



**A Comparative Analysis of  
*Alice in Corporate Land* and *The Monk who Sold his Ferrari*  
: A Study of the Genre**



**Ashita Dsouza, MA (SET)**  
Asst. Professor, Dept. of English,  
Ahmednagar College, Ahmednagar  
Email: [bandeluashita@gmail.com](mailto:bandeluashita@gmail.com)

**Abstract :**

*The novels The Monk who sold his Ferrari by Robin Sharma and Alice in Corporateland by Tulika Tripathi are situated thematically in the corporate culture. The setting and the characters derive their characteristics from the corporate culture. These novels present methods to succeed in the corporate lifestyle. The contents of the novels are akin to the contents in the popular self-help books found in the business. However, compared to the text of the self-help books, whether in terms of learning principles of business success or spirituality, they have made a difference in the narrative style. They have incorporated the technique of fictional narrative to put forth their principles. Their narrative is designed to create a kind of interpellation between the narrative and the reader that is peculiar to their format. They have*

*incorporated the technique of fictional narrative to put forth their principles. As 'Genres may be determined by literary technique, tone, content, or length (especially for fiction). They generally move from more abstract, encompassing classes, which are then further sub-divided into more concrete distinctions' (Wikipedia, Literary Genre), this paper is an attempt to compare the narrative styles of the two novels and analyze the common narrative structure that is peculiar to them to study whether they can be considered as representative of a subgenre within corporate fiction.*

**Keywords:** *The Monk who Sold his Ferrari, Alice in Corporateland, Narrative Analysis, self help books, corporate fiction, genre studies*

## RESEARCH PAPER

### Introduction

*The Monk who sold his Ferrari* is a self-help book about having a proper understanding of success and living a holistic life. It tells the story of a very successful lawyer Julian who had developed his own firm and had achieved great success in terms of wealth and reputation. However, his relentless hardwork took a toll on his relationships and health. He suffered a massive heart attack and that was the turning point in his life. He retreated to a life of meditation under the guidance of the sages in the Himalayas. After he gained the holistic perspective of success he returned to guide his associate John to guide him in the principles learnt from the sages.

Julian's story is an example that progress in the top to down progression. The story begins with Julian having achieved great success in the corporate world and then resigns from it. It does not exactly follow the archetypal pattern of the Phoenix that rises from the ashes, that is, the trajectory of the story is not parabolic in the sense that Julian does not return to rise back to power. However, he does rise back in terms of a spiritual understanding of things that are more valuable. John's case is the corporate success story in the making. Julian's guidance throughout the narrative would probably help John to take up corporate success in a holistic way.

The theme of the novel is learning of spiritual practices that would bring about self development and more efficiency in career with the help of meditative support.

*Alice in Corporateland* is the story of a young graduate who has just set out for her first job. She is guided in a dream sequence about the principles of success that she should bear in mind. Unlike Julian's case, her trajectory of her story is a probable bottom to top progression. With all the guidance that she receives about being successful it is very probable that she would achieve great success in her career. Julian was a person who 'had it all' and Alice is being directed 'how to have it all'. The guidance that she receives is more materialistic and rooted in corporate culture. However, she is also taught the nobler aspects or perspectives regarding these principles for

corporate success. The theme of *Alice in Corporateland* is a guide to corporate success by being a noble human being. It teaching values rather than spirituality.

The novels have been analyzed according to the demonstration of the structural analysis of the narrative of plot by Tzvetan Todorov and Arnold Weinstein in their article titled ‘Structural Analysis of Narrative’ by the method of ‘schematic formulation’ which retains only the common elements of these plots. He has identified three directions of narrative analysis: the study of narrative syntax, study of theme and study of rhetoric.

