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Research ought to be active to create a major boundary in the academic world. It must enrich the neo-theoretical frame that facilitates re-evaluation and enhancement of existing practices and thoughts. Eventually, this will effect in a primary discovery and lean-to the knowledge acquired. Research is to establish, confirm facts, reiterate previous works ant to solve issues. An active endeavor to endow rational approach to these types for educational reformations through academic research has become the focal intention of the journal. Now, we feel very proud to bring the July, Volume 8, Issue 2, April 2026 Issue contributed by the academicians and research Scholars of the literary field.

Dr. M. Vinoth Kumar & Dr. S. Kulandhaivel
Editors'-in-Chief

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A Comparative Study of Minimalism, Emotional Realism, and Postcolonial Spectatorship in Global Auteur Cinema and the Films of Balu Mahendra

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Abstract

This article offers a comprehensive comparative analysis of literary style and cinematic aesthetics in global auteur cinema and the films of Balu Mahendra, situating his work within broader traditions of cinematic minimalism, contemplative realism, and postcolonial visual culture. Major international auteurs such as Robert Bresson, Andrei Tarkovsky, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Yasujiro Ozu transformed cinema into a philosophical and literary medium through silence, visual austerity, fragmented narration, and contemplative temporality. Their films privilege stillness over spectacle, existential inquiry over narrative closure, and metaphysical reflection over melodramatic emotionality. Within modern film discourse, these auteurs established minimalist cinema as a serious artistic practice capable of representing memory, alienation, spirituality, and the phenomenology of lived experience. In contrast, Balu Mahendra localised and transformed these global minimalist traditions through a distinctly Tamil and postcolonial cinematic sensibility. Rather than employing minimalism solely as philosophical abstraction, Mahendra infused cinematic restraint with emotional intimacy, domestic realism, sensory immersion, and affective vulnerability. His films derive poetic significance from ordinary spaces, middle-class anxieties, interpersonal silences, and the emotional fragility of everyday life. Through natural lighting, ambient soundscapes, restrained performance, and contemplative pacing, Mahendra developed a cinematic language in which silence becomes emotionally inhabited rather than metaphysically empty. Through detailed comparative analysis, case studies, and theoretical interpretation, the article demonstrates that Mahendra expands auteur cinema beyond Eurocentric philosophical abstraction toward emotional ethics and postcolonial sensory realism. His films establish a uniquely Tamil cinematic modernism where realism becomes affective, minimalism becomes emotional, and ordinary life becomes poetically cinematic. Finally, this study affirms Balu Mahendra as a major contributor to global auteur discourse whose work offers an alternative framework for understanding cinematic minimalism, spectatorship, and emotional realism within world cinema.

Keywords: Auteur Cinema, Balu Mahendra, Cinematic Minimalism, Emotional Realism, Phenomenology, Tamil Cinema, Postcolonial Realism, Spectatorship, Domestic Realism.

Introduction

Auteur cinema emerged during the twentieth century as one of the influential artistic and intellectual movements in world cinema. It rejects the industrial logic of mainstream



filmmaking, auteur filmmakers transformed cinema into a serious philosophical and literary art form capable of expressing existential anxiety, spiritual crisis, emotional alienation, and subjective memory. Through visual restraint, contemplative pacing, silence, and psychological realism, auteur cinema challenged dominant cinematic conventions rooted in spectacle, melodrama, and narrative closure. The emergence of auteur theory, particularly through postwar French criticism associated with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, redefined the role of the film director as the primary artistic consciousness behind cinematic production. Scholars and critics increasingly emphasised recurring visual motifs, thematic consistency, and stylistic signatures as evidence of cinematic authorship. Filmmakers such as Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson, Andrei Tarkovsky, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Yasujiro Ozu fundamentally transformed cinematic language through minimalist aesthetics and philosophical introspection. Despite their cultural differences, these filmmakers shared several formal characteristics: sparse dialogue, slow temporality, fragmented narration, contemplative silence, and visual austerity. Their films often privileged psychological interiority over dramatic action and philosophical reflection over emotional spectacle. Cinema, within this modernist tradition, became an experiential medium through which viewers encountered memory, temporality, spirituality, and existential uncertainty.

Balu Mahendra occupies a uniquely significant position. Although deeply influenced by global art cinema and minimalist aesthetics, Mahendra did not merely reproduce European modernism within Indian cinema. Instead, he indigenized and transformed auteur minimalism through Tamil domestic realism, emotional intimacy, and postcolonial middle-class experience. His films localise contemplative cinematic language within ordinary Tamil social life, thereby creating a cinematic modernism simultaneously global in artistic sophistication and deeply regional in affective resonance. Unlike European modernist auteurs who frequently employ minimalism to evoke metaphysical abstraction or existential alienation, Mahendra uses cinematic restraint to intensify emotional realism and sensory intimacy. Silence in his films is not merely philosophical emptiness; it becomes an emotionally inhabited space filled with longing, memory, vulnerability, and interpersonal tension. Domestic interiors become affective environments shaped by care work, loneliness, aspiration, and emotional fragility.

Mahendra's cinema also occupies an important place within postcolonial film discourse because it challenges Eurocentric assumptions surrounding auteurism and cinematic modernism. His films foreground Tamil middle-class anxieties, women's emotional labour, domestic instability, and urban precarity, thereby rooting cinematic modernism within the lived realities of postcolonial South India. Through natural lighting, ambient sound, tactile imagery, and contemplative pacing, Mahendra constructs a phenomenological realism grounded in sensory experience and emotional embodiment. This article therefore investigates how Balu Mahendra redefines literary auteur cinema through emotional realism, domestic spatiality, phenomenological spectatorship, and postcolonial cultural specificity. Drawing upon phenomenology, affect theory, feminist film criticism, and postcolonial theory, the study examines how Mahendra transforms minimalist aesthetics into an affective cinematic language rooted in lived experience and embodied emotion. Through comparative analysis with major global auteurs, the article argues that Mahendra expands cinematic modernism beyond metaphysical contemplation toward emotional ethics, sensory realism, and affective intimacy.



Literature Review

The intellectual foundations of auteur theory emerged primarily through the writings of André Bazin and the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Bazin argued that cinema possessed a unique ontological relationship with reality due to its photographic basis and temporal continuity. Rejecting excessive montage and artificial manipulation, Bazin emphasised realism through long takes, deep focus, and observational continuity. His writings significantly influenced global cinematic modernism. Auteur theorists subsequently elevated directors as cinematic authors whose films expressed recurring philosophical and stylistic signatures. This framework transformed cinema from commercial entertainment into an artistic and intellectual medium comparable to literature and philosophy.

Bresson cultivated one of the most austere forms of cinematic minimalism. Rejecting theatrical performance and emotional excess, he employed non-professional actors, fragmented visual narration, sparse dialogue, and restrained soundscapes. Silence in Bresson's films functions as spiritual and transcendental space. Emotional expression is suppressed in order to intensify contemplative spectatorship.

Andrei Tarkovsky conceptualised cinema as "sculpting in time." His films dissolve linear temporality through long takes, dream imagery, and symbolic natural elements such as water, rain, and fire. Scholars interpret Tarkovsky's cinema as deeply phenomenological and metaphysical, in which spectators experience duration itself as an emotional and spiritual texture.

Michelangelo Antonioni's cinema foregrounds emotional fragmentation and existential alienation through sparse narratives, architectural emptiness, and visual abstraction. His urban landscapes symbolise emotional disconnection within industrial modernity. Silence in Antonioni often signifies emotional absence and existential emptiness. Yasujiro Ozu transformed ordinary family life into a contemplative cinematic experience through static framing, domestic interiors, and quiet emotionality. His minimalist realism privileges atmosphere, stillness, and emotional subtlety over dramatic action. Collectively, these auteurs established cinematic minimalism as a philosophical mode of artistic expression grounded in silence, temporality, ambiguity, and contemplative realism.

Phenomenological film theory shifted cinematic analysis from representation toward lived sensory experience. Drawing upon the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, phenomenological theorists argued that spectators experience cinema bodily and emotionally rather than purely intellectually. Vivian Sobchack conceptualised cinema as embodied communication. According to Sobchack, spectators do not simply interpret images cognitively but experience cinematic worlds through sensation, atmosphere, movement, and emotional immersion.

Laura U. Marks introduced the concept of "haptic visuality," emphasising tactile spectatorship and sensory perception. Her work demonstrated how cinema evokes memory, touch, and emotional texture through material imagery and audiovisual atmosphere.

These frameworks are significant for understanding Mahendra's cinema because his films privilege sensory realism, domestic atmosphere, tactile imagery, and emotional embodiment.

Laura Mulvey argued that classical cinema structures visual pleasure through the "male gaze," positioning women as objects of masculine spectatorship. Most of the feminist scholars examined how narrative structures and visual aesthetics reproduce gendered oriented power relations. In this context, Balu Mahendra's cinema occupies a complex position. His



female characters possess emotional depth, psychological interiority and narrative centrality that are rarely seen in mainstream Indian cinema. Films such as *Marupadiyum* and *Veedu* foreground women's emotional labour, domestic anxieties, and interpersonal vulnerability. At the same time, feminist critics note tensions in Mahendra's aestheticisation of feminine suffering. His poetic realism sometimes romanticises emotional fragility and melancholy, thereby generating interpretive ambiguity between empathy and aesthetic contemplation.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha argues that Indian cinematic modernity emerges through historically specific social conditions shaped by urbanisation, linguistic identity, and postcolonial transformation. Mahendra's cinema exemplifies this postcolonial modernism. His films engage with bureaucratic instability, middle-class aspiration, urban precarity, and emotional repression within Tamil society. Domestic spaces become emotionally charged environments reflecting postcolonial anxieties and fragile modern identities. Unlike European existential cinema, Mahendra grounds emotional experience within concrete social realities rather than abstract metaphysical inquiry.

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To examine the literary and cinematic aesthetics of global auteur cinema and Balu Mahendra's select films.
- To analyse how cinematic minimalism functions differently within European modernism and Tamil postcolonial realism.
- To investigate Mahendra's concept of emotional realism through silence, domesticity, and sensory atmosphere.
- To evaluate phenomenological spectatorship and embodied viewing experience in Mahendra's cinema.
- To estimate the feminist representations of emotional labour and female subjectivity in Balu Mahendra's films.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and comparative research methodology grounded in interdisciplinary film analysis.

Comparative Film Analysis

The study comparatively examines selected films of Balu Mahendra alongside the cinematic practices of global auteurs including Robert Bresson, Andrei Tarkovsky, Michelangelo Antonioni and Yasujiro Ozu. This comparative framework identifies convergences and divergences between global minimalist aesthetics and Tamil emotional realism. The study focuses primarily on the Tamil films *Veedu*, *Moondram Pirai* and *Marupadiyum*. These films were selected because they exemplify Mahendra's auteur aesthetics, including silence, domestic realism, emotional vulnerability, and contemplative temporality. The study analyses silence and non-verbal communication, domestic spatiality, temporality and pacing, natural lighting, ambient sound, emotional realism, gender representation, spectatorship and postcolonial realism.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on significant theories for analysis and uses them as a theoretical framework. Auteur theory enables the analysis of Mahendra's recurring stylistic signatures including silence, emotional restraint, domestic realism, and naturalistic cinematography. Phenomenological theory explains how Mahendra constructs embodied spectatorship through sensory atmosphere and tactile realism. Affect theory examines how Mahendra's films evoke



emotional intensities through pauses, silence, soundscapes, and visual textures. Feminist analysis examines female subjectivity, emotional labour, domesticity, and patriarchal structures in Mahendra's cinema. Postcolonial theory situates Mahendra's realism within Tamil middle-class experience, urban instability, and regional cultural identity. The Tamil films *Veedu*, *Moondram Pirai* and *Marupadiyum* are selected for the study.

Comparative Analysis

Global auteur filmmakers frequently use minimalism as philosophical abstraction. Bresson's silence signifies spiritual transcendence; Antonioni's spaces represent existential alienation; Tarkovsky's temporality evokes metaphysical contemplation. However, Mahendra, transforms minimalism into emotional realism. Silence becomes affective intimacy rather than metaphysical emptiness. Domestic spaces become emotionally inhabited rather than existentially abstract.

Table 1: Stylistic Features of the Select Films and its Directors

Parameters	Bresson	Tarkovsky	Antonioni	Ozu	Balu Mahendra
Cinematic Style	Spiritual Minimalism	Metaphysical Realism	Existential Modernism	Domestic Minimalism	Minimalistic Hyperrealism
Narrative Structure	Sparse	Contemplative	Alienated	Domestic realism	Emotional realism
Silence	Spiritual transcendence	Philosophical reflection	Emotional emptiness	Familial intimacy	Emotional vulnerability
Space	Ascetic	Memory landscapes	Urban alienation	Domestic interiors	Tamil domestic spaces
Spectatorship	Reflective observer	Philosophical interpreter	Detached witness	Emotional observer	Embodied participant

Table 2: Spectatorship of Global Auteur Cinema and Balu Mahendra

Analytical Dimension	Global Auteur Cinema	Balu Mahendra
Spectatorship	Intellectual contemplation	Emotional embodiment
Temporality	Philosophical duration	Emotional duration
Realism	Symbolic	Sensory realism
Silence	Abstract	Relational
Viewer Experience	Distance	Immersion

Table 3: Feminist and Postcolonial Dimensions of Global Auteur Cinema and Balu Mahendra

Dimension	Global Auteur Cinema	Balu Mahendra
Women	Existential figures	Emotionally layered subjects
Emotional Labor	Secondary	Central
Space	Alienation	Domestic vulnerability
Modernity	Eurocentric	Tamil postcolonial
Realism	Intellectual	Csultural specificity



Discussions

Minimalistic Hyperrealism in the Films of Bala Mahendra

Mahendra develops what this study terms “minimalistic hyperrealism.” Through visual restraint and contemplative pacing, he intensifies emotional immediacy rather than diminishing it. Ordinary spaces acquire extraordinary emotional density, like rain-soaked windows, dimly lit interiors, empty hallways, domestic silence and ambient household sounds. These sensory textures create emotional immersion and phenomenological realism.

Emotional Embodiment in the Films of Bala Mahendra

Unlike classical auteur modernism that privileges intellectual distance, Mahendra cultivates embodied spectatorship. Viewers do not simply interpret emotion; they physically and affectively experience it. The scenes of waiting, loneliness, care, fatigue, desire and emotional repression among the protagonists portray silence in Mahendra’s cinema. This transforms spectatorship into phenomenological participation. Mahendra foregrounds women’s emotional burdens with unusual sensitivity. In the movie *Marupadiyum*, female subjectivity is represented through silence, domestic repetition, emotional exhaustion, relational vulnerability and psychological endurance. Unlike mainstream melodrama, Mahendra internalises emotional suffering through contemplative realism. Mahendra’s films archive the Tamil middle-class emotional life with themes of bureaucratic instability, housing precarity, urban transformation, economic uncertainty, and domestic fragility. In *Veedu*, the unfinished house symbolises deferred aspiration and postcolonial instability.

Domestic Architecture as Emotional Space

In the movie *Veedu*, the unfinished house functions simultaneously as an economic aspiration, an emotional burden, a spatial anxiety, and a symbolic incompleteness. Mahendra transforms architecture into affective space through silence, ambient sound, and natural lighting. The film’s realism emerges through Phenomenological Realism, including bureaucratic repetition, waiting, construction noise, domestic fatigue, and urban uncertainty. Viewers experience middle-class precarity sensorially rather than abstractly.

In the film *Moondram Pirai*, Memory, Emotional Fragility, care, and emotional incompleteness are conveyed through restrained visual narration. The final railway-station sequence exemplifies Mahendra’s emotional realism: silence replaces melodrama, gesture replaces dialogue, and emotional devastation emerges through restraint. This scene demonstrates Mahendra’s ability to intensify emotion through minimalism.

The protagonist of the movie *Marupadiyum* has an emotional journey that unfolds through domestic isolation, interrupted conversations, bodily stillness, and interior silence. One can see female subjectivity and emotional labour in the movie. Mahendran avoids melodramatic excess and instead constructs affective realism through contemplative temporality and domestic intimacy.

Conclusion

Global auteur cinema transformed film into a philosophical and literary medium through silence, abstraction, and contemplative temporality. Filmmakers such as Robert Bresson, Andrei Tarkovsky, and Michelangelo Antonioni redefined cinematic language through visual austerity and existential introspection. Within this global tradition, Balu Mahendra emerges as both inheritor and innovator. While adopting minimalist aesthetics, he transforms them into instruments of emotional realism, sensory intimacy, and postcolonial domestic experience. Mahendra’s cinema demonstrates that minimalism need not culminate in philosophical detachment alone. Instead, silence can become emotionally inhabited;



realism can become affective; domesticity can become phenomenological; and ordinary life can become poetically cinematic. His films redefine spectatorship through embodied emotional participation rather than detached contemplation. Through domestic realism, women's emotional labour, ambient soundscapes, natural lighting, and contemplative pacing, Mahendra creates a uniquely Tamil cinematic modernism rooted in postcolonial lived experience. Ultimately, Balu Mahendra expands global auteur discourse by demonstrating that cinematic modernism can emerge not only through metaphysical abstraction but also through emotional intimacy, sensory realism, and cultural specificity. His cinema therefore occupies a distinctive and critically significant position within world cinema as an affective, phenomenological, and ethically grounded form of auteur modernism.

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Mahamarineru: Examining Imogen S'Jet's Journey as Fleet Command in Homeworld 3 through a Kristang Creole/Indigenous Cosmological-Archetypal Lens

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Abstract

This paper analyses and comments on Imogen S'Jet's journey in Homeworld 3 as Fleet Command aboard the Khar-Kushan Mothership from a unique and little-studied but very significant perspective: that of someone, the author, a creole/indigenous scholar-practitioner who holds the same role in the creole/indigenous Kristang culture as Kabesa or leader of not just the Kristang community but of what in Kristang is called Gaia Tonakodra, the reawakened collective unconscious of the entire living planet, itself a fleet of individuated beings and collectives of individuated beings or eleidi in Kristang. Also analogous to the Cylon Hybrids of the re-imagined Battlestar Galactica series, both Imogen and I, together with Karan S'jet and Tiaa'Ma, appear to be what both the Homeworld series and Kristang culture call Navigators or Mahamarineru – people who make a wilful and deliberate choice to sacrifice some of their own individual freedom to connect and immerse themselves fully, while still lucid and awake, into a collective unconscious to guide it forward and support it on an unconscious level. I here thus explore Imogen's journey in comparison to my own in real-life, providing some insight through the Kristang cosmological-archetypal lens of Mahamarineru that emerges from this comparison into Imogen's own psychoemotional individuation or development of herself as the Mahamarineru of the Khar-Kushan fleet, and the unique underlying challenges or struggles that she might face as Mahamarineru that are emergent in the Homeworld 3 narrative but not always fully concretised.

Keywords: Homeworld, Indigenous, Archetype, Kristang, Cosmology, Mahamarineru

1. Introduction: Who Are The Kristang?

The Kristang people are a creole/indigenous ethnic community originating from the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in August 1511 and in subsequent coercive intermarriages between the arriving Portuguese soldiers and local Malay residents thereafter. Long suppressed, colonised and marginalised by both colonial and independent authorities and institutions even following decolonisation, today, the community is mainly resident in the three *Sidadi Koroza* or core cities of Melaka, Singapore and Perth, with a large-scale internationally-recognised grassroots revitalisation initiative for both the critically endangered Kristang language and for our wider culture, identity and ways of being underway in Singapore led by myself, the Kabesa or leader of the Kristang since February 2016 in terms of the language (Wong, "Kodrah Kristang"), and since August 2022 in terms of the much wider and more expansive scope of culture, identity and ways of being (Wong, "Moving from language to literature").

