

TRANSFORMING FROM A CRITICAL READER TO A CREATIVE WRITER:  
AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

A Dissertation

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AN ABSTRACT

of the dissertation of *Anoushka Poudel* for the degree of *Master of Philosophy in English Language Education* was presented to the School of Education Kathmandu University on 9 May 2023, entitled *Transforming from a Critical Reader to a Creative Writer: An Autoethnographic Study*

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In this autoethnographic study of my struggle and transformative journey from a critical reader to a creative writer, I reflect on my experience writing *Beyond Her Eyes: An Adventure in the Netherworld*. I wrote and published the novel in 2015. This dissertation emerged from the data I generated by writing and rewriting my anecdotes and stories. I used Mezirow's theory of transformative learning to interpret and discuss the generated anecdotes and narratives of my struggle as a critical reader and writer.

My narratives' reflections, interpretations and discussions revealed that writing fantasy fiction and a dissertation was utterly different. My writing of the fantasy story was a self-satisfying act. I wrote to relax and for catharsis; I had no timeline to complete. On the one hand, completing the dissertation was different. It was not as exciting and enthralling as publishing a novel because I understood its meaning as an obligation. Another revelation was that I unconsciously wrote my fantasy fiction as a child and engaged in emotive writing to appeal to my audience. However, I was critically aware of my engagement in writing a dissertation project to satisfy the research committee members and scholars. Through this project, I learned to combine the language of emotion and reason in writing an academic document. To make this happen, I took refuge in the practice of auto-ethnography in writing my dissertation. Auto-ethnography allowed me the liberty of some semblance of personability in my

writing. It allowed me to use my preferred evocative writing still. I found this apt for my project.

Reading Mezirow in-depth and understanding the theory of transformative learning enabled me to use the writing technique through reflection. In this dissertation, I argue that a writer is a critical reader. Only a critical reader emerges to become a creative writer, but that does not mean all critical readers become creative writers. I also realized that writing manuals do not make creative writers; one should read the genre of one's interest. Reading manuals on creative writing is reading about creative writers, not reading about creative works.

Besides my realisation and transformation, one of the most important contributions of this project is to show that critical scholars with a tinge of creativity can combine the language of creative innovation with the language of academic writing.

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9 May 2023

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I understand and agree that my dissertation will become a part of the permanent collection of the Kathmandu University Library. My signature below approves the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

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9 May 2023

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## DECLARATION

This dissertation is my research and contains no material submitted or published for a degree at any university.

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Anoushka Poudel  
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9 May 2023

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my fictional characters with whom I spent my formative years of life and my family members, my sister, papa, mom, Jelly and Kanchi.

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I acknowledge the support and inspiration that I received in preparing this dissertation. Many people, my peers in the class, professors at the university and family members contributed to this project in many different ways. It is a matter of delight for me to acknowledge the contribution of the people around me, helping me transform into an academician.

To begin with, I am immensely grateful to my supervisors, Professor Dr Jai Raj Awasthi and Associate Professor and the Head of the Department of Language Education, Dr Hem Raj Kafle, for their inspiration and guidance. I never took Prof Awasthi as my teacher; he remained a father figure, guiding and caring for me every moment I knew him. He was, is and will remain a source of inspiration to me like he is to millions of others. My idea of writing a dissertation was triggered when Dr Kafle taught us a course on academic writing. He instilled in me the idea of writing about self. My background in literature never allowed me to think I could write a dissertation on such a matter. I thank you, Dr Kafle, for teaching me to search for my writing self. I could not have completed this project without your emotional and academic support.

How can I leave you behind, Prof Laxman Gnawali? I found Prof Gnawali to be, in all circumstances, always calm and ready to help. Your teachings and interactions, though virtual, shaped me to transform myself from a novice reader to a creative writer. You are a guide to me and all my cohorts. I had heard a lot about you from the students of KU who visited my house; even before I joined this course, you exceeded my image of you. The Eastern philosophies I learned from Dr Lava Dev Awasthi's classes have enlightened my perspective on indigenous cosmology. It has encouraged me to work on a personal writing project on Nepali myths. Thank you, sir, for opening this worldview to me. I do not know whether it is ethical to acknowledge Associate Professor Tikaram Poudel, PhD, as he is my father, but he has also been one the most outstanding teachers in my life. He taught us two courses and made us write one publishable paper for each. I was overwhelmed by the idea of writing publishable papers because it requires a lot of intricacies that I still was not used to. Also, he refused to grade us without the articles. However, I believe they have proved to be boons because today, I took many of the experiences of writing those papers to



use for my research for my dissertation. I have also found that they were the perfect basis for expanding the two papers into chapters four and five of this dissertation. Thank you, Papa, for grudgingly, all the way, bearing my irritating shouting with a smile and helping me.

I am also grateful to the Dean for your kindness and encouragement. Because of the pandemic, we completed the course virtually, and my physical presence was impossible. I wish I could interact with your intellectual arguments. I have had you in my mind as a highly academic scholar since I attended your talk on western critical tradition at Baneshowr in 2018. I will knock on your office to get your blessings very soon.

I am nothing without my family. My sister, Ansuya, is my emotional strength. Because of you, I have gotten into reading. You read much faster than I did, and you still do. You made me read the first Harry Potter novel, which I finished in a day. My child-like curiosity for fantasy comes from the many years we spent under the blanket with battery-operated torchlights, giggling at the adventures of wizards. Thank you, Sweetie, for understanding my tantrums, bearing my sarcasm, and laughing at my witless jokes. And Ashma *di*, you've been a constant in my life no matter how far we are apart; you've always been and will always be my best friend. Mum, you inspire my storms; we are the thunders that run the house together. Your *thoibi* was so engrossed with this dissertation that sometimes I was overwhelmed with it. I hope I get to eat your pulao all my life. Kanchi has been my alert guardian all these years; you've sat by my side throughout this project. You have snored, barked and stared at me throughout these years and have helped me out of my boredom. My family, I thank you for what you have made me today, and I hope I can make you proud of me.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As I understand it, creative writing is a form of artistic expression that engages and moves readers in a way other writing forms may not. Creative writing enhances a reader's understanding of what is integrated into the stories and encourages connections with social practices. Listening to stories is a basic human instinct to understand the self and our environment. It is to replicate our thoughts mentally because we experience the stories through our senses or people. We are social beings who thrive by socializing and interacting with others like us. This basic instinct makes us tell stories and understand the self of the storyteller and the audience. Writing autoethnographically, I reflect on who I am (Rogers-Shaw, 2020). In this dissertation, I narrate my dreams, hopes, despair, and uncertainty when I grew up from a critical child reader to an adult creative writer.

In this dissertation, I document my experience, i.e., transforming myself from a critical reader to a creative writer. Critical reading is a very engaging interaction with the text I am reading. I read the text closely and carefully, paying attention to the author's choice of words, the structure of the text, and the presented arguments. I also need to be aware of any biases or assumptions the author may have and question the presented evidence. By examining the presented evidence and evaluating the quality of effectiveness of the text, I understood the key arguments, assumptions, evidence and rhetorical strategies used by the author to shape their message and impact the reader (UNC Writing Center, 2021). When I read a text critically, I take the time to examine it closely to understand its meaning, evaluate its quality and effectiveness, and identify the key arguments, assumptions, evidence, and the author's rhetorical strategies to shape their message and impact the reader.

From the perspective of Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning, I take creative writing, particularly the genre of fantasy fiction writing, as a means of transforming the writer's perspective (Kumar, 2023). I argue that a creative writer in the writing process explores and interprets his/her experiences. It brings the memories we have gathered from simply living our lives. Following Mezirow's (1991) argument, I argue that an individual undergoes the experience of transformative

learning by critically reflecting on the understanding of human endeavours. This critical reflection enables the writers to understand their self differently. I apply this theoretical framework of transformative learning by narrating my experiences of growing up as a critical reader to an adult creative writer. To achieve this goal, I use critical reflection as an analysis tool to understand the shaping of the self and my perspective of the world around me.

I take personal narrative as the essential component of autoethnographic writing. In other words, borrowing from Clandinin and Huber (2010), I understand “autoethnographic writing is the manifestation of narratives”. At the same time, autoethnography, as a research methodology, allows me to explore and represent my experiences and cultural knowledge. In this study, I combine these two fields in creative writing — personal experiences and cultural knowledge — reflecting on my experience of creative writing and my understanding of cultural practices. In other words, I critically reflect on my experience and cultural understanding of my social ecology by using creative writing as a point of departure. Furthermore, I seek a deeper exploration of my creative self and its meaning and communicate more engaging and impactfully to my readers through my creative writing experience.

To achieve this goal, I combine Mezirow’s (1978, 1990, 1991) transformative learning theory with the research method of autoethnography, though it is challenging for me. This approach allows me to reflect on my creative writing and make sense of these experiences to better understand the struggle and transformative process (Mezirow, 1990) of a child reading and writing in a language she acquired after mastering her first language, i.e., Nepali. Combining the autoethnography research method procedure and Mezirow’s transformative learning theory to explore the creative writing process, I believe this study contributes to our understanding of creative writing in an additional language by individualizing and localizing the creative writing experience.

As a practicing creative writer, I understand the intersection of creative writing and autoethnography has immense potential to combine these fields to facilitate self-exploration and self-expression (Ellis, 2004). However, this area of academic research has received relatively less attention in the academic literature.

To address these gaps, I explored the potential of creative writing as a tool for conducting and presenting autoethnographic research. Through a combination of literature review and my reflection on the writing process, I examined how I, a

creative writer writing in English as a second language, could challenge dominant narratives and power dynamics (Roy & Sambel, 2016).

This chapter introduces the background of the study that I undertook. I explored how I learned to write creatively by critically reading other writers' works. In the following section, I set the background of my study with my anecdotes supporting my arguments with the relevant literature in the discourse of autoethnography and creative writing. After setting the scene with my anecdotes and relevant background, I discussed the rationale of my study, justifying the area of my research. Then I stated the problem statement, followed by the purpose of the study. After stating the purpose of the study, I formulated my research questions to focus on the area of research and shape my research. Finally, I delimited my area of study and summarized the chapter.

### **Background of Study**

I have been passionate about reading, writing, and understanding stories since childhood. Growing up, I began to connect these stories with my childhood fantasies and adult imagination. In this dissertation, I tell the story of my struggle to become a creative writer by tracing my steps in this journey.

Books fascinated me from my childhood when I first learned to read. I still believe that there are always books left to read. This feeling about books reminds me of Marquez, "There is always something left to love." As I grew older, books remained my favourites. I started slow. I started my reading journey with what we had at home. My parents studied literature and had tons of classics at home. They saved them from their university engagements. Even with my basic knowledge of the English language, I was curious enough to want to read and understand works like Shakespeare and Marlowe. While I had heard a lot about Shakespeare's genius, I had heard very little of the mysterious world of Marlowe. *Faustus* engulfed my mind, and the demons like Mephistopheles were an introduction to evil in literature.

I expanded my reading from classics like Jane Austen, Bronte sisters and Dickens to contemporary best-sellers like J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, Brandon Sanderson's *Mistborn Trilogy*, Rick Riordan's mythological fiction, Susan Collins' young adult dystopian trilogy *The Hunger Games* and so on. I came to realize that these were much easier to read and piqued my interest. I discovered my fascination for fantasy and things out of the ordinary.

Even as an adult, I am excited whenever I get my hands on a fantasy novel. I covet books like the dragon collecting gold and gems in the tales of the *Hobbit*. I

jump from one adventure to the other; my mind never fails to enthrall my inner self, led by not only the imagination of the author but also how they have weaved the tales. Like Arachne made her tapestry, they stitch together magical scenes with otherwise familiar words. While I read, my mind never ceases to imagine valleys of green, fjords in the north, deserts of Africa, and the freezing tundra of the poles; every geography is reachable. I meet characters I might never have had the chance to meet if I had not dared to open those pages. I know more, and I learn more when I read.

The story for this study begins with me talking about my childhood hobby. I was a child writer. Through my stubborn perseverance, I finished writing a book, which was strange for a fifteen-year-old to do, not unheard of but still strange. I started to write when I was eleven, but my writing did not give any shape to a book in terms of content or grammar. All that was because I had not read enough to understand the craftsmanship of a writer. I wrote pages and pages, but I distinctly remember that they were not what I would call books. They were just the scenarios in my head, crude and without structure. But I was captivated by them. I would sit on my father's old laptop and write away as soon as I returned from school. I was not only committed but I was also engrossed. The further I wrote, the more I found writing to be quicksand, and I became a willing victim.

As happy as it was, my childhood was often lonely inside our home. My parents worked day and night to provide for us two sisters. We made up stories and played games requiring a lot of acting out plot twists and characters we could pretend to be. I think it fueled my growing imagination slowly, though.

In school, I would divide my friends into groups and pretend we were part of an army from different countries. I would make wands with my mother's necklace, beads and sticks I found in my yard. I would pretend to be a great mage with incredible powers who could overrule the rights of kings. I had a great time doing all of this. But I realized that these weren't enough. I had to admit these into something more concrete, and thus, I wrote my first novel.

I started reading Enid Blyton's *Valley of Adventure*, the first book I had read entirely for the first time. A German professor gifted me the book at the University of Konstanz, Germany. Though she might have given it to me casually, it changed my life forever. After that, I continuously read, never looking back. I joined, with my sister, the public library in Konstanz, Germany, and we would burrow dozens of books at one go and compete to finish them before each other. Reading these books

gave me the thrill of writing my complete novel, but completing it took me six long years of hard work.

At first, I made a small outline and crudely followed it. But as a teenager, the plotline would change every other week. I drew maps of countries of my imagination. These imaginary maps enabled me to depict my characters with interesting backgrounds. Searching for hours online, I gave them appropriate names fitting their characters after thinking meticulously. I gave them scars and histories. And I made several mistakes that a typical beginner writer would make, but the important thing was that these things did not discourage me, and I never gave up. In this way, I came to the world of creative writing, a completely different world from my real-life world, yet still connected.

Through creative writing, I understood the practice of writing a particular literary genre, such as poetry, fiction, drama, etc. (Light, 1996). Conventionally, creative writing describes any imitative activity that produces a fictitious work (Williams, 1983). For me, creativity refers to the ability to come up with new ideas that are intelligible and valuable. Writing is an intellectual activity that involves thinking relating to unfamiliar information, and that information makes sense (Mazeh, 2020). In this sense, creative writing puts writers' ideas and feelings about a topic using their imagination. In this way, I understood writing generally enhances the writer's expression of personal feelings, thoughts, and information.

The production of a literary text makes a person a 'creative writer'. Without literature, there is no author and, thus, no reader (Lindauer, 2009). I call myself a creative writer because of the body of work I have produced. However, a question hovers in my mind if an artist ever completes an art piece; was *Hamlet* complete, the *Mona Lisa*, or the statue of David? I regard myself as a creative writer because I have meticulously trained myself in the art of writing creatively.

In the Nepali context, it is rare to see a child growing up writing in a language that is not his first language. In this research, I documented the process of creative writing that I experienced in my childhood and continued into adulthood.

