


Chapter 16


Crossing Worlds and Resisting Power: Fantasy and Metaphorical Borders in Srivatsa and Karunatilaka

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ABSTRACT

The act of crossing and navigating physical, cultural, and symbolic borders has a profound impact on the shaping of identities, with a focus on the dynamics of resistance and power. By analyzing, through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the experiences of characters portrayed in select Fantasy Fiction [The Spice Gate by Prashanth Srivatsa (2024); and The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida by Shehan Karunatilaka (2022)] in navigating borders—whether literal or metaphorical—the chapter studies how these crossings challenge fixed notions of identity and belonging. The protagonists of the chosen Fantasy works stem from both highly marginalized communities: the lower castes in India, and the more universally discriminated LGBTQIA+ people. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives pertaining to gender, sexuality, caste, oppression, and resistance, the chapter examines the act of border-crossing to illuminate the interplay between Self and Other, belonging and alienation, while confronting structures of power and oppression.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of borders, whether physical, geographical, or metaphorical, remains a critical subject in the larger study of identity, power, and resistance. Borders are spaces where multiple forces converge—political, economic, cultural, and social, to name the more dominant ones. Historically, borders have served the purpose of demarcating not just territorial divisions but also establishing and reinforcing hierarchical social structures. Borders and boundaries are rightfully recognized as having the power to “impose difference” (Kearney, 1991, p. 52) between the Self and the Other. Bringing in the subject of literary portrayal, borders often carry rich symbolic meaning in addition to the connotations attached to them over time, representing the fluidity or rigidity of individual identities as well as societal divisions. Borders, in today’s world, must not be seen as mere physical barriers; they are dynamic spaces that spark power struggles, inspire the reshaping of identities, and are the breeding grounds of all forms of resistance.

Borders are acknowledged to be spaces that harbor a great deal of tension and collision points for forces of globalization enmeshed with elements, such as migration and other socioeconomic and sociopolitical conflicts. However, taking a step back from the reality of borders and border politics, and entering the realm of fantasy fiction borders, as is the focus of the present chapter, have been given many a fantastical and metaphorical connotations over time. These images include magical gates or portals which emphasize processes beyond the physicality of the barrier trope towards the very process of crossing borders, which in turn encompasses the more surreal facets of the journey coupled with the existential aspects. Quite a few fantasy fiction works have used the act of border crossing in an allegorical or symbolic way that inspired countless other forms of art over time. Alice’s journey down the rabbit hole, crossing the border of the real world and finding herself in Wonderland, has been reimagined and adapted by quite a few artists. It led to the famous Spanish artist Salvador Dalí’s bronze sculpture “Alice in Wonderland,” which he completed in 1984 (Webb, 2023). *My Neighbor Totoro*, a 1988 Japanese animated film created by Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli, reimagined the trope of Alice following a rabbit down the hole leading to Wonderland by portraying their character Mei Kusakabe following a forest spirit, Totoro, and ultimately finding herself elsewhere. In the Ghibli movie, Mei and her sister were dealing with their journey to a new home and city, which exemplified an allegory of uprootedness, and their sick mother, making the option of escaping reality, even fleetingly, feel like joy and relief to the two little girls (Rader, 2023). In Rowling’s (1997) *Harry Potter* series, all the young witches and wizards must first traverse the magical barrier on Platform 9^{3/4} to board their train from the human (Muggle) world of London and depart for the magical world of Hogwarts school. Similarly, in Maas’ (2015) best-selling high-fantasy fae series,

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