 'low' art form concerned with play and desire. In this way, fantasy is itself postmodern…but fantasy, by its very nature, challenges the dominant

> political and conceptual ideologies in a manner similar to that of postmodernism (115).

The statement makes it discernible that fantasy matters a lot and can serve as a weapon to challenge dominant ideas and beliefs including conceptual ideologies. The fact that fantasy encapsulates the power to challenge the dominant political and conceptual ideologies validates the approach in which fantasy can be a source of resistance. In addition to this, the statement unravels the stereotypical assumptions that are attributed to fantasy whereby it is often considered as a form of escapism. The empirical approach of fantasy is profound which bears connections with the wider field of human psychology. Taking another stance, it is not only through reason alone that human beings have attempted to construct meaning. Although reason is significant, fantasy proves to be more pivotal. Our dependency on fantasy encourages us and generates hope by reminding us that the world can be a better place. "It is through the fictive projections of our imaginations based on our personal experience that we have sought to grasp, explain and alter, and comment on reality" (Zipes 78). Contrary to reality, fantasy has unwrapped the mysteries of life and disclosed the channel in which we can sustain ourselves and our principles. Moreover, fantasy challenges the objective definition of reality and it becomes intermingled with reality (78).

Acclaimed as an author who conjures new tales adapted from tales and stories from myriad cultures, Gaiman dissects and recombines familiar tales in order to produce new tales. For instance, Gaiman's "A Study in Emerald" invites the readers to consider Holmes and his scientific procedures in a different fashion. Out of the many adaptations and interactions with original tales, Gaiman's *Doctor Who* episode, "The Doctor's Wife" added a new dimension to the series' mythology "that is compatible with the franchise's nearly 50-year history of episodes" (Porter 16). His premise is to reinterpret and create characters and worlds so that they are renewed and familiar. At the same time, he wishes the readers "to admit our links to each other and the mythic past while challenging us to make new connections with ideas and to defy societal expectations" (19). The classical epic poem of *Beowulf* bears direct impact on Neil Gaiman's *Beowulf*. Gaiman's *Beowulf* is a computer-animated film and is written in collaboration with Roger Avary. The changes, alterations and its departures from the style and tone of the original epic poem have sparked criticism among many medieval scholars. As a result,

the movie is labeled “a great cop-out on a great poem”, “some kind of monster”, “Anglo-Saxons of the Caribbean”, “a weird cross between a serious attempt to envision the Northern early medieval past” (Fisher 26, 28). From multiple angles, *Beowulf* (the poem) can be perceived as a “progenitor of modern fantasy literature…The poem has a profound influence on some of the giants of twentieth-century fantasy literature” (19). What makes Gaiman’s body of works prominent and distinguished is the inclusion of mythology. The mythological components in his works are quite diverse and they often feature modern and ancient mythology, including the past and present folklore of cultures (Smith 12). As a writer who exhibits a deep fascination for myth, he asserts his stance on mythology and stresses that “myths are compost…They begin as religions, the most deeply held of belief, or as the stories that accrete to religions as they grow” (Gaiman, “Reflection” 76). He further claims that retelling and the act of inspecting myths are both beneficial because even the long lost forgotten myths are compost, in which stories prosper (80). Gaiman stresses:

> And comics have always dealt in myths: four-colour fantasies, which include men in brightly coloured costumes fighting endless soap opera battles with each other (predigested power fantasies for adolescent males); not to mention friendly ghosts, animal people, monsters, teenagers, aliens. Until a certain age the mythology can possess us completely, then we grow up and leave those particular dreams behind, for a little while or forever. But new mythologies wait for us, here in the final moments of the twentieth century. They abound and proliferate: urban legends of men with hooks in lovers’ lanes, hitchhikers with hairy hands and meat cleavers, beehive hairdos crawling with vermin; serial killers and bathroom conversation, in the background our TV screens pour disjointed images into our living rooms, feeding us old movies, new flashes, talk-shows, adverts; we mythologise the way we dress and the things we say; iconic figures-rock stars and politicians, celebrities of every shape and size; the new mythologies of magic and science and numbers and fame (79).

This is discernible in *The Sandman* series where Gaiman brings together characters from Greek myth and Norse myth. The re-envisioning of ancient characters

which are built on classic themes in the modern world is a new kind of mythology. The new mythology confuses our perception of reality and directs us to think what the world would be like if all forms of myth turn out to be true, which might as well be better, magical as well as interesting (Smith 13). Additionally:

> Myths are traditional narratives that shape and support the intellectual, emotional, and social features of a culture, making the abstract principle of a society concrete and comprehensible through stories that bind a people together and ensure the continued stability of a culture from generation to generation. Yet, to survive, myths must be relevant to a culture, and to remain relevant, myth must fit the changing social, economic, and technological requirements of a society (Gelfand 223)

So, in order to comprehend the role of mythology in Gaiman's literary writings, the primary concern is to apprehend the function of culture. Culture is often a set of acquired beliefs that has generated unity and order. The expansion and convergent interpretations of myth in the works of Neil Gaiman along with the fusion of diverse traditional myths from various times and places generate another account of mythology (223, 230).

Apart from the comic series *The Sandman* and his novels *American Gods* (2001) *and Stardust* (1999), Gaiman has established a niche for himself after the publication of *Coraline* (2002), *The Graveyard Book* (2008), *Odd and the Frost Giants* (2008) and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (2013). His works have been conferred prestigious awards in the literary field-the Hugo, Nebula and Bram Stoker award as well as the Newbery and the Carnegie medals. In addition to this, he is acknowledged to be the first author to have received both the prestigious Newbery and the Carnegie medals for *The Graveyard Book* (2008). The acclaimed novel introduces the conventional image of Death who appears on a grey horse and rides across the sky. Both the Pagan and Christian mythologies are revived in the novel as the image of Death arriving on a horse features in both the myths. She dances with the protagonist Bod and assures him that they will both ride on her horse. One of the remarkable features she possesses is a laugh that is labelled as "the chiming of a hundred tiny silver bells" (Green 50). The novel weaves the account of uninvestigated murder, apart from giving importance to fantasy, dreams

and the uncanny characters. On the other hand, what makes the novel renowned and distinctive is that he draws inspiration from his own son Michael (Gaiman, "*The Graveyard*" Acknowledgement). Like J.R.R.Tolkien, an author whom he is often compared with, Gaiman excels as a myth-maker. He employs age-old motifs and put new life into them and establishes a new dimension and voice. He constructs innovative fantastical worlds which Tolkien has termed "secondary worlds" that immerse his readers and subsequently suspend their disbelief. On the other hand, it provides the readers with a keener understanding of both human nature and human interactions with the natural world. Corresponding to all great literature, Gaiman's works flawlessly associate reality with fiction. With the assistance of his innovative skills, even the most ordinary and apparent aspects of the world become more polished and fresh when viewed through his private lens (Larsen 186). In Neil Gaiman's comic series *The Sandman*, Gaiman has depicted seven personifications of traditional mythological archetypes with a twist namely, Dream, Death, Destiny, Desire, Delirium, Despair and Destruction. Gaiman, an ardent lover of mythology in all its forms, manipulates various aspects of the universe and has assigned each anthropomorphic personality and their own authority as their names have suggested (Jones 217). Similarly, like all the characters in portal-quests the characters in *The Sandman* move between worlds and they are transformed permanently "sometimes for good, sometimes for ill, and, sometimes, they never leave the Dreaming at all" (219). Being the master of the realm, Morpheus is the least affected by the movement between worlds. He is rather affected by the characters he encounters on his journeys, whereas by going through the portal and into the Sandman's realm, the other characters are transformed (219, 220). By constantly referring to this theme of desire in his writing, Gaiman seems to hold a firm notion that desires are generally momentary things and he explores the idea that we tend to take life for granted in the pursuit of temporary pleasure (220, 221).

As an avid reader since childhood, Gaiman confesses that he read *The Chronicle of Narnia* several times as a child and he reads to his children. The Narnia tales focus on the four Pensive siblings. In the magical wardrobe, Peter, Susan and Edmund discover another world. The magical adventures they undergo is often treated as a moralistic adventure and it relies profoundly on Christian allegory which Neil Gaiman and other critics recurrently deal with. *The Chronicles of Narnia* evolves as a modern myth in

Neil Gaiman's "The Problem of Susan" by questioning the reason as to why Susan is exempted from heaven. So, "The Problem of Susan" highlights the problem of Susan's exile both within the world of the "real world" and *The Chronicles* (Kendig 35). Neil Gaiman also employs themes, characters and mythological figures in a similar manner to George MacDonald, in order to raise similar questions which the Victorian author had emphasized upon. George MacDonald is credited as the founder of fantasy genre, although he is not frequently read today. C.W. Sullivan in his essay "Fantasy" validates that George MacDonald is the first fantasy writer who employs ancient images, motifs, and other aspects to recreate new stories instead of retelling older stories. He further argues that his stories form the fantasy genre, while Bonnie Gaarden credits MacDonald as the first writer of fantasy novels for adults in English. Most importantly, renowned authors who are credited with shaping the fantasy genre such as G.K Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien, acknowledge that they are influenced by MacDonald. Likewise, Neil Gaiman acknowledges the inspiration he draws from Tolkien, Lewis and Chesterton (49). Gaiman and MacDonald's similarities can be perceived through the portrayal of the images and beliefs that surrounds death, the nature of evil as well as their endeavor to impart the possibility of forgiveness. Additionally, the striking similarities between Neil Gaiman and MacDonald lie in their technique of attributing human form and personality in death as a beautiful woman. The recurring images of libraries, ravens along with the story of Lilith, Adam and Eve in both the authors address essential issues of the meaning of life, forgiveness and evil (Green 49). Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* portrays a new dimension of death. The narrator of the novel says:

> A graveyard is not normally a democracy, and yet death is the great democracy, and each of the dead had a voice and an opinion as to whether the living child should be allowed to stay, and they were determined to be heard, that night (23).

Death in the novel is portrayed to be a benevolent and appealing experience. It is linked with democracy because it generates freedom of speech and liberty. Most importantly, death symbolizes unity in the novel and it creates a polyphony of voices. By drawing parallels between democracy and death, Gaiman emphasizes the importance of individual freedom and unravels many of the egalitarian values. Similarly, like Bod

in Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, the little boy Diamond in George MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind* spends his time with Death. Their initial conversation is filled with humour since Diamond mistakenly calls her "Mr. North Wind" and he soon realizes why she finds that unpleasant. She remains funny and playful throughout the text but she has a gruesome job. In a similar fashion as the Lady on the Grey in *The Graveyard Book* does with Bod, the woman whom Diamond address as "North Wind" talks to Diamond regarding the future. Unlike the Lady on the Grey she begins to take the child on trips with her and as a result, Diamond becomes weaker after every trip. Diamond could not comprehend who his friend is, even when she leaves him behind to sink a ship. She never reveals her exact name while many hints are given for the readers to guess. She calls herself Diamond's friend but warns him that similarly like him people fail to understand her real identity and she is often labelled as "Bad Fortune", "Evil Chance" and "Ruin". After she sinks ships and gives children fatal diseases, it becomes noticeable that her other name is Death. Although Death in the novel can change shapes and sizes, for Diamond she always proves to be beautiful. Even though the little boy eventually dies in the story, his death is presented as a gentle experience which is not fearful and terrifying (Green 51). The personification of death in both Gaiman and MacDonald unravels the conventional attitudes about death which remains an issue addressed by myth. Besides, both of them are keenly aware that within the culture that they are working in, the reason as to why people fear death is because they are afraid of the unknown. So, both the authors know that it is not sufficient to change the anthropomorphic metaphor, rather what becomes crucial is the reduction of fear. In Western culture, fear bears connotations with the concept of hell that emerges from the Christian tradition. There is a belief that people will go to hell for the wrongs they have committed and according to the Christian tradition there are diverse means to escape being sent to hell. Both Gaiman and MacDonald cling to Bahktinian dialogue with these older texts and prefer to rework on the elimination of the fear of death (53).

As noted earlier, Neil Gaiman's work is loaded with allusions and re-envisioning of familiar myths, folk and fairy stories especially in his short fiction collection. The collection becomes fewer regarding the specific origins for the tales and more attention is geared towards their function as a group, where the transmission of tales becomes fundamental to their meaning. Gaiman's stories have a propensity to share certain

elements as he reworks these structures from fairy tales, folklore and oral tradition. This forms a new relationship between reader and tale as Gaiman's approach to fairy tale explores the ongoing conversation between the tale teller and the audience (Drury 109). Gaiman says:

> The stories that people had told each other to pass the long nights had become children's tales. And there, many people obviously thought, they needed to stay. But they don't stay there. I think it's because most fairytales, honed over the years, work so very well. They feel right. Structurally, they can be simple, but the ornamentation, the act of retelling, is often where the magic occurs. Like any form of narrative that is primarily oral in transmission. It's all in the ways you tell 'em (110)

By employing and reworking on stories from the canon of classic fairy tales and folklore, Gaiman uses their familiarity "in order to survey human experience, emotion and sexuality through the act of tale telling" (110). Fairytales occupy much of Gaiman's works and the short story "Snow, Glass, Apples" and the poems "The White Road" and "Locks" depict the manner in which Gaiman employs "familiar stories from the fairytale tradition in a manner that self-consciously highlights their relationship to the act of storytelling as a creatively generative process" (110). According to G.K. Chesterton, "Fairy tales are more than true; not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten" (Gaiman, "*Coraline*" Prologue). Rewriting fairytales stands as a prominent leitmotif in the works of Neil Gaiman. His works can be interpreted as a rewriting of a contemporary fairy tale. For instance, "Snow, Glass, Apples" can be read as a postmodern reinterpretation of the classical fairy tale *Snow White*. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gilbert claim that the female characters in fairy tales remain passive, submissive akin to the women in traditional societies. They are unable to express themselves freely and are often forbidden to write. Whereas in Gaiman's version the execution of the stepmother is not silenced, she utters a word proclaiming that she is innocent and labels Snow White as a vampire (Klapcsik 326). Although the original version is woven in the story, Gaiman twists the previous perspectives of the story by making the original monstrous character as the narrator of the story. In the original tale, Snow White's name indicates her exceptional beauty which eventually makes the queen jealous. The colour of Snow White's skin, the magic

mirror, the coffin, the apples and the false death provoke new meaning, in which Gaiman twists its meaning through the eyes of the Queen's version. The white skin indicates her unnatural life and her cold flesh and her lips which is "red as blood" indicates that she is an evil creature, who exhibits a vampiric nature (Drury 110, 111). Gaiman states in his Newberry Award acceptance speech:

> We who make stories know that we tell lies for a living. But they are good lies that say true things, and we owe it to our readers to build them as best as we can. Because somewhere out there is someone who needs that story. Someone who will grow up with a different landscape, who without that story will be a different person. And who with that story may have hope, or wisdom, or kindness, or comfort. And that is why we write (Bealer and Luria ix).

Having been celebrated as a writer proficient in storytelling, the stories in *M is for Magic* explore the manifold ways in which Gaiman has employed the storytelling technique. His sequential story telling includes mythological imagery, both old and new, and is frequently used in a playful yet radical manner. Besides, the inclusion of magic realism, Gothic elements and dreams in the stories enrich the narrative. His storytelling technique captivates the readers and explores their collective memory. The employment of storytelling in Gaiman's stories makes his reader achieve a dual sense of the contemporary and the past. In the story "Don't Ask Jack" the children whisper among themselves about the story of Jack though none had seen his face. However, one of the children proclaims that Jack as a wicked wizard, who is forced to stay inside the box as a punishment for the vices he has committed. Later on, when the children grow up and leave the attic nursery, the attic nursery is closed up and almost forgotten. Surprisingly, the narrator says:

> Almost, but not entirely. For each of the children, separately, remembered walking alone in the moon's blue light, on his or her own bare feet, up to the nursery. It was almost like sleepwalking, feet soundless on the woods of the stairs, on the threadbare nursery carpet. Remembered opening the treasure chest, pawing through dolls and the clothes and pulling out the box (44).

The significance and power of storytelling are highlighted from the passage quoted above. Storytelling accords power, which makes the children recollect what has been happening in the past. Additionally, in the story, the stories children share among themselves evoke a feeling of fear which cripples them till they become adults. The close connection between memory and storytelling is highlighted in the passage because storytelling is an art that has a close connection with the psychology of human beings. Gaiman has created a universe in which no story can ever truly end, in which there is a possibility of continuances. In "Don't Ask Jack" the story ends in an inconclusive manner because Jack waits and smiles, holding his secret and waits for the children, as the narrator puts it "he can wait forever". So it is clear that Gaiman has created a universe which favors stories so that the means of representing the past helps one to understand the present context. Besides, in the story "The Case of the Four and Twenty Blackbirds" there is an adaptation of the nursery rhyme tradition. In this story, Jack Homer investigates the death of Humpty Dumpty which makes the story hilarious, ridiculous and wonderful. In the story, Humpty Dumpty's sister, a nurse trainee insists that Jack has to investigate the murder:

> "You seen the cops about this?"
>
> Nah. The king's men are not interested in anything to do with his death. They say they did all they could do in trying to put him together again after the fall" (5).

The king's men here refers to the police. Through the inclusion of nursery rhyme tradition in the story, Gaiman has succeeded in portraying the natural flexibility of the rhyme. At the same time, by reworking with the nursery rhyme, he explores human nature and emotions. In the process, it recreates the power, effect and interior space of memory and inscribes new meanings. There is a great deal of space in Neil Gaiman's works to explore, argue and detest the manner in which meaning is often constructed in a narrative. Jacques Derrida opines that meaning is never a fixed and steady component which simply resides within the text. In his seminal work "Structure, Signs and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science" he claims:

> Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called an "event", if this loaded word did not entail a meaning which is

> precisely the function of a structural---or structuralist---thought to reduce or to suspect (35).

Derrida contends that meaning in a text is ambiguous and interpretation cannot be finalized. He argues that our common perception of language as a dependable instrument for communication is not entirely true. It is rather a "fluid, ambiguous domain of complex experience in which ideologies program us without our being aware of them" (Tyson 249). Deconstruction's perception of language proves to be applicable in the works of Neil Gaiman in order to interpret his works with wider implications. The adaptation of mythology, fairy tales, nursery rhymes and certain other ancient stories in Gaiman's works, without undermining its original version, makes his readers understand the story line in different perspectives. The intertextual references in Gaiman's works also perform the task of detaching the readers from forming one sided view of life and discover the very essence of what makes us human. Meaning, as Kathryn Hume stresses, is "any system of values that causes phenomena to seem related according to a set of rules, and preferably, that makes them seem relevant to human concerns" (169). Additionally she stresses that "meaning is subjective, and our sense of meaning is a feeling which the individual can experience" (170). Wider frame of meaning cannot be defined by religion and science because both of them are not free from logical contradictions (170):

> All the values of science come down to established networks of relationships, and these are as important to literary meaning as to any other. When we notice relationships among things, and between ourselves and the things we observe, then we will feel some sense of meaning. A biologist will view man as an organism, see his similarities to other species, understand his positions in evolutionary, ecological, and anatomical systems. The set of relationships gives one kind of meaning. The nonscientist, to whom these classifications are not familiar networks, will see meaning in different systems of values, such as aesthetic, the social, the moral, or the professional. Some readers get pleasurably excited when they recognize the influence of one text on another; others consider that knowledge pointless, but find a text meaningful if it affects

> them emotionally. Both feelings of meaning come from system of values (193).

What becomes conspicuous is the manner in which man nourishes his sense of meaning through certain kinds of structure. So, fantasy becomes significant to the cycle of creation because a majority of the system of relationships are not scientific. Rather they are "moral, aesthetic, social, or personal" which cannot be validated by the aid of laboratory. The language of science and realism cannot attain that effect as it relies on technical vocabulary in which a word connotes only one universally acknowledged term. Whereas fantasy permits "a dream-like overdetermination and condensation" and it aims for "richness and often achieves a plethora of meaning". Unlike religion, "literature, fantastic or mimetic" assists us in developing our own sense of meaning whether we choose to agree or disagree with the author's values (194).

Having stated earlier, Neil Gaiman foregrounds the act of storytelling in his narratives which bears thematic and literary implications. However, the compelling force behind Gaiman's technique of storytelling is the alteration that is manifested in the form of visual representation and the language of the pictures. Gaiman's works have been illustrated by Chris Rendell and the inclusion of the visual mode functions as an alternate mode of storytelling. Gaiman's multiple manifestations of the visual by images and symbols emphasize and engage the readers in multiple and curious ways of dynamic interaction. On the other hand, the visual mode reflects the potency of visual texts and functions as a mode of expanding the characters' consciousness:

> [The pictorial turn is] a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. It is the realization that *spectatorship* (the book, the gaze, the glance, the practice of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and the visual experience or "visual literacy" might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality (Mitchell 16).

Gaiman's focus on the eyes of his characters becomes significant because the aspect of sight and seeing both functions as a private and communal act. At the same

time, the ability to see things expands the characters' ability to establish vibrant interaction. Gaiman's characters utilize their eyes to form visual clues about their own existence. Gaiman prompts his readers to rely upon his characters' interpretation in order to make sense of what they see, and the most innovative ways in which characters make sense of what they have experienced is their conversion of the audible into the visual. The supernatural characters in Gaiman's works are portrayed visually which in turn becomes a visual representation of the characters' emotions, inner essence and personality. Besides, the inhuman and the supernatural characters are not merely static icons. The language of the supernatural characters and objects in Gaiman's works is pictorial, which subsequently emphasizes the visual richness of it with interpretive possibilities. It encourages the imaginative reader to play with the diverse levels of meaning brought out by the symbols. Crucially important in Gaiman's works are the characters' subsequent struggle articulated not in terms of linguistics but denoted by the visual mode of narration. The four novels which have been selected for the study expand upon the visual hermeneutics. Furthermore, his characters' visual literacy is deepened and broadened and this heightens a new self-conscious mode of being.

The genre that has remained suitably related and has often been identified with fantasy is the genre of science fiction. Science fiction, according to Kingsley Amis is a form of prose narrative that treats a situation that is impossible to arise in the world but it is rather hypothesized accordingly with innovations in the field of technology or science along with pseudo-science and pseudo-technology including human or extra-terrestrial. But science fiction fails to represent what is conventionally regarded as impossible. So, science fiction disrupts the confines of possibility. It aligns with the amazing which, at times, is extensively improbable but fails to adhere to the impossible which is the recurring feature of fantasy (Irwin 96-99). Brian Attebery contends that science fiction confines its time in attempting to convince the readers that "its seeming impossibilities are explainable if we extrapolate from the world and the science that we know" (2). Contrary to this, Attebery states that there are multiple ways in which a story can declare its fantastic nature:

> It can involve beings whose existence we know to be impossible, like dragons, flying horses, or shape-shifting men. It can revolve around magical objects: rings, hats, or castles possessing wills, voices, mobility,

> and other attributes inanimate objects do not, in our experience, possess. It can proceed through events---two people painlessly exchanging heads, a tree reaching out to grab passer-by---that violate fundamental assumptions about mater and life. And fantasy treats these impossibilities without hesitation, without doubt, without any attempt to reconcile them with our intellectual understanding of the workings of the world or to make us believe that such things could under any circumstances come true (2).

The writer of fantastic literature who creates the impossible worlds employs folklore to provide imagined worlds accessible to the readers (Sullivan 1). Sullivan opines "the secondary world, whether set in an imagined future or reimagined past, needs to have within it materials such that the world "make sense" to the reader; in this regard, recognizable folklore (and materials modeled on that folklore) are central to the creation of that world" (281). Myths, legends, folktales and ballads according to Sullivan "are sufficiently fantastic that nothing needs be added and a retelling, usually expanded is the result" (284). Modern fantasy writers often root their creation of fantasy in folk tradition. The ballads contain multiple numbers of other supernatural motifs that are available to the writers of fantasy and it is presented with the necessary vividness and solidarity. The beauty and peril of Tolkien's world is comparable with the ballads and *The Lord of the Rings* is filled with the ballads of elves and men (Attebery 18). The ballads according to C. Hodgart is a universe:

> Peopled with animals and birds that speak, with fairies and with ghosts who return from the grave. There is no clear line of demarcation between such creatures and ordinary mortals. The supernatural is treated in a matter-of-fact and unsensational way, and to the ballads singer there seems to be no question of a suspension of disbelief. Fairies, for example, are not the minute creatures of modern whimsy, but are like human beings in size and in some of their ways of life (17).

Fantasy and science fiction writers employ traditional materials ranging from "individual motifs to entire folk narratives" (Sullivan 279) which will enable readers to identify the cultural reality of the impracticable in a subliminal manner. S.C. Fredericks

labels fantasy as "the literature of the impossible" (280) and this interpretation took place in the 1960s and the 1970s as fantasy literature experienced an extensive increase in popularity (280). By situating the imagined in a comprehensible framework, Attebery argues "we allow ourselves to exist briefly on a plane with it; we enter the Other World only when there is air to breathe, food to eat, and ground to walk on" (35). Following the traits of authors who cling to pre-Christian traditions, there are several writers who have drawn on Christian motifs form the New Testament and the Old Testament as a foundation for fantasy literature. For instance, C.S Lewis' Narnia series, George MacDonald's *Phantaste*s (1858) and *Lilith* (1895) and Madeleine L'Engle's *Wrinkle in Time* series focus on Old or New Testament stories (Sullivan 286). Since these writers blend Christian theology in their fantastic novels, their works can be read as a fantasy novel that deal with complex issues of "good and evil, sacrifice and redemption" (291). Additionally, Tolkien's novels revolve around "courage, loyalty, honor, love, loss and of course good and evil in much the same terms as does *Beowulf*" (291). Likewise, writers of science fiction like Heinlein's characters are confronted with ethical questions (292). Sullivan pronounces:

> Generally, fantasy and science fiction have supported western cultural values and worldview. Fantasy has upheld general notions of good and evil and, again drawing on traditional tales, has shown the good being rewarded and the evil punished. Science fiction, while not always so clear about good and evil as it constructed by Western culture, has generally supported the Western attitudes toward industrialization, capitalism, and expansion…Science fiction, or perhaps better, science fantasy has a history of challenging and critiquing cultural assumptions. Science fantasy is an odd subgenre that has some of the hardware of science fiction but is not as scrupulous about theory as is true science fiction (288, 289).

Fantasy as Attebery claims is "a fuzzy set…defined not by boundaries but by a centre" (Klapcsik 318). The pleasure of fantasy as Attebery states:

> Is not disorienting reality, but in reordering reality. It reinforces our awareness of what is by showing us what might be, and uses the

> imaginary laws of the created world to postulate hidden principles on which our own might be organized. To do so, however, it must be belief worthy on every level except the one that marks "realistic" fiction. Its impossibilities must be reacted to in a recognizably human manner, and they should embody archetypal actions and values. This is no easy task for any work of literature, but the fantasist can call tradition to his aid. He can reanimate old tales of wonder. He can observe and imitate the characteristic devices of ballads and epic. And, most importantly, if he is living in a time when a body of legend is being reevaluated, he can catch bits of that body on their way down from full credence to discredit (36).

It is conspicuous that fantastic literature relies on traditional materials in a manner in which no other fiction performs. Therefore, science fiction and fantasy authors must commit themselves to weave identifiable material in their works so that the readers can decipher the unrecognizable. The insertion and employment of traditional materials by these authors to construct stories prove to be a steadfast strategy for connecting the readers with a story. Additionally, it enables that reader "to decode both the worlds about which they are reading as well as the significance of that world and the actions which occur there" (Sullivan 292).

Fantasy literature continues to flourish gradually with a consistent glow, with most recent fantasy experiencing a dramatic change. Apart from dealing with religious issues, fantasy writers examine the field of global issues like hunger, agony, loss, confusion, human imperfection, and triumph in which their fictional characters experience human emotions. Fantasy has not always been an ordinary genre of literature as Skeparnides professes, "ironically [women] have to take on male characteristics in order to overcome…What we alarmingly see, is that women must become men and enter the world of men that is 'war'…to defeat the evil of men." (Thomas 62). Ursula Le Guin has popularized the concept of anarchy in her works. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* published in 1969, Le Guin sabotages the conventional binary constructs of gender identity in order to celebrate the anarchy of gender. The issue of gender proves to be the novel's significant involvement in postmodern anarchism. The residents of the Gethen are ordinary human; however, unlike most human societies, they are not subjected to the social system of gender binary. Gethenians flourish in a genderless state

characterized by the absence of male and female classification although they frequently engage themselves in an active reproductive phase called *Kemmer*. In this manner, Gethen is an androgynous society that establishes gender identity to be provisional. Gethenian gender in multiple ways corresponds to the postmodern gender theories advanced by Judith Butler and Donna Haraway. Gethenians and postmodern feminist are closely allied in admitting that there is no complete category in gender but is instead fluid and flexible (Call 95). Neil Gaiman deserves note here, as his female characters reflect changing gender roles. They have transcended the boundary of delicacy and their sturdiness can be perceived in his works. In *Coraline*, Gaiman introduces a female child character who gradually learns to procure a spirit of valor, who could effectively exercise her wit and wrath. Gaiman's choice of a girl child in the novel is also significant to dispel the culturally conditioned idea of feminity. Coraline suffers memory losses and constantly tries to make sense and is at times moody and battles with the concept of good and evil. Her inner dilemma is suggestive of the fact that she possesses a supreme moral authority and bears a virtuous principle. Coraline does not exhibit the stereotyped female character nor the stereotyped male traits but she triumphs to be a formidable character in her own right assisted by her inquisitive spirit. Likewise, Lettie Hempstock in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* is characterized as an extension of strong female characters. Her simple humanness, thoughtfulness, gratitude, patience, affection and most importantly her sense of justice in times of dilemmas ultimately makes her an authoritative figure. The novel transcends the binary gender system and reflects the distinctive system of changing gender roles. The unnamed narrator-protagonist confesses that when he holds Lettie's arm he feels like "touching mighty engines" (49). Lettie's courage and gallantry leave a remarkable impression on the narrator. In the novel, Gaiman does not portray his female and male characters according to the conventional understanding of gender. His characters abandon all pretense towards gender hierarchy and choose to navigate the path of progressive humanitarian goals. C.N. Manlove stresses that modern fantasy often belongs to the pastoral genre and claims:

> Kinsley's *The Water Babies* is a submarine pastoral, Lewis's *Perelandra* is an idyll of another planet and Tolkien's 'rural' *The Lord of the Rings*, like White's book, is a myth of history, in Tolkien's case, of *pre*history

> as it ought to have been. Within the walls of the form, however, there need be no escapism, no evasion of the hard facts generated from the pastoral world itself; and in this sense, the pastoral is no less 'realistic' than any other literary form ("*The Impulse*" 98, 99).

Frequently discernible in the twentieth century fantasy is that it is "more ecological than moral, concerned with the preservation of a world at least as much as the transformation of an individual" ("*Christian Fantasy*" 212). Whereas in Victorian fantasy, "the moral emphasis demands not that the individual should stay still, but that the spirit should change. Further, it could be said that there is sometimes almost as much emphasis on protection of the land as of its people in modern fantasy, as in Tolkien or Ursula Le Guin" (212). Clare Echterling stresses:

> Considering the increasing centrality of environmental issues in popular and political discourse, and especially contemporary children's culture and education, it is time that environmental literary scholars turn a post-colonial or anti-colonial lens on children's literature, especially those canonical texts that may be reclaimed as proto-environmental and useful as tools for encouraging environmentalist ideals. Doing so, will help historicize postcolonial ecocriticism and further the study of nature, environmental issues, and imperialism in nineteenth-and twentieth-century literature. Furthermore, it will benefit the study of children's literature and the environment by exposing the imperial roots of contemporary children's environmental narratives and redirecting our potential desire to claim any text that shows a hint of ecophilic feeling for environmental education without also considering its historical particularities and relationship to imperial ideologies (97).

Neil Gaiman's characters also establish a close affinity with nature. The close affinity between humans and nature is at the heart of his novels and it lends a note of environmental stewardship for both the characters and the readers. Characters' strong strand with nature serves as a strategy to transform them into a passive spectator. His novels impart a deep reverence for non-human characters by condemning any forms of exploitation and destruction. Characters' attitude towards non-human characters

ethically engages the readers to rectify their ecological errors. In relation to this a deliberate demonstration of colonial invasion is evident in Neil Gaiman's *Odd and the Frost Giants*. In the middle of the narrative Odd encounters the frost giant who symbolises authority. The frost giant has ostracised Loki, Odin and Thor from Asgard and transformed them into animals. The frost giant claims:

> I outwitted Loki…I bested Thor. I banished Odin. All of Asgard is pacified and under my rule. Even now, my brothers march from Jotunheim, as reinforcements. He darted a look towards the horizon, to the north. The Gods are my slaves. I am betrothed to the lovely Freya. And you honestly think you can go up against me? (87).

The transformation of the gods into animals who are less than the human creatures with inferior knowledge imparts symbolic notes. The transformed figures require the supervision of Odd in order to save the city of Asgard from the frost giants who have invaded it. This incident functions as an allegory to state the unpleasant consequences of opposing the colonizers who exhibit much higher forms of knowledge and control. The tendency to portray and transform them as animals is an attempt to silence the gods and make them less privileged social groups. The provoking speech uttered by the frost giant begins to question the colonial project and intention. The transformation of the gods into animals and casting them out from their domain serve as a link to demonstrate the manner in which a colonizer strove to exert control. "Colonialism promoted the naming and classification of both people and places, as well as nature, in each case with the aim of control. Landscape were renamed, and these names were entrenched through mapping and the formal education system" (Adams and Mulligan 24). Besides, Adams and Mulligan claim:

> Both the exploitation of nature in the colonies and the impetus to conserve nature for long-term human use were a product of the colonial mindset, which was shaped by the interaction between colonial experiences in the centre and periphery. The colonial mindset can only be understood by looking at this interaction; but it was fundamentally rooted in European values, which constructed nature as nothing more

> than a resource for human use and wildness as a challenge for the rational mind to conquer (5).

As Odd approaches the frost giant, he openly questions as to why he rules Asgard. The frost giant quickly explains that his brother constructed the wall, and made a deal with the gods to construct their wall within the time frame of six months without any reward. However, on the last day when the mission is to be accomplished, the gods cheat the frost giant's brother. In narrating this, the giant states that a mare ran across the plain and lured away the stallion and hauled the stones for his brother. The stallion eventually breaks its bonds and the horses run off into the woods together and they are gone. According to the frost giant, when his brother begins to complain about how he is being treated, Thor returns from his travels and kills him with his "damnable hammer" (Gaiman, "*Odd*" 89). The frost giant's malevolent act is justifiable to a certain extent in his attempt to proceed towards the path of justice. However, what becomes striking in the plot is the impact made when the wrong inhabitants occupy the land. When Asgard is being colonised by the giant, the obvious consequence includes the subjugation of the gods along with the environmental destruction. This is conspicuous when the frost giant disrupts the season. It is always winter in Asgard and the frost giant employs winter as a means of control, which serves as a constant reminder that he is in power and it also signifies the bleakness of the gods' situation. The perpetual winter in Asgard marks the beginning of the plot's central conflict which signifies immense environmental destruction as well as cruelty towards nature. The giant's lack of seriousness regarding the climate is described with rich and telling details:

> 'Spring. In Midgard. Where I come from. It's happening this year. And if the winter continues then everyone will die. People. Animals. Plants'.
>
> Frosty blue eyes bigger than windows stared at Odd. 'Why should I care about that?' (92).

The transformation of the locally developed relationship between the inhabitants and their environment is denoted as one of the main strategies of colonialism. This further signifies that colonial treatment of the inhabitants and their environment is immensely detrimental. The frost giant's intention to impart damaging environmental practices offers negative example of colonial exploitation. At the climax of the novel,

the frost giant is defeated and winter eventually vanishes when the narrator says “the endless winter began to cleave and to break up” (123). Through this apocalyptic imagery and plot, the narrative reiterates the familiar message regarding imperial environmental imagination. Asgard’s inhabitants and environment suffer under the legacies of colonialism which is widely detrimental as it encapsulates the rational mind to conquer and threaten environmental stability. Asgard is threatened because it is alienated from the real inhabitants and becomes one of the most important characters in the process. The failure of the gods to proclaim their city successfully denotes the continued domination of the frost giants. On the other hand, the lifeless description of Asgard in the narrative as “snow had blown clear of the path” (83), days being longer in the city and the sun being “a silver disc that hung in the white sky” (83) signals that the city is fraught with complications and contradictions. It further signifies that the real Asgard’s distinctiveness is camouflaged and subjugated subsequently. The real identity of Asgard is revealed in the form of “the cluster of wooden buildings” (108) and is the opposite of the snow covered Asgard occupied by the frost giants. By situating these metaphors and imagery, Gaiman parallels the logic of colonialism. He depicts the manner in which his characters suffer from a lack of space and through the employment of Asgard as a symbolic topographical reference Gaiman repeatedly denotes the obvious consequence of colonial oppression. Gaiman’s holistic approach to nature and the environment in his works renders the idea that human beings are the consumers who are indebted to nature. Particularly discernible in Gaiman’s narrative is the manner in which he has attempted to demonstrate how intersubjectivity ought to encompass mutual recognition and affinity with other entities of nature:

> Just as our own subjectivity depends upon the physical world generating human bodies that include a brain that generates a mind that can think about itself, Intersubjectivity needs to include other entities of nature that perceive us from their own subjectivity, to whatever limited degree that might exist. Also, individual subjectivity is shaped by the physical world in terms of environments that have and continue to shape human sensory perception and tactile expressiveness (Murphy 82).

