Narrative Authority, Paratext, and Identity in R. F. Kuang's *Yellowface*

Nadira Puškar Mustafić[1]
International University of Sarajevo

Abstract
In this paper, I use a narratological approach to analyse the use of metafiction, untrustworthy first-person narration, and paratext in R.F. Kuang's *Yellowface* (2023). The novel's self-referential highlighting of authorship as a constructed act of performance places it in the context of metafiction, as defined by Patricia Waugh and Linda Hutcheon. Wayne C. Booth, James Phelan, and Greta Olson help explain the degrees and effects of unreliable narration in the novel. June Hayward, its central character, transforms from a first-person unreliable narrator into an untrustworthy one. According to Gérard Genette, paratext, or material surrounding stories, influences how they are received and may destabilise their narrative authority. *Yellowface* exposes how the publishing industry and digital discourse shape the circulation of racialised narratives in the novel. Together, these perspectives show that *Yellowface* presents narrative authority as a product of form, institutional mediation, and reader response.

Keywords
Metafictional narration, paratextual framing, untrustworthy first-person narration, narrative authority, racialised publishing, R. F. Kuang's *Yellowface*

Introduction

R. F. Kuang's *Yellowface* (2023) drew attention even before its publication, partly because of its provocative title and partly because its author was already known as both a novelist and a scholar. Her education at Georgetown, Cambridge, Oxford, and Yale, together with the success of *The Poppy War* trilogy and *Babel*, created anticipation surrounding the novel (Kuang, "About"). In *Yellowface*, June Hayward steals and publishes the manuscript of her recently deceased Asian

[1] **Nadira Puškar Mustafić**, PhD, teaches English Language and Literature and coordinates the Cultural Studies Program at the International University of Sarajevo. Her research interests include postcolonial theory, Asian American literature, narratology, adaptation studies, and contemporary American drama. She is the author of *Tears in the Audience: Catharsis in Contemporary Auto/Biographical American Drama* (2020). Among her journal articles are "Reshaping Identities Through Irony in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck*" (2026) and "Deconstructing the American Dream: Race, Class, and Power in Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere*" (2025). Email: npuskar-mustafic@ius.edu.ba

American colleague, Athena Liu. Although June is white, she eventually agrees with the publishing industry's strategy to market her authorial persona under the more racially ambiguous name of Juniper Song, one more strongly associated with Athena's identity and authority. To justify herself and evoke the reader's empathy, June admits the theft, claiming she acted impulsively. However, after the confession, she repeatedly has tongue slips and acts contradictory to her stated remorse, uncovering her hidden resentment towards Athena.

One of the major questions the novel raises is how identity can shape literary reception and influence the market value. This mirrors the real-world controversies surrounding white authors' use of Asian literary identities, such as Yi-Fen Chou and Araki Yasusada. In the case of Yi-Fen Chou, Michael Derrick Hudson claimed his poem was accepted only after he submitted it under a Chinese name. The Araki Yasusada case is different but related: the persona was presented as a Japanese Hiroshima survivor, while the works were later associated with Kent Johnson and debated as a literary hoax involving fabricated ethnic, historical, and authorial identity (Orr; Osofsky). Zoe Hu and Terry Nguyen recognise similar debates about impersonation, plagiarism, privilege, and social-media culture in *Yellowface* but conclude that it fails to criticise them effectively (Hu; Nguyen).

Yellowface has received positive reviews for its use of satire to expose the exploitative publishing industry and its treatment of authorship. Anthony Cummins describes the novel as "a wickedly funny publishing thriller" with a narrator whose voice moves between confession and self-justification thus creating an effective narrative tension (Cummins). Leanne Ogasawara notes that the novel exposes the publishing industry's performative inclusivity which still controls the market by deciding which stories to tell or erase (Ogasawara). Kuang makes a similar point in an interview with Rebecca Liu, arguing that debates about who has the right to tell stories outside one's own race or lived experience can conceal the structural inequalities that shape literary production in the first place (Liu).