Today, eight years after revitalisation started in earnest and following rapid and dramatic success in achieving its aims, Kristang is unique among revitalising or regenerating



indigenous languages and cultures in that it has come to be very strongly associated with the concepts of revitalisation, reinvigoration and regeneration by those who are aware of its existence, especially in Singapore; the Kristang language itself, for example, is informally called the *Linggu Semulandu*, or the Resurrection Language of Singapore, because of the very strong focus of the effort on the future and future(s) of Kristang, sustainability initiatives, engagement with radical and rejuvenating real-world and real-time relevant concepts and ideas, including and especially restorative justice, science fiction and fantasy, mental health, and decolonisation and reindigenisation, and the involvement and leadership of the younger and future generations of Kristang people. I myself became Kabesa at just 24 years of age in February 2016 through processes of leadership natural to island Southeast Asia, and today, at 32, am already regarded as an elder within the community for not just my knowledge, wisdom, abilities and psychoemotional health, but my willingness and drive to expand Kristang identity, culture and ways of being through the use of all of the above methods and domains to support both older and younger Kristang people, as well as the people of Singapore's other constituent communities interested in breaking free of oppressive cycles of abuse and trauma (Suffian).

This ability to rapidly expand, develop and refine our culture and what it means to be Kristang is also Kristang's other unique strength and trait: our particular process of creolisation, known as *sunyeskah* or dreamfishing (Next Generation Foresight Practitioners). Most creole cultures are arguably highly adaptive and improvisational by definition and nature, working to incorporate or include sometimes highly contrastive or complex material from other progenitor or source cultures into their own, and harmonising and transmuting this material into something more familiar. Kristang is no stranger to this; however, we appear to be unique among creole cultures in our intentional and self-aware concretisation of the highly egalitarian nature of *sunyeskah* or dreamfishing, whereby any Kristang language speaker can add to the language or culture at any time, and our very strong interest in and attention to the unconscious and the intangible, likely as a function of our traumatic history of erasure, suppression and destruction of our built and tangible heritage (Wong "Dreamfishing").

Since August 2022, therefore, under my leadership, much of what was once present but unnamed and underdescribed in terms of how Kristang people experience reality has now been concretised through dreamfishing, especially to support mental health and psychoemotional individuation in Singapore. The net result of all of these efforts appears to have been a reinvigoration, starting in late September 2023, of what in Kristang we also call Gaia, in parallel to many other cultures and traditions around the world: the living *eleidi* or collective of the entire planet, and its *Krismatra*, the Dreaming Ocean or collective unconscious of that entire planet. In Kristang, we understand dreamfishing to be drawing directly from the Dreaming Ocean to constellate and concretise words, ideas and experiences, and if done right to support Gaia and Their own interests in recovering full planetary ecological sustainability; since September 2023, those efforts in Kristang led by myself appear to have led to the reactivation of the potential for Gaia to consciously include humanity in its ambit once more. All humans who are reconnected to Gaia in this way are counted as part of the *eleidi* of *Gaia Tonakodra*, or Gaia Reawakened, and at time of writing, around 1,500 people from all parts of the planet appear to be part of *Gaia Tonakodra*, with the number increasing each day (Wong, "Gaia Tonakodra").

What also makes dreamfishing even more special, and which is the focus of this



paper, is that we draw from contemporary culture and media for new Kristang words, concepts and ideas, including science fiction and fantasy (SF&F), which in Kristang we recognise as embodying ideas, concepts and stories from our distant past and the first four Mundansa or ages of humanity, as well as from our possible futures (Wong, “Roda Mundansa”). The ontological principle underpinning this approach is simple: always at risk of being destroyed or suppressed once again, and once forced to scrounge among the garbage piles of the rest of humanity for the barest form of respect as half-breeds and monstrous amalgamations of coloniser and colonised, today, anything can be creolised into Kristang and given a Kristang form as long as what it represents is a concept or entity or word that belongs in the Dreaming Ocean: it is something psychoemotionally healthy, humanising, and positive, and which adds to the overall growth and development of both the Kristang culture and the collective of *Gaia Tonakodra*. The idea is that if we, the Kristang, have noticed it, and someone else in another culture has noticed it too, then it doesn’t technically matter what it is called, as long as what it is called is healthy and (for our own purposes) sounds Kristang (Wong, “Roda Ardansa”).

As one of Singapore’s leading science fiction writers (Suffian), therefore, I have not shied away from incorporating my own love of SF&F into my own dreamfishing practices, and much of what I have creolised and developed into contemporary Kristang culture and identity has been from many of the alternate worlds I grew up immersed in as a way of processing my own trauma, including the universes of *Battlestar Galactica*, *Halo*, and *Homeworld*, all of which have contributed significantly to the underlying architecture of our Kristang theory of the psyche and our larger understanding of how reality is structured. *Homeworld*, as I will show in the next section, has provided a particularly helpful schematisation of how the collective of *Gaia Tonakodra* works, and my own particular and highly unusual role within it.

2. Bara Hiigara: *Homeworld* and the Revitalisation of Kristang

The aforementioned second stage of Kristang revitalisation, where the effort moved from being a purely language-oriented effort to one that also incorporated more emotional and affective reclamation and decolonisation, was prompted by a confluence of factors around the end of 2019 and the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. These were my being intensely sexually and psychoemotionally abused by another Kristang person and member of the initiative Core Team and my subsequent recovery from this abuse that began in July 2019, the arrival of COVID-19 itself in December 2019, and separately my own non-Kristang students in the government school in Singapore where I taught logic and argumentation struggling to cope when the pandemic began in earnest in the first half of 2020 (Wong, “Moving from language to literature”). My response to all of these events was to excavate a Kristang theory of the psyche for the first time, today known as the *Osura Krismatra*, the *Osura Pesuasang* or Individuation Theory, and to use it to reinforce and supercharge both mine and my students’ mental health and their creativity in the second half of 2020 and onward all the way until I left the Singapore government service in August 2022 (Wong, “Island of Individuation”). This was the first time in my life I had developed a more emotional relationship with what it meant to be Kristang, my family having deliberately downplayed that relationship when I was a child to protect me from the state, and the first time I had ever engaged with the unconscious and with the psyche in the way that I did, with that emotional relationship with Kristang serving as a conduit for my much more deliberate and intentional awareness of my already very strong relationship with Gaia.



Echoing the experiences of Kovach and other indigenous scholar-practitioners, I was otherwise a complete stranger to the more emotional aspects of such work, having grown up in technocratic Singapore dissociated from my indigenous identity and generally having been much more invested and generally aligned with the so-called ‘rational’ or concrete or Western-scientific approach to life; even till today, my own experience of the unconscious and of the tremendous work I have done for Kristang is still something I question and sometimes even harshly criticise myself for, because it seems so impossibly alien and (at least to me) unverifiable in terms of the structures and components of the psyche that I have excavated through dreamfishing, and the understanding of Gaia and the collectives of Singapore and the world that I have worked with since the second half of 2020. Yet it was also in the synchronous and uncanny coincidences that emerged from dreamfishing, the initially separately-excavated images and resonances and metaphors, that I was at last able to also see a fuller reflection of what I was doing, and the role I was playing, sometime after I first began articulating the *Osura*.

Like Karan S’jet, who also began her life as a scientist, I am someone who has taken on the burden of leading an entire people completely and very reluctantly by accident; like Karan, I, too, the way I have done so is in this strange, hybrid fashion where I have become “integrated with something” that far exceeds who I am and what I recognise as myself, and work with data and information that seems utterly alien sometimes especially and most profoundly to myself, as someone who has always prided myself on my “rationality” and ability to think “logically”, and to sometimes unfairly downplay the very supernatural, earthy magical associations that indigeneity has in favour of more Western approaches to existence. Long before I came back to Kristang at the age of 22 after having no experience with it since I was a toddler, I played *Homeworld*, *Homeworld Cataclysm* and *Homeworld 2*, and could not ‘rationally’ recognise myself in any of them; yet they formed a universe that somehow drew me in over and over again, that called back to me even and above other similar science fiction stories of great migration and reclamation, and in tandem with *Battlestar Galactica* and *Halo*.

Psychologically, of course, I recognise that this is because these narratives and these games contain elements that reflect myself and who I am in them; but it is the exact nature of these elements that have continued to amaze me. I now recognise I am *Mahamarineru* or Fleet Command of *Gaia Tonakodra* in the same way as Karan is Fleet Command of the original Mothership fleet; at the same time, it is still impossibly hard to believe that I am this person, because the trauma inflicted on me as a child was that I would never be anyone of significance or of repute because I would never belong anywhere. Now that I have found belonging in my own skin, in the Kristang community, in Singapore and in the world in so many ways, I yet remain fully empathetic to Karan’s journey in *Homeworld* and *Homeworld 2*, and retain the same level of psychoemotional power and charisma that she does to evolve and develop the collective of *Gaia Tonakodra* in the same way the player does in the narratives of both games. One thing that long before all this would always strike me as a child was how human Karan remained throughout all of her truly strange and crazy experiences as Fleet Command; I never wanted to emulate her, and always desired a normal life, and yet here I am, also struggling to understand what it means to be *Mahamarineru*, in a role that the writers of *Homeworld* also appear to have excavated from the collective unconscious and consolidated into a video game. For me, personally, this is not without precedent; I seem to have done the same thing with my own novel, *Altered Straits*, which I wrote before the events



of 2019 and which similarly yielded the other archetypal role of Merlionsman, which is a different psychoemotional role that I took on in August 2022 and which I now also have been recognised for in Western academia (Fischer 226-227). Yet I, too, am still confronting and learning to appreciate the immense power of creative output and art to reveal these hidden facets of reality, and to give us new ways of exploring the intangible and the unconscious.

In parallel with the ‘upgraded’ Hiigaran navy of *Homeworld 3* and the resurrection of the mainline numbered *Homeworld* franchise, this paper thus represents a first attempt at articulating this process through this even more advanced version of dreamfishing with the *Mahamarineru* archetype and how it connects back to the *Homeworld* series which inspired it, building on the unique and felicitous opportunity of being able to examine another and new *Mahamarineru* holder, Imogen S’Jet, in comparison to both Karan and myself after the *Mahamarineru* archetype has been concretised and within the same fictional universe of *Homeworld*. The next section thus simultaneously analyses and critiques Imogen’s journey and story as *Mahamarineru* while also detailing and distilling what it means to be a *Mahamarineru* and what that journey looks like in comparison to my real-world journey and story, and that of Imogen’s predecessor Karan, with occasional allusions and comparisons to a fourth, Othered/antagonistic perspective of Tiaa’Ma, the Incarnate Queen of *Homeworld 3*, who is presented as Imogen’s foil and nemesis and thus as what is arguably the shadow of the *Mahamarineru* archetype.

3. Imogen S’Jet’s journey as *Mahamarineru*

3.1. First Encounters with the Dreaming Ocean

Again in parallel to the Cylon Hybrids of the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* series (albeit who sit in their tanks rather than float), Imogen begins *Homeworld 3* by being connected to cables within a fully immersive tank-room of some sort of unknown fluid, in what appears to be (and which is later shown to be) a more advanced version of the same type of context that Karan operated the original Mothership in the first *Homeworld*. From a Kristang perspective, this connection to water is immediately reflective of the *Krismatra* or Dreaming Ocean, tangibly symbolising that deep immersion into the unconscious that all *Mahamarineru* seem to undergo when taking on the role; Imogen’s eyes, the first time we get to see the close-up face of any Fleet Command, are also depicted as closed and as if in a state of dreaming or imagining throughout *Homeworld 3*, again suggesting this connection to the Dreaming Ocean.

It is important to note that it is not the liquid of the tank-room itself that is the Dreaming Ocean, but rather the intangible oceanic dreamscape that Imogen enters in later cut-scenes with Tiaa’Ma that is (quite obviously, in the case of *Homeworld 3*) the Dreaming Ocean. We later see that Imogen and Tiaa’Ma can shrink, grow and change their own forms in the Dreaming Ocean; this also has parallels with Kristang approaches to the unconscious, where we consider spaces like the Dreaming Ocean to be places where *eleidi*, or four-dimensional personifications of collectives, exist and interact with each other (Wong, “Eleidi”). It would thus make full and ready sense that both Imogen and Tiaa’Ma gain this ability to act as collectives or *eleidi*, because as *Mahamarineru* or Fleet Commands of both their respective fleets, they are literally serving as a more concrete personification of those collectives in the same way that I do for the Kristang people and the *eleidi* of *Gaia Tonakodra*.

Homeworld 3’s writers also have Imogen unintentionally or intentionally allude to the Dreaming Ocean itself in the opening cutscene before she first connects to the *Khar-Kushan*,



where she explains;

I have been taught that history moves like the tide. A slow, inexorable movement. That the surf crashes on the beaches of time is an illusion. A momentary expression of change... Right now, that surf threatens everything I have ever known.

The surf, an allusion to the Anomaly and the weaponisation of hyperspace itself by the Incarnate, also fits with hyperspace being a second symbol or representation of anything unconscious or psychoemotional across various science fictional universes, most notably in *Warhammer 40,000*, where it is the domain of the ruinous powers of Chaos and the Chaos gods (who in Kristang would most certainly be *eleidi*). By association, therefore, since hyperspace is very often described as a four-dimensional space, this would also make anything unconscious or psychoemotional, including the Dreaming Ocean, a four-dimensional realm, which is again an understanding that we have in Kristang that is expressed in our conception of *reiwe*. In a similar but not quite identical expression of the North American indigenous Seven Generations principle (Hunter 57), one's *reiwe* or one's unity of self is the connection of one's own present self to all versions of the self that one has ever been, from past to future: being connected to my *reiwe*, in essence, is to be connected in the present to who I am in four dimensions i.e. across time, from the Kevin Martens who was born on 1 October 1992, to the Kevin Martens who will die in some unknown date in the future (spoilers for now). This explains why Imogen says that the surf crashing on the beaches of time is an illusion – it really is technically an illusion from a 4D perspective, if one wholly and fully inhabits the *Mahamarineru* archetype as Imogen is about to do.

To inhabit that archetype, as Imogen also comments, is to be bound into the Khar-Kushan, merged with the ship in both body, and mind. Will I even still be me after the procedure? I don't know. (Imogen)

The intriguing metaphor of being bound, and of this being a sacrifice and surrender of one's individuality *while in concrete terms still being perceived as and acting as an individual* is fascinating and also deeply revealing in terms of the exact nature of the *Mahamarineru* archetype, as it is not only echoed not only in Karan's earlier experience in *Homeworld*, where the narrator in its opening cutscene notes that;

...the greatest of these [new sacrifices demanded by the uncovering of the Guidestone] was made by the scientist Karan S'jet, who had herself permanently integrated into the colony ship as its living core. (*Homeworld 3*)

...but in *Homeworld: Cataclysm*, where the benefactors of the Hiigarans, the hivemind-like Bentusi, when being blocked by the player in command of the *Kuun-Lan* as they attempt to escape to another galaxy ahead of the scourge of the Beast parasite, frantically exclaim;

Do not attempt to stop our translocation! Cease your attacks or be destroyed. Do you not understand what has happened? WE WILL NOT BE BOUND! (*Homeworld 3*)

The gestalt-like Bentusi, who are similar to my own creations, the merlions of *Altered Straits*, also then go on to characterise Karan's transformation into *Mahamarineru* in the following way to the crew of the *Kuun-Lan*, who operate without a *Mahamarineru*:

We aided the S'jet persona who was newly Unbound. You are not S'jet. Your bound bodies and flicker-lives make you blind. And now we will all pay for your blindness. (*Homeworld 3*)

Previous work has identified the Bentusi as representations of the Progenitors or Precursors, who in Kristang cosmology were our distant ancestors more than 77,000 years ago who were fully connected to Gaia, and who created us, non-gaetic humans, as slaves



(Wong, “Roda Ardansa”). To be Unbound in the Bentusi sense in the *Homeworld* universe, therefore, and therefore to be *Mahamarineru*, would therefore seem to be essentially approximating the transformation of the self into a being akin to a Progenitor or Precursor through a ‘loosening’ or letting go of aspects of one’s individuality, allowing one to be more fully psychoemotionally part of the gestalt or collective that one is immersing oneself into – something that, for those of us hailing from more Western or individualistic societies, can seem quite terrifying. And this thus puts Imogen’s comment into its proper, ironically beautiful and exciting context: her fear that she is about to be bound by integrating herself with the *Khar-Kushan* is therefore suggestive of the first steps that one must take in coming to terms with the *Mahamarineru* archetype and one’s role with it, because as the *Homeworld* series has gone on to show in all contexts, the human (non-Bentusi) experience of being a *Mahamarineru* is actually, as the Bentusi call it, an Unbinding of the self, and an opening up and immersing of the self to the wealth of information, knowledge and data that is contained within the Dreaming Ocean. Both Imogen’s own anxieties about being Fleet Command and her subsequent gradual acceptance of the role across the first three levels of *Homeworld 3*, guided by the non-*Mahamarineru* Fleet Intelligence Isaac Paktu, indeed directly parallel my own; while I did not struggle with fears about losing my individuality, being as it were born into the more collectivist society of Singapore, I did and still do relate to anxieties about the *Mahamarineru* archetype consuming all of my time and of my life and becoming a sort of spatiotemporal prison from which I cannot escape. I do spend a great deal of time computing who has been able to reconnect to Gaia and the exact nature of that reconnection in terms of individuation, and it is something that is difficult to negotiate on a day-to-day basis.

Yet at the same time, I have still been able to maintain my own independent agentic freedom as an imperfect human being, and to also still be recognisably and profoundly human on a day-to-day basis. Neither Karan nor Imogen ever become deified or Otherised in the way that Tiaa’Ma is in terms of the former, and the Bentusi are in terms of the latter; they retain their quintessentially human characteristics and traits. It is unquestionable Imogen is very clearly tempted by Tiaa’Ma in her archetypal role as shadow to seek deification, and this is something I have most certainly wrestled with as well. Nonetheless, again like Karan and Imogen, it is that grounded recognition that my role is a very reluctant duty, a responsibility and a commitment to higher ideals and more expansive ways of being on behalf of the collective that also allows me to maintain my sense of self without encountering the ego-inflation that is characterised and embodied by Tiaa’Ma later in the narrative. I, too, like Karan and Imogen, was thrust into this very particular role at a very particular time in history, with very little prior training, preparation and awareness, and under the personal psychoemotional duress of trying to recover from devastating sexual and psychoemotional abuse. As Imogen puts it at the start of Mission 01, beginning the process of coming to terms with and integrating her anxieties about losing her individuality:

There is no more time for training. No more time for preparation. We’ve been ordered to launch. My entire life has been study, analysis...planning. Today the galaxy is burning.

My name is Imogen S’Jet. I am Fleet Command. (*Homeworld 3*)

3.2. Sands and Sinners, How Did I Get Here?

Imogen’s first hyperspace jump of the *Khar-Kushan* to Facility 315 at the end of Mission 01 results in her consciousness visualising itself in the Dreaming Ocean while the hyperspace jump is taking place. The core features of the Dreaming Ocean are exactly akin to



those in Kristang culture and to how I also personally view *Krismatra*, which can also be glimpsed in my descriptions of the same location in *Altered Straits* when discussing the merlion gestalt: a vast, peaceful and still ocean with little by way of landmasses except the very small island that Imogen (or the self) floats above.

