

The Importance of Instapoetry in Light of Dominant Forms with Special Reference to Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*

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Abstract

Recently Instapoetry, a form of minimalist poetry, has emerged as a result of using Instagram as a platform for expression. It has strived to gain validity since many of Instapoets have gained millions of followers who have approved this kind of writing which, most of the time, is accompanied by advertisements that symbolize the hidden economic agenda that controls who will get published. However, Instapoetry has been and is still being faced by a wave of disapproval. The paper's argument is to verify the validity and investigate the reliability of Instapoetry, an emergent subgenre, by measuring it against the dominant literary canon which includes areas of the residual. The paper sheds light on how the Marxist economic approach to literature reproduction affects this newly-exercised type of poetry; to what extent Instapoetry can be considered a mirror of social values, and how it can be a form of propaganda. The researcher compares theories of poetry in Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Poetics*, Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* and Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* in order to formulate measurements, a paradigm, against which this, and other future types, of poetry can be tested, putting in mind the economic factor that has changed the map of publishing houses in the UK and the USA in 2017 for example.

Keywords: Instapoetry, Rupi Kaur, Marxist literary theory, Theories of Poetry

1. Introduction

1.1 *The Dominant (Contemporary Literary Ambience)*

In her article "Poetry Goes Pop: A Brief Examination of the "Instapoet" Debate" Elizabeth Burnam (2019) points out the new genre's pros and cons. She supports Instapoetry as it has turned into industry that plays a cultural role in society. She adds "so perhaps it's only fitting that the modern poet gets their chance at fame and fortune too." Burnam then presents a counter viewpoint that sees Instapoetry as originally designed to sell. Poetry is rarely exercised to make a living. However, Instagram imposes financial restrictions that do great harm to the art of poetry as they "encourage the growth of banal, inauthentic, and cliché posts and discourage truly original thought from reaching the audience it needs" (Burnam, 2019). Burnam (2019) was hesitant for awhile before she declared her approval of Instapoetry. "As long as we actively encourage diversity in form, style, and content, I don't see any harm in welcoming a new, internet-born sub-genre to the poetry club". Actually, people show two different opinions about Instapoetry: "either Instagram poetry was lazy, formulaic and a little trashy; or, it was the voice of a generation. In other words: it was ruining poetry or it was saving it" (Fasham, 2019).

1.2 *Importance of Evaluating Instapoetry*

Instapoetry is used for pedagogical purposes and Rupi Kaur's works have been selected (Amarante, Guimarães de Lima, & Azzari, 2019). Commenting on Atticus's and Rupi Kaur's poetry, Katy Waldman says "their work carves out a pristine space for reflection"—it challenges readers to look at the familiar from a different angle" (Instapoetry and Advertising Change, 2020).

1.3 *Supporters & Opponents*

1.3.1 Supporters

Some of Instapoetry supporters see that "the departure from tradition made by Instapoets [is made] to intone the changes we need to make in our own lives. The message made in that distinctively minimalist style is clear: We need to act. Now" [Brackets mine] (Instapoetry and Advertising Change, 2020). Some, such as Laura Gallon

(2019), see that poetry is made accessible through the Instagram. The readership of poetry has remarkably increased in US and UK in 2017. However, Instapoetry's legitimacy has been questioned from the beginning so much that "a very small number of papers on Rupi Kaur's writing, Instapoetry is treated as a footnote" (Gallon, 2019). Actually, Instapoets try to carve their names but it is doubtful whether their attempt will realize success or not despite the publication of millions of copies. The matter gets complicated when issues of gender and race play a role in turning a poet away from traditional publishing outlets only to find Instagram available for those marginalized people to express themselves. "The debate about the "literariness" of Instapoetry has overshadowed a more important fact: through social media, minorities and women not only have a creative voice but are also being heard, and are experimenting with language, rhetoric and form in innovative ways" (Gallon, 2019). The question is that: will literariness be sacrificed for the sake of giving the marginalized a space *to try their hands in poetry as a mode of expression*.

Many people have realized success as Instapoets. Robert Macias, aka r.m. drake, was a parttime Instapoet but by "the end of 2014, he had over half a million followers and quit his job to write full time" (Leszkiewicz, 2019). The most famous of all is Rupi Kaur with 3.5 million Instagram followers. Kaur's work shows an interest in both the design as well as poetry. Reuben Holmes, aka r.h. Sin., gives an Elysian portrait of life to his 1.4 million followers. To his one million followers, Atticus posts advertisements along with poems. There are other Instapoets with followers counted by hundred thousands such as Najwa Zebian, Nayyirah Waheed, Cleo Wade and Danielle Doby. Despite the widespread of Instapoetry, rarely can high quality be found:

The quality varies, but there is plenty of comically or offensively banal work to be found on Instagram: genuinely insightful or distinctive work is the exception, not the rule. The same tropes and themes appear again and again: lower-case platitudes in typewriter fonts; earnest insistence of the importance of self-love; writing in the second person; petals, rainbows and coffee stains sneaking on to pages (Leszkiewicz, 2019).

Instapoetry has been severely criticized not only by critics but by Instapoets themselves: "Even some of the Instapoets themselves have doubts. "I would never consider these poems," Macias bluntly told a reporter in 2014. "I am not a poet" (Leszkiewicz, 2019).