### **The Rationale**

The rationale for this dissertation on creative writing and autoethnography is rooted in the belief that creative writing engages and moves readers in a way that other forms may not. Autoethnography offers a means of exploring and representing personal experiences and cultural knowledge in a way that gives voice to



marginalized perspectives and challenges dominant narratives (Ellis &Bochner, 2011).

For me, autoethnography and creative writing complement each other in different ways. Autoethnography provides a framework for analysing personal experiences, emotions and perspectives, offering space for creative writing. In autoethnographic research, we write about personal experiences to understand cultural experiences (Denzin, 2018). Critically reflecting on my struggle with creative writing as an autoethnographic practitioner, I reflected on my identity, capabilities and cultures to understand social issues and practices of creative writing. The autoethnographic account enables me to explore my childhood memory of my engagement in reading and writing. Using the autoethnographic analytic tools, I reflected on how this childhood memory represented larger cultural values of the society I grew up in that shaped my identity.

Looking back at the writing process, I realized there was a particular haphazard structure. As a teenager, I wrote the book devoting very little time, but I worked on it every day, whether for an hour or a half. The influence on my writing was greatly affected by the world around me. Personal matters like childhood experiences, family relationships, and emotional conflicts are not the only things that make a creative writer (Lindauer, 2009). Creative writers need ambition and envy (its doppelganger) (Piirto, 2009), and I had many of those, and that ambition came from inspiration. I didn't have access to social media, so my exposure to famous writers came from the library. The most prominent writers would have pedestals for their thick fantasy books. Their thick hardcovers would shine with gold embossing, the characters looking fiercely at the reader that they are about to entangle in their stories.

The most important part of learning to become a creative writer is reading, not reading only as a reader but reading like a writer(Bunn, 2021). In this dissertation, I called such a reader a critical one. Scrutinizing the proses that my favourite writers wrote helped me understand the pace and structure of a fictional novel paragraph and establish the settings. I managed to understand the difference between filler words and exciting ones. I understood different narratives and how to use them. I even understood grammar by reading and reproducing those structures simply in my novel helped me a lot. Writing requires a great deal of knowledge, and my learning came from books I have read.

With this haphazard structure I remember to have used to write my novel, I want to trace the whole process methodologically in this research. I documented my experience as an auto-ethnographer so that this research would explore the experience of a creative writer in the making. More specifically, this research helped me understand the thought processes, such as crafting the plot, drawing the characters, and reproducing my feelings and experiences. I notably spent a lot of time researching to create special effects in action scenarios and express them in the narratives. As I wrote more stories and documented my experiences, this research helped me enhance my writing experience, hastened the process, and helped me understand the process of creative writing from a critical standpoint. I believe this document would be beneficial to all creative writing practitioners.

I understand by bringing together creative writing and autoethnography, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the potential of creative writing as a tool for self-exploration, self-expression, and social change. Besides, this study also contributes to a new approach to English language education in South Asia.

I understand my study contributes to my field of research in two distinct ways. First, it contributes to the discourse of creative writing and autoethnography. This study contributes to researchers interested in exploring creative writing through autoethnography as a tool for self-exploration, self-expression and social change. The target audience of my research is the academic community of autoethnography, creative writing and English language education. Second, my study has developed a new approach to English language education in South Asia. Curriculum designers and implementers, particularly teachers, get a new perspective on teaching creative writing, an almost neglected aspect in South Asian English education curricula. I believe that reading this dissertation encourages my juniors to be creative, and they can contribute to their personal growth and social change.

### **Statement of Problem**

There is much to learn from writing itself. But the process of writing can only start after we read. There are different views on the process of creative writing. For example, how writers externalize thoughts and interact with them, like the biographical analysis of Jane Austen, notes, and drafts of Gustave Flaubert (Oatley & Djikic, 2008). But for me, writing, particularly creative writing, is not only the process of externalizing thoughts and interacting with them but a process of growing

up while experiencing every bit of it and transforming myself from a child reader to an adult creative writer.

I experienced this transformation process, and I felt to document this experience as a writer and a reader. In doing so, I reflected on my writing development to understand how reading shaped my creative writing style and perspectives. This process taught me to think critically, imagine wildly, connect my imagination with thoughts, and make everything readable to a broader audience. In this way, writing was a means of communication and thinking process for me and a method of discovering myself as a learner of the English language and my struggles. I also understood the nuances of writing creatively, emphasizing minor details like active verbs versus state verbs and the relevance of contradictory adverbs and elaborative adjectives.

Therefore, this study concentrates on what goes into making a creative writer through intensive and critical reading and the input for creative writing. Many scholars have undertaken creative writing to understand the writing process (Lindauer, 2009; Piirto, 2009; Oatley & Djikic, 2008). However, how a child grows up by reading consciously to become writing has not been adequately documented in the context of Nepal.

In the context of Nepal, I understand we need research that documents the process of creative writing development among students. I have not encountered any studies on the autoethnographic development of a creative writing process in Nepal. To fill this gap, I reflected on my experience transforming a reader into a creative writer autoethnographically. I looked at my understanding of struggling with reading and writing from the theoretical perspective of transformative learning.

### **Purpose of Study**

The study explores my transformation from a critical reader to a creative writer. More specifically, this research documents transforming my critical self into a creative writer self in a language that is not my mother tongue. However, I have a near native competence in English.

### **Research Questions**

To undertake this study, I have formulated the following research questions;

1. How did I struggle to write creatively?
2. How did literary reading help me develop my creative writing skills?

### **Delimitations**

This research is an autoethnographic study. I collected data from my experience reading and becoming a creative writer through anecdotes and previous writing samples since my childhood. I concentrated more on critical reflection. As I understand, in making my writer's self, the contribution of my family, schooling, and university education cannot be underestimated because they shaped my personality and intellectual abilities. Therefore, I often interacted with them while documenting my transformation process. These interactions shaped the course of my dissertation.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When I decided on the research area, I searched for relevant literature. Reading available dissertations at the School of Education Kathmandu University enriched my understanding of the literature review's rationale during the research process. An appropriate literature review helps the researcher understand the issues in the existing research that he explores and the academic debates on the selected area of study. I also understood that a literature review informs the researcher to understand the research process, methodological process, and theoretical intents.

A literature review also helps the researcher make his/her positionality regarding the concepts of the research area. More importantly, it develops an insight into relating theoretical concepts to real-world problems. I also realized that a literature review informs the researcher about how to present the research findings, link them with the existing discourse of the area, and explain his/her contribution to the current body of knowledge. With this insight, I began this review of the literature.

#### **My Understanding of Creative Writing**

Creative writing gives an abstract but understandable foundation to the world around the reader and the writer (Bunn, 2021). It gives the person involved a sense of belongingness to the social world. Humans are intensely social and rely on social relationships to thrive and grow. I often find readers claiming that they 'relate' to a specific character or find certain fictional places to be like their home. This reliance on imaginary people and places can intensely nurture the psychology of readers and writers (Nettle, 2009).

As I understand creative writing, it emerges as the child, keen to write, grows up reading (Assonizio & Laux, 1997). Studies on the emergence of creative writing indicate two significant areas – psychological and retrospective – of studies examining the creative writing process among children. The first line of research studies suggests the correlation between creative writing and mood disorders (D'Angelo, 1971). On the other hand, the second line of research informs us about the interconnectedness of creative writing with stress (Kohanyi, 2005). The studies further examine that stress alone cannot be necessary for someone to be a creative writer. A

creative writer experiences the creative writing ability facilitated by the home environment of a child-centred family, a higher level of verbal ability to express his/her thoughts and have rich imaginations. These conditions foster the ability to persevere against mood disorders and stress, leading them to become creative writers (Kohanyi, 2005).

### **My Discovery of Writing Styles**

I have always been interested in improving my writing skills, and I knew that exploring different writing styles would be a great way to do so. With the internet at my fingertips, I started researching various writing styles and found much information available. I learned about descriptive writing, expository writing, persuasive writing, compare and contrast writing, reflective writing, and personal writing. I found different tips and techniques to enhance my writing with each style, and I enjoyed experimenting with different approaches. The internet provided me with a wealth of knowledge I continue to draw upon as I strive to become a better writer.

Descriptive writing is where an author uses a set of instructions or details to draw imagery through words. This type of writing promotes better understanding in a reader's mind by incorporating appropriate information. I use descriptive writing to ingrain a reader with extensive details about the subject under consideration. It is like capturing enough information on an event or subject to build a pictorial representation in a reader's mind.

I turn to persuasive writing when I need to align readers with my beliefs. This form of writing allows me to use my persuasive skills to intrigue readers to agree with my opinions. I mostly use persuasive writing when I want to take a stance on a certain issue that needs addressing. By persuasively presenting my argument, I can win over those who already share their opinion and sway those who may be undecided or opposed to my viewpoint.

Similarly, I think that expository writing is a very crucial format of writing that exposes facts through words. In this writing domain, I intend to educate the reader with facts and figures regarding the relevant subject. Expository writing is mostly put to action when writing reports or factual articles, where educating gets the prime focus. This type of writing is also used in academic tasks where education comes first.

In addition to these styles, compare-and-contrast writing is a great option to show a connection or separation between two concepts or ideas. This style of writing allows me to compare two similar subjects for a unique purpose of argument. I also

enjoy reflective writing, describing a certain event or thought with personal reflection. Its purpose is to make the addition of personal experiences foster understanding. I have used to record personal life happenings for others to learn from my experiences conversationally.

I believe that writing styles serve different purposes and audiences, and exploring the depth of writing in English is essential for achieving perfection and uncanny balance. These writing categories, including narrative, descriptive, expository, persuasive, compare and contrast reflective, and personal writing, can allow me to develop English writing with a purpose and intent and nurture a professional character inside my mind. Writing in extensive formats is a gift that I can implement in any work field as per requirements, and it can provide me with the tools I need to cope with any work type.

While reading about writing styles, it's not always necessary to see styles differentiated into these categories. I often come across writers and teachers discussing the individualistic styles of writers highlighted in their magnum opus or their oeuvre. Zak Lancaster's article examines the conceptions of style and voice in writing studies (Lancaster, 2019). It discusses the individualist view, which sees voice as an expression of the writer's unique inner self, and the social view, which sees it as rooted in specific social contexts. On several fronts, the individualist perspective of voice proposed a social idea of voice, which argues that voices are shaped and reinforced in specific social contexts. The article suggests that a writer's voice is a social language performance mediated by experience and culturally embedded. Although these views are different, they are not mutually exclusive. Instead, the article suggests that writers must develop various voices and stances. The text explores the cultural assumptions about writing and selfhood that not all students share and offers advice to help them create a voice that resounds with the authorized ways of speaking as a community member.

### **Processes of Creative Writing**

The process of creative writing is different for every writer. The process itself can last from a month up to years. All over the Internet, we can find all kinds of people giving tips on the writing process, and I admit I have gone through many of them during my various writer's block moments. Writer's block moments are when a writer cannot proceed with writing because of multiple factors, such as lack of inspiration, inconsistent plot lines, burnout, and so on (MasterClass Staff, 2021).

Creative writers who wish to write a novel like to follow two different ways to write: outlining it and not outlining it. There are many names for these two factions. Some call them plotters, pantsers (MasterClass Staff, 2021), or architects and gardeners.

An architect is someone who builds a house with a heavily detailed blueprint. J.K. Rowling and Brandon Sanderson are self-proclaimed architects who cannot proceed into a story without a concrete outline. On the other hand, a gardener will plant a seed and let the plant grow on its own. Stephen King is a famous gardener; he thinks of an interesting statement, writes it down, and allows his imagination to guide his story (Martin, 2019). The man who coined these terms, G. R. R. Martin, also calls himself ‘much more of a gardener than an architect.’

For myself, I have hated the work of an outline without the beautiful prose to guide me into the next scene. It felt like the birth of a skeleton without flesh. Some people can write such long outlines that they do very little for the first draft. But at the same time, I have found that I was not the most excellent gardener because of how young and inconsistent I was as a writer. I often stood at a standstill, not knowing how to proceed to the next scene. One time, I distinctly remember, halfway through the novel, I did not know how to proceed. My characters would wait around doing nothing for the right scene to happen. There was minimal internal conflict. In literature, particularly in characterization, I understand the concept of ‘internal conflict’ as the internal struggle that characters undergo. A character may face emotional problems such as fear of intimacy or alienation (McDowell, 2017). Authors’ ability to depict internal conflicts gives their characters life. It creates pity despite their flaws, for example, the classic characters like Bronte’s Heathcliff, Shakespeare’s Macbeth, Marlow’s Dr Faustus, etc.

I realized it was because I depended entirely on my writing inspiration rather than a concrete plan. I made a thin body of outline, so slender that it would not hinder my inspired mind from wandering around and thinking of new things. And this process made me realize that I did not have to be a meticulous architect to have a good plan. These days, people who do not lean wholly towards heavy or no planning are called planters (Arsenault, 2021). They like to be between the two spectrums and enjoy the writing process without restricting a complete outline.

### **Issues in Exploring Creative Writing**

It is hard to track the progress of a creative writing project. No consistent data proves to show a writer's progress, but it is a matter of individual issues. People could



argue that page numbers are a good landmark, but even if one were to write a thousand pages, one could still just have begun the story. A very appropriate example is *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* by Laurence Sterne; even by the end of the book, Tristram was just born, so really, we got to know very little of Tristram's life and opinions.

The process of writing can consist of ideas like motivation, perception, communication, and so on (Rhodes, 1961). Intentional motivation is essential for an author to finish at least the first draft. Throughout the writing process, writers face several problems. Idea generation is crucial for a birth of a book. Research has shown, and it is true in my own experience, that it can happen in both the preplanning and the post-written phase of a book (Lubart, 2009). The formation of characters, the settings, the plots, and the subplots are all crucial components of writing a story that depends on idea generation. But I can point out several difficulties I had in the area of idea generation itself. I was afraid of disrespectfully portraying different communities' cultural differences, although unintentionally. I would, in case, rethink the idea of a character that would not fit inside the plot I had planned for. I would revisit the ideas of a place if it felt too similar or unfamiliar.

### **Critical Reading**

Casual reading for pleasure does not automatically develop critical reading skills. Understanding a text's literal meaning does not necessarily lead to key comprehension. Thus, I realized that critical thinking can emerge from critical reading. However, it has to become a constant practice (D'Angelo, 1971). Once I understand the text clearly, I can evaluate it by asking critical questions about the author's argument and the presented evidence. For instance, I may ask myself if the evidence is relevant and reliable, if the argument is logical and well-supported, and if the author's assumptions are reasonable.

I find critical reading crucial in academic and professional settings. In these contexts, I need to be able to engage with complex texts and ideas, make informed judgments about their quality and usefulness, and articulate my thoughts clearly and convincingly.

According to Helen L. Warderberg, people consider critical reading as a form of literary criticism which involves analysing and closely examining a literary work to understand its composition, style, themes, and underlying values. Such analysis may focus on the work's aesthetic, moral, or philosophical aspects. We can teach various

techniques and approaches to facilitate this form of critical reading (Warderberg, 1967). This observation is relevant to how I use critical reading to understand the creative writing process better.