Analysing *Yellowface* through cultural and media theory is prevalent in scholarly debates. Banita Devi and Riangsuiliu Panmei praise the novel for its effective criticism of the mainstream publishing, which moulds minority voices into their more universal versions, but often at the cost of their cultural authenticity (3011–13). Their reading is useful because it shows that the problem in the novel is not only that June steals another author's work, but also that the industry is ready to repackage the minority experience in forms that are easier to market and sell. Mangesh Bhaurao Shamkure chooses to focus on how the novel

exposes the flaws of cancel culture, which encourages an online outrage that can produce moral judgement while obscuring institutional responsibility (1–3).

While these reviews and early scholarly discussions are valuable for identifying the novel's major themes, especially cultural appropriation, cancel culture, and publishing inequality, they pay less attention to how the novel makes these issues visible through narrative form. In *Yellowface*, June is not simply emotionally biased. She knows but evades the truth by carefully selecting the narrative's order and details. By often contradicting herself, she exposes how authors construct rather than simply state the truth. The novel also shows stages through which a story becomes public, from its writing, editing, to packaging, reviewing, marketing and online circulation. In this paper, I examine how Kuang combines metafiction, paratext, and untrustworthy first-person narration to question the production of narrative authority. In *Yellowface,* authorship is constructed by an industry that commodifies identity and rewards performance over substance.

Metafiction, paratext, and narrative reliability

This paper combines several narratological approaches: metafiction, paratext, and unreliable and untrustworthy first-person narration. This is useful since authorship, as depicted in *Yellowface*, is not firmly owned by a single writer or narrator. Instead, the novel reveals that it is constructed through writing, publication, reception, and judgement. Together, these concepts illuminate how *Yellowface* deconstructs the production and circulation of minority stories within a commercial literary system.

Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as writing that questions relationship between fiction and reality by "self-consciously and systematically drawing attention to its status as an artefact" (2). This reflexivity is further emphasised by Linda Hutcheon, who explains that metafiction includes within itself commentary on its own narrative or linguistic identity, making "the process of narration part of the action" (5). Her discussion reveals irony as inherent to self-reflexive fiction, in which narrative techniques both construct an illusion and make that construction visible. Metafictional framing in *Yellowface* is not only used to comment on narrative procedures but also to uncover the techniques through which narrative authority is claimed. June Hayward illustrates this by exposing how drafting, revising, or performing an identity can shape the version of truth that readers are invited, and sometimes even pressured, to accept.

Readers' interpretations of a text are not only shaped by its writing style but also by how it is marketed and reviewed by critics and public. Gérard Genette's concept of paratext, which is defined as verbal and nonverbal elements

that surround, extend, and secure a text's presence in the world, connects to this logic. These "thresholds" or "vestibules," as Genette calls them, represent a bridge between the inside and the outside of the text (1–2); they can include titles, acknowledgements, interviews, and other forms of public discourse that influence how a work will be read before or alongside the actual reading (1, 3–5). Although Genette does not mention digital platforms as paratext, his definition is useful for analysing the contemporary publishing industry, in which marketing and online discourse influence a narrative's reception. In *Yellowface*, paratext helps shape June Hayward's authorial identity.

Wayne C. Booth defines narrative unreliability as the gap between a narrator's version of a story and the ethical norms implied by the text, which influences a story's emotional and moral effects (159, 274–75). James Phelan expands Booth's definition by distinguishing among unreliable reporting, reading, and interpreting, drawing attention to the ways narrators manage disclosure to influence the reader's assessment (50). The two models illuminate how narrators manipulate a reader's perception not only through what they say but also through what they omit or fabricate.

Greta Olson discerns additional layers of unreliable narration. Fallible narrators are simply mistaken in their judgement and therefore deserve a certain amount of the reader's trust. Untrustworthy narrators, on the other hand, are continually inconsistent and invite readers to question and revise everything they say (103–04). June Hayward is clearly an untrustworthy narrator. She constantly omits events or deliberately reframes her actions only to contradict herself. This kind of behaviour requires constant reader scrutiny to separate actual events from the version she constructs.

Taken together, the selected frameworks clarify how *Yellowface* questions narrative authority. Metafiction draws attention to the act of writing, paratext reveals the institutional conventions of circulation and reception, and narration theory exposes how June's first-person voice attempts to direct moral judgement. Authorship thus appears as a product of form, framing, and market logic rather than an expression of intent.