Instapoets respond to criticism with longstanding world issues in mind: gender, race and color. Reviewing the work of Hollie McNish (24,000: repeatedly described as the UK's answer to Rupi Kaur) in PN Review, the poet Rebecca Watts accused "the poetic establishment" of "celebrating amateurism and ignorance in our poetry". Many Instapoets see critical responses like this as snobbery, elitism and prejudice. Amanda Lovelace (70,000: author of *The Princess Saves Herself In This One*) argues "people call us 'Instapoets' as a way to differentiate us from 'real poets'—aka dead white, straight, cisgender, males" (Leszkiewicz, 2019). It would have been more appropriate if Amanda Lovelace had refuted Rebecca Watts's statement logically, showing, if she could, that Instapoetry springs from professionalism not amateurism. Leszkiewicz calls for dealing with each post/poet separately so long as there is no clear criterion for passing judgement. I disagree with her since if we cannot set rules for Instapoetry as a whole, we can never judge poets/posts individually.

Mogen Wallersteiner's article (2019) "The Rise of the Insta-Poet" praises Instapoetry highlighting the importance of Instapoets. "Their poetry has the potential to be innovative and to resonate with our times. Be they meritorious or not, these Insta-poets are significant cultural products of our modern digital age".

1.3.2 Opponents

Nisha Mody (2019), one of Instagram poets, states that she has "no formal education or training in writing poetry. But, for the purposes of Instagram, I didn't feel like I needed it". Moreover, she saw that she achieved progress in three "interconnected ways", viz., she is more concise as she wrote the six-word poem, "The feather has a family too", after several trial that lasted for thirty minutes. The second point of progress is that she wrote with more meaning providing context to the poem. The third point is that she has become a better storyteller by adding the adverb too to her six-word poem.

Hathaway (2019) criticizes the wave of Instapoetry that came in the wake of Rupi Kaur's "milk and honey" doubting its poetic nature: "though much of the writing is impersonal and interchangeable, and it's not exactly clear if Instapoetry can truly be considered 'poetry'". It is Kaur's success that encouraged many aspiring poets to fight for a place under the sun. Hathaway compares Kaur's writing to poets such as Sylvia Plath and Elizabeth Bishop, a comparison that highlights the fragile nature of Instapoetry:

It's difficult to define Instapoetry as a subgenre of poetry when it can barely be considered poetry in the first place. While the rules behind poetry are not rigid, after reading the writings of Sylvia Plath and Elizabeth Bishop, it somehow feels cheap to call "milk and honey" poetry. According to Hathaway, Kaur's work lacks "mysterious

intensity” and language-created seriousness.

Kaur and Nayyirah Waheed, the most two famous Instapoets, have much in common: both use lowercase letters and line breaks and jagged punctuation, “but the vast majority of the Instapoetry community do the same thing, regardless of fame or recognition” (Hathaway, 2019). Instapoets have not shown any ingenuity in the use of language or in developing real thoughts: “Instapoets are able to mass-produce sentimental scrambles of words for likes and followers without putting in real thought to their writing, and it drastically decreases the quality of the poetry. ...Instapoetry destroys this economy of language by encouraging the inclusion of filler words through split-up prose” (Hathaway, 2019). One such poet as Warsan Shire is worthy of recognition because her poetry is more real than Kaur’s; however, “Shire’s poetry is often overlooked because of the sheer ubiquity of Instapoetry” (Hathaway, 2019).

Hathaway (2019) directs a scathing tirade against Antipoets who are not real poets and who, at the same time, drag people’s attention away from professional poetry:

While many argue that Instapoetry has made poetry a more accessible genre as a whole, it has merely replaced what many people think of as poetry. When Instagram users begin to read Instapoetry, they rarely branch out into traditional poetry or even the works of contemporary poets. Instead, they look for more Instapoetry to read. If Instapoets such as Kaur could use their platform to highlight the works of professional poets such as Shire, perhaps this dynamic could change. Even better, Instapoets could begin to treat their writings with real dedication, just as professional poets do. In other words, if Instapoets could become “real” poets, they could save the future of poetry.

In his article “‘Instapoetry’ may be popular, but most of it is terrible”, Thomas Hodgkinson (2019) criticizes Instapoetry despite the fact that it has pushed poetry sales tremendously. He quoted a sample by Christopher Poindexter, an Instapoet with 360,000 followers, directing his criticism against Instapoetry at large. “Clichéd, banal, derivative, portentous, repetitive and manipulative. I’m not talking about Poindexter’s poem, in whose second line I take a perverse delight. I’m talking about Instapoetry in general. Is this subjective? Yes, of course. But that’s all we have”. He adds two more samples by R.M. Drake and Najwa Zebian as evidences that Instapoetry lacks form. Insta fans do not pay attention to the style of writing. All that concerns them is “how the content made them feel” (Hodgkinson, 2019). Although he criticizes many famous Instapoets, including Sin and Atticus, Hodgkinson (2019) praised Kaur’s poetry “in accumulative form, her poems seemed to have a rare honesty”. He sees that Instapoetry is in its infancy and should not be judged yet.