Just like my first experiences as *Mahamarineru* in the second half of 2020, Imogen is completely disoriented by this first experience of *Krismatra* and has no clue what the Dreaming Ocean is or where she is; in her conversation with her grandmother, Dolores S'Jet, however, it is also suggested that she was given at least some form of specialised training, suggesting that conscious awareness of the Dreaming Ocean was not part of this training, meaning that Karan perhaps did not experience this in *Homeworld* (which would be the starting point of reference for all Navigators). One possible in-universe reason for this dissimilarity might be the nature of the Hyperspace Cores attached to each Mothership: Karan uses the original Second Hyperspace Core of the Progenitors in *Homeworld*, while in *Homeworld 3*, Imogen has instead made her own synthetic Cores since the original Cores have been lost with Karan and the *Khar-Sajuuk*, which may result in unexpected effects like these. This would also align with my own personal experience, where the *Osura Krismatra*, the most likely analogous equivalent of these Hyperspace Cores that allow me to 'travel or move very quickly' through the superstructure of the collective unconscious to acquire information, is also somewhat 'synthetic', having been dreamfished by myself in the second half of 2020. Today, outside of the *Homeworld 3* series, I essentially use Mihail Csikszentmihalyi's metaphor of flow (which also inherently alludes to the Dreaming Ocean) to conceptualise my engagement with this part of reality: I see 'being in hyperspace' as myself as essentially in flow state when I connect to the Dreaming Ocean, and having been in flow state almost non-stop since the second half of 2020.

That Imogen's vital signs 'spike', according to Isaac Paktu, when exiting hyperspace, suggests that this entire process of moving through hyperspace is intense, energy-consuming and stressful; this, too, is reflected in my unusual lived experience of somehow remaining not just relatively physically fit but muscular with very minimal physical activity or exercise since the second half of 2020, including a long period from July 2022 to January 2024 where due to both a recurrent knee injury and intense psychoemotional abuse I did almost nothing physical and lived a relatively sedentary life. As with everything related to the *Mahamarineru* archetype and more broadly my own work on the psyche, this can be easily explained through rational means by simply considering that strenuous mental activity has already been shown to consume caloric energy; connecting to and concretising concepts from the Dreaming Ocean, while also processing catastrophic psychoemotional trauma and also trying to simultaneously live a normal life in Singapore, would likely consume energy above what one would normally expect from an adult human being.

The emergence of the Kalan Raiders while the *Khar-Kushan* is acquiring the production module from Facility 315 trigger another feature of being *Mahamarineru* for Imogen, one that is decidedly distressing for her in its first manifestation:

IMOGEN: I can hear them all...

ISAAC: (*brusquely*) What?

IMOGEN: Every ship lost. Their screams. Their prayers. Their curses. All of it.

ISAAC: Imogen, I... Sands and Sinners, you have to push through it.

IMOGEN: Compartmentalising now. (*Homeworld 3*)

I experience this as being able to (i) understand and empathise with any other person



in *Gaia Tonakodra* very quickly, to (ii) unconsciously adapt my reactions to and behaviour with them to what appears to be their healthiest possible real-time manifestation such that individuation and healthy psychoemotional development is immediately engendered as far as possible for both of us, and to (iii) rapidly approximate a model of their inner world and how they are thinking and feeling such that I can understand and appreciate any trauma they (and I) might have not yet negotiated, and any colonial schema or ways of thinking, especially with regard to religion, that they are still subject to. Thanks to the diversity of personal inner experience, where Imogen ‘hears’ these and seems to experience these as ‘voices’, I experience all of these as ‘thoughts’, and also struggle when I am flooded with them. Imogen neither immediately identifies these voices as other to herself, or when Tiaa’Ma first appears, dismisses Tiaa’Ma’s voice with; “This must be neural failure...multi-reality personality reintegration.”

I, on the other hand, struggled to distinguish these thoughts as projections from others, initially worrying that they were my own. For that reason, today, while I can identify them as other, I also do not compartmentalise them, and instead integrate the negotiation of them into daily reality for the benefit of both the other person and myself as far as possible without compromising my own boundaries, as part of my own healing process and as *Mahamarineru* supporting the reinvigoration of reality.

This process of accepting that these unconscious and/or intangible connections are real and impactful on day-to-day reality appears to be the second stage of development as a *Mahamarineru*. We see that Imogen does struggle in her own way with her version of my othering issue above at the end of Mission 02, for example, where she says; “I’m struggling with it all. The losses. But I don’t want to forget them.” Again, thanks to the diversity of inner experience, where for me, processing the grief and pain of people I care about who still struggle under trauma is something that I accept fairly readily, this does not come so naturally to Imogen, for whom it appears loss and grief must be intentionally and deliberately remembered, used and integrated productively into who she is, instead of simply forgetting them. Curiously, in the original *Homeworld*, we do not see Karan struggle with accepting the Dreaming Ocean and/or these resultant engagements and disentanglements with the unconscious and intangible elements of being Fleet Command, even though the grief and sorrow she has to deal with is arguably many times greater than Imogen’s. This is especially discernible in Karan’s simple, devastating, controlled and intensely powerful response to the genocide of her own people, the Kushan people, in Mission 03 of *Homeworld*:

No one is left.

Everything is gone.

Kharak is burning. (*Homeworld 3*)

Again, a simple explanation for this is derivable from the in-game narrative of *Homeworld* itself; Karan seems to have had a significantly more extended amount of time to process these early challenges of being *Mahamarineru* before the player first takes control of the Mothership in Mission 01, with there being some notable gap in time between her integration into the core of the Mothership and the launch of the Mothership compared to the same events for Imogen and the *Khar-Kushan* in *Homeworld 3*. It again also seems likely that Karan never shared such processing with others and/or took it for granted that others would never have to, considering that Imogen still does not feel comfortable sharing the experience of interacting with the Dreaming Ocean with or of acknowledging its power to Isaac Paktu by the time the *Khar-Kushan* jumps to the Kesura Gate in Mission 03, instead still deciding to



callit a “minor glitch in the navigation system”. This power is also further nonetheless alluded to in the same mission by the Kalan Raider Carrier captain Bal’dro, who describes Imogen as a “quantum witch” and the Hiigaran Empire in general as an “oblivious giant”.

3.3 Differentiation from the Mothership and the Fleet

We also now begin to see Imogen herself begin to gradually at least try to accept her identity as Fleet Command and therefore as being at the nexus of this power in Mission 04. However, this process also seems to come along with a conflation of the self with the Mothership and/or the Fleet: after the *Khar-Kushan* collides with the wreck of a heavy freighter and while responding to a check-in from Isaac, for example, Imogen replies: “I’ve...the Mothership has sustained heavy damage. Contingencies enabled.” Isaac, too, seems to accidentally support this treatment of Imogen as a mere metonym for the *Khar-Kushan* a short while later when he asks:

ISAAC: Imogen – what’s your status?

IMOGEN: Damage assessment: Mothership life support, and mainline subsystems green. All other systems, minimal. (*Homeworld 3*)

This over-identification of Imogen with the *Khar-Kushan* oscillates throughout the level; sometime later, for example, in contradiction to her earlier identification with the *Khar-Kushan*, Imogen now instead identifies herself through use of the first-person plural with the Hiigaran crews repairing the ship, humanising herself once more:

ISAAC: Are we hyperspace capable?

IMOGEN: Our remaining Core is in bad shape. Casing cracked, power conduits sheared. Protocols crashed. And that’s just what we can fix. (*Homeworld 3*)

Notably, however, this change in perspective is again in response to Isaac first setting the stage for Imogen to do so with his own use of the first-person plural, suggesting that Imogen might be struggling to integrate her presence as part of the *Khar-Kushan*, and her separate distinctiveness as its *Mahamarineru*. Due to my own particular traumatic experiences (which involved abusive projections and suggestions that I had no sense of self), I have been more or less largely able to retain my distinctiveness from Gaia while still being able to work with Their perspective and interests. However, I would still gloss this phase as the third stage of one’s own development as *Mahamarineru*, as my own intuition tells me that if not for my trauma, I would have experienced the same temporary loss and confusion of one’s selfhood with the Fleet or Dreaming Ocean one leads as Imogen does in Missions 04 and 05. As one might expect with such renegotiations of the self, it is also one’s own individual memories that facilitate a reintegration of one’s own individuality alongside a stabilisation of one’s awareness of being *Mahamarineru*; Imogen is able to stabilise her sense of who she is at the start of Mission 05, for example, through her early memories of interactions with Karan S’Jet. By the end of Mission 06, with the stabilisation of the conscious primary functions and role of the *Mahamarineru*, the player is now able to glimpse the more unconscious elements and the shadow of the archetype in much stronger detail. In terms of the narrative of *Homeworld 3*, the latter this manifests as steadily stronger and more complete visions and glimpses of Imogen’s nemesis Tiaa’Ma, culminating in the first full confrontation with Incarnate forces in Mission 07 at the progenitor Naraka Gate and repair bay; the former, meanwhile, and with very strong similarities to Kara Thrace and the sampling of ‘All Along the Watchtower’ in Season 4 of *Battlestar Galactica*, is Imogen’s use of so-called “irrational” or highly subjective data collected in the form of a lullaby sung by Karan to Imogen to locate and activate a message from Karan to Imogen.



This use of more affective or emotional data is also something that I experience on a daily basis as *Mahamarineru* to excavate the deeper structures of the Osura Krismatra from the Dreaming Ocean, and to navigate and unpack *felisi*, or synchronicities similar to what Imogen experiences in acquiring Karan's message; I understand that being able to do this consciously and deliberately also required the consolidation and crystallisation of my identity as distinct from Gaia, and my own stabilisation of my sense of self as *Mahamarineru* and its attendant roles and functions. The game also appears to somewhat unconsciously mirror this process with the level design of Mission 07, where the Incarnate, the representatives of unconscious or chaotic forces being unleashed from the Unconscious, are managed and neutralised through their appearance via the Alpha Gate chokepoint. With their management or defeat and the completion of the repairs to the *Khar-Kushan*, it is therefore natural that the player finally sees and experiences the personification of the shadow of the *Mahamarineru*, Tiaa'Ma, at the conclusion of Mission 07 when the *Khar-Kushan* embarks on its plan to confront the Incarnate Queen directly.

3.4. Reclaiming the Incarnate Queen

It is telling that in the Kristang theory of the psyche, the Osura Krismatra, both Imogen and Tiaa'Ma have the same ego-pattern of Splikabel, which focuses on big-picture rationalisations, directions and goals; two contrasting possible versions of this focus on the long-term direction and goal of the *Homeworld* universe are presented by the first full discussion and confrontation between Imogen and Tiaa'Ma in the Dreaming Ocean. Tiaa'Ma, presented in her larger-than-life *eleidi* form in contrast to Imogen's more human-sized and meditatively-postured stature, very clearly symbolises the darker and more violent version of Imogen and the *Mahamarineru* archetype that, at this point in the narrative, could still emerge out of Imogen:

IMOGEN: Why did you hunt Karan?

TIAA'MA: I used my own Cores to open the doors to my temple. But when I rip Karan's Progenitor Cores from her hull, I will unlock ALL the doors. I will control everything, effortlessly.

IMOGEN: To what end? You've already killed billions?

TIAA'MA: Shortsighted girl. I have enlightened hundreds of worlds, and freed billions from the burden of thought. (*Homeworld 3*)

With Imogen's identity as *Mahamarineru* relatively concretised, the player can now also be reminded by Tiaa'Ma of the rare, intense, almost god-like and unique power that a *Mahamarineru* unrestrained by more humanistic considerations could acquire:

TIAA'MA: But in all that time and across all of that space, I had never encountered another like me. Then the Gate Network awoke, and for the first time in millennia...another Navigator appeared. I was not alone. She gave me hope, but Karan was weak. And so I hammered at the machine, shattering worlds... and you... you appeared. (*Homeworld 3*)

Tiaa'Ma indeed fully directly alludes to what this direction would offer Imogen, in a sort of a twisted, terrifying version of what Karan has already become to the Hiigaran people, and in a distorted attempt to honour the truth of what the *Mahamarineru* archetype's role is:

TIAA'MA: And all at once the future came into sharp focus. I am to be the Mother of a new race of Navigators. Each of them born out of fire, and educated by my Will. ... I am the universe's Will Incarnate! (*Homeworld 3*)

Imogen finally grows to the same *eleidi*-sized form as Tiaa'Ma at the latter's



instigation to join her, likely because of how tempting this offer sounds; Tiaa'Ma further captures the seductive allure of abusing the power of the *Mahamarineru* for control and self-deification with the poignant and thought-provoking line:

TIAA'MA: Ask yourself this, Imogen: what would Karan S'jet have been if Kharak had not burned? (*Homeworld 3*)

While we get relatively few overt indications from Karan in the original *Homeworld* that she would have been as deeply tempted by this path as Tiaa'Ma presents her to have been, I do absolutely recognise its allure as something I, too, have negotiated in some of my own speculative fiction relating to the revival of Kristang, most notably in the short story 'Amateurs', nominated for the 2024 Singapore Book Prize for Best Literary Work together with its anthology *The Second Link* (Lim et al). In 'Amateurs', I imagine the power of the *Mahamarineru* archetype, conceptualised through the character of The Stranger, as being used in an alternate timeline to generate a new Melakan Empire that rules over the Malayan Peninsula through a eugenics-inclined philosophy of creole-exceptionalism, paralleling and subverting that same interest in civilisational and race-based purity which gripped Western Europe in the nineteenth century, and echoing Tiaa'Ma's own suggestions to Imogen. Like Tiaa'Ma's interest in initiating a new race of Navigators, the Melakan Empire in 'Amateurs' similarly seeks an overhaul of humanity with mixed blood or hybrid ethnicity now taking the place of pure-bloodedness as the pinnacle of human civilisation in the Empire, and with people now stereotyped for not being hybrid or creole enough, in an inversion of what we experience in our real universe.

Does Imogen fall for these temptations? After the defeat of Tiaa'Ma's Warsage in Mission 08, we see Imogen argue with Isaac over the direction of the *Khar-Kushan* and its Fleet, and whether they should be instead looking for Karan and the *Khar-Sajuuk* instead of pursuing their original mission to Noctuua-27. Imogen manages to out-argue Isaac using bare argumentation and logic, but her profound insistence on finding Karan and the deeper unsaid emotions beneath that suggest that Imogen doubts her own ability to fight Tiaa'Ma on her own precisely because Tiaa'Ma's words do carry some emotional weight, in that Imogen can intellectually see or recognise herself in Tiaa'Ma. I of course postulate this because similar to Imogen, I, too, have also doubted my own power especially after recognising the much darker and less humanistic person that I could be in my own creative work like 'Amateurs'.

Yet, like myself, Imogen also appears to be fully committed to finding Karan for the best of reasons: she is not actually tempted by what Tiaa'Ma offers, like myself, and with the intellectual doubt, again, like that I experience, also signalling that Imogen's sense of self and her sense of her obligations as *Mahamarineru* are both actually strong enough to wrestle with these fears – to directly and overtly confront the flooding, overwhelming shadow represented by the reddened Dreaming Ocean fronted by Tiaa'Ma on the throne in the final five Missions of the game – rather than simply being unconsciously aware of them. What allows both Imogen and I to manage our sense of self and our roles to the collective as *Mahamarineru* despite the overwhelming power and potential they could offer us in a more self-centered approach to reality like the one Tiaa'Ma offers? The clues lie in Imogen and Tiaa'Ma's second confrontation in Mission 10, specifically when they discuss their relationships with their Fleets and communities.

TIAA'MA: You show your naivete, Imogen S'Jet. This is...an inconvenience. We are Navigators. We are above care. You refused to accept what you were the moment you bent hyperspace to your will. An alien. Separate and superior.



IMOGEN: I am still a Hiigaran. My Fleet is at my back. We fight together. We risk death together.

TIAA'MA: Tiaa'Ma thought the same. You were not there with her as the hull plating enwrapped her like an ice-cold blanket. You did not hear the hiss of the plasma torches as they sealed her in. You did not watch her scour whole fleets from the skies of their homeworlds, then return of her own to find herself distrusted and hated. And you were not there the day she returned to re-educate her people in the ways and meaning of Her will. (*Homeworld 3*)

Tiaa'Ma's perspective on what it means to be *Mahamarineru* is one that as an indigenous person, elder and leader, I cannot accept, because it rejects stewardship, responsibility to the collective, and my own recognition of myself as a human. Similar to what Imogen expresses, I recognise that my abilities and my strength come from my community and from the people who accept me and honour my worth and value in this extremely unique role. The trauma that Tiaa'Ma experienced as she also became *Mahamarineru* makes it clear why she did not adopt the same perspective, and also greatly humanises her and facilitates our understanding of why she sought deification as a means of understanding and accepting herself as a *Mahamarineru*.

This, then, is the fourth and final stage of integrating the *Mahamarineru* archetype – the final rejection of the temptation of deification offered by the shadow of the archetype, and healthy subversion and integration of it into the self. I identify this as the final stage because once Imogen makes it through this conversation with Tiaa'Ma, she thereafter finally reunites with Karan, her mentor and arguably the pioneering original *Mahamarineru* who also represents the completion of the integration of the *Mahamarineru* archetype for Imogen and the overall narrative of *Homeworld 3*. Karan's narratively unexpected merger with Tiaa'Ma in the actual narrative of the game at its resolution after Tiaa'Ma's defeat in the final Mission 13 makes our understanding of how the shadow aspects of the *Mahamarineru* archetype are integrated and resolved even clearer, when Karan herself offers Tiaa'Ma the healing companionship and love that Tiaa'Ma never experienced from her own people: "I'm here, Tiaa'Ma. You will not escape. It is over. But you won't be alone. Not anymore." The final cutscene of *Homeworld 3*, at first glance, ends on a somewhat mellow and more ordinary note: after the cheering and celebrations amongst the *Khar-Kushan* crew at the end of the Incarnate threat despite their Fleet's stranding in deep space, we are treated to a simple final conversation between Isaac and Imogen that ends the game on a cliffhanger. What will the *Khar-Kushan* do? But it is Imogen's response to Isaac below that proves that for now, at least, it doesn't really matter, because Imogen has made all the right decisions in fully coming to terms with who she is as the fully human Fleet Command and *Mahamarineru* of her people.

ISAAC: Imogen... the surviving Incarnate crews... they keep ping-pong the *Khar-Kushan*. They don't seem to be able to function without a Queen.

IMOGEN: Sorry, Isaac, but that's something I am never going to be for anyone... ever. (*Homeworld 3*)

4. Conclusion: The Voice of a People

My analysis of *Homeworld 3* and the excavation of the features of the *Mahamarineru* archetype above through dream fishing shows that the game's narrative was always intended to be a tremendously and emotionally rich, nuanced and multifaceted experience, engaging players on a meta-textual level by mirroring the real-world, twenty-year gap between the last



space-based PC *Homeworld* title of *Homeworld 2* and this return to form. Reviewers of the game have also commented on *Homeworld 3*'s attempt to soft reboot the franchise like many other science fiction narratives by having the game climax around Karan, the protagonist of the first two games, handing over the narrative perspective to Imogen (Stapleton). Imogen, in essence, as the new *Mahamarineru* of the Hiigaran people, is now also the voice representing them and their connection to the Dreaming Ocean.