While nurturing future generations of eco-citizens, Gaiman has succeeded in portraying how one’s subjectivity is fashioned by the environment. His children's

characters are acutely aware of the fact that the subject is not merely the humans. It is rather between nature and multiple others with whom we consciously, and at times, unconsciously interact with. Besides, what remains noteworthy is the way in which Gaiman has highlighted the imperial environmental imagination in *Odd and the Frost Giants.* His novels function as a cautionary account that confirms that our own bodies are a repository for the entire species and the ecosystem in which we depend on for life. Gaiman's employment of fantastic narratives proves to be pivotal in his works because it functions as an abode of satire. Besides, Fantasies:

> Allow the reader to consider and speculate about central and sometimes painfully realistic themes in a way that is more palatable than in realistic fiction or fact. The fantastic nature of the characters and the settings provides readers with emotional distance that gives them room to consider sensitive and important ideas more objectively than in other genres. An irony about fantasy is that despite the fanciful characters, strange imaginary worlds, and bizarre situations encountered, it has the power to help us better understand reality (Kurkjian et al. 492).

Farah Mendlesohn in her book *Rhetorics of Fantasy* suggests that there are four categories within the fantastic namely "the portal-quest", "the immersive", "the intrusive", and "the liminal". She stresses that "these categories are determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world" (xiv). According to her, "In the portal-quest we are invited through into the fantastic; in the intrusion fantasy, the fantastic enters the fictional world; in the liminal fantasy, the magic hovers in the corner of our eye; while in the immersive fantasy we are allowed no escape" (xiv). In elaborating the categories of the fantastic, she further demonstrates that a portal quest fantasy is "simply a fantastic world entered through a portal" (xix) that must be navigated. Its reliance on destiny reflects the necessity "to create rational explanation of irrational action" (xix) without extinguishing the mystery. In portal fantasy, the language is "elaborate", "which relies upon both the protagonist and the reader gaining experience" (xix). Most significantly, in this type of fantasy Mendlesohn argues that, "we ride alongside the protagonist, hearing only what she hears, seeing only what she sees: thus our protagonist (even if she is not the narrator) provides us with a guided tour of the landscape" (xix). Hence, portal fantasy "is about entry, transition, and

negotiation" (xix). Whereas the immersive fantasy invites the readers "to share not merely a world, but a set of assumption…it presents the fantastic without comment as the norm both for the protagonist and for the reader" (xx). In the immersive fantasy, readers are not provided with any descriptive narrative although readers "sit on the protagonist's shoulder and…have access to his eyes and ears" (xx). It is the kind of fantasy which remains close to science fiction, "that makes use of an irony of mimesis" (xx). On the other hand, in the immersive fantasy magic does not occur, and the plot "may be the least fantastical element" (xxi). In the intrusion fantasy the fantastic becomes the transmitter of chaos, "it is the beast in the bottom of the garden, or the elf seeking assistance" (xxi). According to Mendlesohn, "the intrusion fantasy is not necessarily unpleasant, but it has as its base the assumption that normality is organized, and that when the fantastic retreats the world, while not necessarily unchanged, returns to predictability---at least until the next element of the fantastic intrudes" (xxii). At the same time, it maintains "stylistic realism" and it relies on explanation. So, unlike the portal fantasy the readers and the protagonist are "never expected to become accustomed to the fantastic" (xxii). In the liminal fantasy magic and the possibility of magic becomes part and parcel of "consensus reality" (xxiii). It is devoid of "the enclosed nature of the immersive fantasy" in which "hints and clues" (xxiii) are absent. Additionally, "it casualizes the fantastic within the experience of the protagonist, it estranges the reader" (xxiv). Most importantly, the "transliminal moment" (xxiv) generates "fear, awe, and confusion" (xxiv) which are important emotions in the establishment of the fantastic mode. The liminal fantasy relies on "irony and equipoise", "the twisting of the metonymic/metaphorical structure of fantasy, and "a constriction of a point of balance right at the edge of belief" (xxiv). Besides, "it distills the essence of the fantastic" (xxiv). The four novel in focus exhibit the motif of the "liminal fantasy". The absence of territories and boundaries between the primary world and the secondary world stand as an important feature in the works of Neil Gaiman. There is an absence of rigid definitions and presentation of time sequence, and most importantly the supernatural is naturalized which makes its presence felt. Magic and miracle become a recurring event and there is a creative extension of the interplay between them. Thus unity is brought out by multiplicity and magic is perceived as a normal occurrence and part of nature. The juxtaposition of the opposites yoked heterogeneous ideas since the opposites that are juxtaposed in his works are not a random act. Gaiman does not

attempt to clarify the opposites in his works; he has instead invited his readers to ponder upon the incongruity rather than the similarities between the opposites. In this respect, a maximum amount of interpretations is generated by the clash of contexts. It is interesting to note that imagination in the works of Neil Gaiman functions inwardly and intellectually which is akin to George MacDonald's belief "the dwelling-place of God" (Manlove, "*The Impulse*" 72). The novels which have been selected for the study *Coraline, The Graveyard Book, Odd and the Frost Giants, The Ocean at the End of the Lane* situate the significance of imagination and the characters unravel imposing patterns of meanings through their gifts of imagination. The secondary world is imaginatively seen and it serves as an apparatus through which characters attain liberty and authority. On the other hand, by centrally locating imagination in the narratives, the space to retain and restore normality is subverted.

Reading Neil Gaiman's works provoke an important question as to why his characters tend to explore the portals. It is an obligation for both the characters and the readers of Gaiman's works to take on the task of exploring, literally and mentally, the strange and unknown spaces so as to comprehend the regulations that govern them. His characters are often forced, tricked or seduced into entering an unfamiliar landscape in which their identity and lives become susceptible. So, it is an obligation for his characters to map and decode the fantastical world in which they find themselves in order to survive (Bealer and Luria viii). Lynette Potter asserts on Gaiman:

> He creates realistic modern characters: thinking, feeling beings who are called to respond in marvelous ways that they could never have predicted. They touch us because they are lively and force us to interact with them, whether they reside in worlds far away in an interplanetary future or a fictionalized terran past, whether they are human, hybrid, or immortal. Gaiman understands the modern mind and forces us to contemplate our lives and society. Instead of providing mere escapist entertainment, he holds up a mirror so we can discover ourselves (15).

Gaiman's attraction with encountering the unfamiliar is what marks his stories function as travel writing. Travel writing and exploring the unknown in Gaiman's works, however, bear a distinct meaning. In travel writing, the tourist remains at a

distance from his experience and is hidden behind guidebooks and cameras and the tourist then remains detached and untouched by the experience. Gaiman's imaginary spaces equally provide a transformative effect on the readers as well as the fictional characters who inhabit the story. His writings navigate the readers through alien space and perform a glorious task by transforming the readers (viii- ix). The impossible, which is an abstract concept, occupies a pivotal role in the heart of the fantasist and almost all fantasy takes place in another world (Attebery 12). Attebery claims:

> It is difficult to conceive of a fantasy world with only men and women in it, and no elves, goblins, or talking beasts. The inhuman peoples of fantasy may be a little lower than man, like the fauns of Narnia, but not so low that they communicate with man. They may be higher, like the flamelike eldils of Perelandra, but not so high as to be above error and emotion. Much of the wonder in fantasy rests on the interaction between two-footed and four-footed folk, or between mortal and immortal. Finally, high fantasy establishes sphere of significance, in which the actions of hero and inhuman, helper and villain, reflect a coherent and extractable order. Characters are not merely individuals but the upholders of moral and intellectual standards. In most fantasies there is a strong polarization of good and evil, so that the hero's quest concerns not only his own coming of age but also the fate of the kingdom. Acts in fantasy are always meaningful, because everything connects with, or signifies, everything else. The least detail may be an omen of the future, and the smallest action may bring that future to pass. Such a system of relationship is magical, whether the magic is openly displayed in spells and talismans or submerged in landscape or atmosphere or the very fabric of the created world (13, 14).

In Neil Gaiman's works, fantasy is centrally located and has encapsulated multiplicity of meanings. It becomes a common place in which characters project their desire and anchor them to understand reality giving them the platform to hope that the world can be a better place. In seeking to challenge their monotonous existence and after having experienced the harsh realities, characters cling to fantasy. Their confrontation with the fantastic elements in the secondary world gives them a glorious

recognition and at times they have expressed their existential angst. As postmodernist novels, Gaiman's works depict an extensive amount of fantastic narratives and has given space for the possibility of multiple interpretations. In Gaiman's works, the impossibility of knowing anything for certain is evoked through the experience undergone by his characters. Uncertainty regarding their own existence propels them to journey into the secondary world which is approachable only through the medium of imagination. The inconclusive ending of his novels and the occurrence of the unexpected events including the unsettled boundaries between dreams and the real, subsequently followed by the self-critical dialogue in his works render them as postmodernist texts. His novels feature a scene of the impossible and the experiences of wonder which is perhaps the formal characteristics that have featured in certain postmodern novels. In Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, the protagonist confronts multiple number of ghosts ranging from Roman Caius Pompeius to the witch Liza Hempstock, and from spinster, Letitia Borrows to Thackeray Porrringer. Crucially important in the novel is that the ghosts in the graveyard function as educators, because each of the ghosts represents a particular piece of history (Newhouse 123). Both in terms of psychology and literary, ghosts signify "selfhood and moral development" (120). The ghosts embody an interrelated network of lessons that mirrors human history. The graveyard becomes an abode in which the dead Roman and the eighteenth-century poets share their thoughts and advice with each other simultaneously. The graveyard does not necessarily signify "unified philosophical or cultural truth" (123); it attempts to show that knowledge emerges from different conflicting values and historical dialects (123). The protagonist of *The Graveyard Book* possesses freedom of the graveyard and acquires supernatural skills such as fading, haunting and Dreamwalking. Fading allows him to turn invisible and haunting allows him to make people feel uneasy and terrify them. Whereas in dreamwalking, Bod intrudes in others' dream and control their dreams. These skills are taught to Bod by his loving graveyard parents, his ghost teacher Mr. Penny Worth and his guardian Silas. Gaiman's *Coraline* inherits a number of traits and characteristics propounded by certain prominent fantasy theorists. The creation of the secondary world or the liminal space becomes noteworthy. In the novel, Gaiman has highlighted the similarities of Coraline's real house and the other house which is inhabited by her other mother and other father including several inhuman characters and creepy creatures. In the other world, everything is exactly similar to her house which

makes her feel strange. She sees her grandmother's strange-smelling furniture, the painting of the bowl of fruits with grapes, plumps, peach and apple. In the novella, Coraline is portrayed as an adventurous heroine with an agitated and doubting spirit, who is inclined to suspect the truth. She is depicted as a heroine who is capable of criticizing, perfectly right in making conditional answer and a heroine who possesses strong wit and purity of her own scruples. The novella places heavy emphasis on the Gothic with the atmosphere, settings, and diction to build suspense and a sense of unease in the readers. The grotesque is reflected in the appearance of the three children in the mirror room who have been trapped in the other world under the domain of Coraline's other mother for a long time. Their hearts and souls are stolen by Coraline's other mother who takes their lives away and leaves them in the dark for a long time that is "time beyond reckoning" (100). These ghost children in spite of their grotesque appearance and form assist and comfort Coraline and help her save her parents by giving her hints and significant instructions. Coraline establishes an intimate relationship and thereby breaking the boundary between the two worlds. As a result, the mystery and variety of horrors are diminished and exploited. Additionally, the narrative, plot and motifs in Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* and *Odd and the Frost Giants* make his works a fantasy novel. Both of them offer perspectives regarding dreams, imagination and memory. On the other hand, the main driving force in the two novels is that the fantastic elements are explored through ordinary events in the story. Gaiman's *Odd and the Frost Giants* is a transmission of an indigenous story told from the point of view of a non-indigenous writer. The book draws on Norse mythology with mythical figures and creatures. In the book, Norse mythology characters like Frost Giant, the beautiful goddess Freya, Odin, Loki, and humanity protecting God Thor feature in the story. Though Gaiman is British by birth, he has highlighted Norse indigenous practices, belief, and myth in his works. He skillfully portrays the indigenous practices of the Norse with indigenous themes and characters in his work in order to imply how indigenous people everywhere do not have the same practices and beliefs, even though there exist striking similarities across diverse indigenous people. Joseph Bruchac comments, "Knowledge is not the function of bloodline. Culture is something we learn, not something we're born with….You do not necessarily have to be for example, Lakota to write well about Lakota experience for children" (342).

Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* embodies traits and characteristics of "quest fantasies". According to W. A. Senior:

> The structuring characteristics of quest fantasy is the steeped journey: a series of adventures experienced by the hero and his or her companions that begins with the simplest confrontations and dangers and escalates through more threatening and perilous encounters. The narrative begins as a single thread but often becomes polysemous, as individuals or groups pursue minor quest within the overall framework. Quest fantasies conventionally start in a place of security and stability, and then a disruption from the outside world occurs…Choice is crucial in quest fantasy, so protagonists face several cruxes where their choice determine the fate of many…The quest journey continues across a massive, wild landscape of forest, rivers, mountains, valleys, small village and occasional cities (190).

*The Ocean at the End of the Lane* encapsulates the standard elements of quest fantasy. The author introduces the reluctant, average person as a protagonist. The protagonist in the novel confronts disruptions from the outside world. Left without a choice in his domicile, he triumphantly seeks the aid of his companion Lettie. He experiences a series of adventures as a hero, from confronting simple dangers and soaring into more terrifying encounters. The journey quest occurs in the forest and he faces threats from hungry birds who, according to their version, have "devoured places and worlds and kings and stars" (204). These birds would laugh so loudly that for the protagonist, they sounded like a train approaching. In the novel, Gaiman further explains the importance of companionship, the acquisition of knowledge, the discovery of the self, the crux of choice and action, the rejection of passivity as well as the wonder of the secondary world.

Fantasy literature addresses issues that are not seen outwardly as "it provides not only entertainment but a means to keeping a clear perspective on our required concerns of thought and feelings" (Irwin 187). Fantasy integrates conflicting opinions, feelings and beliefs and it reaffirms and incorporates positive future meaningfully. It is a genre of literature that "cannot be dominated by the logic of instrumental rationality" (Zipes

81). The fantastic proliferates in “current films, in music, psychology, sociology, anthropology, theology…the only thing they do not generate is indifference” (Irwin 85). It is employed in all kinds of popular culture to project “utopian possibilities for developing a humane community in which differences among people are resolved through mutual support” (Zipes 87). Additionally, Jack Zipes stresses that “the fantastic also serves to provide a perpetual critique of the norm that appears to be so pervasive and incongruous that the only hope for spectators, young and old, is laughter” (87). Gaiman’s works pave a way to approach fantasy on an empirical basis. His works assist the readers to abandon preconceptions about reality and highlight new perspectives regarding the diversity of fantasy literature. On the other hand since his works address relevant issues, they become a portal “through which we explore other realities and thus make sense of our own” (Porter 17).

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This chapter shall attempt to explore the relationship between fantasy and childhood in Gaiman's works. While doing so, the concept of the supernatural has been taken into account in a manner that assists the characters in the formation of the self. Childhood and colonization are deliberated in order to perpetuate the manner in which childhood becomes a site of colonization. It will highlight the harsh realities that Gaiman's characters confront and it shall attempt to demonstrate the way in which they seek escape in the form of alternate realities. The inclusion of Gothicism in the chapter generates transformation and it asserts characters' individuality because Gothic is "both an art of haunting and an art of regeneration" (Edmundson 6). Apart from this, Gothicism enables the child characters to gain a sense of purpose and it nurtures them to reconsider and understand their own emotions. EcoGothic has been put into perspective in order to grasp the ecocritical implications that dislodge archetypal binary ideas and negative discourses regarding animality. The chapter will also explore how childhood bears a close connection with the concept of power.

John Locke regards fantasy as a chimera, "whereas for the writer of 1860, the same concepts are being put forward in the name of childhood imagination. Fantasy – the argument anticipates Bruno Bettelheim – is best suited to promote the growth of that 'wonderfully organized instrument' which is the child's mind" (Rose 81). One of the major criticisms of fantasy, according to Peter Hunt is that "it is childish" (3) and it has "been associated with each other, because both are essentially democratic forms-democratized by being outside the solipsistic system of high culture" (3). Whereas, Erica Burman contends that "childhood is thus not outside culture, but is its production, although children are nevertheless addressed as potentially transcending or comprehending such positions" (61, 62). Additionally, children are not "regarded in the essentialist mode as trans-historically and trans-culturally consistent beings, shaped primarily in a deterministic way by biology and brain-development." (Oberstein 2). M. Daphne Kutzer stresses that "fantasy, more than realistic fiction, is often considered to be escapist in the most negative sense of the word, and hence to be devoid of any serious purpose whatsoever" (79) but "in fantastic literature, children's darkest fears and the various taboos implicit in the horror story are portrayed more directly and graphically" (Natov 219). Peter Hunt professes that "there is no reason to suppose that children and fantasy have a natural connection, even if the struggle of imagination and

generic constraints parallels the conflict between common concepts of the child and the adult-the expansive versus the repressed, freedom versus discipline" (3). Neil Gaiman's fantastic narrative encompasses an innovative direction regarding fantasy and childhood. The fantastic narratives in Gaiman's works function as a strategy to explore the child's clarity of thoughts because "the child does not express itself through things, but things through itself. In the child, creativity and subjectivity have not yet celebrated their bold meaning" (Burman 68). Jacqueline Rose professes that there is an urgent need to question the hostility regarding what "the written words implies for childhood" (47) and she argues that "language has gradually progressed into a set of abstractions, and has lost touch with the object, or sentiment, which it was originally intended to express" (47). Rose's arguments become crucial in Gaiman's narrative when he emphasizes the visual image as well as his preoccupation with the fantastic elements. Apart from this, the fantastic narratives in Gaiman's works subside the verbal language and establish fantasy as an idyllic form of language in relation to childhood that serves as a repository for the child characters' experiences. Rosemary Jackson asserts:

> To introduce the fantastic is to replace familiarity, comfort, *das Heimlich*, with estrangement, unease, the uncanny. It is to introduce dark areas, of something completely other and unseen, the spaces outside the limiting frame of the 'human' and 'real', outside the control of the 'word' and of the 'look'. Hence the association of the modern fantastic with the horrific, from Gothic tales of terror to contemporary horror films…Fantasy has always articulated a longing for imaginary unity, for unity in the realm of the imaginary. In this sense, it is inherently idealistic. It expresses a desire for an absolute signified, an absolute meaning (179).

Fantasy can be defined as a narrative combining the presence of the primary and the secondary world which is the real world and the magical or fantastic imagined world (Nikolajeva 142). It is a form of narrative in which the "plots are built around the impossibility of bringing anything back from the magical travel" (142), unlike the fairy-tale hero who brings back "magical objects or helpers from his travels" (142). Irene Eynat-Confino argues that for the existence of fantasy what becomes necessary is the willingness of the readers and the spectators to admit it as an essential part of "human

experience and not merely as an ephemeral flight of fancy" (112). Additionally, she asserts "the fantastic is a representation of that breach into the unsteady ramparts that surround the ever-changing concept of reality, a breach that enables us to comprehend and accept the illogical, the seemingly impossible, and out of ordinary as part of human experience" (112). Gaiman's characters' magical travel rather provides them the license to discover their power because "fantasy cannot be 'free-floating' or entirely original, unless we are prepared to learn a new language and new way of thinking to understand it. It must be understandable in terms of its relationship to, or deviance from, our known world" (Hunt 7). This further makes it conspicuous that Gaiman's fantastic narratives are didactic and have imparted moral lesson for his characters. His child characters at the close of the novels have come to realize the importance of relying on one's own ability to establish a strong sense of self. On the other hand, Gaiman's narratives are instructive which is discernible from the manner in which he has situated the significance of the secondary world. Instead of offering a solution to his characters' quest for answers regarding the meaning of self, the impossible in ordinary life is enriched by the employment of the fantastic and is depicted as the most fundamental part of everyday life. W.R. Irwin stresses:

> Fantasy does not result when the supernatural, however serious rendered, remains a subject matter or a display; nor when it impinges upon ordinary human life and environment without transforming them; nor when it is primarily a means of recommending conduct and values; nor when it is but a projection, even though vivid, from the psychic and emotional constitution of a character. Fantasy results when the supernatural is shown as present and acting of itself because it is real. It brushes aside the established sense of possibility and imposes itself as the center of belief. Because of its concreteness and its intrinsic energy, moreover, the supernatural of the fantasies determines the field of action in which it dominates (155).

Gaiman's *Coraline* presents fantastic events that comprise a process of magical thinking on the part of not only the author but the readers as well. The magical realist narrative is discernible through the appearance of a ghost in his narrative and Coraline's other mother and other father who resemble her real father and her real mother. Although

their appearance and existence may be magical their presence brought Coraline to the site of chivalry, making Coraline understand everyday reality and the physical necessities that accompany it. By juxtaposing Coraline's journey behind the old door, and her own house the textile of everyday life is sewed together to expose the marvelous and the real. Coraline's close magical connection is portrayed when her mother takes her into the nearest large town to buy her clothes for school. She encounters aliens who come down from outer space with ray guns and is kidnapped by them. She fools them by wearing a wig and laughs in a foreign accent and eventually escapes from them. Coraline's magical connection with the universe becomes part of her which reorients her ability to identify as "there were all sorts of remarkable things in there she'd never seen before: wind-up angels…books with pictures that writhed and crawled and shimmered; little dinosaurs skulls that chattered their teeth as she passed" (36). Through the narration of magical events in the story, it is conspicuous that magic becomes part of Coraline's self. Besides, it is evident that "magic cut across national and linguistic boundaries, gender, class, age and social class and mores, un/natural boundaries of life and death,…the territories of this world and the next…and belongs as a birthright to all peoples" (Sieber 171). The employment of magic realism in the novella manifests the nature of reality because there is no objective reality and reality in the novel is context bound. Gaiman demonstrates how everything is constituted by a relation to other things and he explores how analysis cannot be complete or final. *Odd and the Frost Giants* employs fantastic elements that are drawn from myth and it arouses a sense of wonder and excitement along with the upsurge of the supernatural into the natural. The supernatural becomes a familiar daily experience for Odd, who possesses the ability to perceive the invisible. The presence of the Mimir's Well elevates the manner in which the visible is not only the truth that pervades Odd. The reflection in the water surface overshadows Odd's emotions and it explores the mystery that is embedded in the visible and invisible self of Odd. At the outset of the story, the narrator says, "he had no plans, other than a general determination never to return to the village" (16). As the plot of the story progresses and after reaching the culmination of the story readers could discern how Odd's determination never to return to the village has vanished with the passage of time. Odd derives psychological, mental and physical growth from his engagement with the mythical characters. His encounter with the mythical creatures becomes a reality, and not just a mere dream. On the other hand, the inclusion of magic and mythical characters

intensify and enhance the space for recognition that becomes necessary for healing and restoring a sense of harmony. Likewise, in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, apart from the protagonist who strives to search for his selfhood, the narrative explores the protagonist's identification with the supernatural elements. The protagonist says, "I heard a sound, a soft, raggedy, flapping sound. The grey cloth began to detach themselves from the ceiling…but not in a straight line. They fell towards us, from all over the room, as if we were magnets, pulling them towards our bodies" (158). The protagonist's close connection with magic is narrated in the novel and this has enriched the narrative by reconstructing the fragmented psyche of the unnamed protagonist. The protagonist's involvement with the magical elements becomes a "carnivalistic contact" (Bakhtin 123). Mikhail Bakhtin in his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, has claimed:

> Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, *a new mode of interrelationship* between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchal relationships of noncarnival life. The behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchal positions (social, estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in noncarnival life, and thus from the vantage point of noncarnival life become eccentric and inappropriate (123).

The protagonist's engagement with magical events is a transitory experience which is indeed a total reversal of rules and restrictions imposed upon him. The inclusion of magical narrative in the novel invokes the protagonist's thoughtfulness and it heightens the vivacity of ordinary life. Ginnie Hempstock's awareness regarding the protagonist being pushed in the water by his father without being told makes the protagonist bewildered. The magical procurement of the protagonist's toothbrush, the seamless dressing gown of the protagonist, the sudden healing of the tiny hole in the protagonist's foot as if it had never been there signified the manner in which the novel weaves the supernatural. Additionally, it manifests the protagonist's ability to embody the ordinary and the extraordinary. Most importantly, magic bestows the protagonist with the power to overcome the authority of adults and finally resolves his fear. Vladimir Solovyov says, "In genuine fantastic, there is always the external and formal possibility

of a simple explanation of phenomenon, but at the same time this explanation is completely stripped of internal probability" (Todorov 26). *The Graveyard Book* is densely populated with supernatural characters in which the boundary between the living and the dead is unraveled. The invisible truth is made visible in the novel when magic destines the destiny of both the human along with the supernatural characters. Jack Tar professes to Bod the reason for their killing of Bod's family. There has been a prophecy which foretold the existence of a child who would become a link between the living and the dead. The child proves to be a deadly threat to the order, which is the reason why they send the best of all the Jacks to deal with Bod and his family. However, Jack Frost fails to carry out this mission. Through this instance, it is discernible that Gaiman raises doubts, hesitation, and constant state of suspense that becomes an important landmark in which magic becomes part of Bod's experience. Besides, the inclusion of the marvelous in the ordinary domestic life of the protagonist depicts how everyday experience is weaved by constant uncertainty and as Jan Hokenson claims, "those clichés of the fantastic, the monster and the miracle, perhaps enforce our most disturbing engagement with all that lies beyond human reason and comprehension, in both our outer and inner worlds" (Confino 124).

Childhood stands as a crucial and debatable issue in Neil Gaiman's works. The manner in which childhood is portrayed in his works deviates away from the stereotypical assumptions concerning childhood. Generally, childhood is often associated with purity, innocence and most importantly, an important stage in the formation of the adult. The concept of childhood and the child "are cultural myths replicated and reinvented through representational practices of history, science, literature, material culture, woven in, and by, discourses, or discursive traditions" (Morgado 204). Chris Jenks claims that the status of childhood is marked by certain institutional forms such as "families, nurseries, schools and clinics, all agencies specifically designed and established to process the child as a uniform entity" (5). She further stresses that childhood is to be perceived "as a social construct" (7) that varies from society to society and time that is eventually "incorporated within the social structure and thus manifested through and formative of certain typical forms of conduct. Childhood then always relates to a particular cultural setting" (7). Oberstein stresses:

> Childhood and children, are seen primarily as being constituted by, and constituting, sets of meanings in language, for instance of innocence or of uninhibited appetite, of being totally controlled or completely anarchic; purely imitative or truly original; freely sexual or without any sexuality at all. As Allison James and Alan Prout formulate this: childhood is to be understood as a social construction. That is, the institution of childhood provides an interpretive frame for understanding the early years of human life (2).

One of the peculiar subjects that remain necessary to be denoted is the idea with which Gaiman's child constitute the marginalized group. The four novels in focus represent the voice of the marginalized. Besides, they have explored the manner in which the child is stereotyped. Stereotyping implies characterization which is "a method of representation whereby a set of features of an entire collective or group (ethnic, community, social, racial, etc.) are identified and then ascribed to every member of the group" (Pramod 53). Homi Bhabha claims that stereotype is a "major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', and already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (94). This statement remains pivotal in Gaiman's narrative and is basically what his characters fight against. According to Roni Natov:

> In the best recent literature for children, the darker sides of childhood experience are conveyed with a depth of emotional expression. However, the vision at the heart of each story is not exclusive of hope, even in the portrayal of the darkest, often imaginable pain that is, horrifyingly enough, the truth of some children's lives. Even in writing about incest, poverty, bigotry, and other trauma, the thrust is toward achieving balance. The experience must be recounted with the unflinching honesty that serves to witness and acknowledge the child's experience...The story should also include a kind of chronicle of how one survives—and further, an indication of what one retrieves from such a painful experience (220).

In Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, Scarlett's proclamation regarding a boy named Nobody living in the graveyard is taken unconcernedly. Her father responds "imaginary friends were a common phenomenon at that age, and nothing at all to be concerned about" (37). Her experience is evaluated as unreliable and normal for her age, which reflects the stereotypical assumptions framed by her parents. In her analysis of J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan Jacqueline Rose claims that "the innocence of *Peter Pan* is not, therefore, just the innocence of a boy child: it is also, and perhaps more centrally, the innocence of a cultural phenomenon which cannot be explained other than in terms of individual daring and/or magic" (91). When Scarlett is denied the liberty and skills to introspect differences and by failing to earn the trust from her parents, she becomes the marginalized subject. At the same time, she becomes the constructed and stereotyped child who is forced to represent what Jacqueline Rose terms "the innocence of cultural phenomenon" (91). Additionally, the formation of a normal childhood and the normal child is one of the examples of a "colonialist construct" (Cannella and Viruru 78). According to Cannella and Viruru:

> Childhood is labeled normal or abnormal, as if there is a particular way of passing through the early years of life. Judgment and control over those who are younger is legitimated in the name of "normality". Both the normal and the abnormal are believed to be understood (even before they are born) and are thus controlled and limited (78).

In order to overcome and dismiss the stereotypical traits and characteristics of the child, Gaiman has weaved the cordial relationships, unrelenting trust and the ability to appreciate amongst the child characters in *The Graveyard Book*. This is discernible when Scarlett professes to Bod, "You're brave. You are the bravest person I know, and you are my friend. I don't care if you are imaginary" (53). The trust and faith that has existed between Bod and Scarlett throughout the novel indicate that they have made attempts to acknowledge each other as well as to generate harmony. *Coraline* fuses the everyday life with the fantastic in which the author has represented the voice of the marginalized through the character of the protagonist who is denied independence and is at times propelled to remain conventional. Coraline's mother's refusal to buy her "Day-Glo green gloves" (29) and her mother's preference "to buy white socks, navy-blue school underpants, four grey blouses, and a dark grey skirts" (29) validates her

mediocre condition. When Coraline pleas before her mother, "*everybody* at school's got grey blouses and everything. *Nobody's* got green gloves I could be the only one" (29) she attempts to assert her individuality. Her ardent inclination to be unique is discouraged by her mother which reflects that Coraline's fluidity of thoughts, feelings, spontaneity and sense of personal authenticity is not encouraged. Gaiman's works unravel certain deep-seated ideas of childhood. His works revolve not only around children necessarily but rather something about the qualities of childhood attributed by the adult. Coraline tells Miss Spink and Miss Forcible that her parents are missing, but they consider her case to be silly and do not pay heed to it. Later on, Coraline calls the police since that is the only option left for her. Similarly, like Miss Forcible and Miss Spink's reaction, the local policeman deemed it as ridiculous and impractical for a child to launch a complaint to the police. He casually tells her that she is trapped in her dreams and instead suggests, "You ask your mother to make you a big old mug of hot chocolate, and then give you a great big old hug. There is nothing like hot chocolate and a hug for making the nightmare go away" (65). Sara Thornton remarks that "the child is seen as sacred object, outside of the market and associated with regret, nostalgia and desire-always out of reach but always there as a possibility of gratification, watched from afar" (131). Coraline is disappointed by the answer she has received from the policeman. The suggestion provided by the police is ironic because after being told that her parents are missing she is in a desperate situation to find her parents and he tells her to insist that her mother prepares a mug of hot chocolate. Coraline "tried really extra hard to sound like an adult might sound, to make him take her seriously" (65) but it turns out to be a fiasco. She could sense the smile in the policeman's voice which makes her more disappointed. For her, the complaint she has attempted to launch is a "crime" (64) whereas for the police it is devoid of a practical approach. Her responsibility as a child remains unacknowledged and becomes a figure who is continuously underestimated. For Miss Forcible, Miss Spink and the policeman, Coraline is a distant being and a specimen to be ignored and observed without any involvement of seriousness. She represents the marginalized character and occupies the base and is not even allowed the tiniest taste of freedom. Even though Coraline is empowered through her creative imagination, she is still wholly at an adult's will, which makes her the victim of the stereotyped child.

R.J.C. Young stresses that colonial discourse does not necessarily entail the manner in which colonialism can be perceived. Rather, "it does provide a common ground through which many disciplines can work" (Cannella and Viruru 90). On the other hand, "colonial discourse analysis can bring to the forefront the argument that colonialism was not just an economic or military activity, or notions like intellectual colonization" (90). The segments of colonialism are discernible through the portrayal of childhood in Neil Gaiman's *The Ocean at The End of The Lane*. The protagonist says:

> At home, my father ate all the most burnt pieces of toast. 'Yum! He'd say, and 'Charcoal! Good for you!' and Burnt toast! My favorite!' and he'd eat it all up When I was much older, he confessed to me that he had never liked burnt toast, had only eaten it to prevent it from going to waste, and from a fraction of a moment, my entire childhood felt like a lie: it was as if one of the pillars of belief that my world had been built upon the crumbled into dry sand (24).

The protagonist expresses the unpleasant site of his childhood and expresses his dissatisfaction when he compares his childhood with a lie. His sense of dissatisfaction begins to emerge gradually as the plot of the novel progresses. The protagonist claims that he would sometimes envy "fictional children for the cleanness of their lives" (88). The statement indicates the darker side of his childhood experience which is solely an in-depth emotional expression. Apart from this, the protagonist declares that he is not satisfied as a child and confesses that he lives in books more than he lives anywhere else. The violent scene and abusive language explore the injustice inflicted upon him by Ursula Monkton, "I need the boy safe. I promised I'd keep him in the attic…But you, little farm girl…I ought to turn you inside out…with your eyes staring forever at the darkness inside yourself. I can do that" (159). The manner in which Ursula threatens Lettie and the protagonist destabilizes the common notion of childhood as a safe and stable place. Ursula's inclination to lock up the protagonist in the attic symbolizes her insistence to make him insignificant. By attempting to confine him in the attic and torment Lettie, Ursula Monkton is attempting to deny their existence. The protagonist admits his powerlessness as a child when he says, "Ursula Monkton…was power incarnate, standing in the crackling air. She was the storm, she was the lightning, she was the adult world with all its power and all its secrets and all its foolish cruelty"

(114). Cannella and Viruru claim that the division of the child from adult aligns with Cartesian thought that differentiates "mind from matter as an actual representation of physical material difference (e.g.,small/large) and the representation of difference created through mind…innocent/knowledgeable, dependent/independent, savage/civilized" (66). The protagonist's otherness as a child becomes noticeable when he clamors to find space. He is depicted as the other and is compelled to envelop a world filled with fear, insecurity and anger. By and large, he is a creature who is subsequently forced to embrace a condition that has paralyzed him and he is restricted from making sense of the events he has witnessed. This is reflected when he is in a dilemma as to whether he should tell his parents when a shilling gets stuck in his throat. Having learned how he is incapable to earn the thrust of adults and with his firm conviction that he would not be believed makes him the subject of the marginalized. Margarida Morgado stresses:

> Children are notorious for their lack of self- representation in culture. This has been discursively accounted for a political issue only seldom challenged–children occupy a minority status in society, they have a lesser domain of the linguistic skills necessary to operate as a voice and to be heard in society; and they experience a non-adult relation between living and narrating: children live their experiences as the immediate narration of those experiences (206).

In Gaiman's *Odd and the Frost Giants*, Odd is depicted by the author as a character who is marginalized as a child. Odd's mother marries Fat Efred, who is affable only when he does not drink so "he had no time for a crippled stepson, so Odd spent more and more time out in the great woods" (9). The injustice inflicted upon him is revealed by the author through his early exile. Odd experiences a state of loss at an early age in which isolation becomes the governing state of his life. He represents the hyperbolic figure of the abused child because "the vast majority of child abusers are parents, step-parents, siblings or trusted kin" (Jenks 91). Additionally, Jenks remarks, "it is not public parks and crawling cars that are the primary source of threat to the child, but the family" (91). Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* states:

> Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the orient---dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (3).

Orientalism, in Neil Gaiman's novels, becomes fairly obvious in his child characters, who are stereotyped and are constructed as being unable to speak for themselves. Likewise, in *Odd and the Frost Giants*, Odd is unable to challenge the authority of his stepfather. Odd's opportunity to formulate a deep understanding of his self is destroyed. He is the victim of the marginalized and embodies a state of loss, and an ultimate betrayal that leaves him powerless. Being discouraged from forming a cordial relationship with his mother, and from the bond that will make him more influential, he represents the other who is forced to embrace a situation that does not suit with his fine sensation. Gaiman's works which have been selected for the study have portrayed the dynamics in which childhood is constructed and marginalized. The betrayal of hope, alienation and isolation experienced by the characters and the manner in which a child is stereotyped validate how childhood can be scrutinized as a colonizing agent. On the other hand, the voice of the other or the voice of the children is reflective of colonizing discourses as well as the resulting power relations propounded by Edward Said. Gaiman's works explore the urgent need to discard the monolithic category of childhood and he instead gears his readers to establish pluralistic concepts of childhood.