For this dissertation, critical reading skills require close attention to detail, analytical thinking, and an open-minded willingness to question assumptions and consider alternative perspectives. I can better understand a text's meaning and evaluate its quality and effectiveness by developing this skill. Ultimately, critical reading helps me become a more informed and effective communicator, thinker, and problem solver.

### **Autoethnography and Creative Writing as an Art**

As discussed in Chapter III, autoethnography as a research methodology combines the elements of autobiography and ethnography to analyse the researcher's experiences in his socio-cultural context (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnography as a research method enables researchers to understand their subjective experiences, making meaning of their experiences in a larger socio-cultural context.

In this research enterprise, I understand creative writing as a form of artistic expression using originality and imagination to tell stories that appeal primarily to readers' emotions, not reasons. These artistic expressions can take different literary genres like poetry, fiction, non-fiction, etc.

Combining creative writing and autoethnographic writing practices creates a unique form of artistic expression (Luitel & Dahal, 2021) in which researchers explore their engagement in a neo-creative writing process. The term neo-creative writing process is my neologism to refer to the transformative process I underwent when I combined my creative writing experience with autoethnographic writing. Imagination and creativity are core components of creative and autoethnographic writing (Nettle, 2009). This approach enabled me to understand cultural and social issues, giving these issues a unique perspective and voice. By culture, in this context, I understand the usual practices of a community, and society refers to the community of researchers and creative writers.

Many prominent authors exploited this approach. I still remember the readings like bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldua. I am particularly interested in hooks (1989). In this book, the author uses this approach to explore the issues of race, gender and social hierarchy in American society. Similar to my case, hooks educated herself to speak as an equal to an authority figure and learned to disagree when needed. This

approach enabled her to reflect on the issues of racism and gender and its politics. As she grew, she discovered that moving to speech from silence empowers the oppressed and exploited people like herself. She developed an attitude of a defiant writer healing the tortures of racism and gender-biased norms of society.

In the same vein as bell hooks, Anzaldua's stories are personal but have universal appeal because we all live in the borderlands created by our society. These borders are not limited to the physical geographical ones but created by our linguistic and cultural practices. She speaks several languages and dialects and is unsure where the border lies; e.g., English or Spanish are her dominant languages. She exploits this cultural and linguistic possession by writing the book in English and Spanish without difficulty deciphering it for English natives (Ochoa, 2023). I find Anzaldua's multilingual experience similar to mine. However, I found it difficult to follow her style in creative writing; my multilingual experience enabled me to move ideas from one cultural space to another.

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

Jack Mezirow proposed the Transformative Learning Theory in 1978 and refined it in his later writings. Based on the writings of Paulo Freire and Jürgen Habermas, Mezirow (1978) argued that a fundamental dimension in the development of a person makes him/her aware of his/her social context. It leads to transformations in him/her and his/her relationships with society (1978). Depending on the traits of culture, the person takes the perspectives of inclusivity, non-discriminatory attitudes, and feelings of integration.

In his seminal article, Mezirow (1978) conceptualized perspective transformation as a critical reflection on one's assumptions, beliefs and worldview. He argued that the process enables a researcher to critically examine his experience to make sense of them to grow. Overemphasis on individual learners and their experiences ignores the social and cultural factors that shape the identities of individuals.

Mezirow (1991) is a comprehensive guide to emancipatory learning. The author argues that fostering critical reflection leads an individual to emancipatory learning, hence, transformation. For Mezirow, an individual evaluates his experiences to understand himself through reflection, and it becomes a source of learning. This experience leads the individual to personal transformation and societal change. Mezirow develops his argument on the experience of individual learners, but he is

silent on the role of socio-cultural practices in an individual's transformation. He argues that learning is not simply acquiring information but transforming the learner's perspectives and understanding of his surroundings, leading to the rediscovery of one's self-concept and life purpose.

A critical attitude, motivation to learn and ability to reflect on one's experience are essential elements of transformative learning. A supportive learning environment facilitates the learner to ask questions and challenge assumptions. Mezirow's conceptualization of transformative learning provides valuable theoretical insight to understand my transformative journey of creative writing (Mezirow, 2000).

Transformative Learning Theory makes us aware of critically reviewing our discriminatory cultural values, belief systems, and assumptions to learn and improve ourselves, enabling us to create new knowledge systems. In this regard, Transformative Learning Theory is closer to 'constructivism'. Constructionists argue that a learner interprets and reinterprets his/her experience, making meaning out of it, hence the learning and the transformation (Mezirow, 1991).

Mezirow (2003) argues that critical reflection leads to a transformative learning process. The learner questions and challenges the existing system and perspectives through critical reflection. Mezirow (2009) argues that we make new meanings from each experience, and this meaning-making process changes our self-concept and purpose of future action. He uses the term 'disorienting dilemma' to argue for challenging taken-for-granted assumptions and force the learner to question the existing norms. Each reflection brings a new meaning to our experience, and we reconceptualize the world based on the sense we create. Unlike Mezirow, a transformation took place in me as a creative writer. For this to happen, my school, the books I read and my family members immensely contributed to this achievement.

Mezirow was particularly interested in people's worldviews that enable them to change their understanding of the world they are living in. To be precise, Mezirow's interest was in understanding the learning processes and their implication in education. He developed this theory while working on a study of women who returned to the workplace after an extended education period in the United States.

Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory enables us to explain how adults change their understanding of the world and become aware of the changes in their everyday behaviour because of their learning process. In other words, it helps us understand how adults make meaning out of their life experiences, actions and

information they receive through different sources. I understand it to be an understanding of the learners' experience critically interpreting the learning process. In this process, as Mezirow (2000) argued, the adults critically review their social values, personal feelings, and meanings for specific life purposes.

Understanding social, economic, political, and religious belief systems shape the structures of our society, and it helps reconstruct an individual's identity and set the goals and criteria to evaluate the change. Transformation learning takes place in phases. We begin with a personal dilemma considering whether the undertaking will work out. Then we begin to examine ourselves to relate our actions, sometimes with the feeling of shame or guilt. In the third phase, we critically assess failures and improvements in social and cultural epistemological assumptions. In the fourth phase, we intend to connect our discontent with the transformation process. In the fifth phase, we explore our new roles in our actions and relationships with others, i.e., how we differ. In the sixth stage, we plan the course of action to see whether it works in a real context. We implement the knowledge and skills we acquired into action in the seventh phase. In the eighth phase, we try our new roles in new situations and then build self-confidence with new roles in the ninth phase. Finally, considering life conditions, we reintegrate the transformation (Mezirow, 1978).

A critical review of transformative learning theory, particularly focusing on Mezirow's conceptualization, provided me with some key concepts to address my issues. I am heavily indebted to his concepts of pre-perspective and perspective in addressing my transformative experiences. The concept of disorienting dilemma and the role of critical reflection in the process of meaning-making enabled me to rediscover my writing self. I could not have been critical about my genre of writing, i.e., the fantasy genre, without the insights from Mezirow's writing. I use Mezirow's transformative learning theory with caution because I feel his conceptualization is a bit utopian.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I describe the research methodology that I intend to apply for this study. I begin the chapter with the philosophical foundation, including my ontological, epistemological, and axiological stand regarding this study. I elaborate on my research paradigm, i.e., interpretive paradigm, and then I discuss the procedures of my research method, i.e., autoethnographic inquiry. The prefinal section of this chapter is devoted to discussing the quality standard, and finally, the section on ethical consideration closes the chapter.

#### **Philosophical Foundations**

In this section, I discuss how I understood the philosophical foundation of my research study. I begin this section by discussing my ontological, epistemological and axiological stance on this research. For me, ontology refers to the study of being (Blaikie, 2010). I understand epistemology is the study of the criteria by which the researcher classifies what does and does not constitute knowledge (Hallebone & Priest, 2009). I know that axiology studies judgments about value (Saunders et al., 2012). Specifically, it assesses the value of the researcher during the research process.

Through my interaction with my professors and peers during the course and my subsequent readings, I understood that my philosophy, belief and value system determine the information generation process, interpretation of the information and analysis and discussion in an academic study. My philosophical position, determined by my belief and value system, guides me in selecting my research paradigm and method to answer the research questions I formulated in Chapter I.

#### **My Ontological Stance**

I construct my ontology for this study socially, as I cannot imagine an alienated being through reading, dialogues and collective understanding. I use the common language shared by my academic community to explore and interpret my creative writing experience. I construct my ontological position through multiple mental constructions based on my social and experiential experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). My ontological stance represents multiple realities that shaped me as a creative writer.

I encountered different people in this process and documented their realities through my experience and the transformation process. Since this study demonstrates the process of reading multiple authors, I also represent theseveral realities of the authors that I understood. Through different levels of interaction with professors and peers, I understood we understand external realities through the human mind, a subjective reality. I construct my ontology through the socially constructed meaning of dialogues and experiences(Pitard,2017). For me, a dialogue means a mental interaction with the persona of the text, not simply a conversation with a colleague or a peer.

### **My Epistemological Stance**

My epistemological stance is how I came to know what I know. In the epistemic process, I critically reflected on the nature of the knowledge I was constructing, its scope, validity and reliability of my claims(Willig, 2001). As an auto-ethnographer, I discovered my ‘self’ concerning the self of others who contributed to shaping me as a creative writer. The shaping of my ‘self’ reflected in the research from my reading of creative authors and how I transformed myself into a creative writer. I know creative people creatively act since creativity occurs in becoming and making the struggle to be creative (Pirto, 2009).

I am aware that the interpretative research paradigm acknowledges the transient nature of reality that defines my experience. As I moved on, critically reflecting on my experience, I realized that my social world shapes my experience, influencing my perspectives and values. This realization confirmed the epistemological stance of my research to interpret my social world, putting my experience and reflections at the centre. To put it another way, the nature of learning is my epistemological stance because, in many cases, I unconsciously selected to ignore how my knowledge affects how and what I know(Pitard, A journey to the center of self: Positioning the researcher in autoethnography, 2017).

### **My Axiological Stance**

As a practitioner of auto-ethnographical research perspective, I value the socially constructed nature of reality, giving value to the people I encounter in shaping my ‘self’. In this regard, the axiology of my research is value-laden (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Luitel & Dahal, 2021). I understand that in this research, the ontological stance enables the researcher to ask the right question to a creative writer’s self. I am aware that, as an autoethnographic researcher, I respect the values

of the people I interact with people, including my supervisors and other professors at my university, before, during and after the reflective praxis of my experiences (Luitel & Dahal, 2021).

### **Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm is a set of fundamental beliefs and a worldview to understand the nature of the world the researcher intends to explore (Aliyu et al., 2015). Among the various choices available, I followed the principles of the interpretative research paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is inductive and considered appropriate for ethnographic studies. More precisely, the researcher observes the data in an interpretive paradigm to construct a theory about the phenomena.

As an auto-ethnographer, I assume social reality is multiple and subjective, i.e., shaped by the social contexts that human beings experience. In other words, in the socio-historic context, the interpretive paradigm concentrates on interpreting the researcher's experiences. The interpretive paradigm intends to understand the social reality implanted within abstract social settings. The interpretive researcher makes meaning of these abstract settings from his/her subjective interpretations.

As an interpretive researcher, I attempt to interpret my subjective reality of transforming myself from an active child reader to an adult creative writer. I understand I contextualize my interpretations heavily. They are unique to the process of my transformation that I subjectively document in this research. Based on the philosophical assumptions outlined above, I subjectively interpret my transformation from an active child reader to an adult creative writer by connecting my experience with the social context (Bhattacharjee, 2021).

### **Auto-ethnography as a Research Method**

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that combines ethnography, biography, and self-analysis (Ellis et al., 2011). It uses data about the self (auto) to understand the connectedness between the researcher's 'self' and the world around the researcher within the context of the research area (Ngujiri et al., 2010). I am aware that autoethnography research ranges from the researcher's personal experience to the exploration of his/her experiences in the social context (Méndez-López, 2013).

Using autoethnography while researching creative writing was my intentional choice. Autoethnography as a research method separates itself in my eyes in the way that it is very self-expressive. Unlike positivistic research, which demands the



researcher to provide generalized conclusions, autoethnography equips me to explore and document my unique experiences as an artistic representation of the ‘self’. I believe autoethnography is the most artistic research method that provides me with the creative freedom to explore my ‘self’ artistically. I am also aware of the criticisms of auto-ethnography as a research method for being the least scientific (Ngujiriet al., 2010).

As a child, creative writing posed a question to me. I began to think about who I was. I know I have many stories to tell. Autoethnography has attracted my interest because of my background. In this autoethnographic writing, I explore the self of the creative writer within me. In this process, I bring my anecdotes and reflect on my struggle to become a creative writer connecting to broader socio-cultural issues (Rogers-Shaw, 2020).

I seek to find the meanings in the stories of my struggles, setting those stories within a broader context of my social and cultural backgrounds. As an autoethnographic researcher, these backgrounds enable me to understand the academic practices of my community (Rogers-Shaw, 2020). In my writing, I follow evocative and analytic autoethnographic techniques. These techniques enable me to tell emotional stories and analyze these stories for academic purposes (Rogers-Shaw, *Performing disability: An autoethnography of preserving and becoming*, 2020). I weave my stories of self; I know I live in multiple plotlines, shaping my research landscape (Clandinin et al., 2015).

I used autoethnography as a research method to explore my experiences learning to write creative writing, more particularly fiction, to understand the motivations that shaped it. Like other qualitative research, auto-ethnography implies a humanistic stance toward exploring the researcher’s experiences (Cresswell, 2009). I understand that this approach considers the personal narratives of experiences as data that answers the questions the researcher is looking for.

A question encapsulates the essence of autoethnography very well: “Who am I in relation to the research?” (Pitard, 2017). Our ontological and epistemological knowledge results from our experiences and thought processes that have shaped our philosophical stances (Pitard, 2017). Autoethnography builds a storyline in which the philosophical beliefs of the researcher shape the research itself. However, philosophical beliefs do not exist in a vacuum, but it does when it is regarding the knowledge and experiences gained by the researcher.

In the research process, I represent my ‘self’(Spry, 2018). I also represent the Other because I understand ‘existence is not an individual affair’ (Barad, 2007, p. ix) as it is a construct of my socio-cultural background. In this regard, my exploration is not only the exploration of ‘I’ but of ‘we’ because I cannot imagine the existence of my ‘being’ without ‘you’ and ‘other’.

Epistemologically, I keep looking forward and backwards at my feelings about creative writing, which encourages me to move ahead with my writing and the writings of others. In this process, I heard the voices in my inner self similar. I understand voices hold the thoughts and lead to the moment of reflection and intuitions of your making and the frame of thinking.

For my purpose, I take two of Spry’s (2018) three phases of the methodological process: first, the agency and identity of the Other do not depend on the service of a self. Second, the self as an agent constitutes the methodological development negotiated with the socio-cultural power and meaning.