### Narrative Analysis

The narrative structure of *The Monk who sold his Ferrari* employs a fable to tell its story. Julian returns as a monk to guide his associate John in the spiritual principles of leading a successful holistic corporate life. The instructions are not prescriptive as in the regular self-help books. Instead, the two have discussions with Julian providing stimulus by way of anecdotes and situations and John expressing his concerns and doubts. The reader is given the perspective of a listener to the conversation between a teacher and disciple. The instructions are strung into a fable that is actually a narrative joining a number of symbols. The narrative line of the fable is that there is a lighthouse in a garden in which there is a sumo wrestler. The sumo wrestler is naked with his private part bound in wire. He picks up a gold stop watch and faints. He regains consciousness because of the fragrance of flowers in the garden and sees a long winding road covered by millions of diamonds. Each object in this narrative is a symbol used to develop a virtue. The narrative though containing explanations for developing one’s personality is make appealing by the use of visual images. It is structured to be an aid to memory so that repetition would help cultivate the habits. The basic points are summed up graphically in a tabular format at the end of every chapter. Thus, the narrative is a patterned mix of dialogues, anecdotes, symbols, a fable, instructions and non-narrative elements like images, tables, notes and check lists.

The narration of the story in *Alice in Corporateland* is developed as a pastiche of the story of Alice in Wonderland. It is similar to the fable of the sumo wrestler told by Julian in *The Monk who sold his Ferrari*. Alice follows the path of Alice in the fairytale, she follows a rabbit down an underground tunnel and comes to face a small door. She has to eat a cake to shrink in size so that

she can go through the door. She comes across a parchment that has couplets as riddles that she has to solve so that she could return to her home. On the way she meets different fairy tale characters who guide and instruct her in principles and virtues that she needs to live by so that she could have a successful corporate life. The setting of the story is similar to that in Alice in Wonderland, such as the small door, the toadstool the towers and the lakes and a tea cup but the characters are replaced by popular traditional fairytale characters such as Cinderella, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Rumpelstiltskin. Each character's story contains an anecdote from their lives that explain some principle for wholesome success. The events that occur when Alice meets each character generate a practical demonstration for Alice to practice the principles learnt. For instance, while Alice and rabbit were flying holding on to Peter Pan, Rabbit slips and falls through the sky. Alice, in response, lets go of Peter Pan to fall along with Rabbit, takes hold of him, thinks happy thoughts that are the fuel that enables them to fly. This event occurred to test her leadership qualities and teach her the importance of being responsible for her team mates or colleagues and helping them to rise up. This sense of responsibility stems from the values of not being selfish but by being considerate towards others. It comes in line with the corporate world as the reason she is able to fly is by thinking happy thoughts that are her dreams and ambitions that would save her from falling. The narrative uses the image of the rolled parchment that opens up further through the narrative whenever she is able to solve a riddle by learning a new principle of success. Each chapter contains a riddle, a fairytale character, a noble value, a principle for corporate success and an event that test Alice's integrity. The narrative can also be seen as a young girl's *bildungsroman* as she learns along a journey from different characters she meets along the way and performs the tasks set out for her along the way.

## Chapters

Questions about the philosophy have been asked as if. The narrative then proceeds in the form of dialogues as questions and answers between the teacher and the disciple, something similar to Plato's *Dialogues*. The narrative format of listening to a teacher and disciple's conversation helps the reader place her/himself within the context of a student learner.

A fable is narrated through the discussion. It joins up the symbols used to represent the seven virtues in the form of a story.

the visual input required and the fable provides the kinetic input for greater cognition and memorization.

Each chapter is devoted to an explanation of one symbol and the corresponding action in the fable culminating with the principle of the virtue to be learnt through it. As the text seems to involve the reader, s/he is made to imagine herself in a particular place with certain symbols that s/he has to keep in mind. The first symbol, the garden, represents the mind that has to be cultivated with care weeding and planting represents proper focus and de-cluttering. The next symbol is the lighthouse that symbolizes life's purpose or Dharma. This leads on to the corporate concept of goal setting. Each chapter ends with a revision of what is to be learnt in a graphic format with pictures and tables. After summing up the points regarding the one virtue he goes on to the next symbol in the next chapter but revises whatever was learnt in the earlier virtues. Thus, each chapter is organized exactly in the same pattern as the earlier chapters so as to aid memory. The complete narrative ends with a checklist of the symbols in the fable and the virtues they represent. Thus, the narrative format uses the system of Mnemonics, recaps, revisions and summaries so that as the reader reads s/he is also learning to remember the tenets of the complete philosophy.