Cecil Fasham’s (2019) description of her experience of writing Instapoetry highlights many characteristics of the subgenre:

As I went about the experiment I wrote “poems” that were dashed out in moments. They were highly formulaic, cliché-filled, and conforming to the stylistic and semantic tropes of “Instapoetry”. My feed became a careful curation of simple sentences split up with a line-break or two, presented neatly centered in a square with carefully curated backgrounds and fonts, covering the familiar topics of Instapoetry (romance, heartbreak, didactic messages of self-love), and using the common imagery—moon, stars, ocean, wildflowers, honey etc.

Although in ten days only she had hundreds of followers, she described her experience of writing Instapoetry as “disheartening” because this type of poetry is narcissistic, money-oriented and manipulated by Instagram to suit the likes of the audience. She concluded her article by stressing the detracting nature of Instapoetry: “so far, from what I’ve seen, Instagram poetry has created a poetic movement focused on bite-size clichés rather than originality”.

The very title of Rebecca Watts’s (2018) “The Cult of Noble Amateur” bears a scathing tirade to Instapoets who are describes as “Noble Amateur”, a term that recalls to mind “the Noble Savage”. For Rebecca, Instapoetry is artless and it is in vogue because “artless poetry sells”. Watts rejects the redefinition of poetry as ‘short form communication’ and she insists that poetry is an artform and honesty is not an aesthetic quality. She discusses the falsification of poetic truth and gives examples: Hollie McNish, a poet, and Don Paterson, an editor. Watts (2018) concludes her article: “we must stop celebrating amateurism and ignorance in our poetry”.

1.4 Rupi Kaur’s Milk and Honey

The first thing notable about those who support Instapoetry is that it has a formative impact on economy. “No one can deny Instapoetry’s influence on the market in recent years, putting books by Instapoets like R. H. Sin and Gabbie Hanna on prominent shelves” (Shymanski, 2020). To the same effect Alkhalby (2019) added “In fact, so-called “Instapoets” made up 12 of the top 20 best-selling poets in 2017”. Instapoetry plays the role of the base

that is exploited by the superstructure (publishing houses business and social media specially Instagram) and the role of the emergent genre, a literary class that struggles against the residual and the dominant. The economic exploitation of social media agencies affects the presentation of the poetic content. “Social media, however, tends to favor smaller units of content as many accounts compete for the limited attention of users. Platforms reinforce this tendency with character limits, dense layouts and systems of ranking posts with an eye for maximizing advertising revenue at the expense of long-form content” (Alkhalby, 2019). Platforms practice hegemony as they force Instapoets to accept these conditions for getting published.

Milk and Honey is divided into four parts: “the hurting”, “the loving”, “the breaking” and “the healing”, each with a different purpose. The deviation from basics of poetic writing, “the familiar cliches of Instagram poetry” (Pâquet, 2019, p. 301), make it difficult for Instapoetry to be incorporated into the dominant literary canon. The book discusses themes such as love, loss, trauma, abuse, healing and femininity, highlighting hard times and pinpointing sweetness in them. Part one, “the hurting”, opens with lines that discuss kindness and show the importance of being kind even to the unkind. The second poem discusses a child’s first kiss and the feeling of being empty that is experienced even by the adults. The following poem draws upon a more complicated image of the futility of sex without love, “with a vacant body empty enough/for guests but no one/ever comes and is/willing to stay” (Kaur, 2015, p. 9). The antithetical relation between “comes” and “stay” stress the tedium of a loveless sexual experience. She further illustrates this point in another poem “i’ve had sex she said/but i don’t know/what making love feels like” (Kaur, 2015, p. 17). She concludes that sex without love “is rape” (2015, p. 19). She supports those who have been raped saying, “it will not end you” (2015, p. 23). However, women are not safe from strangers as well as kinsmen’s sexual harassment: “even in a bed full of safety/we are afraid” (2015, p. 33). The traumatic experience of harassment by her father is recalled when she is with her lover: “i flinch when you touch me/i fear it is him” (2015, p. 38).

After portraying sexual harassment, she depicts parental love, making the father the first male love. However, she blames fathers later who yell at their daughters out of kindness as they make them grow trusting men who hurt them. Kaur (2015, p. 29) highlights maternal love:

your mother is
in the habit of
offering more love
than you can carry
your father is absent.

The above lines reveal a common human experience of valuing the love of one of the parents over the other. The father figure is a symbol of anger, rage and carelessness whereas the mother is a symbol of tenderness. This idea is developed in another poem which closes with “this rage is the one thing/i get from my father” (Kaur, 2015, p. 31). Father-mother relationship is blurred. She cannot tell if the mother loves or is terrified by the father as “it all/looks the same” (Kaur, 2015, p. 37). She criticizes alcoholic parents “who could not stay sober/enough to raise their kids” (Kaur, 2015, p. 36).

She discusses women abuse and draws an aural image of a muzzled woman: “you were so afraid/of my voice/i decided to be/afraid of it too” (Kaur, 2015, p. 14). The idea of silencing women is developed into another poem which stresses the unrelenting strength of women:

you tell me to quiet down cause
my opinions make me less beautiful
but i was not made with a fire in my belly
so i could be put out
i was not made with a lightness on my tongue
so i could be easy to swallow (Kaur, 2015, p. 27).