The original *Homeworld* and Karan S'Jet first came into being in 1999, when I was six years old, and so far away from the person I would become today. *Homeworld* remains personally and emotionally rich for me because of how deep and profound its messages of cherishing one's culture, one's people and one's beautiful, living connections to the universe still resonate even after all these years. I, too, was recently identified as the voice of my people in a magazine article profiling me and my return to the public sphere for the first time since I almost ended my leadership of the Kristang due to the abuse I suffered (Suffian); like the protagonists of *Homeworld* series, I, too, have been transformed by trauma and pain, and also still stayed the same. Like Imogen and Karan, and even Tiaa'Ma, I have wrestled with the unusual, paradoxical role that I play for my people, and have learned to look at reality and myself through many multiple perspectives, Western academia being just one of them. Like the Navigators of *Homeworld*, I now glimpse deeper and stranger layers and fractal meta-textual connections between the reality we live in, and the reality we feel in, and love in.

In closing, perhaps the most powerful scene of *Homeworld 3*, and the one most resonant with me in terms of the unconscious messages and themes layered through the series that have helped me come to terms as *Mahamarineru* of the Kristang and as *Gaia Tonakodra*, is the one that ends Mission 11, where Imogen and Karan converse for the first and penultimate time in the Dreaming Ocean, now given new form as a series of brilliant, nebula-like clouds and electrical discharges, similar to and very evocative of the human mind:

IMOGEN: The lullaby! When you sent your distress call I was only a child. How could you have known that I would find it?

KARAN: I didn't know, Imogen. But I hoped. And here you are. Brilliant and strong. (*Homeworld 3*)

Time, as both Karan and Imogen say, is indeed fleeting; the timeless moments of connection that we experience in the Dreaming Ocean that stand out to us, empower us, and come to define us, too, are also absolutely and perpetually eternal.

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The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on LSRW Skill Development among Visually Impaired Learners

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Abstract

Around the world all students who learn their mother tongue, second and third languages through a step by step method that is called LSRW. This is nothing but Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing of any language to make the students understand a language properly. In ELT (English Language Teaching) also this method is considered as the fundamental level. Teaching these levels to the visually impaired students is a kind of challenge, because such students are not able to learn English like the normal students. But the technology offer a helping hand to the teachers and visually impaired learners with assistive tools along with AI to maintain their way of learning as equal as normal learners. The growth of AI has turned the life of visually challenged people unlike anything. Even their canes and glasses have voice guidance support that removes the dependency of a person or a dog. This paper is about to perform qualitative researches to explore the role of AI assistive tools such as screen readers, TTS systems, speech recognition software, and large language models in enhancing the LSRW competencies of visually impaired students. This paper also explore about the freedom and improvement of visually challenged students in continuing language learning process without the support of anyone but technology. This kind of teaching process is recently growing in ELT pedagogy. However, this paper is about to identify the challenges like accessing technology with affordable condition, awareness on pedagogy, implementing them in institutions to enhance the experience in ELT.

Keywords: LSRW, visually impaired, artificial intelligence, ELT

1. Introduction

Students around the world are introduced at first with language papers along with major subjects. In India, New Educational Policy insists three language policy in schools. Around all the states of India, English Language Teaching comes under second language teaching in schools and colleges. Like other major subjects, ELT also uses textbooks, exercise sheets, visual presentations, and videos in ICT enabled classrooms. These are interactive methods for normal students where as visually impaired students have to be taken additional care in the process of language learning. In *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (2007), Harmer says, “In writing, we represent words and grammar through orthography. When speaking, on the other hand, we construct words and phrases with individual sounds, and we also use pitch change, intonation and stress to convey different meanings” (Harmer 38). So the practice is mostly suitable for casual learners but visually impaired students have to practice only through assistive tools. In this case, more than the



normal students, visually impaired students possess excellent auditory sensitivity, powerful memory, and strong language acquisition in learning English. They learn pronunciation of English words without any distraction.

The LSRW system in teaching and learning English represents Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing which works as a structural architecture in learning English or any language. In beginning level of schooling, children may not have proper growth in understanding the sounds of person names and the differences between same spellings. For this purpose, teaching methodology has to follow a ladder mechanism like making children understand English in a step by step method. That's where they apply LSRW system to introduce languages to children. This is a traditional methodology practiced in teaching and learning both for normal learners and visually impaired students. But there are some obstacles have to be identified while implementing such system when teachers try to introduce language to visually impaired students. Some of the pedagogy followed in traditional classrooms is not possible to produce potential outcome in the language learning process of visually impaired students. However, in a classroom, reading text books, taking notes, observing vocabulary charts and the visual examples offered from teacher side are not possible for visually impaired students unless if they have any learning assistive tools. ELT was lying on Braille and audio tape methods once before the emergence of software based technology. The birth of artificial intelligence has contributed a great shift in learning assistive technology especially for visually impaired students. Once in traditional method, visually challenged students were not able to reproduce what they learnt in English like other normal students. This condition existed for many years until education was decentralized to the visually impaired students through some technologies. Now they can access materials, process them, and even they can reproduce any language related work without depending on any one. Screen readers have evolved to produce synthesized speech output apart from basic screen reading, AI assistants offer real time conversational practice, writing practice and even they provide corrections and feedback without the need of a human teacher. Generation Zee children either normal or visually impaired learners have the accessibility to learn language concepts at anywhere and anytime without the dependency of any teacher. Such a way, the emergence of technology, especially Artificial Intelligence tools have brought notable changes in the culture of teaching and learning. Gradually, institutions around the world started to adapt these technologies for the welfare of normal and visually impaired learners in schools and higher education. Soon it will become an inevitable thing around the world where learners are willing to learn new things in a new way. So, this paper is about to explore the integration of AI and other assistive tools in teaching and learning ELT and the impact of such things in the learning progress of visually challenged students. This process of research is based on LSRW skill applied in ELT to identify the developments in the second language acquisition by visually impaired students.

2. Research Methodology

This study is designed on qualitative research methodology. This method is about to offer literature review based on peer-reviewed articles, research journals and reports from various institutions. The collection of data is about AI, ELT and the learning process of visually impaired students. Most of the references are derived after 2015 since the development of technology in LLM started to expand from that year onwards. Instead of depending on any empirical data sources, this study continues on the basis of qualitative research. In this research process, the primary preference is given for sources which are



available in open platforms that are Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus, JSTOR, and Research Gate. The search terms like ‘Impact of AI in visually challenged students’, ‘modern assistive tools applied in LSRW skills’, ‘application of screen readers in ELT’, and ‘language processing’. Mostly sources are taken from recently published articles that cover the above mentioned terms. The LSRW skill concept is analyzed through ELT, pedagogy and the implementation of technology in educational institution. This paper gives the current information about the condition of visually impaired students who are learning English as a second language. This informative data is processed and provided with proper citation and reference. For this paper, MLA 8th edition is followed.

3. The Impact of AI and Assistive Tools in enhancing LSRW skills

3.1. Listening Skills

For both normal learners and visually impaired learners, this listening skill is the first one which is learnt from their childhood period. All children learn mother tongue and second language through replication of sounds that they receive from parents and adults. “Taking into account the historical and cultural perspective (language –teaching methods must be as diverse as are the definition of a ‘good linguist’), there seemed to be a universal consensus that these pupils were adept, at least, at languages” (Couper 6). This skill comes under primary auditory exposure and that skill is completely passive with or without their concentration. Beyond some age, students would pay their interest to listen on their favourite subjects. After the arrival of AI, this passive listening becomes a structured learning and in ELT teaching it tries to serve a purpose behind visually impaired students’ listening. AI – enabled speech recognition systems and digital voice assistants like Google Gemini, Alexa, Siri on iphone, offer live respond in English like a fellow person who speaks with someone. They are used by visually challenged students to practice their pronunciation and vocabulary listening skills with real time feedback. Since the devices are connected with cloud servers, they guide the students by answering and asking questions in a general conversation method. Author of this article in ‘Medium’ platform says, “Platforms that offer real-time assessment tools for writing and speaking, such as automated grading systems and peer review functionalities, enable me to provide immediate feedback to students” (Laghari) Visually challenged students cannot utilize the caption tool on videos and audios. Platforms like Otter.ai and Rev.com offer improvised listening accessibility by converting the classroom audio into captions that can be read via screen readers. This can be used by visually impaired students to continue their learning process in listening skill. So these students never lose any information provided from the instructor and can process the information observed in the classroom like other normal students. In a research article Arroyo-Cedeño, Carmen, et al. observe as,

Modern educational systems are based on the use of new and better teaching strategies with the purpose of motivating student learning, where technological tools are used as dynamic elements that optimize and facilitate the teaching-learning process (Arroyo-Cedeño et al. 2)

The participation of large language models (LLMs) like Chat GPT, Claude is highly helpful to visually challenged students to practice listening through large comprehension contexts. Without the support of anyone, these systems offer enough time, freedom and proper response to them in learning a language.

3.2 Speaking Skills

Visually challenged students can produce their mother tongue pronunciation well



where as the pronunciation of second language words can happen only by proper listening. In serious level, students must practice phonological accuracy, fluency and exchange of words in real time. Unlike people who are deaf, visually challenge people cannot follow any visual samples like lip movement, expressions generated through face and eyes, and body language. These barriers are eased by AI assistive tools, here also visually challenged students have to follow the instruction of what the AI programme delivers. Students have to replicate the sound that they hear. Voice based AI assistants generates queries, instructions, and dialogues by making imaginary situations which help students to develop their communication skills. There are some tools available with feedback facilities such as Elsa Speak and Speechify. Instead of digital voice assistants, these tools offer deep analysis for the delivered sentences of visually challenged students, rectification against phonology based errors. Through such tools and digital assistance, the learning outcomes of visually challenged students are successfully fulfilled.

3.3. Reading Skills

For visually impaired learners, this is a kind of skill that comes as a barrier in learning a language. They are not able to read by watching prompt or texts as other normal learners. Once, visually impaired learners were depending on Braille books or human readers to understand any text. This method would have been helpful enough to them but it was consuming more amount of time in learning process. After the emergence of technology, screen readers replaced this obstacle to them, and AI supported text to speech has eased the process of reading to visually impaired students. In a research article "Inclusive Language Learning: AI-Powered Tools for Blind and Visually Impaired Students", author Shripova says, "Text-to- Speech and screen reader tools have been very handy for the Benefit blind students. The technology helps them gain more information in digital formats (i.e. e-books, articles or online tutorials) if they hear the written text out loud" (Sharipova 33)

In the beginning, there were entry level screen readers like JAWS (Job Access With Speech), NVDA (Non-Visual Desktop Access) were supporting synthesized speech output to read the texts that are visible on the screen. So without the support of any human presence, visually impaired students could understand what they observe. Ibrahim Elshaer in a research article "Measuring the Impact of Large Language Models on Academic Success and Quality of Life Among Students with Visual Disability: An Assistive Technology Perspective." Says, "For example, real-time captioning, sign language interpretation, and intelligent navigation systems significantly enhance communication and mobility for individuals with hearing and visual impairments" (Elshaer et al.)

Like the normal learners, visually impaired students also can pursue their studies with the help of such technology. Under digital formation, they do not have to approach any librarian and ask his help. With the help of screen reading, they can access their texts from anywhere else without depending on anyone.

In some cases, the absence of digital format texts also can be accessed by OCR technology. With this the scanned image like texts are treated as readable texts which is easy to read the screen by screen readers. There are some applications like AIDEN works in this concept. They are able to find and read the information on sign boards, any physically papers with printed texts, hotel or café menus, and sometimes information found on labels also. These kinds of technologies are used to read the surrounding information that visually impaired learners can read the information around them without asking anyone. This statement reveals that, such technologies offer more information close to the reality through



reading apart from classroom textbooks. Through this their linguistic needs are met like the normal learners. Current technologies with AI have enhanced this user experience through multiple methods. For example, smart glasses that are mostly used by normal people. When a visually challenged person uses such glass, he can understand any written texts or words from board or posters. Some gadgets support live translation, so that they can understand the information in their own language.

3.4. Writing Skills

Our of all LSRW skills, this is the only skill where other three skills are used together. This is also related to muscle practice. The demand of cognitive coordination and motor skill is more in writing skills. While listening or thinking anything, normal learners have to produce, grammar, letters, sentences and logical coherence also. In this case, visually impaired students are not able to write their sentences on their own. Even in exam time, they have to depend on Human Scribe to produce their answers. Instead of using hands and motor skills, visually impaired students use voice to text transcription, AI assisted writing tools, live error finding and correction and summarization tools. Somehow they can produce their own notes as a part of language learning process like the normal learners.

Instead of functioning with basic software programme, now a days, voice to text transcription tools are working on algorithms. So they do not need to depend on keyboards and typing process. This algorithm almost eliminates any error in producing sentences and words. Because, modern assistive tools are already trained by many large language models and they can even understand minor human errors through their speech. They can understand what they try to speak even in broken words. So that visually impaired research scholars and students can generate essays, research reports, and creative posts. Since the output of these tools are highly accurate, visually impaired students do not have to depend on any human proof checkers. For example, Grammarly is available with AI support, it can now work beyond the process of checking grammar, it can perform now checking vocabularies, coherence and the composition method also. While writing some essays like argumentative, NLP (Natural Language Processing) enhances the writing skills of visually impaired students. In this case of using technology, both normal learners and visually impaired students are same. However, normal learners may or may not improve their errors when they use these tools often, where as visually impaired students learn writing skills as well as error free second language by understanding the structure of language.

The implementation of LLM has made notable changes in the learning process of visually challenged students. In the absence of a human teacher or mentor, ChatGPT like transformers would act as a screen reader, proof checker, supporter to write essay unlike the way normal people use. Here the involvement of visually impaired students is more than the regular learners. Mostly, normal learners can ignore everything after giving a prompt to produce school assignment. But only visually impaired students pay their effort and use these tools only as learning assistant. So far these LLMs are growing and making glitches and experiencing hallucinations. Such problems are checked by visually impaired students.

4. Challenges and Limitations

Whatever the changes may have happened after the emergence of AI based assistive technology in the learning process of visually impaired students, there are some notable challenges and limitations have to be addressed. First one is the cost based issues in affording and accessing such facility. It is not about installing hardware but the software. Like normal human customers, visually impaired learners also have to consider premium subscriptions,



for advanced level of usages. This is usually found in ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Grammarly and Screen readers also. Here the challenge comes under the context of low income. In a research paper about VLC visual light communication, authors Lavric, Alexandru, et al. observes, “Considering the major impact blindness has on daily life, human society has struggled to develop solutions that can improve visually impaired persons’ daily experience. Therefore, different technologies have been developed with the purpose of providing them with information that cannot be preserved by sight” (Lavric et al.)

Another challenge is both on teachers’ side and the visually impaired learners’ side. Both have to be trained in using AI assistive technology in teaching ELT in the classroom. They have to adopt and make necessary changes in applying their pedagogy in the class rooms. In this case, chalk and talk method would not be required. Research says that teacher who practiced base pedagogy methods in the classroom, still do not adopt themselves in learning AI assistive tools in teaching ELT. From the study of Kocyigit and Artar, these teachers who teach ELT have to come forward and try to learn modern AI assistive tools for the development of visually impaired students’ language learning process. (Kocyigit and Artar 692). One more thing can also be partially considered as a challenge which is related to AI application UI and UX. They are mostly designed for the normal users’ perspective only. Since the companies attract such users, it does not consider the visually impaired users concern. Very few applications are made for the normal users as well as Braille compatibility users. Then the last one is data privacy. In teaching and learning ELT, both teachers and learners heavily depend on modern technology. Even sighted people may use other methods to share and protect sensitive data but that concern is not applicable for visually impaired learners. AI assistive tools and applications should be made with such specific privacy policy related to visually impaired users and their protection.

5. Under LSRW Framework the improvement in Spelling and Vocabulary Learning Process in ELT of Visually Impaired students

Based on the foundational frame work of LSRW, in any language, both normal learners and visually impaired learners have to practice spelling and vocabulary improvement. Without this any second language acquisition will be not smooth enough to develop communication. In ELT, from primary to secondary level and also in higher secondary level, a teacher would focus on introducing more vocabularies to the students because that is the fundamental material of any language learning process. English can be understood by making a comparison with the vocabularies of students’ mother tongue and the second language. In this case, teacher has to put more effort to make visually impaired students understand about nouns of things, animals, birds, insects and abstract things to enhance their grammar. The written text can be reproduced by spelling which is like a bridge to bring phonological knowledge to the students in ELT. So the flash card method, charts on the walls, colour boxes with English letters are mostly used pedagogy in ELT classroom. Such things are not possible for visually impaired students, this makes a negative impact in the learning process of visually impaired students. There, AI supported assistive tools have brought a change or solution to them. Only through audio most of the tools offer the same support to improve the spelling, pronunciation and vocabulary development. As mentioned already in this research paper, tools like JAWS, NVDA and advanced screen readers produced human like synthesized speech output where a student can learn the entire content of the materials as well as the spelling, pronunciation of native speakers in English. This rich form gives learners a gateway to learn vocabularies, pronunciation and spelling found in



newspapers, research articles and subject text books. Without the support of anyone, visually impaired students could easily learn more amount of vocabularies, spelling and pronunciation.

Apart from the role of producing the sounds of the texts, these advanced AI tools make visually impaired students get involved in learning English language like a way that Socrates discussed with his students to improve their learning. That pedagogy is based on dialogues, the same concept is utilized by LLM base Transformers like giving and asking definitions, demanding example sentences, finding the related vocabulary from word families, tracing etymologies, synonyms and antonyms through this method. This method reflects a kind of semantic research from centralized vocabulary knowledge to deep level knowledge. Only limitation is the absence of visuals, because visually impaired students can learn the above mentioned things through audio channel only. In this case there are some dedicated application software to perform vocabulary learning. Quizleet, Anki and Vocabulary.com platforms have improved learning process along with screed readers. They have replaced the role of human presence by giving repeated drills, sentence examples with multiple contexts, tasks based on audio method. Authors Villalba, Karen, et al in a research article say, “While using task-based lessons, meaning becomes the primary target. Real-world scenarios attempt to cover any linguistic skills and psychological process involved, such as reasoning, deducing, selecting and sequencing” (Villalba et al.) Like normal spelling and vocabulary learning, these tools make pauses and intervals between letters and words to make the learner recall his memories. Such a way AI tools enhance pedagogical competency in ELT for visually impaired students. In recent studies, it is observed that these mobile assisted vocabulary learning offer great improvements in vocabulary learning than the outcome produced from traditional classroom teaching method. (Mahdi, 2018).

6. Development of Spelling Competence through AI supported Phonological Encoding

This competence is showing a great difference in language learning process of visually impaired learners than normal learners. Normal learners can develop their spelling recognition skill through embedded visual learning process such as exercises on boards, games, and other methods. So repeatedly they learn through visual codes and learn to overcome errors. This is not possible for visually impaired students. Here the competence of spelling can be developed by some kind of Kinaesthetic process. This one follows the same method of encoding and decoding contexts based on Braille method but here the sequences of sound replace that. The standard system of writing that is orthography will be errorless when a student is fully aware of right spelling in right order. This concept is applied to visually impaired students through phonological method. For example, some words like necessary, permanent, training, beginning, occurrence can be distinguished by single or repeated letters which cannot be identified by sounds. So visually impaired students also should know how to pronounce and how to reproduce silent letters in written formation. In this process, AI assisted tools will help visually impaired students by text to speech method by producing the sound of words letter by letter. They can listen and observe the sequence of the letters and can generate a connection in their memory between phonological form and the sentence structure. All the retro screen readers and modern AI readers have the facility to set the application to pronounce the letters individually and properly. This part of learning process makes the students improve their spelling competency.