One aspect of appreciating the work in its fictional spirit is the amount of inter-textuality involved in its narration. There are references to a variety of fairy tales that generally a person with an upbringing in the English story telling atmosphere would be familiar with. Some of the fairy tales that are referred to in the text are *Cindrella*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Rapunzel*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, *Pinocchio*, *Peter Pan* and a short reference to *The Frog Prince*. Although it has the potential to be a more enjoyable read if the reader is able to create the frames of reference with the stories of the fairytales in the main narrative, yet, it is not necessary to an understanding of the context of the story or its message. Each fairy tale is retold in a way that it would relate to the corporate world.

### Characterization

The protagonist Julian is introduced as squirming in the court house with a massive heart attack. The narrative then has his associate, John, describing him as he was in the past. The words

used to describe Julian to be noted are that 'he had it all', he was a 'rainmaker in the waiting', 'a young star'. The reader is provided information about Julian from the perspective of John who is Julian's admirer. The way he worked is summed up in the statement that 'this man could never be wrong'. He was obsessed with work. The description about his work culture is something that the corporate world would say is the formula for success. he was inspired by the power of law that can effect social change. He was not just a rich kid but he saw himself as a force for good and an instrument for social improvement. The second character in the story John is developed in the narrative as a family man and informs about what his father had told him, that when he would be on his death bed he would wish that he had not spend so much time at the office. This perspective appeals to the less ambitious reader who is entangled with the corporate world not for personal success but for the sake of family. Thus, the narrative, by creating two characters with contrasting ideologies regarding family and the meaning of life for both of them sets off the theme that would appeal to a variety of readers.

When Julian returns to meet John he says that he was filled with an underlying peacefulness that gave him an almost divine presence. The reader is informed of what he is getting into when Julian tells John about the benefits of the Siwana system, "You will experience changes within the workings of your mind, body and even your soul that will astonish you. You will have more energy enthusiasm and inner harmony that you have had in perhaps your entire life. People will actually begin telling you that you look younger and happier. A lasting sense of wellbeing and balance will swiftly return to your life."

Guru , a sage from the Himalayas practicing the siwana system. Person from many lifes.

The characters in *Alice in Corporateland* are fairy tale characters with a difference. The character Cinderella in the original story is a hardworking exploited by her cruel stepmother. She is able to go to a ball arranged by the prince of the land in order to search for a prospective wife with the help of her fairy godmother who uses her magic to transform Cinderella who is dressed in rags to an elegantly dressed lady with a chariot. In the story of *Alice in Corporateland* Cinderella modifies the story to fit into a corporate culture. The step mother represents the employers who load a lot of work on the newbies in their office. Conceding to grueling hardwork would not get the aspirant any closer to success. The fairy godmother represents mentors who are experts in the

organization or the corporate sector who could guide the aspirant and provide her with the needed exposure and protection needed to progress. The magic mirror in the fairy tale of Snow white and the Seven Dwarfs is used by the evil step mother to answer questions about who is the most beautiful woman in the land. This concept is modified in the story of Alice in Corporate land where the mirror is asked for feedback. Alice is taught the importance of gaining objective feedback and that she should use feedback constructively to develop herself and gain good will. Each character provides an intertextual frame of reference. The reader can compare the two stories of the character and glean the contrasting qualities in the two which provide the dos and don't's for corporate success. The characters tell anecdotes that instruct Alice. They even set out tasks for her and present situations that Alice can learn from. The tea cup does not allow Alice to pass through the gate and presents her with a question. Alice learns not to make hasty decisions and look for other options before answering.

### Symbols

The symbols in the fable of *The Monk who sold his Ferrari* are used for meditation. This style of meditation involves visualization, the symbols help the aspirant to visualize and memorize concepts. The Sumo wrestler represents an aspirant's mind that in reality is very strong and has infinite potential. The sumo has bound his private part with a pink wire that represents discipline. The fragrant flowers in the garden represent good thoughts and good habits that are to be cultivated in the garden of one's mind and the unwanted thoughts are to be weeded out. This helps an aspirant to be more focused. The movements of the sumo wrestler provide the kinetic stimulus to the meditation. The sumo faints after picking the gold stopwatch. He regains consciousness because of the fragrant smell of the flowers in the garden. This connection helps the aspirant to understand the importance of cultivating thoughts that would help him to be resilient and progress on the path of success.