Sara Thornton claims that "the child is seen to be the object of speech, the object of the gaze in a process of adult self-definition in which the child is the other, the inessential, the receiver of labels" (129). Margarida Morgado says:

> The language of children does not lend itself exclusively linguistic analysis…it demands varied tools of analysis across the boundaries of disciplines of knowledge. There are silent languages of fictional children which signal not only their presence as different from the adult but also the need to identify alternative frameworks of meaning where there is the possibility of understanding the child from within. Departing from Julia

> Kristeva's notion that there is a semiotic pre-verbal language, which she considers the easiest access-route to child experience and feeling, one may easily become aware that there is something which pre-exists language, several 'silent areas' through which children communicate: body gestures, play, drawing, songs. All these areas are researched in connection to children, but are seldom accepted on the same level as verbal language (212).

The employment of fantastic narrative in Gaiman's works mirrors the painful experience undergone by children, who are forbidden from cultivating their individuality. Tzvetan Todorov says that the fantastic "seems to be located on the frontiers of two genres, the marvelous and the uncanny, rather than to be an autonomous genre. One of the great periods of supernatural literature, that of the Gothic novel, seems to confirm this observation" (41). It is interesting to note by making his characters crawl through the darkness, the Gothic in Gaiman's works provide an outlet for the characters' feelings. Rosemary Jackson asserts that fantasy "can be traced back to ancient myths, legends, folklore, carnival art. But its more immediate roots lie in that literature of unreason and terror which has been designated Gothic" (97). At the same time, it emerges into a literary form that is:

> Capable of more radical interrogation of social interrogation, no longer simply making up for a society's lacks. It is progressively turned inwards to concern itself with psychological problems, used to dramatize uncertainty and conflicts of the individual subject in relation to a different social situation. The subject is no longer confident about appropriating or perceiving a material world. Gothic narrates this epistemological confusion: it expresses and examines personal disorder, opposing fiction's classical unities (of time, space, unified character) with an apprehension of partiality and relativity of meaning (97).

Childhood, as Michael Howarth emphasizes "is not a skin that one sheds and then forgets" (12) and it is not a stage that ends before adulthood begins. Gothicism serves as a significant genre because it deals with the emotions and feelings that remain crucial for promoting psychoanalytic discussion and reading. The genre proves to be

crucial especially in the context of children's literature "because children themselves often displayed heightened levels of emotions as they try to figure out who they are and their place in the world" (12). Additionally, the Gothic tradition according to James Twitchell "has always revolved around concepts and images of transformation-shape changing-whether psychological, physical, or both" (Magistrale 27) and it "highlights characters who are undergoing identity transitions and transmogrifications" (28). Besides the implication of the Gothic is defined as:

> Rather than seeing the Gothic as an anomalous intrusion into their lives from some external and alien force, the children in many contemporary Gothic novels court their dark side, and own it as an aspect of the self. They don't nurse any illusion that they are innocent victims in the drama in which they find themselves (Anna Jackson et.al 16).

The physical description of the house at the outset of Gaiman's *Coraline* foretells and directs the gloomy atmosphere in the story: "It was a very old house- it had an attic under the roof and a cellar under the ground and an overgrown garden with huge old trees in it" (3). The antipastoral which can be treated as the Gothic "constructs a landscape of fear…it is about the dislocation of childhood, children served from the world of adults, or the child part of the adult from a more acceptable self" (Natov 159). The effect of the Gothic is that "it warns of the dangers mysteriously close to even the most familiar places. It reminds us that the world is not safe. It challenges the pastoral myths of childhood, replacing these with myths of darkness drawing down" (Townshend 21). Besides, "they challenge us to look boldly into this world's underbelly, to know that the underworld is not simply a metaphor, to take the hauntedness of our lives as an opportunity for strength-the strength to dream strong dreams, to capture the energy of the Gothic villain" (21). As noted earlier in Gaiman's *Coraline*, the Gothic element becomes a significant part of the narrative. The employment of Gothic narrative in the novel possesses an effect of alienation for the protagonist. The inclusion of the Gothic element in the story becomes a powerful symbol of injustice and serves as a means of conveying the underlying horrors of Coraline's everyday experience. At the outset of the novel, the garden of Coraline's new home bears an unpleasant description: "It was a big garden: at the very back was an old tennis court, but no one in the house played tennis and the fence around the court has

holes in it and the net had mostly rotted away" (5). Apart from this, "there was an old rose garden filled with "stunned, flyblown rose bushes: there was a rockery that was all rocks: There was a fairy ring, made of squidgy brown toadstools which smelled dreadful if you accidentally trod on them" (5). The grotesque description of the garden possesses symbolic significance which is not merely the literary technique of the narrative. It is ambiguous and is a reliable way of knowing the psyche of Coraline. The "stunned flyblown rose bushes" (5) and "a rockery that was all rocks" (5) imparts the internal conflict Coraline undergoes, which is intensified through the grotesque images. The disintegrated self and the confusion are generated which calls for incessant questioning in order to form an authentic self. The holes in the fence around the court that has almost rotted is thus a form of coherent response for the readers to what Coraline currently endures. Besides, it reflects the manner in which certain circumstances have not rendered it possible for Coraline to embrace her right to identify herself. A peep into the grotesque images and symbols signifies her failure to dislodge the prevailing stereotypes imposed upon her. The dreadful smell of the toadstools becomes extremely relevant because it indicates her inability to form distance between her instinct and the snobbish superiority of the adult characters who hinder her from exploring her surroundings. The continual horrors of domination are evident when Coraline repeatedly exclaims that she wants to explore:

> She glanced at the mirror at the end of the hall. For a moment it clouded over, and it seemed to her that faces swam in the glass, indistinct and shapeless, and then the faces were gone, and there was nothing in the mirror but a girl who was small for her age holding something that glowed gently, like a green coal.
>
> Coraline looked down at her hand, surprised: it was just a pebble with a hole in it, a nondescript brown stone. Then she looked back into the mirror where the stone glimmered like an emerald. A trial of green fire blew from the stone in the mirror, and drifted toward Coraline's bedroom (113, 114).

With the assistance of Gothic settings in the narrative, Gaiman builds the malevolent mode of life. It foreshadows the conflict that has intervened between Coraline and her journey towards self-realization. The image in the mirror that is

clouded, "indistinct and shapeless" (113) that has rapidly vanished denotes a dreadful warning against dependency. The terror she has experienced in the mirror is in conjunction with the various fragments Coraline exhibits. Certainly, Coraline realises that she is a victim of her own internal weakness whose wisdom is forbidden. Her inability to perceive the image immediately directs the readers that she has intruded in attempting to assert her individuality. Ultimately her engagement with the image in the mirror is a crucial moment of discovery. She unravels the former shapeless and bitter image and perceives a brighter image that glimmers like an emerald. The appearance of the shapeless and clouded image and the emergence of an image that shines like an emerald and the green fire blowing erase her fear. At the same time, it reveals the way in which Coraline is responsible for finding her own destiny. Rather than to put herself on trial, she creates an innovative way of finding selfhood through the power she possesses. She labours her creativity and botches the disruptions that occur in the process of forming selfhood instead of merely embracing it. Her inclination to experience the unpleasant images, sites and scenes by and large firmly indicates her perseverance in everything she undertakes. Her exploration suggests her wish to annihilate such stumbling blocks and her attempt to purify all the inner and outer horrors that intrude in the formation of selfhood. Thus, the author does not reduce the novel to a mere tale of horror. He has insisted on the suggestiveness of the Gothic narrative and makes Coraline swim with certainty and most importantly it offers her infinite number of selves. Bruno Bettelheim asserts:

> Gaining a secure understanding of what the meaning of one's life may or ought to be-this what constitutes having attained psychological maturity…At each age we must seek, and must be able to find, some modicum of meaning congruent with how our minds and understanding have already developed (3).

*The Ocean at the End of the Lane* depicts a character who is vulnerable to his powerlessness, but soon discovers a new source of vitality. The unnamed protagonist in the novel is a victim of violence, fear, anger, injustice and isolation whose childhood is filled with anger and resentment. A majority of the dark pastoral settings in the novel imparts complexity and becomes a symbolic representation of myriad frustrations that the protagonist encounters. The protagonist utters:

> I knew only that the Hempstocks' farm was at the end of my lane, but I was lost in the dark field, and the thunderclouds had lowered, and the night was so dark, and it was still raining, even it was not raining hard yet, and now my imagination filled with darkness with wolves and ghosts. I wanted to stop imagining, to stop thinking but I could not (107).

The grotesque setting in the novel is a response to the protagonist's fear and isolation because Gothicism, as Linda Bayer-Berenbaum claims, is "an intensification of consciousness, and expansion of reality, and a confrontation with evil" (Howarth 92). The experience of being lost in the dark field enveloped with darkness denotes the protagonist's inability to succumb to the fear and the injustice imposed upon him. The protagonist's inability to discontinue his bleak thoughts illuminates his confusing condition whose emotional life is shattered. The protagonist claims:

> I have dreamt of that song, of the strange words to that simple rhyme-song, and on several occasions have understood what she was saying, in my dreams. In those dreams I spoke that language too, the first language, and I had dominion over the nature of all that was real…In my dreams I have used that language to heal the sick and to fly; once I dreamed I kept a perfect little bed and breakfast by the seaside, and to everyone who came to stay with me I would say, in that tongue, 'Be whole,' and they would become whole, not be broken people, not any longer, because I had spoken the language of shaping (56, 57).

The attitude and assumption of the protagonist have a profound implication. The channel to accomplish the protagonist's desire is depicted to be attainable through a dream. The dream of the protagonist further bears healing power and it becomes a delightful exercise because "it cures sadness by joy, worry by hope…hatred by love and friendliness, and fear by courage and confidence; it appeases doubt by conviction and firm belief, and vain expectation by realization (Freud 89). The process of dreaming in the novel becomes a form of escapism in which the protagonist performs the task of a philanthropist. On the other hand, speaking the language of shaping to heal the sick and fly inadvertently signifies his passive experience. He remains submissive and battles with his monotonous life carried out by rigid restrictions. The Gothic atmosphere in the

novel is consequential as it can yield a sense of fear and anxiety as "these emotions spark a questioning and self-reflection process that helps to guide children through various psychological landscapes as they attempt to resolve their own individual crises" (Howarth 24). The protagonist's arbitrary state is reflected while attempting to access his individuality by seeking solace from his dreams. The actual visible world has debarred him from communicating successfully with Lettie Hempstock. Hence, the only channel to respond to his sentiment and instinct is to stay true to the basic quality of his dreams. With reference to the situation denoted above, the indication of escapism is precise. By escaping into his dreams the protagonist discovers that virtues are hidden resources within himself. Gaiman's employment of the graveyard in *The Graveyard Book* heightens the atmosphere of the Gothic in the novel. Gothicism aids the protagonist to triumph over his fear. James M. Keech says:

> One of these common elements is the particular quality of the Gothic response of fear, a fear characterized by a necessary presentiment of a somewhat vague but nevertheless real evil. It is a fear of shadows and unseen dangers in the night. Explicitness runs counter to its effectiveness, for Gothic fear is not so much what is seen but what is sensed beyond sight (132).

Bod's contact with the grotesque characters and the atmosphere produces self-realization which makes him earn and understand the aspect of his future that lies ahead. At the climax of the novel, Bod utters contradictory statement when compared with his earlier proclamation that he does not need more lesson beyond what he learns in the graveyard. He boldly confesses to Silas, "I want to see life. I want to hold it in my hands. I want to leave a footprint on a sand of the desert island. I want to play football with people. I want, he said, and then paused and he thought. I want *everything*" (286). The speech uttered by Bod proves to be consequential which bears an underlying connotation with Bod's self. On the other hand, it manifests the problem of identification Bod experiences as Gothicism is "fundamentally concerned with the boundaries of the self: What distinguishes the me from the not-me" (Horner and Zlosnik 72). Although Bod reveals how the graveyard inhabitants provide him with all the requirements in life he is incapable of remaining true to his former thought. He starts to exhibit a distinct idea of life which gives him a sense of challenge and broader vision.

The concept of escapism is discernible in Neil Gaiman's works which are not merely "a literary trope or a psychological escapist solution to existential dilemmas" (Confino 125). Characters escape into the marvelous world which has provided them with the opportunity to reflect and sketch their existing problems. Escape in Neil Gaiman's works is denoted in the forms of dreams, magic, imagination, and the marvelous journey characters undertake. Escapism in Gaiman's works encapsulates significant implication because it serves as a manifesto to express whatever that is muted, suppressed and compromised. Additionally, one of the frequent traits attributed to fantasy is escapism. Jack Zipes denotes:

> The fantastic is frequently employed in all forms of popular culture to project utopian possibilities for developing a humane community in which difference among people are resolved through mutual support, the fantastic also serves to provide a persistent critique of the norm that appears to be so perverse and incongruous that the only hope for spectators, young and old, is laughter…a laughter that does not necessarily provide relief or hope for a better world (87).

Gaiman's works are enriched with the interconnection between fantasy and escapism. Through the assistance of fantasy and escapism into the marvelous world, characters are capable of alteration and growth. Eric S. Rabkin says, "Boredom is one of the prisons of the mind. The fantastic offers escape from the prison" (42). Escape literature includes adventure stories, detective stories, tales of fantasy. It incorporates pornography, western science, fiction which are read for pleasure by adults. Escape literature according to the conventional belief has a higher purpose rather than to muse (44). According to Rabkin, "Escape in literature is a fantastical reversal, and therefore not a surrender to chaos" (45). He claims that in the literature of the fantastic, escape is a channel of exploring "an unknown land, a land which is the underside of the mind of man" (45). Neil Gaiman unravels the stereotypical assumptions about fantasy which is often labeled as mere escapism. The form of escapism depicted in his works is rather a construction of a world which is devoid of confinement and is indeed an examination of uncharted territory. There are additional tasks and intentions in exploring an unknown land besides being entertained and being amused. Amusements can be considered as one of the preconceived notions which are automatically associated with fantasy

because of characters' unfathomable participation in the fantastic. Kathryn Hume stresses on the efficiency of fantasy, "Like dream images they can condense several problems or ideas…the very condensation of fantasy images, their ability to resonate with different emotional needs…gives fantasy a power and effectiveness" (191). David Del Principe asserts:

> An EcoGothic approach poses a challenge to a familiar gothic subject – nature–taking a nonanthropocentric position to reconsider the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear…EcoGothic examines the construction of the Gothic body–unhuman, nonhuman, transhuman, posthuman, or hybrid-through a mere inclusive lens, asking how it can be more meaningfully understood as a site of articulation for environmental and species identity.In contemporary society, the EcoGothic serves to give voice to ingrained biases and a mounting ecophobia- fears stemming from human's precarious relationship with all that is nonhuman (1).

The fantastic narrative in Gaiman's works generates the EcoGothic subject which serves as an important channel in understanding and interacting with the environment and all forms of life. Animals along with human characters populate Gaiman's *Coraline* and the presence of inhuman characters do not merely bear a moral purpose, it rather bears a strong connotation with the issue of race. In *Coraline*, there are certain strange inhuman characters namely dog-bats, aliens, rats, mice, black cat, black Scottie dog. Gaiman's book depicts a world of fantastic diversity in many ways with the presence of inhuman characters in the same world. The diversity of his characters bring uniformity which appears to be a raceless society, which is devoid of racism and discrimination. In the story, the black Scottie dog plays an important role in the process of social exchange, "lets see your ticket: it said gruffy…That's what I said. Ticket. I haven't got all day, you know. You cannot watch the show without a ticket" (48). The necessity of the ticket in order to watch the show represents the scene of life in a rapidly expanding fragmented society. When Coraline admits to the black Scottie dog that she does not have a ticket, the dog picks up the torch in its mouth and proceeds towards the dark and shows her the empty seat. In the story, money no longer becomes an inherent worth. It is conspicuous that transformation occurs not just at the level of the plot but also in Gaiman's

presentation of race. Gaiman consistently modifies his readers' perception of people, relationship and facts. When Coraline narrates her story, she associates the heroic deeds of her father with a rhino. By associating the heroic deeds of her father with the figure of a rhino, Gaiman prompts his readers to evaluate his cherished ideas about unity of culture, race as well as personal relationships. Gaiman has highlighted how Coraline and the cat attempt to build close relationships and unity with each other, "We could be friends, you know, said Coraline…We could be rare specimens of an exotic breed of African dancing elephants, said the cat" (45). Gaiman uses highly figurative language to engage the readers into imagining a picture of contemporary society which is inflicted with atrocities. For the cat, the idea of establishing friendship between them would be unusual because "racial space is also more globalized today, with the international movement of labour and immigration creating new racial identities" (Nayar, "*Postcolonial*" 9). The figurative language is sarcastic indeed because the tone of the dialogue is filled with sarcasm and mockery. It highlights society's refusal to participate in the creation of peace and unity that showcases that racism is still rampant today. Viewing this aspect from another dimension, the conversation which takes place between Coraline and the cat mirrors the alienated and fragmented society, one in which race defines a person's identity at large. The presence of inhuman characters in the story evokes changes in the attitudes and behavior of the protagonist. Coraline says, "The air became alive with dog-bats" (Gaiman 121). Coraline's view of the dog bats echoes Coraline's ardent desire to form a relationship with the inhuman characters. The dog bats make the life of Coraline lively, they flap and flutter about her but they do not have any intention to hurt her. By depicting the congenial relationship that flourishes between Coraline and the dog-bats, the gap that exists between human beings and inhuman characters are unraveled. The actual encounter between the two opposite characters depicts how Gaiman unravels cruelty, class and ethnic hatred and discrimination. Although the other world seems to be the shadow of the real world, it actually represents a world devoid of racial discrimination and prejudice. Similarly, in Gaiman's *Odd and The Frost Giants*, the fusion of the human and inhuman characters is discernible throughout the narrative. Imma Ferri-Miralles remarks:

> Gothic criticism has traditionally leaned more towards an anthropocentrism, engaging with discourses of the self and the

> fragmentation of the self, often experimenting with the trope of the animal, linked at the same time to the beast and ultimately to the monster. Ecocriticism can help to shift this perspective and broaden it to redefine the sometimes negative discourses about animality. Additionally, it can enrich discourses about the self with the inclusion of the ecocritical paradigm of place and the added social dimension of ecocriticism's 'theoretical paradigms that help to critically reinvigorate debate about the class, gender and national identities that inhere within representations of the landscape' (318).

The fox, the eagle, the bird and the bear in the story assist Odd. The narrator says, "If Odd slowed down, if the terrain was too difficult, if the boy got tired, then the fox would simply wait patiently at the top of the nearest rise until Odd was ready, and then its tail would go up, and it would flicker forward into the snow" (18). In the book, the cordial relationship between the protagonist and the inhuman characters including the gratitude generated by Odd are stressed by the author. Chapter 3 of the book which is titled, "The Night Conversation", reveals the peaceful existence between the human and inhuman characters. Odd thinks that the side of the salmon would suffice him for a week, but he soon learns that his companions eat salmon too. Hence, Odd thinks that feeding them is the only thing he could do to express his gratitude to them. They eat until it is gone, although the salmon does not quench the hunger of the fox and the bear. In addition to this, the act of storytelling has imparted a close connection between the characters. It reinforces the bond between them and everyone becomes an active listener. The individualized voices call attention to the rich range of oral tradition. Moreover, it sustains the characters' questioning spirit and it becomes the foundation for an artistic enterprise. The individualized voices that emanate from the story humanize and intensify unity among them that further retrieves their consciousness. Additionally, the wide range of voices unravels the gap between the human and the inhuman characters. It emphasizes the underlying bond of sympathy and it eventually links the split that is explicitly based on race and class. Terry Gifford claims that the versatility of the pastoral that erases "tension and contradiction", "country and city", "art and nature", "the human and the non-human", "our social and our inner selves", "our masculine and our feminine selves" is true of the green world in children's

literature (Natov 2). Odd's journey through the woods, the bird that circles high overhead, the mournful bellow greeting him, the honey that oozes down from his throat and most importantly his companionship with the animals in the forest maintain an idyllic atmosphere. Lisa Kroger states that a forest is "a unique space in the Gothic as it represents neither the church-dominated convent nor the aristocratic power struggle found within the castle" (16). Nature, in the novel, assists Odd with infinite possibilities and it makes him overcome his earlier state of loss. The dark pastoral fantasy turns despair into hope and Odd's consciousness expands and it helps him reconcile with the opposite. What becomes salient in Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* is the manner in which Gaiman explores anti-racist sentiments in between the narratives. Unlike the colonialist who attempts to "exert control through the process of claiming, studying, and renaming the environment" (Adams 24) the protagonist seeks communion with nature and builds environmental stewardship:

> There was a strange scent in the air, sharp and floral. Bod followed it up the hill to the Egyptian Walk, where the winter ivy hung in green tumbles, an evergreen tangle that hid the mock-Egyptian walls and statues and hieroglyphs.
>
> The perfume was heaviest there, and for a moment Bod wondered of snow might have fallen, for there were white clusters on the greenery. Bod examined a cluster more closely. It was made of small five-petalled flowers, and he had just put his head in to sniff the perfume (Gaiman 140).

The pristine external scene of Egyptian Walk which Bod visits frequently functions as an atavistic pastoral vision of nature. The creative literary expression lends ethical orientation which heightens Bod's consciousness gradually. It connects him to nature and thereby it eschews him from viewing non-human characters as alien. The labyrinthine description of the Egyptian Walk entices Bod. It entails and espouses a liberation for him and it emphasizes Bod's ardent attachment with the sights and sounds of nature. Gaiman's intention to extend the spectrum of nature's voices are conspicuous that automatically imparts racial and ethnic inclusiveness and diversity. The statement deviates from the abuse and environmental destruction propelled by colonialist and

apartheid policies of land use. The narrative inscribes nature that soothes Bod from the restrictions that are placed on him. At the same time, the organic life of the winter ivy with its evergreen quality advances Bod's interest to move forward. Gaiman's Bod is raised by werewolves, vampires and the witch, and the werewolves in the novel hold an important examination. Miss Lupescu states that "those that men call Werewolves or Lycanthropes call themselves the Hounds of God, as they claim their transformation is a gift from their creator, and they repay the gift with their tenacity, for they will pursue an evil-doer to the very gates of Hell" (88). Janine Hatter asserts:

> Werewolves are an effective rhetorical device for examining ecological issues because they have a long folkloristic history that demonstrates them evolving with their changing environments…Wolves in Western folklore and fables were stereotypically treacherous, conniving, and aggressive males who used the natural forest environment as a cover for their predatory behaviour…Wolves retain their deceptive traits in order to prey upon other animals and humans, while their relationship with the environment evolves from utilizing woods to their own advantage, to having nature used against them (7).

The stereotypical understanding of the werewolf is unravelled by Neil Gaiman through the character of Miss Lupescu. David Del Principe asserts that the consumption of nonhuman flesh and blood "reflects the evolving meaning of species, nation, and gender…flesh consumption plays an important role in the development of nutritional allegories and nonhuman vampirism" ("(M)eating Dracula" 24). Apart from educating Bod, Miss Lupescu prepares "dumpling swimming in lard; thick reddish–purple soup with a lump of sour cream in it; small, cold boiled potatoes; cold garlic-heavy sausages; hard-boiled eggs in a grey unappetising liquid" (Gaiman 64). She would then insists, "Now the salad!...Unpopped the top of the container. It consisted of large lumps of raw onion, beetroot and tomato, all in a thick, vinegary dressing…You stay here until you have eaten it all" (62, 63). The werewolf's insistence to make Bod consume vegetables provokes a significant implication in which she attempts to unravel "nutritional imperialism" (Principe, "The EcoGothic" 3). Principe questions:

> Are humans the vampire's only victims in Bram Stocker's Dracula or are there other beings who have been 'bitten', drained of their blood, and sentenced to an accursed state like the undead? Should the allegorical domain of vampirism be limited to humans or can it be extended to include nonhuman subjects as well? ("(M)eating Dracula" 24).

Casting an ecocritical approach in *The Graveyard Book*, Gaiman stresses upon the werewolf's affinity with nature, who maintains a balance between the human and the non-human characters. On the other hand, the novel reminds the readers regarding the manner in which "flesh consumption plays in the development of an alternate form of vampirism" (1). Miss Lupescu's refusal to provide meat and her insistence to make Bod consume vegetables is indicative of the fact that the narrative unleashes the binary opposition between the human and the non-human distinctions. Moreover, it bears a persistent reference to Gaiman's environmental concerns and his progressive, hopeful approaches to land and ecological issues. The irony of the novel is also indicated in the character of Silas. He is the vampire who plays a leading role in protecting and nurturing Bod and he consumes "only one food, and it was not bananas" (Gaiman 22). The opposite qualities of werewolf and vampire that is seen in *The Graveyard Book* heightens the EcoGothic perspectives and particularly it invites the readers the urgent need for redefining their understanding of monstrosity. Additionally, the irony of the narrative is that the graveyard does not bear a monstrous proportion. *The Graveyard Book* portrays a character who has spent his life in the graveyard and who encounters the world of the living people as well as the dead people who inhabit the graveyard. The graveyard, for Bod, is an abode as it bestows the freedom to converse with the dead folks residing in the graveyard. The tranquility and harmonious scenes of the graveyard are thus described:

> It was a perfect spring day, and the air was alive with birdsong and bee hum The daffodils bustled in the breeze and here and there on the side of the hill a few early tulips nodded. A blue powdering of forget-me-nots and fine, fat yellow primroses punctuated the green of the slope as the two children walked up the hill towards the Frobishers' little mausoleum (43).

The harmonious and the symphonic description of the bird's song and bee hum along with the bustling of the daffodils and the tulips nodding is in contrast to the world of the living folk. It is rather Bod's school in the living world which represents monstrosity. Bod's school becomes the haunting ground, an uncanny place, which proves to be a dangerous place for him because "there were these kids bullying other kids" (183). The school is represented as a place where the innocent are victims of injustice and violence by malevolent pupils. Bod's experience in the living world is abominable and is a total reversal of life in the graveyard. His inquisitiveness knows no limit when he starts to question the idea of revenge to Mister Trot. He is the victim of bullying by Nick Farthings and Maureen Queeling in which situations compel him to be more brutal and ferocious. Changes occur in Bod's life after having experienced the world of the living folk because fear begins to envelop him. By weaving together the different scenarios of the graveyard and the living world, the author is attempting to bring out the existing conditions of the contemporary world. The fusion of the peaceful co-existence of the graveyard folks and the disrupted and chaotic world of the living folks have an important connotation. The former representing the possibilities of peaceful co-existence and the latter conveys the social conflicts and injustice that is still rampant. By employing the fantastic narrative in the text, the novel transports the readers into the world of solace, coherence and unity and it indirectly imparts the possibility to establish unity.

Rebecca Anne C. Dorozario defines the nature of Gothic, "In the absence of an actual castle, books themselves create the architecture, libraries, shelves, boxes, and piles of books configuring paper and ink secret chambers and passages, dungeons, and wild woods" (216). Deidre Lynch opines that bibliophilia pervades Gothic novels especially in the realm of children's literature and that it subverts the "distinctions between text and the lived experience (210). On the other hand, "Bibliophilia, manifested in its intertextual excess, becomes the architecture of the gothic novel through which the secrets of children's literature can be endlessly whispered" (210) as well as a channel "through which the distinction between the readers and text can be repeatedly dispelled" (210). *The Ocean at The End of The Lane* presents a protagonist who attempts to find his selfhood by reading books which playfully becomes an adventure that goes unnarrated. The protagonist professes that he takes cues from books

and asserts “They were my teachers and my advisers. In books, boys climbed trees, so I climbed trees, sometimes very high, always scared of falling. In books, people climbed up and down drainpipes to get in and out of houses, so I climbed up and down drainpipes too” (101). He is an ardent lover of myths, who would journey in the stories that he reads. At times he would imagine himself as Batman and “a hundred heroes and heroines of school romances” (102) as well as “dinosaurs...totting thunder lizard, bigger than buses…vultures…winged but featherless; faces from nightmares” (168). The statement possesses an important existential question because when “character becomes text and text becomes character, the legitimacy of humanity itself is interrogated” (Do Rozario 218). It breaks down “barriers of distinction between the layers of story and thus existence, ultimately denying the difference between “human” and “character,” “flesh and blood,” and “paper and ink” (218). The Gothic architecture, which is established in the form of books, preserves the coherency between the protagonist’s engagement with the human and non-human, animals and nature. Books, thus, erase the protagonist’s fear and decreases ecophobia. Books also provide a wider proliferation of his self behind the authorial inscription and subsequently; he learns how to love the “other” and learns how to cherish what is other than him. Additionally, the protagonist finally understands that the decision to be human encapsulates a number of choices that subsequently necessitates persistent vigilance. Judith Halberstam professes that “monster not only reveal certain material conditions of the production of horror, but they also make strange the categories of beauty, humanity, and identity that we still cling to” (6). Roderick McGillis states that “populating the Gothic are various monsters; the genre is something of a teratology, examining freakishness, otherness, abnormality, and deviance” (228), which lends the concept of “post-human before we ever thought of genomes and cloning and other forms of altering the human form” (228). To erase the distinction between the human and the nonhuman, the concept of monstrosity is brought out in the narrative of *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*:

> I said, ‘Are you a monster? Like Ursula Monkton? Lettie threw a pebble into the pond. ‘I don’t think so,’ she said. ‘Monsters come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are things people scared of. Some of them are things that look like things people used to be scared of a long time ago.

> Sometimes monsters are things people should be scared of, but they aren't' (149, 150).

Over here, Lettie Hempstock is attempting to state that monsters are not precisely the opposite of human flesh. Her provocative statement blurs the borders between binary groupings such as "the human and the beast, between the apparent and the concealed, the known and the unknown, the natural and the unnatural, the explicable and the inexplicable" (Confino 124). Lettie unmaps the parcel of human being's fear of the rough beast as "Gothic challenges our accepted orthodoxies, when the haunting works to revision our sense of things" (McGillis 230). On the other hand, it is conspicuous from Lettie's statement that there are certain things which can be scarier, immoral and degenerative. Her ecosensitivity delightfully captures the need to appreciate the details of nature and the environment that are often ignored and repressed. She becomes the Gothic heroine who seeks identification with nature and a heroine who clings to nature for spiritual edification. In order to manifest the manner in which human exists harmoniously with nature, she takes the protagonist to examine nature, and his self ultimately. According to Mark Edumundson, Gothic "breeds fear and anger, shuts down the power to make humane distinctions, eclipses thought" (61). Lettie's alternative perspectives denote her increasingly ecocentric consciousness that dislodges the distinction between human and nonhuman identities and she solidifies human and non-human kinship. It is apparent in the works of Neil Gaiman that the Gothic does not seem to be less appropriate for the child characters. The inclusion of darkness and the fear in the fantasy world allows the child characters to navigate their own desire. On the other hand, the inclusion of the Gothic in Gaiman's narratives dislodges cherished ideas regarding childhood. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim, "Heroines who characteristically inhabit mysteriously stifling intricate or uncomfortably stifling houses are often seen as captured, fettered, trapped, even buried alive" (83). This is one of the reasons why Gaiman's characters' encroachment with darkness proves to yield a fruitful result. The fantastic journey, experience and their encounter with the terror and the horror challenges "traditional paradigm of a neglectful and often oppressive patriarchal adult culture" (Anna Jackson et al., *Introduction* 8).

Childhood in Neil Gaiman's works has aroused the notion of power expressed through the narrative in his works. Michel Foucault stresses, "Power comes from below,

there is no binary and all encompassing opposition between the rules and the ruled" (94). Foucault challenges the traditional notion that power is linked with authority because according to him, power does not only spring from the seemingly authoritative figure when he says, "Power comes from below" (93). Gaiman's *Odd and the Frost Giants* revolves around the theme of power that is deviant, not only a purely one way route, which lies more or less in an individual's personality. Transformation occurs in the life of Odd as the plot of the story proceeds. Odd, although being an abandoned child who is impoverished and crippled, is presented to be an extremely liberated free spirit. Odd's encounter with the frost giant and his heroic defeat of the frost giant validates that he has the full autonomy over his personality. The narrator says, "then he smiled at the Giant, a big, happy, irritating smile…If Odd had not smiled, the Giant would simply have picked him up and crushed the life from him, or squashed him against the boulder" (86). Odd's smile yields a fruitful result which appeals the Giant and it displays how power is manifested through Odd's personality. His smile saves his precious life from the dreadful Giant and it saves him from the brutal murder that is likely to occur against him. Chris Jenks asserts that "any knowledge of the self derives from an experience of collective constraints; and being and action, as opposed to being and behaviour, is contingent upon the presence of and communication with others" (40). The narrator of the book further stresses that Odd continues to smile with "his broadest, most irritating smile" (Gaiman 87) as his smile becomes the source of power. Odd's communication with the giant enables him to assert his individuality because "nobody had smiled at the Giant like that before, and it bothered him" (87). Gaiman has presented a revamped version of power and he dislodges the rudimentary approach of power. Likewise, in Gaiman's *Coraline,* the protagonist is trapped in the darkest danger but she is able to defeat evil through her deeds and unique personality. She is tempted by her other mother who claims that she loves her and she will continue to love her unconditionally. She further prompts her to smell what she calls her "lovely breakfast" (109). The narrator says "It was true: the other mother loved her. But she loved Coraline as a miser loves money, or a dragon loves its gold in the other mother's button eyes, Coraline knew that she was a possession, nothing more" (126). By uttering this statement, it is conspicuous that Coraline grapples with her instinct and reason. Though her marvelous journey appears to be more preferable and appealing at first, she finally learns that she is enveloped by the evil which necessitates her to overcome it

independently. Mark Edmundson professes, “Gothic shows the dark side, the world of cruelty, lust, perversion, and crime that, many of us at least half believe, is hidden beneath established conventions” (4). He further stresses that “Gothic tears through censorship, explodes hypocrisies, to expose the world as the corrupted, reeking place it is-or so its proponents maintain” (4). Coraline’s occupation with the darkness makes her conquer evil and it instead gives her the power and authority to discover a sense of self which is lacking in her at the outset of the novel. The dark and depressing atmosphere of the Gothic becomes a source of power for Coraline as “Gothicism aids in the discovery and resolution of each fundamental crisis” (Howarth 14). Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book* revolves around the theme of power. Power is present in all forms of human relationship which is undoubtedly stated by Michel Foucault, “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (93). Bod exercises his power when he attempts to defeat what is not morally right from his perspective. He wants to stop Nick and Maureen from bullying the other kids in the school. He says to Silas, “I was getting involved. There were these kids bullying other kids. I want them to stop. I drew attention to myself” (183). Bod exercises his power by employing his supernatural skills of Dreamwalking and fading towards the bullies. He masters the skill of Dreamwalking which proves to be an important remedy. When Nick Farthing is in bed and is asleep dreaming of pirates performing heroic deeds, he sees someone standing on the black deck, looking down at him. He becomes scared of the dead-faced man in pirate costume with hand on the hilt of a cutlass. The stranger in Nick’s dream is none other than Bod. Bod exercises his power through the technique of Dreamwalking in order to frighten Nick Farthing. His main intention is to make Nick discard the appalling practices he imposes on others. Bod succeeds in terrifying Nick because Nick has no idea what his dream was, and it becomes the “most scary terrible thing he had ever-would ever-encounter” (182). As for Maureen Quilling, Bod employs his supernatural skill unlike the skill he inflicts on Nick. Her existence becomes hellish, dull and monotonous, which is filled with fear and terror. Barriers of communication subsist between Nick and Maureen. Her Uncle Tam shouts at her and accuses her of disgracing him. Her parents are furious with her and she soon feels that she is betrayed by the world. Bod’s ways of exercising his power validate how power does not spring only from the seemingly authoritarian figure as it can be exercised by every individual. In Neil Gaiman’s *The Ocean at the End of the*

*Lane*, the readers encounter an unnamed protagonist, who is helpless as a child, fragile and is torn apart from his family. Nevertheless, as he moves through the fantastic world, we can perceive the manner in which the protagonist exercises the power which is innate in him. Similarly, like the rest of the principal characters in the novels which have been selected for the study, the unnamed protagonist in the said novel conquers evil. The gravity of Ursula's selfish wish to possess the protagonist is trounced by the protagonist's own determination and consciousness. The protagonist validates his power when he makes a bold statement regarding the difference between adult and children:

> Adults follow paths. Children explore. Adults are content to walk the same way, hundreds of times, or thousands; perhaps it never occurs to adults to step off the paths, to creep beneath rhododendrons, to find the spaces between fences. I was a child, and I knew a dozen different ways of getting out of our property and into the lane, ways that would not involve walking down our drive (74).