In colonial studies, the Other was conceptualized as the colonized subject and the self as the European colonizer. Auto-ethnography, as a postcolonial study, locates the Other within the self because the identity of the self is negotiated with socio-political ramifications as it emerges through auto-ethnographic reflexivity. My argument aligns with Trinh (1991), who argues that we cannot locate the self without locating the Other because a critically reflexing self responsibly represents the Other. In auto-ethnographic research, the involvement of the Other is for understanding the self (Spry, 2018). My understanding of auto-ethnography as a research methodology is that its ultimate objective is exploring the self through activating the foundational socio-cultural aspects through personal reflections. Therefore, I intend to articulate the socio-cultural relation by self-exploring the nexus of creative writing in our context.

I understand autoethnography as a method is both a process and a product (Carolyn et al., 2010). I wrote my autoethnographic account of my creative writing experience, both autobiographically and ethnographically. By autobiographical account, I understand describing and analyzing my experience. By ethnographic account, I mean integrating my creative writing experience into my cultural background, particularly as a socially conscious act.

I took writing autoethnographic research consisting of personal stories of the researcher. For me, human stories are complex as they constitute different forms of morals and ethics and make sense of themselves and the stories of others. As a student

of postcolonial studies, I understand autoethnographic accounts are instrumental in resisting colonial ideology and preserving the indigenous value system (Carolyn et al., 2010). Autoethnographic studies are instrumental in resisting colonial ideologies in that they produce meaning through local and personal experience; evocating and sensitizing the experience is unique.

This research is an auto-ethnographic account of my journey of being a creative writer. As an auto-ethnographic researcher, I combine the characteristics of autobiography and ethnography in my research process. In autobiographical research, life narratives, memory and time serve as the information or the data for the study (Abrahamo, 2012). I take my memory of writing poems and stories and intertwine these critical reflections with the social and cultural belief systems. I also understand the interpretations and discussions are complementary to each other. Like an ethnographer, I rely on observations of my creative process for generating information (Sangasubana, 2011).

As an auto-ethnographer, I write my anecdotes as stories retrospectively and selectively. I also understand that my anecdotes stem from the part of the culture in which I grew up and shaped my cultural identity as well. I look at my experience analytically because I have to prove that my stories are valid as academic research. Linking the stories of my experience with the theory gives me the advantage of validating my arguments in the academic world.

I know that other creative writers like me also experience my experiences as creative writers. Therefore, in my discussion section, I link my experiences with the experiences of other existing research in creative writing. Further, to validate my argument, I draw insights from other creative writers (Ellis et al., 2011).

This study is an auto-ethnographic account of my transformation from a passive to an active reader while learning to become a creative writer. My method of writing as an auto-ethnographic researcher was to blend the methods of writing an autobiography and ethnography in my research process. To my understanding, in autobiographical research, life becomes a chartable narrative, with memory and events serving as the data for the study (Abrahamo, 2012). My understanding of autobiography allowed me to take in the memory of my readings, my favourite authors, and the explorations of new worlds as critical reflections. I used this information as data for my research. An ethnographer depends on the surroundings to

generate information (Sangasubana, 2011). Thus, I relied on my experiences of reading literature and writing my creative works to generate information.

I reflected on my experiences and wrote them down as my anecdotes to research as an auto-ethnographer. The experiences and culture of my environment heavily influenced my anecdotes and stories. I internalized these experiences, and they greatly affected the output that I put out. To mitigate any doubt of validity, I reflected on these ideas critically, allowing me to validate my arguments in the academic setting.

I realized these experiences were not exclusive to me; many other artists like me experienced these events as creative writers. Hence, in my discussion section, I have linked my accounts with the accounts of other existing research in reading to learn to write. Further, to validate my argument, I draw insights from other creative writers (Ellis et al., 2011).

### **My Research Process: Information Generation, Interpretation, and Discussion**

As an autoethnographic researcher, I combined the characteristics of autobiography and ethnography in my research process. In autobiographical research, life narratives, memory, and time serve as information (Abraham, 2012). In such research, the researcher intertwines his/her narratives with the social and cultural belief systems. The interpretations and discussions are complementary to each other. On the other hand, in ethnographic research, the researcher relies on observation, interview sessions, and archival research to generate information (Sangasubana, 2011).

As an auto-ethnographer, I wrote my epiphanies as stories retrospectively and selectively. I also understood that my epiphanic stories stem from the part of the culture in which I grew up and shaped my cultural identity. I looked at my experience analytically because I needed to prove my stories are valid as academic research. I underpinned my experiences' stories within the transformative learning theory's theoretical framework. Linking the autoethnographic accounts with the transformative theoretical frame gave me the advantage of validating my arguments in the academic world. I am aware that other creative writers like me have also experienced my experiences as a creative writer. Therefore, in my dissertation discussion phase, I linked my experiences with the experiences of other existing research in creative writing. Further, to validate my argument, I drew insights from fellow creative writers who went through a similar experience to me (Ellis et al., 2011).

I produced aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal experiences. I accomplished this by discerning the patterns of my cultural experiences supported by the information I collected in my stories and my creative writing. In addition, I brought interviews and artefacts that relate my experience to cultural practices, i.e., reading, writing, and storytelling. This way, my anecdotes and stories became a meaningful and engaging contribution to the larger and more diverse academic world (Ellis et al., 2011).

### **Quality Standards**

I began this research with personal experiences and reflections to illuminate larger cultural practices. I made the text evocative, i.e., creatively employing my anecdotes through writing diaries, reflections, poems, and illustrations I had created while writing. My body of work leans heavily towards self-expression and the fantasy genre; thus, this research stays true to the genre aesthetics of fantasy with self-expression. In this research, I employed academic prose appropriate for academic settings (Schroeder, 2017).

My research paradigm is interpretive; therefore, I follow the criteria of quality standards, i.e., dependability, credibility and confirmability.

#### **Dependability**

I understand dependability in interpretive research paradigms meets the level of authenticity. If two or more researchers work on the same set of evidence or information, they will reach the same conclusion or insights. As an interpretive researcher, to ensure dependability in my research, I provide adequate details related to my research area, i.e., creative writing, relating it to the social context in which I grew up as a reader and a writer (Bhattacharjee, 2021).

#### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to believable inferences or insights for the reader. I understand that the credibility of my research improves with the evidence I provide and the thick descriptions I generate through my critical reflection, memoirs, experiences and struggles to become a creative writer. At the same time, I will also relate my insights to the existing body of literature to create a space in the discourse of autoethnographic research in the context of Nepal (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

#### **Transferability**

For me, transferability refers to the insights I generate we can apply to similar situations and contexts. I provide rich and thick descriptions of the context in which I

undertake this research. I draw insights based on aesthetic descriptions of my experiences and anecdotes. I expect the readers to independently assess whether these insights can transfer to situations and contexts similar to mine (Bhattacharjee, 2021).

### **Ethical Considerations**

In autoethnography research, ethical considerations are often questioned for being too subjective as these types of research lack academic rigour and their validity is often questioned. One of the most important concerns is that the researcher comes up with his or her stories narrated from a personal perspective that may also involve other people. I was aware that I must use real people and evidence in my anecdotes and stories through pseudonyms for anonymity and I have fulfilled this requirement (Schroeder, 2017). One of the most important ethical considerations I maintained in the autoethnographic research I have undertaken is maintaining academic integrity and giving due credit to the sources I cited while writing this dissertation. As an academic researcher, I followed the research guideline of my university.

## CHAPTER IV

### LEARNING TO WRITE CREATIVELY

Informed with documenting the struggle of a creative writer through a review of the literature and autoethnographic research method, I discuss the process of a creative writing project that I did when I was young. Critically reflecting on my anecdotal experience, I construe the importance of critical reading in helping creative writers hone their crafts. Reflecting on my childhood challenges as a critical reader and a creative writer, I document my struggle in an anecdotal discussion of the narratives of my overcoming those challenges. As an auto-ethnographer, I realized I overcame creative writing challenges by reading fiction from other great writers within the genre I wanted to write in. I also understood that reading is an intentional and cognitive activity. In the process, my ultimate goal is to explore the self of a creative writer in different phases of the process.

I organize this chapter into the following sections. Four themes emerged, and I discuss each in four different sub-sections. My discussion begins with my early struggles to be a creative writer connecting my anecdotes with the discourse of autoethnography. In the section following, I connected how I developed my thought processes in creative writing to the literature of creative writing. In the third and fourth sub-sections, I reflected on my struggle to frame settings in my fictional universe, appropriated my characters in their universe, and looked at these connections through the lens of transformative learning theory.

#### **Early Struggles: State of Confusion**

*As a child, I loved writing poems and stories; in other words, creative writing developed as my hobby as I grew up. I wrote poems and recited them at different school functions, and I was happy when I won the prizes. I still remember I wrote poems for my friends who wanted to participate in poem recitation competitions organized in the school. This process continued, and I thought of writing a novel that children like me would love to read.*

I applied the skill of writing poetry and stories that I developed as a child to write a novel for children. From the transformative learning theory, I argue that my prior knowledge and skill of writing poetry and stories to satisfy my childhood zeal

and school competitions guided me to the world of creative writing of future action (Mezirow, 1991). I take the act of writing poetry and story as a hobby to be ‘pre-perspective’ and desire to write a fantasy novel is my ‘perspective’. This change in perspective results from my critical reflection on acts of hobby that transformed me into a creative writer. Writing poetry and stories for school competitions and the self-satisfying recreation transformed me into a creative fantasy writer, impacting a wider audience.

*By the time I was fifteen, I had finished writing a book, and it was ready for publication. My family members helped me get it published by a publisher in Germany. While the book was in the process of publication, I sent it to some of the professors of English, requesting them to write a blurb for the book, and they wrote great comments for me. I was enthralled. Finally, the book got published, and it was available on Kindle. I was young, and if I think about it now, it was strange for a fifteen-year-old to get a book published.*

I take writing a fantasy novel and publishing it from a German publishing house at fifteen as a transformative perspective. In Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, individuals construe the interpretation of the meanings of experience that guides their future actions (Mezirow, 1991). Like in the previous anecdote, writing a fantasy novel is a pre-perspective and publishing it and getting positive feedback from professors is a new perspective. This shift from pre-perspective to perspective transformed me from a shy and introverted teenager to a speaker in a public space. I gave a talk reflecting on my experience as a teenage author. I felt my abilities got validated, and the public began recognizing my writing abilities. This transformation enabled me to see new possibilities for the future as a creative writer. Mezirow (1991) argues that validation and recognition of one’s abilities lead to self-perception and critical awareness, a key component of transformative learning.

*About the book, Shobhana Chelliah, a University of North Texas professor, writes, ‘Fantasy with a touch of C.S. Lewis, this charming novel by first-time not-yet twenty -author, Anoushka Poudel, is a gripping delight of a read....’ Reading the book, Irom Gambhir Singh, Associate Professor, Manipur University, reacts, ‘The sufferings are mandatory to understand the basic principle of life; thus, the story has revealed the power of endurance, the true virtuous life of a noble soul.’*



*Miriam J. Butt, a Professor at the University of Konstanz, Germany, says, 'A surprising, well-crafted book containing an original story from an unexpected perspective. Indeed, a world beyond and a world well worth visiting.'*

It was not the first time. This hobby started much earlier, when I was eleven, but serious contemplation and research began only later. I realized that now that it was because I had not read enough to understand the craftsmanship of a writer.

I realized that writing as a hobby to satisfy my writing instinct lacked the craftsmanship of a serious creative writer. This lack of writing craftsmanship hindered the transformation of my childhood hobby into an adult creative writer. As a writer, reflecting on my experience, I see satisfying my writing instinct as the perspective in the transformative learning theory. Researching the art of craftsmanship of a creative writer with contemplation and critical reflection enabled me to revise the interpretation of my experience (Mezirow, 1991). Further, I consider the act of writing as a hobby for the self-satisfying act is a pre-perspective. Getting aware of the craftsmanship of a creative writer is the perspective to borrow the terms from transformative literature.

This transformation from a self-satisfying hobby to a skilled craftsmanship equipped with artistic ability resulted from critically reflecting on my abilities as a child writer. It impacted the self-concept of my activities with a shift from a schoolgirl writing for local competitions to a serious writer who understands the artistic craftsmanship of a fantasy writer. This experience of transformation I feel today while writing this dissertation made me realize that an individual must excel in his/her knowledge and skills. To achieve this goal, a transformative learner critically reflects on connecting his/her experience with the skill and expertise in the area of research concerned (Mezirow, 1991).

*I wrote those pages long ago but distinctly remember my struggles while crafting my story. I first made an outline based on my likes and dislikes as best as possible. I formed characters in my head and gave them their names from the movies I had seen. I made worlds inspired by the books that I had read. I wrote many pages, often with the mistakes of a first-time writer. Even after completing the story, I returned to it and changed many things. I changed everything that disappointed me, even down to the tense of verbs in the novel.*

As an autoethnographer, I narrate the story of my struggle in crafting my fictional fantasy narrative and the revisions I made to fine-tune the draft. I am also

aware that the movies I watched and books I read with my sister, a manifestation of cultural experience, influenced the making of my story. My understanding of crafting the story and creating several drafts through critical revisions reflects my perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978). In this way, I applied my transformative learning in practice through crafting and giving it a fine tune through a series of reflective revisions (Mezirow, 1997).

As a transformative researcher, I contemplate the struggle of writing a fictional story while crafting it. I interpret the writing process of a fictional story as a perspective from the perspective of transformative learning theory. Transformative literature defines a perspective as a process of interpreting earlier experiences in the light of later experiences that guide future actions (Mezirow, 1991). My struggle for crafting the story is my transformative pre-perspective and completion and revision that occurred in my mind, and my laptop is the transformative perspective. This shift from pre-perspective to perspective gradually transformed me from a beginner writer to a skilled and experienced publication-oriented author (Mezirow, 2000). Reading transformative literature enabled me to reflect on my ability of critical reflection and demonstrate this fantasy fiction writing process (Mezirow, 2003). In my transformative learning from a critical reader to a creative writer, I moved from critical reflection and perspective transformation to self-concept. As an auto-ethnographer, I feel and experience the impact of critical reflection on personal development as a reader and a writer. This process of critical reflection enabled me to understand the creative writers' craftsmanship.

*I tasked reading for myself to become a very active work. I did not only read for entertainment anymore. I did not know this, but a theory already allowed us to view writing progress by simply reading (Assonizio & Laux, 1997; Bell, 1997). The reading I did for writing differed from the reading I did for pleasure. I was very conscious of the reading process and how the writers wrote to create specific scenarios in their books. I was aware of the grammatical nuances they used to make their writings reader-friendly. I knew how they wrote dialogues that were not generic but served a particular purpose. I may have been young, but I was mindful of the hard work that these writers had put in to make something out of their words. Thus, I studied their works to make my own better.*

This anecdote highlights the auto-ethnographic and transformative learning process I underwent while engaged in active and critical reading to improve my

writing. As is typical with auto-ethnographic researchers, I gained a deeper understanding of writing craftsmanship through critical reflection, using various creative writers' techniques to write compelling fictional narratives. Practitioners of transformative learning argue that critical reflection triggers perspective transformation and self-concept change (Mezirow, 2003).

