

Ashes, War, and a Broken Earth: The Systemic Role of Education in Fantasy Literature

Abigail Welch

Dept. of English and Comparative Literature

Introduction:

- Development of fantasy: Imaginary worlds have history of addressing social issues and asking philosophical questions (Wolf 148).
- Modern scholarship emphasises genre theory and definition, rather than thematic implications of fantasy.
- Potential for imaginary worlds to reflect the actual world.

Key Terms and Theories:

- **Liminality:** “moments of transition” in which education is a space of transition in actual society and in the reader’s experience of education across actual and fictional worlds (Thomassen 4).
- **“Parallel words”:** Literary application of possible worlds theory in which what occurs in fictional worlds impacts what could occur in actual worlds by bridging liminal space between them.

Thesis:

- Education as the site of the instillation of social norms into people.
- Fantasy’s autonomous, detailed worlds comment on education’s foundational role in creating and upholding society in a way that is relevant to the reader’s lived experience.
- Liminality—Education in fantasy worlds mimicking educational systems in the actual world.

Texts:

- Contemporary fantasy and science fantasy.
- High-fantasy worlds distinct from actual world.
- First Book(s): Details collapse of an educational institution with significant social ramifications.
- Permutations of possible worlds that are historical and social: the Roman Empire, the Second Sino-Japanese War, and the outcomes of climate change.
- Considers education as a foundational institution impacting marginalized communities.

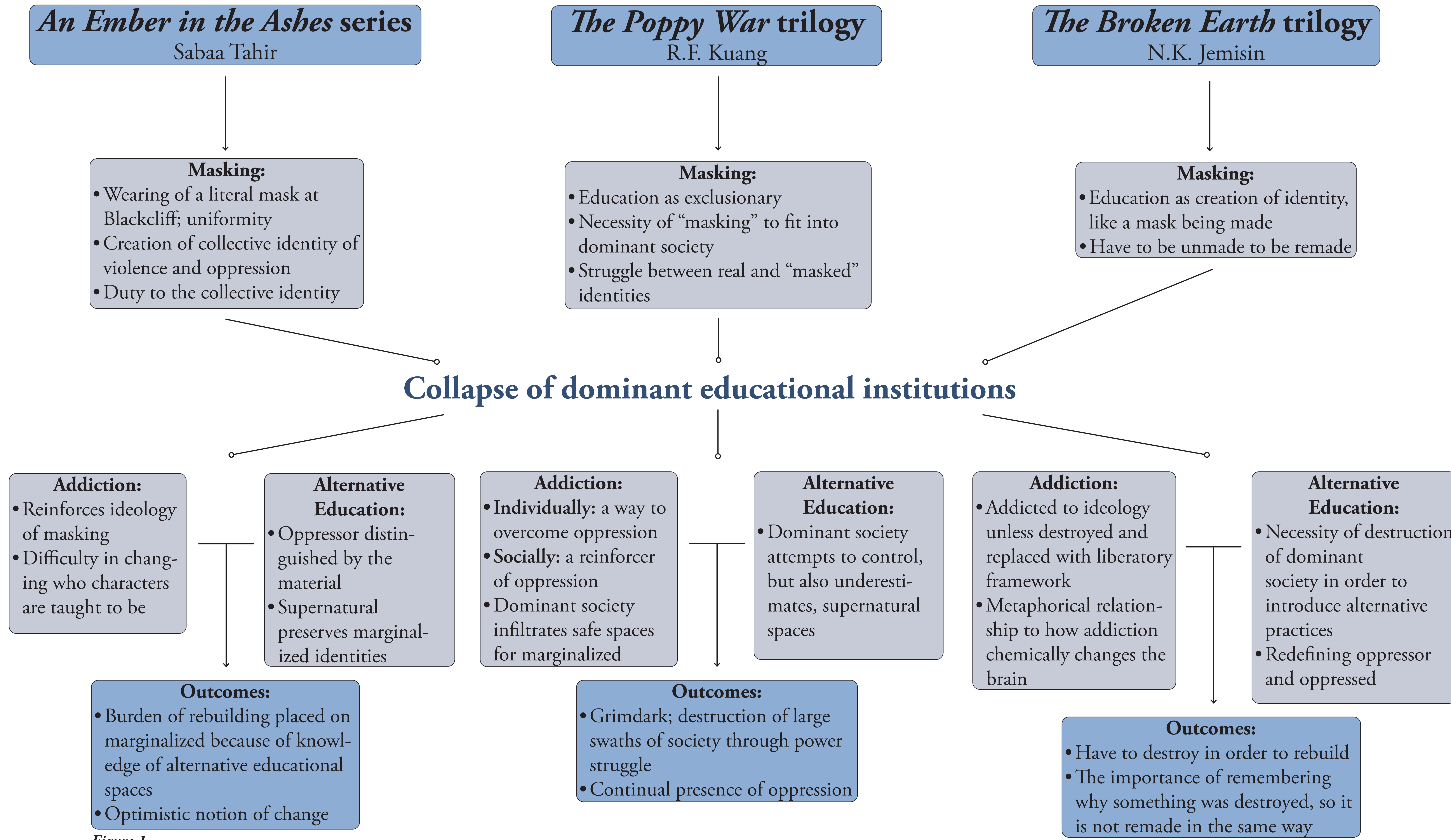


Figure 1.

Analysis:

See Figure 1.

- Supernatural as symbolic of marginalized communities.
- **Masking and Addiction:** Literalization of the physical and mental effects of oppression.
- **Alternative Education:** Non-dominant, non-oppressive practices learned by the marginalized.
- The ability of ideological practices to be changed or reproduced through education.
- Burden of rebuilding after social collapse.

Discussion:

- Varying perspectives on the collapse of oppressive systems and their regeneration.
- *The Broken Earth* trilogy balancing optimism and destructionism through history.
- Fantasy as a reflection of education’s role in creating change in the actual world, as discussed in Paulo Friere’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
- If educational spaces are not actively advocating for liberation, they are by default upholding oppressive systems.

Future Research:

- Implications of “parallel worlds” in fantasy for sociological and public policy research.
- Curriculum design and the incorporation of fantasy in the classroom.
- Public pedagogy, border pedagogy, liminality.
- Addition of colonialism-specific analysis.

Works Cited:

Thomassen, Bjørn. *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-between*. Ashgate, 2014.

Wolf, Mark J. P. *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*. Routledge, 2012.