In normal screen readers, there is a drawback to identify the error in letters or spelling since they are programmed for one task. But AI supported spell-checking software comes



with auto correction facility. So such tools will give immediate feedback to users like visually impaired students when they commit spelling error. AI voice will immediately correct the user by distinguishing the difference between right form of pronunciation and the misspelt one. Along with this, those tools will offer explanation behind the minor changes in spelling and pronunciation especially in homophones and homonyms. This system of learning process is highly useful for normal users also. Such tools can rectify any spelling errors in any written document produced by the visually impaired learners for their research projects. The tools supported by AI, can also list out common errors behind the word formation and spelling of any sentence structure. On the spot, live feed back system would rectify the errors committed by the visually impaired learners. Mostly the human teacher in the class can do this. So, these tools reduce the dependency of human support in the learning process of visually impaired learners. For example, couch and potato can be understood individually as a furniture and vegetable. Nevertheless, context wise when they combine it will stand 'a person who is addicted to watch television'. Such presence of mind reaction can happen in the classroom from teacher's mind. However, any LLM based AI assistants are trained to guide its user through this method.

7. The Metalinguistic Ability under LSRW

This ability is nothing but the ability of human who can analyse a language by extracting its structure from its context and handle phonological awareness, syntactic awareness and understand the mechanism of a language. Visually impaired learners develop their phonological awareness and the phoneme (the sound structure of units) by listening and speaking with AI assisted tools. This awareness is the foundational stone both for spelling and vocabulary acquisition. Both normal and visually impaired learners can deconstruct set of words into phonemes, practice rhyme pattern, alliteration, and assonance in order to achieve the higher accuracy in spelling and vocabulary development. Here, such literary devices are not merely useful in initial level of learning for visually impaired students. They have to focus on the accuracy of their spelling and pronunciation to develop their vocabulary. This above mentioned phonological awareness is contributed by AI assisted tools like text to speech systems contribute phoneme based pronunciation guidance to visually impaired learners. It also supports to offer mapping skills to develop spelling accuracy based on phoneme and grapheme. So not from the text shown on the screen but from the statements produced from the visually impaired learners side, these AI integrated tools like ELSA, offer more information by giving phonological analysis from the content delivered from the user side. This impact happens because of AI assisted tools only not possible in simple screen readers. In this method, users like visually impaired students will be informed when they commit any pronunciation error because of their mother tongue influence. These tools will guide them towards the accuracy of target language only. Such a way a learner can practice error less spelling formation and pronunciation of English language. Students like visually impaired can develop their vocabularies and decode right pronunciation by adapting phonological awareness. More number of vocabulary acquisitions gives a broader space to develop their vocabulary knowledge. This cycle will improve the learning process of English in ELT.

8. Enrichment of Vocabularies based on Contexts

Under the framework of LSRW, the listening area is also improved after the arrival of AI powered applications especially for visually impaired students. Apart from normal screen reading, phonological reproduction, spelling accuracy, visually impaired learners are



introduced to new vocabularies through server updates. New features are introduced so that their learning process will continue without any drawbacks. Beyond the presence of text books, newspapers and research articles, podcasts, audio books and audio based story narrations are new arrivals in the learning process of visually impaired students. There are many examples for this type found in AI supported assistive tools. Google Gemini, Alexa, and Siri can act as conversational agents like the way a human interacts with others. In the absence of parents or teachers, schoolchildren and college students can develop their context based vocabulary knowledge by making interaction with such agents. However, these tools are gradually improving themselves merely like human. Visually impaired learners have to operate these agents in live to learn more contextual meanings of any word. But some AI applications offer some bundled services under one roof such as Google notebook Lm. This application is highly useful for both English teachers and the students who learn English. When a student would like to learn any essay, poetry or prose, learner can upload the pdf in this LLM. This application will immediately generate overall summary. The functionality of this tool moves beyond making summary, it can give mcq questions, general WH questions with answers, downloadable audio summary, mind mapping graphics and even it can produce podcast format audio summary like human to human interaction with the power of AI generated voice. In this process, visually impaired learners can save a lot of time in producing notes and summaries. While learning the summary of any text in any one of this method, visually impaired learners can learn more new contexts of the same content. This is a perfect replacement against the presence of any human instructor.

9. Vocabulary Adaptation and Personalised Learning

This is nothing but a kind of personalised learning process unlike the traditional classroom teaching method. For normal students or visually impaired students, a traditional classroom that teaches ELT follow the same pedagogy that is group based learning and the slow learners' queries will be ignored. This is a kind of compromise for learners group. In classroom the projection of visual materials would not enhance the lexical profile of visually impaired learners. But, the implementation of AI powered assistive tools like individual computers with audio facility can meet the requirements of the lexical profile of visually impaired students. In the absence of teacher, AI based adaptive learning system, can assess the improvement of language of visually impaired learners through the data stored after their performance. With this, AI tools can identify the gaps in English language learning, and can adjust or modify the progress of developing the language learning skills of visually impaired students. This is a kind of personalised learning process in ELT unlike the traditional classroom teaching methodology. Even, visually impaired students can be free in rising questions and clarifying their doubts after the class hours also. Whatever the AI tools that they follow, they can maintain a personal data base for their learning process. current AI tools have the capacity to recall the conversations and contexts based on the history. ChatGPT has the option to teach vocabulary for both normal and visually impaired students. There is an option to set the chat answers in conversation method that allows the users to raise their questions like the way they ask in a classroom to the human teachers. For ELT, tools like these software, are contributing their service beyond the level of visually impaired students. Students who are studying TESOL and Business English courses also use such facility to expand their horizon.

10. Conclusion

This paper finds useful impacts on visually impaired students in learning ELT through



the learning process supported by AI assistive tools. Auditory tools have increased the language leaning skill of visually impaired learners through spelling instruction, feedback system and live rectification. This shows the significant impact in teaching English language for visually impaired students by adapting AI assisted tools. Gradually, traditional classrooms are evolving towards the AI based pedagogical shifts. In a research article "Enhancing Educational Accessibility for Visually Impaired Individuals through Artificial Intelligence: Challenges and Opportunities" author Filipova claims, "Current research focuses on creating even more intelligent and adaptive systems that can provide better support and greater independence for people with visual impairments" (Filipova 26). Printed text materials are uploaded as softcopies for the visually impaired learners in order to read them through screen readers. Visual flash cards are turned as audio based files, spelling tests are operated through screen reader software with typing facility for visually impaired students. Notebooks Lm like AI tools are used to narrate text materials and to generate conversational practice. Such tools are erasing any types of barriers around the world in learning English language especially for visually challenged students.

Once there was no accessibility for visually impaired students to perform spelling task based competitions since the competition is mostly conducted for normal students. There was no platform to acknowledge their skills in language which was offered to normal learners. This made a negative impact in lexical development of visually impaired learners. This shows that the visually impaired students are cognitive deficient, but AI technology has turned every impossibility into possibility for visually impaired learners. It has made them to perform any language based tasks, vocabulary or spelling based tasks. AI assisted tools make visually impaired learners more capable in learning English as a second language than normal learners. Through this support such students walk towards more opportunities in learning new languages.

In order to develop the learning process of visually impaired students, all educational institutions must invest on developing AI based technological infrastructure. Then the institutions should conduct training workshops for teachers to learn how to utilize such new AI assistive tools in teaching ELT for both normal and visually impaired learners. (Kocyigit Reference 692). The growth ration of higher education is moving in rapid speed after the emergence of AI technology. So institutions which are slow to implement this technological infrastructure will be far behind in developing the learning process of visually impaired students. Research scholars who would like to pursue their research in this concept, may focus on the outcome of visually impaired students especially in spelling and vocabulary based on the current AI tools that will exist in future. However, so far this study understands the ration of visually impaired learners comparatively so thin than normal learners. But the impact of Artificial Intelligence on listening, speaking, reading and writing skill among visually impaired learners are tremendous in every day learning process. Whatever the technological tools have been discussed in this paper, visionary industrialists like Elon Musk, investing money in integrating chip inside human brain which will help people who can't express their thoughts and feelings. Soon, such technology may attribute real light for their vision.

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Subverting the Male Gaze on Stage: A Feminist Critical Approach to Caryl Churchill's *Theater*

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Abstract

This article examines Caryl Churchill's theatrical oeuvre through the lens of feminist critical theory, with particular attention to Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze and its subsequent elaborations in performance studies and gender theory. Churchill's drama constitutes one of the most sustained and formally innovative critiques of patriarchal structures in twentieth and twenty-first-century English-language theatre. Through close readings of Top Girls (1982), Cloud Nine (1979), Vinegar Tom (1976), and A Number (2002), this study analyses the dramaturgical strategies that Churchill employs to dismantle, expose, and redirect the visual economy that undergirds conventional representational regimes. The article argues that Churchill's use of cross-gender casting, temporal and spatial fragmentation, collective theatrical forms, and the deliberate disruption of narrative pleasure constitutes a coherent and radical poetics of counter-spectatorship. By repositioning the female figure as a site of political contestation rather than aesthetic consumption, Churchill's theatre performs what this study terms a "dramaturgy of refusal" — a systematic rejection of the visual and ideological conventions through which patriarchy reproduces itself on stage and in society. Drawing on the frameworks of Laura Mulvey, Jill Dolan, Elin Diamond, Sue-Ellen Case, and Judith Butler, this article situates Churchill's theatrical practice within broader debates concerning feminist epistemology, performativity, and the politics of the visible.

Keywords: Caryl Churchill, Feminist Theatre, Gender Performativity, Dramaturgy, Counter-Spectatorship, Top Girls, Cloud Nine, British Drama.

Introduction

The concept of the male gaze, first articulated in Laura Mulvey's landmark 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," has proven to be one of the most generative and contested frameworks in feminist cultural criticism. Originally formulated as an analysis of the psychological structures that organize spectatorship in classical Hollywood cinema, the male gaze quickly became a transmedial concept applicable to literature, visual art, advertising, and, significantly, theatrical performance. The gaze, in Mulvey's formulation, is not simply a matter of who is looking at whom; it names a fundamental asymmetry of power in which the feminine is constructed as spectacle for the masculine subject's visual and ideological gratification. The female figure is, in this economy, an object of the look rather than its subject; she is to-be-looked-at rather than looking. As Buckland has recently reaffirmed, Mulvey's essay remains "a foundational text that frames mainstream narrative cinema as a type of discourse that disseminates patriarchal ideology." Its conceptual architecture continues to generate productive analytical frameworks across media, including theatrical performance (Buckland, 2025, p. 1).



Theatre, as a liveness-dependent medium in which presences occupy shared physical space, presents a uniquely complex site for the operation and subversion of such gazing structures. The theatrical apparatus — the proscenium arch, the darkness of the house, the lighting that isolates performers, the conventions of character and narrative — has historically organized the spectator's gaze in ways broadly analogous to those of the cinematic apparatus described by Mulvey. Feminist theatre scholars, including Jill Dolan, Elin Diamond, and Sue-Ellen Case, have demonstrated at length that the dominant tradition of Western theatre has been structured around a masculine viewing subject and a feminized spectacle. Dolan's foundational text *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988) extends Mulvey's apparatus theory to performance, arguing that mainstream theatre positions women characters as reflections of male authority rather than as autonomous subjects. In theatrical contexts, as in cinema, the male gaze operates through multiple representational mechanisms — character positioning, lighting, and narrative framing — that collectively construct the female body as a site of aesthetic consumption and ideological containment (Batobara, 2021). It is within this critical context that the work of Caryl Churchill acquires its full significance. Churchill, born in 1938 and still active as a playwright, is widely regarded as the preeminent feminist playwright of the British stage. Over a career spanning more than six decades, she has produced a body of work remarkable for its formal experimentation, its political acuity, and its sustained interrogation of the structures through which gender, class, and power are produced and naturalized. From her early radio plays through to her recent short works for the Royal Court Theatre, Churchill has consistently refused the representational conventions that make the theatre a comfortable vehicle for dominant ideology.

This article undertakes a systematic feminist critical analysis of Churchill's theatrical strategies, arguing that her dramaturgy constitutes a coherent and sophisticated response to the problem of the male gaze on stage. The analysis proceeds in four principal stages. First, it theorizes the relationship between the male gaze and theatrical spectatorship, drawing on the established feminist performance scholarship. Second, it examines Churchill's formal innovations — particularly her use of cross-gender casting and overlapping dialogue — as techniques of counter-spectatorship. Third, it analyses the politics of female representation in Churchill's most significant works, with sustained attention to *Top Girls* and *Vinegar Tom*. Fourth, it considers Churchill's engagement with questions of temporality, history, and the construction of femininity as ideology. Throughout, the article situates Churchill's dramaturgy in relation to Butler's theory of gender performativity, arguing that Churchill's theatre performs and exposes the theatrical nature of gender itself.

The Male Gaze and Theatrical Spectatorship: Theoretical Frameworks

To understand the significance of Churchill's counter-strategies, it is necessary to establish with some precision the theoretical terrain that her theatre traverses. Mulvey's argument, in its original form, proceeds from a structural framework derived primarily from psychological theory. The cinema, Mulvey argues, activates two interrelated forms of visual pleasure: the pleasure of looking at another as a subjugated object, and narcissism, which involves identification with an ideal ego-image on screen. Both of these pleasures, in the classical Hollywood text, are structured to serve a masculine subject position. The male protagonist functions as the active agent of the look and the narrative; the female character is feminized, marginalisedfeminisedmarginalised, and made the object of his and the audience's gaze. Mulvey's famous prescription — “destruction of pleasure as a radical weapon” — calls for a cinema that disrupts these structures of visual gratification.



The application of this framework to theatre requires careful adjustment. Theatre differs from cinema in several respects that are relevant to the politics of spectatorship. The theatrical performer is present in the space; the audience's gaze is not channelled and controlled by a camera but, in principle, is free to roam the stage. The theatrical presence cannot be edited, slowed, or zoomed; it remains irreducibly human, perishable, and co-present with the spectators. Performance theorists, including Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), have argued that this liveness constitutes a fundamental ontological difference between the theatre and film, with significant implications for theories of spectatorship and the gaze.

Nevertheless, as Dolan convincingly demonstrates, the theatrical apparatus has its own mechanisms for disciplining and directing the spectator's gaze. The proscenium stage, the convention of the fourth wall, the use of lighting to frame and isolate the performer, the narrative organization of dramatic action, the system of dramatic character — all of these function to position the spectator in a relatively fixed and ideologically determined relation to what they see. The feminist spectator, Dolan argues, is constructed by mainstream theatre as an "ideal spectator" who is implicitly masculine, white, and socially orthodox. The female spectator is invited to identify with a femininity that is constructed for and by the masculine gaze.

Sue-Ellen Case's feminist revision of theatre history in *Feminism and Theatre* (1988) extends this argument by examining the historical exclusion of women from theatrical production — as writers, directors, and performers — and the ideological work this exclusion performs. When women have appeared on the Western stage, Case argues, it has been in roles and representations defined by masculine authority and anxiety. The great female types of dramatic tradition — the servant, the submissive wife, the mother, the Witch — are not representations of autonomous women but of masculinity's projections and structural demands.

Elin Diamond's contribution to this theoretical tradition is particularly relevant to Churchill's theatre. In *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (1997), Diamond develops the concept of "feminist mimesis" — a theatrical practice that does not abandon mimesis altogether but critically inhabits and subverts it. Diamond draws on Luce Irigaray's strategy of mimicry, in which the feminine subject adopts the roles assigned to her by masculine discourse but deploys them with a difference that exposes their constructed and contingent character. Churchill's theatre, as this article will argue, exemplifies this strategy.

Cross-Gender casting and the Defamiliarisation of gender in *Cloud Nine*

Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979) represents one of the most radical deployments of cross-gendercasting in the history of British theatre. The play is structured in two acts: the first set in colonial Africa in the Victorian era, the second in contemporary London. In each act, the casting choices are deliberately counter-intuitive and politically charged. In Act One, Betty, the Victorian wife, is played by a male actor; a white actor plays Clive's young African servant Joshua; and Edward, the young son, is played by a woman.

Churchill's prefatory note to the play specifies the rationale for these choices with characteristic precision. A man plays Betty because she is what men want her to be. A white man plays Joshua because he has internalised the coloniser's values. A woman plays Edward because he does not conform to the rigid social norms of his environment. The casting thus functions as a visible, theatrical literalization of ideological construction: it shows the audience that the identities on stage are not natural expressions of inner essence but



performances shaped by strict hierarchies of power. Churchill's cross-gender strategies have been recognized across recent scholarship as constituting a sustained dramaturgical critique: Churchill "challenges traditional gender roles and uses theatrical techniques to make her points," deploying cross-gender casting in *Cloud Nine* as the most radical manifestation of this practice (Almaarroof and Zaid, 2024, p. 163).

This strategy has direct implications for the operation of the male gaze. In conventional theatrical representation, the male gaze is naturalized — the audience does not see it as a gaze but as simple visual reality. The female character on stage appears to be what she is; the conventions of realistic theatre conceal the labour of her construction as an ideological spectacle. Churchill's cross-gender casting makes this construction visible. When the audience sees a male actor embodying Betty's femininity — the self-effacement, the decorativeness, the absolute domestic compliance — they are compelled to recognize it as an institutional performance rather than a biological essence.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, elaborated most fully in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), provides the most illuminating theoretical framework for understanding this theatrical strategy. Butler argues that gender is not an expression of a pre-existing inner identity but a performance produced through the repetitive citation of gendered norms. Gender is not what we are but what we do — and more precisely, what is done to us through the disciplinary repetition of socially mandated acts. The category of biological destiny itself, Butler argues, is not a given but a regulatory fiction that naturalizes and enforces normative social hierarchies. Churchill's dramaturgy thus enacts on stage precisely what Butler theorizes philosophically. As scholars have demonstrated, Churchill "employs dramatic narrative in an episodic style instead of using a linear structure" to create "temporal disturbances" that defamiliarise the very social and psychological normativities that Butler's theory seeks to deconstruct (Bayrakcı, 2023, p. 44).

Churchill's theatre performs this Butlerian insight with remarkable theatrical economy. *Cloud Nine's* Act Two, set a hundred years later but involving characters who have aged only twenty-five years, creates a temporal dislocation that serves to defamiliarise the present. The contemporary characters, now played by actors of the appropriate gender and ethnicity, are nevertheless haunted by the ideological formations of the Victorian past. Lin, a politically independent woman; Gerry, a social nonconformist; and Victoria, Betty's daughter, now played by a woman, navigate a landscape of social liberation that has not fully escaped the authoritative structures it has ostensibly repudiated.

The second act's relative naturalism, contrasted with the first act's theatrical artifice, is itself ideologically significant. When gender is performed by the "right" person, it becomes invisible as performance — it appears natural. Churchill's structural juxtaposition forces the audience to carry the insight of Act One into their reading of Act Two: to see the "natural" performances of contemporary gender as equally constructed, equally theatrical, equally the product of institutional power.