Metafiction and the making of the authorial self

In *Yellowface*, Kuang uses metafiction to expose how authorship is often performed, revised, and used as a self-defence strategy. June Hayward makes her drafting and editing visible; however, she does not only do it to reveal her writing process but also to construct an authorial identity that later repeatedly must be justified. These metafictional moments do not interrupt the plot but increase the

tension of the central ethical conflict: the gap between performed authorship and an author's ethical responsibility.

June first introduces herself to the reader as an ordinary girl, "just brown-eyed, brown-haired June Hayward, from Philly" (6), right after claiming that publishing "picks a winner" based on traits that have "nothing to do with the strength of one's prose" (5–6). By framing herself as overlooked, excluded, and professionally wronged, she appeals to the feelings of an ordinary person, deliberately contrasting herself with the harsh and unfair standards of the publishing industry. In retrospect, as June's strategic storytelling becomes more noticeable, this moment is clearly metafictional since June draws attention to the construction of her narrative identity. She does not only describe herself as plain and lacking self-confidence to tell a story but also to elicit the reader's empathy. In this way, authorship itself becomes part of the story she is constructing. When she steals Athena's manuscript, as an experienced storyteller, she anticipates that readers will judge her, so she intercepts their reaction by performing honesty and vulnerability. This makes her self-portrayal visibly unreliable, especially when she jumps from describing her bitterness over professional exclusion to recalling the immediate crisis of Athena's death.

June's narrating skills are highlighted when she turns the description of Athena's death into a self-protective narration. When Athena starts choking on pancakes, June claims that she tries to save her "again and again," only to conclude that it "isn't working" (17). However, when she later provides the details of the tragic event, it becomes evident she uses the narrative of feeling overwhelmed and panicked to mask her indifference to Athena's pain. By the time the EMTs arrive, June is less focused on Athena's death than on the possibility that she might be arrested (18–20). This matters not only because June had already stolen Athena's manuscript, but also because it shows how early she begins to arrange events around her own innocence. In the context of the novel's metafictional framework, it is significant because the narrative does not simply state what happened but shows how writers use narrative strategies to influence the reader's interpretation. Before the theft, June carefully chooses language and orders the events to support the story of her vulnerability. When she publicly becomes *The Last Front*'s author, she continues using the same narrative pattern, demonstrating that her authorship identity depends on rehearsal, visibility, and performance. She defends herself against the readers she imagines will judge her: "I know what you're thinking. Thief. Plagiarizer… Racist. Hear me out" (36). By doing this, she turns the theft into a narrative problem that can be rationalised.

June's changing assessment of Athena's manuscript also helps her excuse what she has done. At first, she praises the manuscript as a "masterpiece" (27),

only to later diminish it as unpolished, claiming a high moral ground by stating she "finished it according to the style of the original" (36). In this way, she rewrites the theft as editorial work and presents herself as the saviour who gives the work "a chance to go out into the world" (37). Her direct address to the anticipated reader exposes the defensive structure of this argument: "Is that justification enough for you? Or are you still convinced that I'm some racist thief?" (38). However, she is not truly inviting ethical judgement but trying to control the terms on which it will take place. Alleged general resentment toward Athena, including her own, helps June to imagine herself as morally entitled, especially when she claims that working on Athena's prose "felt like reparations" (39). Through this, she reshapes her theft into a form of compensation. When she does not report on the theft, but constantly seeks its justification, June consciously creates a narrative frame, which connects to Hutcheon's understanding of metafiction as a mode in which narration itself becomes part of the action.

The authorship in the novel depends on rehearsal, performance, and public visibility, which becomes clearer after June starts appearing as the author of *The Last Front*. As the book becomes a bestseller and receives award nominations, June starts imitating Athena's behaviour she once claimed to despise. She admits that she rereads nomination emails "several times a day," lingering over the words "Dear Ms. Song, we are delighted to inform you," and even rehearses an acceptance speech modelled on Athena's style (123). This is metafictional because June does not only care about the book as she initially claimed. She is also learning how to perform the role of the successful author. This awareness becomes even more pronounced after she is accused of plagiarising Athena's work. Instead of focusing on the moral implications of the theft, she imagines how the scandal will be written about, archived, and circulated through Wikipedia pages, memes, and public commentary (137–39). She behaves the same way at the Virginia panel, where she appears as an invited speaker on East Asia-inspired stories after the allegations about her plagiarism of *The Last Front* have already begun circulating. During the panel, one of the speakers, Diana Qiu, directly challenges June by asking whether she has "a problem with unacknowledged Asian labor," and then links the question to Athena by saying that stealing words from a dead woman is also wrong. As audience members begin photographing and recording the exchange, June thinks less about the accusation itself than about its public circulation and the humiliation it will cause (159–60). By treating every public moment as an event that can be managed, revised, and connected to her self-protecting version of the story, she turns narration into the part of an action in Hutcheon's sense.

