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Carroll's Wonderland and Rowling's Hogwarts: Fantastic Reflections on Legal System for Children

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Abstract

Rowling heralded a new dimension to a society besieged by the media culture, mobiles, video-games, etc. with children as well as adolescents immediately responding to the startling imagery and the world of fantasy created around their favorite character, Harry Potter. Equally captivating is Lewis Carroll's Alice Series with its glamorous English homes and gardens of Victorian age for the children of today. In the world where rapidly changing social norms has created absolute confusion in the mind of children, the creative imagination of writers like Carroll and Rowling has evolved a valuable design to awaken the dormant inborn goodness inherent in man. The screen presence of the characters further makes the characters more relatable and thus sensitizes the children towards even such serious issues as the critical importance of democratic values and justice in governance. The present paper focuses on the effective introduction of legal system and its related issues to children while they are engrossed in the world of fantasy in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and Lewis Carroll's Alice Series.

Key words: Children's literature, fantasy, justice, legal system, crime and punishment.

Introduction

For thousands of years children's literature of the world has been enjoying wide popularity among children in the forms of nursery rhymes, folktales and lullabies, stories and films. Beginning with its oral form and travelling through books printed from wooden blocks with engraved texts and illustrations, manuscripts of splendid calligraphy (e.g., *Book of Kells* of



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the Irish School) to printed poems and stories, children's literature has been making its great impact on young minds through the scripts written for audio-visual medium as well through different languages and dialects of the world. The fairy tales, fables, fantasies and the legends have an international appeal and are enjoyed by children irrespective of their caste, creed and faith. The universality of children's literature has been well expressed in Cassell's Encyclopaedia of Literature (1953, volume 1):

The Arabian Nights from the east, the tales of Perrault, the brothers Grimm, and Andersen from Europe, the negro folk stories of Joel Chandler Harris' *Uncle Remus* (1880) from America, these can be appreciated by any child, irrespective of nationality (97).

The *Panchatantra* is one of the oldest collections of stories for children known for its moral themes expressed in a very entertaining manner. Max Muller in his study 'Migration of Fables' describes "the travels of Panchatantra from India to Persia, to Arabia and from there to Italy, Spain, France, Germany and other countries of the west" (Quoted by Kunhappa, 1980, 57).

In the contemporary world with significant changes in the socio-political order children are seen as human beings not only to be informed and educated but also to be entertained. The modern trends of children's literature have been widely influenced by radio, television, films, world events and dynamic trends in education. Social realism has become a major factor in books and films for children and the young people. Writers like Lewis Carroll and J.K. Rowling are among the few story-tellers who have successfully accepted the challenging task of keeping the children hooked to the books. Moreover, while entertaining them by creating an imaginative and fantastic world they have introduced them to different aspects of real social institutions and values without overtly moralizing them. The writing craft of these writers make the highly unrealistic, romantic and wonderful world with its inhabitants, apt symbols for real life situations thereby encouraging and enhancing the little one's power of observation and intellectual skills. The fantastical settings, wacky animals, animated objects of the world of innocence, fairies,



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ghosts, goblins, magic, etc. become metaphors of real-life events. The happiness or sufferings of their favourite characters sensitize the young formative minds towards humanitarian values.

It is very interesting to mark the effect of powerful political satires, like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, especially its first two chapters, "Travel to Lilliput" and "Travel to Brobdingnag", which are written with the tools of children's literature. The stories of Alice written by Lewis Carroll for the Victorian children are still loved by small children and they come to realize the importance of fair dealing while travelling with Alice in the Wonderland with its strange characters having human weaknesses and wickedness. The phenomenal success of the Harry Potter Series and its universal appeal has established J.K. Rowling as a writer with the credit of bringing back the children from the world of technology, visual media and mobiles to reading books for entertainment in the twentieth century. In a single text of Harry Potter's adventures or misadventures, Rowling has nicely intermingled fantasy, bildungsroman and science fiction. The themes of children's stories range from the simplistic good versus evil encounter to portrayal of complex and intricate tussle among various forces at play to wield control over others.