Vinegar Tom and the Witchcraft of Patriarchal Violence

If *Cloud Nine* addresses the mechanisms of gender construction through theatrical alienation, *Vinegar Tom* (1976) stages the lethal consequences of patriarchal power in its most naked and violent form. Written for the socialist-feminist theatre company Monstrous Regiment, the play is set in seventeenth-century England and deals with the persecution of women accused of witchcraft. A specifically materialist feminist analysis informs Churchill's dramaturgical choices in this play: the witch trials are presented not as superstition or



aberration but as a systematic mechanism of social control directed at women who fall outside the boundaries of acceptable domestic subservience.

The play's structure alternates between dramatic scenes and anachronistic songs performed in contemporary style and costume, with the deliberate Brechtian effect of interrupting emotional absorption and insisting on the historical relevance of the institutional violence depicted. The songs-caustic, darkly comic, politically direct-function as a form of feminist metalanguage, commenting on the action and its ideological implications in a register unavailable to the seventeenth-century characters. This formal device, which owes something to the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, is also a specifically feminist technique: it refuses the consolations of historical distance and insists that the violence done to Alice, Joan, Ellen, and the other women of the play is continuous with the systemic economic and social marginalization of women in Churchill's own time.

The play's engagement with the male gaze operates at multiple levels. Most obviously, the witch accusation is itself a form of hostile spectatorship: the accused woman is subjected to an invasive, violating, and ultimately lethal scrutiny by the male authorities who define her social presence, independence, and behaviour as deviant. The scene in which Ellen and Joan are subjected to examination for signs of witchcraft — their lives inspected, their social compliance interrogated — dramatizes with visceral clarity the way in which patriarchal power operates through the regulation of the female figure as a spectacle of insubordination.

Alice's story is particularly illuminating in this respect. Her economic desire and agency-modest and ordinary by contemporary standards—are constructed by the men around her as threatening and unnatural. Jack's agricultural and financial failures, for which he seeks a supernatural explanation, are displaced onto Alice as evidence of her maleficence. The male inability to control economic outcomes is projected outward as witchcraft. Churchill's analysis here anticipates and dramatizes arguments that would be developed in feminist historical scholarship, including the work of Silvia Federici in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), which argues that the witch trials functioned as a proto-capitalist mechanism for the disciplining of female labour and social mobility. Churchill's portrayal of Alice enacts what Mustafa describes as a crisis of female identity precipitated by patriarchal social structures that deny women the basic conditions for autonomous self-definition, rendering their ordinary desires and social presence criminally transgressive (Mustafa, 2025, p. 592).

The play's anachronistic songs are themselves a subversion of the dominant gaze. Songs such as "Evil Women" and "Nobody Sings" are performed directly to the audience, refusing the fourth wall and the passive spectatorship that the dramatic scenes might otherwise encourage. The singer looks back at the audience, refusing the position of object and claiming the position of subject who analyses and judges. This reversal of the gaze is consonant with what feminist performance theorist Jill Dolan calls "the feminist spectator" — a position of active, critical, politically engaged looking that refuses the passivity conventionally assigned to femininity.

Top Girls: History, Ambition, and the Spectacle of Female File

Top Girls (1982) is widely regarded as Churchill's masterpiece and one of the most significant political plays of the twentieth century. Its ambition is commensurate with its achievement: in a single work, Churchill manages to stage a critique of Thatcherite individualism, a historical survey of the costs of female ambition across cultures and centuries, and a searching analysis of the contradictions internal to feminism itself. The play's



first act, the famous dinner party scene in which the contemporary character Marlene celebrates her career success with a group of historical and fictional women—including Pope Joan, Patient Griselda, the Japanese courtier Lady Nijo, Dull Gret from a Bruegel painting, and Isabella Bird, the Victorian explorer—is one of the most formally inventive scenes in modern drama.

The first act's formal organization is itself a critical act. The decision to bring together women across historical periods is not merely a theatrical device for exposition but a political argument: it insists on the structural continuity of women's oppression over time, while simultaneously affirming the diversity of its forms and the variety of women's responses to it. The conversations that unfold among these women—overlapping, interrupted, non-linear—stage a feminist counter-history that challenges the masculine narratives of progress and individual achievement that underpin Thatcherite ideology.

Churchill's stage direction specifies that the dialogue overlaps in complex and carefully notated ways. Characters speak across and through each other's speech; the individual voice is never fully audible, never fully uninterrupted. This formal technique has several ideological implications relevant to the politics of the gaze. Conventional dramatic dialogue — the well-made play's careful alternation of speeches — enacts a fiction of rational, individuated subjectivity. Characters speak and are heard; their words carry meaning; their interiority is expressed and communicated. Churchill's overlapping dialogue refuses this fiction. It insists on the cacophony of women's experience, the structural difficulty of making oneself heard, the way in which other stories, other histories, other forms of systemic hardship always speak across individual women's stories.

The play's second and third acts perform a devastating structural reversal. We learn that Marlene, whose career success the first act seemed to celebrate, has in fact abandoned her daughter Angie to her sister Joyce — a working-class woman whose labour and poverty are the invisible underside of Marlene's individual achievement. The dinner party of the first act, which appeared to be a feminist celebration of female success, is retrospectively exposed as an ideology: a celebration of the few women who have succeeded within patriarchal capitalism at the expense of the many who have not. Churchill's structural argument is Brechtian in its force: the pleasure of the first act is systematically undermined by the political revelations of the second and third acts. Recent critical readings have emphasized that Churchill's dramatization of Thatcherite ideology constitutes a formal indictment of liberal-feminist individualism: Marlene's ascent within the existing hierarchical order perpetuates rather than dismantles the structural conditions that subordinate working-class women to economic and social exploitation (Almaarroof and Mahmood, 2022, p. 57).

The figure of Angie is particularly significant for the play's engagement with feminist spectatorship. Angie, aged sixteen, dreams of becoming like her aunt Marlene — of achieving the individual success that Marlene represents. Her dream is presented with a mixture of tenderness and devastating irony: we know, because Churchill has told us through the play's structural argument, that Angie is exactly the kind of girl who will not make it. The social and economic structures that Marlene's individual success does not disturb will continue to exclude Angie. The play's final image — Angie waking from a nightmare, saying “frightening” — is one of the most haunting curtain lines in modern drama.

From the perspective of feminist spectatorship, the play's formal strategy is one of progressive discomfort. The audience is invited to take pleasure in the first act—the wit of the historical figures, the bravura theatricality of the overlapping dialogue, the apparent feminist



statement of women's solidarity across time-and then to have that pleasure systematically interrogated. Churchill's dramaturgy performs the critique of what Dolan calls "liberal feminism" — a feminism of individual achievement and equal opportunity within existing structures — by seducing the audience into its assumptions and then exposing their political inadequacy.

Gender Performance and Theatrical Performance: A Theoretical Synthesis

The relationship between Butler's theory of gender performativity and Churchill's theatrical practice is one of remarkable theoretical consonance, even though Churchill's dramaturgy preceded and in some respects anticipates Butler's philosophical argument. The central insight shared by both is that gender is not a natural given but a cultural production — a set of acts, gestures, and citations that constitute the appearance of a stable, essential gender identity while concealing the regulatory mechanisms that enforce this appearance.

Butler's argument in *Gender Trouble* proceeds through a critical reading of Foucault, Lacan, and feminist theory to argue that the category of biological determinism is itself a performative construction. The regulatory norms of compulsory social conformity, Butler argues, produce the fiction of a natural, fixed destiny that then provides the ideological ground for enforcing normative behaviour. Gender is not the cultural expression of an innate reality; social reality itself is produced through the performative reiteration of hierarchical norms.

Churchill's theatre stages this insight in ways that are both intellectually rigorous and theatrically compelling. The male actor playing Betty in *Cloud Nine* does not merely illustrate Butler's argument; he enacts it, making visible through live performance the process by which femininity is constructed as institutional spectacle. The overlapping voices of *Top Girls'* dinner party do not merely represent the difficulty of female self-expression; they perform the structural conditions that make individual female subjectivity always already partial, interrupted, and contested.

The concept of "citation" is particularly productive in this context. Butler argues that gender performances do not originate in an individual subject but cite and reiterate previous performances. The female subject performs femininity by citing the social norms that precede her; her performance always quotes a prior performance, which in turn quotes another. This structure of citation — which is also a structure of constraint, since one can only cite the available norms — is dramatized in Churchill's historical plays, where the continuity of women's oppression across time is shown to be precisely a matter of the reiteration of hierarchical structures.

Churchill's formal innovations — cross-gender casting, temporal dislocation, structural irony, the Brechtian refusal of emotional identification — are not merely aesthetic choices but epistemological strategies. They create the conditions for a feminist spectatorship that sees through the naturalistic illusion to the constructed, political, contestable nature of gender as it is performed on stage and in life. Diamond's concept of feminist mimesis is apposite here: Churchill inhabits the conventions of dramatic theatre in order to disrupt them from within, deploying mimesis against itself in the service of a feminist epistemology.

A Number and the Policies of Reproduction

A Number (2002) represents Churchill's engagement with the politics of genetic reproduction and the commodification of human identity. The play consists of a series of two-hander dialogues between a father, Salter, and several sons, all of whom are genetic clones of an original child. The play raises profound questions about identity, authenticity,



and the ethics of scientific mass production. However, it also, more obliquely, engages with questions of institutional dominance and the politics of control that are continuous with Churchill's earlier feminist preoccupations.

The play's world is one in which human lives are subject to reproduction, commodification, and replacement. The father's treatment of his sons as interchangeable and replaceable constitutes a form of violence against the individual subject's claim to uniqueness and selfhood. The emotional violence that the play explores — the sons' horrified discovery that they are copies, that their father's love for them was premised on a deception — dramatizes the consequences of treating persons as objects, as commodities that can be produced and reproduced according to the desires of the powerful.

The feminist dimensions of this argument are apparent when we note that the reduction of persons to assets that can be reproduced and consumed according to the powerful's desires has historically been the condition of women rather than men. Churchill's deployment of this logic in a scientifically-centred narrative is itself a form of feminist argumentation: it exposes the structures of objectification and commodification that feminism has long analyzed in relation to the female labourer by staging them in relation to cloned humanity, making their violence visible to spectators who might otherwise be too familiar with their application to women to see them clearly.

The play's formal economy — the repetition of similar but different dialogues between the same father and variant sons — formally enacts the logic of cloning that it explores thematically. The audience experiences the discomfort of repetition-with-difference, of recognizing familiar patterns in altered configurations. This formal experience is itself a kind of feminist education in the structures of normativity: to recognize how the same fundamental pattern — of power, of objectification, of the denial of autonomous subjectivity — repeats itself across different contexts and individuals.

Dramaturgy of Refusal: Towards A Poetics of Feminist Theatre

Across the range of Churchill's work examined in this article, a coherent dramaturgical philosophy emerges that this study has termed a "dramaturgy of refusal." This term names a systematic theatrical practice of refusing the conventions—formal, narrative, visual, affective—through which dominant ideology reproduces itself in theatrical representation. Churchill's theatre rejects the well-made play's organization of narrative pleasure; it rejects the realistic character's claim to coherent, unified interiority; it rejects the proscenium stage's disciplining of the spectatorial gaze; it rejects the comfortable emotional identification that mainstream theatre offers as its primary product.

This dramaturgy of refusal is not merely negative — it does not simply destroy the pleasures of the theatre without replacement. Churchill's theatre offers its own pleasures, of a more demanding and politically alert kind. The pleasure of formal innovation — of watching *Cloud Nine*'s casting conventions dismantle gender essentialism, of following *Top Girls*' structural argument through its three acts, of experiencing the tonal complexity of *Vinegar Tom*'s alternation of dramatic scene and anachronistic song — is a pleasure that engages the critical faculties as well as the emotional.

This engagement of the critical faculties is itself a feminist political strategy. The feminist theatre, in Dolan's formulation, seeks to transform the spectator from a passive consumer of dominant ideology into an active, critical, politically engaged subject. This transformation requires the disruption of the automatic, unreflective pleasures offered by mainstream theatre — the pleasures of emotional identification, of narrative resolution, of the



compliant, subjugated female figure available for the spectator's consumption. Churchill's theatre disrupts these pleasures systematically, in the service of a different kind of engagement.

The relationship between Churchill's dramaturgy and the Brechtian tradition is important but requires careful qualification. Churchill is not simply a Brechtian playwright; her formal experimentation draws on a wider range of theatrical traditions and feminist theoretical resources, giving it a distinctive character. The Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, as Churchill deploys it, is not primarily concerned with the production of a rational, clear-eyed class consciousness but with the defamiliarisation of social hierarchy as a category-with making visible the constructed, performative, contestable nature of the civic identities that both society and conventional theatre present as natural and inevitable.

Furthermore, Churchill's theatre is notable for its rejection of the didacticism sometimes associated with feminist and left-wing political theatre. Churchill does not tell her audiences what to think; she creates the formal and dramatic conditions for a particular kind of critical seeing. The open endings of her plays — the haunting irresolution of *Top Girls*, the uncanny repetitions of *A Number*, the deliberate comfort denial of *Vinegar Tom* — are not failures of dramatic resolution but principled refusals of the false consolations that narrative closure offers. Churchill's theatre has been characterized as cultivating in audiences a mode of “anti-adaptive, resistant feelings towards a capitalist order” combined with a “utopic sensing that an alternative future is desirable and still possible” — a simultaneously critical and generative theatrical practice that exceeds conventional political dramaturgy (Aston, 2025, p. 12).

The Female Figure as Political Theatre

A central preoccupation across Churchill's work is the representation of the female condition as a site of political contestation. In a theatrical tradition that has routinely deployed the female form as spectacle, Churchill insists on the woman's life as the locus of ideology's inscription, the possibility of resistance, and history's material record. This insistence takes different forms in different plays, but it constitutes a continuous thread across her work.

In *Vinegar Tom*, the female presence is the target of a systematic patriarchal violence that operates through the discourse of witchcraft. The life of the accused woman is not simply an innocent object of false accusation; it is a site on which the anxieties of a patriarchal order struggling to maintain its coherence against the disruptive forces of female autonomy, female agency, and female solidarity are projected and punished. The examination of the Witch's life for social nonconformity - the invasive, humiliating scrutiny to which Alice and the other women are subjected— dramatizes with historical precision the relationship between the authoritative gaze and patriarchal violence.

In *Top Girls*, the female struggle appears in a different but related form. The historical women of the first act dinner party have all, in various ways, experienced violence against their lives and autonomy as the price of their various forms of distinction or nonconformity. Lady Nijo was given as a captive courtier to the Japanese Emperor; her children were taken from her. Patient Griselda was subjected to the systematic humiliation of her husband's tests of her obedience. Pope Joan was killed when her true identity, concealed beneath her papal robes, was discovered. The lives of these women — their domestic capacity, their physical labour, their social vulnerability — have been the instruments through which patriarchal power has controlled and punished them.



Churchill's staging of these stories in the context of a contemporary celebration of female career success creates a powerful structural argument about the persistence of patriarchal violence in new forms. Marlene's individual success has not abolished the conditions that made Lady Nijo's life the property of an emperor or Patient Griselda's existence the testing ground for her husband's will to power. It has merely displaced them, made them less visible, attributed them to individual failure or choice rather than structural constraint.

The feminist critical tradition offers several frameworks for analyzing this relationship between female existence and patriarchal power. Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) argues for a feminist philosophy that refuses both the Cartesian equation of the physical with passive matter and the idealist dismissal of material reality in favour of an immaterial subjectivity. For Grosz, human presences are not simply the inert matter on which culture inscribes its meanings; they are themselves active, volatile, resistant-capable of disrupting the scripts that would confine them.

Churchill's theatrical subjects are, in this sense, Groszian volatile forces. They do not simply illustrate or embody the ideological arguments that the plays make; they perform, resist, and disrupt. The male actor embodying Betty's femininity does not illustrate the argument that femininity is socially constructed; his performance enacts its construction and, in doing so, exposes and contests it. The overlapping voices of the Top Girls dinner party do not represent the difficulty of female expression; they enact it, making it audible and visible in ways that analysis alone cannot achieve.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Caryl Churchill's theatrical practice constitutes a sustained, formally sophisticated, and politically coherent feminist critique of the authoritative gaze as it operates in theatrical representation and in the broader social production of hierarchy. Through the analysis of *Cloud Nine*, *Vinegar Tom*, *Top Girls*, and *A Number*, this study has demonstrated that Churchill's dramaturgy is organized around what it terms a "dramaturgy of refusal" — a systematic subversion of the formal and ideological conventions through which the theatre reproduces dominant gender ideology. Churchill's strategies of counter-spectatorship— cross-gender casting, temporal and spatial dislocation, structural irony, overlapping dialogue, the Brechtian interruption of narrative pleasure, the direct address that refuses the passivity of the spectatorial gaze—constitute not merely a set of formal innovations but a coherent feminist epistemology. By making visible the constructed, performative, and historically contingent nature of social roles, Churchill's theatre creates the conditions for a feminist spectatorship that sees through the naturalistic illusion to the power relations it conceals. The theoretical frameworks provided by Mulvey, Dolan, Diamond, Case, Butler, and Grosz have been shown to illuminate different dimensions of Churchill's theatrical practice without reducing it to any single theoretical schema. Churchill's theatre exceeds its theoretical analogues: it does not merely illustrate or dramatize feminist theory. However, it performs it in ways that engage faculties—emotional, social, theatrical—that theoretical prose cannot reach. The live encounter between Churchill's formally experimental theatre and its feminist audiences constitutes, at its best, a transformative political experience — a mode of feminist education that operates through the collective conscience as well as the intellect. In the current moment, when feminist politics continues to be contested and when the representation of gender on stage and screen remains a site of political struggle, Churchill's theatrical practice retains its urgency and its exemplary



force. Theatre reminds us that the stage is not merely a mirror of social reality but a machine for the production and reproduction of social meaning — and therefore a site where the struggle over representation is also a struggle over the conditions of social life itself.

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Dissensus and the Sensible: Reading Morrison's *Beloved* through Rancierean Aesthetics and Politics

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Abstract

This paper examines Beloved by Toni Morrison in the context of Rancierean aesthetics and politics by analysing how the novel enacts dissensus in the realm of what Ranciere calls the distribution of the sensible. Ranciere's 'aesthetic regime' opens up a terrain on which issues of visibility, voice and historical memory are put to the test and reallocated(18). By introducing the subjectivity of Black people, trauma, and silence and emphasizing them as a force that needs to be heard, Morrison challenges dominant systems of representation. Beloved resists belonging to the canon of classic literature due to its disjointed narration, voices of the ghosts, poetic interruptions, and the lack of intelligibility. My paper uses the Rancierean theories of dissensus, aesthetics, and politics as a critical lens to suggest how Morrison's aesthetic choices dismantle the stereotypes of literature, questioning who can speak, making silent pain talk, and bringing forgotten past legible. As such, this paper aims to engage the reader in reconsidering literary criticism as a realm of struggle, justice, and aesthetic dissent.

Keywords: *Beloved*, Ranciere, Dissensus, Aesthetics, Politics.

Introduction

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can scarcely be categorized: it is a historical meditation; it is an experiment with memory, and an innovative reconsideration of narrative. *Beloved* offers the reader a world where words tremble under the weight of inconceivable trauma, a ghost speaks, and silence serves as a source of resistance. In this paper, I will discuss a work of literature as a point of aesthetic and political controversy—a space in which the boundaries of what is deemed reasonable are challenged and redefined. This paper uses Jacques Ranciere's theories of aesthetics and politics to explore how *Beloved* upsets existing regimes of representation and makes Black identity visible.