June's narration also makes her role as an "author" appear in the making. Often without meaning to, she reveals how a carefully constructed narrative can mislead the reader to see someone as misunderstood rather than guilty. Therefore, metafiction in *Yellowface* is not decorative; it exposes authorship as performance. June constantly draws attention to the artificiality of her storytelling by confessing, justifying herself, and selectively omitting its parts. She writes and rewrites, and frequently comments on how stories work, which reinforces the idea that she is attempting to author both her book and her own moral narrative. In Hutcheon's and Waugh's sense, *Yellowface* makes narration part of the action and exposes authorship as a constructed performance. The metafictional frame highlights the ethical tensions present in June's version of events, which leads directly into the question of June's narrative reliability, since her metafictional self-portrayal depends on constant revising, excusing, and distorting her own actions.

Unreliable and untrustworthy narration as self-exoneration

June Hayward uses first-person narration as a strategy of self-presentation and self-exoneration. To deflect blame and shape the reader's ethical judgement, she depicts herself as an insecure, struggling writer, filled with professional disappointment. From the beginning of the novel, June narrates herself as a victim of an unfair literary marketplace, but her own account exposes resentment, envy, and moral evasion. The gap between June's version of events and the ethical meaning produced by the narrative marks her transformation from an unreliable towards an untrustworthy narrator.

From June's perspective, Athena "has everything," from major publishing contracts to prestigious award nominations (1). She initially admires her but soon becomes jealous and hostile in her fantasies. To justify herself, she appeals to readers' ordinariness and insecurity contrasting their lives with the life of Athena who is difficult to like because she "outshines" everyone around her (2). She then admits that part of her wishes Athena were dead (2). These tongue slips contradict June's repeated claims that Athena is her friend. Read through Booth's model, this pattern exposes a widening gap between June's self-presentation of an insecure friend and the ethical position implied by the narrative itself.

June's unreliability becomes apparent even before Athena's death, especially in the rooftop bar scene where her professional jealousy becomes inseparable from violent fantasy and self-victimisation. While celebrating Athena's Netflix deal, June presents herself as inferior to Athena and resents her for not being capable of recognising her own privilege (8). When Athena praises

her supportive editor, June's thoughts become violent: She imagines peeling Athena's skin "like an orange" and wearing it (8). The exposed hostility is important since it foreshadows June's transformation from an unreliable into an untrustworthy narrator. She justifies her resentment by exaggerating her overlooked position in the publishing industry by contrasting Athena's powerful editor with her own, who does not seem to care about her at all. However, her account also reveals that she has access to agents, editors, publication, and literary spaces. The contrast between what her narration shows and her self-presentation illustrates Phelan's idea of unreliable evaluation: She deliberately portrays herself as a victim.

When June later describes the stealing and editing of Athena's novel, she does not do it to confess but to strengthen the account of her alleged victimhood. She initially praises Athena's prose as brilliant but quickly changes her mind, claiming that it "needs work" (27–28). This allows her to rewrite herself from *The Last Front*'s reader into its editor, co-author, and eventually saviour. She even reframes the theft into her "divinely ordained" responsibility (29). To further conceal her immorality, June presents her rewriting as innocent editing, claiming that she is only trying to "fill in the blanks" (29). Following the same logic, she later publishes the novel under her own name arguing that "without [her], the book might never see the light of day" (31). Her version of the story reframes the theft as loyalty, even though Athena's name disappears from the title page of the novel. This is not an accidental misinterpretation but an unreliable evaluation; June redefines theft as friendship and expects the reader to accept it. Read through Olson's theory, June's narration is ethically untrustworthy because her account repeatedly clashes with the moral position the novel implies.