It would be interesting to take up the writings of both Carroll and Rowling in order to make an in-depth analysis of the fantastic portrayal of legal system in order to appreciate their relevance and efficacy in moulding the young readers' approaches to law and legal institutions. Children being the target readers for the happenings in the world of fantasy, these series do not go too deep into the arena of law and justice, but the children do get introduced to evil consequences of unfair legal system in a very creative manner which helps them recognise the need of an effective mechanism of delivery of justice. In the middle of unexpected areas such as the children's delight- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Alice through the Looking-Glass* (1871) by Lewis Carroll and the critically acclaimed Harry Potter series by Joanne Kathleen Rowling, a grim scenario of law and the judicial system is unravelled in the world of fantasy. The highly imaginative scenes have the potential of making lasting imprints on children undergoing through the process of natural unfolding of their relatively uncorrupted personality.



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Alice's adventures are written in the literary nonsense style, where apparently nothing seems to make sense, whereas, the story of an orphan protagonist born to wizarding parents, "Harry Potter - the boy who lived" (HPPS 18) and went through various challenges - maturation, relationships and social conflicts - runs through seven volumes. The series unwraps with a sketch of the Dursley household situated in the Muggles society (the non-magic people). Harry at the age of eleven, along with other young children reaches Hogwarts to learn magic. He then continuously moves between the boring world of Muggles and the magical world of Hogwarts. The characters in both the fictional worlds go through real life trial and develop their personalities by experiencing love along with hate. Two extremely dissimilar spheres are present - one being a simple world as ours, presented by the Dursley family and other Muggles who regard Harry as an unwanted burden and another is the world of Hogwarts, full of Magical events, consisting of witches and witchcraft. A relentless fight for justice is visible and can be seen when Harry Potter, together with his friends - Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger, confronts the profoundly immoral Lord Voldemort (who killed Harry's parents) and his supporters - Death Eaters. Voldemort intends to live forever and can be seen running after acquisition of more and more power. He wants to take the world of wizards under his full control and seeks to destroy every hurdle that interferes with his deadly aims. In the last book, Harry establishes himself as a hero after a direct confrontation with the evil Lord Voldemort.

Carroll, unlike Rowling, doesn't blur the line which separates the real world from the world of fantasy. The world of fantasy created by him is full of humour and gets its added effect because of very clear hints of real-world idiosyncrasies in the behavioural pattern of the inhabitants of the wonderland encountered by little Alice. It is a story of a little girl aged seven, named Alice - who in the first book goes down a rabbit-hole and in the second book goes through a looking glass. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice is bored to sleep by the story read to her by her elder sister. In her dream, she goes down a rabbit hole following the talking White Rabbit with a waistcoat, where she comes across mysterious creatures along with a ruthless Queen and a cat which keeps vanishing. In the *Wonderland* anomalies of the legal framework has been mocked at through the actions of the King and the Queen of Hearts as



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judges and the jury of animals and birds. The real dangers of the jury system have been pointed out in the following scene:

The twelve jurors were all writing very busily on slates. "What are they doing?" Alice whispered to the Gryphon. "They can't have anything to put down yet, before the trial's begun."

"They're putting down their names," the Gryphon whispered in reply, "for fear they should forget them before the end of the trial."...

Alice could see, as well as if she were looking over their shoulders, that all the jurors were writing down "Stupid things!" on their slates, ... "A nice muddle their slates'll be in before the trial's over!" thought Alice (AAW 97-98).

The dictatorial attitude of the king is subtly revealed at the court procedure exposing its shallowness. When Mad Hatter is called as an eyewitness and gets trapped during the interrogation process, he comes under severe threat by the King which emphasizes the unreasonable and ridiculous approach of the ruling class towards judicial system:

Here the Queen put on her spectacles, and began staring hard at the Hatter, who turned pale and fidgeted.

"Give your evidence," said the King; "and don't be nervous, or I'll have you executed on the spot" (AAW 100).

Satirical treatment of justice delivery system as per the "rules" of Wonderland highlights the consequences of defective legal machinery, although Carroll's satire is not as harsh as that of Swift's commentary on the government in *Gulliver's Travels* but it does pinch the children. The Wonderland is apparently governed by the Queen of Hearts, who does not think twice before breaking off the system of rules which keeps people safe from unlawful prosecution. She can be best described as the Goddess of Death. The fact is expressed in the words of a group of gardeners who looked as playing cards engaged in colouring white roses to make these red.



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Explaining the bewildered Alice, they tell her that their head would be cut off if the Queen finds out their act of sowing white rose-trees instead of those of red ones. Irregular and strange interpretation of the body of laws has been depicted through the weird actions of the Queen of Hearts who destroys the very soul of the system of rules. Chopping of the head seems to be the favourite of the Duchess also who happens to be the cousin of the Queen. When Alice tells her that "the earth takes twenty-four hours to turn round on its axis" (AAW 61) the quick-tempered Duchess mistakes the word 'axis' for 'axes' and commands the cook to chop off Alice's head.