She defends women’s emotional as well as physical safety and shows that they have a right to protect themselves. Muzzling women is portrayed as a tradition in the family. The father orders the mother not to speak with her mouth full and “this is how the women in my family/learned to live with their mouths closed” (Kaur, 2015, p. 32).

The opening lines of part two, “the loving”, highlight family relationships especially to her pregnant mother. On page 55 the poem starts with “love will come” portrays the beauty of love and heralds the expected lover, which

is the theme of the poem on page 70 starts with “i need someone”. Only do these two poems show the spirit of poetry and have a rhythm that captures the reader and compel him to think over the meaning of love and the lover. She discusses man-woman love and highlights the importance of it: “you/are every hope/i’ve ever had/in human form” (Kaur, 2015, p. 44). An olfactory image crystallizes the way she sees her lover: “you smell like/earth/herbs/gardens” (Kaur, 2015, p. 45). Her life and hopes are centered around her lover. The voice of her lover is a source of safety: “nothing is safer/than the sound of you/reading out loud to me” (Kaur, 2015, p. 48). The aural image suggests perfect harmony. The sound of his voice gives her a sense of warmth. The harmonious perfection of this relationship is completed by a tactile image:

he placed his hands
 on my mind
 before reaching
 for my waist
 my hips
 or my lips
 he didn’t call me
 beautiful first
 he called me exquisite (Kaur, 2015, p. 49).

The tactile image starts with the intangible, the mind, then the physical touches follow: “the waist”, “hips”, “lips”. This order shows that they are matching body and soul. Sex as an expression of love is portrayed through a visual image that makes having sex with a lover is a kind of art: “the very thought of you/has my legs spread apart/like an easel with a canvas/begging for art” (Kaur, 2015, p. 52). Sensuous love is portrayed through an olfactory and gustatory image: “you look like you smell of/honey and no pain/let me have a taste of that” (Kaur, 2015, p. 61).

The third part, “the breaking” opens with an image of a breakup with a hopeless lover who falls to his death. The poet recalls a heated discussion between her and her mother about the speaker’s lover who was defiantly defended by the speaker against her mother’s doubts: “he still loves me” (Kaur, 2015, p. 76). Recollection of love memories are down-to-earth but they lack what differentiate them from prose, the spirit of poetry. However, few poems do express lovers’ breakup through vivid images:

the next time you
 have your coffee black
 you’ll taste the bitter
 state he left you in
 it will make you weep
 but you’ll never
 stop drinking
 you’d rather have the
 darkest parts of him
 than have nothing (Kaur, 2015, p. 83).

The traumatic experience of breakup is portrayed through a visual image of blackness supported by a gustatory image realized in “taste”, “bitter” and “drinking”.

Description of women’s resistance against a macho-based relationship illustrates the poet’s struggle for women’s equal rights in love as well as in life. The comparison the speaker held between how she sees herself and what the lover expects from her is meant to highlight women empowerment: “don’t come here with expectations/and try to make a vacation out of me” (Kaur, 2015, p. 91). The closing lines of the poem shutters the stereotypical image of a female. Women empowerment is further crystallized in a two-line poem: “i am a museum full of art/but you had your eyes shut” (Kaur, 2015, p. 94). The speaker believes in her infinite variety, a metaphor borrowed from Enobarbus’s description of Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, which is not realized or valued by the lover. Self-empowerment and discard of the stereotypical male gaze are further illustrated in another two-line poem: “i was music/but you had your ears cut off” (Kaur, 2015, p. 109).

The traumatic breakup shows itself when a lover has sex with another woman since his first beloved's name "rolls off your/tongue accidentally" (Kaur, 2015, p. 99). However, a woman's experience is more woebegone than a man's: "when my heart is broken/i don't grieve/i shatter" (Kaur, 2015, p. 103). A new facet of breakup is portrayed in a life-in-death relationship: "neither of us is happy/but neither of us wants to leave/so we keep breaking one another/and calling it love" (Kaur, 2015, p. 116). This love-hate relationship will surely end in a disaster; therefore, the lines suggest, breakup is better. After-breakup vulnerability is hammered in many poems such as: "he isn't coming back/whispered my head/he has to/sobbed my heart" (Kaur, 2015, p. 127). The above facets of a breakup do not show the function of poetry and the role of the poet clearly, though they comply with the Wordsworthian definition of poetry as a spontaneous outpouring of powerful feelings, which need to be recollected in tranquility.