The statement expressed by the protagonist goes against our natural assumptions regarding childhood as "the object of speech, the object of the gaze in a process of adult self- definition in which the child is seen as the other, the inessential, the receiver of labels" (Thornton 129). The novel unravels the archetypal storehouse of childhood images and ideas. Additionally, the protagonist's statement reflects his self-awareness which directly informs the readers an utterly distinct self that the protagonist exhibits. The protagonist learns that he is equipped with the knowledge to experiment with his surroundings without the assistance of the adult's characters. His fearless assertiveness demonstrates how power "comes from everywhere" (Foucault 93) and is undoubtedly cultivated by the protagonist.

Neil Gaiman's works offer multiple interpretations of fantasy and his narratives incorporate the child characters who are isolated, detached and alienated. The fantastic narratives in his works bear an underlying connotation with desire. Escapism in his works are indicative of the characters' anxieties and is further a channel to bring novelty and it imparts the centrality of imagination. Through the portrayal of childhood in Gaiman's works, one can perceive the manner in which "childhood constitutes a way of conduct that cannot properly be evaluated and routinely incorporated within the

grammar of existing social system" (Jenks 12). The employment of complex symbols, imagery and the antipastorals pave way for liberation and makes the child experience life anew. The transition of the powerless child into a powerful child represents the dynamics of power in Gaiman's novels as his characters exhibit the "capacity for direct contact with the world, devoid of linguistic problems, or as possessing a purity of language" (Thornton 130).

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This chapter shall attempt to locate the dynamics of the self and primarily focus upon the manner in which fantasy serves as an alternative narrative for establishing selfhood. The productive significance of acknowledging the abject and its immense role in the formation of distinct selfhood has been taken into account. Nonetheless, abjection offers the characters a flexible self; it assists them to negotiate boundaries and renew their self by interacting with the abject. The chapter explores and vaunts the pervasive influence of food, memory, the body of the mother and their crucial role in altering the characters' selfhood. Alongside the validation of these crucial topics, an attempt will be made in order to place the "transmodern self" perspective in the selected works as opposed to the notion of the fragmented self.

The self, as Samantha Vice asserts, "Isn't something that is given to us, or just happens 'despite ourselves'. We are responsible for its contours and so in a significant sense, are self-made persons" (98). Without an assured sense of self, proclaims Ihab Hassan, "We risk to lose the world and mutilate the lives we touch, lives both in literature and in the flesh" (423)…it has become an essentially contested category, continually revised, devised, supervised, or denied" (428). The self is often fabricated through the medium of discourse, and language is designated as an influential system the subject must reflect in the formation of the self (Jenkins 3). Especially in postmodern characterization, the proliferation of heterogeneity remains rampant in the context of understanding the self as well as identity, and the postmodern self is "disintegrated, fragmented and disconnected" (Shen 285). On the other hand, "the assumed or desired totality of a real self is endlessly 'dispositioned' always a 'being there,' as opposed to being here, a being present to itself" (284). In analysing the concept of selfhood Tod Sloan remarks:

> Throughout the modern period, which perhaps began to dissipate at the macrosocial level in the 1960s, the self was generally assumed to consists of a relatively unified and autonomous mind operating rationally in a body, disrupted occasionally by the emotions. As the observations of psychoanalysts and psychiatrists became more widely available, this view of the self as coherent could no longer be affirmed. We became all too aware of the fissures, contradictions, fragments, and splits within the psyche. Furthermore, the fields of cultural anthropology and linguistics

> joined psychoanalysis in demonstrating that the psyche is hardly autonomous but rather a socioculturally and linguistically constituted entity (111).

The self as the heterogeneous entity disrupts the scholarly understanding of the self because "scholarly concepts of self or personhood sometimes gradually work their way toward expression in institutions such as families, schools, courts, and the media and thereby meditate the actual experience of individuals" (110). An enlarged understanding of the self is "a process of breathing new life into language, of imaginatively transforming it into something from anything before" (Freeman 21). Whether it is in the form of films, books, television shows including all kinds of imaginable media, Alan Jacobs argues that fantasy is a channel through which "the late modern self strives to avail itself of the unpredictable excitements of the porous self while retaining its protective buffers" (4). He stresses that "fantasy, in most of its recent forms, may best be understood as a technologically enabled, and therefore *safe*, simulacrum of the pre-modern porous self" (4). Besides, Alan Jacobs further remarks that fantasy "plays a distinctive role that has not been fully been understood, a role that centers on the problem of a thoroughly buffered self under an increasingly omnipotent technopoly" (10). In addition, Kathryn Hume says that fantasy "encourages intensity of engagement, whether through novelty or through psychological manipulation. In addition, fantasy provides meaning-systems to which we can try relating our selves" (196). Moreover, "it asserts relationships…encourages the condensation of images which allows it to affect its readers at many levels…helps us envision possibilities that transcend the purely material world which we accept as quotidian reality" (196). One of the concepts that remain central in Gaiman's narrative is that the characters' fantastic engagement affords them power and it functions as a source of revitalization and retrieval. The narrative of Gaiman's works ponders largely on the realm of fantasy. In his works, ordinary children's experiences are treated meaningfully because they become a gateway into other worlds. In it, the powerless child learns strength, gains heady sense of freedom, power, intelligence and virtues. The child, who is considered to remain on the periphery, discovers the inner qualities hidden inside to generate his or her individuality. So to speak, children who are assumed to be at the bottom of the totem pole in the everyday world will eventually discover that they exhibit qualities that

strengthen them to confront any situation. Rosemary Jackson says, "Fantasy has always provided a clue to the limits of a culture, by foregrounding problems of categorizing the 'real' and of the situation of the self in relation to that dominant notion of reality" (52). In Gaiman's *Odd and the Frost Giants*, the image of the rainbow has contested immensely to portray the manner in which fantasy has extended the notion of reality. Most importantly, it has portrayed how the fantastic narrative in the novel has participated in the formation of self for the protagonist. Odd is walking in the rainbow and "it felt as if he was being carried up the arch…uncertain how fast he was travelling, only certain that he was somehow swept up in the colours, and that it was the colours of the rainbow that were carrying him along" (60, 61). Strange and bizarre as it may seem, Odd does not distinguish between fantasy and reality, daydream or nightmare. The fantastic narrative can no longer be designated as merely supernatural, rather it is an externalization of the protagonist's self. The rainbow functions in projecting the unconscious part of the protagonist's self. Odd has owned his own fantasy by engaging with the marvellous and he begins to free himself from his former repressive experience. Furthermore, it has diverted him away from a position of dependency and has specifically developed intriguingly contradictory ideas about his former self. The importance of imagination is centrally located which has an underlying connotation with fantasy because "fantasy is more or less synonymous with imagination, and it is taken to be subject to rational, intentional control; one directs one's imagination purposively to achieve a coherent aim" (Scott 287). Gaiman's *Odd and the Frost Giants* depicts Odd's successful integration with the mythical creatures. It would be an erroneous idea to consider imagination as a similar concept with daydreaming because both of them have a different connotation. Odd possesses an agile imagination which assists him to restore peace in the city of gods. Astoundingly, "Odd found that he wanted to believe that he was still in the world he has known all his life…Only he wasn't and he knew it. The world smelled different, for a start. It smelled *alive*. Everything he looked at looked sharper, more real, more there" (63, 64). Imagination painstakingly becomes an important tool for Odd because it becomes a vibrant faculty in which the magnitude of his courage is restored. It helps him in forming a lucid state of mind and it assists him to assimilate and synthesize the most disparate elements into an organic whole. The privileging of imagination in Gaiman's works reveals how imagination is the supreme sovereign since it is not bounded by time and space. Odd

exercises the sovereignty of his imagination that seeks unity to inhabit both the worlds. The fantastic events comprise a process of magical thinking on the part of not only the author but the readers as well in Gaiman's *Coraline.* The magical realist narrative is discernible through the appearance of the ghosts, Coraline's other mother and other father. Julia Briggs asserts:

> The ghost story reverts to a world in which imagination can produce physical effects, a world that is potentially within our power to change by the energy of our thoughts, yet practically alarming. And of course the ghost story itself lends some degree of credence to the power of imagination, since the mere words on the page can, in their limited way, reproduce the effects they describe: once we are in the grip of the narrative, the heartbeat seeds up, the skin sweats, or prickles, and any unexpected noise will cause the reader to jump (178).

Coraline encounters the ghost children about her own size, "pale as a moon in the daytime" (99), whose hearts, souls and lives are stolen by the other mother. One of the voices urges Coraline to flee, "Flee, while there's still air in your lungs and blood in your veins and warmth in your heart. Flee while you still have your mind and your soul" (100). An unexpected instruction from the voice of the ghost sounds magical and foregrounds the power of imagination. They are the opposite of traditional ghosts because the "traditional ghost often return as a consequence of "unfinished business" in life and therefore represents a continuity of the past" (Becher 96). Although the ghost children's appearance and existence may be magical and grotesque, their presence brought Coraline to the site of chivalry, making her understand the everyday reality and the physical necessities it accompanies. By juxtaposing Coraline's journey behind the old door and her own house, the framework of everyday life is weaved together in such a fashion to disclose the real and the marvelous both within time and space. Equipped with his own imaginative power, Gaiman in *The Graveyard Book*, has explored a creative journey of the protagonist. Bod's fantastic engagement formulates a wider perspective to confront the future. The graveyard, which is supposedly perceived to be a threating site, serves rather as a creative energy which is the opposite of the real world filled with chaos and discrepancy in the novel. At times, Bod longs to see the world beyond the graveyard gates, but he is warned that it is not safe for him. However, the

graveyard "was his world and his domain, and he was proud of it and loved it as only a fourteen-year-old boy can love anything" (213). Apart from being Bod's domain and world, the graveyard is the province in which Bod's engagement with the fantastic is generated to the fullest. Bod proudly asserts that he can learn everything he needs to know. He learns the ghoul-gates, learns to dream walk, and watches the stars. Most importantly, Bod's engagement with the fantastic makes him acquire supernatural skills such as fading, dream walking, and haunting. The supernatural skills he has acquired from the graveyard are an immense source of power for the protagonist. The deplorable condition of Bod is explored at his school and the other children forget about him. The narrator further stresses that Bod "was a model pupil, forgettable and easily forgotten, and he spent much of his spare time in the back of the English class" (169). The other children do not think about him nor show any sign that they need him. The narrator goes on to state that if someone asks the kids in Eight B to close their eyes and list the twenty-five boys and girls in the class, his name would not be included in the list and that his "presence was almost ghostly" (169). Bod is aware that the essential process of self-definition is complicated within the narrow confines imposed upon him. The art of making his presence felt in order to be recognised by others remains the task Bod has to cultivate. To transcend the extreme images which the other kids have generated upon him, the supernatural skills become crucial as the self is not "a *thing*; it is not a substance, a material entity that we can somehow grab hold of and place before our very eyes" (Freeman 8). Consequently, Bod escapes the stereotypical designs vested upon him when he exercises his skill on Nick Farthing and Maureen. On the other hand, Bod's supernatural skills valorize moral gestures for the other characters, which ultimately makes his presence felt on a large scale. He exercises his unique skills to attack Nick Farthings, the bully and shoplifter, along with Maureen Quilling who assists Nick Farthings in the act of bullying. The ability to be heard, seen and felt by others is an important step towards forming the self for Bod. His ability to organise himself regardless of what he is labelled before strengthens his potential and finally supersedes misappropriation. Subsequently, readers discern how deeply he is needed including the process of coming to terms with the self through the inclusion of the fantastic events.The fantastic narrative in Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* has broadened our understanding of how fantastic engagement is necessary especially when an individual is a victim of the combined forces of alienation and condemnation. The

alienated protagonist seeks solace and comfort through the solitary act of reading. Reading functions as a battering ram that eventually broadens his imaginative skill. He builds his own ivory tower and creates meaningful experience by reading. The unnamed protagonist discloses his fondness of books when he says "Books were safer than other people anyway" (12). He confesses that he is not happy as a child although he is complacent from time to time and claims that "I lived in books more than I lived anywhere else" (17). Perhaps what is most noteworthy in the text is the attitude of free self-expression and unrestrained enjoyment the protagonist exhibits in the act of reading since "the very act of making sense of ourselves and other, is only possible in and through the fabric of narrative itself (Freeman 21). Deeply immersed with the occupation of reading, which provides him with the freedom of narrative imagination, the protagonist's consciousness is developed. It gives him a great deal of sensitivity and it garners enough courage and devises methods of survival. He has chosen to erase the physical unattractiveness of his surroundings by engaging with the imaginative act of reading. Under this circumstance it is crucial to note that his imaginative act creates a timeless world that is untouched by any outside intrusion. He imagines himself as Batman, and as "a thousand heroes and heroines of school romances" (102). Although his imagination is depicted in a sentimental manner, his imagination becomes specific rather than being general, and is timeless which is beyond the daily course of human experience and history. By taking clues from books and being assisted by his imagination, he displays his sense of continuity and validates the manner in which "rewriting the self involves significantly more than the mere reshuffling of words" (Freeman 21). He retains vitality and realises that the pleasing patterns of developing the self is through imagination and the engagement with the fantastic. In addition to this, the novel makes it conspicuous that imagination unlocks a space of eternal floating that gives birth to replenishment from exhaustion. More accurately, the protagonist's engagement with the fantastic creates a sense of coherence and the ability to see the possible through the impossible.

Filled with characters that are deemed grotesque, monstrous and abnormal, Gaiman's narratives posit the abject creative potential in the formation of a coherent self. The abject, for Kristeva, is neither a subject nor an object, and abjection according to her is the "state of abjecting or rejecting what is other to oneself – and thereby

creating borders of an always tenuous "I" (McAfee 45). According to Julia Kristeva abjection refers to something that "does not respect borders, positions, and rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour" (Kristeva 4). What proves interesting in Kristeva's theory of abjection is her attempt to denote the difference between the symbolic and the semiotic which are the two fundamental modes of signification. One can sum up the abject as the ambiguous, humanizing force and the liminal that transcends boundaries and most importantly "disturbs identity, system and order" (4). Abjection proves crucial in Gaiman's narratives because "the freedom to engage imaginatively with abjection or to sublimate abjection imaginatively enables more secure if flexible or fluid constructions of self" (Jenkins 48). A relevant point Gaiman raises is a self that is all embracing and inclusive of anything through the medium of the abject. Tracing the life of an impoverished protagonist in Gaiman's *Odd and the Frost Giants*, the novel elevates what has been considered as an abject. Trapped in a space of the sordid world, Odd's engagement with the abject reverses the expectations of the readers. Odd defeats the giant with his smile; the ability to defeat the giant with his smile connotes the inadequacy of symbolic language in establishing a coherent self. Instead, it authorises the manner in which Odd's individuality cannot be attained without the inclusion of the abject. The presence of the giant provides Odd the opportunity to re-embrace the semiotic, regenerates his creativity and most importantly, it propels him to re-embrace his liminal space. As Elizabeth Grosc elucidates, the insistent haunting of the symbolic by the abject exemplifies "the impossibility of clear-cut borders, lines of demarcation, divisions between the clean and the unclean, the proper and the improper, order and disorder" (89). The abject narrators in the novel unravel the often conventional modes of narration and it disrupts the order of the absolute symbolic order. Both in *Coraline* and *Odd and the Frost Giants* the fluid boundaries of the self is highlighted when the animal characters occupy the dialogue. This establishes the scope for the readers to dislocate cultural divisions of values and makes them devour the creativity of abjection. As creatures relegated beyond the dominant culture's symbolic order, the non-human characters in *Coraline* functions beyond the recognized culturally semiotic-symbolic dynamics. They do not merely disrupt the dominant order, instead they provide a channel for Coraline to immerse herself in the fluid space and the non-human characters eventually participate in the

culture's symbolic order productively. Human characters in *Coraline* are also labelled as the abject for instance, Coraline at one instance would "appear like a giant woman" (11). Coraline labels herself as the abject when she associates the similarities and the fluidity that evolves between herself and the cat, to whom she insists, "we could be friends" (45) and the cat replies "we *could* be rare specimens of an exotic breed of African dancing elephants" (45). At another instance, the abject in Coraline is brought out when she could not tolerate the self-centeredness of the cat: "half of her wanted to be very rude to it; the other half of her wanted to be polite and deferential. The polite half won" (45). Subsequently, the creation of the grotesque image of Coraline's parents who inhabit the secondary world represents the abject; their presence destabilizes the self as a rigid construct. In the secondary world, Coraline encounters the rats which she had never seen before. Here, she experiences the disgust and the horror when the rats began to sing in whispery voices, "we have teeth and we have tails…we have eyes we were here before you fell you will be here when we rise" (38). The rats diminish the sharp distinction between their species and the human when they invite Coraline to acknowledge their adventures. The extreme abject in Coraline is made more recognizable which destabilizes the unknowable and the unreadable. On the other hand, the human symbolic construction of the unreadable and the unrecognizable are deconstructed when Gaiman equalizes the nonhuman characters and Coraline. The cat professes before Coraline, "I'm not the other anything, I'm me…you people are spread all over the place. Cats, on the other hand, keep ourselves together" (44). Acknowledged in this way, through the abject there is an ability to empathize with the other and the scope to achieve a sense of connection. Guided by the nonhuman perspectives, Coraline and the readers are able to reflect upon humanity from a de-centered position. Through the recognition of the other Coraline sees the parallel between herself and the rats. Later in the novel, she becomes more sensitive to what is culturally deemed abject. Phase such as "her eyes were beginning to get used to darkness" (99) denotes Coraline's ability to recognize experience from other perspectives, witness and embrace the abject rather than differentiate. Her ability to recognize, reflect and react on the experience of the other imparts wisdom and it makes her realize the value of acknowledging the abject. Pivotal to the narratives of Gaiman's *Odd and the Frost Giants* is the inclusion of the fox, the bear and the eagle's narratives. Their narratives are brought alive when they narrate their stories, recast their memories

and embark on a quest with Odd. Consequently, their shared experiences and the mutual relationship that flourishes celebrate the manner in which abjection acknowledges and celebrates the marginal status of the other. The animal characters are the abject because they refuse to conform to "borders, positions, and rules" (Kristeva 4). Evolving from the marginalised being into human form the boundaries between the self and the other are diminished. Ruth Y. Jenkins remarks that "education, economic, and religious institutions reinforced cultural efforts to clarify boundaries, attempting to distinguish what was valued from what was not" (21). Gaiman constructs instances where the abject transgresses borders that are culturally constructed. Despite his young age, Odd has to find his own space and sanctuary. Odd comes from a society where "sea raiding was something the men did for fun" (4). During winter, "the men would fight and fart and sing and sleep and wake and fight again" (9), while the women "would shake their heads, and sew and knit and mend" (9). Contrary to his native home, the secondary world offers creative experiences that distances him from the dictates his culture taught him. For a moment when Odd comes back from the secondary world, "he wondered if he had come to the wrong place, for nothing looked quite as he remembered it when he had left less than a week before. It all looked smaller" (123). This confusion and complexity denote the ambiguous ending in the novel. His final uncertainties illustrate the power of the abject that unravels "clear-cut boundaries, lines of demarcation, diversions between the clean and the unclean, the proper and the improper, order and disorder" (Grosz 89). This crucial incident remarks Odd's increasing authority as well as the persistent presence of the abject even in the symbolic order, Odd's sense of absolute good and bad, the unacceptable as well as the appropriate actions evolve to become more nuanced through the scene of transformation. When goddess Freya transforms the bear, "he was the biggest man, who was not a Giant that Odd had ever seen. He looked friendly, and he winked at Odd, which made the boy feel strangely proud" (111). Ensnared in the energy of the abject and the abjection, Odd becomes increasingly enveloped by a mature emotional sense of self. The transformation of the bear makes him proud because Odd's emerging self embraces one that rejects extreme absolutes. Abjection pervades all forms of cultural and social life hence in the context of literature, abjection "entails a type of communication that differs from the everyday use of language and involves the element of the 'poetic', which disrupts the flow of symbolic language" (Arya 15). Lettie Hempstock, from the narrator's point of view,

"talk in mysteries all the time" (Gaiman, "*The Ocean*" 153) which at times makes the protagonist perplexed and confused. Her mysterious existence is narrated visibly when the narrator says, "She looked three or four years older than me. She might have been three or four thousand years older, or a thousand times again" (153). Such is the extent of uncertainty, doubts and suspicion that haunt the protagonist. Excluding her mysteriousness in her language and speech, what becomes more interesting and mysterious is the manner in which she dislocates the nature of symbolic language. Lettie interprets the pond as an ocean, while the protagonist insistently tells her that oceans are bigger than seas, but Lettie asserts "it's as big as it needs to be" (151). By remaining faithful to her conviction she eventually disrupts the logic and meaning inherent in the symbolic language. She epitomises the abject when she refuses to respect the rules of the symbolic order and instead she prefers to privilege her imagination. Early in the novel, the unnamed protagonist is described as a child who is better versed with narratives and a child who is less trained in the cultural standard of behaviour. The protagonist confesses that he "lived in books more than I lived anywhere else" (17), and professes "I was not scared of anything when I read my books: I was far away, in ancient Egypt, learning about Hathor, and how she has Egypt in the form of a lioness, and killed so many people" (69). Overall, he admits that he likes myths because according to him they are neither adult nor children's stories and books and he professes "taught me most of what I knew about what people did, about to behave. They are my teachers and advisers" (101). His relationship to creativity is crucial to his existence but this denotes a culturally dubious position. His excessive reliance on the fanciful and the imaginary rather pushes him into the realm of abjection. He is labelled "little *momzer*" (67) by his aunts, he remains unnamed throughout the narrative and describes himself as an "imaginative child, prone to nightmares" (22). His bond towards language reveals his complex abject state. As a male protagonist who clings more toward the imaginary, he is related to abjection. Additionally, he participates in abjection and his solace in the semiotic nurtures him when he seizes the artistic potential of that order. His capability along with his imaginative ability to establish an alternative script and subject position empowers him and nourishes him mentally, physically and emotionally despite his continual experience of alienation, uncertainty and loneliness. The presence of abjection in Gaiman's narratives filter the conventional understanding of selfhood because abjection both "endangers and protects the individual: endangers in that it threatens the

boundaries of the self and also reminds us of our animal origins, and protects us because we are able to expel the abject through various means" (Arya 2). Filled with characters who are the exact figure and representation of the abject, *The Graveyard Book* becomes a home of simultaneous danger and pleasure. Andrea Gutenberg claims that the werewolf "assumes special significance as a destabilizer of fixed identities and a construct somewhat truer and closer to (post)modern notions of the self" (178). Out of the multiple monstrous characters who populate the novel, the presence of the werewolf, Miss Lupescu, problematizes the concept of the self and the other and other classificatory cultural concepts. Werewolves have been regarded as a prominent symbol of "the marginal, of deviance and hybridity" as they shift between animals and the human world" (149), they hold the position of what Julia Kristeva terms "the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Miss Lupescu, the werewolf in *The Graveyard Book*, characterises abjection and she belongs to the abject because of her twofold failure to present either a constant body or a steadfast identity, the "Not me. Not That. But not nothing, either" (Kristeva 2). Miss Lupescu distorts the basic norms of civilized behaviour and she inhabits uncontrolled violence, brutality, unbridled instinct as well as cannibalism. As a character who threatens the normative understanding of the human subject, she represents abjection. Although she exhibits the monstrous body, her presence is extensively significant with regards to the normative understanding of gender and meaning. Her actual metamorphosis remains invisible and untold earlier in the novel and Bod realises later that Miss Lupescu is a werewolf. Therefore she becomes more threatening and mysterious when Bod witnesses and acknowledges that she is unrepresentable as "abjection […] is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles" (Kristeva 4). The threatening abject who remains outside the social order is raised as one of the most attractive characters. She cannot be truly represented or classified as either human or nonhuman, civilized or the other. This implicit denial of fixity and boundary makes the readers revalued the notions of animality. On the flipside, it appropriates the female body whose stereotypical role is to remain aesthetically appealing. The novel further affirms the manner in which the human body is an "unreliable marker of species affiliation, notions of the abject and the revolting are turned upside down, and the realm of the pre-symbolic is revalued over the symbolic order" (Gutenberg 169). Bod might not adopt wolfish body language and behaviour but he learns certain practical lessons including the names of the stars and

their constellations from Miss Lupescu. Miss Lupescu's magical bodily transformation is portrayed as an effective model of sacrifice that is available for the protagonist, "there was blood on her face…'Save the boy.' She was halfway between grey wolf and woman, but her face was a woman's face" (Gaiman 230). Gaiman's narrative denotes the menaces of reproducing the quintessential norms of femininity and in the process, the patriarchal logic is powerfully criticized. Besides the frontiers between the good and the bad, the object and the subject are blurred when the effects of abjection are intensified in the narratives.

One of the most fascinating aspects that has been tackled with in the works of Gaiman is the problematization of naming. Characters' names which are assumed to define their specificity and personhood are deemed futile in Gaiman's narratives. Roni Natov says, "Once you name something, you limit what it can be and imply what it isn't. The desire for naming, differentiating person from person, things from things, also leads into issue of identity" (105). In order to ensure that characters do not participate in the constructed notions of selfhood, their specificity in relation to their names is distorted. Ultimately, it voices characters' confusion and summons the reproachful reaction that is required. Besides, what is implicitly denoted is that characters are more inclined and are better equipped to chart an alternative self. Names, a form of verbal expression, functions as a form of protest that fights limitations on the part of the characters. The futility of names transmits and ensures the manner in which characters proceed towards flexibility and change in which their selfhood is revitalized. Most importantly, it denotes the complexity inherent in the search for meaning and it further validates the diverse approaches required in the formation of selfhood. The concept of naming further generates debate in his novels by making it discernible that the concept of self is treated unconventionally. The issue of naming is problematized in *The Graveyard Book* on the outset when the graveyard inhabitants mull over whether it is necessary to label a name for the protagonist. Silas opines that the old name of the toddler should not be deemed consequential because he thinks "His old name won't be of much use to him now anyway. There are those out there who mean him harm" (18). While Mrs Owens contends, "He looks like nobody but himself…He looks like nobody (19). Soon after the long discussion and comparisons, it is finally decided by Silas that the toddler's name will be "Nobody Owens" (19). The term "Nobody" being the name

of the protagonist appears to be absurd and inconsequential at the surface level because it literally signifies that he does not exist. The term seems to bear no connection with the protagonist's existence. But on the other hand, the term speaks volumes by diverging what it literally indicates. The Lady on the white horse tells Bod that "Names aren't really important" (150). Wade Newhouse in his essay "Coming to Age with the Ageless" claims:

> Gaiman presents a vision of postmodern moral growth based on accepting divergent viewpoints and accepting their contradictions, limitations, and eccentricities as the very essence of selfhood. In the end, Bod's proudest statement of his own awareness of self sounds ironically like a denial of self: "I' m Nobody Owens. That's who I am". Bod symbolically claims ownership of an identity that is at once autonomous and universal- he is most himself by being generic, by being no one at all (126).

What becomes so significant in the novel is the process of understanding and the patterns of intertwining diverse viewpoints along with the inclusion of diversity and plurality embedded in the formation of the self. Although the name is denoted as one of the pivotal characteristics to assert one's personhood, it is not a means to establish an intelligible and authentic self. The protagonist in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* who is in fact, the narrator of the novel remains unnamed throughout the story. The absence of the protagonist's name is not a means to deny him as a person. His self is not diminished; it modestly makes it clear that he is ignored and is desired too. Although the protagonist is not given a name, readers find means of identifying with him by acknowledging a sense of individuality and independence he exhibits. The protagonist boldly declares that as a boy several aunts remind him, "You were a little momzer" (67). However, he asserts, "Once I had safely reached adulthood and my dreadful infant deeds could be recalled with wry amusement. But I do not actually remember being a monster. I just remember wanting my own way" (67). The voice raised by the protagonist echoes his attempt to define himself. The statement clarifies the manner in which the unnamed protagonist is often forced to accept a self which is contrary to the ways in which he understands himself. The intrusion of the adult characters make it conspicuous that he occupies an inferior position. He is forbidden from inculcating an

authentic version of himself when he recalls his infant deeds with “wry amusement” (67). In addition, the protagonist does not permit himself to fail, because he is aware that failure in any domain implies failure in establishing selfhood. Although he has failed to unravel the pedantic view imparted by the adult counterparts, a passive acceptance of domination is eschewed for an inclination to change, the protagonist assures, “I was certain, rock-solid, unshakably certain, that I was the most important thing in creation. There was nothing that was more important to me than I was” (207). Similarly in Gaiman’s *Odd and the Frost Giants*, one of the most innovative things about the novel is that the protagonist is reformed through his own effort. On another level, the novel makes the reader active and imaginative and it opens a broad way to challenge dominant assumptions regarding selfhood. The novel commences provocatively, “There was a boy called Odd, and there was nothing strange or unusual about that, not in that time or place. Odd meant *the tip of a blade*, and it was a lucky name” (1). Odd’s individuality is limited when his name is described as “tip of a blade”. The possibility for interpretation is hindered when the narrator clarifies that there is “nothing strange or unusual” with his name. The description of Odd’s name is ironic which is contrary to what he has experienced; it is no doubt discernible that Odd is not lucky as a person. The fixed idea imparted in his name is diminished as the plot of the story progresses. Odd belongs to a close-knit society from a village on the banks of a fjord “where everybody knew everybody’s business” (3). Surprisingly the narrator says that “Nobody knew what Odd was feeling on the inside. Nobody knew what he thought” (3). He is neglected and hardly earns attention, compassion and love. His father has been killed during a sea raid two years before he was ten. His mother remarries Fat Elfred “who was amiable enough when he had not been drinking” (8) and has no time for the crippled Odd. The fixed idea inherent in Odd’s name is destructive because Odd’s name does not merely connote the tip of a blade. Contrary to its general meaning, his name signifies power, passion, progress and authority. The meaning of Odd’s name is multiplied in the narrative which is massive, complex and perplexing. *Coraline* has drawn the readers into the protagonist’s quest for selfhood. Naming remains one of the subjects of discussion and is developed to be the novel’s other concern. Miss Forcible asks, “what’s in a name?...that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (52). Her statement emphasizes how language possesses the power to construct meaning. In a similar manner, selfhood is denoted as a dynamic

process that encapsulates multiple implications and contradictions. By emphasizing the concept of name and naming Gaiman has demonstrated that having names is not the criterion to formulate an authentic self, instead, there are certain internal and external factors that form an individual self. The cat tells Coraline "Cats don't have names…*you* people have names. That's because you don't know who you are. We know who we are, so we don't need names" (45). What remains noteworthy to be expressed is the cat's insistence on the futility of having names. Naming in the novel appears to be insignificant for the cat because it does not carry qualities that are pre-requisite for forming an authentic self. Coraline's bold proclamation regarding her awareness of self as, "I'm on my own. I think I've probably become a single child family" (60) remarks a deeper level of self. Her despairing statement, by labelling herself as "single child family" sounds ironically powerful. It is not a denial of the self, rather she has emblematically claimed ownership of her individuality. On the other hand, she gradually learns the fragile system in which humans are involved with and she has attempted to exploit the fear of constantly being ignored and discriminated. Coraline's name is often mispronounced which at times evokes a feeling of resentment. The mispronunciation of her name and the inability of the other characters to pronounce her name correctly symbolically denotes the complexity by which we perceive ourselves and others.

Like everything else, the value of food cannot escape a discussion in Gaiman's works. Food, in Gaiman's novels, bear an implication with the search for the self. The image of food becomes a metaphor and the symbol that marks the inner battle occurring within the characters. The fantasy for food in Gaiman's works to a great extent capture the disappointment, frustration and loneliness of the characters and food symbolism in the works selected for the study has an important connection with the desire and the repression of the characters. Additionally, it serves as a tool to which characters inner desire and imagination are expressed to the fullest. The significance and fundamentality of food in literature is elucidated:

> Food is important. In fact, nothing is more basic. Food is the first of the essentials of life, our biggest industry, our biggest export, and our most frequently indulged pleasure. Food means creativity and diversity. As a species, humans are omnivorous; we have tried to eat virtually

> everything on the globe, and our ability to turn remarkable array of raw substances into cooked dishes, meals, and feasts is evidence of astounding versatility, adaptability, and aesthetic ingenuity (Keeling and Pollard 5).

The portrayal of food in Gaiman's works has indicated the manner in which food has served as a means of understanding the characters and how it redefines their social relations. On the other hand, it functions as a means of rebellion and self-empowerment while functioning as an important tool to revamp and counter desolation and hopelessness. Natalia Andrievskikh says:

> Throughout cultures and epochs, metaphors of consumption act as a major symbolic vehicle to convey and shape concepts of sexuality, agency and gender identity. In literary and popular contexts, appetite stands for sexual desire, description of eating mask language of possession, and representations of cooking express both enslavement and empowerment (137).

Food serves as an apt tool to reflect the inner turmoil of the protagonist in *The Graveyard Book*. The manner in which food stands as enslavement and empowerment is resonated time and time again in the novel. Bod feels imprisoned in the graveyard and his intense longing to consume the food of his dream further denotes his ardent desire to explore and extend his territory. Bod utters his feeling of discontentment when he says, "The lady who looks after me, she makes horrible food. Hard-boiled egg soup and things" (66). By paying close attention to food, the author evokes Bod's deepest desire and anger. Additionally, it symbolises Bod's consternation as well as the problem inherent in the conceptualization of the self and others. Further, the vivid picture of Bod's passionate longing to consume food is stressed when his tummy rumbles after being informed by the Honourable Archibald Fitzhugh that they are going to a place which provides the best food in the whole world. Bod makes a plea to join their company in order to quench his hunger and starvation. The act of pleading can be associated with the intensity of Bod's early passion to exercise his individuality. Miss Lupescu cooks food that includes "dumpling swimming in lard; thick reddish-purple soup with a lump of sour cream in it; small cold boiled potatoes; cold garlic-heavy

sausages; hard boiled eggs in grey unappetising liquid" (64) which is not appetizing for Bod. It denotes the manner in which Bod enters new stages of development as he moves from dependent childhood to angry adolescence. The primary importance of food represents the need for self-expression and the manner in which he struggles to define his self. The gastronomic adventures of Bod prove to be a psychological journey of self-discovery and self-expression. *The Ocean at The End of The Lane* proves to be a path-breaking study of the relationship between food and the self and it serves as a symbol to reflect the life of an enslaved protagonist. In attempting to identify himself and his place, the protagonist embarks on a journey to understand his own fear and desire. He is no longer content as a child and feels imprisoned in his own house. His tendency to consider the Hempstocks' food more appetizing and special is crucial and debatable. The author has portrayed the way in which the unnamed protagonist has reconstructed his self through the food along with his eating habit. When asked by Lettie, the protagonist boldly professes, "I was so hungry, and the hunger took my head and swallowed my lingering dreams" (196). The farmhouse's huge kitchen features "a portion of shepherd's pie, the mashed potato a crusty brown on top, minced meat and vegetables and gravy beneath it" (196). Subsequently, the protagonist professes that he is scared of eating food outside his home, "scared that I might want to leave food I did not like and be told off, or be forced to sit and eat it in minuscule portions until it was gone, as I was at school, but the food at the Hempstocks' was always perfect. It did not scare me" (196). The explicit lines illustrate the trauma hidden behind and the intense pain the protagonist undergoes. The author has consistently employed a graphic description of the appalling condition the protagonist undergoes. It has further reconstructed him as capable of understanding and dealing with the tragic event when he confesses that the food in the Hempstocks' does not scare him. The protagonist's hunger to consume food and the hunger he exhibits towards establishing his self can be treated synonymously. A note of resentment, fear and frustration is conspicuous from the speech uttered by the unnamed protagonist. The protagonist's revelation that hunger takes his head which has further swallowed his dreams can be interpreted metaphorically. It indicates his ceaseless attempt to survive and it is connotative of disempowerment who is unrelentingly devoid of relief. Besides, the meal reinforces the message that one's self cannot be defined and limited and that the concept of selfhood is subjective. Eating without restriction "certainly represents refusal to conform to socially

determined gender behaviour marked by moderation and constant worry about body image (Andrievskikh 141). Comparing his own eating habit at home and at the Hempstocks' home, the latter seems to be more preferable because he can procure immense freedom. This sense of freedom empowers the protagonist and helps him to form a new relationship to his own body. Peter Farb and George Armelagos state, "Eating is symbolically associated with the most deeply felt human experiences, and thus expresses things that are sometimes difficult to articulate in everyday language" (111). The crucial scene that is emphasized in Gaiman's *Coraline* is the importance of food within the narrative and the novel's scenes of eating penetrate deeper with its rich thematic significance and narrative parallels. Associated with appetite and mutual sustenance, food reconnects Coraline with the realm of visceral experience. Early in the narrative, the narrator claims that the chicken served by Coraline's other mother is "the best chicken that Coraline had ever eaten" (35). Neither Coraline's mother nor her father prepares chicken to suit her taste and her Mother's chicken "never tasted of anything" (35). Both in craving and attempting to consume the food of her dreams, she inquires whether "awful meals, with food made from recipes, with garlic and tarragon and broad beans" (142) will be served in the other world. This marks the emptiness and the ceaseless fear that haunts Coraline. Her reluctance and fear to consume the formal recipe reveal her attempt to define herself independently. While pleading to consume an exotic food, Coraline subsequently earns freedom and transformation in a more sophisticated manner which raises her to a more experienced and more powerful person. To the question, "What is food", Roland Barthes says that "it is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also…a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behavior" (21). For Coraline, food becomes a mode of constituting the self that marks her social position and aesthetic gesture. Likewise, Food becomes a marker for physical and emotional sustenance in *Odd and the Frost Giants* and the author makes mention of how Odd exemplifies this. Before embarking on a journey, Odd equips himself with his warmest clothes, and steals "a side of smoke-blackened salmon from where it hung in the rafters of Fat Elfred's house, and a fire pot with a handful of glowing embers from the fire" (11) along with his father's second best axe. As the plot of the novel progresses, the salmon he shares has strengthened the bond between Odd, the eagle, the fox and the bear and uplifts Odd as an authoritative figure. He makes himself heard and

becomes uncontrollable and a centre of admiration who takes initiative towards maturity. The transformed self of the protagonist is witnessed when he is treated as a regulator of food, who acquires the authority to command when he says, "We'll find more food tomorrow" (28). The relentless hunger and the quest for food mark Gaiman's characters who struggle to survive in order to establish their selfhood. His works have succeeded in exploring how food can be perceived symbolically as a source of power to form a sense of self. Food, in his works, participates in the adventures of the characters and nourishes their body, mind and soul. Characters continual assertion to consume food is a process of self-definition and the control they exhibit over their body and is a tool for power both over oneself and one's surroundings. From being a negative symbol, food transforms into a positive symbol of personal fulfilment and it magnifies the positive qualities of Gaiman's characters.