Increasingly widespread Victorian feminist criticism of systems of law and an urgent request space for women within institutions has been presented by Carroll in the form of Alice. By way of the Duchess, Carroll highlighted Victorian England's dishonest political system. The growing political consciousness of Victorian women and the deprived common masses is reflected in the protest of Alice and the biased response of the Queen echoes the attitude of the ruling class:

'I've a right to think,' said Alice sharply, for she was beginning to feel a little worried.

'Just about as much right,' said the Duchess, 'as pigs gave to fly; and the m-' (AAW 84).

Interestingly, the central theme of the *Harry Potter* series can be summarized as "knowledge is power" with Harry moving to the magical world of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry with the gigantic "Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts" (HHPS 52). "Harry felt a great leap of excitement. He didn't know what he was going to - but it had to be better than what he was leaving behind" (HHPS 104). Professor Dumbledore clearly communicates the concept of rights and responsibilities when he warns young Tom Riddle that the magical power comes accompanied with immense responsibility:

[W]e teach you not only to use magic, but to control it...All new wizards must accept that, in entering our world, they abide by our laws (HPHBP 227-228).

The system of rules and legal institutions play a very dominant part in the *Harry Potter* series. The plot is full of references to undemocratic administration, illogical restrictions on



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different institutions and lack of freedom in the judiciary. The deficient system of governance which ignores' and defy social values has been presented in a very stark manner.

The Ministry of Magic which is just referred to in the first book of the series- *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, makes its comprehensive appearance in the fifth book. The Ministry of Magic is the authority designated to formulate and implement the system of rules for maintaining law and social order but the Minister for Magic in charge of the Ministry exercises unbridled power in the Wizarding World. In the fifth book, *Harry Potter and the Order of Phoenix*, it is told that Dumbledore was once proposed to be the Minister for Magic but eventually was dismissed from the Wizengamot. The Wizengamot is somewhat like the High Court of the wizarding world which comprises of a small group of wizards and witches. In the sixth book, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, self-seeking Cornelius Fudge is brought in as the Minister for Magic, obviously ignoring the expected process of voting. The undemocratic status of the institutions has been suggested by the author through repeated omissions of voting scenes associated with their formation. There is an effective scene in the seventh book which summarizes the rotten legal system which failed to deliver justice. When asked by Rufus Scrimgeour, the then Minister for Magic, if she is planning to follow a career in Magical law, the frustrated Hermione answers in negative and declares that instead of that she hopes to do 'some good' in the world (HPDH 98). Subsequently, after Voldemort is killed by Harry Potter, Kingsley Shacklebolt takes the charge of the Ministry and makes sincere efforts to bring positive changes in it. Significantly, in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, which is technically not a part of the series but the story of the magic world continues here, there is a glimpse of a better governed world of magic with Hermione changing her mind and becoming the Minister for Magic.

The imaginative excellence of Rowling transports the children and adolescents to the world of mystery and supernatural forces with such accomplishment that the line between reality and fantasy starts blurring. Like all other great bildungsroman novels, this series has its most powerful appeal in successfully creating a consciousness amongst its reader regarding the need of a well governed social life with democratic values in the real world. The dispute between Harry Potter and the agent of evil forces, Lord Voldemort, has been presented as the everlasting struggle between morality and



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immorality throughout the series without any overt moralising. This subject by its very nature is the centre of interest of the system of laws which inevitably brings into focus the world of law with its varied aspects. Unfortunately, the following words regarding the fantastical government of Rowling by Benjamin H. Barton do not sound strange or outlandish. He enumerates their *modus operandi*:

...[It] tortured children for lying; designed its prison specifically to suck all life and hope out of the inmates; placed citizens in that prison without a hearing; ordered the death penalty without a trial; allowed the powerful, rich, or famous to control policy; selectively prosecuted crimes (the powerful go unpunished and the unpopular face trumped-up charges); conducted criminal trials without defense counsel; used truth serum to force confessions; maintained constant surveillance over all citizens; offered no elections and no democratic law-making process; and controlled the press (Barton 1523-1524).