The confessional nature of the opening lines of part four shows the speaker's dire need for healing. She tells her reader: "i am paying/for sins i don't/remember" (Kaur, 2015, p. 140). The speaker swings between her need for love and that of recovery from memories. She addresses herself: "you deserve more/than painful love" (Kaur, 2015, p. 144). Subsequent poems function as an important stage to reach a crescendo of a healing process, of self-confidence and independence. She addresses the reader "stay strong through your pain" (Kaur, 2015, p. 151) even if it means to "fall/in love/with your solitude" (Kaur, 2015, p. 154). After addressing women of color and discussing their history which is full of hardships, she touches upon B. T. Washington's and Langston Hughes's philosophy of self-acceptance in a two-line poem: "accept yourself/as you were designed" (Kaur, 2015, p. 166). Discussing such issues bring Kaur fame and makes her fulfill her role as a poet. "Kaur is a woman of color and appeals to a global audience of women whose voices may often be silenced and marginalized" (Pâquet, 2019, p. 305). However, poems on the body lack the complexity one finds in Stevie Smith's or in Carol Ann Duffy's poems. For example, her use of menstruation, "it is ungraceful of me/to mention my period in public" (Kaur, 2015, p. 171), is not so effective as Duffy's use of it in her poem "Mrs. Tiresias".

The speaker discusses women empowerment by highlighting the privacy of her body, "remind/that boy your body/is not his home" (Kaur, 2015, p. 158). Self-confidence, independence and empowerment complete the process of healing and the reader sees a portrait of a strong independent woman:

i like the way the stretch marks
 on my thighs look human and
 that we're so soft yet
 rough and jungle wild
 when we need to be
 i love that about us
 how capable we are of feeling
 how unafraid we are of breaking
 and tend to our wounds with grace
 just being a woman
 calling myself
 a woman
 makes me utterly whole
 and complete (Kaur, 2015, p. 162).

This sense of being complete is a result of woman's emancipation from a male-dominated society, from the objectifying gaze, from sexism and from all obstacles set in the way by a patriarchal society. She expresses her wish for all women to be "resilient/and striking" (Kaur, 2015, p. 185), to be successful "to gain/enough milk and honey/to help those around/me succeed" (Kaur, 2015, p. 193).

Lili Pâquet (2019, p. 299) pinpoints Kaur's aim behind writing Instapoetry, "the message to her followers is that Kaur has reached an inner peace that she can pass on to them, if only they buy her books of poetry". Had Kaur had enough time to study the art and function of poetry and the role of the poet, had she had the freedom to write with no restrictions from Instagram or publishers, had she written without focusing on creating self-branding in order to achieve economic gain, she would have produced good quality poetry that combines important areas of the residual and represents the concerns of the emergent.

2. Method and Methodology

2.1 Identifying Subsections

The method used in this paper is a comparative one under the umbrella of Marxist literary theory. Different literary criticism theories, representing the dominant literary canon that includes parts of the residual, are discussed in order to form a tool for verification, a measurement for Instapoetry which represents the emergent. The researcher works for establishing a paradigm for testing and judging new types of writing poetry. After setting the paradigm samples of *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur, the most famous Instapoet, are tested.

2.2 The Paradigm

The table shows how the emergent genre, viz., Instapoetry, can be measured against the selected areas of residual incorporated into the dominant literary canon. Incorporation of Instapoetry depends on the fulfillment of two main points: the function of poetry and the role of the poet. Each poem is analyzed in order to see to what extent it corresponds to the measurement.

Table 1. Measuring the emergent genre against the selected areas of residual

The dominant (including the residual)	Sticking to established forms	The function of poetry	The role of the poet	Sticking to established Forms (Yes/No)	The emergent (Instapoetry)		remarks
					Function: (Fulfilled/unfulfilled)	Role: (Fulfilled/unfulfilled)	
Plato		Celebrate the victors of the state	Support the state				
Aristotle		Imitate human life in a universal sense. Have a cathartic effect.	Tell what could happen, not what happened as it is the task of the historians. Imitate noble actions.				
Sidney		Imitate with the aim of teaching and delighting.	Show and entice man into entering into the right way; therefore, the poet deserves to be called a prophet.				
Shelley		Lead to men's pleasure and to lead men to "the light of life".	Teach and preach with the aim of man's perfection; and to be the unacknowledged legislators of the world.				

2.3 Marxist Literary Class Struggle

The emergence of Instapoetry which has been faced by a wave of disapproval when compared to established literary theories can be analyzed by Marxist literary theory which interprets a literary text as a response to political, economic and social conditions, something applies to the whole process of writing and publishing Instapoetry. Instapoems are mirrors of social values and act as propaganda which affect human beings who, from a Marxist perspective, are the product of their environment, be it social, economic or political. Capitalism has been propagated in the form of products advertised along with the published poems. The concept of Marxist propaganda has been developed into one of hegemony by Antonio Gramsci who sees that consent should be involved when one tries to convince people with an ideology. The Gramscian concept of ideology and hegemony has caused problem to his interpreters. Eagleton maintains that Gramsci causes ambiguity because his concept of hegemony sometimes means to win consent and other times means consent and coercion (Maglaras, 2013). Other critics see that Gramsci's concept of hegemony "appears to be the logical conclusion to his total political experience" (Bates, 1975, p. 351). Gramsci highlights the importance of ideas and their role in not only

eliminating class struggle but in causing a true class societies mobility.