Transformation occurs when an individual re-assesses their assumptions and beliefs, resulting in a shift in perspective (Mezirow, 1997). In my case, I read books and watched movies. My approach was a form of entertainment that gradually transformed into a more active and purposeful study of other writers' works to improve my writing. I am aware that critical self-assessment of one's experience leads to transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). Writing and struggling to craft the narrative transformed me into a compelling and publishable creative writer. Further, reflecting critically, I realized my characters' grammatical errors and irrational dialogues led me to look into the works of established writers. This critical reflection that triggers transformation learning (Mezirow, 2003) enabled me to understand my writing process and equip me with the technical aspects of writing.

*In the book Ways of Reading, Bartholomae and Petrosky (1993) argue how beneficial reading is for writing. We write through the knowledge that we have and the experiences that we have garnered. Critical reading transforms a person into imaginative and creative through the process of higher-order thinking because the words on the pages leave a mark on us. I do not consider reading a passive activity; it involves a lot of interactions between the reader and the text in which every single word of the text tells a different meaning of what the author intends to communicate. I did something similar but not as organized because, as I said, I was young and unaware of theoretical underpinnings. I studied the books I read closely, especially the Harry Potter series.*

I understood reading enables writing; one cannot be a writer without reading critically. Reading allows the writer to integrate his/her world knowledge and experience within the broader experiences of books. This process makes the writers more imaginative and creative. In my case, reading the Harry Potter series had a similar impact.

This auto-ethnographic anecdote highlights my transformative learning process. I was engaged in active reading to improve my writing. By active reading, I mean

reading with a determination to understand the style of creative writers, not simply the content and to assess the information for my purpose. I highlighted the text with different colours to indicate my purpose and future reference. Through this process, I understood the technical nuances of the artistic craftsmanship of creative writing. I experimented with these writing techniques in a series of draft revisions. Critical assessment of one's experience, for example, grammatical inconsistency and irrational dialogues in my earlier texts, in my case, shifted my perspective of creative writing (Mezirow, 1997). Recognizing my shortcomings, i.e., that tense inconsistency and irrational dialogues that my characters spoke, led me to look into the works of others critically. Being critical means also being sceptical. For me, the term sceptical has a positive connotation, i.e., it allows me not to take anything for granted but evaluate. Then I understood Mezirow's (2003) dictum that critical reflection triggers transformative learning.

*JK Rowling's series was helpful in how she wrote earlier series in the format of children's books, but as Harry grew, the books grew as well. I started to learn the ideas that can make a book enjoyable. She wrote sarcastically but made it seem like the narrator was our friend. Writing from the third person narrative perspective, she mainly focused on the mood of Harry Potter himself.*

*Throughout the books, we were never out of Harry's thoughts except for certain circumstances, like when we saw the perspective of an old man in the fourth book or the standpoint of Malfoy's mother in the sixth book. I do not know if I executed these skills in my book correctly, but I remember the results of the studies I did then, even today.*

In this anecdote, I highlight the transformative learning process that I underwent while reading the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling. This series helped me recognize the techniques that make a narrative appealing to readers for a particular age group. The sarcastic tone that Rowling employs enables her to focus on the perspective of Harry, the protagonist. As in the transformative literature (Mezirow, 1997), being a critical reader of the Harry Potter series changed my self-concept of creating characters with flesh and blood, hence, transformation.

I had the advantage of reading Rowling's series. Her protagonist, Harry Potter, and I were of the same age group. To put it another way, I grew up with Harry Potter, falling in love with my favourite protagonist. I went to a school in Konstanz, Germany, where I got immersed in reading the Harry Potter series. Perhaps, the

German social environment facilitated my young mind to get close to feelings of Harry.

### **Creative Thought Process**

In this dissertation, I understand creative thought is a mental process through which creative writers generate new ideas. Creative writing manifests the writer's thoughts in his/her mind into words. In other words, it is translating an abstract image into a text. This creative thought process is fundamental in producing engaging and impactful stories in creative writing. Following the insight from transformative literature (Mezirow, 2003), I argue that critical reflection leads to mature creative thought processes that may transform into creative work. Reflecting critically on experience, a writer gets a deeper understanding of the craft, and this understanding gives a unique voice.

For this dissertation, I conceptualize creative thought processes as connecting seemingly unrelated ideas into a coherent body of creative texts, involving a thought process that psychologist de Bono (1985) conceptualizes as lateral thinking and Guilford's (1950) divergent thinking. Lateral thinking breaks traditional thinking patterns and approaches an issue from a new and unique perspective. This unique and innovative perspective enables the writer to be open to new ideas connecting to experiences. On the other hand, divergent thinking enables creative writers to make connections between seemingly unrelated ideas or concepts. In divergent thinking, the creative writer sees the problem of selecting the content and presenting it to the reader from multiple perspectives. Critically reflecting, the creative writer generates novel and appealing ideas providing the best expression in words to the mental image in mind. As a creative writer, I realized that one of the essential aspects of the creative thought process of a creative writer is to put aside daily activities and immerse in generating unique ideas in both content and style.

*I had read many books even though I was only fifteen. But the more I read, the more I felt I needed to do it, too; create my characters and worlds with their own stories. So, on a day like any other, I actively decided to write a book. I knew what I disliked in books but little about what I wanted to write. I sat down with papers and pen in my hand and let my head wander around the worlds of imagination I knew from books and movies I had gone through.*

This anecdote concentrates on my struggle to develop my creative thought process as a struggling writer. I interpret my development of the creative thought

process by connecting it with the theory of transformative learning. At fifteen, I wanted to write a grand story of my characters who were like the people of my imagination or me. However, I did not initially know who my characters were and what they experienced.

I began reading, and it was an act of active reading. I engaged myself in reading narratives that interested me. These readings told me to be a creative writer; one had to have a deeper understanding of his/her preferences. I think these preferences emerge from the writer's experience. Connecting the threads of isolated preferred thoughts and experiences gave me a unique voice never told before. Informed by transformative literature (Mezirow, 2003), I argue that I critically reflected on connecting threads of thoughts to make an organic whole of creative work. This process transformed me from a critical reader into a creative writer. This transformation did not occur suddenly, but a gradual process emerged from understanding continuous active reading.

*The books that my hands cannot resist snapping up are the ones with fantastic graphic covers. In the libraries, my eyes wander to the especially thick fantasy novels with their embossed letterings and strange characters because I had always loved the stories so much better when they had an element of magic or fantasy in them.*

Books with unique graphic covers and titles with embossed letters with strange fonts fascinated me. This fascination could be because my teenage mind might have conceptualized that books with such covers and fonts tell fantasy stories that have a more profound significance of imagination. I argue that my attraction to fantasy and magic elements reflected a reality utterly different from my existing one. I take it to be another way of understanding the world, not an escape from the disoriented dilemmas of my life. In transformative literature, Mezirow (1991) suggests that we fundamentally change our perspective of understanding the world. Reading transformative literature informed me that my engagement in writing brought me from the world of disorienting dilemmas, alienation and depression to the world of imagination and creativity.

*I knew that my interest was in the genre of fantasy; the possibilities of stories were endless. This fiction genre has typical features such as myth and adventure intrigue; the hero typically has superpowers, magical artefacts and opposition to evil on a global scale (Ryzhchenko, 2018). But I had so many ideas that*

*piqued my interest. I had so many books that I looked up to. I had to narrow down my list of interests so that I could plan to write my book. I had several writers and series within fantasy to choose from.*

I reflect on developing skills and insight in writing fantasy fiction in this auto-ethnographic account. Reading Ryzhchenko (2018) today, I realized I was on the right track. The fundamental components of fantasy fiction are myths, adventure and evil threatening humanity globally. However, I had a wide range of ideas, maybe isolated ones, and my creative thought process had to grapple with them to narrow them down to give a coherent artistic structure. It is similar to narrowing down the research area to focus on the intended area. I critically engaged in reflecting and examining my preferences for fantasy writing. The insights gained through this reflection and examination helped me filter what to include to give my work a coherent structure connecting the isolated ideas.

*The Twilight series was one of the first large volumes of books I had read. However, my interest in the series did not endure long as it did for others. It was a stereotypical man-save-girl story with the female protagonist being a damsel in distress and the male protagonist having a saviour complex. However, it was still from fantasy and thus had elements I was interested in—especially Edward’s ability to hear people’s thoughts. I was very intrigued by the idea.*

In this anecdote, I tell the narrative of my engagement with the *Twilight* series. This reading engagement familiarized me with the convention of this genre and its unique elements. My initial interest in the series was fantasy elements, but that interest did not last because of its stereotypical trope. From this experience, I understood that readers would not read fantasy fiction because of its elements, but it needs a compelling and engaging story that thrills readers. Although my interest did not last, I found Edward’s ability to hear people’s thoughts inspired me to explore unique and intriguing supernatural abilities.

*Understanding the idea of reading the minds of others was a whole different task. I liked the idea a lot, but alone it seemed cliché. It was a trope overdone in many fantasy novels or even in detective fiction. I needed to understand the implications and consequences that this ability would bring, not only on the character’s emotional station but also their physical abilities.*

I found my engagement in questioning my assumptions and understanding of familiar tropes in fantasy literature, reading the minds of others. Reading fantasy literature made me aware that this trope has been overused and become a cliché. Therefore, I had to consider its implications and consequences in employing this trope in my work. The critical reflection and questioning allowed me a deeper understanding and the potential for personal and intellectual growth (Mezirow, 1978). Critical thinking and self-reflection actively engaged me in the process of transformation.

*By listing Cullen's abilities, I felt good about narrowing down my list and was beginning to understand the things I disliked better. But I also wanted to narrow down the themes I wanted to develop. Edward Cullen can be considered an incomplete or even a little absurd character who did very little with his ability. I believe it made him quite arrogant. His character had a personality that was very questionable in many aspects, and I didn't want that in my book.*

Getting insights from this anecdote, I argue that reading literature transforms the reader's understanding of the world around me (Eagleton, 1983). Listing Cullen's abilities helped me understand my dislikes and narrow the content by excluding them. Reflecting on Cullen's character, I found he was incomplete and absurd, and his abilities made him arrogant. Cullen's character informed me a creative writer should not include questionable aspects of character that question his readers' values.

*As a character, Harry Potter, the creative child of J. K. Rowling, was a mark of her genius. He was a character that many liked for his loyalty and remarkable ability to love the people around him (Finke, 2014). Harry constantly avoids violent tendencies, even in the most dangerous situations, always choosing to forgive and find a different path (Tsatsa, 2013). Along with these qualities, I also loved him for his flaws. He was an abused little boy with much neglect from the only caregivers he knew. Often these abusive scenes are portrayed with a sense of humour, and Harry is a street-smart boy who has learned to live with it (Figenschou, 2020). He went to a magical school about which he knew very little and discovered the truth of his life. He was vulnerable, and that made people empathize with his story more.*

Following the insights from Abrams (1999), I understand that creative expression allows me to explore my thoughts and emotions. I admire J. K. Rowling's creation of Harry Potter: his ability to love and avoid violence in dangerous situations.



Like the flaw in a tragic hero, Harry is an abused and neglected child. This flaw in Harry's character makes him remain in the mind of readers. Rowling's portrayal of Harry creates a sense of humour with his street smartness that readers empathize with his personality (Abrams, 1999).

*I finally understood my likes and dislikes by thinking about my favourite tropes within the fantasy genre. My first work towards creating a novel was complete. I wanted to write about a character that could read people's minds but was still vulnerable. I wanted to know how it would affect someone naïve or powerless. Edward Cullen's mental response to his ability was that he became tired of the people around him, and it made him feel like people were simple. I wanted to see if a young girl would feel the same.*

This anecdote accounts for my reflection and critical thinking that I underwent to develop the creative writing process. Reading popular fantasy fiction like *Harry Potter* and the *Twilight* series informed me of the common tropes of this genre to explore differently. Reflecting on my likes and dislikes in this genre and analysing the implications, I actively engaged in critical self-reflection and transformative learning. I actively sought to understand and challenge my earlier perspectives and biases and convert that insight into a powerful tool for the creative writing process (Mezirow, 1991, 1997).

### **Setting**

For me setting in creative writing, particularly in the genre of fictional fantasy, refers to elements of time, place, and the atmosphere in which the writer sets the story. Through the setting, the writer creates a sense of realism in the fictional universe, liveliness to the characters and the creation of figurative speech through images and symbols (Abrams, 1999).

The setting has three primary functions in creative writing — creating a sense of realism, adding depth in characterization and conveying through images and symbols. The writer creates a sense of realism by providing temporal and spatial details of the story. Experienced and gifted writers create visual images in the readers' minds through words as if they travel in that space and time. For example, Jonathan Swift sets his story in Lilliput, an imaginary land. He describes the people, environments, and artefacts appropriate to that land. As soon as we enter the universe of Lilliput, we suspend the facts of our world and interact with the text, a different reality. Sometimes, the writer takes us to the historical or cultural world of the distant

past, both in time and place. In this case, the writer's fictional world juxtaposes readers' temporal and spatial reality (Foster, 2018). Any historical or cultural genre can serve as an example, e.g., Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Bal Krishna Sama's *Prahalad*.

Writers also use setting to add details in characterization. By placing a character in a particular temporal and spatial space, the writer reveals the physical action and internal mental states through the character. For example, Shakespeare puts Hamlet in a situation concerning his uncle Claudius and his mother Gertrude's relationship to explore the state of procrastination in the human psyche. Coming home to the fictional world of *Muna Madan*, Devkota casts Madan in a dilemma of love and responsibility to dig out of the human conflict. The character's interaction with the setting reveals their emotional states, such as a feeling of revenge or loss and alienation (Herman, 2021).

A particular setting could be symbolic of the protagonist's destiny. For example, by introducing Hamlet to his father's ghost, Shakespeare indicates that something unusual and supernatural is going to happen to him. Dr Faustus' interaction with Mephistopheles indicates a human conflict between man and the underworld in Marlow's *Dr Faustus*. On the other hand, a setting in a lush green forest, as in *Robinson Crusoe*, symbolizes the protagonist's growth (Crowley, 2023).

*When we were in Germany, our family friends gave us The Lord of the Rings DVDs. Watching these DVDs, I learned the concept of world-building. An author's way of world-building depends on the need of the story. It can comprise several methods of substantiating a fictional place, like making maps and designing, defining and extrapolating a world based on specific basic ideological ideas (Ekman & Taylor, 2009). The vast world of Tolkien was simultaneously genuine and unreal, making me more curious about its on-goings. In my story, I also wanted a world with diverse countries and places with their own rules and civilizations. But I was only fifteen, and my mind was still simple. My abilities to conjure up worlds were still unpolished at best, but I worked hard. I made countries and gave them names. I studied fantastical maps from other books and built continents on paper. These days, there are incredible tools to help new authors and game builders make their fantasy maps, like the Incarnate or Azgaar. But I did it all on paper, which, I believe, is more fun.*

I reflect on my introduction to world-building in creative writing in this anecdote. I began conceptualising world-building by watching the DVD adaptations of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. I experienced how the fictional world of middle-earth made me curious as they juxtaposed the real and unreal elements. This technique impressed me.