The Government exercises complete control over information system and utilizes media to carry forward its own propaganda. It has completely curbed the power of the media to think, speak or act, on its own; it is desperate to control the educational system so that it can have authority over public views. Children get an imaginative exposure through concrete actions and their consequences which are like those of any other totalitarian government and its people of the real world. Dolores Umbridge, an official of the Ministry of Magic, has been posted at Hogwarts to keep an eye on the day-to-day happenings taking place there and to thwart the movement of critical news like those of Voldemort being back, etc. There is a system of imposition of severe punishment for 'indulging' into any kind of public communication – whether true or false. Harry gets punished for announcing the return of Voldemort, a truth no one wanted to either listen or be revealed. Umbridge punishes Harry and compels him to make use of a magical pen to write the lines:

Harry placed the point of the quill on the paper and wrote:

I must not tell lies.



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He let out a gasp of pain. The words had appeared on the parchment in what appeared to be shining red ink. At the same time, the words had appeared on the back of Harry's right hand, cut into his skin as though traced there by a scalpel – yet even as he stared at the shining cut, the skin healed over again, leaving the place where it had been slightly redder than before but quite smooth...He looked back at the parchment, placed the quill upon it once more, wrote I must not tell lies, and felt the searing pain on the back of his hand And on it went. Again, and again Harry wrote the words on the parchment in what he soon came to realise was not ink, but his own blood (*HPOP* 247-248).

This tendency to suppress and muffle information in this world of fantasy is disturbingly reminiscent of dictatorial countries where freedom of expression is denied by the government. The unjustifiable pain suffered by the adored Harry is revolting for the children. There are many such incidents which make readers, the future legislators and theoreticians, conscious of the need and importance of the implementation of a fair legal system with a balanced degree of crime and punishment which protects the democratic values.

"[T]he worst place" (*HPPA* 102) is a kind of prison where the prisoners are driven to become mentally ill by the state itself. Remus Lupin explicates:

The fortress is set on a tiny island, way out to sea, but they don't need walls and water to keep the prisoners in, not when they're all trapped inside their own heads, incapable of a single cheerful thought. Most of them go mad within weeks (*HPPA* 198).

The prisoners suffer from complete loss of hope resulting into self-destructive actions in the absence of any expectation of improvements. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry for the first time gets to know about the Dementor's Kiss and assumes that it is a curse which causes the death. But it turned out to be a far worse tool because Dementors sucked out not only pleasant emotions but even all cheerful memories from individuals. Remus Lupin tells Harry that they suck away an individual's soul from their body:



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...You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no... anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just – exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever... lost (HPPA 262).

The government in this series reminds of the narcissistic King of Lilliput in *Gulliver's Travels* and the Queen of Heart in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. In order to expose the degrading political and moral values and increasing human vanity in the contemporary England Swift has created imaginary island communities and puts the defenceless Gulliver to fend for himself. Even the giant Gulliver in the land of Lilliputians has been sentenced severely by the ungrateful King. Carroll's Alice finds herself with strange beings and witnesses the Queen in the Wonderland who prosecutes her subjects and puts them in prisons sans basic facilities, without offering them any chance at defence. Sirius Black, the accused killer of Harry's parents and other Muggles, had been imprisoned wrongly in Azkaban for twelve years without being offered any trial. In the Wizarding World, Ministry of Magic made use of Dementor's kiss as a sentence for criminals. After Sirius runs away from the prison, Cornelius Fudge asks Dementors to kiss him. Sirius's mistake was to trust his unworthy friend Peter Pettigrew, who is subsequently discovered as the actual murderer of Harry's parents. However, in the end, Harry and Hermione manage to save Sirius and Buckbeak from an unjust death sentence by using the Time-Turner (going back in time) –under the guidance of Professor Dumbledore.

Lucius Malfoy is the head of the rich pure-blood Malfoy family. He is a Death Eater who belongs to a privileged family and enjoys tremendous influence. Arthur Weasley words to Harry Potter may not look alien for the readers: "[He] delays laws he doesn't want passed...oh, he's very well-connected, Lucius Malfoy..." (HPOP 143).

Glaring discrimination in the implementation of the system of rules is also visible in the fantasy world of Harry Potter. As per the law, underage students are prohibited from carrying out magic and its performance in front of the Muggles is also banned. But interestingly, Harry is not punished, when his magic blows up his aunt Marjorie Eileen Dursley as a balloon:



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But Aunt Marge suddenly stopped speaking. For a moment, it looked as though words had failed her. She seemed to be swelling with inexpressible anger – but the swelling didn't stop... she was inflating like a monstrous balloon, her stomach bursting free of her tweed waistband, each of her fingers blowing up like a salami... (HPPA 31).