Dissensus, Ranciere's concept, implies a rupture in the distribution of the sensible, the state of self-revelatory facts of sense perception that reflects the existence of something in common and the boundaries defining the respective parts and positions within it (Ranciere 7). In Ranciere's view, aesthetics is political as it confronts this state, paving for the emergence of new modes of seeing and expressing. Morrison's novel *Beloved* exemplifies this aesthetics- the political nature of aesthetics. Morrison, through an untraditional structure, polyphonic narrative voices, the supernatural presence, disrupts the stereotypes of literary subjects and forms, and shifts the reader's attention to experiences that have been historically neglected or stifled. In "Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, Race and Tragedy," David Roger Whitehouse argues that the hidden aspects of social relationships that outline African Americans as a unique demographic group help to clarify DuBois' recurring use of the veil metaphors adapted by Morrison. The veil in the story of Morrison serves as an effective symbol that sums up the forced homogenization of enslaved people by the authoritarian command of their slaves and thus creates the stereotypical image of a unified people and hides the reality of the white supremacy (179).

This paper argues how Morrison's chosen aesthetic contents in the novel are not merely stylistic but political. The depiction of the Black slaves' pain, the scars on their souls caused by slavery, on the one hand and on the other, the rejection of sequential narrative – all help Morrison



reconfigure literature. In this way, Morrison's *Beloved* embodies a new aesthetics of emotion that encompasses trauma, anger, and resilience of the Black slaves. By raising the historically suppressed voices of the slaves and reinstating a new rational of Black memory, Morrison subverts the traditional roles of aesthetics—a subversion which, in Ranciorean terms, is a rupture in the distribution of the sensible.

This paper also takes into account how Morrison's novel makes the connection between aesthetics and ethics. It is here that the storytelling in *Beloved* becomes a moral obligation—a mode of witnessing to histories that the official narratives have refused. The aesthetic form of the novel cannot be divorced of the ethical position it takes; it, unlike traditional aesthetic practices, does not beautify, rather its beauty lies in its ability to simplify. Using Ranciere, we could view the aesthetic choices Morrison makes as political subversion, transforming not only what can be done by literature, but what must be done in the context of historical violence.

Finally, this paper encourages the reader to reconsider the definition of aesthetics in literary criticism. Instead of positing it as a principle of pleasure or formal elegance, it suggests aesthetics as a form of political intervention— a means of making visible that which has been made invisible, of giving voice to the voiceless and of disrupting the conventions according to which the literary judgment has been organized. Reading *Beloved* through the critical lens of Ranciorean theory, turns it into not only a novel, but a vindication of dissensus, an appeal to rethink the sensible world in terms of justice, memory and empathy.

Defining Ranciorean Dissensus, the Sensible, and Aesthetic Politics

In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Ranciere says, “I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (7). In its most basic sense, the distribution of the sensible is how Ranciere refers to the way society arranges what is visible, sayable and hearable, and by whom. It is not merely about the sense experience, but who gets the chance to shape the reality.

Ranciere states that politics commences when a person who has not been enclosed in this distribution, and whose voice was deemed as a noise—who form the part that have no part— breaks the order, and claims, “I am a part of it as well.” That is dissensus: a break in the sensible order. Therefore, politics is not all about legislation and rulings. It is about re-inventing the perception when the invisible is made visible and the inaudible is made audible. To Ranciere, politics is not about what people get or demand. It is not the institutional formulation of equitable social systems. Rather, it relates to what people do, especially, what challenges the hierarchical framework of a society. To seek to disrupt such a hierarchy is to do so on the premise of being equal. When the action is considered political, it will be collective, but not individual. It will entail a collective of individuals (or part of that collective) assumed unequal by a given hierarchical structure, and those who stand in solidarity with them, acting as though they are, in fact, equal to those who are above them on that hierarchy, and disrupting the very order of things. What is disrupted here are not just the power relations of that social order but even more deeply those of the foundations, the perceptual and epistemological grounds of that order, the apparentness and naturalness of that order. It is this disruption that Ranciere calls dissensus. Considered as such, it is possible to begin to understand how it relates to the issue of aesthetics. A dissensus is not merely a disagreement as to the equitability of certain social arrangements, though that is also a part of it. It can also be used to reveal the contingency of the whole perceptual and conceptual structure in which such arrangements exist, the contingency of what Ranciere calls ‘le partage du sensible’, the division or distribution of the sensible.

Aesthetics also confronts a particular allocation of the sensible, in another sense. But before we could understand how it goes against the sensible, we have to keep in mind that aesthetics does not mean art in general but rather a particular regime of aesthetic practice, what Ranciere calls “the aesthetic regime of the arts” (Ranciere 18). Art is no longer subject to rules in this regime; it is not assessed according to whether it imparts moral lessons, as in ethical regimes, or how effectively it mimics reality, as in classical representation. Rather, art transforms into something that challenges the



routine, reframes perspective, and asks us to view the world in a different way. Politics and aesthetics, as Margus Vihalem suggests, are closely interwoven: politics always requires perception and engagement, and aesthetics defines the frontiers of what can be perceived and represented (7). Aesthetics is not then a wise and informed contemplation about art, nor a series of judgement-criteria; but it is, in essence, a question about how, as a community, people perceive the world in sight or sound, touch or other senses, and how these perceptions evoke their responses and affect them. Both politics and art, according to Ranciere, define a type of consensus, a dissensual reconstruction of the common knowledge of the sensible. Therefore, a dissension from a particular distribution of the sensible is what constitutes an aesthetic practice, just as politics. They both address what Ranciere refers to as the distribution of the sensible—what is seen, heard, said, and felt.

Politics occurs when the outsiders or the part without part disturb the order of things. It is not being about the control of society, but breaking it in order to insist on equality. The aesthetic regime does not have art merely reflecting the world. It reconfigures it. It renders the invisible seen and the inaudible heard. It puts new senses and imaginations open. Both aesthetics and politics oppose the status quo whether it is with a protest or a poem. They are the rearranging of coordinates of possibilities.

Reclaiming the Sensible: Visibility, Voice, and the Politics of Perception

The themes of Toni Morrison's novels include racial discrimination, sexual politics, history, community, enslavement, love and survival. Through these universals she devotes herself to rewriting history, re-considering cultures and examining the stereotypes of black-white and man-woman in America. She also insists on the inclusion of the African community in her works that discuss the lives of African Americans in different historical periods. When Morrison dramatizes the first-person experiences of trauma inflicted on the bodies of African American women, she directs the reader to focus on the moral and ethical consequences of these experiences, and implicitly asks the reader to consider how best to memorialize and rectify the atrocities to which her characters are witnesses (Cox 97). Morrison as a literary artist emerges as a conduit to the rediscovery of her people and their consequent empowerment. Morrison is a historical thinker who attempts to redeem and re-contextualise the African past that has been lost in the slavery in America. She hopes to know more about herself by learning about her legacy. Her themes have evolved into universal themes as opposed to being exclusive to her or her group. They pertain to contemporary times and address disintegrating families. Her books share an ambiguous relationship with history; to a degree, they are historical fictions narrating the pitiable stories of African Americans who have lived through American history.

Morrison writes largely in a realistic vein, and the narrative structure that she employs places the Black people as Other and the White people as dominant in the American society where the racial issues are yet to be resolved. As an Africa-American herself, Morrison has continued to be a true representative of the African-American cultural past in her novels. History is the most important part of African Americans legacy. It links them with their glorious history. The Black people in the country have been degraded and distorted by the majority, the Whites, whose view has been influential to American history. Without being able to hear the voices of the people on the margins, the history of America will remain incomplete.

One of the motifs that are prevalent in the novels of Toni Morrison is the conflict between the African-Americans and the White community based on racial distinctions. She uses the perspectives of African-American characters and their difficulties to articulate her opinions about the conflicts between the Black people and the Whites. Her writing life began when the African-Americans were experiencing a myriad of injustices. The majority of the main characters in her works conflict around the questions of identity and have to deal with the outcomes not only due to their own experience but also to their own roots, traditions, and cultural practices.

In *Beloved*, Morrison emphasizes the significance of modern Americans seeking remedy of this historically significant event and honouring the ancestral spirit that still carries on and speaks of the pain caused by such a traumatic past, by offering a perspective of reinterpretation and vision to the effects of enslavement and the inescapable racism that follows (Dhakal 129). Morrison employs a real-



life event in the history of African Americans with the main focus being the horrors and infringements of slavery as a historical reminder to the reader. *Beloved* is based on the real-life story of a slave Margaret Garner. Since Garner did not want her children to visit the plantation where they laboured, she murdered her two-year old daughter and attempted to murder her other two children on January 28, 1856. Morrison aims at highlighting the ugly and forgotten aspects of slavery since she thinks that the atrocious issues relating to slavery are unacknowledged and evaded in the conventional narratives about slavery. The books by Morrison compel the reader to perceive the truth and the conditions of slavery in the country that had even forgotten about them.

A novel to Morrison must be undoubtedly political because she holds that good art has always been political. The concept of the distribution of the sensible by Jacques Ranciere provides an interesting explanation of how Toni Morrison replaces the black subjectivity at the centre of narrative and memory. In Ranciere's view, the distribution of the sensible is the implicit rules that operate in the aspect of what can be perceived, heard as well as spoken within a given social order. The aesthetic aspect of politics is the manner in which the perception itself is constituted in such a way that it includes some voices and excludes some. In this context, the fiction of Morrison is a radical dissensus: breaking the hegemonic regimes of visibility and audibility, Black lives and histories previously silenced or distorted are able to be heard.

According to Morrison, the former slaves were not granted a chance to overcome their trauma as their stories needed to be approved by white masters, and thus, they could not say all they desired to say. The infanticide episode, in *Beloved*, presents the idea that slavery has rather been written by the dominant White culture. Sethe and her four children evade slavery by escaping from Sweet Home. The family is discovered by her master, a schoolteacher, who attempts to re-enslave it. In order to defend them against the schoolteacher and not to return to slavery, Sethe kills her daughter Beloved and then attempts to kill her other children. Through the infanticide Sethe not only tells the audience about it justifying her action but her action gives her an opportunity to vocalize the traumatic experience. Yet she is silenced. The slave catcher is the only white and judgmental person who describes the story to the audience. The event is written about or explained only by the slave owners and abolitionists with the help of newspaper articles where there is no space left to the story of Sethe herself. White people use the story of Sethe to their advantage making Sethe silent. Morrison hopes that the African American women would read the text as a way of rediscovering a lost, suppressed or distorted cultural history (Cox 100).

In *Beloved*, Morrison symbolizes the collective identity of her African-American people as being lost and haunted, literally and figuratively, by the traumatic experiences of enslavement (Cox 100). The Black experience is belittled by the White narrative of slavery. Morrison tries to find the meaning of this derision in her White characters and their perception that Blacks are inferior race. The schoolteacher objectifies slaves; he is documenting the bestial nature of the slaves in his little book. Even though the slavery institution has ceased, White discourses have taught the African Americans to deny their subjectivity so that they can control over their lives. Morrison depicts Sethe who is grappling with her shame and disgust with herself. Embarrassed being dehumanized, Sethe cries where she reflects on the opinion of the schoolteacher that the slaves are animals. The only way to dismantle shame and internalized racism is to expose the lie of the scornful White perspective on slavery and the Black identity by creating their own narratives in their perspective. Morrison writes to reclaim her Blackness by arguing against a White culture that continues to construct her as exotic and mythical Black 'other'. By writing, Morrison reclaims Black ancestors narrating their stories in a Black perspective. Their narratives need to be written, spread, understood, and documented to ensure that the narratives bring about a powerful Black culture. This is exactly what Ranciere refers to as aesthetic dissensus: a break of the sensible order that enables new perception and subjectivity to appear.

Reimagining History and Innovative Narrative Strategies as Dissensus

Historical events and records are often incomplete, biased, and fragmented and leave gaps in our understanding of what has occurred. Therefore, history is not complete. The inadequacies in the



historical record can be explained by the following reasons: the historical record can be relatively small, damaged, or lost; historians and archivists may have their own interests making them selective in their approach to the description of events; alternative interpretations of the historical events can emerge depending on the cultural, social, and political background; and the marginalized communities could have been neglected in the historical record or their records suppressed. This sense of incompleteness is what motivates the perpetual search, through the generations, to explore more of the forgotten facets of the self and the community, the past, the present and the future. The attempt to rewrite the historical experience and redefine the world through the prism of nationality, cultural legacy, and personal experience is a commendable endeavour that Toni Morrison has made in her historical fiction. Toni Morrison as a literary figure has a sense of duty to unveil the unfinished history and redefine it in her narratives. The theory of the aesthetic regime by Ranciere suggests that art does not reflect the world, but it makes it. It makes the invisible thing visible and the inaudible thing audible. It establishes alternate ways of perception and imagination. Ranciere does not insinuate that art is the same as life but he believes that art is a place in which life can be re-imagined. The process of imagining is crucial in dealing with the insufficiency of history and resisting historical denial or absence. On the one hand, the focus of imagination shows the creativeness of the memory and increases image-making ability and essential distance and disloyalty to fact. Conversely, imagining serves as a liberating device to the writer and helps him/her to overcome the constraints posed by documentary evidence to make a choice, to build and to cogitate a historical reality (Ying 12). It is a kind of third space in which we have a glimpse of the possibilities that exist beyond the reality. Through reconfiguring real and fictional, Morrison re-enacts and re-constructs the nature of a historical past that could otherwise be unreachable. The relation to history in the works of Morrison is complicated. Morrison is required to perform the imaginative reconstruction in order to unravel the neglected spaces of history.

In *Beloved*, Morrison tries to enter the mind of those people who were enslaved, and to bring the emotion, which must have been connected with a great amount of uncertainty, loss, and violation. That personification is brought into reality in the novel through Beloved's character. Beloved can also be regarded as a symbol, a personification of all the trauma and devastating human price of the Middle Passage and slavery (Gillespie 19). The most prominent idea in *Beloved*, according to Tessa Roynon, is a phrase that Morrison coined in the novel itself: 'rememory' (46). *Beloved* is also concerned with not only reconstructed memory, but also deconstructed history. The story is set in the post-civil war Ohio where Sethe leads a terrible memory but she has avoided it by closing down one part of her brain; the novel is about the previous life of Sethe as a slave in Sweet Home Farm, her escape with her children to what appears a safe haven and the tragedy that follows. In spite of surviving physically, Sethe is still psychologically oppressed and the need to love and be loved turns destructive for her. Morrison is also concerned with the challenges that former slaves encounter. Once slavery has violated the history of one, once past is something more real than present, once the anger of a dead baby can literally shake a house, one no longer has a sufficient instrument in the conventional novel. And *Beloved* is written in fragments and pictures, shattered in the form of a mirror on the floor to be assembled by the readers. Sethe is an escaped slave and a mother whose life and the lives of the people around her are depicted by Morrison in a hypnotic, beautiful and elusive manner in her novel. The wisdom that we gather out of them reaches deeper than understanding, due not only to the extraordinary, but also to the experimental style, and to the intensity of the subject matter.

White dominance finds its main origin in the degradation of Black bodies so as to exercise control over them which can best be achieved by convincing them that their black bodies are ugly. Thus, slavery aimed at women as its primary targets with the help of the tool of dehumanizing the body. Speaking of institutionalized slavery, it is pertinent to know that the maltreatment of the African-American women was a more pressing topic than the issues of liberation alone. It was more effortless to apply cruelty on women since, besides being Black, they were the most vulnerable in the Black society since they were women. This fact made White oppressors sexually abuse them. *Beloved*



by Morrison is a clear depiction that there are many more to the oppression of slavery because under slavery women were pervasively rape victims, forcibly bearing children, and forced isolation from their new-born children. That they were mothers encouraged the white masters to dehumanize and deprive women to a greater degree than could be done to slave men.

Therefore, the cruelty of dehumanization which indirectly compelled Sethe to kill her child can be exemplified best with the examples from the novel. Sethe has been dehumanized by the White oppressors through two important moments in her life. The first instance in Sethe's story that served as a turning point in her life and radically changed her understanding of the future, was when she was placed on the side of the animal in the list of features based on the schoolteacher's education. Sethe listens to the lesson delivered by him in which he teaches his nephews about the natural aspects of a human, and he creates a very thick line between a human being and an animal. He has provided the exact example of the distinction between the animal and human worlds; he categorizes Sethe as representative of the animal world. The second moment becomes even more significant when Sethe is pregnant with Denver much later in her life. The milk of Sethe is then stolen off her to nourish the nephews of the schoolteacher. Sethe repeatedly refers to her violation as she often says 'they took my milk' (Morrison 33). The fact that Sethe is robbed of her milk is clearly painful to her since she is being robbed of her soul, the most treasured of all things she has—her maternal milk. Her total concern to get the milk back to her children even neglecting her bodily pain emphasizes how Sethe sees her milk as more valuable than her own body. Thus, Sethe is reduced to the role of a breeder—like an animal in the service of feeding humans.

The humiliation culminates when Sethe realizes that her husband, Halle, had been a witness to the situation. He is emasculated, being unable to protect her and leaving her alone. Paul D, being the last of the sweet-home men and the only survivor, is introduced into the life of Sethe eighteen years after she killed her child and is ready to develop a feeling towards Sethe. However, to the disappointment of Sethe, Paul D is unable to come to terms with the fact that Sethe committed such barbaric act as the murder. Sethe, who has envisaged Paul D to support her in her suffering does not get it either from the Black society or from Paul D.

The act of Sethe may be perceived as a heroic act of resistance that exposed in it the entire concept of slavery and explores her stance by her statement that if the master could subject the slave children in bondage to a slow social death, the mother could release them through physical death. Morrison appears to be inviting her readers to view Sethe's killing of her child as not the exception but instead as a reenactment of the stereotype of the mammy figure. Her society once joyfully accepted her as a legitimate member of this society and welcomed her into their free society after she had managed to escape slavery. It can however only be a month and she experiences the status of a black sister. The people who are able to comprehend her motives best due to their shared experience reject her after the unforgivable infanticide. Sethe is rejected, and she has no home to live in; she only discovers a home of desolation in the walls of 124 Bluestone house and manages to isolate herself. Sethe confines life to the house and in this case, she can perceive a means of discovering her true self. The subconscious desire of Sethe to receive the explanation of the past and at the same time forgiveness leads her to the appearance of the ghost of her murdered child. The West Africans hold that the dead are not done with the living as the past (the dead), the present (the living) and future (the unborn) are co-existent. The ancestors who have passed away can and do talk to their own descendants especially because some rites of the dead have not been performed. This is such a worldview that points to a continuity and fluidity between past and present.

Therefore, Morrison's novel not only narrates but also reorders the perception, restores the voices that were not given a chance to speak, and reinstates the Black subjectivity as the new location of the narrative and memories. In Rancierean terminology, dissensus is the intervention of the excluded in the order of the dominant— a fissure in the sensible order by confronting the established framework of perception, thought, and action with the 'inadmissible' (89). Nonlinear narration of the story by Morrison is a kind of aesthetical dissensus, as it refuses the linear, chronological narrative that is the preferred mode in the mainstream historiography. Another example is that in *Beloved*, the



memories of Sweet Home where Sethe escapes and the killing of her child are not mentioned in order. Rather, they come out in fragments, like emotional flash-points. This aligns with the rhythm of trauma and the unreasonableness of the chronological sequence of telling the history. According to Morrison, “It was not a story to pass on” (523). This line implies that there are some stories that refuse containment, yet claim to be remembered.