I also understood that world-building as a creative writing technique depends on the story's needs. A gifted creative writer achieves this goal differently, e.g., by map-making, designing and extrapolating the worlds based on the writer's ideological frames (Ekman & Taylor, 2009). With the inspiration of Tolkien's complexity and the simplicity of the Narnian world in mind, I built a world appropriate for my story and characters.

### **Character**

Characters, either protagonists or antagonists, inhabit the spatial and temporal space of the narrative setting. They drive the plot forward, evoke emotions and shape the narrative depending on the writer's ideology. The stronger the antagonist, the more pity and fear for the protagonist. For example, the antagonist of *Dr Faustus* is Mephistopheles, Satan. Fighting against the supreme power of evil, Dr Faustus wins our heart and forgive all his sins, though unpardonable. Hiranyakashipu is against Prahlad. We turn to Prahlad's side, not because he is a child but because he stands for truth and justice. Christopher Marlowe and Sama juxtapose the extreme of good and evil virtues to express their ideologies, heightening the conflict. Fully developed characters like Dr Faustus and Prahalad represent human nature through their characters and provide a deeper understanding of human experience.

The creation of characters begins by giving roles in the narrative. The protagonist functions as a mouthpiece of the writer and the antagonist as an opposite force creating conflicts. After establishing the character's roles, the writer develops their attributes and puts them in fictional actions. Heightened the conflicts, the more developed characters. The fictional conflicts allow characters to grow and change for the ultimate redemption. A conflict can be internal or external; for example, Dr Faustus suffers from an internal one as his inner desire to challenge the authority of God. On the other hand, the conflict in Prahlad is an external one. His father threatens his existence simply because he understands God differently.

A fully-developed character has a unique personality, like a natural person in flesh and blood. Through such characters, writers create a believable world of a

fictional universe. Like in our world, these characters have their past life; they move linearly from one point to another in both temporal and spatial spaces.

*My idea of a character came before I outlined the plot because, according to the books I read, I knew that characters need to influence the plot. My main protagonist was a girl who looked virtually like me at that age. She was a brown girl who grew up in Germany. My idea of a character never strays too far from the characteristics of an author, i.e., I. The power that I wanted her to have the ability to read minds but not involuntarily like Edward; I wanted her to have a choice.*

I describe how I create fictional characters for my fictional fantasy narrative in this anecdote. The idea for the character came before the plot outline. However, I understood that characters influenced the structure of the plotline through their actions and motivations (Kress, 2012). My protagonist resembles me in terms of physical appearance and cultural background. I understood that my readings and experience shaped the characters of my story.

*As a teenager, I missed the unmistakable signs of bad character development and writing when I read the Twilight series when it first came out. Significantly, the character of Edward Cullen is one that enraptured me. I must give a disclaimer here that it was not because of his supposedly amorous behaviour and glittery appearance that made girls swoon over him, though I do not judge those who like it. He was a problematic character and could have been written much better. Many news articles have pointed him out to be a perfect example of toxic masculinity or the kind of masculinity that has gone unchecked (Finke, 2014). But here, I wanted to focus on one aspect of him that Stephanie Meyer had cleverly given him; the ability to read the minds of others. I loved the possibilities this ability would bring to people different from him.*

This anecdote highlights my experience of critical reading the *Twilight* series focusing on the character of Edward Cullen. As a teenage writer, I did not feel I missed the trait of the development of a bad character. On the other hand, today, I realized that Edward Cullen was a problematic character. What fascinated me at that time was his ability to read the minds of others. But his portrayal of a toxic masculine character developed a kind of hatred towards him.

Instead, I loved Harry Potter because of how people can empathize with him because of his vulnerability. I wanted that element in my character too. I wanted to see how a vulnerable person would function emotionally and physically with the ability to read minds.

*Harry Potter, as a character, stands for no-nonsense. If someone is doing wrong, he is going to point it out. Harry is shown as a lonely eleven-year-old who is extremely vulnerable but must fight a great evil in the world. This story has garnered quite a huge fan following, and the character gets a lot of praise. Even a study was conducted about Harry Potter's effects on children. It concluded that children who identify with Harry allowed for attitude improvement towards out-groups.(Vezzali, Stathi, Giovannini, Capozza, & Trifiletti, 2014).*

In my mid-teens, I found Harry Potter a perfect and ideal protagonist who fulfilled all my expectations of a protagonist. For me, he was honest but vulnerable, fighting against a great evil in the fictional world. This 11-year-old, who struggles against all odds in the world of evil, wins readers' sympathy and pity. Readers find Harry in their personality; they relate his vulnerability, honesty and determination to human attributes.

In this chapter, I reflected critically on my creative writing process. After going through critical reflections and relevant literature, I learned that writing is a very complex process that needs several strategies we must follow. For example, I could not just read novels casually like general readers; I had to read between the lines, reflecting on the author's style to capture the inner feelings and imagination that shape the character and the theme. I also understood that reading other creative writings helped tremendously in my writing process. For example, while reading JK Rowling's *Harry Potter*, I understood that pace makes a lot of difference in how the reader understands time inside a novel.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I reflected critically on my creative writing process. After going through critical reflections and relevant literature, I learned that writing is a very complex process that needs several strategies we must follow. For example, I could not just read novels casually like general readers; I had to read between the lines, reflecting on the author's style to capture the inner feelings and imagination that shape

the character and the theme. I also understood that reading other creative writings helped tremendously in my writing process. For example, while reading JK Rowling's *Harry Potter*, I understood that pace makes a lot of difference in how the reader understands time inside a novel.

## CHAPTER V

### READING TO WRITE

In this chapter, I document my experience and discuss how I learned to write creatively through extensive reading. Based on my experience, I argue that reading, as a technique, improves creative writing, and it is an intentional and cognitive activity. I connect my experience of critical reading and creative writing, substantiating through the literature of creative writing and transformative learning theory. For the data of this chapter, I concentrated on my anecdotes, personal writing samples and my reflections on reading and writing. My writing is personalized and descriptive at the same time. It is a deliberate and mostly self-realized creative process.

I organize this chapter into the following sections. Nine different themes have emerged in this chapter. I started by discovering my early revelations of what I must do to become a writer. After learning the importance of reading, I became a critical reader to become a writer. I move on to relate my reading experience to understand the deeper themes of writing, such as world-building, magic systems, atmosphere, language, humour, poetry and prose and crafting characters. I reflected on how reading my favourite writers helped me understand the importance of understanding these themes in my context by critically reading their books. I looked at these connections through the lens of transformative learning theory.

#### **My Early Revelations**

Drawing on literature from creative writing and transformative theory, I explore my transformational journey from a critical reader into a creative writer based on my autoethnographic anecdotes. Through my experience in learning to write creatively, I discovered that to be a creative writer; one needs to be a critical reader. Reading the works of others is essential for an aspiring writer (Riordan, 2010). I learned that reading allows the writer to ingest his voice and become successful. I became a critical reader in learning how to write and realized that it is one of the most effective methods of learning how to write. One must be a reader to be a writer.

*As a child writer, I did not have the resources I have today as an adult. I based my research on old books my parents had saved from their education, an*

*encyclopaedia from the town library, and movies we borrowed from friends. I wanted to write books long before I started to read critically. The problem with this was that I was terrible at it. There were several things wrong with the content that I was producing. I did not have a vast imagination. I had not mastered the language I was writing in, the English language. I did not know the structures and plotlines. I did not know how to distinguish between characters. There were so many things that I did not know.*

In this anecdote, I document my limitations in writing fiction in my early teens and my struggles to make my dream come true. Reading whatever I had in the home library and borrowing from friends and the public library gradually transformed me into a critical reader from someone reading for pleasure. I understood that I could change and grow through my experience, which challenged my thinking and understanding of reading for writing.

In writing this dissertation, reading transformative literature informed me that agency, i.e., the ability to make choices for taking action, is essential for growth and change (Mezirow, 1991, 1997). Despite hindrances, my determination to write continuously enhanced my writing skills with time. Reading transformative literature further helped me realize that context and social relations shape my experiences. Yes, I had limitations as a child writer. Reflecting today as a transformative researcher, I understand how that social and economic context also transformed me into the self of a creative writer with information and knowledge.

*One of the most important things, I believe, a writer requires to master the language. Bad grammar "yanks the readers out of the story" (Donovan, 2021). Even as a child, I realized that if the grammar of a sentence is wrong, I will not understand the sentence at all. It was not limited to literature; I often noticed that if the sentences in my science and maths books had grammatical mistakes, the whole concept became incomprehensible to me. Grammar is not there only for the structure but also for meaning. Often, I had to create unique characters who spoke differently. These characters did not follow the standard grammar of English. To represent these unique circumstances, I had to break the grammatical rules. To break the rules, I had to learn grammar thoroughly because I needed to learn the rules to break them. Because of this, I believe that it is essential that writers prioritize grammar.*



In this anecdote, I reflect on my struggle to master the language I was writing. When I determined to write, my English language was not exactly the language of the narrative genre. I began to ponder what if my readers did not understand what I intended to communicate. I realized bad grammar could distract the readers. This realization made me aware that writing did not mean the ‘what’ but the ‘how’ aspect was more crucial than the content. I understood that the style and grammar give a coherent structure and enable the reader to understand the writer’s perspectives. The biggest challenge came to me reading fantasy fiction when I found the writers broke grammatical rules. This mystery remained with me till I went to Delhi University for my bachelor’s and master’s studies. There I took a course in literary theory for my Master’s course, and reading Jakobson’s poetics made me jump with a Eureka! Then I realized I had to learn grammatical rules to break them for a different purpose. Now I understood why the dictum *vini, vidi, vici* was so crucial in Latin.

As I grew up, my sense of wonder towards strangers lessened as I realized we all are part of the same world. Though I realized there are exceptions, I understood that most of us feel similar emotions in our day-to-day lives. The first characters in my book were very shallow and unrelatable. I realized I was not creative or observant enough to create real characters. It may have been the fault of my inexperience, or it may have been the fault of not reading enough books. Neil Gaiman believes that all fiction needs to be as honest as it can possibly be (Gaiman, 2020). Honesty here does not mean realistic but rather honest to the belief systems of the writer. Honesty helps the writing become more assertive and the characters more relatable. As I read more and more books, I realized that I would have loved to be friends with most of the characters. I saw them as real people with real feelings and emotions that I could feel through the pages and the words of the novel. These characters have depths, and their sufferings seem real even in a fictional world.

*For me, it is difficult to chart out the elements of a novel because every other piece of advice either omitted some or added some. Some believed that characters were more important than a plot, while others suggested that characters cannot exist without a plot. Many prioritized settings and world-building, while others preferred illustrations and maps. I had not read many guiding books for writing a novel, and my first learnings were from YouTube videos. In this process, I learned many new things that I had not previously known about writing a novel. Gradually, I realized one of the most significant*

*learnings was to take every piece of advice with a grain of salt. Not all the teachings work for everybody; everybody has a different writing style.*

In this anecdote, I document my struggle to chart out the elements of fantasy fiction and how my critical reading works of similar genres enhanced my writing skills. Reading creative writing manuals was not a good experience for me. I found university teachers or instructors wrote these manuals, and I knew they never wrote creative works; exceptions are there, like leaks in grammar. Conflicting advice about the techniques of writing fantasy fiction that I got from writing manuals and YouTube videos frustrated me. I could not remember what triggered me to read fantasy fiction, not about the genre, highlighting every detail that excited me. In any case, it proved promising.

Reading literature on transformative learning and creative writing for this dissertation, I realized a creative writer needs a unique voice and style. I understood why writing manuals frustrated me. Today I realized writing, particularly creative writing, takes one through a transformative process, allowing me to reclaim my stories and find my voice in them (deSalvo, 1999). I realized that all advice did not work, and I followed Barthes' (1968) recommendation to reject external expectations and conventions to create my unique style. In this process, I re-discovered my writing self.

*When I first started writing, I enjoyed the sense of wonder I received from getting to know what happens next with the characters I created. I realized that I became increasingly engulfed in the lives of the characters I was writing about. I did not plan what to write. I wrote purely for pleasure, but because of that, I had to make several changes, and my plot had various problems with continuity. I went back and forth in the books, calculating moves, correcting continuity, editing pace, removing unnecessary descriptions, and adding details about characters. I learned new methods of charting plots; even these methods have names: an architect and a gardener. An architect plans every aspect of a book, while a gardener lets the story unfold as they write.*

In this anecdote, I reflect on the approaches to writing fiction. Steinberg and MacKendrick (2015) discuss architect and gardener approaches to creative writing. In the architect method, the writer carefully plans the plot, characters and themes before the creative writing begins. On the other hand, the writer unfolds the story as he/she

writes on, discovering new elements and making changes accordingly (Steinberg & MacKendrick, 2015).

As a teenager, I wrote my story without a strict plan, but I allowed the story to unfold as I wrote. I had to move forward and backwards, adjusting the plotline and the pace of the characters. However, I discovered the joy of knowing my characters as I kept on investing my intellectual capital in them.

*Reading books exposed me to writers' various writing styles and gradually developed my voice and style. I realized that I was focusing more and more on the style of the writers. I observed how they worked with humour to release tension while simultaneously making us emotional. I slowly understood how to structure and develop my own stories. It took a lot of reading, but I started seeing patterns in adventure stories. I was no longer a passive fiction reader; I was critically and actively researching from a writer's perspective as I read.*

Active and critical reading of the fantasy genre enabled me to develop a unique voice and writing style. By exposing myself to different writing styles and techniques, I better understood my craft and perspective (King, 2000). My close observation made me realize how writers exploit humour to overcome stress for themselves and their readers and evoke emotions. Gradually I learned to structure and develop my stories in readable forms. This process transformed me into an active fantasy reader and a critical researcher from a passive reader. Now I know one's reading content and observation of styles shape his/her writing output.

I returned to the Internet again and realized I was not far off. People followed a few different structures, but many caught on to that. They were the 'Three Act Structure', the 'Hero's Journey', the 'Freytag's Pyramid', and the 'Snowflake Method'(Atwood, 2021). However, just like the rules being broken in grammar for unique cases, a renaissance was happening for young adult novels. People were breaking stereotypes and structures. Writers were defiant of rules and no longer adhered to bygone archetypes.

*One of the most recent books I've read is the first book from the 'Stormlight Archives' by Brandon Sanderson, 'The Way of Kings'. I was so impressed by these books that I researched him on the Internet and found out he had given several well-structured lectures on writing fantasy books. Sanderson's unique feature in his books is the amount of background he gives to his characters. His characters are multi-dimensional, flawed, and empathetic individuals.*

*Sanderson says that all the book lines must perform multiple tasks (Sanderson, 2016). One way to do this is while writing descriptions about the characters; the author can show how the character interacts with the world by showing the character's past, relationships, obligations, motivations, and sensibilities.*

Reading Sanderson (2016) struck me with the depth and complexity of the characters. This complexity helped me discover his unique approach to characterization in narrative development. I followed Sanderson's advice that characters do multiple things, and he taught me to create multi-dimensional with a human flaw but still empathetic. I achieved this in my narrative by incorporating my characters' experiences, relationships, obligations, and sensibilities in framing their descriptions. This approach allowed me to create round, not flat characters, adding layers of meaning and exploring the inner psyche of my characters.