In the final part of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the fed-up Alice is shown to be finally protesting against the illogical proceedings of the court. In the words of Kristin Brandser, "Alice, in her final adventure in Wonderland, becomes increasingly bold during the trial to determine who stole the tarts of the Queen of Hearts" (Brandser 221).

..."Let the jury consider their verdict," the King said, for about the twentieth time that day.

"No, no!" said the Queen. "Sentence first-verdict afterwards."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Alice loudly. "The idea of having the sentence first!"

"Hold your tongue!" said the Queen, turning purple.

"I won't!" said Alice.

"Off with her head!" the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

"Who cares for you?" said Alice. (She had grown to her full size by this time.) "You're nothing but a pack of cards" (AAW 107).

Catherine Siemann writes that in the second book of Alice, *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*, "...Alice plays by the rules in the forlorn hope that the social mobility afforded by the game, which will reward her by making her a Queen if she succeeds, will also help her to make sense of the world in which she has found herself. But in the panoptical world of the Looking-Glass legal system, justice operates backward, and crimes are punished before they are committed" (Siemann 430).

The chaotic and imperfect English system of law of the nineteenth century has been made fun of in the proceedings of the case. Cassandra Sharp rightly observes: ".....it would seem that in both worlds she encounters, law is *prima facie* absent" (Sharp 346). Afraid of Alice's



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imposing appearance in his court, the King makes his best attempt to release her in order to get rid of her. With her growing trust in reasoning, she intervenes and speaks herself out to the justice in the law court, leading to the jury becoming really unhappy. In this part of the *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Carroll can be seen conveying his worries through this scene where he makes fun of the institution of law. Even a child of Alice's age can make out the absurd twisting of punishment rules and regulations. The system of rules is based on the personal whim, rather than any reason or system. When Dormouse warns the defiant Alice that she has no right to grow inside the law court (AAW 100):

... [T]he King, who had been for some time busily writing in his note-book, called out "Silence!" and read out from his book, "Rule Forty-two. All persons more than a mile high to leave the court."

Everybody looked at Alice.

"I'm not a mile high," said Alice.

"You are," said the King.

"Nearly two miles high," added the Queen.

"Well, I shan't go, at any rate," said Alice; "besides, that's not a regular rule: you invented it just now."

"It's the oldest rule in the book," said the King.

"Then it ought to be Number One," said Alice.

The King turned pale, and shut his note-book hastily. "Consider your verdict," he said to the jury, in a low trembling voice (AAW 104-105).

Alice makes a choice to remain in the court, openly resisting the power of the court of law to take decisions, give orders, and enforce obedience, reminding us of Professor Dumbledore's advice to Harry during the sorting hat incident when Harry rejects to be in Slytherin and selects Gryffindor. The importance of making 'Choice' has been focused upon by Rowling and is visible in various incidents such as the Sorting Hat incident among many others.



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His good personality is disclosed by his preference for Gryffindor. He requests the Sorting Hat not to place him in Slytherin:

Harry gripped the edges of the stool and thought, 'Not Slytherin, not Slytherin.'

'Not Slytherin, eh?' said the small voice. 'Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that – no? Well, if you're sure – better be GRYFFINDOR (*HP*PS 129-130).

Professor Dumbledore, Harry's mentor, convinces him that it is an individual's act of choosing between various possibilities that discloses who he actually is: "It is our choices, Harry, that show us what we truly are, far more than our abilities" (*HP*CS 352).

The immense popularity of these two wonderful examples of creative imagination prove that youngsters do respond to virtuous personalities of the fantasy world and their identification with them affords very effective means to create an awareness regarding the need of a just legal system for smooth functioning of a society. The exceptionally effective art of communication employed by the authors blurs the line between reality and imagination taking the readers to a world of fantasy which becomes an interesting mode to learn, examine and evaluate the real world. The human beings of impressionable age are encouraged to make the right choice by enabling them to differentiate between the moral and immoral ways of life through stories told in a highly entertaining manner. The intricate subject matter of law and legal institutions which plays a crucial role in the inculcation and promotion of democratic and humanitarian values in any society has been dealt with in such a subtle manner in both *Alice* series and the *Harry Potter* series that children are introduced to the legal world without any explicit intent and their lies the key to their success.



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- . *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (HPHBP)*
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