Reconciliation with the mother is of enduring importance and has imparted critical importance in Neil Gaiman's works. Patricia Seator Skorman stresses that mirroring in the earlier stages of life occurs in the bodily relationship with the mother. The receptiveness of the mother allows the infant to fully inhabit the body from which an authentic sense of self emerges (Natov 65). Whereas, the process of individuation according to Nancy Chodorow comprises "defensive splitting, along with projection, introjection, and the creation of arbitrary boundaries by negative identification (I am what she is not)" with the mother" (137). Given the role the mother plays in the formation of the self, Gaiman's works call attention to Kristeva's "Semiotic Chora" (Kristeva 27). Kristeva claims that the body of the mother is "what meditates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of semiotic chora" (27). Julia Kristeva argues that the human subject is seen only as male while the subject can actually also be female. Additionally, she opines that an idea of a coherent human can only develop from the unconscious because subjectivity, according to her, is a dynamic process that cannot be finalized, hence it is always "divided, contradictory and unfinalizable" (Nayar 55). Kristeva's introduction of the semiotic chora particularly "marks her desire to move beyond the paradigm of a violent rupture that promotes a monolithic understanding of *logos* (relieved only by a feminized otherness outside it)" (Morgaroni 81, 82), including "a metaphorics of gendered hierarchical op/positions (speech vs. silence, spirit vs. matter, time vs. space)" (82). Julia Kristeva further

suggests that the maternal body can function as a meaningful self that is beyond symbolic language. The symbolic in the context of Kristeva designates the inclination to use language in an orderly way including grammar and syntax and it is a means of expressing meaning that leaves little scope for ambiguity. Whereas the semiotic, according to Kristeva, encompasses certain gestures, touch and sound and the semiotic according to her is exemplified in poetry, dance and music that originates in the unconscious (McAfee 17). Moreover, the child and the mother's interaction serves to be an example of the semiotic which is termed the Chora by Julia Kristeva. It is not merely a space; it can be understood as a non-linguistic interaction that precedes formalized written discourse. Kristeva fuses the two terms 'chora' and 'semiotics' in which the chora becomes "the space in which the meaning that is produced is semiotic: the echolalis, glossolalias, rhythms, and intonations of an infant who does not yet know how to use language…or of a psychotic who has lost the ability to use language" in an appropriately expressive way (19). The semiotic chora, according to Clare Kahane comprises, "the infant's experience of maternal voice…sound that is the paternal precursor of the infant's language" (Natov 65). *The Graveyard Book* begins with a creepy narration that has denoted the murder scene of the protagonist's mother and father and the novel ends with Bod leaving the graveyard. Apart from highlighting the bond between Bod and his foster mother, Mrs Owens the novel stresses on the chronicle of Bod's psychological journey away from his foster mother towards adulthood. Gently rocking Bod in her arms, Mrs Owens chants to Bod so that he can sleep until he wakens. Through her musical improvisation, she underscores the future that awaits Bod, that is, to "see the world…Kiss a lover, Dance a measure, Find your name and buried treasure" (20). The maternal semiotic aspect that is carried out in the songs through its rhythm and melody functions as an agent of selfhood and it functions as a perpetual reminder regarding the infant's ability to grasp the semiotic impulses. Later in the novel, the practicality of the chora is validated when the non-linguistic interaction yields a fruitful outcome. He confesses, "I want to see life. I want to hold it in my hands. I want to leave a footprint on the sand of a desert island. I want to play football with people…I want *everything"* (286). The semiotic feature of language is brought alive through this instance. Moreover, Gaiman here suggests the fluidity of the bond between the two characters and it foreshadows a new independent self Bod will exhibit. Since the graveyard no longer provides him the space and opportunity to assert his individuality,

he has to disassociate himself from his foster mother. Before Bod finally leaves the graveyard, Mrs Owens bids farewell with an encouraging note, “Face your life, its pain, its pleasure, Leave no path untaken” (288). Disassociating the subject from the mother proves crucial as Donna Bassin remarks, “A healthy way for mothers to mourn is to move beyond nostalgia and recognize that a child is moving to a new stage in life and then supporting his or her independence” (Gilmore 98). Mrs Owens digresses from the image of “smothering mother” that is a mother who fails to realise that her child grows and becomes independent, who is not willing to admit that the child moves into new stages of life (98).

The romance of “othermothering” (Pfeiffer 59) remains conspicuous in Gaiman’s narratives which are depicted both in *The Graveyard Book* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. Mothering, in both the novels, transcends beyond the physical and emotional nourishment. The displacement of biological mothers extends the scope to understand the concept of othermothering that becomes a communal act and inhabits an ethical stance. Julie Pfeiffer stresses, “The concept of othermothering, the need to share the nurturing and mentoring of children, extends biologically rooted notions of motherhood and decenters heterosexual models of power in favour of community mothering and mentoring” (61). Mothering is glorified as a shared enterprise that extends beyond the biological connection and nowhere in the two novels do readers come across insurmountable problems inherent as a result of absence of the biological connection. Bod and the unnamed protagonist in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* are the recipients of the ethical quality the concept of othermothering offers. The romanticization of othermothering in both the works provides a space for the two characters to see their self in a wider context. The Hempstock’s farm in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* represents a retreat from the injustice the protagonist undergoes. The farm becomes a heavenly abode for the protagonist and it becomes a safe place where wonderful dinners are served and ultimately a multiple frame in which his conscious self is regenerated. It is interesting to know that the farm is inhabited by women characters who are emotionally strong and who have willingly ignored traditional gender roles. When asked by the protagonist whether there were any men and whether it is it just the three of them who reside in the farm, Old Mrs Hempstock replies, “Men!...I dunno what blessed good a man would be! Nothing a man could do

around this farm that I can't do twice and five times as well" (124). The patriarchal belief regarding the difference between man and women and the custom that governs gender is debunked by Old Mrs Hempstock. The farm rather demands responsible persons and offers no guarantee that men are fully skilled and more powerful than women. The female Hempstocks perform a domestic task and are not deprived of a sense of their individuality, independence and autonomy. The novel deviates from traditional patriarchal thinking which believes that women are born to be passive while men are born to be active agents. Thus, women characters become more active to shoulder responsibilities. Lettie's mother comments that the Hempstock men "went off to seek their fate and fortune…they get a distant look in their eyes…they're off to towns and even cities, and nothing but an occasional postcard to even show they were here at all" (125). Furthermore, the female Hempstocks function to discourage an assessment of gender differences that can complicate the unitary conception. The novel becomes a piece of criticism on the patriarchal belief that has revealed the biases and limitations of the traditional definition of gender. Besides, the novel glorifies the self-confidence and assertiveness of the female Hempstocks. Through another lens, the protagonist eventually learns to transcend gender divides and participates in establishing complete equality between men and women. The maternal space in both novels encompasses an ethical process that calls attention to what Kristeva terms Herethics. It is "a love that propels compassion rather than narcissistic desire" (Jenkins 169) and as Andrea Powell Jenkins asserts Herethics "endeavours to deconstruct the binaries between the rational and the sensual, the body and the mind" (146).

The desire for a mother appears in *Odd and the Frost Giants* which is depicted in the character of the protagonist as an early state of desire. The book explores the transformation of Odd from darkness and despair, hardship and discrimination to a stage in which he attains his individuality. Barba Creed states that women have been "constructed as 'biological freaks' whose bodies represent a fearful and threatening form of sexuality" (6). Rather the novel has dramatized the kind of relationship between mother and child that is essential in the formation of the self. In the deep forest when they finish eating, the fox goes to sleep beside the fire, and the eagle flaps off into a dead pine to sleep and "Odd took the leftover fish and pushed it into a drift of snow, to keep it fresh, as his mother had taught him" (68). By sharing the food with the

nonhuman characters, Odd embodies a love that deviates from narcissism and clings towards compassion. This enables him to cuddle the cultural others as he is conscious that their needs and desires equal his own. Odd's frequent memory of his relationship with his mother enables him to establish greater compassion. In this manner, Odd's mother represents the Herethics of maternal thinking, which makes Odd realise the need for acknowledging the other which eventually makes him embody love instead of narcissistic desire. Odd remembers his mother's ballads, which are always safe and unblemished in his mind. Longing to recapture his closeness to his mother, he identifies himself with his mother's ballad, "The fox sauntered ahead of them, and Odd thought crazily, happily, *I'm just like one of the brave lords in my mother's ballads. Only without the horse, the dog and the falcon* (24). Odd makes a connection with his mother through the ballads during their stages of separation and the space of semiotic chora comes into play. Ruth Jenkins asserts, "Functioning as a "repository of alterity and difference," the chora can also be understood as either an "experimental psychosis" or a place that "opens up the realm of pure possibility," pure "imaginableness" (55). Reminiscent of the semiotic energies, the ballads provide him with the space to gain emotional nourishment and it bestows him pure imaginability and meaningful experience. Odd and his mother are connected linguistically through the chora and that has provided the space for mirroring. It is an affirmation of the self for Odd as well as his mother, in a bond of true reciprocity. Although Odd and his mother separate physically, the ballad imparts connection between them that resounds across the pages. Towards the closing of the novel, as an extension of his individuality and courage, Odd decides to take his mother to Scotland which will bring them together after their separation. The affection between Odd and his mother emphasizes the significance of continuity that can be generated through the bond. Besides, it is fundamental for developing the spirit of self, which is based on fluidity and mutuality. Coraline too yearns for love, someone to play with her, who could make her life interesting. For a mother to make the child embrace the subject position and meaningful recognition Robin Calland professes, "The child must know that his or her mother is not a product of the child's own fantasies. The child must know that his or her mother exists outside his or her own interiority" (166). Coraline's mother exhibits "a strong subjective self…she was able to successfully mirror Coraline during infancy, which allowed Coraline to see her mother in the mirror through her own reflection" (Kotanko 176). Her

ability to distinguish between what is authentic and inauthentic makes her a heroic figure and it eventually makes her realise the bond she exhibits with her real mother. Coraline discovers, embraces herself and refuses to let her body be colonized by the other mother. She retains her own sensory experience and learns to speak to herself in her own voice. She learns to use her own body to test the truth of a situation and discourage the chances of the potential power of powerlessness. The multiple treacherous images of her other mother as "possession" (126), and "tolerated pet, whose behaviour was no longer amusing" (126) indicates her attempt to return to her real mother who is the original source of sustenance. Moreover, this makes Coraline unravel her fantasy of an ideal mother and she soon realises the need to find her parents and moves with an urgency to find them. Coraline affirms her primal intimacy with her mother when she interprets her other mother as a person who could only "transform, and twist and change" (147), and who was "sick and evil and weird" (91). Her sense of self is extended when she differentiates her real mother from the other mother. This instance proves to be a transitional moment for Coraline which makes her realize the dynamics of mothering because "parenting is not simply a set of behaviour, but participation in an interpersonal, diffuse, affective relationship" (Chodorow 33) The voice that whispers to Coraline reverberates her mother's voice though her body cannot be seen; this manifests the limitations of the symbolic while the power of the semiotic is retained. The inclusion of the semiotic chora restructures Coraline's psychic energies and provides a channel of interaction which subsequently alters her values and ideas regarding traditional mothering ideology.

One of the intricacies of Gaiman's works is the relationship between memory and the self as Mark Freeman summarises, memory "has to do not merely with recounting the past but with making sense of it – from 'above', as it were – is an interpretive act the end of which is an enlarged understanding of the self" (29). Additionally, Dorothee Birke asserts that other than one's memories nothing could be further distinctive and private (24). Linkages between memory and the self give characters their distinctive nature and it helps them communicate with others and store their learned experience. Remembering past events, through either narratives or direct experience permits the development of the characters and it facilitates them to assert mastery and control over events. Gaiman's characters draw meaning on their own

instead of relying on what others provide for them. His works have depicted the manner in which memory is not merely the retrieval of information; instead, it has contributed immensely in the formation of the coherent self. Fictional characters and objects occupy a large entity and it is through such constructions that characters are provided with a usable backdrop for shaping their memories and organizing them into meaningful lines of action. Memory, in Gaiman's works, connotes power that coexists with the past and the present because:

> In order to answer the age-old question 'who am I?' we more often than not look to our past and fashion a narrative for our lives. By comparing our present selves with the selves we remember, we experience ourselves as being in time-an experience which is crucial for our sense of self (Birke 2).

A diverse function of memory and the possibility of recognizing oneself without having names are stressed in Gaiman's *Coraline*. At the same time, Gaiman has denoted how an individual's self is the outcome of one's memory. The narrator of the novel says that occasionally Coraline would forget who she is while she daydreams whether she is "exploring the Arctic, or the Amazon rainforest, or the darkest Africa" (81). It is only when "someone tapped her on her shoulder or said her name that Coraline would come back from a million miles with a start, and all in a fraction of a second have to remember who she was, and what her name was" (81). Memory moulds Coraline's self because without memory, Coraline finds it difficult to construct her individuality. Without memory she cannot perceive any future for herself and she cannot make decisions. The protagonist does not have a vocabulary to describe her emotional state that would make sense to the readers. The troublesome mystery of the self is reflected in the passage in which readers activate their empathy and come to grasp Coraline's experience. Further, she is troubled with the saddening notion that her own fantasy and dream may not even be her own. The anonymous voice in the story tells Coraline the triviality of having names and stresses the significance of memory in order to narrate events, "Names, names, names, said another voice, all faraway from and lost. The names are the first thing to go, after the breath has gone, and the beating of the heart. We keep our memories longer than our names" (98). The voice says that it keeps pictures of its governess on his mind some May morning, carrying a hoop and stick with

the morning sun behind him and the tulips bobbling in the breeze despite his inability to recall the tulips and governess's name. The voice could still picture the colour of tulips as "red, and orange-and-red, and red-and-orange-and-yellow, like the embers in the nursery fire of winter's evening" (99). The message imparted by the author in the story is that a name which is often considered as a signifier of one's self is temporary and fragile. Rather, memory becomes the basic tool to express characters' past experiences and it creates their perception of the world which they inhabit. Additionally, *The Graveyard Book* has resonated with the memories of the characters and it has knitted the lasting impact it has on the individual. Characters memories are recollected and it is manifested through storytelling techniques in the novel. Bod's alliance with Scarlett Amber Perkins has nurtured him immensely towards his mental and emotional development. The narrator explores this when he narrates how they would wander in the graveyard together every weekend afternoon and trace names with their fingers and write them down. Bod tells Scarlett whatever he knows about the inhabitants of the grave or mausoleum or tomb and she would tell him stories that she has read or learned including the scenario of the living society which is the other world for Bod. She introduces to him the existence of cars, buses, television and aeroplanes and Bod, in turn, would tell her about the days when the people in the graves are alive. He tells her how Sebastian Reeder had gone to London Town and has seen the queen, "who had been a fat woman in a fur cap who had glared at everyone and spoke no English" (38). Storytelling becomes a channel for imparting discredited forms of knowledge and it is inextricably linked with an act of fantasizing, instruction, as well as entertainment. The story exchanged between them makes Bod realise that he needs more lessons beyond the graveyard. Later in the novel, Bod finally learns how to distinguish his position through the assistance of his memory. When Josiah Worthington tells Bod that the living and the dead do not mingle, he soon "realised why he had danced as one of the living, and not as one of the crew that had walked down the hill, and he said only, 'I see…I think" (152). Memory generates therapeutic quality for Bod because:

> Only when memories are appropriated into the fabric of the self…only when one commences to rewrite the self by incorporating one's memories within the context of plausible narrative order – can they be coincident with a measure of psychic healing (Freeman 171).

The novel illustrates death as a great equalizer which is validated through the "danse macabre". The danse macabre holds together the living and the dead and stands as a metaphor for unity and harmony. One notes that death in the novel is shown to be a decent experience which is compared with "great democracy" (23). Having been raised by the graveyard folks, Bod does not alienate and detach himself from the graveyard folks. He prides himself in claiming that he knows every inch of the graveyard and consider himself as the graveyard inhabitants. On the other hand, his memory intervenes which places Bod in the horns of dilemma. While having the strong notion that he is part of the graveyard, his memory reminds him that he belongs to the living world beyond doubt. Through the intervention of his memory, Bod finally learns that he has certain goals to accomplish. Apart from this, Dreams, waterfall, Mimir's well as well as the natural scene and objects become a warehouse of memory for Odd in *Odd and the Frost Giants*. The metaphors have provided a usable backdrop for shaping his memories and it has organised them into meaningful lines of action. In the novel, memory serves as an instrument to explore the past. The feeling of familiarity of the past occurrence facilitates Odd's perception and helps him differentiate the inadmissible from the admissible evidence. The waterfall is one of his favourite places in the world which runs high and fast from spring until midwinter. Odd's consciousness is layered with his memories of the past into detailed tableau. Over these layers of metaphors, he finds an analogue of his better self. The natural scenes in the novel along with his emotions make him emerge as a sensitive being with a creative soul. The process of recollection and reflection through imagination and memory denotes the manner in which memory comes to us through a nexus of images clustered around a moment. The narrator says, "In the water's surface he saw reflections. His father, in the winter, playing with him and his mother- a silly game of blind man's buff that left them all giggling and helpless on the ground" (74). The power of the seemingly ordinary moment which Odd's early memory coalesce is discernible here. Besides, memory plays an important role in the relationship with and the creation of one's family, and through them, the self emerges. Odd bases his sense of self with continued connection and interaction with his parents. It is by looking into the past that Odd anticipates and creates his present and future, "to know what we were confirms that we are. Self-continuity depends wholly on memory; recalling past experiences links us with our earlier selves, however different we may since have become" (Lowenthal 197). What becomes extraordinary is Odd's ability to

move from observation to transformation through memory. For Odd, memory offers solace in its concrete distinctiveness and is imaginatively gratifying. Distinctions get blurred as Odd descends deeper into the forest. He is keenly aware that it is time for him to head for home. When he is almost at the bottom, he realises that he "had absolutely no idea where the hut was" (22). Although he follows the fox, he is certain that the fox will not lead him back. He then hurries and stumbles "on a patch of ice, and his crutch went flying" (22), and finally lands in the hard snow. But in spite of all these, Odd gains clarity and the narrator affirms "The moon rose, pale and huge, and cold, cold, but Odd laughed some more, because his hut was waiting for him, and he was an impossible lord riding a bear, and because he was Odd" (24, 25). The affirmation is generated from Odd's memory. Thus, it is conspicuous that memory is reconstructive, that it can be shaped by one's belief, goal and determination which at times may be inaccurate. Moreover, the device of memory has moulded the protagonist and is instrumental in recreating different personalities in him. Memory, for Odd, becomes the psychological map, and it has strengthened the growing awareness of his individuality and self. The novel has explored the possibility of accessing the creative and the essential part of memory by dreaming, observing and even through listening. *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* has reminded the readers of the power inherent in one's memory. Besides, in the novel, memory is shown to be twofold and dynamic which is reliable as well as unreliable. Old Mrs Hempstock claims, "Different people remember things differently, and you'll not get any two people to remember anything the same, whether they were there or not" (228). Memory, a storehouse in which the narrator and protagonist makes the relation between the past and the present, possesses dual significance. Memory in the novel is not static, which leaves the protagonist perplexed and bewildered. The events narrated by Ginnie Hempstock and Lettie's mother that had occurred in the past is different from what the protagonist can recollect:

> 'After a fashion, dear', said Ginnie. 'The hunger birds tore out your heart. You scream so piteously as you died. She couldn'tabide that. She had to do something'. I tried to remember this. I said,'This isn't how I remember it.
>
> The old lady sniffed. 'Didn't I just say you'll never get any two people to remember anything the same? (230).

The narrator is told that he had come back to the farm when he was twenty four with his two young children but he is unable to recollect this because "the process of self-understanding is itself fundamentally recollective" (Freeman 29). The difficulty of extracting the past from the present situation is discernible here. However, the manner in which the memory of Lettie is preserved suggests a measure of memory's temporal continuity. By attempting to restore and preserve his memory, the protagonist establishes different relations to the past because "all awareness of the past is founded in memory" (Lowenthal 193). He continues to marvel how he would have reacted if he sees her standing before him. Thus, it may be stated that memory, in the novel, is inextricably linked to elements of passion as well as desire in the protagonist. In this manner, memory functions in a significant way and becomes a site for reconstruction and adding in the process, incompleteness. Memory, as denoted earlier is not stationary; what becomes more important is the individual who exercises it. Memory becomes traumatic for a while but it nurtures the protagonist to exhibit a brighter perspective. The protagonist heartily gets up and walks a few steps to the edge of the pond and declares, "Lettie…Thank you for saving my life" (232). The death of Lettie fills him with a sense of guilt and remorse and in the process, his present self is recreated when he identifies his existence. Simultaneously, a site of memory can function as a storehouse that unceasingly generates consciousness.

Switching gears a little bit from the earlier discussion, what lies crucial in the heart of Gaiman's narratives is the varying degree in which visuality imparts a new self-conscious mode of being. Therefore, the ability to visualize stands crucial for the characters which situates the importance of the characters' mind, body as well as the imaginative skills, which can function as a new mode of seeing. Characters' preoccupation with their own body parts becomes a landmark in understanding the self, a self which Karen Coats terms "Transmodern self". Diverging from the modernist and postmodernist conception of the self, Karen Coats proposes the significance of the transmodern self in her essay "Postmodern Picturebooks and the Transmodern Self". In it, she argues that the modernist situates independence, reason, freedom, autonomy and self-actualization as the goal of the human self, while some of the postmodernist considers the self as "constructed-a fragmented play of surfaces where any sense of

coherence or integration is illusory at best, a violent repression at worst" (76, 77). Coats claims:

> In both modern and postmodern accounts of the self, for instance, the body is lost-either as an unnecessary hindrance to the concept of a disembodied individual rationality in the former, or as an infinitely plastic substance that is inconsequential to virtual reality in the latter. The transmodern brings the body back into the mix as both limit and as an invariant centering principle around which a child's sense of self articulates (81).

Transmodernity, according to her, regards the self as embodied, which is born into a community, that employs language including other semiotic systems in order to communicate meaning (81). Coraline's flared understanding of vision is denoted several times when she widens her eyes in the scenes. Her sensitivity towards colour propels her to choose independently. Her preference of "Day- Glo green gloves" (29) over "white socks, navy-blue school underpants, four grey blouses, and a dark grey skirt" (29) displays her visual literacy. In the secondary world, Coraline first notices a picture hanging, "Coraline stared at his eyes trying to work out what exactly was different" (34). At first glance, the picture looks similar to the one that hangs in their hallway at home. However, she immediately notices that the expression of the boy in the picture is different from theirs. Her visionary skill develops her active mode of spectatorship and to clarify her doubts, she utilizes her vision, "her heart beat so hard and so loudly she was scared it would burst out of her chest…She closed her eyes…bumped into something, and opened her eyes" (55). Unlike Coraline, the buttoned eyed characters are unable to comprehend the prosperity and creative visualization Coraline enjoys. Later in the scene, Coraline finds reassurance through the assistance of her visionary skill. She sees that her other mother does not look like her mother at all; she is "huge - her head almost brushed the ceiling of the room – and very pale, the colour of a spider's belly. Her hair writhed and twined about her head, and her teeth were sharp as knives" (155). It is conspicuous that Coraline has been deceived, but her expanding field of vision rescues her and it eventually makes her an astute interpreter and observer. "See the world…Get in trouble. Get out of trouble again. Visit jungles and volcanoes and deserts and islands. And People. I want to meet an awful lot of people" (Gaiman, "*The*

*Graveyard*" 287). In this statement, Bod confesses his inclination to experience community life and exercise his own visual literacy in order to attain a coherent sense of self. Additionally, his remarkable speech makes the readers consider Bod's awareness regarding his body's relationship with others. Bod is keenly aware that he possesses the skill to face life not in a way he is programmed to be, but a self in a larger cultural system. In spite of choosing to remain isolated and alienated, Bod acknowledges his human nature to find meaning and become more inquisitive. Gaiman couches Bod's endeavour in visual terms. The intensification of visual perceptiveness breeds the willingness to negotiate interpersonal relationships. Bod's vision expands further as a result of his relationship with Scarlett and most importantly, the graveyard inhabitants. Bod visually displays his yearning to move forward in life with eye-catching imagery such as jungles, volcanoes, deserts, and island. Interestingly, his vision foregrounds the mental picture of his imagination. The outward manifestation of his dreams involves his intense physical and emotional strength, which empowers the visualization of his own self. Part of his self and the picture in his language denotes Bod's growth towards a higher level of consciousness and perception. This raises him to be more intact physically and emotionally with the rest of the world. Besides, his ability to vision emanates from being a human being, so by the medium of the human way of seeing assisted by his imaginative skill he attains a mystical vision, this makes him perceive that all existing matter is alive and connected. The fantastic indicates "an integration of the readers into the world of the characters; that world is defined by the readers own ambiguous perception of the events narrated" (Todorov 31). In parallel with Todorov's stance, Farah Mendlesohn claims that "the fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder" (viii). The fusion of the visual and the textual mode of representation in Gaiman's works bear thematic and literary implication. These two modes of representation exhibit a dual significance in Gaiman's works when he makes the author and the readers interact. Secondly, it paves a channel for providing new meaning in multiple ways while allowing the dexterity to zoom the character's perception and psyche. The pictorial effect and the description of place, person, objects, and characters' own emotions stand crucial in Gaiman's narrative. Apart from the verbal form of description, the visual mode of description in the narratives provides what Andrea Schwenke Wylie calls "narrative Space" (172). The narrative space, then, is a

"contemplative space that relies on the graphic space of the topographic page and the reader's interaction with its story space" (186, 187). In *The Ocean at the End of the Lane,* the relationship between the visual and the verbal is counterpointing. The protagonist often labels Ursula Monkton as a monster, who "wasn't real…was a cardboard mask", (79) who travels inside him "as a worm, that has flapped and gusted in the open country under that orange sky" (80). Surprisingly, readers become bewildered when the protagonist declares that Ursula Monkton smiles brightly at him and Lettie, "she really was pretty…I wonder what I would have done if she had smiled at me like that now: whether I would have handed my mind or my heart or my identity to her for the asking, as my father did" (157). Contradictions occur on the part of the protagonist which challenge the readers to meditate on the picture and the words. The heightened visual acuity of the protagonist makes him negotiate meaning and the dynamics of interpersonal relationship. Yet, what strikes the readers is the appearance of Ursula Monkton belies the protagonist's former perception of her. His surprise and bewilderment connotes his confusion as he endeavours to apprehend this challenging, contradictory relationship. When the visual accuracy dominates the thought process of the protagonist, his consciousness is expanded and begins to see the thing he has never seen or never bothered to see. Engaging with a broader visual perception leads to a greater level of consciousness for the protagonist.

Gaiman has portrayed the manner in which his characters possess an ardent inclination to move forward further and confront the unknown territory. This generates the idea that by portraying his characters desire to march forward, he has deviated from the romantic perception of childhood. Alision Lurie stresses that the natural innocents in the works of Blake and Wordsworth "reappeared in middlebrow versions in hundreds of nineteenth-century stories and poems, always uncannily good and sensitive, with an angelic beauty and charm that often move the angels to carry them off" (118). The angelic and the passive, the gullible and the indecisive children are not seen in the characters of Neil Gaiman. He alters the angelic qualities and prefers to portray them as willing children who live with uncertainty and in some cases, welcome the unknown. Gaiman's characters do not remain forever in the secondary world. The stereotypical image of a child who refuses to grow up and who remains in the fantastic world forever does not define the characters of Neil Gaiman. Rather, Gaiman has introduced

characters who are ready to challenge life and counter a path of discordance. At the same time, he has introduced characters who are willing to challenge their right through their own choices and actions. In *The Graveyard Book*, Bod refuses to remain in the graveyard and finally insists on moving forward instead of remaining forever in the graveyard. The narrator says that in the graveyard no one ever changed, the little children Bod had played with when he was small are still little children. The motionless atmosphere of the graveyard is indicated when the narrator says, "Thackeray Porringer…would walk with Bod in the evenings, and tell stories of unfortunate things…Normally the stories would end in the friends being hanged until they were dead for no offence of theirs and by mistake" (213, 214). The novel contradicts typical childhood wishes because to have exciting adventures and be perfectly safe and secure is no longer applicable. The passage remarks the manner in which Bod is not an embodiment of an innocent child, naively self–centred who refuses to grow mentally, physically and emotionally. He is inquisitive, independent and becomes solely engaged with his goal. His insistence to move forward by abandoning the idea of remaining in the graveyard is a sign that reveals that Bod is ready to embrace life and even start life anew. Similarly, Coraline is moved with the same sentiment as Bod. For her, the sign of maturity and the act of possessing selfhood is not defined by acquiring what an individual craves. She questions, "What kind of fun would it be if I just got everything I ever wanted? Just like that, and it didn't mean anything. What then?" (143). Coraline finally understands that the secondary world of her other mother and father is not connected with her idea of independence and self. Therefore, she dislodges the idea of remaining in the secondary world which will provide her "awful meals, food made with recipes, with garlic and tarragon and broad beans" (142). By willingly refusing the temptations that are positioned before her, she establishes her principle and prefers to follow her instinct. At the same time, her lack of insistence on bringing the food and clothes and boots from the secondary world makes it conspicuous that she seeks to thwart any sense of wholeness and prefers to face ultimate bewilderment in any sphere. Whereas in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, the narrator confesses his refusal to die. Death in the novel does not mean a rejection of life or a delinquent evasion of responsibilities under a displeasing environment. Interestingly, the protagonist's fear of death is not his failure to shoulder responsibilities, "I did not want to die. More than that, I did not want to die as Ursula Monkton had died, beneath the rendering talons and

breaks of things that might not even have had legs or faces" (208). The narrator is not willing to die like Ursula because he sees a peculiar difference between the two of them. Besides, he is in constant fear of dying like Ursula because he does not want to make connections with her. He utters this statement to make it discernible that he possesses a unique personality and it would be erroneous to experience a similar situation like Ursula's. The protagonist eventually comes to understand that death is not an escape from displacement and fear. By vacillating between vulnerability and defensiveness, he is addressing to the reader that he is ready to shoulder responsibilities in every sphere. On the other hand, the statement imparts the protagonist's desire to wander into new imaginative domains when he is scared to break "things that might not even have had legs or faces" (208). Therefore, the protagonist furnishes an escape into the opportunities offered by the future that opens a theatre of possibilities to seek life anew.

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This chapter shall address how liminality and fantasy function as conceptual tools in presenting the subjective nature of reality. This chapter engages with Milkail Bakhtin's concept of the carnival in order to depict the collapse of boundaries and how it subverts and interrogates the definitive version of truth. Fusing these two concepts, liminality and carnivalesque transmit the concept of cultural liminality since "possible identity is one that emerges from pluralism and dialogical writing and from subverting myths about cultural identity" (Zavala 16). A different dimension of grotesque and monstrosity in the fantastic narratives explores the subjectiveness of one's body. This analysis makes one understand the liminality of identity and relinquish ideas regarding race, the foreign and the monstrous.

Realism and fantasy have been the subject of discussion that remains a debatable issue. Definitions and interpretations within these two realms differ from that of modernism and postmodernism. In order to validate the subjective nature of reality, postmodernist critics, academicians and historians developed theories to counter an objective nature of reality. Hyperreality, magic realism, carnivalesque, fantasy including liminality pervade the work of art in postmodernist fiction. Taken all together, these insightful theories make one understand the manner in which reality is not always what it was assumed to be earlier. Rather, these theories engaged themselves in the Frankensteinian experiments of creating innovative ones. While doing so, they plunge the readers to reflect reality beyond what was being represented and reject the existence of single reality and one truth. Therefore, the premise of reality is enlarged and a variety of reality is made recognized, making total signification impossible. For modernism, fantasy is considered the antithesis of the real and the fantastic belongs to the territory of the non-real. What makes truth possible for the modernist is the exclusion of the fantastic form such as dreams, lie and fiction from reality. Additionally, fantasy is dismissed as fancy which is inconsequential and connotes automated congregation of ideas, a mere device that is identified with escapism. On a lighter note, fantasy for the modernist proves to be fruitful and acceptable for children to impart moral instruction or as a channel to instill in people how to behave appropriately towards their superior. The binary opposition of the real and the non-real is the defining characteristic of modernist fantasy theories. It is commonly agreed that metaphysically and rationally fantasy is secondary in relation to the reality of ordinary human experiences (Aichele 323, 324).

During the second half of the twentieth century, Pam Morris remarks that an innovative theoretical understanding of what institutes reality developed. It destabilises and challenges rational and the Enlightenment notion of realism. It entirely discards the human ability in creating knowledge, "recognizing instead the constituting force of an impersonal system of language to construct the only sense of reality we can ever achieve" (24). Jean-Francois Lyotard contends that "Modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the 'lack of reality' of reality, together with the invention of other realities" (Arva 69). Postmodernism subverts the modernist perception of reality and fantasy in which fantasy is not debarred from the realm of reality. Rather, the fantastic becomes "the potential within language (within any signifying system) to speak the incoherence at the heart of every allegation of reality" (Aichele 325). Additionally, fantasy underlines "the discontinuity between the signifier and any signified, the gap which we must endlessly seek to fill with reality" (325). To the question as to why fantasy is gaining attraction at all levels of literature although it was once pushed on the periphery, Kathryn Hume provides a significant answer. She asserts "realism no longer imparts an adequate sense of meaning to our experience with reality" (39) and because "there is not just one reality, but a kaleidoscope of realities" (Arva 79).

Liminality which is regarded as "a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (Duffy 905) according to Victor Turner heralds the multiplicity of reality in Neil Gaiman's works. The concept of liminality was introduced by Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner into the anthropological discourse. It is also identified as a "state permitting revitalisation, the transgression or dissolution of confining norms, structural renewal and the revelation of potentiality" (905). The fantastic narrative in Gaiman's works bears a strong connection with liminality. Besides, it deconstructs the conventional understanding of reality in Gaiman's works which can be associated with instability and freedom. Additionally, liminality further suggests "a sort of *neutrality,* an aspect that confirms its connection with utopia" (Tally Jr *Foreword,* xii). Sandor Klapcsik asserts that "the contemporary interest in liminality coincides with the rise of postmodern geography, postmodernity becoming the epoch of space" (2). As a tool in literary studies, liminality extends a way to approach postmodernism while investigating and inquiring concrete boundaries which eventually

leads to the breakdown of conventional binaries and homogeneity. Fantasy is situated as an important narrative event which reflects the psyche of Gaiman's characters that impose multiple and shifting truths. Readers encounter strange characters which makes his works appear complex and ambiguous. As per the classifications made by Farah Mendlesohn in the realm of fantasy namely the portal quest Fantasy, the Immersive Fantasy, the Intrusion Fantasy and the Liminal Fantasy, the Liminal Fantasy in Gaiman's works contests the liminality of fantasy and reality. The Liminal Fantasy, according to Mendlesohn, invites the readers to admit "truth behind multiple and competing narratives while refusing to explain which truth it is we should discover" (240). An overriding characteristic of liminal fantasy is that it does not have apparent boundaries (183). It creates possible readings which fall into the category of "I know it when I see it" (183). Characters interacting with supernatural creatures, animals and the unusual characters contribute immensely in making them realize their personal and psychological conflict and ultimately offer a possible solution and alternative explanation. Additionally, the impossibility of locating the real and the unreal is heightened in his works when the fantastic narratives intrude in the dialogue. The intrusion takes its shape in the form of dreams, imagination and magic including the supernatural, which is not linear and often achronological. Lance Olsen provides a succinct definition of fantasy, he states:

> Contemporary fantasy may be thought of as the literary equivalent of deconstructionism. It is a mode which interrogates all that we take for granted about language and experience, giving these no more than shifting and provisional status. It is a mode of radical skepticism that believes only in the impossibility of total intelligibility; in the endless displacement of "meaning"; in the production of a universe without "truth"; in a bottomless relativity of significance (3).