The narrative of *Alice in Corporateland* is replete with symbols. The objects that appear in the original story of Alice in Wonderland take on very significant meanings. Alice follows the rabbit who is always in a hurry. He is the symbol of ambition as he reveals his name to be towards the end of the story. Ambition sometimes could make the aspirant get lost in the Corporate world. He looks at his pocket watch and exclaims that he is very late. Cinderella reveals to Alice that he



is supposed to take his medicine that is patience and put eye drops that help him focus. This is representative that one needs to be patient as well as focused and not allow ones ambition to run out of hand or out of our control. Peter Pan represents happy thoughts that enables him to fly. One's ambitions and dreams are the happy thoughts that help one soar to success and not drop down into the Winds of Mediocrity. Thus, we find similar principles of patience, focus and optimism in both the narrative represented symbolically, to teach principles of corporate success.

### Concepts Learned

The reader is informed that there are seven basic virtues, seven fundamental principles that embodied the keys to becoming a responsible, enlightened leader: Master your mind, follow your purpose, practice Kaizen, live with discipline, respect your time selflessly serve others and embrace the present. Different kinds of meditation techniques such as the 'Heart of the Rose', 'The Secret of the Lake' and others are presented in the narrative alongwith with anecdotes that explain their benefits in life. He also teaches a number of rituals to be practiced to live a holistic disciplined life such as 'the ritual of solitude', 'ritual of abundant knowledge' and the like. The basic idea about these meditation techniques and rituals are provided without going into details. The concepts learnt range from principles like giving time to nourish oneself with proper diet, exercise, knowledge and meditation to serving others selflessly. Here the focus is on the development and exercise of the self in the aspects of physicality, mentality and spirituality. The concepts taught seem to be centered in focusing on the development of the self.

*Alice in Corporateland* provides tips that help to achieve greater ambitions. Alice is taught the ethics of the corporate culture. The concepts range from instructions that are as simple as the importance of a firm handshake and appropriate appearance that would impact how others perceive you to greater values such as compassion, consideration and sacrifice that would help in better team work and longer lasting meaningful progress. She is taught to be humble and start with smaller tasks and projects that would open her up to greater opportunities, develop a network of mentors, be focused and patient with ambitions, remember the grander dreams so that she doesn't become mediocre, help others on their path to success and the like. Thus, the concepts taught in *Alice in Corporateland* inculcate important values of character and ethics but teach more about fulfilling one's ambitions.



## Conclusion

The themes of the two stories are complementary to each other, the young student is guided in principles required for a successful career in Alice while Julian represents the ill effects of extreme obsession with success and guides the reader to principles of a holistic balanced work life. Thus there is a possibility of a narrative grammar that would include a semantic and a pragmatic component as suggested by Gerald Prince in *Narrative Analysis and Narratology*. Both the narrative have used symbols extensively. The virtues the Julian wants to teach John are represented symbolically and strung into a narrative as a mnemonic tool to aid in visualization in meditation. Alice comes across various objects that symbolize attitudes and values to be successful. These symbols also form a part of the path that Alice travels. The use of symbols differ at the level that the symbols are incorporated in the diegetic narrative. Julian's use of symbols is explicitly extradiegetic whereas the symbols used to teach Alice make up a part of her adventures. Both the narratives involve the reader and achieve narrative transport by the use of questions. The Johns questions to Julian are constructed such that they voice the possible reactions of the readers in general and express concerns and doubts. Alice is presented with riddles and the element of suspense creates reader involvement in the search for the answer to the riddles in the events that follow. The narrative chapters follow a rhythmic structured pattern of narration after the introductory chapters. Each chapter ends with a graphic tool that revises the concepts learnt. The pattern of revising the principles learnt, summing up the chapters theme at the end of each chapter and creating an anticipation for the next chapter is a common chapter structure in both the novels. There is a single main teacher in *The Monk who Sold his Ferrari*, Julian the monk presented as the spokesman for Yogi Raman while *Alice in Corporateland* have fairytale characters who together guide Alice one at a time along the story line. Both the aspiring characters, the receivers of guidance, John and Alice, are made to get involved in practicing the principles that they have learnt within the narrative events creating reader interpellation and transport. As stated by Barabar Hernstein smith in her article 'Narrative Versions, Narrative Theories', 'For any given narrative, there are always multiple basic stories that can be constructed in response to it', the similarities in the underlying structure of the narrative in both the novels *The Monk who sold his Ferrari* and *Alice in Corporateland* are very similar.

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