In Marxist terms, Instapoets, and Instapoetry as a subgenre, function as the base or infrastructure whereas the superstructure (consciousness) consists of society, culture and literature (including established literary theories). Instapoetry (representing the base now) has been claimed to affect literature (an element of the superstructure). Instapoetry has been defended on the basis that it has withstood false consciousness and has brought new forms of poetry that correspond to contemporary society. In *Marxism and Literature*, Raymond Williams (1977, p. 123) discussed three types of competing hegemonies: the dominant (what literature is), the residual (established literary forms) and the emergent (Instapoetry actually). For Williams some part of the residual cultural from major areas is to be incorporated in the dominant culture in order for the latter “to make sense in these areas”. The handling of the dominant culture to the residual experience can be applied to literature. “This is very notable in the case of versions of ‘literary tradition’, passing through selective versions of the character of literature to connecting and incorporated definitions of what literature now is and should be” (Williams, 1977, p. 123). The pressures of incorporation are resisted in order to sustain residual meanings and values. Instapoetry, seen as an uneven “emergence of elements of a new cultural form” (Williams, 1977, p. 124), tries to play the double role of the emergent, viz., the “alternative or oppositional to dominant elements” (Williams, 1977, p. 124). Actually, the case of Instapoetry is similar to that of the labor class: “since the basis of incorporation, in such cases, is the effective predominance of received literary forms—an incorporation, so to say, which already conditions and limits the emergence” (Williams, 1977, p. 124). What complicates matters is that most of the time incorporation seems to be a form of acceptance which is supposedly to be made by the residual force, the established opinions of literary canons. In order to solve the problematality of defining and understanding the residual, the dominant and the emergent, Williams maintains: “no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention” (Williams, 1977, p. 125). Therefore, the modes of domination are selective and not representative of the full range of human practice. However, what has been selected can be seen as “the ruling definition of the social” (Williams, 1977, p. 125).

2.4 The Established Literary Canon and the Marxist the Residual, the Dominant and the Emergent

Established works of literary criticism that represent, in Marxist terms, the dominant and residual literature are discussed and compared in order for the emergent Instapoetry to be measured against them. Works from Plato’s *Republic* to Shelley’s *A Defence of Poetry* were discussed in order to highlight the characteristics and function of poetry and the role of the poet.

2.4.1 The Republic

Plato sees that poets are merely imitating an imitation when they write about an object in the material world. For Plato, a poet’s craft is “an inferior who marries an inferior and has an inferior offspring” (Sharma, 2018), because the poet is now two steps removed from reality. Plato concludes that these imitators of mere shadows cannot be trusted. For Plato, poets produce their art irrationally, relying on untrustworthy intuition rather than reason for their inspiration. Because such inspiration opposes reason and asserts that truth can be attained intuitively, Plato condemns all poets.

For Plato, the poets’ works are full of lies, an example is the *Iliad* which provides a bad example for the Greek citizen. However:

In the Platonic dialogues, the philosopher operates with three categories. The first category is that of the eternal and unchanging ideas; the second is the world of sense and the third category comprises such things as shadows, images in water and mirrors, and fine arts. Yet, the poet is superior to the moral philosopher and the historian as he is capable of moving his auditors more forcefully to virtue. The poet has got the general notion of the philosopher and the particular example of the historian (Aman, 1999, p. 63).

In *The Republic*, Plato ultimately concludes that the poets must be banished from Greek society. However, in “*Laws, Book VIII*, Plato recants the total banishment of poets from society, acknowledging the need for poets and their craft “to celebrate the victors’ of the state” (Bressler, 2011, p. 21). Plato maintains that “those poets “who are themselves good and honorable in the state” can be tolerated” (Bressler, 2011, p. 21). Therefore, Plato decrees poetry’s function and value in and for his society. Plato sees that: “poets must be supporters of the state or risk exile from their homeland. Being mere imitators of reality-in effect, good liars-these artisans and their craft must be religiously censured” (Bressler, 2011, p. 22).

2.4.2 The Poetics

In the first chapters of the *Poetics*, Aristotle developed “his theory of the serious style of poetry” (Carroll, 1893,

p. 17). He defended poets against Plato's accusations since the former did not see poets as liars and saboteurs whose work is a danger against their society. Aristotle provided systematic treatment to poetry and defended poets such as Homer from detractors. For Aristotle, poetry is the imitation of human life in a universal sense. "Thus, the objects of poetic representation are (a) real events, or (b) current traditions and popular belief, or (c) the ideal, the universal, 'the higher reality'" (Carroll, 1893, p. 17). Aristotle did not favor comedy and saw it as ugly; he was more concerned with tragedy which is "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament.... By language embellished, I mean language into which rhythm, harmony and song enter" (Koss, 1997, p. 10). For Aristotle, the poet's task is to tell what could happen, not what happened as it is the task of the historians. Aristotle distinguished between imitations carried out by poets according to the nature of the action imitated: noble or inferior; of course, he favored the former. True poetry expresses the universal not the particular. The cathartic nature of verse is important for Aristotle because it represents the role of poetry in life and how it can help human beings by giving them positive energy through purgation so that they can face and come over their problems. For Aristotle, "poetry is to be measured not by a moral but by a purely aesthetic standard" (Carroll, 1893, p. 18).

Aristotle's *Poetics* has been controversially received throughout ages. "The marginality that Aristotle's treatise acquired in late antiquity became even more pronounced in the Middle Ages" (Javitch, 1999, p. 54). However, in the fifteenth century, "manuscripts of Aristotle's Greek text were being copied, were circulating, and were being studied in Italy as early as 1470s" (Javitch, 1999, p. 54). Kenny (2013, p. 11), one of Aristotle's *Poetics* translators saw that Aristotle cared more for the content than the metrical form as "it is content rather than form that matters in poetry".