Gaiman's works do not privilege one binary over the other in determining what is right and wrong or the real and the unreal. His works inadvertently overturn dominant discourse on the notion of reality and implant a vision of reality which is unstable and as a result, disrupts the binary imperative. This further assists the readers in formulating a subjective vision of reality. On the other hand, the inclusion of the fantastic narrative portrays multiple realities through time and space. It transcends the objective meaning

of symbols and images in his works and makes his readers acknowledge the impossibility of framing a single dimension and description of reality. Eric S. Rabkin claims:

> Fantasy represents a basic mode of human knowing; its polar opposite is reality. Reality is that collection of perspectives and expectations that we learn in order to survive in the here and now. But the here and now becomes tomorrow; a child grows, a culture develops, a person dreams. In every area of human thought, civilization has evolved a functioning reality, but the universe has suffered no reality to maintain itself unchanged. The glory of man is that he is not bounded by reality. Man travels in fantastic worlds (227).

The concept of reality and fantasy have been an intriguing part of the discussion in the works of Neil Gaiman which have been selected for the study. The novels which have been selected for the study deviates from the traditional understanding of reality. His narratives combine seemingly unrealistic characters with human characters. However, they are the vessel and mirror that make the characters violate their former knowledge about their own world and ultimately make a conclusion from that difference. Rosemary Jackson opines:

> Themes of fantastic in literature revolve around this problem of making visible the un-seen, of articulating the un-said. Fantasy establishes, or dis-covers, an absence of separating distinctions, violating a 'normal', or common- sense perspective which represents reality as constituted by discrete but connected units. Fantasy is preoccupied with limits, with limiting categories, and with their projected dissolution. It subverts dominant philosophical assumptions which uphold as 'reality' a coherent, single-viewed entity, that narrow vision which Bakhtin termed 'monological' (48).

Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002) offers a commentary on the interconnection between reality and fantasy. The non-human characters who populate the novel can speak in such a way that the dialogue between the protagonist and the animals become the descriptive part of the narrative. Talking animals have been the dominant scene that becomes a

strategy for the author to unravel dominant discourse regarding the non-human characters. The negotiation of fantasy and reality makes Coraline ascertain her place both in the primary world and in the fantastic world. The multiple and shifting truth subverts the possibility of a single authoritative reading of the novel that subsequently distorts fact and fiction. The manner in which Gaiman integrates reality and fantasy in his narrative is demonstrated at the climax of the novel when Coraline opens the front door and looks at the grey sky, "She wondered how long it would be until the sun came up, wondered whether her dream has been true thing while knowing in her heart that it had been" (175). Jean Baudrillard claims, "The impossibility of rediscovering an absolute level of the real is of the same order as the impossibility of staging illusion. Illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible" (19). The fantastic language in the statement denoted above states the manner in which Coraline attempts to interconnect the fantastic space and the primary world. Coraline is aware that she does not need to distinguish the real over the unreal and is certainly aware that they can exist simultaneously. This epitomises Coraline's preference of multiple lives and makes her catch a glimpse of new found confidence to go beyond the constricting reality paradigm. By extension, she is able to negotiate a set of binaries and encounter the opposing options. In the secondary world, Coraline sees that the view outside the window is similar with the view she sees from her own bedroom which is surrounded by trees, fields and beyond them on the horizon, the distant purple hills. Coraline perceives endless copies of image other than a ball of glass, on the mantelpiece. In the other world, when she looks around the room, "Everything was exactly the same as she remembered: there was all her grandmother's strange-smelling furniture…painting of the bow of fruit…low wooden table with the lion's feet and the empty fireplace" (84, 85). The familiarity that is displayed in this context becomes a conspicuous sign of simulation. Coraline witnesses the familiarity of the primary world and the secondary world which becomes the real for her. By drawing the familiarity between the primary world and the secondary world, reality is distorted, and it becomes a simulation. The process of simulation imparts the absence of reality that hardly leaves any space to demarcate the real from the unreal. The objects, images and characters that are visibly present again in the secondary world with its sights, smell and sounds are the hyperreal. Hyperreal indicates "the loss of the real, where distinctions between surface and depths, the real and the imaginary no longer exist. The world of the hyperreal is where image

and reality implode" (Sim 262). The secondary world is an illustration of the dreamlike space which facades the absence of the real. It continues to serve as the successive annihilation of reality. The creation of the liminal space in the novel makes memory distorted, unreliable and complex. At times, Coraline feels utterly dislocated and does not know who she is. Her memory is unable to provide her with a perfect clue to state her sense of self when the narrator says, "She was not entirely sure who she was" (81). This is further demonstrated in the character of Coraline's parents because they never seem to remember anything regarding their entrapment in the snow globe. This puts Coraline in awe and wonder and ponders "whether they had even noticed that they had lost two days in the real world, and came to the eventual conclusion that they had not" (179). Coraline's inability to trust her memory as well as the memory of her parents makes the narrative entirely liminal. Hence, the confrontation of the ordinary and the marvellous envelopes the fate of Coraline that brings a profitable level of sophistication. The liminal space provides the channel for Coraline to identify herself both in the primary world and the secondary world. The relativity of fantasy and reality and the boundaries between the primary world and the secondary worlds appear to be more subtle. At the outset of the novel, Coraline is told that she is in "terrible danger" (23) by Miss Spink and Miss Forcible after reading the black tea leaves. The secondary world becomes functional in affirming the dangers predicted by Miss Spink and Miss Forcible. In the secondary world, Coraline has to shoulder responsibilities which at times put her life at risk. In it, she encounters her other mother and other father including certain supernatural characters. In parallel with what has been predicted by Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, Coraline confronts the problem of making choices and she battles with what is good and what is evil. She is left with a revolutionary task because she has to save her parents including the souls of the three children who are imprisoned by her other mother. Moreover, the secondary world turns out to be a moment where Coraline ought to inculcate a productive means of asserting her individuality. On the other hand, what becomes crucial is that Coraline has to escape from the other mother who endeavours to sew the buttons into her eyes. The prediction made by Miss Spink and Miss Forcible is authorised in the secondary world which renders the relativity of fantasy and reality. A stringent boundary of reality and fantasy are blurred instead, and the author ties these two aspects together making reality a subjective aspect. Viewing from another dimension, the prediction proves to be consequential because it affirms the

vulnerability of Coraline. The narrator of the novel claims that the space in which Coraline is imprisoned is the size of a broom cupboard which is tall enough to stand in or sit, but is "not wide or deep enough to lie down in" (97). The limited space of imprisonment affirms the limited space and strength she has been enduring. This limited space can be seen symbolically to highlight that, she is unable to reconcile her destiny. It functions as a way of explaining that her partial way of viewing life is as faulty as the malevolent treatment inflicted by her other mother. Gaiman has painstakingly developed a hero who travels beyond time and space in his novel *Odd and the Frost Giants*. The novel does not mark the boundary between fantasy, imagination and the real. The protagonist's dreams, imagines and, in the process, communicates with animals and mythological figures. The fantastic landscape serves as the liminal space in which everything is made possible as liminality is "a state of location that is transitional, subjective, ambivalent, unstable…that opens up new possibilities in a binary system" (Eisenberg 31). It becomes an abode in which Odd is able to witness the image of his deceased father and acknowledge the transformation of the gods into the human form. The Mimir's well in the novel plays a pivotal role in highlighting the author's creation of the liminal. The reflection in the water makes the protagonist access multiple frameworks of everyday experience. He sees his father and mother playing with him and his father sitting in the wood cutter's college "as a young man, leaping from the longship into the sea and running up a craggy beach" (Gaiman 75). The images and reflections in the water become the only channel in which Odd is able to unite with his family. The scene and images that are reflected in the water become an important aspect of simulation that blurs the distinction between the real and the illusion. Jean Baudrillard opines that "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (1). The omission of territory and boundary which occurs in the novel imparts the complete absence of the real. By drawing the analogy between what is seen in the primary world and the secondary world, the writer puts forth the liminality of space and time. Odd is not amazed to see that the home of the Gods looks almost exactly like the village on the fjord, it is "bigger, of course, but the same pattern – a feasting hall, and smaller buildings all around" (93). The passage highlights how Odd perceives the similarities between the two worlds. Hyperreality occurs here because the fantasy world is deemed to be more real and the distinction between the real and the

imaginary is blurred. The inclusion of the hyperreal in the narrative reverses Odd's perception of the real when the narrator says that "Really, truly, with all his heart, Odd found that he wanted to believe that he was still in the world he had known all his life…The world smelled different, for a start. It smelled alive. Everything he looked at looked sharper, more real, more there" (64). This statement indicates that Odd forms his knowledge of the real from the image of the primary world he belongs. The hyperreal in the statement provides Odd with a feeling of satisfaction, exuberance, passion and vitality that grants him a determination to view life optimistically. Nonetheless, Odd ultimately embraces various possible selves and perceives otherness as a divine presence. Ursula Le Guin stresses that fantasy is "a different approach to reality; an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence. It is not anti- rational, but para-rational; not realistic, but surrealistic, super realistic; a heightening of reality" (Hunt 10). The fantastic narrative in the novel broadens the concept of reality. The vision Odd perceives in the Mimir's well elevates him to a self-fulfilling individual. Odd is able to form an idealistic vision when he sees his father playing a game of blind's man buff with him and his mother. On the other hand, it makes him visualise his mother sewing Fat Elfred's worn jerkin with a gloomy vision of his mother whose eyes were red with tears. The image that is reflected in the water may appear as an illusion but it serves as an opponent to physical reality. In the novel, reality is not merely sustained with the factual narration of the plot. The weaving of emotion, imagination and dreams impart the alternative mode of reality. As a liminal entity, stories are made alive that bestows Odd the perseverance to proceed and succumb to fear. Stories offer a reassuring sense of safety where characters feel secure to unfold their tales that contributes a fabric of memories and experiences. In one instance, Odd willingly admits that he is like one of the brave lords in his mother's ballads. His mother used to tell him stories about boys who tricked giants. His mother's story comes alive and is reincarnated when Odd defeats the giant. The parallel that is drawn between fiction and the actual incident when Odd defeats the giant elevates reality to a higher level for the readers. Odd's ability to respond and communicate with his emotion provides him with the channel to attain a new self. This makes him observe the essential and realize the heroic qualities inherent in him. On the other hand, stories serve as a safe backdrop that makes Odd contemplates the mysteries of liminality and time. Interestingly, Odd experiences a liminal moment which Victor Turner comments as "reduced or ground

down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with new situation in life" (95). When the protagonist maps the unfamiliar space, his former perception of reality gradually diminishes and prevents him from being a prey who attempts to classify, organise and objectively view reality. The protagonist in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* utters:

> I saw the world I had walked since my birth and I understood how fragile it was, that the reality I knew was a thin layer of icing on a great dark birthday cake writhing with grubs and nightmares and hunger. I saw the world from above and below. I saw that there were patterns and gates and paths beyond the real. I saw all these things and understood them and they filled me, just as the waters of the ocean filled me. Everything whispered inside me. Everything spoke to everything, and I knew it all (192).

"Patterns and gates and paths beyond the real" (192) becomes a teasing phrase which has an underlying connotation with the concept of reality. The protagonist's assertion regarding the nature of reality which he clarifies from his experience is a blatant manifestation to show that reality is subjective. The metaphors that run in the narrative exemplify the idea that what counts as reality can be infinite. Moreover, the statement indicates the possibility to accumulate experience beyond what is visible and seen. Reality denoted as "a thin layer of icing on a great dark birthday cake writhing with grubs and nightmares and hunger" (192) stands prominent in the narrative. In the midst of attempting to establish his self, he has to test his strength to comprehend reality and has eventually succeeded in comprehending the test. For the protagonist, reality is an illusion when his memory fails to provide him with an exact clue to what has been happening in his life. His memory participates lesser in attempting to accumulate facts and events. The unnamed protagonist is unable to recollect the time when he goes back to the farm with his two young children and is fed a meal by Old Mrs Hempstock in which he narrates his dreams and the art he makes. However, none of this incident narrated by Old Mrs Hempstock lingers in the protagonist's memory and instead claims, "I don't remember" (229). His confusion is further heightened when he inquires, "Why did I come here?" (228). After having been told by Old Mrs Hempstock that "different people remember things differently", (228) he abolishes the former perception of what

he counts as true. The protagonist's inability to recollect his memory, however, suggests that perfection is not possible. As Ginnie Hempstock remarks, he neither passes nor fails, when he is unable to recollect his memories. By portraying the disruptive element of memory in the narrative, the author attempts to highlight the impossibility to establish the truth. The protagonist's memory contradicts with the female Hemsptocks which subsequently challenged the traditional nature of reality and in a way showcase it as an impractical act. Rabkin asserts that "the wonderful, exhilarating, therapeutic value of Fantasy is that it makes one recognize that beliefs, even beliefs about reality, are arbitrary" (218). The protagonist withdraws his belief and chooses to counter it based on the Greek myths. His books on great myths tell him that the narcissi are named after a beautiful young man who falls in love with his own image. The protagonist considers the narcissi to "be the most beautiful flower in the world" (89). However, he soon confesses that he is disappointed when he learns that it "was just a less impressive daffodil" (89). The protagonist imbibes this literally and rejects the partial way of seeing the world. Therefore, while myths are necessary to form a belief system, the protagonist realises the importance of questioning in order to perceive the fluidity of it. Old Mrs Hempstock's presence in the novel situates the readers on different planes of reality. She is a character who "remember when the moon was made" (43). According to her narration, she has won medals for her cheese back in the old king's days. Her cheese entices many and is claimed to be "the finest cheese they ever tasted" (45) by the king and his sons. The narrative imparts a scene where the protagonist's foot is healed by Old Mrs Hempstock which amazes him and stands as the testament of magic realism. The healing procedures performed by Old Mrs Hempstock is characterised by the magic that makes it supernatural. The wondrous and the supernatural are fused together when Old Hempstock heals the wound of the protagonist which is certified by the protagonist when he says, "She let go of my sole and I pulled my foot back. The tiny round hole had vanished completely as if it had never been there" (136). The strange and the unusual description of the events and characters in the novel demonstrate the manner in which everything is constituted in relation to other things. Moreover, the strange description of the characters in the novel serves as a blatant manifestation of simulation because "simulation threatens the difference between the "true" and the "false", the "real" and the "imaginary" (Baudrillard 3). The novel situates another level of reality in order to extend the territory of the normative form of the real. The blind acceptance of

representation and the external layers of events stand futile for the protagonist. The protagonist's perception of the real and realness is denoted `through his senses when he utters, "I held on to Ginnie Hemsptock. She smelled like a farm and like a kitchen, like animals and like food. She smelled very real, and the realness was what I needed at that moment" (213). The statement uttered by the protagonist reveals the manner in which he deviates from seeking external truth and organizational reality. The innovative way of defining the real facilitates a powerful mechanism through which his ideas and senses are legitimised. Maria Nikolajeva stresses:

> From a limited, positivistic view of the world humankind has turned to a wider, more open view of life. We have thus become sufficiently mature to accept the possibility of the range of phenomena that fantasy deals with: alternative worlds, nonlinear time, extrasensory perception, and in general all kinds of supernatural events that so far cannot be explained in terms of science (140).

The statement continually raises a question regarding the concept of reality and opens a new channel to challenge the ultimate truth. As an individual attempting to find his place, the protagonist undergoes a series of experiences. As stated earlier, he gradually learns that his former perception of reality is merely "a thin layer of icing on a great dark birthday cake" (192). For the protagonist, reality is beyond dominant narrative which cannot be cited in terms of pragmatic logic which is driven by structure or hierarchal basis. Rather, it is conspicuous in the narrative that the creative sensory perception transmits his sense of reality and realness. On the other hand, it implies the manner in which reality as well as the sense of realness is based on the multiple ways in which an individual discusses and experiences it. *The Graveyard Book* commences with the description of a murder scene by a man named Jack, who wears black leather shoes being polished that resembles "dark mirrors"(4). Straight after the short description of the murder scene, the narrative demonstrates how the toddler crawls out from the room and enters the graveyard. The narrative then progresses in a bildungsroman fashion and the dialogue in the novel hardly leaves any space to narrate the murder that takes place at the commencement of the novel. The crime that occurs in the novel remains a crime that is not investigated which is rather silenced. As the narrative of the novel progresses, it is only towards the climax of the novel that the murder is investigated. Scarlett Amber

Perkins performs the role of the detective and hunts for clues to investigate the murder of Bod's family. Her investigation requires the aid of microfiche in order to gather the information that occurred many years ago. Scarlett's assumption is diminished because she thinks that the murder of the family would have been the central issue in the newspaper. She eventually finds that the incident is "almost buried on page five" (227) which happened in October, thirteen years earlier. She begins to learn that the article is devoid of colour without description that merely bears inconspicuous list of events:

> *Architect Ronald Dorian, 36, his wife, Carlotta, 34, a publisher, and their daughter, Misty, 7, were found dead at 33 Dustan Road. Foul play is suspected. A policeman spokesman said that it was only too early to comment at this stage in their investigations, but that significant leads are being followed* (227).

Scarlett is jolted to learn that there is no mention of how the family died. She is filled with overwhelming gloom when she discerns that nothing is revealed about the missing baby. In addition to this, the narrator says, "In the week that followed, there was no follow-up, and the police did not ever comment, not that Scarlett could see" (228). Hence, she returns the box of microfilm and thanks the librarian and proceeds towards her home. Jean Baudrillard stresses:

> We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning…The media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite of the implosion of the social in the masses. And this is only the macroscopic level of the sign (79-81).

The implausible explanation is the only reality Scarlett can accumulate. The piece of information regarding the murder is not satisfactory in order to grasp the whole situation. The reason for the murder, the culprits who are involved and other miscellaneous information are withheld. Her ardent inclination to investigate the crime represents her desire to learn the truth which further manifests the desire for justice. The murder incident represented in the microfilm bears no relation with the reality and her knowledge is based on a simulation of what she has seen in the microfilm inside the library. Jean Baudrillard opines that simulation is the trait of postmodernity and states that we inhabit an age "saturated with images, maps, models and signs that have become

ends in themselves" (Nayar 49). Therefore, it is impossible to demarcate the real and the unreal because "there is no 'real' we can recognize. We only know the image of the real" (49). Scarlett encompasses the liminal personae which Turner describes as "one who is betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, customs, convention, and ceremonial" (95). She is placed in a liminal position where she becomes the figure of the law and in the meantime assists Bod to escape the death traps of the Jacks. The novel weaves an unconventional narrative in which a definable emotional self of Bod is demonstrated in the narrative. Carmen C. Richardson states that fantasy does not dismiss emotion nor is viewed with sentimentality. According to her, "Human feelings are presented objectively…allowing readers to experience healthy emotional responses without fear or embarrassment. They discover that emotions are one more avenue for experiencing reality" (500). The thrilling description of the graveyard reflects the mindscape of Bod which goes beyond the apparent:

> The sky was red, but not the warm red of a sunset. This was an angry, glowering red, the colour of an infected wound. The sun was small and seemed like it was old and distant. The air was cold and they were descending a wall. Tombstones and statues jutted out of the side of the wall, as if a huge graveyard had been upended, and, like three wizened chimpanzees in tattered black suits that did up in the back (71).

As a character who is attempting to find his niche, Bod struggles with his self. His rootlessness becomes more visible because he is a living being who inhabits the graveyard with the dead occupants. Bod's instability is metaphorically highlighted through the description, which is in fact, the abstract definition of his emotion. He witnesses the red sky which is devoid of the warmth of a sunset which is angry and resembles an infected wound. The unappealing description of the sun being small, old and distant manifests Bod's incompleteness to the core. His emotions assist him to comprehend the reality of his situation and make him recognise that he is different from the graveyard inhabitants. By responding to his own emotion, the abstract becomes definable that puts him in a safer track. *The Graveyard Book* reverses the readers' perspectives that insist on the possibilities of the impossible. Readers are bestowed the opportunity to consider the relationship between life and death in a non-threatening manner. Eric S. Rabkin says, "The fantastic gives us the chance to try out new,

"unrealistic" possibilities, and thus, perhaps change seen reality" (218). The binaries between the normal and the abnormal, the living and the dead and the exclusive concept of true and false do not occupy the narrative of the novel. The protagonist's quest to understand his true feeling stems from the relationship he establishes with the supernatural characters. Silas tells Bod that he withholds the memory of Scarlett and reaffirms to him that "people want to forget the impossible" (170). The realm of memory is represented here and needs to be questioned. From Silas's statement, it is clear that memory serves as a productive space in constructing the possible and the impossible. Unlike Scarlett, the impossible becomes part of Bod's real story that fills the parental gap and makes him more independent.

The fusion of the supernatural elements, human characters, non-human characters including the bleak and grotesques images in Gaiman's works parallel with the notion of carnivalesque. The marriage of the unusual set of images, settings and characters in Gaiman's works convincingly argue how Gaiman has unravelled the binary opposition in his works. "The carnival is the ultimate other. It is what escapes classification, theorization and control…subvert and interrogate established/institutional authority over meaning" (Nayar 23). Mikhail Bakhtin claims:

> Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, *a new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to all-powerful socio-hierarchal relationships of noncarnival life. The behavior, gestures, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) defining them totally in noncarnival life, and thus form the vantage point of noncarnival life become eccentric and inappropriate…Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid (*Problems* 123).

Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* generates the concept of the carnival that continues to keep the meaning of fantasy and reality in flux. The farm, in the novel, becomes a platform for the carnival in which the protagonist encounters characters whom he would have never come across. The farm which has been inhabited

by the Hempstock women namely, Lettie, her mother and her grandmother integrate the protagonist to form positive ways of viewing choices. On the other hand, it is represented as an abode that integrates the Hempstocks and the protagonist which is devoid of class, race, hierarchy including age and rank. The farm, with its idyllic pastoral setting, liberates the protagonist from his resentment and insecurities. The protagonist of the novel utters his feeling of dissimilarities when he claims, "My feet began to throb as they come back to life. I knew that *naked* was wrong, but the Hempstocks seemed indifferent to my nakedness" (122). The female Hempstocks are not concerned about his nakedness which makes him reject the persistent idea of the traditional structure of right and wrong. The dismissal of the protagonist's nakedness exemplifies the abandonment of the physical distance between the female Hempstocks and the male protagonist. Besides, it has demonstrated the manner in which the boundary that exists between gender is unravelled and is put on the periphery. Chris Haywood and Martin Ghaill claim, "The significance of the carnivalesque is the inversion of the established order where the everyday norms are relaxed and where identities and behaviours become unfastened" (54). In the farm, the protagonist is offered an attire which resembles a "girl's nightdress" (123) which is "made of white cotton, with long arms and a skirt that draped to the floor, and a white cap" (123). The carnivalesque nature of gender is reflected which disrupts the normative boundaries between masculinity and femininity. The collapse of the gender and sexual order is furthermore discernible in the novel when Gennie Hempstock says, "You only need men if you want to breed more men" (220). Gender and sexual rules become obliterated in the novel and at times twisted, it becomes blurred gradually resulting in the disruption of the normative parameters of hierarchy and sexuality. The perfect dinner that is served in the farm quenches the protagonist physically and emotionally when he confesses that the food is always perfect. Bakhtin, in his book *Rabelais and His World*, claims that during a carnival people entered "the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (9). The protagonist says, "My mother's mother would tell me off for eating like a wild animal. 'You must *essen*, eat,' she would say, 'like a person, not a *chazzer*, a pig. When animals eat, they *fress*. People *essen*. Eat like a person" (197). The creation of the liminal space in the novel is brought out through the act of eating. The unnamed protagonist vents out that he is contented in the farm because besides eating the perfect food he claims that the Hempstocks' food does not "scare me"

(196). The protagonist utters his fears when he states that he is scared of eating food outside his home because he might be forced to consume the food he does not like and ultimately forced to eat it "in minuscule portions" (196) until it is gone. The protagonist's fear is unravelled in the farm and subsequently attains freedom. Bakhtin opines that eating is fundamental in the carnival because with this act, the "body transgress its own limits…here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself…the limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage" (*Rabelais* 281). Earlier in the narrative, the protagonist is confined in his room and hardly has the space to interact and assert his individuality. He ultimately undergoes a series of carnivalesque that transforms his life and becomes a trajectory for survival. The restrictions and restrains he has faced in his own home are unknotted in the farm in which laws and rules no longer accompany his life. Additionally, the farm in the novel appears as the carnival square which suspends inequalities and "any other form of inequality among people (including age). All distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: *free and familiar contact among people*" (*Problems* 123). The inclusion of the carnival in the narrative becomes massively functional because it is the liminal space where the protagonist realises his worth as a person. In the farm, he is not discriminated for being a child. In the Hempstocks' farm, the protagonist can act, think and talk in a precise manner that suits his sentiments and role. The protagonist confesses, "I felt wonderfully important" (44) after Old Hempstock places the vases accordingly with his suggestion. He gradually learns to incorporate the unity of opposites and perceives the relativity of everything:

> Could there be candle flames burning under the water? There could. I knew that, when I was in the ocean, and I even knew how I understand it just as I understood Dark Matter, the material of the universe that makes up everything. That must be there but we cannot find. I found myself thinking of an ocean running beneath the whole universe, like the dark seawater that laps beneath the wooden boards of an old pier: an ocean that stretches from forever to forever and is still small enough to fit inside a bucket, if you have Old Mrs Hempstock to help you, and you ask nicely (193).

The passage normalises fantasy and reality within the ambit of the carnival and merges them into a single domain. The carnival, in the narrative, is situated as an arena that serves as a crooked mirror and breaks the boundary between reality and fantasy because carnival "absolutizes nothing, but rather proclaims the joyful relativity of everything" (*Problems* 125). On the other hand, the carnival act subverts one-sided seriousness, subjugates rigid hierarchal orders and explores the relativity of fantasy and reality. Likewise, the graveyard in Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* connotes the carnivalesque in which the boundary between the dead and the living is dissolved. The graveyard itself is portrayed as the liminal space in which the dead and the living communicate and interact. Apart from the living and the dead, the diverse set of characters ranges from the Sleer, the ghouls, vampire including werewolf. Besides the diversity of the characters, the diverse voices of the characters are heard and are given equal importance. This makes the novel a prime example of Bakhtin's heteroglossia, which can be defined as "the simultaneity of many levels of dialogic and language" (Nayar 21). The co-existence of both the living and the dead in the novel highlights the manner in which heteroglossia is situated in between the narratives. The voice of the Sleer in the novel contributes immensely in making the protagonist discover his self. The Sleer proposes to Bod:

> IF YOU WERE OUR MASTER, WE COULD HOLD YOU IN OUR COILS FOREVER. IF YOU WERE OUR MASTER, WE WOULD KEEP YOU SAFE AND PROTECT YOU UNTIL THE END OF TIME AND NEVER LET YOU ENDURE THE DANGERS OF THE WORLD…THEN FIND YOUR NAME (234)

The Sleer possesses the "body of an enormous snake" (264) that has three heads and three necks and its "faces were dead, as if someone had constructed dolls from parts of the corpses of humans and of animals. The faces were covered in purple patterns, tattooed in swirls of indigo, turning the dead faces into strange, expressive monstrous thing" (264). In spite of its strangeness and its supernatural existence, the voice of the Sleer plays a pivotal role for the protagonist. The Sleer is not reduced to the status of an object and is not dehumanized, instead Bod gains a significant moment of self-knowledge and transformation when he encounters with the supernatural. The Sleer provokes Bod's consciousness prompting him to be more self-reflexive. It directs Bod

to discover the path he ought to encounter in the process of maturation. When the Sleer insists Bod to find his name, the Sleer attempts to erase the uncertainties that has muted him. On the other hand, it is an attempt to make him realise a privilege he can acquire. As a result Bod proudly claims, "I know my name…I'm Nobody Owens. That's who I am" (264). This becomes a moment of jubilation because it is an instance that signifies that Bod is the transformed figure who can reconcile with his inner problem. The multiplicity of voices in the novel introduces heteroglossia and reworks the difference identified between the human and the non-human. The envisioning of the death as a democracy by the author disrupts hierarchy, race and class structure. At the same time, it becomes a site through which a multiplicity of voices is taken into account and acknowledged. The binary distinction between death and living no longer exists in the graveyard. The living and the dead communicate with perfect ease and freedom, "A graveyard is not normally a democracy, and yet death is the great democracy, and each of the dead had a voice and an opinion as to whether the living child should be allowed to stay" (23). A different class of people who are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers establishes free contact in the graveyard. The protagonist forms new relationships with other people whom he would not normally interact with. Bakhtin claims that the carnival functions "as a way of combating 'real' everyday and religious fears of death in the Middle Ages, conjured up by natural 'divine and human power" (Vice 154). The novel introduces the dance of the living and the dead which portrays the carnivalesque view of life which is not linear but rather cyclical. Bod dances with Liza Hempstock and finds his hand taken by Fortinbras Bartleby, and he dances with Fortinbras. Bod sees Abanazar Bolger dancing with Miss Borrow and sees the living dancing with the dead, "And the one-on-one dances became long lines of people stepping together in unison, walking and kicking (La-la-la-oomp! La-la -la-oomp!) a line dance that had been ancient a thousand years before" (148). The remarkable scene of the dead dancing with the living promotes critical thought among the readers. The dance of the living and the dead suggests carnival celebration that bridges the gap between the living and the dead. The confluence of the living and the dead brings unity as Bakhtin stresses, "Carnivalistic life is a life drawn out of its *usual* rut, it is to some extent "life turned inside out," "the reverse side of the world" *(Problems* 122). The imagery of the carnivalistic scene represented in the novel has diminished the boundary between reality and fantasy. It synchronises the distance between these two different

realms. The carnivalistic act that is weaved in between the fantastic narrative makes it conspicuous that reality is not merely a mode of representation. Additionally, it becomes noticeable that reality is ambiguous and is diversely variant. The narrator of the novel says that the dance speeds up along with the dancers that makes Bod breathless and he could not imagine the dance to stop. "Carnivalization…makes it possible to extend the narrow scene of a personal life in one specific limited epoch to a maximally universal *mystery play scene,* applicable to all humanity" (*Problems* 177) according to Bakhtin's perspective. Likewise, through the inclusion of the carnival in the novel, Gaiman has extended the border vision of life by glorifying the unusual in his fantastic narrative. Malcom V. Jones claims, "Sometimes the essence of the real is to be found in the fantastic and exceptional (in the sense of abnormal)" (3). The timelessness of the dance suspends the limitation of time and space. The absence of rational explanation of time problematizes the linear time perspectives, "A clock somewhere began to strike the hour, and Bod counted along with it. Twelve chimes. He wondered if they had been dancing for twelve hours or twenty-four or for no time at all" (151). The exclusion of the objective notion of time in the narrative reveals the impossibility of demarcating the actual and the real as well as the past and the present. The inability of Bod to identify the duration of the dance evokes the author's attempts to diversify and enliven reality. The timelessness of the dance deviates from the modern oppressive understanding of time and destabilizes presence over absence. On the other hand, his memory gets distorted which makes him incapable to arrange the past in sequential order. The timelessness of the dance also signifies the possibility of infinite meaning and the plurality available beyond the paramount reality. Barry Lewis states:

> Postmodern fiction did not just disrupt the past, but corrupted the present too. It disordered the linear coherence of narrative by warping the sense of significant time, *kairos* or the dull passing of ordinary time, *chronos*…postmodernist writing is full of these kinds of temporal disorder (172).

The disruption of time in the narrative problematizes reality and deconstructs modern assumptions about linear time. Moreover, it comprises a series of Bod's failure in attempting to find the order of the real. The strangeness and liminality of time in *The Graveyard Book* distorts the boundary between the past and the present. Bod's life is in

danger because an ancient prophecy in Egypt, in pyramid days states that a child will be born who can pass the frontier between the living and the dead and if he grows to adulthood the order of the Jack of All trades will be ended. The prophecy that is brought back highlights Bod's identity in the past as well as in the present. Additionally, the fusion of the past and the present situates time in a non- linear fashion which is distanced from reality. Akin with the earlier discussions, in Gaiman's *Odd and the Frost Giants,* Bakhtin's notion of carnival appears germane in which the novel accommodates heterogeneous collections of characters. Characters in the novel range from human beings, mythological figures, frost giants and talking animals who have mingled and suspended the hierarchical barriers. In the novel, the author creates polyphonic exchanges in which the power relations between the different set of characters are negotiated. The unique voices of the characters are frequently portrayed when characters take turns to tell stories. The characters narrate their stories which is acknowledged and appreciated in a way that invites the readers to participate in the story. In the novel, the voice of the marginalised and the poor is heard through Odd and the voice of the defeated is heard through the gods who are transformed into animals. The language of the animal conveys another form of dialogue in the novel and their intervening gesture reinforces polyphonic exchanges and distorts the hierarchical barriers between the human and the non-human:

> Its muzzle was narrow, its ears were pricked and sharp, and its expression was calculating and sly. When it saw that Odd was watching, it jumped into the air, as if it were trying to show off, and retreated a little way, and then stopped. It was red-orange, like flame, and it took a dancing step or two towards Odd, and turned away, then looked back at Odd as it if were inviting him to follow (16).

Although there are no words inscribed, the minor gesture of the fox contains layers of language. The interaction between the fox and Odd reverses the archetypal relationship between human and animals. The image of Odd riding on the bear's back, the fox trotting along beside them and the eagle riding the wings reinforce the carnival quality. The boundaries between human and animal are transgressed when the fish is distributed and consumed among them. The bear confesses that they are the gods beneath the animal disguise and soothes Odd not to be petrified. This makes Odd

bewildered when he learns that the bear, the eagle and the fox are Thor, Odin and Loki. This diffuses the accustomed boundary between the human and the non-human. The celebration of the ecstatic relativity designates a liberating note that combats the real and the truth. The carnivalesque style of action is brought out through the interaction among the disparate characters that mingle "the sacred with the profane, the lofty and the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" *(Problems* 123). Bakhtin argues, "Special carnival category goes into effect: *free and familiar contact among people…*People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square" (123). The power struggle between Odd, the gods and the giant moves the novel in the direction of the explicit carnivalesque style of action. The shift of power from the seemingly authoritarian giant to the seemingly powerless figure becomes remarkable in the narrative. The giant who invades the home of the mighty gods is conquered by an ordinary boy, Odd, who possesses "a big, happy, irritating smile" (86). The conquering of the giant by Odd with his irritating smile breaks the boundary, hierarchy and distorts the binary opposition between them. The reversal of power further signifies the dynamics of power that can emanate from the fringe as well. Raman Seldan and Peter Widdowson claim that in carnival "hierarchical are turned on their heads (fools become wise, kings become beggars); opposites are mingled (fact and fantasy, heaven and hell)" (40). The carnival atmosphere of the novel reaches its zenith in the crucial chapter of the novel "Four Transformation and the Meal". In this chapter, the gods are transformed into their original godly form. The chapter imparts a celebrative gathering and functions as a form of medieval carnival square. The suspension of the hierarchical relationship becomes more apparent in the scene where Goddess Freya heals Odd's injured leg. She picks him up and places him "down on the great feasting table of the Gods" (114). The narrator states that "Goddess Freya reattached Odd's leg to Odd, and it was as if it had always been there" (115). Apart from the multiple levels of dialogues between the protagonist, the gods and the goddesses, the novel allows the cordial coexistence of the ordinary and the extraordinary since "carnivalization made possible the creation of the open structure of the great dialogue, and permitted social interaction between people" (*Problems* 177). Intersubjectivity, which is a prominent postmodern concept, presupposes the absence of a single fixed subject in a literary text. It suggests that "the complex "subject" of a narrative has to be assembled by the reader from several individual consciousness"

(Nikolajeva 149). This phenomenon can be described through Bakhtin's concept of polyphony or heteroglossia which is "an interplay of different voices in the narrative" (149). In the novel, the concept of polyphony makes simultaneous access to several voices and imparts multiple interplays of opinions, beliefs and thoughts. The narrative authority is dislodged in which readers are allowed to enter Coraline's mind as well as several other non-human characters from both sides. The role readers do not acknowledge at the outset of the novel are the non-human characters who assist Coraline to succeed. Their voice bear an immediate impact on Coraline and the plurality of voices in the novel reconcile the two separate characters and their separate narratives. Besides, the carnival framework in the narrative promotes the positive act of animal and human connection. Further proof of respect for animals is skilfully demonstrated when Coraline offers the dog chocolate. The narrator of the novel says that as Coraline's "eyes got used to the darkness she realised that the other inhabitants of the seats were also dogs" (48). The concept of darkness stands crucial and debatable in the passage. Her acquaintance with darkness directs her and makes her embrace the usual and the unusual. Additionally, the darkness diminishes prohibition and order she experiences at home. The darkness unleashes her from impenetrable hierarchical barriers and subsequently suspends the terror of the dark. Thus, "the joyful relativity of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position" (*Problems* 124) is eliminated inside the theatre which is a site for the carnival square in the novel.