Sanderson's lectures are perfectly in line with the books that he creates. He makes writing less ambiguous by giving us methods we can easily follow. His lectures are readily available on YouTube, and I have learned much from them. Sanderson is also known for making three laws of magic, and he calls them Sanderson's Laws of Magic. The first law says that the writer's ability to solve any conflict with magic is directly proportional to how well the reader understands the said magic. The second law states that any weakness in magic is more interesting than the powers themselves. The third law says, 'Expand, don't add.' He claims that fewer strong elements are better than a significant number of weak ones (Sanderson, 2020).

### **Transforming a Writer's Self into a Critical Reader**

I have never read a novel that I like only once. I realised that I go back to the ones I like many times because, after the initial adventure, I still have much to learn from them. One study by the National Literacy Trust found that children who read for pleasure have higher levels of creativity in their writing. They also found that children who read more tend to write more and have better writing skills than those who read less (Clark & Rumbold, 2006).

When reading for pleasure, I focus much on the characters because they connect me with the novel's fictional world. Perhaps it is because we are social creatures; thus, we analyse people more than any other aspect of our environment. I often identified myself with the characters who were more like me because I saw the representation of my identity in these characters. My focus on characters led me to grow affection for them. I didn't know enough back then when I first read books, but

my affection for characters would lead me to reread the books, thus allowing me to explore further what I can learn from rereading the book.

This rereading inspired me to write my own stories. Humans have told and written stories, carved their live patterns into stones, or immortalised history in songs from the beginning of civilizations. From the hand paintings of Cueva de las Manos to the oldest English song ever recorded, “Sumer is icumen in,” (British Library, 1261), I believe that we have an inherent nature to preserve our experiences in art. As a growing teenager, I was intrigued by creation and creativity. Exploring self-expression in a world where I learned so much about other people’s identities was a rare opportunity. It became an outlet that became my haven of catharsis and becoming my writer’s self. I believe several psychological and social reasons why people love to write stories. Writing can provide a sense of control, self-expression, connection, and legacy. It is a powerful way for people to make sense of their experiences, understand themselves better, build relationships, and leave a lasting legacy. According to a study by researchers at the University of Texas at Austin, writing about one’s thoughts and feelings can help people better understand themselves and improve their emotional well-being (Klein & Myers, 1999). Writing stories can also allow people to explore and express their identities (Kumar, 2023).

Empirically, I have witnessed the phenomenon of art inspiring art all my life. Much mythological lore has become modern fiction, like the Percy Jackson series, *The Secret of the Nagas*, *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, etc. All of this is possible because of our ability to comprehend stories through our individuality. Creating great fiction depends on finding one’s voice and vision and telling stories that are true to one’s self (Gaiman, 2020). Beauty and nature have always inspired art, but in a world proliferated by art, we can go beyond the source material and take inspiration from imitations, such as novels. It is no recent discovery that art inspires art or literature inspires literature. Many writers have claimed to have read pieces that inspired their novels. Neil Gaiman has pointed to the works of many who have inspired his novels, like J.R.R. Tolkien, Terry Pratchett or even Susanna Clarke (Gaiman, 2020).

### **World Building**

One of the most important aspects of fantasy, a genre I prefer to read and write, is world-building. World-building involves the creation of a detailed and consistent fictional world, including its geography, history, cultures, and laws. World-building contributes to the believability of the fictional universe enabling the readers to

immerse in the story. It provides the readers with a rich backdrop for characters and events to unfold. One of the critical elements of world-building is the creation of a consistent internal logic, which provides a framework for the world's workings. What I believe sets fantastic narratives apart from realistic ones is that their fictional world has a different structure from reality. The term "structure" is used in a broad sense, encompassing both cosmology and social structure (Bertetti, 2017). Consistency and coherence are essential in world-building, as they help to maintain the reader's suspension of disbelief and ensure that the world feels believable and immersive.

One author that I want to refer to for his influential work in world-building is Brandon Sanderson. Brandon Sanderson is an American fantasy writer best known for his *Mistborn* and *The Stormlight Archive* series. He has published over 30 novels and has a reputation for creating intricate and well-crafted worlds with complex magic systems. Readers praise him for his writing style and ability to blend traditional epic fantasy elements with unique and imaginative concepts. Reading the works of Brandon Sanderson can be a valuable tool for understanding world-building in fantasy literature. Sanderson is a contemporary fantasy author well-known for his intricate world-building and the attention to detail he brings to his stories. Through his works, I have gained a deeper understanding of the art of world-building and how creative writers create believable and compelling fantasy worlds.

He often provides extensive backstories and world-building details for the reader, which help to create a sense of depth and richness in the world. The world in the *Stormlight Archive* series is the perfect example of this. One of the critical elements of world-building in the *Stormlight Archive* is the creation of a consistent internal logic. The author sets the series in a world where magic is a central aspect, and Sanderson has created a detailed and consistent magic system that provides a framework for the workings of the world (Sanderson, 2013). The series is set in the world of Roshar, characterized by its high storms, powerful storms that sweep across the world. The high storms play a central role in the story's events and provide a unique and imaginative backdrop for the world-building in the series. World-building also serves a symbolic or thematic purpose. The series explores themes of leadership, power, and the nature of humanity, and the world of Roshar provides a rich and imaginative backdrop for these themes to unfold. For example, the magic system in the series is a metaphor for the power dynamics between the different characters and nations in the world of Roshar. The magic system symbolizes the struggle for control

and mastery over the world. It provides a rich backdrop for the exploration of these themes.

The amount of detail in the book allows for deep scrutiny and inspiration for me as a writer. I do not have to copy or replicate the details of his world-building to write my own story; rather, it helps me understand the effects it creates for the book's readers. The world-building allows for an immersive reading experience, allowing the readers to adjust to the logic and rules of the world, thus letting them understand the complexity that the characters face.

Another writer I often go back to is Neil Gaiman, whose world-building has a different approach to Sanderson. One of the most notable aspects of his world-building is his use of folklore and mythology. In his novels, such as "American Gods", Gaiman weaves together a tapestry of gods, monsters, and supernatural beings from various cultures and traditions, creating rich and diverse worlds. In it, the gods of Norse, Egyptian, and Hindu mythology are brought together in a modern American setting, providing a rich and imaginative landscape for the reader to explore. By drawing on these cultural touchstones, Gaiman creates a sense of familiarity and depth in his worlds while allowing a fresh and inventive approach to traditional myths and legends.

His use of symbolism and metaphor permeates all his novels. Gaiman employs symbols and metaphors throughout his novels to create layered and complex worlds beyond the surface-level descriptions of setting and character. For example, in "The Graveyard Book," the titular graveyard symbolises the transition from childhood to adulthood, reflecting the main character's journey from innocence to experience. In "Coraline," the spooky and eerie atmosphere of the Other Mother's world contrasts with the comforting and familiar atmosphere of the protagonist's real world, creating a sense of unease and danger that drives the plot forward. In this way, Gaiman's world-building is integral to his novels' overall tone and mood.

### **Magic System**

Another key element of Sanderson's world-building is his use of magic systems. In his works, he treats magic as a fundamental aspect of the world and uses it to create a sense of wonder and enchantment. Consistency, logic, and well-thought-out nature characterize Sanderson's magic systems. By examining the magic systems in Sanderson's works, I learned how he adds depth and complexity to his fantasy world. I want to talk about the "Mistborn" series, where the magic system is based on the

consumption of metals, and each metal grants the user a different power. This magic system adds depth and complexity to the world of Scadrial and is a crucial aspect of the story. Readers can understand how Sanderson has created a consistent and believable magic system by carefully reading and examining how magic works in the "Mistborn" series.

The magic system in the Stormlight Archive, known as "Surgebinding," is based on manipulating the elemental forces of wind, water, and fire. The magic system is also tied to the high storms, powerful storms that sweep across the world of Roshar. It is also a key aspect of the characterization and development of the characters in the series. The main characters learn the use of magic, and it serves as a symbol of mastery and control of power. The magic system serves as a metaphor for power dynamics between the different characters and nations in the world of Roshar. It allows the author to explore themes of leadership, power, and the nature of humanity. It is also a source of conflict and tension in the story. The magic system is a valuable and powerful resource, and the different characters and nations in the world of Roshar struggle for control and mastery over the magic. The conflict and tension arising from the magic system provide a rich and imaginative backdrop for the story's events and helps keep the reader engaged and invested in the world of Roshar. We can extend this understanding to other fantasy worlds, even those I write about. It helps me understand the intricacies of world-building in fantasy literature.

However, Sanderson's idea of magic systems is more complex than a simple element of the fantasy genre. He has actually formed this idea of *Laws of Magic*, as represented on his official website. Basically, the *Laws of Magic* govern the universe using magic in Sanderson's worlds. He based these laws on the idea that magic is a natural force and those who understand its principles can harness and control it. The laws dictate the limits of magic and the consequences of breaking them.

The first law refers to the energy for all magic must come from an external source. In other words, authors create magic from an external source, such as a metal, a person, or an object, as they do not create it out of thin air. Sanderson uses this law to create a sense of realism in his magic system and to avoid the idea of magic as a limitless power. The second law infers that all magics have values, i.e., magics have a price that could be physical, emotional or another kind. As writers use magic to solve problems, they require sacrifice and hard work. The third law says that all magics obey the conservation laws of energy. It means the energy in the system remains



constant, and authors cannot create or destroy it. This law limits the power of magic and prevents it from becoming too powerful. The fourth and final law tells us that an action or a command must activate all magic. In other words, magic cannot happen by accident or without intention; its activation gives the magic system a sense of control and agency.

I consider Sanderson's *Laws of Magica* a fresh and unique approach to fantasy literature, providing a sense of logic and realism to the magic system. They also remind us that power comes with responsibility, and the ability to control it is more important than the power itself. The laws have become a staple in the fantasy genre, providing a unique and logical approach to using magic in literature. They have helped to create a sense of realism and responsibility in using magic, making Sanderson's worlds more believable and enjoyable to read (Sanderson, 2018).

### **Atmosphere**

I believe that world-building and atmosphere are different aspects of story writing. While world-building is the gear of the story, the atmosphere is the mood. I understand atmosphere as the mood or feeling that permeates a work of fiction, such as a fantasy novel or game. It can be dark, eerie, light-hearted, or anything in between. The atmosphere of novels sets the tone for the reader or player and can evoke emotions such as fear, wonder, or excitement.

To talk about atmosphere, I will refer to *Piranesi* by Susanna Clarke. It is one of the most mysterious books I have recently read, and I have learned much about setting the tone and the mood in novels. The atmosphere is a crucial component of *Piranesi*. Clarke uses various techniques to create a sense of place and mood that is both strange and captivating. One of the most notable elements of the novel's atmosphere is its use of language. Throughout the book, Clarke employs rich and descriptive language to create a sense of wonder and magic in the reader. For example, she describes the labyrinthine House as "endless, endless, endless," creating a sense of scale and majesty that adds to the reader's understanding of awe and mystery. Throughout the book, Clarke uses light and darkness to create a sense of mood and to convey a sense of wonder and mystery. For example, she describes the House's grand halls as "illuminated by a bright and steady light," adding to the reader's sense of wonder and awe. Similarly, she describes the shadows and darkness of the labyrinthine passages as "enormous and mysterious," adding to the reader's sense of unease and wonder (Clarke, 2020).

Madeline Miller uses similar elements to establish the atmosphere in her novel *Circe*. Miller uses imagery to describe the unfathomable world of the Greek gods. Circe tells Hermes that the island that she inhabits is Aiaia. Aiaia is the location where Helios showed his allegiance to Zeus through the use of his power. He emerged victorious in the sky above this area by defeating a Titan giant, resulting in the land being covered in the giant's blood. Similarly, she describes the arrival of Odysseus on Circe's island as "a sudden and stunning sight". Throughout the novel, she explores how Circe and the other characters transform and change, transforming Circe from a naïve goddess to the witch she is known as today.

### **Language**

When I read and reread my favourite novels, I was learning the use of language itself. I knew the English language, how to read it; do my homework, but I did not own it. It didn't obey my commands to know the complexity with which I could use it to tell stories. And I do not mean to praise flowery language and big, long words. I mean to emphasize the practicality of language to simplify the knot of thoughts in our heads. The books I read allowed me to see things I could never see. Language is so crucial in creating the world that the novels exist in. According to a study by researchers at the University of Paris, we can use language to transport the reader to a specific place and time and to create a sense of atmosphere and mood (Lee, 2017).

Reading has given me numerous benefits beyond just improving my literacy skills. It has, I believe, increased my capacity to empathise with characters, improve my vocabulary, and enhance my critical thinking skills. Furthermore, reading has also provided a form of escapism and entertainment. Multiple times, I have noticed how it has helped me reduce stress while increasing my knowledge and creativity (Kumar, 2023). Reading has allowed me to become aware of different cultural practices worldwide, which, in turn, has alienated feelings of loneliness. It has paved paths towards personal growth. Reading different genres of literature has brought so many ideas and styles to my table that they have inspired me to craft my own stories. Reading has tremendously helped me improve my sense of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, which are all essential elements of good writing (Krashen, 2004).

Reading has also allowed me to learn from established authors that I admire. It taught me how creative writers use different techniques and styles to create a story. By studying successful authors' work, I have better understood how to structure my stories and create compelling characters (Gardner, 1993).

## **Humour**

As time passed, I kept reading more books, transforming myself with every new book I read. I realized this process a long time ago when I first started reading books, not as a reader but as a writer. I first realized that reading helps writing when I read the Harry Potter novels. Being one of the most famous theories conjured up the imagination in many people who also want to become writers, and I was not the only one who felt this way. It might be a little cliché to admit this, but I could not be honest without mentioning the influence of JK Rowling on my writing. I first realized from these books that stories could be humorous. The characters could be funny even in drastic situations. This realization helped me immensely not to take myself too seriously while I write a story. While writing, I should not underestimate my readers because that would trivialize the story's humour and plot. I started marking down pages whenever I thought there was more to the prose of JK Rowling than met the eye. I copied dialogues on a notebook to see what makes them human and realistic. I realized it was not just the idioms or the jargon that made it natural but the way they interacted with the surroundings and the person they spoke to. These dialogues were identifiable as a particular character's speech because Rowling had given every character a certain characteristic or style of speech.

*Mr. Weasley was having no success at all in lighting the fire, but it wasn't for lack of trying. Splintered matches littered the ground around him, but he looked as though he was having the time of his life.*

*"Oops!" He said as he managed to light a match and promptly dropped it in surprise.*

*"Come here, Mr. Weasley," said Hermione kindly, taking the box from him, and showing him how to do it properly. (Rowling, 2000)*

From an excerpt like this, I picked up a lot of information. It shows Mr Weasley's lack of knowledge about muggles and his extreme enthusiasm for their products. It shows us that even though he was trying to light a match, he is more interested in knowing how it works than making it work. Hermione's exasperation but willingness to initiate help anybody shows us her character as well.