2.4.3 Sidney's Apology

Sir Philip Sidney's work was published under two titles: "The Defence of Poesie" and "An Apologie for Poetrie". He saw poetry superior to both philosophy and history: "neither philosopher nor historiographer could at the first have entered into the gates of popular judgments, if they had not taken a great passport of poetry" (Sidney, 2002, p. 83). Sidney further asserts: "Truly, Aristotle himself, in his Discourse of Poesy, plainly determineth this question, saying that poetry... is more philosophical and more studiously serious than history. His reason is, because poesy dealeth with katholou, that is to say with the universal consideration, and the history with kathekaston, the particular" (Sidney, 2002, p. 92). The poet was called vates, a prophet, by the Romans and a maker by the Greeks. He agrees with Aristotle that poetry is an art of imitation: "for so Aristotle termeth it in his word mimēsis, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end,—to teach and delight" (Sidney, 2002, p. 86) Sidney divides imitation into three kinds:

Of this have been three general kinds. The chief, both in antiquity and excellency, were they that did imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God... The second kind is of them that deal with matters philosophical, either moral, as Tyrtaeus, Phocylides, and Cato; or natural, as Lucretius and Virgil's Georgics; or astronomical, as Manilius and Pontanus; or historical, as Lucan... For these third be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight; and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, has been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be. These be they that, as the first and most noble sort may justly be termed vates (Sidney, 2002, pp. 86–87).

The poet who follows the last kind deserves, according to Sidney, to be called a prophet.

Sidney (2002, p. 95) describes the poet, whom he calls a monarch and gives convincing justification that sketches the characteristics of a good poet:

For he doth not only show the way, but gives so sweet a prospect into the way as will entice any man to enter into it. Nay, he doth, as if your journey should lie through a fair vineyard, at the very first give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste you may long to pass further. He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness. But he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well-enchancing skill of music; and with a tale.

For Sidney the poet delights and teaches, thus placing poetry above all arts and making it the sources of other learnings.

Sidney (2002, p. 102) listed many objections against the art of poetry, the most important of which, according to him, are:

First, that there being many other more fruitful knowledges, a man might better spend his time in them than in this. Secondly, that it is the mother of lies. Thirdly, that it is the nurse of abuse, infecting us with many

pestilent desires, with a siren's sweetness drawing the mind to the serpent's tail of sinful fancies... And, lastly and chiefly, they cry out with an open mouth... that Plato banished them out of his Commonwealth.

Sidney (2002, pp. 103–107) refuted these objections and stressed the importance of poetry. At the end of his *Apology*, Sidney (2002, p. 116) defended poets and asked all his readers not to scorn or look down upon poets any more, but to:

believe, with Aristotle, that they were the ancient treasurers of the Grecians' divinity; to believe, with Bembo, that they were first bringers—in of all civility; to believe, with Scaliger, that no philosopher's precepts can sooner make you an honest man than the reading of Virgil; to believe, with Claverus, the translator of Cornutus, that it pleased the Heavenly Deity by Hesiod and Homer, under the veil of fables, to give us all knowledge, logic, rhetoric, philosophy natural and moral, and *quid non?* to believe, with me, that there are many mysteries contained in Poetry which of purpose were written darkly, lest by profane wits it should be abused; to believe, with Landino, that they are so beloved of the gods, that whatsoever they write proceeds of a divine fury; lastly, to believe themselves, when they tell you they will make you immortal by their verses.

When all is said, it is noteworthy that in the *Apology* Sidney synthesized ideas taken from Aristotle, Horace and others in order to form his own theory of poetry. Therefore, rules deduced from the *Apology* is of hybrid nature and a summary of older theories than Sidney's. The Aristotelian mimesis is illustrated in sonnet 31 from Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*. Sidney initiated the concept of the golden world which the poet, as maker, delivers to his readers. The concept has been developed by Blake, Pound and Yeats (Pryor, 2011, pp. 13–14). In 1595, Thomas Churchyard wrote a 117-quatrain poem titled "A Praise of Poetry" based on Sidney's *Apology* and considered an apology for poetry by poetry itself: "Churchyard praises Sidney's poet in order to overcome himself" (Shifflett, 2016, p. 25). Truly, Sidney sympathizes with the peerless poet when defeated and discarded and curses his oppressors; however, his "short list of cursed figures", which is "reminiscent of Ovid's catalog of victims" (Shifflett, 2016, p. 38) or his cursed reader cannot be conducive to a pessimistic end which, as Shifflett suggests, concludes the *Apology* which ends in "in images of meaningless death and sexual frustration. Both images are suggestive of dynastic and cultural failure" (Shifflett, 2016, p. 38).