The liminal space in Gaiman's works function as a contact zone which resembles Sabine Broeck's phrase, "practices of cultural fusion might be enjoyed in difference" (57) while discussing the issue of racial hybridity. To establish a dialogic theory of cultural liminality, Bakhtinian concepts such as "doublevoicedness, carnivalization and heteroglossia" (Zavala 9) remain central in Gaiman's narratives. Parallel with the concept of carnivalization, liminality "erases hierarchal separation" (9) which connotes "productive condition of being situated between two locations. These locations may be physical locations, languages, literary genres, cultural traditions, or stages of development" (9). In order to facilitate his characters' progression, Gaiman employs tools such as secondary world, other world and liminal space which are inhabited by ghost, giants, grotesque and nonhuman characters who are transitional. These enable his characters to interact with both the self and others. The positioning of

between and betwixt places and spaces propels Gaiman's characters to negotiate the terrain between childhood and adulthood, the real and the unreal, high and low as well as the familiar and the unfamiliar. Most importantly, Gaiman establishes multicultural utopia within the liminal because the discourse of liminality is an indication of "cartographic anxiety or spatial confusion characteristics of the present moment, whether it be associated with poststructuralism, postmodernity, globalization, or some other conditioning condition" (Tally, Jr *Foreword,* X). Neil Gaiman situates liminality, fantasy and the carnivalesque in his narratives because it encapsulates an interestingly multicultural profile which exemplifies "the liminal nature of contemporary multiculturalism" (Zavala 10). The transitional phase of Victor Turner's "communitas" stands prominent in Gaiman's works. It is defined as "a state wherein people experience liminality together, as established social boundaries such as race, class, and religion are broken down in the act of sharing a common experience" (Mann 178). As Coraline proceeds to move further, she enters the poorly lit theatre which is surrounded by high wooden stage, empty and bare along with a dim spotlight shining on it from above. The conversation between Coraline and the black Scottie dog exemplifies the notion of heteroglossia:

> Hello, said Coraline,
>
> The dog put the torch down on the floor and looked up at her. 'Right. Let's see your ticket,' it said gruffly…
>
> I haven't got all day, you know. You can't watch the show without a ticket.'
>
> Coraline sighed. 'I don't have a ticket,' she admitted…
>
> The dog picked up the torch in its mouth and trotted off into the dark. Coraline followed. When it got near to the front of the stage it stopped and shone the torch on to an empty seat. Coraline sat down and the dog wondered off (47, 48).

The scene concerns the unusual relationship between human and animal. The admittance of Coraline in the theatre without producing the ticket has explicitly foregrounded and idealized carnivalistic act. On the other hand, this incident exemplifies the demolition of structure and authority, and sanctifies and opens the possibility of multiple relationships. It indicates the liminality of cultures while

depicting a state of communitas. The subtleness of the primary world and the secondary world is further demonstrated in the narrative through the employment of objects. The boundary between the primary world and the secondary world is controlled and sealed with the help of the key. However, this does not necessarily make either of the two worlds distinct entities; it signifies the possibility of travelling in the two worlds which is devoid of rigid boundaries. The transparency between the two worlds is symbolised by the key instead and functions as a transcultural allusion. In addition to this, the absence of an extensive boundary between the two worlds denotes that neither of them is acknowledged as the paramount reality. The elusiveness of the boundary is put to the forefront towards the climax of the novel when the other mother appears again in the primary world. Hence, the novel makes the boundaries between the primary world and the secondary world more fragile that displaces meaning and subverts conclusive version of truth and culture. Additionally, the significance of the stone with a hole is stressed time and time again in the novel and it serves as a battering ram for Coraline in order to magnify her vision. The fantastic narrative of the novel situates the seemingly ordinary objects as the essential component. Coraline's vision is enlarged through the hole in the stone that makes her more self-reflexive and capable. The narrator says, "Through the stone, the world was grey and colourless, like a pencil drawing" (115). The ordinary turns out to be extraordinary that denotes fantasy's therapeutic function. Maria Nikolajeva stresses that "the hero's task in a fairy tale is totally impossible for an ordinary human being; it is always a symbolic or allegorical depiction. In fantasy, characters are ordinary; the writers often assure their readers that the protagonist is "just like you" (153). Interestingly, the ordinary protagonist that the readers encounter in the novel becomes the embodiment of every men. By introducing the ordinary within the fantastic realm, the writer effaces fear and loathing for fantasy and liminality. Instead, fantasy and reality are fused together that becomes part and parcel of human experience that does not merely end by being symbolic or allegorical. Moreover, the ordinary protagonist, making use of the ordinary objects within the fantastic space, suggests the integration of fantasy and reality and the intersection between them suggests the possibility of anything in both the spheres. In defining the trends towards culture in contemporary society, Bodtorf Clark asserts that as much as the border between the real and the fantastic become more porous, "other borders in society have also become less rigid…there are many situations and events that are not viewed as totally right or

wrong, black or white, male or female, as they were in the past" (83). *The Graveyard Book* interrogates the normal that leaves the space between the living world and the non-living world. The elusiveness of these two worlds is manifested when the protagonist journeys between the living world and the graveyard. The supernatural skills he has acquired from the graveyard folks introduce reality in a higher sense. Besides, a majority of the characters who populate the novel are the dead occupants that make the novel a suspenseful fantasy adventure. Silas, the guardian of Bod, is described as a character who is neither living nor dead and the novel introduces Kandar "a bandage-wrapped Assyrian mummy with powerful eagle-wings and eyes like rubies" (222). The strangeness of the characters is highlighted once again when Mister Owens says that he is "neither the devil nor the Deep Blue Sea" (83). In terms of characters, the boundary between the normal and the abnormal, the real and the unreal is blurred and truth vanishes in attempting to define the fixed identity of the characters. Scarlett Amber Perkins utters to Bod, "I just wanted to know if you were real…I thought you were something in my head. And then I sort of forget about you. But I didn't make you up, and you're back, you're in my head, and you're in my world too" (220). The statement consciously discards the fixed personal identity of Bod and distorts the role of memory in attempting to define the real and the unreal. There is a slippage between reality and perception as well as the signifier and the signified. The double selves of Bod are highlighted when Scarlett willingly admits that Bod is not only a person she can register in her memory. When Scarlett says, "I didn't make you up, and you're back, you're in my head", (220) she is admitting the fact that definitive interpretation of vision is impossible. Her statement can be interpreted as an androgynous blend of the male and the female pattern when she claims, "You're in my world too" (220). Rosemary Jackson argues:

> Fantasy expresses a longing for an absolute meaning, for something other than the limited 'known' world. Yet whereas 'faery' stories and quasi-religious tales function through nostalgia for the sacred, the modern fantastic refuses a backward-looking glance. It is an inverted form of myth. It focuses upon the unknown within the present, discovering emptiness inside an apparently full reality (158).

The fantastic narrative of Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* examines the various ways in which postmodernism is situated in his works. Jean Francis Lyotard claims that postmodern works dwell on the "incommensurability of human existence, putting forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies the solace of good forms" (Casey 116). The alternative form of the human and the transformative possibilities is predicted and explained by the supernatural characters in the narrative. The existence of the unpresentable challenges the notion of totality, dominant narrative and promotes non-hierarchal interpretation and meaning. Towards the climax of the novel, as Bod proceeds to leave the graveyard the narrator says that "there was a passport in his bag, money in his pocket…for the world is a bigger place than a little graveyard on a hill; and there would be dangers in it and mysteries, new friends to make, old friends to rediscover, mistakes to be made" (288, 289). This statement plays with the idea of liminality that reflects liminality as an important aspect of the human condition. Apart from what his passport states,, Bod's liminal state signifies his potential for a multiplicity of identities as Stuart Hall puts, "[c]ultural identities are the points of identification or suture, which are made, within, the discourses of history and culture" (Clopot 163). Magic realism, a "seamless interfacing of realistic human experience and the imaginative" (Clarks 87) dominates Gaiman's *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. Magic realism, on the other hand, "may be considered an extension of realism in its concern with the nature of reality and its representation…it resists the basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism" (Arva 77). The fragmented realities which occur in the course of the narrative make the reader unable to distinguish between illusion and reality. The author has introduced the characters of the female Hempstocks who appear strange and abnormal. The description of the female protagonist in the novel Lettie Hempstock is beyond the confines of the normal description of human character. She is described as a character who is eleven years old, who looks three or four years older than the unnamed narrator and "might have been three or four thousand years older, or a thousand times again" (153) according to the narrator. Her character becomes extremely mysterious; for instance when the narrator inquires her mother Ginnie Hempstock whether she is really her daughter she replies "more or less" (220). At times, Lettie would utter words which the unnamed protagonist would not comprehend. Sometimes she would talk which appears "more like singing in a tongue that was nothing" (55) the protagonist has heard before

or “would ever encounter later in life” (55). The tune, according to the narrator, is a “child’s song” (55) in which the nursery rhyme ‘Girls and Boys Come Out to Play’ (55) is sung. Nevertheless, what makes it extensively remarkable is that “her words were older words” (55). Lettie appears to be mysterious for the protagonist, but the role she has played for him is immense in whom the protagonist vested his trust and faith. The narrator confesses, “I trusted Lettie…I believed in her, and that meant I would come to no harm while I was with her. I knew it in the way I knew that grass was green, that roses had sharp, woody thorns” (153, 154). It becomes impossible to distinguish whether Lettie is a person imagined by the protagonist, half-spirit or half-human. Through the enigmatic description of her character, the writer blurs the line between reality and illusion. At one instance, the protagonist utters, “I had spoken the language of shaping” (57) in his dreams to heal the sick and to fly. Treating his dreams as an adjacent space, the protagonist further attempts to distance his unappealing dream when he says, “I tried to pull the dream that had upset me so to the front of my mind, but it would not come” (143). Readers sense a creativity that emanates from the stylization of different literary techniques such as magic, irony, humour, fantasy and imagination. An interesting point that becomes noteworthy is that neither of the narrative frameworks wins and dominates the overall narrative. The diverse narrative types masquerades centrality which becomes kin to carnivalistic ritual and the liminal space. Consequently, it privileges experience over knowledge that propels the readers to perceive the freshness of reality that can be lived and relived ceaselessly. Relying on this giant pastiche, the fabric of cultural identity acquires special significance. Stuart Hall claims, “Cultural identities come from somewhere…they undergo constant transformation. Far from being externally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Sethi 140). Similarly, Gaiman represents cultural identity as a giant pastiche that becomes a patchwork in which “every style, every tone, and every voice has a place and where no one voice is ever more important than any other” (Zavala). Giving equal importance to certain narrative types and genres further remarks the failure of dominant culture and narrative to achieve total credibility. Additionally, it signifies the failure of total signification and the susceptibility of common knowledge and factual knowledge. Corresponding with this, Gaiman has depicted the ways in which culture is something which is acquired and learned. He skilfully weaves in his narrative how culture is not something we are born with. The

narrator of the book *Odd and the Frost Giants* says, "Odd had taken his father's tree-cutting axe, so huge he could hardly lift it and had hauled it out into the woods, certain that he knew all there was to know about cutting trees and determined to put this knowledge into practice" (6). Odd is aware that he has to master the skills and procedures of cutting trees. Although he finds it difficult to lift his father's tree-cutting axe, he is determined to put the knowledge into practice. The skill of wood cutting has to be practised and learned which cannot be inherited. It becomes mandatory for Odd to acquire the skill in order to survive in the forest. Besides, wood cutting is regarded as an important skill man needs to exhibit in Midgard. So, in order to acquire the skill of wood cutting which is part and parcel of traditional practice, Odd exercises his will power and determination which is not inherent in him. Similarly, culture which includes a set of belief, tradition and practice is not inherent in human beings; it is rather learned and acquired in order to fit it a particular culture. Odd's mother, who remains in the conventional world of a mother, is not given a name. Odd's father brings her from Scotland on a ship and Odd wonders if she ever missed Scotland, but when she is asked she says that she does not miss her native place. She simply confesses to Odd that she misses the people who speak her language although she could speak the language of the Norse after her marriage with Odd's father. When Odd's mother says that she "just missed people who spoke her language", (4) it denotes how language is the medium through which cultural ideologies are passed on. In attempting to define the possibility for a multiplicity of identities, NicCraith asserts that "one can be Irish, working-class, female, a Londoner, a Quaker, a speaker of Gaelic, a mother, a daughter and British at the same time" (162, 163). When Odd's mother confesses that she does not miss Scotland while intensely longing for people who speaks her language, the liminality of culture is asserted. The narrator of the novel claims, "After Odd's father died, her mother sang less and less" (6). This provoking statement aligns with Victor Turner's definition of postmodern societies where "rules of law and traditional customs have undergone major upheaval or change, individuals and communities are left in a continually unfixed, destructured, and liminal state of existence" (Downey et al., *Introduction* 8). Subsequently, Odd's mother navigates in a space of "neither here nor there" and "betwixt and between" (Turner 95). The inconclusive ending of the novel situates the liminal condition of Odd and his mother. When asked whether she would like to go back to Scotland, his mother replies, "That would be a fine thing" (Gaiman

127). This remarks the manner in which liminality serves as a universal human experience which enables a channel for positive transformation that transgresses boundaries and deconstructs identity.

According to Victor Turner, "The attributes of liminality or of a liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locates states and positions in cultural space" (95). In summarizing Victor Turner's concept of liminality, Cristina Clopot asserts, "Liminality also entails a certain freedom, expressed in the ability to mix and match distinct elements of culture, such as creating monstrous figures representing deities through the use of masks and costume, or performing special dances" (158). The novels in focus unfold the grotesqueness of the characters. Brian McHale stresses:

> Grotesque imagery of the human body, a direct inheritance from the carnival practices, is also highly typical of postmodernist fiction…postmodernist fiction compensates for this loss of the carnival context by incorporating carnival, or some surrogate for carnival, at the level of its projected world. In the absence of a real carnival context, it constructs fictional carnivals (173, 174).

According to David Danow, "A combination of falsehood and truth, of darkness and light, of anger and gentleness, of life and death" (40) exists in the tradition of the carnivalesque. The grotesque description and language of the characters serve as an agent that disrupts the notion of normal reality. On the other hand, it inverts "the hierarchy of "upper" and "lower" parts of the body" and transgresses the limitation of the body "through grotesque excesses of ingestion, defecation and copulation, the dismemberment or "explosion" of the body, and so on" (Hale 172). Apart from this argument, the vibrant part of Gaiman's narratives questions the concept of beauty and monstrosity. One of the disasters of imperialism is "the categorization of race – black, brown, yellow…a classification which is based on creating generalizations regardless of irreducible difference" (Sethi 230). In her discussion of monstrosity, Judith Halberstam asserts that "monsters not only reveal certain material conditions of the production of horror, but they also make strange the categories of beauty, humanity, and identity that

we still cling to" (6). Besides the progressive quests for the protagonist's attempt to search for his selfhood and identity, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* describes another dimension of the supernatural through the character of Ursula Monkton. The grotesque description of Ursula Monkton is bizarre and seems unlikely, "The thing that called itself Ursula Monkton hung in the air…crawled and flickered in the air behind her. She was not flying. She was floating, weightless as a balloon, although the sharp gusts of wind did not move her" (109). The fight that occurs between Ursula Monkton, the protagonist and Lettie can be described as a fight involving the supernatural. She would petrify the protagonist and constantly remind him that she exhibits the potential and the power to overthrow him. Her presence in the household makes the narrator resentful and apprehensive. She threatens the protagonist affirming that if he disobeys her, she would lock him in the attic. For the protagonist, Ursula Monkton is not a person, "she was a monster" (87). According to him, "There was nothing sympathetic in her expression, or her smile, or her rotting-cloth eyes" (91) and is described by the protagonist as "a cardboard mask for the thing that had travelled inside me as a worm, that had flapped and gusted in the open country under that orange sky" (80). Furthermore, the unpleasantness and resentment the protagonist exhibits towards her are expressed when he says, "I would not be able to get rid of her by flushing her down a plughole, or putting frogs in her bed" (72). The grotesque description of Ursula Monkton inadvertently situates her as a character of flesh and blood and represents "extreme fear of feminine sexual response" (Halberstam 29). Her monstrous body does not define her as a totalizing monster, which is affirmed later when the protagonist says, "I had seen her torn to pieces a few hours before, but now she was whole" (183). Although interpreted as monstrous, grotesque and unpleasant, Ursula Monkton's presence in the novel disrupts the boundaries and categories between human and monster. The varmints in the novel function as good examples of the transference of horror from the unnatural description of Ursula to nature that accommodates a folk of aggressive varmints or the hungry bird. Gaiman refuses to manifest monstrosity only within one sphere that disrupts the logic of otherness where meaning refuses to unite only within one body. Attention is not established in attempting to identify the monster, but what makes the readers suspicious is the maker and hunter of the monster in the narrative. The protagonist's preoccupation with the bodily monstrosity of Ursula attunes to the specific ways in which identity itself is often structured, categorized and demarcated. The cross

dressing scene brings to light the liminality of gender that makes realism, in terms of gender, at stake when the protagonist is made to wear a nightgown that resembles "a girl's nightdress but made of white cotton, with long arms, and a skirt that draped to the floor, and a white cap" (123). Interpreting Ursula Monkton as a thing that travels inside him, the aspect of the normal and the real subsequently becomes an abode of terror. Whereas in Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book*, the grotesque element is introduced through the dead occupants who inhabit the graveyard. The novel disrupts the typical traits attributed to the concept of the dead when the narrator says, "Death is the great democracy" (23). Death, in the novel, functions as a great equalizer that leaves no boundary between the high and the low. The fusion of characters ranging from different nationalities diminishes society's fear about race, nation and sexuality including fear of the perverse and the foreign. Horror, in the novel, is linked to the oriental and it charts otherness as a fusion of race which becomes the antithesis of Englishness. For instance, the novel introduces Kundar, the Assyrian mummy, "bandage-wrapped…with powerful eagle-wings and eyes like rubies, who was carrying a small pig" (222). Savagery is defined in terms of borders; Caledonia men according to the narrator "were more animal than human and covered in orange fur, and were too savage even to be conquered by the Romans" (41). As a liminal space, the graveyard enables a series of narration to flourish and almost every characternarrate events and stories. Such kind of narrative functions as a form of a judicial model of narration where everyone can give an account of their experience. Surprisingly, the readers become the judge to realise the truth and most importantly it makes them personalize monstrosity. The chameleonic presentation of monster invites multiple interpretations. Mr Pennyworth tells Bod, "You're as plain as the nose on your face,'…And your nose is remarkably obvious…You are a vacant doorway. You are nothing. Eyes will not see you. Minds will not hold you" (96). Another form of monstrosity is brought out here, which functions as an integral feature of the dead as well as the living. Bod's monstrosity transforms the notion of race and beauty into a form of psychological struggle while blurring the distance between the imagined and the real and stabilizes otherness. The dynamic portrayal of monstrosity rather situates the marginal and peripheral to occupy a centre stage. Judith Halberstam asserts:

> We were monsters like skin, they are us, they are on us and in us. Monstrosity no longer coagulates into a specific body, a single face, a unique feature; it is replaced with a banality that fractures resistance because the enemy becomes harder to locate and looks more like the hero. What were monsters are now facets of identity, the sexual other and the racial other can no longer be safely separated from self. But still, we keep our monsters ready (163).

In the graveyard, all kinds of hierarchies are debunked and despite the grotesqueness of the place it accumulates, organises and it displaces authority and hierarchy. The description of the Bishop interweaves an element of the grotesque when the narrator says, "The creature, which grinned sharp teeth and let a pointed tongue of improbable length waggle between them, did not look like Bod's idea of a Bishop: its skin was piebald and it had a large spot across one eye, making it look like almost piratical" (68). The dismaying description of the Bishop with a grotesque language denotes the manner in which carnival liberates the mandate of things. On the other hand, the horrifying picture of the Bishop is a reversal of real life image of a Bishop. The surreal description of the Bishop connotes the multiplicity inherent in his identity. One of the things that become remarkable is that the Bishop's identity is altered and has profoundly become problematic. It is thus by rejecting the normal description that the Bishop of Bath and Wells can acquire unique identity. The enclosure of the grotesque in the novel provides a means by which the repressive binaries of the real and the fantastic can be rephrased in order to yield manifold forms of transformation. A scene of the grotesque is discernible in the narrative of Gaiman's *Coraline*. One of the elements of the grotesque is brought out in the narrative when the narrator describes the other mother as a replica of Coraline's real mother. The fragility of the other mother's body who possesses skin "white as paper", "taller and thinner" than her mother with fingers that "never stopped moving" (34) curve and sharp dark- red fingernails whose eyes are "big black buttons" (34) denotes her unstable identity that can be deconstructed and reconstructed into multiple shapes. Her unstable body being an amalgamation of big black button eyes, huge body and her head that brushes the ceiling is an external exemplification of the instability of identity. Since her outer appearances can be broken, remade and altered, so can her inside. A simile that is employed to signify the other

mother's skin "white as paper" (34) functions as a symbol of death which signifies her temporary existence because "whiteness is a sign that makes white, while simultaneously signifying the true character of white people, which is invisible" (Ng 104). Whiteness, in the novel, is reversed and having been associated with colonialism that symbolises civilization, the novel rather employs it as an aspect that symbolises discontinuity. The monstrous creation of characters problematizes the concept of reality which society and culture generate. The grotesque identity of Coraline's mother is reflected in Coraline's other mother which appears outlandish and bizarre. The image of the other mother which is excessively extravagant becomes less than a human being which becomes a corporeal aberration. The fusion of monstrosity and grotesqueness situates Coraline's mother's identity as illusory and subjective, that is to say, it is neither absolute nor empty. More precisely, it signifies the suspension of reality through the employment of the grotesque because "the grotesque is…a way of drawing and writing the self and (or as) other. It involves not just what is drawn or written, but how and even where. It is thus as much, if not much more, of the signifier than the signified" (Epps 42). Therefore, it "gives rise to a sort of convoluted formalism, where irregular shapes and wild burlesque at once reveal and conceal, engrave and encrypt, something that pushes at the established order of the natural and the human" (42). The grotesque description of Coraline's other mother conveys a symbolic note that pertains to the issue of one's self and identity. Brad Epps states that "identity may be nothing, in other words, but a cryptic entangling of grotesque" (51). The multiplicity of Coraline's mother selves is established through the grotesque body of the other mother and have subsequently transgressed and challenged a normative understanding of fixed identity. Apart from this, fantasy and reality functions as two side of the same coin that compliments each other operating within a single domain. Coraline's repetitive act of opening and closing her eyes and seeing things exactly alike signifies the manner in which she does not merely end by being an observer but she attempts to be part of the simulated world. Additionally, it signifies the awe and wonder she experiences while encountering the grotesque surrounding and characters showcasing that she accumulates reality and multiple selves in another space and time. Abraham and Torok observe that "[just] as desire is born with its prohibition, Reality too, at least in the metapsychological sense, is born of the necessity of remaining concealed, unspoken" (Ng 110). A body that confronts the normative, the giant in *Odd and the Frost Giants*,

represents the grotesque figure in the novel. He is larger in size, who appears authoritative before the gods and Odd. The huge and uncouth figure of the frost giant in the novel conveys a symbolic note; he represents the possibility of subjectivity in terms of becoming. The figure of the frost giant who grows beyond the natural epitomises the liminal utopia of human freedom and creativity. His grotesque body provides a cathartic outlet that challenges the limited and static identity. Sarah Gleeson White says that the grotesque "unnerves the world of classical identity and knowledge, for it tests the very limits of the body and thus of being" (110). Hence, the strange, bizarre body of the giant becomes a site of production and signals another way of life. Through the creation of the frost giant, the author propels his readers to focus on the possibility of transformation which is directly inherent in human beings. The grotesque body of the giant transcends limitation that rebel against the decent, the normal and the sacred. In doing so, it challenges normative demands for forming an identity and unknots the boundaries of how reality and identity are perceived. In finally encountering the impossible body, Odd himself momentarily detaches from his own body. The narrator says, "It is a strange sensation, talking to a being who could crush you like a man could crush a baby mouse. *And*, thought Odd, *at least mice can run*" (86). The reality Odd conceives earlier including his own identity suddenly becomes alien and other. In encountering the giant, Odd too embodies a liminal state and the grotesque figure in order to experience wholeness since the grotesque body according to Bakhtin, "is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (Ng 166).

The integration of reality and fantasy stands as an important narrative event in the works of Neil Gaiman. By narratively juxtaposing the life of his characters within the fantastic spaces, Gaiman complicates the nature of truth in his works, disrupts the idea of binaries and has indeed manifested the spaces where change can occur. Fantasy, in his works, is not an attempt to escape reality; it permits the characters to examine their own emotion. Fantasy, encapsulate therapeutic function and perform symbolic tasks and replace violent emotion in his works. By and large, fantasy encourages self-confrontation and widens the ability to perceive ambiguity. The inclusion of the carnivalesque in the settings makes his readers perceive the subjective in the objective.

It assists them to sustain a precarious balance between the opposite and explore possibilities that offers a world of liberation and infinite possibility.

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Fantasy has no doubt remained to be a constant and recurring theme in the context of Neil Gaiman. It is "ultimately the most philosophic form of fiction, giving scope to man's deepest dreams and most potent ideas" (Prickett xv). In Gaiman's works, fantasy is deliberated in the form of dreams, visions and the creation of the other worlds. On the other hand, it functions as an important tool in order to address the invisible experience Gaiman's characters undergo. The scope of the fantastic is stressed by Eric S. Rabkin when he says:

> The fantastic is a special quality that we have seen as a defining quality in the genre of fantasy. Fantasy has had a broad appeal to people of all ages. In addition, fantasy is a genre not only in narrative, but in drama, poetry, painting, music and film. Considerations of the fantastic have complemented normal methods of inquiry into both genre criticism and literary history because those considerations are based on an atomic element of reader response, what we have called perspective. Perspectives can be compounded into constellations of attitudes, genre definitions, even worldviews (189).

To build a broader picture of the psyche of the characters, the creation of the alternative world stands as the prominent platform for Gaiman. The creation of alternative space and time emanates contradiction and disjunction. The confrontation with these contradictions affirms the nature of frustrations and desires which have been hidden and concealed. The fantastic encapsulates the Gothic, magic realism and the surreal which yield in the production of the impossible. At the center of Gaiman's plot and narrative, fantasy anchors the characters to contemplate the alternatives. Simultaneously, the fantastic narratives in Gaiman's works have outstripped the conventional modes of viewing life because fantasy plays an important role by functioning as a form of resistance. Although the fantastic narrative appears to be misleading, it operates human lives and the unexpected accommodates a moment of calm distancing. The meaning of fantasy is loaded as the plot of his novel progresses. It becomes the forces that have determined the fate of the characters and is elevated as important ingredients that cannot be accomplished by rationality and logic.

In terms of readership, Gaiman's fantasy exhibits a universal appeal because it can accommodate all kinds of readers and is appropriate for all ages. The novels which have been selected for the study namely *Coraline, The Graveyard Book, Odd and the Frost Giants* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* own the child characters as the central figure. Although the selected works account the life of the child, it appeals the adult readers as well because the early stages of life are visibly reflected through the child characters. It performs a dual role in making the child readers, as well as the adult readers understand the grievances that occurred during childhood. It facilitates a solution for both the readers and it reinforces impression to a varying degree. By unmasking the clear distinction between the audience and the genre, Gaiman communicates with two audiences in his works. Ursula Le Guin claims "fantasy is the great age equalizer" (Cadden 143). This statement stands crucial in the works of Neil Gaiman because the ardent desire and the inclination to construct the self matches the need of both the child and the adult characters. Thus, it is conspicuous that fantasy suits the physical and the psychological demands of both the child and the adult, which is not age specific. Rather it equalises, harmonises and facilitates renewal and change.

The origin, history and the background reading of fantasy literature have been explored in the study. Definition propounded by fantasy theorist namely Kathryn Hume, C.N. Manlove, Rosemary Jackson, Tzvetan Todorov, W.R. Irwin, Farah Mendlesohn and other prominent theorists in the course of the study provokes new approach to the classification of the genre, including a critical definition of fantasy. Fantasy literature proves to be fundamental in generating emotional engagement and response between the readers and the characters. However, the literary role of fantasy literature extends beyond the invisible by substituting the real, the normal, and the acceptable. These reversal propounded in the fantastic literature decode the barriers that have existed between ourselves and the fantastic world. The fantastic novels of Neil Gaiman have inevitably responded to our invisible desire and have invariably emphasized the scope for possibilities. The scope, strategies and the extensive dimension of fantasy literature which have been highlighted in the study challenge the future through the clues imparted by the unfamiliar and the less acceptable. To a greater degree, fantasy literature accommodates all kinds of readers. Its universal applicability has outwitted all kinds of structure relating to the concept of one's self and individuality. The fantastic

landscape and characters are instructional that inherits therapeutic functions and it becomes a space for continuous progress.

Gaiman's works are designed in the fashion of the bildungsroman. The employment of bildungsroman has an underlying connotation with the concept of the self. The gradual growth and development of his characters recall every inch of what the characters experience ranging from the inner and the outer level of thoughts. The confluence of the fantastic narrative and the inclusion of the bildungsroman becomes the reservoir of recognition from simple escapism into an understanding of a larger characters psyche. The symbolic nature of their changing relations with their surroundings is witnessed through the employment of bildungsroman that eventually locates his works as a quest fantasy novel. What remains noteworthy in the study is the curious magnificence of desire and the fantastic that has become part of everyday life. Additionally, the weaving of bildungsroman in Gaiman's narratives gradually dislodges the stereotypical image of the child. It has created a child who has formed a mystical vision of selfhood. Through the employment of bildungsroman, characters are bestowed the opportunity to vent out their fears, resentment, unfulfilled promises as well as their enduring sense of exile and loss, even though they seem to be reunited in their familiar surroundings. On the other hand, it encompasses the complex journey inherent in defining one's selfhood and it serves as an important dimension of the characters' journey towards freedom and it has achieved a resonant and improvisational expressive dignity.

As mentioned earlier, Gaiman's works are loaded with a re-envisioning of mythology, the employment of mythical creatures stand prominent in his narrative. The novels which have been selected for the study bear mythological characters in which readers can find certain traces of diverse mythology in his works. Additionally, the study has elucidated upon the rhetorics of fantasy, which have been defined by Farah Mendlesohn. It has emphasized the meaning and characteristics of "the portal quest". "the immersive", "the intrusive" and "the liminal". The definition that has been denoted in the study offers the readers wider perspectives on how to view the different categories within the fantastic realm. The study has explored the manner in which Neil Gaiman's works fall under the category of the "liminal fantasy". Although it bears certain characteristics of the other categories of fantasy, the liminal becomes an

important feature of Gaiman's works. The study further stresses on the anxiety exercised by the characters through the liminal space and time. Additionally, "The success of the liminal fantasy consists of, or invites, the readers to accept truth behind multiple and competing narratives while refusing to explain which truth it is we should discover" (Mendlesohn 240). Intrinsic to the study is the subsequent approach in which fantasy literature has sought to glorify an individual's imagination and transcend truth. What becomes distinctively remarkable within the context of fantasy literature is the coverage of the extensive reservoir of human nature along with the intensification of its problem. One can perceive it as a trajectory that escalates an individual through moments of doubts and confusion. Amidst the rise of this doubts and confusion, fantasy specifically prizes the characters the capacity to maintain their own position because they are self-consciously connected with the fantastic.

Storytelling technique is employed by Neil Gaiman and his writings embark on the politics of power inherent in the act of storytelling. The act of storytelling which is discernible in his works celebrates the transparency of orality. On the other hand, storytelling signifies the act of representing the past in order to comprehend the present context. Frequently in his narrative, the collective memory and consciousness of the characters are altered through the act of storytelling technique, which gives space for alternative options. Most importantly, storytelling in Gaiman's works functions as a credential of selfhood. Charles Taylor opines that "a basic condition of making sense of ourselves [is] that we grasp our lives in a *narrative*" (Vice 94). Therefore, narrative form is not merely an indispensable state of experiencing the world, it also entails understanding our selves (94). This statement proves to be crucial in the context of Neil Gaiman because through the technique of storytelling characters establish their narrative self. This, however, does not necessarily mean that Gaiman's narratives are linear which attempt to internalize coherence between the plot structures. Rather it is one way of manifesting the manner in which the self can be narrated which constitutes personhood. Storytelling in Gaiman's works shapes the realities of the character and it is through the process of narrativising their experience that characters acquire an immense significance and it enables them to alter rational based realities.

Taking a clue and solace from nature, the pastoral landscape nourishes their sensory experience. The pastoral landscape and settings are portrayed to be the most

initial natural desire for the child characters. Alienated since early childhood, nature becomes an abode for harmony and grace. The pain and the trauma of childhood and the betrayal of hopes drive the child characters and this is mirrored through the creation of pastoral fantasy. Deeper penetration into the heart of Gaiman's works has revealed the bonding between nature and the child. The inclusion of the bonding between these two significant concepts bears aesthetic and moral implications and it bears a value beyond its utilization to humanity. The portrayal of nature and the close connection between natures incite environmental appreciation. The fantastic landscape and the environment provide a peaceful wilderness that expands the characters' consciousness extensively. Turning to the pastoral and the green world, the self remains transparent while sustaining the vitality of childhood. A critical study regarding the imperial environmental imagination has been highlighted in the study. The symbolic and metaphorical representation of the imperial environmental imagination in *Odd and the Frost Giants* has imparted a sense of environmental stewardship among his characters. Proving the fact that nature has a close resemblance with the child characters in his works, Gaiman has incessantly demonstrated that his child characters are constantly interacting with nature. Apart from this, it has inadvertently denoted the child's ability to form social connection in such a way that he or she can perceive what life offers beyond the apparent.

The study has focused upon the manner in which fantasy functions in exploring the child's thoughts, experiences and psyche. It serves as a medium of language and functions as a storehouse that accommodates all that is not seen that is not deemed real, significant and trivial on the part of the characters. Most importantly, the characters' engagement with the supernatural renders an important understanding as to how supernatural and magical events become part and parcel of the daily existence. The encounter with the supernatural lends a remarkable experience that lies beyond the common reason and understanding of life. The study further explores the complexity that is inherent in childhood in the works of Neil Gaiman. The conventional understanding of childhood is debunked in Gaiman's narratives. Unlike the romantic conception of the child as innocent, fragile and the child as an object of purity and the common understanding of childhood as a path to the formation of adulthood is unraveled. Rather, in Gaiman's works, the child is seen as the embodiment of loss, who

is attempting to gratify his or her desire and form his or her unique selfhood. The study interprets childhood as a site of colonialism while weaving in the extensive amount of discrimination and control that is generated upon them. When the child characters are stereotyped and are attributed to certain norms and conduct by the adult characters, their difference is automatically created. Their existence as peripheral beings who could hardly be deemed consequential including the creation of normal childhood validates the fact that childhood can be interpreted as a site of colonialism. The destruction of the personal authority of the child as well as notions of normality inflicted upon the child characters facilitates a consistent form of domination, judgment, intervention and control.

The study focuses upon an incisive reading of Gothicism since it can transgress across national, social, sexual and the boundaries of one's own identity (Howarth 81) that can also offer a sense of productivity. Apart from situating the Gothic as a leitmotif that runs parallel in Gaiman's narratives, Gothicism in his works implies that in any form of a frightening situation, the child characters can find a channel to triumph over their fears. A reading of Gaiman's works makes it discernible that Gothicism is no less appropriate for children. His characters are propelled to proceed forward and it makes them formulate a coherent choice while extending the scope to understand the nature of their emotions. Ultimately, although being burdened with the conflicted feelings of terror and awe Gothicism evokes a visual stimulus for the child characters and fuels them with insatiable desire to comprehend the unknown. Aside from instilling suspense in Gaiman's works, Gothicism lends itself as an important component in the formation of selfhood and assists the characters to resolve certain crisis and builds a greater sense of self-confidence and initiatives.

Apart from this, an extensive reading of the Ecogothic has been put into perspectives. An analysis of the selected works that are based on the Ecogothic theoretical paradigm lends new perspectives regarding nonhuman characters. Most importantly, the inclusion of the Ecogothic, as the name suggests, doubly serve to locate the significance of ecology and Gothicism. Therefore, the phenomenon of the Ecogothic in the study question ingrained biases between human and the non human characters. While erasing ecophobia, what lies significant in the study is the manner in which the inclusion of the Ecogothic makes the readers consider the idea of humanity in a broader

perspective. Transformation, both within the sphere of the narrative and the characters, occur simultaneously when the Gothic and ecology is fused. Discourse regarding animality is raised and at another instance, it diminishes the notions of binary distinctions, class, gender and ethnic hatred. Additionally, it propels anti-racist sentiments and highlights ethnic diversity.

The distinctiveness of childhood is brought out in the study and the study locates this by associating childhood with the concept of power. Aligning with Michel Foucault's theory of power, the study traces the relation between power and childhood. Fantasy retrieves the power that the child can exercise. Undeniably, fantasy generates power while the child is labeled wretched, confused, inferior who occupy the margin. Power is analysed and is celebrated as a child oriented impulse that is highly productive in order to assert one's selfhood.