Ranciere believes that equality is emulated when the voices are all treated as intelligible. The application of multiple narrators and interior monologues by Morrison democratizes perception. We listen to Sethe, Denver and Paul D, and even Beloved. They do not have their voices silenced by an omniscient voice. Rather, Morrison allows each consciousness to form the narrative, a mosaic of Black experience. The haunting voice of Beloved transcends boundaries and thus resists fragmentation by claiming a shared memory: “I am not separate from her, there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is” (Morrison 402).

The prose by Morrison is tactile, vibrant, and emotionally charged— it offers dignity to Black bodies. The back of Sethe, scarred into a chokecherry tree, is depicted as a living archive. Morrison does not provide a clinical manifestation; she makes it as poetic flesh, as the place of agony and endurance. “Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves.”—this metaphor turns the trauma into a myth, restoring the body as a place of meaning, rather than merely a place of misery (Morrison 31). This is echoed by Ranciere who believes that aesthetics is a political field when it restructures the sensory field. Dissensus, in Rancierean thought, resists resolution. The endings in Morrison’s narrative usually provide ambiguity, echo and return. *Beloved* is concluded not by justice or reconciliation, but with a dying voice: “It was not a story to pass on” (Morrison 523). The line does not aim to suggest that the story is unpalatable and deserves to be forgotten; nor does it aim to make trauma palatable and domesticated. Instead, imposing on it the continuity of memory, which must be active, unfinished and shared, Morrison keeps the wound unhealed.

Morrison’s is an aesthetic politics which always defines itself by a certain recasting of the distribution of the sensible, a reconfiguration of the given perceptual forms; the rediscovery of history and the narrative experiments by her are, then, not merely literary inventions, but they are the acts of redistribution in Rancierean terms (Ranciere 59). She challenges the distribution of the sensible by placing the lives, voices, and memory of the Blacks at the centre. By doing this, she creates aesthetic politics in the sense that Ranciere means it, without preaching, but by reorganizing perception itself.

Conclusion

When we read *Beloved* in the perspective of Jacques Ranciere and his aesthetics and politics, we start to notice how the narrative of Morrison does not merely narrate what happened but reconfigures perception itself. Her narration turns into a kind of dissensus, refuting the prevailing distribution of the sensible that has all too long excluded Black voices, memories, and subjectivities to the mainstream literary and historical discourses. Fragmented form, ghostly figures, and polyphonic voices, in Morrison’s book, are not merely a manifestation of trauma but they disrupt the aesthetic system of values, where the concepts of coherence, linearity, and rationality are valued. Thus, she sets a space of another form of truth—one that is emotional, embodied, communal. This is what Ranciere refers to when he talks about politics as a violation of the sensible order, when the invisible or unheard say they are there and are refused to be ignored. In *Beloved*, Morrison asserts her authority to narrate the Black experience on its own terms. She does not plead to be part of the canonical narrative; she brings in a change in the very landscape of narrative, raising a voice to be heard by those voices which were previously silenced. Her fiction is an aesthetic resistance, in which memory is not an archive, but an experience, and history is not concluded, but re-read. Through this, the work of Morrison becomes very close to the vision of Ranciere of aesthetic politics. Both claim that equality is never a goal that can be bestowed on us but a principle that should be practiced by use of words, images, and imaginary thinking. Both are of the opinion that art may also be political not through conveying messages, but through transformation of what we can see and feel. Therefore, *Beloved* is not merely a slavery or survival novel. It is an anti-capitalist novel, a rearrangement of the world, of finding a place to fit the part that has no part, of demanding that the lives, memories and



desires of Black people be claimed as the central figure in our collective human narrative. Morrison is not only committing a literary innovation but also engaging in political courage in her aesthetic choices. And within the context of Ranciere, we are able to start comprehending how such decisions do not just speak to the past, but to the future of how we are going to read, remember, and resist.

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The Interplay of Love and Wisdom in Shakespearean Tragedies

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Abstract

William Shakespeare is one of the most influential writers in the history of the English language, with much of today's vocabulary tracing back to his plays and sonnets. He is famous for his sonnets, tragedies, and comedies, and he created a collection of classic plays whose characters remain culturally relevant even centuries later. Among all his works, his tragedies are generally considered his greatest achievement. Shakespeare structured his tragedies around three recurring patterns: a historical or social tragedy based on real events, a tragedy focused on the conflict or separation of lovers, and a tragedy in which the hero is taken from a familiar setting and placed in an unfamiliar one. Iconic figures like Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo have become enduring symbols in popular culture. Two themes that prominently recur throughout Shakespeare's tragedies are wisdom and love. Each is depicted as both a positive and a negative force capable of fostering relationships and wise decision-making, but also capable of leading to ruin and death. Analyzing how Shakespeare addresses love and wisdom in both their positive and negative aspects suggests that he intended these themes to serve as layered explorations of human psychology, with their positive sides acting as rewards and their negative sides presenting potential dangers. Hence, this article traces the interplay of love and wisdom in the tragedies of Shakespeare.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Interplay, Love, Wisdom, Tragedies.

William Shakespeare stands among the most influential writers in the history of the English language, and much of the vocabulary still used today can be traced back to his plays and sonnets. He is renowned for his sonnets, tragedies, and comedies, and he produced a body of classic plays populated by characters who remain culturally relevant centuries later. Of all his work, the tragedies are generally regarded as his finest achievement. Shakespeare built his tragedies around three recurring structural patterns: a historical or social tragedy rooted in real events, a tragedy centered on the conflict or separation of lovers, and a tragedy in which the hero is removed from a familiar setting and thrust into an alien one (Frye 16). Figures such as Macbeth, Hamlet, and Romeo have endured as touchstones of popular culture. Two themes recur throughout the tragedies with particular force: wisdom and love. Each is depicted as both a positive and a negative force — capable of driving relationships and sound decision-making, yet also capable of triggering ruin and death. Examining how Shakespeare treats love and wisdom on both sides of this spectrum suggests that he intended these themes as layered explorations of human psychology. Their positive and negative dimensions surface, respectively, as a form of reward and as a source of peril.

Five tragedies showcase these themes most vividly: *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*. Each play follows a set of characters who become tragic heroes, whose choices exact a cost on their own lives and on everyone around them. These figures are not heroic in any conventional sense and often behave in ways unbecoming someone



thought of as noble (Stoll 25). Shakespeare's heroes diverge from the archetypal hero — the knight or savior figure. They may display virtue early on, but the audience's estimation of them shifts quickly as the plot unfolds (Stoll 25). Shakespeare's use of "wisdom" also departs from convention: it has been described as "the capacity to realize what is of value in life, for oneself and others" (Nordstrom 185). For the purposes of this analysis, wisdom refers to the knowledge characters acquire and apply as a tragedy unfolds — the capacity to weigh a situation before acting on it, rather than proceeding impulsively (Nordstrom 186). A person governed by wisdom does not act rashly; they take the time to assess circumstances fully before responding. Wisdom is also tied to nobility (Nordstrom 190): humility, morality, and integrity mark a character as wise within Shakespeare's framework.

Love, in this analysis, encompasses romantic love as well as familial bonds and friendship. Shakespeare's gift lay in dramatizing love in a way that made audiences genuinely feel what his characters experienced (Knights 19); he understood how to render both the joy and the anguish of love vividly. A recurring device is love at first sight, portrayed as both unavoidable and essential to his characters' arcs (Charney 9, 10). Romeo and Juliet exemplify this — the two fall instantly and irresistibly in love upon their first glimpse of one another, despite having no opportunity to speak. Shakespeare also idealizes love through images of devotion, portraying it as an intense, all-consuming attentiveness to a partner's needs (Charney 9).

Shakespeare frequently assigns love different roles according to gender, casting women as the nurturing and emotionally expressive figures and men as the assertive, guarded ones who require a woman's influence to settle into stability (Charney 19). Female characters tend to be more openly devoted, tending to the emotional needs of their male counterparts (Charney 10), and are sometimes framed as temptresses whose beauty draws men into love almost against their will. Beauty, in fact, is presented as a central catalyst for romantic attachment (Charney 17). Women often function as muses in this scheme, frequently reciprocating affection, and many of Shakespeare's female characters seem drawn less to a particular man than to an idealized notion of masculinity itself.

Eye imagery recurs throughout the plays as a way of linking sight to romantic feeling (Charney 15); the eye becomes a vessel of affection and a gateway into a character's inner world. Many first encounters between lovers unfold through descriptions of seeing rather than speaking — Romeo, for instance, questions whether his eyes are deceiving him when he first beholds Juliet's beauty. But the eyes can just as easily mislead, as in *Macbeth*, when Lady

Macbeth's husband begins hallucinating and sees the ghost of Banquo. Rattled and guilt-ridden, *Macbeth* recoils from the apparition: "Hence, horrible shadow! / Unreal mock'ry, hence" (*Macbeth* 3.4.106-107). In *Hamlet*, the prince's encounter with his father's ghost likewise overwhelms him with emotion (Charney 15); he cries out, "O, fie! — Hold, hold, my heart; / And you, my sinews, grow not instant old, / But bear me stiffly up" (*Hamlet* 1.5.93-95). Shakespeare repeatedly uses the eye as a symbol of the mind's hidden depths, and eye imagery more broadly reinforces the idea that love defies rational control (Charney 16).

Wisdom's positive potential surfaces throughout the tragedies. As a prized human trait, wisdom often allows characters to anticipate danger or warn others before catastrophe strikes. In *Macbeth*, Banquo demonstrates this by sending his son away once he recognizes that *Macbeth* has descended into madness — a decision that ensures his line's survival. Banquo's descendants come to embody wisdom themselves, possessing a kind of foresight



that lets them watch Macbeth's futile efforts to control fate with a degree of detached amusement.

Love's positive dimension is likewise present. Although few of Shakespeare's characters achieve lasting happiness, love brings genuine, if often fleeting, joy — and that joy matters regardless of its brevity, since it shapes the major choices characters make and enriches their lives even when tragedy ultimately follows. When Romeo first meets Juliet, he likens her to a sacred shrine, describing his lips as pilgrims approaching a holy site: "This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this: / My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand" (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.5.93-94). Shakespeare's lovers repeatedly frame their romantic experiences in religious terms, elevating love to something almost divine. Othello and Desdemona's relationship is similarly steeped in religious language (Leggatt 837); their courtship is expressed through references to the heavens, and Desdemona is effectively placed on a pedestal, worshipped not only by Othello but by the wider community as well. Othello spends much of the play in "religious awe" of her, a devotion that makes his eventual killing of her all the more tragic (Charney 20).

Wisdom also functions as a reward for Shakespeare's protagonists. Solving a mystery or uncovering an answer becomes, in itself, a kind of prize, since wisdom is traditionally linked to power and status — rulers, for instance, are assumed to hold their positions because of their judgment. Each hero comes by wisdom differently, and one recurring pattern is that Shakespeare's tragic heroes arrive at genuine self-knowledge only near the play's end (Bromwich 132). This self-recognition, often triggered by remorse and reflection, allows a character to mature into the role that tragedy has thrust upon them, even as death approaches. Othello reaches this point of self-awareness only at the close of the play, when he finally understands what he must do (Bromwich 133); because the play is a tragedy, that understanding arrives too late, and Othello concludes that only his own death can restore balance (Bromwich 133).

Love, too, operates as a reward, since Shakespeare consistently privileges it above other emotions. Romeo and Juliet's lives visibly improve the moment they meet — before their encounter, both feel trapped in stagnant, unfulfilling lives, and their sudden connection promises new possibility. Shakespeare also links love directly to knowledge, suggesting that love generates its own form of wisdom through lived experience (Knights 16), and that the passion between lovers can motivate characters to greater effort and daring (Clement Marsh 49) — Romeo's willingness to fight in the streets for Juliet's sake being one example. Not every character is so fortunate: Hamlet's love for Ophelia goes unreciprocated after her father convinces her that Hamlet's madness makes him untrustworthy. Even so, that unfulfilled love fuels Hamlet's ambitions, as he imagines eventually making her his queen.

Wisdom also has a darker register in Shakespeare's tragedies, functioning as a force capable of unraveling the mind. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are both destroyed by the guilty knowledge of Duncan's murder; awareness of what they have done drives them to increasingly irrational choices. Duncan's own gentleness and generosity only deepen the tragedy of his murder (Stoll 27), intensifying Macbeth's guilt since Duncan had done nothing to provoke it beyond preparing to pass the crown to his son. In *King Lear*, the knowledge of his daughters' betrayal similarly unravels the king's sanity, as Goneril and Regan quarrel over his inheritance while he lies dying, unable to accept their cruelty toward Cordelia. Because wisdom is bound up with nobility, many characters wrestle internally between wise restraint and the pull of temptation (Nordstrom 191) — a conflict in which short-term gratification



often wins out over long-term consequence. Hamlet's discovery of his father's murder compels him toward vengeance and, ultimately, toward the throne he believes should be his; his mother, meanwhile, has married her husband's murderer to retain her crown.

Unlike Macbeth, who is consumed by guilt, Hamlet is driven by resentment and a desire for vengeance toward his uncle. Even so, characters overwhelmed by this kind of knowledge remain heroic in Shakespeare's telling, since their underlying motives are not purely malicious. They are "tragic" heroes specifically because of their downfall: likable at first, they grow steadily more compromised as the play progresses, undone — deliberately or not — by their own actions. Shakespeare consistently frames his heroes' ruin as self-inflicted, the product of yielding to temptation rather than resisting it, which is itself central to the hero's arc. Macbeth's persistent guilt shows that some part of his conscience survives his crimes (Stoll 27); rather than enjoying his new crown, he is tormented by what he has done and grows suspicious of everyone but Lady Macbeth, sensing on some level that a reckoning awaits him. Othello, by contrast, is undone by his own delusions, genuinely believing he is restoring justice rather than committing a wrong (Stoll 31) — his intentions, however misguided, remain sincere. Tragic heroes are also defined by change, though always for the worse, which means they are remembered for their final, diminished state rather than their earlier accomplishments (Frye 3); death, in this framework, is what ultimately defines a character (Frye 3).

Love carries a similarly destructive charge. It repeatedly draws Shakespeare's characters toward their own ruin (Clement Marsh 9), and whether love itself is truly to blame for their deaths is a question that runs through much of his work (Clement Marsh 9). A persistent thread across the tragedies is that those who love are ultimately undone by their own mortality (Clement Marsh 52). In Shakespeare's era, love was often viewed with suspicion as a potential source of weakness (Clement Marsh 11); many marriages were arranged for practical or economic reasons rather than romantic ones, and literature of the period frequently downplayed love as a legitimate basis for a relationship. Excessive emotion, in this view, could render a person ineffective within society (Clement Marsh 11). Yet Shakespeare's characters routinely defy this convention, acting against social expectation in the name of love. Romeo and Juliet epitomize this defiance: they meet in secret and declare their love more important than family loyalty, ultimately abandoning everyone else in their lives for one another. Their mutual devotion becomes so consuming that they choose death over separation (Clement Marsh 51). Both believe themselves immune to time's passage and convinced that no one else could ever match what they've found in each other. Fearing that time will separate them, they act impulsively, setting their own tragedy in motion (Clement Marsh 49).

Love and hatred, too, sit close together in Shakespeare's writing (Stoll 29); in Othello, love curdles into consuming hatred as jealousy takes hold (Stoll 29). That jealousy frequently escalates into death or open conflict elsewhere in the tragedies as well. In King Lear, Goneril and Regan's competition for their father's estate exposes their lack of genuine devotion compared to Cordelia, and Goneril's jealousy flares further when Edmund, whom she desires, instead falls for Cordelia. Othello's jealousy likewise convinces him that killing Desdemona is necessary. In Hamlet, Ophelia rebuffs Hamlet's letters at her father's urging, since he has warned her both of Hamlet's instability and of his own doubts about Hamlet's sincerity. After Hamlet kills her father, Ophelia's grief unravels her, and she drifts through her final days in a state that resembles mourning-induced madness, seeming almost like a spectral presence to



those around her.

Shakespeare frequently blurs the boundary between wisdom and foolishness, and many of his characters straddle both states at once. Often a fool figure appears within a play specifically to be mocked, drawing a contrast between the wise and the foolish — yet Shakespeare's fools consistently possess insight the "wise" characters lack, often foreshadowing the trouble to come (Hancock 421). Wise characters tend to miss subtle warning signs embedded in ordinary circumstances, while the fool, unburdened by overanalysis, perceives what others overlook. In this sense, wisdom in Shakespeare inevitably tips into folly at some point. He also frequently grants a semblance of wisdom to characters who neither deserve nor truly possess it, since many lack the humility to admit fault. Pride, in particular, becomes Macbeth's undoing: convinced of his coming crown, he acts on false assumptions that lead him into wickedness (Bromwich 141), and that same prophecy-driven pride pushes him to kill Duncan. The paranoia and guilt that follow eventually overwhelm him, turning him into precisely the kind of proud fool who cannot heed his own conscience. In *King Lear*, the Fool serves as a trusted advisor to the king, whose willingness to rely on him signals an unconventional but genuine form of wisdom — an acknowledgment that fools, too, possess real insight. Lear himself only learns humility once madness and ruin have stripped him of everything. Hamlet's own foolishness surfaces when he mistakenly kills Polonius, believing him to be Claudius — an impulsive act born of mistaken identity. The knowledge Hamlet carries about his mother and uncle destabilizes him in a similar way, pushing him toward increasingly irrational behavior. Excess knowledge, in Shakespeare's tragedies, tends to produce this same effect: characters like Lear, Macbeth, and Hamlet become consumed by paranoia, convinced the world has turned against them, and only with hindsight do they recognize their own folly (Nordstrom 187).

A parallel tension exists between love and folly. Just as wisdom can provoke irrational behavior, so too can love drive characters to acts they would otherwise never consider. *Romeo and Juliet* again provide the clearest example: falling in love within a single day, they resolve to sacrifice everything for one another and quickly make a series of rash choices that lead to their deaths. Juliet dramatised killing herself while taking sleeping potion goes catastrophically wrong when Romeo, believing her truly dead, cannot bear to live without her and kills himself at her side. When Juliet wakes and discovers what has happened, she takes her own life as well. Both deaths stem from impulsive decisions made without adequate reflection — a reminder that sexual and romantic passion can override reason in pursuit of immediate satisfaction (Quincy 104), and that desire itself can drive people toward madness. Between love and wisdom, love ultimately emerges as the more powerful force in Shakespeare's tragedies. Both carry the potential for good and ill, but love's capacity to override reason gives it the edge (Charney 11): it drives characters toward acts like murder, betrayal that they would never otherwise contemplate, consuming their judgment and narrowing their concern to their beloved alone. Nearly every tragic figure in Shakespeare commits some irrational or reckless act in the name of a woman he loves. Wisdom, too, can provoke strong emotion and, in excess, lead to madness and destructive behavior but on balance, love proves the stronger of the two forces.

Across Shakespeare's tragedies, love and wisdom function as parallel themes, each capable of producing both constructive and destructive outcomes. This duality plays out across the five tragedies examined here — *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello* in each of which the protagonist's heroic journey ends in death or a decline



severe enough to lead to it. Love and wisdom together drive much of what happens in these plays, shaping both character choices and dramatic structure. Shakespeare's writing rewards close attention precisely because these themes carry such depth of meaning. Ultimately, the characters who fare best are not the ones defined by a single trait, but those who draw on a balance of qualities to navigate crisis and rise above those who have lost their grip on reality.

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