After *The Last Front* is published, June presents its success as proof that the theft was somehow justified and interprets rewards that follow as something she believes she had been denied for too long. Publishing the novel, then, allows her to begin "living Athena's life" (34–35). This metaphor, in retrospect, reveals that her earlier fantasy of wearing Athena's skin has, in a way, come true. Regardless of all signs pointing to her as an undeserved beneficiary of someone else's work, she continues to present herself as an underdog who has finally been recognised. The contrast between what she tells herself and what the novel shows becomes the main sign of her untrustworthiness.

June's later acts of appropriation show that her self-exonerating narration has become openly untrustworthy. Even after she has been accused of plagiarising Athena's work, she continues to appropriate Athena's ideas by rebranding one of her unpublished stories as "Mother Witch" (199). When other writers recognise parts of the story from Athena's workshop, June still refuses to

see this as evidence of theft. Instead, she accuses Athena of stealing from others, suggesting that she therefore does not deserve sympathy (206). When an online account @AthenaLiusGhost begins exposing her, June creates a fake website and social media account to identify the user, but once she creates a theory, she treats her own assumptions as established facts (176). These events show that she is no longer only misinterpreting events but actively produces explanations to protect the version of herself she wants to preserve. This aligns with Phelan's unreliable reading and interpretation since June reads both evidence and accusation through the need to appear innocent.

June's untrustworthiness is clearest in how she responds to the online attacks on Athena's reputation. She keeps tracking the TikTok videos, YouTube commentary, and Twitter threads that portray Athena as morally compromised but does not respond to them (172–73). Instead, she uses them to promote her own beliefs about Athena. When June says that Athena "was too pretty, too successful, too suspiciously clean," she interprets the backlash as a punishment Athena somehow deserved (173). Her pleasure becomes impossible to hide when she admits, "I'll confess, I'm enjoying this a bit" (173). At this point, June's narration does more than defend her own actions. It joins in the public destruction of Athena's reputation. By accepting the online attacks as moral correction, June shifts blame away from her own theft and turns Athena into the guilty figure.

June's slips of the tongue remove any possibility of her previous claims of grieving for Athena and being her loyal friend. The pattern she uses to exonerate herself by ruining Athena's reputation is present from the opening chapters. At the same time, she repeatedly slips into aggressive, envious, and vindictive thoughts about Athena. Her attempts to manipulate an implied reader into taking her side have the opposite effect. The instability of her narration becomes most visible in how quickly and often she changes her moods, shifting between self-pity and triumph, between victimhood and retaliation.

Using the shifts described in June's narration, Kuang crafts not only an unreliable narrator in Booth's technical sense but also an untrustworthy one described by Olson. As a writer, June knows how to use storytelling to manipulate the reader into accepting inaccurate versions of events. She omits key details, heightens her emotional responses, and revisits earlier events in ways that cast her actions in a more favourable light. June's immoral actions and feelings of resentment towards Athena contradict her narration; she is not sharing her story to tell the truth but to defend herself from it. Therefore, Booth, Phelan, and Olson's definitions of narrative reliability help illuminate why June's account cannot be trusted, especially for what it tries to make the reader accept.

Essentially, her storytelling depends more on persuasion and performance than on facts. This pressure placed on the reader also leads into the novel's illustration of paratext, where meaning is shaped not only by June's voice, but also by the public, commercial, and digital frames that surround the text.

Paratext, industry, and the marketplace of identity

Narrative authority is not only questioned through June's untrustworthy narration, but also through materials surrounding *The Last Front*. When June becomes known as its author, the book starts circling the public space through blurbs, launch events, interviews, reviews, social media posts, and digital commentary, which begins to influence how the book will be interpreted even before it is read. In this context, Genette's concept of paratext helps with explaining how materials around a literary work guide interpretation and shape its public meaning. In *Yellowface*, these paratextual frames are important because they help produce June's image of an author, while they gradually displace Athena's role in the novel's creation.