2.4.4 Defence

Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" was a response to Thomas Love Peacock's "Four Ages of Poetry", an essay which claimed that poetry is valueless in an age of scientific discoveries. Shelley refuted this claim by stressing the importance of reason and imagination in order to create a complete vision of the world. For Shelley, one of poetry's functions is to strengthen imagination: "Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb" (Shelley, 1891, p. 14). Shelley (1891, p. 46) exalts the role of poetry so much that poets are regarded as prophets:

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

The poet is a teacher and a preacher whose poetry aims at the perfection of man. Poetry leads to men's pleasure and leads men to "the light of life" (Shelley, 1891, p. 22).

Although, in the *Defence*, Shelley points out the role of poetry in supporting religion, "Shelley does not assign a didactic role to poetry. For him, poetry ought to be a pleasing vehicle rather than a means of instruction. He depreciates teaching that uses moral proposition" (Aman, 1999, p. 59). A poet is the spokesman of his people, who is concerned with their problems and works hard to find solutions. Shelley was influenced by the Platonic concept of the poet; however, for him "the poet is superior to the moral philosopher and the historian as he is capable of moving his auditors more forcefully to virtue. The poet has got the general notion of the philosopher and the particular example of the historian" (Aman, 1999, p. 63). In *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams (1971, p. 332) differentiates between Plato and Shelley concerning achieving the highest good, highlighting the latter's image of a poet who socializes with his people and speaks their thoughts. It is noteworthy that the main difference between Plato and Shelley lies in the appreciation of the poet who is a liar for the former and a prophet for the latter.

3. Results

Table 2. Analysis of Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey* yields the below results

The dominant (including the residual)	Sticking to established forms	The function of poetry	The role of the poet	Sticking to established Forms (Yes/No)	The emergent (<i>Milk and Honey</i>)		remarks
					Function: (Fulfilled/unfulfilled)	Role: (Fulfilled/unfulfilled)	
Plato		Celebrate the victors of the state	Support the state	No	Unfulfilled	Unfulfilled	The book is about human feelings and experiences, things unfavored by Plato.
Aristotle		Imitate human life in a universal sense. Have a cathartic effect.	Tell what could happen, not what happened as it is the task of the historians. Imitate noble actions.	No	Unfulfilled	Unfulfilled	Themes are not portrayed from a universal perspective and Kaur's Indian culture colors many pages.
Sidney		Imitate with the aim of teaching and delighting.	Show and entice man into entering into the right way; therefore, the poet deserves to be called a prophet.	No	Partially fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	Some common human themes are discussed for delight and advice.
Shelley		Lead to men's pleasure and to lead men to "the light of life".	Teach and preach with the aim of man's perfection; and to be the unacknowledged legislators of the world.	No	Partially fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	Some common human themes are discussed for delight and advice.

Milk and Honey shows no compliance with Plato's as well as Aristotle's concept of poetry/poets. However, it touches upon Sidney's and Shelley's since it discusses common human problems with the aim of teaching readers and showing them the way. *Milk and Honey* and Instapoetry at large do not use any traditional form of writing poetry. Many important themes such as family relationships, man-woman love, feminism and women empowerment are discussed. Many poems lack the poetic style and barley can be called poetry. However, few pieces can be called poetry, as they show artistic features such Kaur's use of imagery. Prose pieces that are dispersed in the four parts of the book further distort Kaur's poetic endeavor. In part one, pp. 34–35, and part two, pp.72–73, Kaur provides two pieces of prose which mar the few beautiful examples of real poetry. Prose passages that discuss memories of a love relationship and the effects of a breakup recur in part three on pages 78, 82, 102, 126, 132. Page 136 provides a prescription for overcoming a breakup. All pages do not show any characteristics of poetry nor do they live up to the mark of good prose. In part four, many poems are irrelevant and lead the reader astray from the focal point of the part, viz., healing. Instapoetry is wanting; its content and form are controlled by a crave for making more many rather than presenting good quality poetry. However, an insta technique may justify the issues of content and form: "Instagram poetry is further legitimized by the way in which its practitioners employ poetic techniques of ekphrasis" (Pâquet, 2019, p. 296).

4. Discussion

4.1 Examination of Results

Milk and Honey, an example of Instapoetry, has been measured against Plato's, Aristotle's, Sidney's and Shelley's theories of the function of poetry and the role of the poet. The results and discussion reveal that this emergent subgenre is affected by Instagram and publisher's strategies which are mostly economic. As a subgenre, Instapoetry will take a fairly long time in order to be incorporated into the dominant literary canon. In order for this incorporation to take place more attention should be given by Instapoets to the art of poetry; less pressure should be exercised by Instagram and publishers on Instapoets, thus giving them liberty in using suitable content and form.

4.2 Reliability of the Study

The study uses a comparative approach that focuses on two definite points, viz., the function of poetry and the role of the poet. The study considers the influences of factors such as Instagram and publishers on the process of writing.

4.3 Limitations

In order to build the above paradigm, the researcher considers the above theories of poetry as he sees them the most important ones that have discussed the function of poetry and the role of the poet; however, other theories may be of use. The researcher analyzes one book by the most famous Instapoet; however, there are other books written by other Instapoets.

4.4 Challenges for Further Research

Future studies can be conducted on developing the paradigm in order to include more artistic features of Instapoetry that will be incorporated in the dominant literature. Therefore, studies can include many poets at a time and results will be relevant to Instapoets at large.

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