The aspect of the self runs parallel with the notion of fantasy in the works of Neil Gaiman. There are certain factors that have contributed to the formation of the self in the works of the author which have been selected for the study. For the propagation of selfhood, what remains distinguishable is the imagination of the characters. The refined imagination of the characters proliferated heroic quest, recognition as well as the ability to exercise one's authority. Besides, the characters' imagination stands as a myriad instruction in order to formulate a strong sense of self that alters their ability to make choices. Meanwhile, Gaiman stresses on the significance of encountering the unusual, the unsaid and the unseen. What becomes striking in the study is the manner in which the establishment of one's self and individuality is nourished with the assistance of contradiction, the invisible and the unlikely. The surrealistic images, symbols, characters, and imagery are treated as the foundation that has generated a fruitful result.

Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject is put into perspective in the study in order to disseminate the dynamics of the self in Gaiman's works. Analysis that is propagated through the theory of the abject makes the readers anticipate and alter the conventional understanding of selfhood. The implication of the abject is to transgress rules and boundaries of the borders in Gaiman's novels. By weaving the abject and abjection in the study characters are made to incorporate a flexible self one that is not defined by convention. The abject in Gaiman's works remind the readers of the impossibilities of

boundaries and divisions while showcasing the fluidity of selfhood. What is generally deemed as the abject such as monster, ghost, animals and other supernatural characters that refuse to conform to boundaries provide the characters ceaseless opportunities to renew their selfhood. Most importantly, the abject becomes a process through which characters interact with others and cherish multiple scripts of experience, instead of depending upon a fixed form of selfhood. In addition, the creative potential of the abject is denoted in the study when the abject acknowledges and celebrates the marginal experiences of the child characters. Equally significant is the manner in which abjection contributes to the establishment of healthy ego and empathy as well as the development of the child's morality.

Gaiman has introduced characters who bear no connection and linkage with their names. Naming in his works occupies the peripheral status, which is denoted as a vague and inconsequential phenomenon. What becomes more attractive and innovative is the skilful manner in which Gaiman has rooted the unusual explanation of selfhood. Naming in his works is deemed to be inconsequential for the characters because there is a limitation inherent in naming. In *The Ocean at the End of the Lane***,** Gaiman introduces an unnamed male protagonist, who remains unnamed throughout the plot of the novel. Although he remains nameless throughout the novel, he is portrayed by the author as the most distinguished character. The namelessness signifies his relationship with both the visible and the invisible. On the other hand, it signifies the impossibility of viewing the protagonist's experience of life objectively. Establishing values beyond what is visible becomes an important backbone in the novel's narrative, so in the case of the protagonist, his namelessness rather denotes that he is not a victim of narrative seduction. It symbolically implies that he exhibits the freedom and he progresses towards maturity and leaves his childhood which is marked by abandonment and loss. Whereas in *The Graveyard Book*, the protagonist is addressed as Nobody Owens by the graveyard inhabitants. Contrary to what his name implies the opposite quality of nobody becomes discernible as the plot of the novel progresses. Hence, in the novel, the protagonist maintains an extensive detachment with the meaning that is implied by his name. Being Nobody does not debar him from cultivating his deepest instinctual needs and desires. In fact, Bod is fashioned with power and vigour, which is accompanied by self- determination who could assert his superiority and proves his worth beyond no

doubt. In *Odd and the Frost Giants* readers encounter the strange and distinguished character who has adopted a different approach of establishing selfhood. Ordinary as it seems to be on the superficial level, Odd's challenging journey and determination prove him as an authentic hero. His heroic qualities are manifested in multiple ways. The typical meaning imparted by his name deceives the readers because as a creature of flesh and blood, Odd exhibits qualities more than what his ordinary name signifies. Whereas in *Coraline*, Coraline's name is mispronounced often by the other characters. Although the adult characters are unable to pronounce her name correctly, she still becomes an independent child. She realises that she cannot attain a sense of self by clinging to the relationship she forms with others. So, she prefers to ignore her neighbour's mispronunciation and she later realises that self-affirmation becomes one of the stepping stones for feeling important, special and unique. Naming in the works of Neil Gaiman is treated differently and the lack of affirming names in his works is a blatant manifestation to show that in order to attain a sense of self, labelling becomes less powerful. It is rather the character's self-knowledge which becomes the most important weapon.

Food symbolism stands as one of the most important metaphors that become the evocative part of the narrative. Through the lens of the food imagery in his works, the author provides the channel to trace the desire and hunger that have enveloped his characters. The metaphorical hunger Gaiman's characters undergo and the prevalent act of probing for food testifies the trauma and insecurities they have been enduring. At the same time, it reflects their capacity as a human being to vent out their anger and see themselves humanly and own their own basic impulse. Kara K. Keeling and Scott T. Pollard remarks:

> Food is associated with plentitude, love, the imagination, and the real in both its yielding and unyielding aspects, assuring children that they will be able to cope with their existence even when manna ceases to fall from the sky or their parents' refrigerators and that adulthood has its redemptive features (16).

Food liberates the characters from a certain level of oppression that brings a redemptive change. It insinuates a mode of empowerment that bears a therapeutic role

and it ultimately affirms their existence. At the same time, food in Gaiman's works is associated with power. Characters attain a new relationship with their body through the food they consume, which makes them overcome hindrance positively and meaningfully.

Memory, in the study, is situated as an important ladder in the formation of the self. The study has highlighted the dual aspect of memory which can be both reliable as well as unreliable, but memory proves to be an important component. The presence of memory within the narratives geared the characters to recall the past in order to comprehend the present context. The fusion of both the past and the present are deemed ardently necessary when confronted with a dilemma of choice. With the assistance of memory, Gaiman's characters develop a sense of continuity among the disconnected events in order to have a lasting purpose and significance. Memory plays a vital role in every character and there are scarcely any characters who are not affected by memory. It is eventually portrayed as a reservoir of knowledge that helps in making a sense of continuity of the self. Most importantly, the past relationship with the present is highlighted in the study because "memory is a means of overcoming the limitations of the human condition as it is understood in contemporary culture, by making the past appear once again in the present, despite its temporal, and possibly spatial distance" (Tim Woods and Middleton 1).

What becomes an important subject matter in the study regarding the formation of the self is the body of the mother. Gaiman's narrative has situated the importance of family and the image of the mother is the central focus. As a child, his characters yearn for recognition and a certain level of attention. Attainment of a higher form of self-recognition in his works is achieved through the body of the mother. The maternal voice in Gaiman's works transforms the personality of the child that has created a rendezvous of self and other. Thomas Insel says, "The mother not only provides a relationship but also forms an environmental unit with her infant" (Natov 63). The maternal voice of the mother figure in his works reassures in the characters a sense of wholeness that prevent them from remaining frozen in a state of loss. To highlight the significance of the mother in the formation of the self Kristeva's concept of Herethics is weaved in the study. Herethics, in Gaiman's works, emerges as a representation of ethical relationship which makes the characters establish greater compassion and makes them embody love

instead of narcissistic desire. Ostensibly, Gaiman's narratives subvert the linear structure of gender discourse. In Gaiman's works, the maternal figure stands as a constellation of utter security, strength, as well as a source of sustenance which has subsequently become part of the character's self. Interestingly, the study situates the mother figure that functions to solidify the child's experience. Besides, it embodies a meditative passage in order to attain a transcendent vision. What yields fruitful in the study is the manner in which the interaction and relationship between the child and the mother exemplify what Kristeva terms "semiotic chora". The semiotic chora in Gaiman's works functions as a kind of non-linguistic interaction. On the other hand, the interpretation of the mother and child interaction as a semiotic chora clarifies how mothering does not merely connote the fulfillment of gendered expectations. Rather, motherhood unravels hierarchy, represents empathy and validates the possibility of disseminating what is considered unrepresentable and what language cannot define. Another noteworthy aspect that is emphasized in the study is the concept of "other mothering". Unlike the traditional figure of foster mother that is seen in fairy tales, the study instead dwells on the manner in which mothering extends beyond biological associations.

An innovative understanding of the self is brought out in the study which is termed as "the transmodern self". The transmodern self situates the body as the most significant part of selfhood. The sensory experience of the characters is then noteworthy to be studied because viewing from the lens of transmodern self, characters' engagement with their own body provides them with a comprehensive way to understand their own self. The inclusion of transmodern self in the study contests the postmodern understanding of the self as fragmented being. Characters' preoccupation with their senses and their body validates the manner in which the self is not merely a thing. In order to validate the exactness of transmodern self, a theoretical framework based on picture book is employed in the study. The heightened visuality of the characters makes them reconsider human constructed spaces which ultimately serve as a new way of seeing. Those spaces offer a platform for the readers and the characters to interact through the fantastical metaphors. Nevertheless, it reinforces the fact that the words, metaphors and images become the narrative space. The visual perfomativity of

the characters contribute layers of possibility in order to understand the passage of establishing selfhood.

The confluence of reality and fantasy in the works of Neil Gaiman have debunked the dominant assumptions of reality. The appearance of ghosts, giants and other supernatural characters in his works mirror the possibility for change and it paves way for the author to explore the subjective nature of reality. An account of realism and fantasy from modernism and postmodernism era has been addressed in the study. Additionally, the study has focused on the concept of liminality. The liminal space that is highlighted in the works of Neil Gaiman further abandons the normative understanding of reality. The liminal space assists the characters to perceive the relativity of fantasy and reality. It serves as an important step towards psychological growth especially when the child characters are doomed with alienation and inner turmoil. The postmodernist framework in the study explores the manner in which the conventional conception of reality becomes increasingly inadequate. It replaces and affirms the readers that fantasy is way too complex to fit in the convention of realism.

In attempting to denote the illogicality of reality, the study situates the manner in which stimulation occurs in the course of the narratives. The process of simulation in the study has explored how logical and coherent definition of reality is not possible. So, simulation in the study has been interpreted as the hyperreal, which has ruined the abstract quality of the real. Hyperreality, as Jean Baudrillard defines, is "a simultaneity of all the functions, without a past, without a future, an operationality on all level" (78). The fantastic narrative, events, and characters are treated as an abode of the hyperreal, which unravels all kinds of territory and boundaries which has its origin without the presence of reality. Besides, simulation in the study has generated differences and certifies the impossibility of isolating the process of fantastic realism in Gaiman's works. One can perceive the fantastic as the real which surrounds the life of the characters because as Baudrillard has noted that "it is now impossible to isolate the process of the real, or to prove the real" (21). The four novels in focus become an apparatus of simulation in which meaning collapse and the truth is being distorted.

The relationship between fantasy and reality is also highlighted in the four selected novels. The relativity of the two seemingly contradictory terms makes the

characters embrace the ordinary and the extraordinary, the impossible and the possible and the usual and the unusual. Ursula Le Guin stresses:

> For fantasy is true, of course, it isn't factual, but it is true children know that. Adult know it, and that is previously why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenge, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phoney, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons because they are afraid of freedom (Hunt 7).

The reality in Gaiman's works takes a post-modernist stance and framework. Both as a philosophical and cultural theory, postmodernism discards totalizing narratives. It interrogates the notion that there is no reality beyond what is represented and instead favors the fragmented and the disjointed (Nayar 48). Moreover, it professes that images and signs comprise reality that discards elite culture and is apprehensive of truth in language (48). The location of the carnivalesque in the study has promulgated the subjective nature of reality in the works of Neil Gaiman. The Bakhtinian concept of carnival situates reality which is in flux that is flexible as well as dynamic. The inclusion of the carnival within the fantastic narrative has glorified the unusual in which human and non-human characters relationships exist cordially. The fantastic events, characters and the non-human characters existing together in harmony question the normal from the abnormal and the usual from the unusual. On the other hand, the presence of these supernatural characters dilutes reality and truth and it blurs the boundary between the binaries. The framework of Baktinian carnival has perpetuated multiple and shifting truth and digress the convention of reality. In Gaiman's works, the carnivalesque generates an opportunity for the characters to interact and exchange thoughts and opinions. By amalgamating the human, the non-human and the supernatural, the hierarchy has been dislodged in the narrative. Therefore, the narrative diminishes classifications and combines the high and the low as well as the prudent and the imprudent. Most importantly, the process of self-making project comprises the task of encountering and coming to terms with the supernatural and the fantastic. The significance of the carnival in Gaiman's narrative is viewed from a new dimension in which the phenomenon serves to inculcate polyphony of voices. The multiplicity of voices in his narratives geared readers' attention towards selfhood. Each of the

characters' voices in his narratives is deemed to be significant and provocative. An equal level of attention towards minor and major characters' voices in his works provoke explicit knowledge about human mortality including the essential ideas regarding what it means to formulate the self. Regardless of the characters' background, status and upbringing their voices become a confirmation of their existence.

In the context of liminality, Gaiman's creation of the liminal space alters the familiar understanding of culture, authority, class in which the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. Transformation occurs not just in the characters and the structure of the plot Gaiman alters the readers' perception of people and things. The inclusion of liminality in his works denotes the liminal nature of culture in which racism, class and gender no longer define the character. The secondary worlds in the select novels are multicultural. Hence, one can interpret his work as a multicultural utopia. Victor Turner's concept of 'communitas' situated in Gaiman's works erases hierarchy and explores the liminality of culture itself. Hybridized cultures and liminal communities are created through the fusion of human and nonhuman characters. As a result, the creation of liminal communities demystify myths regarding the monologic view of culture. Liminality and fantasy questions objective truth regarding culture and history while functioning as a space for revitalization, transgression as well as structural renewal. The creation of the secondary world in Gaiman's narratives is the liminal zone. Ultimately, the secondary world, with its liminal nature, makes the characters negotiate the terrain between childhood and adulthood. Their encounter and the choices they have made within the liminal space makes them aware of themselves better and teach them how to come to terms with grief along with the willingness to make connections with others

Additionally, the element of the grotesque bears an enormous relation with the characters. It functions as a symbolic representation of the subjective nature of one's self. The bizarre settings of the novels, along with the peculiar description of the characters, have imparted the multiple ways to which one's self and identity can be subverted and transformed. The grotesqueness of the characters in Gaiman's works become a complex tapestry to view one's self as personal, which is essentially built around a series of deeds. On the other hand, the grotesque imagery and the grotesque characters emphasize fantasy's ludicrous aspect. This, in turn, has sustained the vitality of contradiction, which can be interpreted as a deconstructionist route. The multi-

faceted, complex layering of the grotesque images correspond with the more flexible and pliable nature of one's self and identity in Gaiman's works. Jacques Derrida asserts that "identity has come to mean not sameness but differences" (Sethi 230). Monstrosity, in the study, is shown to be an internal feature. The inclusion of monstrosity and the grotesqueness of the characters makes one understand the manner in which race, culture including selfhood is a production of otherness. Apart from imparting fear, it arouses desire for the other. A rereading of monstrosity compels us to understand how identity itself is a constructed category that relies on the construction of gender, race and class.

Neil Gaiman's prologue in *Coraline* claims, "Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragon exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be eaten" (Gaiman, *Prologue*). The complex and consequential statement paves a way in making the readers understand the power and literary significance that fairy tales exhibit. In a similar fashion, fantasy has revealed the unexpected and the unacknowledged side of human experience. They have informed the readers in expressing the diversity of human imagination as well as the virtue inherent in imagination. Peter Hunt opines, "Fantasy is not a realm where you find out and follow other people's arcane rules, it is a place where you make your own moral decisions and invent ways of implementing them" (105). Therefore, in the context of fantasy what lies fundamental and inescapable is the degree to which an individual exercises his free will. Suspension of disbelief becomes an important phenomenon in order to grasp the unseen and the invisible. Mirroring in Gaiman's works occurs within the fantastic space as "the fantastic reveals not only our deepest fears, but also our greatest aspirations; not only our hidden shames, but also our finest hopes" (Rabkin 227). On the concept of the fantastic Tzvetan Todorov stresses:

> The physical world and the spiritual world interpenetrate; their fundamental categories are modified as a result. The time and space of the supernatural world , as they are described in this group of the fantastic texts, are not the time and space of everyday life. Here time seems suspended, it extends beyond what one imagines to be possible (118).

The relationship between fantasy and reality is highlighted in the specific novels which have been selected for the study. The relativity of the two seemingly

contradictory terms makes the characters embrace the ordinary and the extraordinary, the impossible and the possible and the usual and the unusual. Ursula Le Guin stresses:

> For fantasy is true, of course, it isn't factual, but it is true children know that. Adult know it, and that is previously why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenge, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phoney, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. They are afraid of dragons because they are afraid of freedom (Hunt 7).

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# ABSTRACT

# FANTASY AND THE SELF: A STUDY OF SELECT NOVELS BY NEIL GAIMAN

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Neil Gaiman was born on 10th November 1960 at Portchester, Hampshire in England. He has created a body of works which has ranked him amongst the most popular writer of the twentieth century. His body of works is never limited to "one culture, time period, franchise, story world, or medium" (Porter 15). A majority of his works has been adapted into films and is celebrated as an author proficient in storytelling. Gaiman's works have been conferred numerous awards, namely the Hugo, Nebula and Bram Stoker award as well as the Newbery and the Carnegie medals. In addition to this, he is acknowledged to be the first author to have received both the prestigious Newbery and the Carnegie medals for *The Graveyard Book* (2008). Neil Gaiman has contributed immensely to the vast body of fantasy literature apart from being screen writer, comic book writer, poet as well as an occasional song writer. Four of his novels have been selected for the present study namely *Coraline* (2002), *The Graveyard Book* (2008), *Odd and the Frost Giants* (2008), *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (2013).

The thesis entitled "Fantasy and the Self: A Study of Select Novels by Neil Gaiman" has attempted to explore the dynamics of selfhood through the medium of fantasy. Gaiman's child characters in his fantastic narratives map the secondary world and the unfamiliar spaces. This lends transformative effect on the child characters since it makes them examine ideas about themselves and it offers competing worldviews. Reading Neil Gaiman's works provoke an important question as to why his characters tend to explore the portals. It is an obligation for Gaiman's heroes and his readers to mentally and literally explore the unfamiliar spaces in order to understand the rules that administer them. His characters are often forced, tricked or seduced into entering an unfamiliar landscape in which their selfhood and lives are susceptible. So, it is an obligation for his characters to map and decode the fantastical world in which they find themselves in order to survive (Bealer and Luria viii). Gaiman's engagement with encountering the unfamiliar is what marks his works as travel writing. Travel writing and exploring the unknown in Gaiman's works however, bear a distinct meaning. In travel writing, the tourist remains at a distance from his experience and is hidden behind guide books and cameras and the tourist then remains detached and untouched by the experience. Gaiman's imaginary spaces equally provide a transformative effect on the readers as well as the fictional characters that inhabit the story. His writings navigate the

readers through alien space and perform a glorious task by transforming the readers (viii, ix). In Neil Gaiman's works fantasy becomes a common place in which characters project their desire and anchor them to understand reality. In seeking to challenge their monotonous existence and the harsh realities, characters cling to fantasy. Their confrontation with the fantastic elements in the secondary world gives them a glorious recognition and at times they have expressed their existential angst. In Gaiman's works, the postmodern trait of the impossibility of knowing anything for certain is evoked through the experience undergone by his characters. Uncertainty regarding their own existence propels them to journey into the secondary world which is approachable only through the medium of imagination. The inconclusive ending of his novels and the occurrence of the unexpected events including the unsettled boundaries between dreams and the real subsequently followed by the self-critical dialogue in his works render them as postmodernist texts.

The term fantasy derives from the Latin word *Phantasticus* which in turn is derived from the Greek word *phantastikos*. It is a word that denotes "what is presented to the mind, made visible, visionary, unreal" (Lance 14). The first traces of it in Western culture can be discovered in ancient myths, legends, and folklore, which are closely associated with the ritual of the carnival. Throughout history, fantasy has been considered somehow inferior to the mimetic mode. Offensive remarks on it have always been rampant and "have thus always been associated with "high-brow" aesthetic" (15). In comparison with realist mode of writing fantasy literature is deemed to be complex and obscure that is incapable to explore real human concern. David Hume, a prominent eighteenth-century philosopher, disdains literary fantasy "as a threat to sanity" and professes that romances deal with nothing but "winged horses, fiery dragons and monstrous giants" (Hume 6). Moreover, during the nineteenth century fantasy occupied a peripheral status by the champions of the realistic novel. However, with the passage of time, fantasy evolved and eventually gained popularity. It has generally been a "well established part of mainstream narrative, and is today re-established as a prominent narrative in contemporary fiction" (21). As a mode of narrative that runs contrary to fact, late in the nineteenth century, various authors have employed it as an alternative to counter the novel that focuses on social realism. However, in spite of the increasing accomplishment as a genre, what becomes problematic is the interpretations and the

complexities involved in comprehending the term. There are definitions that claim that fantasy is merely another version or imitation of science that embodies the supernatural, the past and the future. Apart from this, fantasy is attributed as a term that is synonymous with the fictional, the bizarre, the improbable that eventually connotes escapism (Irwin 4, 5). Lance Olsen claims:

> The fantastic confounds and confuses reader response, generates a dialectic that refuses synthesis, explores the unsaid and unseen, and rejects the definitive version of "truth," "reality," and "meaning". Its function as a mode of discourse is to surprise, question, put into doubt, produce anxiety, make active, disgust, repel, rebel, subvert, pervert, make ambiguous, make discontinuous, deform, dislocate, destabilize (117).

Fantasy literature addresses issues that are not seen outwardly as "it provides not only entertainment but a means to keeping a clear perspective on our required concerns of thought and feelings" (Irwin 187). Fantasy integrates conflicting opinions, feelings and belief and it reaffirms and incorporates positive future meaningfully. It is a genre of literature that "cannot be dominated by the logic of instrumental rationality" (Zipes 81). It is employed in all kinds of popular culture to project "utopian possibilities for developing a humane community in which differences among people are resolved through mutual support" (87).

The study has explored the dynamics of selfhood through the medium of fantasy along with other fantastic genres. The self, as Samantha Vice asserts, "Isn't something that is given to us, or just happens 'despite ourselves'. We are responsible for its contours and so in a significant sense, are self-made persons" (98). In the context of Neil Gaiman, one's selfhood is dynamic, for instance, the varied personal experiences of the characters are deemed consequential. The discredited form of experience such as imagination, the occurrence of the supernatural, the persistent huger for food, memory, the body of the mother, the abject including the senses of the characters are positioned as an important component in the formation of selfhood in Neil Gaiman's works. Opposing to the idea of the fragmented self, Gaiman's works validate the manner in which selfhood incorporates the acceptance of contradictions, diversity and plurality.

One of the concepts that remain central in Gaiman's narratives is that the characters' fantastic engagement affords them power and it functions as a source of establishing selfhood. The powerless child learns strength, gains a sense of freedom, power, intelligence and virtues. The child, who is considered to remain on the periphery, discovers the inner qualities hidden inside to generate his or her individuality.

## CHAPTER I: SITUATING NEIL GAIMAN IN THE CONTEXT OF FANTASY LITERATURE

Gaiman's works are loaded with a re-envisioning of mythology and the employment of mythical creatures stand prominent in his narratives. The novels which have been selected for the study bear mythological characters in which readers can find certain traces of diverse mythology. The adaptation of mythology, fairy tales, nursery rhymes and certain other ancient stories in Gaiman's works, without undermining its original version, makes his readers understand the story line in different perspectives. The intertextual references in Gaiman's works also perform the task of detaching the readers from forming one sided view of life and discover the very essence of what makes us human. Storytelling technique is employed by Neil Gaiman and his writings embark on the politics of power inherent in the act of storytelling. The act of storytelling which is discernible in his works celebrates the transparency of orality. Frequently in his narratives, the collective memory and consciousness of the characters are altered through the act of storytelling. Significantly, storytelling in Gaiman's works functions as a credential of selfhood. Charles Taylor opines that "a basic condition of making sense of ourselves [is] that we grasp our lives in a *narrative*" (Vice 94). Therefore, narrative form is not merely an indispensable state of experiencing the world, it also entails understanding our selves (94). This statement proves to be crucial in the context of Neil Gaiman because through the technique of storytelling characters establish their narrative self. This, however, does not necessarily mean that Gaiman's narratives are linear which attempts to internalize coherence between the plot structures. Rather, it is one way of manifesting the manner in which the self can be narrated as constituting personhood. Storytelling in Gaiman's works shape the realities of the character and it is through the process of narrating their experience that the characters acquire immense significance, thus enabling them to alter rational based realities.

Frequently discernible in the twentieth century fantasy literature is that it is "more ecological than moral, concerned with the preservation of a world at least as much as the transformation of an individual" (Manlove, "*Christian*" 212). Whereas in Victorian fantasy "the moral emphasis demands not that the individual should stay still, but that the spirit should change" (212). Neil Gaiman's characters establish a close affinity with nature. The close affinity between humans and nature is at the heart of his novels and it lends a note of environmental stewardship for both the characters and the readers. Apart from imparting ecophilia in his works, the imperial environmental imagination is brought out *Odd and the Frost Giants*. The frost giant's disruption of the season as a means to generate his power exemplifies the colonizers strategy of exploiting the land. Gaiman depicts the manner in which his characters suffer from a lack of space, and through the employment of Asgard as a symbolic topographical reference he repeatedly denotes the obvious consequence of colonial oppression. Gaiman's holistic approach to nature and the environment in his works renders the idea that human beings are the consumers, who are indebted to nature. Particularly discernible in Gaiman's narrative is the manner in which he has attempted to demonstrate how intersubjectivity ought to encompass mutual recognition and affinity with other entities of nature.

## CHAPTER II: CHILDHOOD AND FANTASY

Childhood stands as a crucial and debatable issue in Neil Gaiman's works. The novels which have been selected for the study namely *Coraline, The Graveyard Book, Odd and the Frost Giants* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* own the child characters as the central figure. The concept of childhood and the child "are cultural myths replicated and reinvented through representational practices of history, science, literature, material culture, woven in, and by, discourses, or discursive traditions" (Morgado 204). The fantastic narratives in Gaiman's works function as a strategy to explore the child's clarity of thoughts because "the child does not express itself through things, but things through itself. In the child, creativity and subjectivity have not yet celebrated their bold meaning" (Burman 68).

The segments of colonialism are discernible through the portrayal of childhood in Neil Gaiman's works. The betrayal of hope, alienation and isolation experienced by

the characters and the manner in which a child is stereotyped validate how childhood can be scrutinized as a colonizing agent. Gaiman's works explore the urgent need to discard the monolithic category of childhood and he instead gears his readers to establish pluralistic concepts of childhood.

It is interesting to note that by making his characters crawl through the darkness, the Gothic in Gaiman's works provide an outlet for the characters' feelings. The genre proves to be crucial especially in the context of children's literature "because children themselves often displayed heightened levels of emotions as they try to figure out who they are and their place in the world" (Howarth 12). The experience of the Gothic depicts the darker side of the characters' imagination which further recasts the kind of fear and frustration that dominates them. Gothicism resonates further when it makes the characters learn what frightens them and it eventually makes them triumph over their fear. Gaiman's characters do not nurse delusion in encountering the Gothic. Rather, the Gothic functions as an abode for reassessment and it dismantles readers cherished conviction regarding childhood.

Furthermore, the fantastic narratives in Gaiman's works generate the EcoGothic subject which serves as an important channel in understanding and interacting with the environment and all forms of life. David Del Principe asserts "EcoGothic examines the construction of the Gothic body…the EcoGothic serves to give voice to ingrained biases and a mounting ecophobia-fears stemming from human's precarious relationship with all that is nonhuman" (1). Animals along with human characters populate Gaiman's *Coraline* and the presence of inhuman characters do not merely bear a moral purpose, it rather bears a strong connotation with the issue of race. In *Coraline*, there are certain strange inhuman characters namely dog-bats, aliens, rats, mice, black cat, black Scottie dog. The diversity of characters in Gaiman's works brings uniformity which appears to be a raceless society. In the story, the black Scottie dog plays an important role in the process of social exchange:

> "lets see your ticket: it said gruffy…That's what I said. Ticket. I haven't got all day, you know. You cannot watch the show without a ticket" (48).

The necessity of the ticket in order to watch the show represents the scene of life in a rapidly expanding fragmented society. When Coraline admits to the black

Scottie dog that she does not have a ticket, the dog picks up the torch in its mouth and proceeds towards the dark and shows her the empty seat. In the story money no longer becomes an inherent worth. It is conspicuous that transformation occurs not just at the level of the plot but also in Gaiman's presentation of race. Gaiman consistently modifies his readers' perception of people, relationship and facts. When Coraline narrates her story, she associates the heroic deeds of her father with a rhino and this association prompts his readers to evaluate his cherished ideas about unity of culture, race as well as personal relationships.

## CHAPTER III: LOCATING THE SELF

The productive significance of acknowledging the abject and its immense role in the formation of distinct selfhood has been taken into account. According to Julia Kristeva abjection refers to something that "does not respect borders, positions, and rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a saviour" (Kristeva 4). Filled with characters that are deemed grotesque, monstrous and abnormal, abjection offers Gaiman's characters a flexible self. It threatens the boundaries of the self in which otherness becomes the condition of the characters' self.

Food, in Gaiman's novels, bears an implication with the search for the self. The image of food becomes a metaphor and the symbol that marks the inner battle occurring within the characters. The fantasy for food in Gaiman's works to a great extent capture the disappointment, frustration and loneliness of the characters and food symbolism in the works selected for the study has an important connection with the desire and the repression of the characters. One of the intricacies of Gaiman's works is the relationship between memory and the self. Mark Freeman summarizes that memory "has to do not merely with recounting the past but with making sense of it – from 'above', as it were – is an interpretive act the end of which is an enlarged understanding of the self" (29). Remembering past events, through either narratives or direct experience permits the development of the characters and it facilitates them to assert mastery and control over events. Gaiman's characters draw meaning on their own instead of relying on what others provide for them. His works have depicted the manner in which memory is not

merely the retrieval of information instead, it has contributed immensely in the formation of the coherent self.

Kristeva claims that the maternal body can function as a meaningful self that is beyond symbolic language. Reconciliation with the mother is of enduring importance and has imparted critical importance in Neil Gaiman's works. Given the role the mother plays in the formation of the self, Gaiman's works call attention to Kristeva's "Semiotic Chora" (Kristeva 27). The symbolic in the context of Kristeva designates the inclination to use language in an orderly way including grammar and syntax and it is a means of expressing meaning that leaves little scope for ambiguity. The interaction between the mother and the child serves as an example of the semiotic. It is not merely a space rather it can be understood as non-linguistic interaction.

What lies crucial in the heart of Gaiman's narratives is the varying degree in which visuality imparts a new self-conscious mode of being. Therefore, the ability to visualize stands crucial for the characters which situate the importance of characters' mind, body as well as the imaginative skills, which can function as a new mode of seeing. Characters' preoccupation with their own body parts becomes a landmark in understanding the self, which Karen Coats terms "Transmodern self". Diverging from the modernist and postmodernist conception of the self, Karen Coats proposes the significance of the transmodern self. In it she argues that the modernist situates independence, reason, freedom, autonomy and self-actualization as the goal of the human self, while some of the postmodernist consider the self as "constructed- a fragmented play of surfaces where any sense of coherence or integration is illusory at best, a violent repression at worst" (76, 77). Coats claims that "the transmodern brings the body back into the mix as both limit and as an invariant centering principle around which a child's sense of self articulates" (81).

## CHAPTER IV: FANTASY AND REALITY

To the question as to why fantasy is gaining attraction at all levels of literature although it was once pushed on the periphery, Kathryn Hume provides a significant answer. She asserts "realism no longer imparts an adequate sense of meaning to our experience with reality" (39). The inclusion of the fantastic narrative portrays multiple realities through time and space. It transcends the objective meaning of symbols and

images in his works and makes his readers acknowledge the impossibility of framing a single dimension and description of reality. In attempting to denote the illogicality of reality, the study situates the manner in which stimulation occurs in the course of the narratives. The process of simulation in the study has explored the manner in which logical and coherent definition of reality is not possible. Therefore, simulation in the study has been interpreted as the "hyperreal", which has ruined the abstract quality of the real.

The fusion of the supernatural elements, human characters, non-human characters including the bleak and grotesque images in Gaiman's works run parallel to the notion of the carnivalesque. The alliance of the unusual set of images, settings and characters in Gaiman's works convincingly argue how Gaiman has unravelled the binary opposition in his works. The liminal space in Gaiman's works function as a contact zone, in which unity is celebrated through difference. To establish a dialogic theory of cultural liminality, Bakhtinian concepts such as "doublevoicedness, carnivalization and heteroglossia" (Zavala 9) remain central in Gaiman's narratives. In order to facilitate his characters' progression, Gaiman employs tools such as secondary world, other world and liminal space which are inhabited by ghost, giants, grotesque and nonhuman characters that are transitional. These enable his characters to interact with both the self and other. The positioning of between and betwixt places and spaces propels Gaiman's characters to negotiate the terrain between childhood and adulthood, the real and the unreal, high and low as well as the familiar and the unfamiliar. Neil Gaiman situates liminality, fantasy and the carnivalesque in his narratives because it encapsulates an interestingly multicultural profile which exemplifies "the liminal nature of contemporary multiculturalism" (10). According to Victor Turner, "The attributes of liminality or of a liminal *personae* ("threshold people") are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locates states and positions in cultural space" (95). The novels in focus unfold the grotesqueness of the characters. The grotesque description and language of the characters serve as an agent that disrupts the notion of normal reality. The grotesque description of Ursula Monkton in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* inadvertently situates her as a character of flesh and blood and represents "extreme fear of feminine sexual response" (Halberstam 29). Her monstrous body does not define

her as a totalizing monster, which is affirmed later when the protagonist says “I had seen her torn to pieces a few hours before, but now she was whole” (183). Although interpreted as monstrous, grotesque and unpleasant, Ursula Monkton’s presence in the novel disrupts the boundaries and categories between human and monster. The varmints in the novel function as good examples of the transference of horror from the unnatural description of Ursula to nature that accommodates a folk of aggressive varmints or the hungry bird. Gaiman refuses to manifest monstrosity only within one sphere that disrupts the logic of otherness where meaning refuses to unite only within one body. Attention is not established in attempting to identify the monster, but what makes the readers suspicious is the maker and hunter of the monster in the narrative. The protagonist’s preoccupation with the bodily monstrosity of Ursula attunes to the specific ways in which identity itself is often structured, categorized and demarcated.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

Fantasy has no doubt remained to be a constant and recurring theme in the context of Neil Gaiman that explores man’s deepest dreams. In Gaiman’s works, fantasy is deliberated in the form of dreams, visions and the creation of the other worlds. On the other hand, it functions as an important tool in addressing the invisible experience Gaiman’s characters undergo. In terms of readership, Gaiman’s fantasy exhibits a universal appeal because it can accommodate all kinds of readers and is appropriate for all ages. Although the selected narratives for the study centers on child characters, they appeal the adult readers as well because the early stages of life are visibly reflected through the child characters. Gaiman’s works, therefore, perform a dual role in making the child readers, as well as the adult readers understand the grievances that occur during childhood. It facilitates a solution for both the readers and it reinforces impression to a varying degree. By unmasking the clear distinction between the audience and the genre, Gaiman communicates with two audiences in his works. The ardent desire and the inclination to construct the self cater to the need of both the child and the adult characters. Thus, it is conspicuous that fantasy suits the physical and the psychological demands of both the child and the adult, which is not age specific. Rather it equalises, harmonises and facilitates renewal and change.

Gaiman's works are designed in the fashion of the bildungsroman. The employment of bildungsroman has an underlying connotation with the concept of the self. The gradual growth and development of his characters recall every inch of what the characters experience ranging from the inner and the outer level of thoughts. The confluence of the fantastic narrative and the inclusion of the bildungsroman becomes the reservoir of recognition from simple escapism into an understanding of a larger characters psyche. The symbolic nature of their changing relations with their surroundings is witnessed through the employment of bildungsroman that eventually locates his works as a quest fantasy novel. What remains noteworthy in the study is the curious magnificence of desire and the fantastic that has become part of everyday life. Additionally, the weaving of bildungsroman in Gaiman's narratives gradually dislodges the stereotypical image of the child. It has created a child who has formed a mystical vision of selfhood.

The study has reiterated that fantasy and selfhood have proved to be discernible in the literary sphere of Neil Gaiman. The fusion of these two seemingly separate aspects perhaps reassure the dynamics of selfhood while validating the role of fantasy in the formation of selfhood. While functioning as another dimension of reality, the therapeutic function and creativity of fantasy are witnessed by Gaiman's characters. Hence, the characters selfhood find its creative expression in the Gothic, the abject, the supernatural, the grotesque, the liminal as well as imagination. Apart from the aspects that have been foregrounded in the study, further exploration and studies can be attempted in Gaiman's works. His works can be studied as an extension and creation of new mythology that accompanies significant cultural shifts. The manner in which he dissects familiar fables in order to produce new tales becomes fascinating because it creates new spaces while challenging monolithic view of meaning. The celebration of fantasy in his works builds a greater appreciation for understanding the seriousness and diversity of fantasy literature.

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