After *The Last Front* is launched, it becomes apparent that June's authorial identity is built through her public performance, as much as through success of the actual book. To support June's public image of a successful author, her publishing house sends her a congratulatory card and a gift, which June then posts on Instagram, to further perform the success (77–78). She suppresses her awareness of the book's unethical origin, and chooses to focus on its online evaluation, such as clicks and likes. Therefore, the launch itself functions as a paratextual event. A similar pattern is repeated at the promotional event at Politics and Prose in Washington, DC. When June enters the crowded room, she notices the audience's silence and attention, which she reads as proof that she has become a respectable author (80–81). The way she speaks, dresses, and generally presents herself all becomes part of the authorial image she wants to inhabit. In this sense, the paratext does not simply market *The Last Front*. It helps produce June's public authorship by turning visibility into authority. The Q&A that follows makes this performance even clearer. The questions June receives do not unsettle her claim to authorship; they help confirm it. She answers with ease and privately enjoys the feeling that the audience is responding to her as the writer of *The Last Front* (81–82). At this point, authorship is no longer limited to the writing of the book. It also includes the public work of appearing as an author: speaking well, looking convincing, managing the room, and maintaining an attractive media presence. In this way, June herself becomes part of the book's paratext. She is not only presented as the producer of the text but also turned into one of the elements through which the text is sold and interpreted.

When two famous producers show interest in turning *The Last Front* into film, their main casting choice of a white celebrity, as well as making the film accessible to the more global, English-speaking market, exposes how the mainstream market turns minority voices into commodities. As they further suggest, box-office success of a film outweighs historical accuracy, which is why they choose a white lead, and reduce the Chinese protagonist to a loose casting category, treating Asian actors' "bad English" as a liability (129). The discussion of the book's film adaptation becomes another paratextual threshold here. Before the story even reaches a new audience, it is already being adapted to fit the mainstream assumptions about race, language, profit, and what the public is presumed to be willing to watch. Anticipated reception therefore becomes part of the frame that shapes the story in advance. The scene exposes a form of racism that is not limited to personal prejudice but built into the commercial logic through which minority histories are judged as more or less marketable.

June's reaction to the producers' suggestions shows how quickly she accepts racial erasure once the commercial future of *The Last Front* seems to depend on it. She does not defend the perspective of Chinese labourers the novel is based on. Instead, she praises the producers as experts and allows them to reshape the story in the way they see it fit (130). She even accepts their argument of "accessibility," suggesting that an American blockbuster audience would not be interested in a Chinese-language film about Chinese labourers (130). At this moment, June is not only a beneficiary of Athena's erasure but also complicit in turning minority histories into objects tailored to the tastes of white celebrities and global franchise logic. In the context of paratext, her reaction shows that narrative authority never fully belongs to the author. It is split between the agents, producers, marketers, and the public, who decide how a story will be packaged. In that process, showing the true history of Chinese labourers is overshadowed by the version of the story that promises more marketability. Related to Genette's concept of paratext, it shows how adaptation and its promotion influence the audience reception and help decide what racial and historical meanings are allowed to survive.

After the plagiarism scandal comes out, June starts checking online reactions and reading hostile messages obsessively, including those accusing her of racism (137). What is striking is that she does not seem to be frightened of the legal consequences of the theft, but the possibility that her authorial reputation will be rewritten and permanently ruined through Wikipedia entries, think pieces, and viral comments (137–38). June's authorship becomes a story she can no longer control. It is taken over by a wider paratextual network that records her, circulates her image, and gradually redefines who she is in public.

The online backlash against Athena is another form of paratext. As *Yellowface* shows, negative online commentary can destroy anyone's reputation through a carefully constructed narrative, even that of a deceased author. June uses her writing skills to depict Athena as a cold monster and write herself into the victim. When "disturbing, almost gleeful" comments about Athena's misconduct start, June does not try to defend her but secretly enjoys them (172). She takes advantage of the knowledge that the audience connects through a sense of shared moral authority by taking Athena down (173). Although she criticises them, she benefits from Athena's damaged reputation, since it makes her own theft easier to conceal. This case shows that paratext does not simply reflect public opinion but helps define culprits and victims.

As examples in *Yellowface* illustrate, paratext does not only surround the novel's events. It helps define the authority, perpetrators, victims, and stories worth writing about. June's authorial persona is not only constructed through narration. It is also moulded by launch events, marketing, film adaptation negotiations, reviews, social media, and online backlash. This is directly connected to the novel's metafictional moments.