## **Poetry and Prose**

My interest in fantasy did not fade even if I ventured into other genres. I did not miss out on reading new books as they were published even after finishing my first book. I was greatly interested in Greek mythology and believed any literature

produced would match my most significant interests. Because of this, I was ecstatic when I came across Madeline Miller's book *The Song of Achilles*. I immediately knew that I would love it. I read the book physically and listened to the audiobook, and neither disappointed me. Perhaps because it was on Greek mythology or the author's style, it felt like a book that would remain in people's hearts forever. It read like a poem; the story felt too personal to be somebody else's. Incidentally, it was also the first LGBTQ book I had read, and the romance between Achilles and Patroclus made me feel as emotional as any other couple would. As a writer, the one thing that I learned from this book is to write beautifully. The one word that can perfectly describe the writings of Madeline Miller is beautiful.

*The fruits flew, colours blurring so fast they seemed not to touch his hands, to tumble of their own accord. Juggling was a trick of low mummets and beggars, but he made it something else, a living pattern painted on the air, so beautiful even I could not pretend disinterest.*

*His gaze, which had been following the circling fruit, flickered to mine. I did not have time to look away before he said, softly but distinctly, "Catch." A fig leapt from the pattern in a graceful arc towards me. It fell into the cup of my palms, soft and slightly warm. I was aware of the boys cheering (Miller, 2012).*

This book paints such vivid pictures with just words. I know the term imagery and its uses, but I have never seen it being used so well. These two paragraphs tell us how Achilles juggles fig in the air while Patroclus sits alone, away from the other children, trying to ignore the bustle created by the boys. These paragraphs help show how Achilles drew Patroclus' interest. This moment is to be enjoyed with beautiful words and not descriptive ones. Miller does not bore us with too complicated words but uses imagery to describe what Patroclus saw. It has taught me to become braver with my words and pay more attention to details to make the setting more vivid. Madeline Miller's novels are true works of art; they do not exist to learn a lesson but to be enjoyed and consumed fully. They exist to tell us stories that were untold unapologetically.

### **Crafting Characters**

According to Aristotle, the plot is essential for any story. "The Plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy: Character holds the second place" (Aristotle, 1974). Because of this, I gave a lot of priority to the plot. Though I was not

a great planner, my stories began and ended to fulfil the story's plot. Everything else took a back seat in my stories. Gradually, I realized that to be published in this era; I needed to adapt to many changes. According to recent authors, the characters make the most crucial element of a story for a modern novel. In one of his lectures, Brandon Sanderson mentions that a story with an interesting character and a bland setting is much more likely to be successful than a story with a bland character and an exciting setting (Sanderson, 2016)

There are many ways to plot a story, and just like that, there are many ways to create characters. Focussing on internal conflicts helps us create believable characters. Internal conflicts matter in the story, while external conflicts are vents to the characters (Emmons, 2018). According to Haleh Agar, a character can become substantial when the writer offers details to their backstory, considering the social context, their way of speech and dialogue, and details in how the character observes the world around them (Agar, 2020).

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I contemplated my transformation process from my critical reader self to the self of a creative writer. I argued that critical reading is essential for a creative writer because it enables the author to master the language, create relatable characters, and write honestly. I reflected on my struggles and growth to understand how reading authors from the same genre transformed me into a creative writer.

I understood that, for me, reading for pleasure can improve my writing skills and creativity. I shared my experience of how reading and rereading novels led me to develop an affection for characters and inspired me to write my own stories, concentrating on how stress-relieving reading and writing can be. It has improved my understanding of self-expression, allowed me to understand myself better, absorb empathy in my relationships and leave a lasting legacy. I discussed how art inspires art and how finding my voice was crucial in forming a vision while writing creatively. World-building is a critical part of fantasy literature as it allows for a more immersive and believable experience for the readers. I addressed how I learned the elements of creating effective world-building through reading great writers like Brandon Sanderson and Neil Gaiman. I have them in high regard because of their intricate and imaginative world-building. Sanderson's worlds showcase a detailed and consistent magic system, while Gaiman's works use folklore and mythology to create rich and

diverse words filled with symbols and metaphors.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIONS

This is the last chapter of this dissertation. In this chapter, I conclude my discussion and close the dissertation with my reflections on writing this dissertation. Its primary purpose is to reflect on the revelations of my research, summarize the key findings, and provide a final evaluation of the research. The chapter begins with concluding remarks on my first and second research questions, restating my analysis of my stories. Then, I reflect on the ups and downs of selecting the research area, finalizing the title of the dissertation, defending the proposal and writing and getting ready to defend the dissertation.

#### **Conclusion**

I began this study with two research questions. My first research question was: How did I struggle to write creatively? To answer this research question, I divided my discussion into four subheadings. In the first subheading, entitled Early struggles: State of confusion, I reflected on my experience of struggling to write creatively. When I started reading books, they fascinated me, and I had a wild idea that I should write books like I was reading. I was confused because I had no idea what made the fantasy fiction I was trying to write. Gradually copying the writing styles of well-known writers gave me some ideas about writing styles but that often did not fit in the context of my fictional universe. I knew I had to reinvent my writing style that fit my characters and their contexts.

The second theme was Creative Thought Process. I narrated my transformative experience of developing a creative thought process, i.e., from not knowing how to write and learning to write by reading critically to becoming a creative writer. Reflecting on my experience as a creative reader and writer, I realized that writing is not easy because it requires a lot of active thinking and transformations that I had not thought about before. Today as a conscious researcher, I know writing creatively, particularly fantasy fiction, involves several strategies and requires determination. One of the most important things is that I constantly learn to change my thought process to transform my writing. I moved from a passive reader who reads for entertainment to a critical and analytical reader who reads for writing. I understood

this was a deliberate process of transformation. It helped me immensely in knowing the requirements to become a writer.

The third theme was the Setting. For me, describing the fictional world the characters inhabit was important. This fictional world I build for my characters enables me to create a fictional plot. I learned to write descriptive language that vividly represents my imaginary world through the writers I read. The fourth theme was the Character. I learned that my characters should be multidimensional and as realistic as they can be in a fictional universe. This helps the readers relate to the characters and empathise with their actions.

If I were to describe my transformation journey from being a reader to becoming a creative writer, I would say it was a critical reflection and introspection process. Mezirow's transformative learning theory guided my autoethnographic documentation of this transformation. Since transformative learning theory emphasizes the importance of critical reflection and perspective-taking in facilitating personal growth and transformation, I have applied it to analyse and trace my transition from being a reader to becoming a writer.

My second research question was: How did literary reading help me develop my creative writing skills? To answer this research question, I critically reflected on the elements of good writing. Reflecting on my experience as a creative writer and reading critically, I developed eight themes. I began with My Early Revelations, where I learned critical reading is essential for creative writing. In my inexperience, I had not read enough to write with the skill that the writers I admired were creatively writing. This understanding changed my habit of reading.

In the second theme, Transforming a Writer's Self into a Critical Reader, I realised that reading critically and reading for enjoyment are entirely different. Critical reading allowed me to look closely at the writing style, the pacing and the character arcs of the novel. It helped me improve many of the writing elements I struggled with.

In the Worldbuilding and Magic system themes, I talk about Brandon Sanderson's methods in using these techniques. In Worldbuilding, Sanderson incorporates a consistent internal logic that helps in the world's inner workings. Sanderson's Laws of Magic have allowed me to build a magic system that makes the plot more exciting by not allowing the characters to use unlimited magic. In the Atmosphere and Language themes, I connected how specific language styles fit a



particular atmosphere. I learned that atmosphere differs according to the genre, and language helps to create that atmosphere. In the theme of Humour, I realised that humour engages the reader. Humour in novels cannot be too outlandish and should fit the scene's context. In the theme of Poetry and Prose, I realised that the books that have created clear memories in my mind are the ones with the most beautiful sentiments and emotions. We do not read novels for utilitarian reasons. We read for enjoyment and catharsis; thus, I believe that beauty is a choice we cannot give up on.

To be more precise, this study challenges the dominant narratives of creative writing that writers draw inspiration from their imagination and experiences. And my experiences inform me that our sociocultural factors shape creative writing, and the writer is not an isolated being. The traditional view of creativity is innate, but my findings show that it is a dynamic and flexible construct that a person develops through exposure to diverse ideas and experiences.

### **Reflections**

For me, writing has always been a way to make sense of the world and connect with others. As a child, I would spend hours writing stories and poems, losing myself in the act of creation. When I decided to pursue a degree in literature, it felt like a natural choice. I was excited to hone my craft and connect with other writers who shared my passion.

However, as I progressed in my education, I started to feel a disconnect between my creative work and the academic expectations placed upon it. There was an emphasis on objectivity and detachment that felt at odds with the deeply personal nature of my writing. It seemed as though my academic success was irrelevant or a hindrance to my experiences and perspectives. It was not until I discovered autoethnography that I realized the value of personal narrative in academic research.

Autoethnography is a method of research that emphasizes the researcher's personal experience, acknowledging the subjectivity and complexity of lived experience. It is a way to use personal narrative as a lens through which to examine broader social and cultural forces, challenging traditional expectations of academic research. In one sense, it was a decolonizing process of an individual's self, making it personal and subjective. Using autoethnography in my writing allowed me to explore my experiences as a writer more deeply and meaningfully. By examining the challenges and setbacks, I faced and the moments of triumph and growth, I gained a greater understanding of the creative process and of myself as a writer. I have come to

appreciate the importance of vulnerability and authenticity in creative work and how they can create connections with readers.

By sharing my personal experience as a writer through autoethnography, I hope to challenge the idea that personal experience has no place in academic research. I want to contribute to a broader conversation about the importance of personal narratives in understanding complex experiences. I believe that by embracing our experiences and perspectives, we can better understand the world and connect with others more meaningfully.

Throughout my education, I encountered challenges and setbacks that tested my resolve as a writer. However, these challenges also taught me valuable lessons about perseverance, creativity, and writing. Through my account of my creative writing journey, I showed how this process influenced my understanding of myself as a writer and shaped my broader intellectual pursuits. My writing allowed me to explore different perspectives and voices, which broadened my understanding of the world around me. I have also come to appreciate the importance of vulnerability and authenticity in creative work and how they can create connections with readers.

One quote I can stick to while describing my process of finishing this project is Tony Morrison's, "Write the book you want to read." It has been a guiding principle throughout my creative writing journey. This idea has helped me to stay motivated and passionate about my work, even when I have faced challenging tasks. It has inspired me to tackle a project I initially thought would be tedious and uninteresting. However, I found myself deeply engaged in the project by approaching it from an autoethnographic perspective and exploring my journey as a reader-turned-writer. Through this work, I have discovered new insights into writing and research that I had not previously considered.

This process reminded me of the power of storytelling and the importance of writing from a place of genuine passion and interest. When we write about topics that truly matter to us, our work can become more engaging, impactful, and rewarding. By writing the book that we want to read, we can create something that not only speaks to our interests and passions but also has the potential to resonate with others. Writing has become a fulfilling activity for me, but it has also helped me create meaningful and impactful work. As I continue to explore new ideas and perspectives through my writing, I am grateful for this guiding principle that has helped me stay true to my voice and vision.

As I delved deeper into creative writing, I often faced what Mezirow calls 'disorienting dilemmas.' These dilemmas arose when I encountered new information or experiences that challenged my existing assumptions and beliefs about writing. For me, this often meant questioning my writing experience and the unconscious instincts I had developed as an inexperienced writer.

At first, this dissonance was uncomfortable and difficult to navigate. I struggled to reconcile my old assumptions about writing with the new knowledge I gained through critical reflection and research. However, as I continued to grapple with these dilemmas, I began to see them as opportunities for growth and learning. I challenged my assumptions and beliefs and developed a deeper understanding of the creative writing process. I learned to approach my writing more critically, constantly questioning my assumptions and seeking new perspectives and ideas. I knew we could push ourselves to become better writers and create more impactful work by embracing the discomfort and uncertainty of challenging our assumptions and beliefs.

Looking back on my writing journey, I am grateful for the disorienting dilemmas I faced. Though they were sometimes uncomfortable, they pushed me to grow and develop my writing skills. And by continuing to approach my writing with an open mind and a willingness to challenge my assumptions, I know that I can continue to learn and evolve as a writer for years to come.

But this dilemma could not dissuade me from trying to become a writer. As I continued to read and write, I became more aware of the importance of having an open mind when approaching creative writing. Mezirow's theory of transformative learning suggests that to grow and truly learn, individuals must be willing to examine their assumptions and beliefs and consider alternative perspectives. This theory resonated with me and helped me understand why keeping an open mind is crucial to becoming a skilled writer.

In my writing, I have found that embracing new ideas and perspectives has allowed me to create more nuanced and engaging stories. By exploring different points of view and challenging my assumptions, I have created characters and worlds that feel more authentic and dynamic.

Of course, being open to new ideas and perspectives is not always easy. Questioning our beliefs and exposing ourselves to new experiences to challenge our assumptions can be uncomfortable. However, I believe this discomfort is necessary

for the creative process. By embracing the unknown and stepping outside of our comfort zones, we can push ourselves to create truly exceptional work.

Looking back on my writing journey, I am grateful for my love of fantastical books and my eagerness to create my own stories. These passions have driven me forward and helped me develop my writing skills. And while I may not have been aware of Mezirow's theory when I first started writing, I now understand the importance of approaching creative writing with an open mind and a willingness to explore new ideas and perspectives. Doing so allows me to continue to grow and improve as a writer for years.

When I first started this project, I struggled to connect my previous writings as data to my dissertation. My previous writing consisted of personal reflections about novels I have read, creative pieces, and other works that did not fit into the traditional academic research mould. I wasn't sure how to incorporate this work into my dissertation and how to use it to support my claims. At first, I tried to force my previous writing to fit into a more traditional research framework, but this approach felt inauthentic and forced. I realized that I needed to find a way to use my previous writing to inform my autoethnographic research rather than trying to force it into a predetermined mould.

One of the challenges of using autoethnography as a research method is the need to balance personal experience with academic research. It can be difficult to strike this balance, especially when working with non-traditional data sources like personal writing. However, I realized that my previous writing could serve as a valuable data source, offering insights into my writing experiences and how they influenced my development. I had to approach my previous writing with a different mindset to incorporate my previous writing into my dissertation. Instead of trying to fit it into a traditional research mould, I began to see my previous writing as a form of data that could be analysed and used to support my claims. I used techniques like content analysis and thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in my writing, using them to inform my autoethnographic research.

In doing so, I learned that my previous writing offered valuable insight into my creative writing journey. It allowed me to see how my experiences and perspectives as a writer had evolved with time and influenced my development. It also provided a means of triangulation, allowing me to compare and contrast my personal experiences with academic research and other data sources.

Ultimately, I learned that autoethnography is not just a research method but a way of being in the world. I created a more authentic and meaningful dissertation by embracing my personal experiences and using them to inform my research. While it was challenging to connect my previous writings as data to my autoethnographic dissertation, I ultimately found that they were a valuable source of insight that enriched my research and offered a unique perspective on my creative writing journey.

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