While metafiction shows how June builds authorship from inside her own account, paratext shows how that authorship is promoted, challenged, and rewritten from the outside. The two strategies work together to expose a literary marketplace in which minority narratives can be packaged, consumed, and reshaped by those who benefit from them. In this context, the author is not a stable source of meaning, but a public figure continually produced through the changing spaces around the text.

Conclusion

In *Yellowface*, R.F. Kuang questions narrative authority through voice, narrative form, a text's public presentation, and reader response. By using first-person narration, June Hayward attempts to control the story, but the novel continues to point to places where that control becomes unstable. Her narration depends on what she omits, the contradictions she creates, and consequent revisions she uses to defend herself. These moments move her from an unreliable to an untrustworthy narrator in Greta Olson's sense; she is not simply mistaken but ethically compromised and manipulative. The more June tries to write herself into an author, a victim, and a rightful owner of the story she stole, the more her account must alter questions of authorship, race, and responsibility.

The novel's metafictional and paratextual moments extend this critique. Kuang constantly draws attention to a text's writing process, its marketing, and the way reception and online circulation invite us to question traditional

perceptions of authorship. *Yellowface* shows that authors are not the exclusive writers of their stories, since they are further shaped by publishers, market demand, reviews, readers, and public image associated with books and writers. June's story changes after her book is presented at launch events and after it receives positive and negative reviews as well as online comments. Through this, Kuang shows that writers can never fully control how their books will be read. As *Yellowface* illustrates, authorship is shaped by narrative choices, institutional power, and reader resistance; it is not a neutral act of expression.

Works Cited

Booth, Wayne C. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Cummins, Anthony. "*Yellowface* by Rebecca F. Kuang Review." *The Guardian*, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/may/21/yellowface-by-rebecca-f-kuang-a-wickedly-funny-publishing-thriller

Devi, N. B., and R. R. Panmei. "Media Representation and Cultural Appropriation in R. F. Kuang's *Yellowface*." *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2024, pp. 3011–3016. https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.3178

Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Hu, Zoe. "*Yellowface,* a satire of race and publishing, falls into its own trap." *The Washington Post*, 12 May 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/books/2023/05/12/yellowface-kuang-book-review/

Hutcheon, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. Routledge, 1991.

Kuang, R. F. "About." *R. F. Kuang*, www.rfkuang.com/about.

Kuang, R. F. *Yellowface*. The Borough Press, 2024.

Liu, Rebecca. "Rebecca F. Kuang: Who Has the Right to Tell a Story? It Is the Wrong Question to Ask." *The Guardian*, 20 May 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/may/20/ rebecca-f-kuang-who-has-a-right-to-tell-a-story-its-the-wrong-question-to-ask

Nguyen, Terry. "The Diversity Elevator: On RF Kuang's *Yellowface*." *Cleveland Review of Books*, 2023, https://www.clereviewofbooks.com/r-f-kuang-yellowface/

Ogasawara, Leanne. "RF Kuang's Novel *Yellowface* and Diversity in US Publishing." *3 Quarks Daily*, 2023. https://3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2023/07/rf-kuangs-novel-yellowface-and-diversity-in-us-publishing.html

Olson, Greta. "Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy

Narrators." *Narrative*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2003, pp. 93–109.

Orr, David. "Michael Derrick Hudson Posed as a 'Yi-Fen Chou': Did the Name Sell His Poem?" *The New York Times*, 10 Sept. 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/10/books/michael-derrick-hudson-posed-as-a-yi-fen-chou-did-the-name-sell-his-poem.html.

Osofsky, Luling. "Kent Johnson's / Araki Yasusada's / Tosa Motokiyu's 'Mad Daughter and Big-Bang.'" *The Paris Review*, 6 May 2013, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/05/06/kent-johnsons-araki-yasusadas-tosa-motokiyus-mad-daughter-and-the-big-bang/

Phelan, James. *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*. Cornell University Press, 2005.

Shamkure, Mangesh Bhaurao. "The Portrayal of Cancel Culture in *Yellowface* by R.F. Kuang" *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2023, pp. 1–5.

Waugh, Patricia. *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*. Routledge, 1984.